

## AN INVESTIGATION INTO BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE AND BUSINESS SKILLS IN MARKET LEADER BUSINESS ENGLISH COURSEBOOKS (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)\*

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### Abstract

*Market Leader Business English coursebooks (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)* are used for English for Business Course offered in the four-year Bachelor of Arts in English for Professional Purposes (BA (EPP)) Programme. The purpose of the course is to fulfil the needs of EPP graduates who are going to work in various business fields. The purpose of this research was to investigate the business knowledge and skills provided in the coursebooks and their usefulness in EPP employees' business field. Firstly, all English for Business coursebooks used in BA (EPP) programme were studied and analysed using an evaluation checklist proposed by Romanowski (2016) which was based on the theories of Hutchinson and Water (1987), Cunningsworth (1995), McGrath (2002) and McDonough and Shaw (2013) in order to examine business knowledge and business skills contained in the coursebooks. Then, EPP graduates working in business field were given a questionnaire to explore their responsibilities, and knowledge and skills they need in carrying out their daily business schedules and their opinions on the course. After that, the data were investigated and it was found that the business knowledge and skills contained in the prescribed English for Business coursebooks were suitable and helpful for BA (EPP) graduates and English for Business course was of great help for them to function in business field. The suggestions given were to integrate internship programmes in the course, include more practical tasks and arrange field trips for students so that they will get more experience from actual workplace and learn how the business is going well in real business world.

**Keywords:** English for Business course, Business skills, Business knowledge

### Introduction

Nowadays, in Myanmar, public universities offer Business English courses as Business English is important in grasping job opportunities. The coursebooks used for English for Business Course offered in Bachelor of Arts in English for Professional Purposes (BA (EPP)) programme conducted by National Management Degree College are elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate *Market Leader Business English Coursebook (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)*. According to Frendo (2005), Business English is English people use in their business activities such as negotiating, persuading, telephoning, interviewing, marketing, etc. According to Ellis & Johnson (1994), Business English is an area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and a combination of specific content and general content. But Cunningsworth (1995) stated that although the topics included in ESP coursebooks are different from those in general English coursebooks, criteria for coursebook evaluation are the same, adding a point that ESP coursebooks must contain balanced lessons of language and skills which are useful for business context. This arouse the researcher's interest to investigate the English for Business coursebooks prescribed for BA (EPP) programme. A series of *Market Leader Business English (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)* has been prescribed for BA (EPP) Programme starting from the 2012-2013 academic year. However, to the knowledge of the researcher, no research has been carried out to measure the effectiveness of the coursebooks. Thus, this research aimed to explore the business knowledge and skills provided in those coursebooks and their effectiveness in EPP graduates' business life. In this research, an evaluation checklist for Business English coursebook was used in analysing the coursebooks. A survey questionnaire was sent to EPP graduates working in different business fields via email to find out

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the business knowledge and skills they need in performing their tasks. Finally, the collected data were investigated to find out the usefulness of business knowledge and skills in the coursebooks for EPP employees in their business life. As a result, it was found that some practical tasks and writing activities should be added to the coursebooks although they are useful for EPP graduates in terms of business knowledge and skills.

### Materials and Method

In order to investigate business knowledge and business skills in English for Business coursebooks prescribed for BA (EPP) students, *Elementary, Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate Market Leader Business English Coursebooks (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)*, *Teacher's Resource Books* and *Practice Files* were scrutinized, using an evaluation checklist proposed by Romanowski (2016) which was designed for Business English coursebook evaluation. There are ten topics in the checklist. They are “general attributes”, “design and organization”, “language content”, “skills and tasks”, “culture themes and intercultural communication”, “other relevant topics”, “methodology”, “teacher’s book”, “practical considerations” and “overall/summary evaluation” (See Appendix A). Then, one hundred and thirty six EPP graduates who completed the course in the 2015-2016, 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years were sent a survey questionnaire via email to explore their duties and responsibilities and their needs of business knowledge and business skills. 31 % of them who were employed in business fields responded to the questionnaire via email. The questionnaire comprised nine questions to search what they usually do in their business career, what business knowledge and skills they use and which language skills they use most in their daily business schedules. The questionnaire was set using open and closed questions taking into consideration the point made by Krosnick (2010) that “open items offer more reliable and valid measurement than do closed items” (See Appendix B). Finally, the collected data were studied to investigate whether the business knowledge and skills in the coursebooks help EPP graduates who work in business fields.

