

DESIGNING ENGLISH FOR THEOLOGY: A DUAL-DOMAIN ESP CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR THEOLOGY STUDENTS IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum for theology students can integrate academic and ministerial needs within one coherent framework. Using a qualitative descriptive case study at STT Anugerah Misi Nias Barat, Indonesia, data were collected over one semester through a needs-analysis questionnaire administered to theology students, semi-structured interviews with relevant institutional stakeholders, and analysis of existing teaching materials. The triangulated findings reveal two interconnected domains of need: academic theological literacy and ministerial-mission performance. Students needed English to read theological books, journal articles, commentaries, and abstracts; write summaries and reflections; and present theological ideas. They also needed English for prayer, Scripture reading, testimony, and ministry communication. However, their proficiency remained low, especially in speaking and listening, with grammar, limited vocabulary, low confidence, and restricted exposure as major challenges. The study argues that English for Theology should not abruptly replace foundational English, but should recontextualize it through theology-related texts, tasks, and assessments appropriate for low-exposure, faith-based higher education settings.

Keywords: *Curriculum design; English for Specific Purposes; English for Theology; Needs analysis; Theology students*

Introduction

English has become a dominant language of academic circulation, scholarly gatekeeping, and cross-border professional exchange. In higher education, students who can read and communicate in English gain wider access to books, journal articles, digital repositories, conferences, and international scholarly networks; those who cannot often remain dependent on local-language materials and narrower intellectual ecosystems (Hyland, 2022; Hyland & Jiang, 2021; Yang et al., 2023). This condition is especially significant in theology, biblical studies, missiology, and related fields because a substantial body of foundational and contemporary scholarship is available in English. The ability to interpret theological arguments, consult commentaries and lexicons, engage academic abstracts, and participate in ministry

conversations beyond the local context is therefore not peripheral but structurally important to theological education. In English language teaching, such discipline-linked demands are addressed through English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP is generally defined not by a special grammar or a rigid method, but by its responsiveness to learners' purposes, target tasks, and context-specific communicative needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Hyland, 2022). From this perspective, curriculum decisions should be derived from what learners need to do with English, the genres they must handle, the constraints under which they learn, and the forms of assessment that best reflect real use. More recent curriculum-oriented accounts similarly emphasize that needs analysis, goals, content sequencing, format, methodology, and assessment need to be aligned as a single design process rather than treated as disconnected stages

(Nation & Macalister, 2020). Such an orientation is especially relevant when learners must use English in specialized discourse communities shaped by field-specific texts, values, and communicative events (Hyland & Jiang, 2021; MacDiarmid & Haghi, 2024).

For theology students, the relevance of ESP is not confined to reading academic sources. English for Theology, or English for Bible and Theology, involves distinctive genres, lexical items, discourse practices, and communicative situations that differ in meaningful ways from General English (Deressa et al., 2022; Manurung & Sinambela, 2023). Students may need to understand theological terminology, summarize doctrinal arguments, read short exegetical passages, present theological ideas in class, participate in ministry simulations, lead prayer, read Scripture aloud, and communicate in worship- or mission-related settings. This means that a workable theology-oriented curriculum must respond to two intertwined purposes at once: academic theological literacy and practical ministerial communication. Reducing English for theology to everyday conversation ignores the academic burden of theological study; reducing it to reading alone ignores the lived ministerial performance expected of graduates.

Indonesian ESP scholarship increasingly recognizes the need for discipline-sensitive curriculum design, yet the theological domain remains relatively underdeveloped. Studies in Christian higher education have shown that theology students experience persistent difficulties in vocabulary, pronunciation, writing, and the expression of complex theological ideas, and that they benefit from more specialized materials and pedagogy (Manurung & Sinambela, 2023). Other recent needs-analysis studies similarly demonstrate that stakeholder expectations, learner constraints, and target tasks should shape course design rather than being treated as background information (Mao & Zhou, 2024; Simaremare et al., 2023). However, much of the available work either concentrates on isolated classroom issues, focuses on material development, or treats theological English as a partial adaptation of General English rather than as a curriculum problem in its own right. What remains less clearly demonstrated is how a curriculum can be designed for a theological institution where learners have low exposure,

modest proficiency, strong ministry orientation, and limited time for autonomous study.

