

A Syllabus-Based Review of English Communication Courses in Management Programs of Assam

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ABSTRACT

English has become an indispensable tool for academic and professional communication, particularly in management education where graduates are expected to demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills. Recognizing the growing importance of workplace communication, management institutions have incorporated English communication courses into their curricula. This study examines how English communication is conceptualized and delivered in MBA programs across selected public and private institutes in Assam.

The study aims to explore how English communication is introduced and framed in MBA programs. It examines the objectives, content, and teaching methods outlined in business communication syllabi and assess the alignment between course contents and real-world managerial communication needs. The study also aims to identify shared trends, strengths, and curricular gaps to strengthen future course design.

A qualitative comparative syllabus analysis was undertaken using MBA curricula and course documents collected from selected institutions. The analysis was guided by the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and needs analysis frameworks proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans (1998). Course objectives, content areas, pedagogical approaches, and assessment strategies were systematically examined to fulfil the objectives.

The findings indicate that while communication courses are widely included in MBA curricula, considerable variation exists in their scope and orientation. Most courses emphasize oral communication and presentation skills, whereas workplace writing tasks receive relatively less attention. The study concludes that greater alignment with industry communication practices is needed through needs-based and practice-oriented curriculum design.

Keywords: Business Communication, MBA Curriculum, English for Specific Purposes, Needs Analysis, Management Education.

INTRODUCTION

English today has become much more than just a language. It is a global medium that connects people, institutions, and ideas across countries and cultures. Whether we speak of international trade, technology, research, or education, English plays a central role in shaping how individuals communicate and how systems operate. In most parts of the world, including India, English acts as a second language but functions as the first language in many formal, academic, and professional situations.

The academic importance of English is well established. It is the language of higher education, research papers, professional journals, and classroom instruction in most reputed institutions in India. Fluency in English not only helps students understand their subject matter better but also enables them to participate in academic discussions, write assignments, and present ideas confidently. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) note in their foundational work on English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the need for English language instruction should be shaped by the

learners' goals and the context in which they will use the language. In other words, English is best taught when it serves a clear purpose.

Professionally too, English plays a crucial role. Employers across industries expect candidates to have a working command of written and spoken English. Reports, emails, proposals, presentations, client interactions, and internal communication are carried out in English, especially in corporate and multinational environments. It is in this context that the role of English in management education becomes extremely important. Business schools across India, including those in Assam, recognize this need and have introduced English communication courses under various titles, such as Business Communication, Managerial Skills Development, or Communicative English. These courses are designed to help students learn how to write and speak professionally, understand workplace etiquette, and present ideas effectively. They often include modules on letter writing, report writing, oral presentations, public speaking, and group discussions.

However, while the inclusion of English communication in the management curriculum is a step in the right direction, there is a growing need to assess how effectively these courses are structured and delivered. Research in the area of ESP and business English (Raman & Sharma, 2013; Bhatia & Bremner, 2012) suggests that the success of such courses depends largely on how well they align with the actual communication needs of the industry. Unfortunately, as studies by Boozer and Stacks (1984) and Smeltzer and Leonard (1986) indicate, many students enter the workforce without having mastered the writing and communication tasks expected of them.

In many cases, business communication courses focus more on theoretical content and general etiquette, while offering limited practice in real-life tasks such as drafting emails, preparing executive summaries, writing policy notes, or handling intercultural communication. Moreover, oral communication is often given more attention than writing, reinforcing the myth that speaking skills alone are sufficient for professional success.

This paper aims to explore how English communication is introduced, taught, and assessed in management programs across some of the leading public and private institutes in Assam. Through a comparative syllabus analysis of universities, the study seeks to understand the scope, depth, and pedagogical orientation of English courses in MBA curricula. It also reflects on whether these courses are adequately preparing students for the written and spoken communication demands of the business world.

Drawing from the frameworks of ESP and needs analysis (Dudley-Evans, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), the paper critically examines whether current curriculum designs cater to the actual target situations students will encounter after graduation. In doing so, it offers a grounded perspective on how business communication education in management schools can be strengthened by making it more responsive, relevant, and practical.