### Findings

In this section, the results of the coursebooks’ analysis and business skills and knowledge in the coursebooks and duties and responsibilities of EPP employees and the business knowledge and skills they need in their workplace are presented.

Referring to the data shown in Appendix C which is an analysis of *Market Leader Business English Coursebooks (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)*, the coursebooks can be said to aim at pre-experienced students who are still preparing to work in business field as most of the topics deal with general and basic business knowledge. They are not for a particular business field. The coursebooks contain main units and other sections such as revision, case study, writing file, activity file, grammar reference, audio scripts, glossary and working across cultures to be aware of other cultures. Moreover, practice file, test file and teacher’s resource book with Audio CD and DVD-ROM are included in the course package. Therefore, the coursebooks were found to be complete. The contents are sequenced on the basis of complexity and learnability with reference to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): first year coursebook is of the level between A1 and A2, second year coursebook between A2 and B1, third year coursebook between A2<sup>+</sup> and B1<sup>+</sup> and fourth year coursebook between B1<sup>+</sup> and B2<sup>+</sup>. The layout of each unit is very clear since each unit begins with an overview of the unit. The presentation of lesson sequence is also clear because of sub-headings. Each unit begins with “starting up” activity to introduce students to the topic of the unit, followed by “vocabulary”, “listening”, “reading” and “language focus” and it ends with “business skills”. In addition, pictures, photos, charts are respectively added to the lessons to make them look more authentic and interesting.

As seen in Appendix D which is the analysis of *Vocabularies section provided in each English for Business coursebook*, it can be said that vocabularies taught in English for Business course are fundamental and adequate for students who want to start their business life when they graduate. They are sequenced from more common vocabularies to specific vocabularies related to business. The vocabularies in the first year are quite similar found in most general proficiency coursebooks, for example, nationalities, days, months, dates, leisure activities, adjectives used in talking about jobs, travel details, food and dishes, choosing a product, choosing a service, describing people, etc. In the second year, business vocabularies such as career moves, describing companies, making sales, verb and noun combinations in relation to new ideas, opportunities, stress in the workplace, economic terms, word partnerships in marketing, making plans and describing plans, verbs and prepositions to describe skills and personal qualities, word-building to talk about qualities for negotiators and describing products are found. The third year coursebook deals with more specialized vocabularies such as brand management, British and American English, describing change, company structure, advertising media and methods, financial terms, idioms, employing the right people, free trade, words related to the ethics of different situations, words related to leaders' character, and sports-related competition expressions. In the fourth year, more specialized knowledge and skills that business people should have such as good communicators, marketing word partnerships, describing relations, successful business, synonyms and word-building in relation to the language of motivation and job satisfaction, describing risk, management qualities, prefixes of words used in talking about people and teams in the workplace, financial terms, complaints, handling crises, and describing mergers and acquisitions are included. Thus it is certain that students will be enriched with enough business vocabularies on completion of the course.

From the data shown in *Business knowledge provided in each coursebook* (See Appendix E), it was observed that reading texts are quite authentic and interesting as they are taken from the world's leading sources of professional information and they provide students with sufficient business knowledge. For example, the reading materials in the first year deal with successful business persons with their daily schedules, popular brands, companies, hotels, etc.; in the second year, business companies and their issues and how they expanded their business; in the third year, popular business groups and how they defeat their rival and how they managed their employees; and in the fourth year, business network, business risk, management styles, dealing with crises and finding finance. The reading materials in the first year provide students with basic business knowledge and with more business contents in the second and the third years, and in the fourth year, students are made to reflect the challenges and difficulties they might face in a real business world. Thus, it is clear that the reading materials could really enhance students' business knowledge as well as essential business vocabulary.

Moreover, a topic like "Working across cultures" section was included to help students raise awareness of different cultures in dealing with people with different cultural backgrounds. The cultural contents like cultural attitudes to eating out; different communication styles in China, Germany and the US; aspects of doing business in France and Russia and etiquette when invited into a person's home in Colombia; attitudes to team work in Asian, northern European and southern European countries; how to say "no" politely in different cultures; how to do business internationally; how to participate effectively in international conference calls; how to prepare to do business internationally; cultural difficulties when doing business in an international context; the ways that people communicate, not only through language, but also in other ways; and negotiations in a cross-cultural context can be found in the coursebooks and they can be seen in Appendix F.