This unresolved issue is not only practical but theoretical. If ESP is truly needs-driven, then theology poses a useful test case because its target domain is internally complex. Theology students often need to operate across at least two overlapping discourse worlds: one academic, where texts, summaries, terminology, and argumentation matter; and one ministerial, where oral intelligibility, worship participation, testimony, pastoral interaction, and mission communication are central. (Kurniaty et al., 2024) curricula are designed around only one of these worlds, a mismatch emerges between instructional content and projected graduate roles. Theological education therefore offers an important site for refining ESP theory at the level of curriculum alignment, especially in institutions where resource limitations and low learner exposure make abrupt specialization pedagogically unrealistic (Ghafar, 2022; Nation & Macalister, 2020). The present study emerged from such a mismatch at STT Anugerah Misi Nias Barat, a theological institution whose students are being prepared for ministries such as pastoring, teaching, evangelism, and mission work. The existing English course had largely retained a General English orientation even though English competence was needed for accessing theological literature, participating in theology-related academic activity, and preparing for ministry and mission communication. Internal evidence gathered before the full study suggested that many students still struggled with reading comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and theology-specific terminology. Diagnostic and interview data further indicated that students often lacked confidence when asked to present, lead prayer, or read Scripture in English. Although English-language worship exposure had been introduced institutionally, these activities had not yet been supported by a systematic curriculum grounded in learners' target and learning needs.

The local case therefore illustrates a broader ESP problem: how can a curriculum remain pedagogically realistic for beginner or low-intermediate learners while also moving beyond a generic language course toward field-relevant academic and vocational performance? An answer cannot be produced simply by

inserting theology vocabulary into an existing textbook. It requires attention to environment analysis, present situation analysis, target situation analysis, and learning needs, followed by a translation of those findings into goals, content, tasks, and assessment (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; MacDiarmid & Haghi, 2024; Nation & Macalister, 2020). It also requires methodological sensitivity. In low-exposure settings, questionnaire results alone are not sufficient; richer interpretation depends on triangulating learner reports with stakeholder expectations and document analysis of the materials actually used in class (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Morgan, 2022).

Accordingly, this article investigates the English needs of theology students at STT Anugerah Misi Nias Barat and uses those findings to formulate a context-sensitive ESP curriculum framework. The study addresses three questions: what English needs theology students have in terms of target needs and learning needs; what curriculum components should be derived from those findings; and how the resulting curriculum orientation can be interpreted in light of stakeholder expectations and existing teaching materials. The contribution of the article is twofold. Empirically, it offers a richly contextualized description of theology students' needs in a faith-based higher education setting in Indonesia. Theoretically, it argues that English for Theology in this context is best understood as a dual-domain ESP curriculum that integrates academic theological literacy with ministerial-mission performance while preserving a strong scaffold for foundational language development.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study with embedded quantitative description. A case study design was appropriate because the investigation was bounded by one institution, one learner population, and one curricular problem: the design of English for Theology at STT Anugerah Misi Nias Barat. Rather than testing the effectiveness of an intervention, the study sought to understand learners' present condition, identify target tasks and learning preferences, compare those needs with the current course, and translate the results into curriculum directions (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Tisdell et al., 2025). The descriptive orientation was important because the study

aimed to produce a detailed account of the case and a design response that was grounded in institutional realities rather than abstractly generalized beyond the context. The research was conducted over approximately one academic semester at STT Anugerah Misi Nias Barat, a Christian theological institution in Indonesia. The program prepares students for ministry roles such as pastoring, teaching, evangelism, and mission work. English was already part of the curriculum, but it had mainly been taught as General English. This setting made the institution analytically useful for ESP research because English had recognized value, yet the curriculum had not been systematically aligned with theology students' academic and ministerial needs. The semester-long fieldwork period allowed sufficient time to gather learner data, conduct interviews, analyze curricular documents, and develop an interpretive account of the case.