Scope Of the Study

This study examines how English, particularly in the form of business or managerial communication is positioned within the MBA curricula of select management institutes in Assam. By analyzing the syllabi from six institutions; three government run and three private, the paper investigates how English is conceptualized, taught, and aligned with the communication needs of future managers. The focus remains on syllabus design, rather than classroom delivery or student outcomes.

Objectives Of the Study

1. To explore how English communication is introduced and framed in MBA programs across select institutes in Assam.
2. To examine the objectives, content, and teaching methods outlined in business communication syllabi.
3. To assess the alignment between course contents and real-world managerial communication needs.
4. To identify shared trends, strengths, and curricular gaps to strengthen future course design.

METHODOLOGY

This study follows a qualitative, syllabus-based analysis to examine how English communication is integrated into MBA curricula across six management institutes in Assam: Gauhati University (GU), Dibrugarh University (DU), Tezpur University (TU), The Assam Kaziranga University (KU) Royal Global University (RGU), and North Eastern Regional Institute of Management (NERIM).

The analysis focused on: course titles and positioning, stated objectives and outcomes, content focus (writing, speaking, presentation, etc.) and teaching methods and assessment patterns. Guided by the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Needs Analysis, the study evaluates whether the syllabi align with the communication demands of the business world.

Limitation of the Study

No classroom observations or student feedback were included; the researcher conducts the analysis based on the curriculum documents available from institutional sources.

Contextual Overview of The Universities

To interpret the design and intent of English communication courses in MBA programs, it is important to situate each syllabus within its institutional context. The six institutions studied represent a cross-section of public and private management education providers in Assam, each with distinct academic cultures and curricular priorities.

Gauhati University (GU)

As one of Assam's oldest and most reputed public universities, GU offers a broad-based MBA curriculum. Its Written and Oral Communication course is designed to integrate academic learning with field engagement, although it lacks detailed breakdowns of language tasks and assessment methods.

Dibrugarh University (DU)

A key state public university in Upper Assam, DU offers MBA programs through affiliated colleges. The Managerial Skills Development course merges communication, HR fundamentals, and personality development into a single module, with moderate attention to business writing and oral communication.

Tezpur University (TU)

A central university with a research-focused academic environment, TU offers Business Communication and Negotiation in its MBA curriculum. The course includes modules on listening, presentation, negotiation, and non-verbal communication, though it does not elaborate on assessment practices or writing-focused instruction.

The Assam Kaziranga University (KU)

A leading private university located in Jorhat, KU emphasizes industry-oriented learning and professional skill development. It offers Business Communication I & II as two semester-long courses, reflecting a structured and progressive approach to building communicative competence.

Royal Global University (RGU)

A prominent private university in Guwahati, RGU offers a multi-semester Communicative English program spread across four MBA semesters. The curriculum is wide-ranging, covering business writing, speaking, group communication, cross-cultural understanding, technical writing, and corporate communication, making it one of the most comprehensive communication programs among the institutes studied.

North Eastern Regional Institute of Management (NERIM)

A private institute affiliated with Dibrugarh University, NERIM integrates English communication within the Managerial Skills Development course. The syllabus includes business writing, presentations, and legal aspects of communication, but treats English more as a support skill than as a core area of professional training.

FINDINGS

The study aimed to examine how English communication is introduced, structured, and aligned with the professional needs of MBA students in Assam. Findings are presented in relation to the four research objectives and are supported with insights from relevant literature and the collected syllabi.

Introduction and Framing of English Communication Courses

Across all six institutions studied, English communication is formally included within the MBA curriculum. However, the way it is introduced and framed varies significantly. At Kaziranga University and Royal Global University, English communication is treated as a foundational subject spread across multiple semesters. Kaziranga University offers Business Communication in both the first and second semesters, while Royal Global University runs a four-semester sequence under the title Communicative English. These models enable for a continuous skill development over time.