Referring to the data shown in Appendix G which is the analysis of *business skills provided in each coursebook*, it can be said that business skills that are useful for students who are going

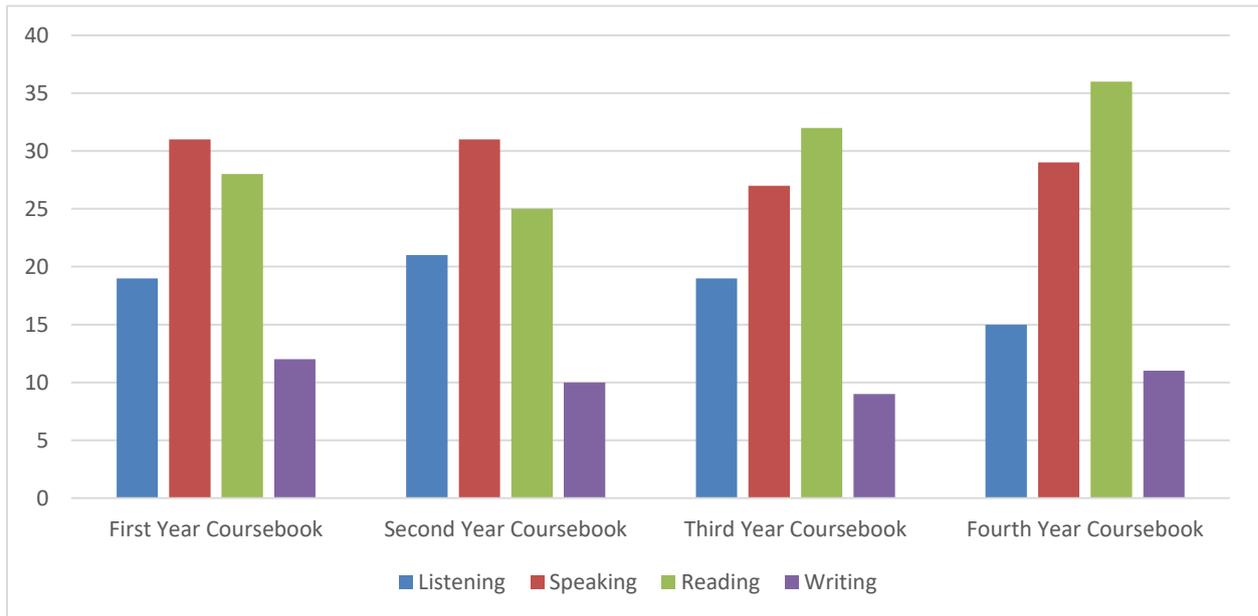
into the business world are integrated in the lessons of these coursebooks. In the first year, students learn some common language functions and business skills such as introducing oneself, giving opinions, meeting, negotiation and presentation skills. In the second year, essential skills needed to use in business world such as telephoning, presentation, negotiation and meeting skills are taught. In the third year, making arrangements, obtaining information on the phone, considering options, meeting skills, negotiation and presentation skills and in the fourth year, more advanced skills like dealing with communication breakdown, brainstorming, establishing good business relationships, reaching agreement, resolving conflict, active listening, dealing with difficult questions and making presentation are included. In addition, interview skills, social English and cold-calling which are essential in business world are also taught in the fourth year. The percentage of business skills distributed in the coursebooks can be seen in the following table.

**Table 1 Percentage of business skills provided in English for Business coursebooks**

| Skills                       | Frequency | %  |
|------------------------------|-----------|----|
| Socializing                  | 4         | 8  |
| Telephoning                  | 6         | 13 |
| Participating in discussions | 8         | 17 |
| Interviewing                 | 1         | 2  |
| Negotiating                  | 6         | 13 |
| Managing meetings            | 4         | 8  |
| Making presentations         | 7         | 15 |
| Problem solving              | 2         | 4  |

In order to practise business skills and to equip students with business knowledge and vocabularies for real-life situations, several speaking activities and the case study sections are in the coursebooks. Speaking activities comprise role-play, telephone conversations, group discussions, marketing meetings, preparing and giving presentations, negotiations, holding regular meetings, attending conferences and brainstorming meetings. Case study sections consist of simulations of real-life business world. As most activities are role-plays, students have opportunities to take different roles and different responsibilities depending on their tasks. The case study section puts students in situations that are unavoidable in business fields so that they can develop their business vocabulary, business knowledge and business skills.