The primary student participants were theology students who had taken or were taking English courses. These students were central because the curriculum was being designed for them and because they could provide first-hand information about their difficulties, priorities, preferences, and short-term goals. The broader stakeholder group consisted of semi-structured interview informants representing foundation leadership, institutional leadership, academic leadership, program leadership, and students. These roles were important because an ESP curriculum should not be based solely on learner preference; it must also reflect the communicative expectations attached to future graduate roles and institutional mission (Hyland, 2022; Nation & Macalister, 2020). Participants were therefore selected purposively to capture information-rich perspectives directly relevant to the curricular problem under investigation. In this sense, participant inclusion was guided by contextual relevance and analytical contribution rather than by statistical representation.

Three main instruments supported data collection. First, a student needs-analysis questionnaire gathered information on English exposure, prior learning experiences, self-rated ability, perceived difficulty, target-task importance, preferred learning activities, feasibility constraints, and short-term learning goals. The questionnaire combined Likert-scale items, ranking tasks, multiple-choice options, and

open-ended responses. Closed-ended items provided descriptive tendencies, while open-ended items supplied richer contextual detail (Yusoff et al., 2021). Second, semi-structured interview guides were developed for student and stakeholder informants. Interview questions focused on perceptions of current English ability, anticipated academic and ministry uses of English, limitations of the current course, and expectations for a revised curriculum. Third, a document analysis checklist was used to examine the teaching material currently used in the English course, namely Teaching Material Bahasa Inggris 1 for the 2025/2026 academic year. The checklist covered stated goals, topics, skills emphasized, text types or genres, theology-related content, and exercise or assessment orientation.

Data were collected in several stages. After institutional permission was obtained and the research purpose was communicated, the questionnaire was administered to theology students. Interview participants were then selected on the basis of role relevance and information richness. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and conducted in a language comfortable for participants; they were later transcribed and translated where necessary for analysis and reporting. Relevant teaching materials and institutional documents were collected for documentary review. After the needs-analysis data had been interpreted, the researcher formulated curriculum implications concerning goals, content areas, learning activities, and assessment, and these implications were considered in relation to stakeholder perspectives on relevance and feasibility. Analysis combined descriptive and thematic procedures. Closed-ended questionnaire items were summarized through frequencies, percentages, rankings, and mean scores in order to identify dominant patterns in learner profile, self-rated ability, target-task importance, and learning preferences. Open-ended responses, interview transcripts, and documentary evidence were then read repeatedly and coded inductively. Codes were grouped under categories aligned with ESP needs-analysis constructs, particularly present situation analysis, target situation analysis, lacks, wants, learning needs, and curriculum implications. The analytic process followed a thematic logic in which recurring

meanings were identified, compared, and interpreted across sources rather than treated as isolated findings (Bingham, 2023; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Triangulation was a central analytic principle. Questionnaire patterns were not interpreted as self-sufficient evidence; instead, they were compared with stakeholder interviews and document analysis to identify convergence, divergence, and complementarity. This step was important because a curriculum should reflect both what learners report and what institutional actors expect them to do in future academic and ministerial settings. Document analysis added a further layer by revealing whether the actual course content already addressed, partially addressed, or failed to address the needs identified elsewhere in the data (Morgan, 2022). After the main patterns were established, they were translated into curriculum components by drawing on language curriculum design principles associated with environment analysis, needs analysis, goals, content sequencing, format, and assessment (Nation & Macalister, 2020). The trustworthiness of the study was strengthened through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability procedures (Ahmed, 2024). Credibility was enhanced through the use of multiple sources, sustained engagement over one semester, and the comparison of learner, stakeholder, and documentary evidence. Dependability was supported through an audit trail of coding notes and analytic decisions. Transferability was addressed by providing thick description of the institution, participants, and pedagogical context so that readers can judge the applicability of the findings to similar settings. Confirmability was pursued by grounding interpretations in collected evidence rather than personal assumptions. The study also observed ethical principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respectful reporting, while maintaining reflexive awareness throughout the research process (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