In contrast, institutions like Dibrugarh University, NERIM, and Gauhati University offer English communication within a broader managerial skills course, usually limited to one semester. Tezpur University has a dedicated course on Business Communication and Negotiation, but without a multi-semester structure.

The inconsistent course titles and time allocations indicate a lack of standardized framework in how English communication is conceptualized within management education. This aligns with concerns raised in ESP literature, particularly by Hutchinson and Waters, who argue that the success of any ESP course depends on how clearly its goals are defined and sequenced. As communication is subsumed under soft skills or HR-related topics, as seen in DU and NERIM, hence, the focus on language development weakened by emphasising more on organizational communication.

Course Content and Pedagogical Orientation

All institutions include core areas such as business writing, oral communication, and presentation skills. Kaziranga University and Royal Global University provide greater detail in their syllabi, covering genres like reports, letters, emails, minutes, and proposals. They also incorporate modules on phonetics, non-verbal communication, and cultural sensitivity. These elements reflect principles of genre-based pedagogy, which encourages students to learn language through authentic workplace texts.

Other institutions like GU, DU, and NERIM offer a more general list of skills without elaborating how these will be taught. GU's syllabus, for example, emphasizes exposure to real-world projects and field interactions, but lacks clear articulation of writing formats or assessment methods. Dibrugarh University and NERIM refer to commercial letters and business reports but do not elaborate on how students will be guided through the writing process.

In terms of teaching methods, most syllabi mention lectures, group discussions, and case studies. Another observable point is the stronger emphasis on oral communication compared to writing. Public speaking and presentations receive consistent attention, while writing is often treated as a secondary focus. This may be influenced by the belief that spoken English is more directly tied to employability. However, business literature suggests that written communication remains central to managerial effectiveness, and neglecting it may lead to gaps in workplace readiness.

Alignment with Workplace Communication Needs

It is difficult to quantify to what degree the course content reflects real-world business communication. Royal Global University and Kaziranga University present the most workplace-aligned syllabi. They include instruction on writing emails, memos, minutes, CVs, and cover letters, documents that graduates are likely to encounter in professional contexts. Their syllabi also mention negotiation strategies, cross-cultural etiquette, and digital communication platforms, which are highly relevant in today's business environment.

Other institutions, however, remain vague in defining what specific communication skills students are expected to master. Dibrugarh University and NERIM focus on broad categories like oral communication or business reports but do not link them explicitly to target tasks in industry. Tezpur University's syllabus introduces negotiation and presentation platforms, yet it does not detail how these will be practiced or assessed.

The syllabi suggests that the courses are designed more with academic convention in mind than with real-world application. As Bhatia and Bremner (2012) point out, business English must reflect the dynamic and context-specific nature of professional communication, something that current syllabi do not fully capture.

Trends, Strengths, and Gaps in Curriculum Design

All institutions acknowledges that communication is essential to management education. Most syllabi attempt to combine oral and written skills, and several include elements like presentation delivery and personality development. Textbooks such as Raman and Sharma or Lesikar and Flatley are frequently cited, indicating an attempt to align with recognized academic standards.

Kaziranga University and Royal Global University demonstrate curriculum depth through structured course progression, varied content, and wider skill coverage. Their emphasis on phonetics, etiquette, and intercultural communication shows awareness of the broader communicative competencies required in global business.

However, significant gaps remain. For example, writing is rarely treated as a process-based skill. There is little attention to writing skill development. The courses tend to privilege oral performance over writing ability, perpetuating a misconception that most carry regarding communication skills.

The most important missing element across the board is the absence of any ESP-based alignment. Without using frameworks that identify learners' needs, institutional expectations, and workplace realities, communication courses risk becoming generic and insufficiently practical. This disconnect may explain why many MBA graduates continue to face challenges in writing effective business documents, despite having completed formal communication courses.

The findings of this study show that while English communication is widely acknowledged as an essential component of MBA education in Assam, there is considerable variation in how it is introduced, taught, and connected to workplace requirements. All six institutions examined include communication courses in their curricula, but the way these courses are framed and delivered differs in significant ways.