Furthermore, the data shown in Appendix H proved that activities in the coursebooks aim to develop the integrated skills of students. The following bar graph shows the distribution of skills development activities in the coursebooks.



**Figure 1** Percentage of activities and exercises for each language skill

As seen in Figure 1, the percentages of reading and speaking skills activities in the coursebooks were higher than those of listening and writing. Materials for spoken English in each coursebook are well-designed to equip students with useful language phrases used in performing their tasks in real-life situations. Speaking activities are developed to initiate meaningful communication having a balance between individual response, pair work and group work. They are also adequate for students who want to do business since the speaking activities called for role-plays, discussions, presentations, meetings that students can practise their knowledge and language taking different roles and responsibilities depending on the situations and problems given. The listening materials in the coursebooks were authentic interviews with business people and background information was provided in the instruction. Moreover, it was discovered that the coursebooks contains a variety of listening tasks such as true/false, fill-in, completion, numbering, taking notes, answering the questions, choosing correct answer, discussion, error correction and summarizing (See Appendix C). Concerning business writing, different genres of business writing which are essential in business fields, for example, email, reply message, product launch, company profile, action minutes, letter, a proposal, report, summary, press release/letter, guidelines, and article/report were found in those coursebooks (See Appendix C). Thus, it can be said that students are more likely to feel confident in their business writing after completion the course.

In addition, from *the findings from the questionnaire sent out to EPP graduates* as shown in Appendix I, some concrete evidences of the helpfulness and effectiveness of English for Business course for EPP graduates can be witnessed.

The following are the findings from the questionnaire which consisted of nine questions.

Responding to Question 1, all respondents replied that the knowledge and skills they acquired from the BA (EPP) programme are applicable to their work since they can perform their tasks easily when they enter the business world.

Concerning Question 2, the use of English at workplace, it was found that over 60% of respondents used over 70% English in their work every day while 16% of respondents used less than 40% English in their daily routine (See Appendix J).

With regard to Question 3, it was observed that the respondents have different duties and responsibilities in their daily life and the skills and knowledge they learnt from the course help them in performing their tasks efficiently. For example, they can communicate with guests and travel agents, build good relationship with customers, participate in business meetings and negotiate prices as they have learnt socializing, establishing good business relationships, negotiation and meeting skills. Moreover, they can perform well in arranging events, brainstorming marketing strategies, solving customers' complaints, planning promotional activities and merchandising materials due to the fact that the coursebooks provide them with making arrangements, brainstorming, reaching agreement, resolving conflict, and presentation skills. As the coursebooks equip them with business knowledge like launching a new product, business strategy, management styles, brands, advertising technique, employee engagement, qualities of successful salespeople, conflict management, trade and the economic issues, raising new business finance, workplace problems, and the importance of teamwork in business, they can deal with project management, strategy development, marketing and digital campaigns, change management, HR strategy planning, employer branding, social media content, event planning for employee engagement and employee well-being, taking care of shopper marketing and creating idea for promotion for shopper, maintaining and developing brand image, developing new products, working with internal and external teams for brand events, and marketing plan.

In response to Question 4, all respondents used all English language skills. But the percentage of language skills they used every day varied according to their duties and responsibilities.

**Table 2 Percentage of employees with their most used language skill**

| Language Skills | No. of employees | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------------|------------|
| Listening       | 10               | 24         |
| Speaking        | 9                | 21         |
| Reading         | 22               | 52         |
| Writing         | 22               | 52         |

As shown in Table 2, over 50% of respondents used more reading and writing skills and over 20% used more listening and speaking skills. According to the analysis presented in Appendix H, the coursebooks contained more reading and speaking skills activities than writing tasks. The finding suggests that more writing activities should be added in the coursebooks in order to meet the required skills demanded in their everyday business life.

The responses of participants to Question 5 pointed out that employees had to perform different tasks applying different business skills. 93% of respondents needed to participate in discussions and over 80% involved in problem solving, socializing and negotiating. Over 70% dealt with managing meetings and making presentations, but only 40% needed to conduct interviews (See Appendix K).

Regarding Question 6, as seen in Appendix L, over 90% of respondents had to write emails and reports and over 60% needed to write business letters, action minutes and proposals. 55% had to write guidelines, but only 19% were involved in preparing press release. Thus it is clear that the business writing used most by EPP graduates are email writing and report writing.

The findings of Question 7 proves the effectiveness of the English for Business Course as most respondents did not attend any business English course when they started their business career

though some attended in-house training as well as business management courses (See Appendix I).

In response to Question 8, none of the respondents denied that English for Business Course is of great help to EPP graduates in their business life. Some very positive responses to that question are “English for Business course really makes my life easier at work”; “I don’t have to struggle like others in understanding the usage of Business English words and this also placed me in a better position in doing business deals with foreign companies”; “It gave me knowledge about writing emails, letters, vocabularies to use in meetings, dealing with customers and business partners and help me to get ready for those tasks when I started working”; “Managing meeting is easier and I can make conversation with superiors confidently”; “We can get knowledge concerning companies and products which can help us boost our career as a part in the future”, etc. Thus, in general, it can be summarized that English for Business course provides sufficient knowledge and skills for students. The only suggestion made by EPP graduates is to integrate practical work, projects and field trips into the course so that students can get more experience of actual workplace experiences and learn how to achieve success in real business world.

### **Discussion**

According to the findings of the results of the analysis of English for Business coursebooks and responses of EPP employees, it can be said that business knowledge and business skills in the coursebooks meet the needs of EPP employees in performing their tasks. All the materials and activities in listening, speaking, reading and writing are suitable and support EPP students to enrich business vocabulary and business knowledge and to improve business skills. Although the percentage of exercises for reading and speaking is higher than listening and writing in the coursebooks, the employees need more reading and writing in their everyday business schedule. Thus, it is recommended that more writing activities should be provided with sufficient actual practice as more practical work and visit to real factories and companies are required in order to get more real-life workplace experiences.

As seen in Appendix H, the amount of activities for business skills improvement was sufficient for students because the coursebooks comprise 17% of participating in discussions, 15% presentation skills, 13% negotiation and telephoning, and 2% for interviewing. It shows that the coursebooks contained fewer activities for interview skills than other business skills. In real business world, EPP employees do not use much interview skills. However, it was found that activities for socializing, managing meetings and problem solving are not enough because their percentage was less than 10%. In real business world, over 70% of EPP employees had to use those business skills. Thus, more activities on those skills should be included to give more practice to students.

According to the findings of the percentage of writing activities in coursebooks shown in Appendix M, it can be said that the coursebooks contain the highest number of writing tasks for e-mail as its percentage was 40% and the least percentage went to writing proposals, guidelines and press release. But for writing reports, it was 23% and for business letters 17%. When comparing the percentage of writing activities in each coursebook to the employees’ needs, it was found that more activities for writing reports, business letters, action minutes, proposals and guidelines should be added in order to provide EPP students with adequate writing practice.

To put it in a nutshell, it can be concluded that English for Business coursebooks can equip BA (EPP) students not only with fundamental business knowledge but also with sufficient business skills to be able to function well in various business fields.

## Conclusion

With reference to the findings of business knowledge and business skills in coursebooks and EPP employees' needs in their business life, it can be summarized that business knowledge and business skills in prescribed English for Business coursebooks: *elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate Market Leader Business English coursebooks* are of great help to EPP graduates working in business fields. They can fulfil the requirements called for by different job positions and they also meet the needs of EPP employees. Therefore, EPP employees do not need to attend any course for their jobs except the on-the-job training. In conclusion, it can be claimed that *Market Leader Business English Coursebooks (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)* are suitable for students who want to work in different business fields with the exception that more practical work and writing tasks need to be added to the coursebooks.

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**Appendix A****The proposed evaluation sheet designed by Romanowski (2016)**

There are ten topics in it. The topics with the detailed questions are as follows:

**General attributes**

1. What kind of learners is the course book aimed at: pre-experienced or job- experienced students?
2. Is it meant for a specific working area?
3. What components make up the total course package?

**Design and organization**

1. Is a vocabulary list/index included?
2. Are there reference sections for grammar etc.?
3. How is the content sequenced (e.g. on the basis of complexity, learnability, usefulness)?
4. What visual materials does the book contain (photographs, charts, diagrams)?
5. Are the layout and presentation clear?
6. Are the tests included in the teaching materials (diagnostic, progress, achievement)?
7. Is there adequate recycling and revision?
8. Is it well-organized and can it be used intuitively?

**Language content**

1. Does the course book cover the main grammar items appropriate for the level, taking learners' needs into account?
2. Is the material for vocabulary teaching adequate in quantity and range?
3. Is the Business English vocabulary clearly introduced?
4. Is vocabulary practice sufficient for the students?
5. Is there any material for pronunciation work included?
6. Does the course book deal with structuring and conventions of language use above sentence level (are tips given on how to structure conversations or various genres of writing)?