While there is a growing awareness in Assam's management schools about the value of English communication, the current approach to teaching is uneven and often criticised for its disconnectedness from industry expectations. There is an urgent need to adopt a curriculum that is practical, needs-based, and aligns with how English is actually used in business. This approach would not only improve students' communication skills but also strengthen their overall professional readiness.

Impact on English Skill Development and Recommendations

The syllabus analysis and institutional review make it clear that the current approach to teaching English communication in many MBA programs in Assam has a limited and uneven impact on students' language skill development. While the inclusion of communication as a course signals awareness of its importance, the way it is structured, taught, and assessed does not provide students with enough exposure or practice to become confident users of English in professional settings.

First, the short duration of most communication courses, especially when limited to a single semester, restricts students' opportunity to build fluency over time. Language development, especially for writing, requires repeated engagement, revision, and contextual application. As many syllabi focus on lectures and theoretical understanding rather than hands-on writing or speaking activities, students often do not experience English as a skill to be honed, but rather as a subject to be passed.

Second, the imbalance between spoken and written communication instruction creates further limitations. Although oral fluency is valuable, writing remains a critical function in managerial roles. Students who are not trained to write clearly, concisely, and professionally may struggle to compose reports, emails, memos, or proposals once they enter the workforce. The neglect of structured writing tasks and absence of feedback mechanisms means that many students graduate without mastering workplace-relevant written English.

Third, the lack of contextualization within the syllabi contributes to reduced learning impact. Without tailoring the content to the specific communication needs of business professionals, the courses remain general in nature. This generic approach may benefit confident English users, but it leaves behind those who need structured language support to improve. As a result, the learning gap between English-medium and vernacular-medium students may widen, with the latter group particularly affected by the absence of scaffolded instruction and skill-based progression.

In the long run, these limitations can affect employability, confidence, and performance in professional environments. Graduates may find it difficult to express themselves in writing, participate in structured communication tasks, or adapt their tone and language to different business contexts. The impact is especially significant in regions where English exposure outside the classroom is limited.

To address these concerns and enhance the effectiveness of English communication education in MBA programs, the following recommendations are proposed:

Adopting a multi-semester, skill-based structure

Instead of limiting communication to a single course, it should be spread across at least two semesters, with a gradual shift from foundational skills to advanced, workplace-specific tasks. This approach would allow students to develop fluency and confidence over time.

Integrating ESP and Needs Analysis principles

Courses should be designed based on the specific language functions and genres required in business contexts. Conducting a needs analysis at the institutional level would help ensure that course content is aligned with employer expectations and student career goals.

Emphasizing on writing skill development

Business writing should be taught not as a one-time performance but as a process involving drafting, revision, feedback, and reflection for enhance writing skill development. Incorporating writing workshops, peer editing, and formative assessment would help students develop practical and transferable writing skills.

Contextualizing learning with real-world tasks

Students' assignments should simulate authentic business communication scenarios such as composing internal memos, writing reports, replying to client emails, or preparing meeting summaries. This would enhance student engagement and improve the transfer of classroom learning to workplace use.

Providing differentiated support for diverse learners

Students from vernacular-medium backgrounds or with limited prior exposure to English often find themselves left out from the teaching and learning process. This not only weakens their already poor language skills but also demotivates them to attend classroom sessions. They should be provided with extra support, offering bridge courses, language labs, or mentoring sessions to help bridge the skill gap and promote inclusive learning outcomes in the classrooms.

Promoting teacher training and instructional resources

Faculty members teaching business communication should be trained in ESP principles and writing pedagogy. As, it is normally observed that the communication course is either taken by an English faculty or a Human

Resource faculty. Hence, in order to equip teachers with updated resources, teacher training must be promoted. Further, instructional resources like sample documents, digital tools, classroom facilities should be augmented to make instruction more practical and interactive.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that while English communication is present in Assam's MBA programs, its limited scope, lack of practical focus, and minimal alignment with workplace needs affects effective skill development. A more structured, needs-based, and professionally relevant approach is essential to build real-world communicative competence among management students. This will not only restore the merit of the communication courses but also better equip students with communication skills required for employability.

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