**Skills and tasks**

1. Are all four skills adequately covered?
2. Is there material for integrated skills work?
3. Is material for spoken English (role-plays, dialogues, etc.) well-designed to equip students for real-life situations?
4. Are the speaking activities developed to initiate meaningful communication?
5. Are the speaking activities balanced between individual response, pair work and group work?
6. Are the speaking activities adequate for business people?
7. Are the readings suitable for students at the proper level?
8. Are the readings interesting and authentic?
9. Is the listening material of good quality, authentic, accompanied by background information and various tasks?
10. Do the writing tasks have achievable goals and take learners' abilities into consideration?
11. Are all genres of writing present in business context well-practised?
12. Are the task instructions clear?

### **Culture themes and intercultural communication**

1. Is there cultural content added in the texts/activities?
2. Do the activities raise cultural awareness of students?
3. Are the exercises, texts and recordings adequate in terms of developing learners' intercultural communicative competence?
4. Do the activities and exercises offer sufficient practice for business-related environment?

### **Other relevant topics**

1. Is there sufficient material of interest to learners?
2. Are all the main topic areas covered?
3. Are the presented topics relevant to the professional life of the students?
4. Will the topics help expand students' awareness and enrich their experience?

### **Methodology**

1. Can the activities be exploited fully? Do they embrace a variety of methodologies in ELT?
2. Does the material include any advice to students on study skills and learning strategies?
3. Are students expected to take a degree of responsibility for their own learning?

### **Teacher's book**

1. Is there adequate guidance for teachers who will be using the course book and its supporting materials?
2. Are keys to exercises given?
3. Are there any additional photocopiable activities/exercises included?
4. Are tests incorporated into the teacher's book?

### **Practical considerations**

1. What do the book and supplementary material cost? Does this represent good value for money?
2. Are the books strong and long-lasting?
3. Are they attractive in appearance?

### **Overall evaluation**

1. Is the course book comprehensive enough to make up the syllabus of a course?
2. Can the materials be used as core or supplementary?
3. Is the book a sufficient resource for learners and teachers?
4. Is the course book flexible? Is it possible to omit some units or use them in a different order?
5. Does the course book allow for different teaching and learning styles?
6. Is some of the material suitable for self-study?

## Appendix B

**Questionnaire for employees (EPP graduates)**

Dear Students

In order to do research on an evaluation of English for Business Course offered in BA (EPP) programme, I would appreciate it if you would assist me by completing the following questionnaire. Your response will be anonymous and all information will be treated confidentially and exclusively for the research study. In order for the research study to be reliable, your exact and true information is needed. Thank you for your co-operation.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Academic year you finished BA (EPP) programme: \_\_\_\_\_

Educational qualification(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Designation/Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of service: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you think the knowledge and skills you acquired from the BA (EPP) programme are applicable to your work? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you need to use English at your work? If so, what percentage of English do you use every day?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What are your duties and responsibilities? Please specify them.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you need to use all four skills at your work? What percentage of each skill is used at work?

\_\_\_\_\_

listening \_\_\_\_\_% speaking \_\_\_\_\_% reading \_\_\_\_\_% writing \_\_\_\_\_%

5. Which of the following tasks do you perform in English at work? Please tick them.

a) Socializing \_\_\_\_\_

b) Telephoning \_\_\_\_\_

c) Participating in discussions \_\_\_\_\_

d) Interviewing \_\_\_\_\_

e) Negotiating \_\_\_\_\_

f) Managing meetings \_\_\_\_\_

- g) Making presentations \_\_\_\_\_
  - h) Problem solving \_\_\_\_\_
  - Others: \_\_\_\_\_
- 

6. What kinds of business writing do you do in English at your work? Please tick them.

- a) emails \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) product launch plans \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) company profile \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) action minutes \_\_\_\_\_
  - e) business letters \_\_\_\_\_
  - f) proposals \_\_\_\_\_
  - g) reports \_\_\_\_\_
  - h) press release \_\_\_\_\_
  - i) guidelines \_\_\_\_\_
  - j) articles \_\_\_\_\_
  - Others: \_\_\_\_\_
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7. Did you need to attend a business course or training when you first entered the business world?  
If yes, what course or training and why?

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8. Do you think English for Business course is of great help for you in your business life? Why?

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9. What suggestions would you like to give to improve English for Business course?

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Comments:

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