The design nevertheless has clear boundaries. As an institution-specific qualitative case study, the study was intended to generate in-depth, contextually grounded understanding rather than statistical generalization. Most learner data derive from self-report, which means that the findings describe perceived ability and priority

rather than independently measured proficiency. Even so, the study gains methodological strength from triangulation across learner questionnaires, stakeholder interviews, and document analysis, allowing patterns to be interpreted through converging sources rather than a single dataset. Because the study is concerned with curriculum design rather than intervention testing, its value lies in analytical depth, contextual relevance, and the coherence of cross-source evidence for similar faith-based higher education settings, rather than in broad numerical coverage (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Tisdell et al., 2025).

Findings and Discussion

The first notable feature of the case is the coexistence of limited English exposure and high vocational relevance. Most respondents reported using English only one to two times per week, while the remainder reported using it three to four times per week. No respondent reported intensive or daily use. At the same time, ministry orientation was strong: mission was the dominant area of interest for most students, and a majority had at least some participation in English-language worship or service activities. This combination matters because it shapes what kind of curriculum is realistic. A program designed for learners with daily English contact would differ sharply from one designed for students whose exposure is irregular and limited, yet whose future roles make English symbolically and practically important. The stakeholder data sharpen this profile. Foundation and institutional leaders repeatedly connected English with mission identity, wider ministry networks, and communication with external partners. Academic leaders emphasized the role of English in accessing theological literature and supporting disciplinary literacy. Together, these perspectives indicate that English at STT Anugerah Misi Nias Barat is not an optional prestige subject. It functions simultaneously as an academic resource and as a form of ministry capital. That dual positioning helps explain why a conventional General English model is pedagogically insufficient: it underestimates the specific communicative situations students are being prepared to enter.

This profile also has implications for curricular pacing. Because students do not inhabit an English-rich environment, the classroom must carry more of the burden of input, guided

practice, and rehearsal than it would in a high-exposure setting. At the same time, because students already connect English with mission and worship, the course needs visible relevance from the beginning. A curriculum that postpones all field relevance until after a long period of generic language preparation risks losing motivational force. For this reason, the case suggests that curriculum design should combine early contextualization with careful scaffolding rather than treating foundational language and theology-related language as two completely separate stages.

Students' self-ratings reveal that present ability is low across all major skill areas relevant to the projected curriculum. Reading theological texts and writing summaries or reflections were both rated in the low range. The weakest areas, however, were speaking for presentation or worship and listening to sermons or lectures. The mean scores were 2.27 for reading theological texts, 2.27 for writing summaries or reflections, 1.73 for speaking for presentation or worship, 1.91 for listening to sermon- or lecture-like input, and 2.36 for understanding theological vocabulary. These results indicate that the students were not only short of advanced theological English; they were also fragile in the foundational language resources required to participate in the target tasks identified elsewhere in the study. The difficulty profile adds important detail. All respondents selected sentence building during speaking as a major problem. Other recurring difficulties included listening to accent or speed, understanding theological vocabulary, and producing academic writing. Open-ended responses repeatedly mentioned grammar as a major obstacle, alongside limited time, uneven motivation, and restricted access to facilities. This pattern suggests that the central bottleneck is not unwillingness but the gap between target-task demands and the linguistic resources students currently possess. In ESP terms, the study therefore identifies a clear set of lacks: learners are expected to perform theology-related academic and ministry tasks for which their present control of grammar, vocabulary, listening, and oral organization remains inadequate.

Interview data strongly reinforce this interpretation. Student informants described low confidence, weak grammar, and limited lexical

range. Leaders and lecturers likewise characterized many students as functioning at a beginner level in English. This cross-source convergence is significant because it discourages simplistic curricular solutions. The findings do not justify either of two common extremes: retaining a generic General English course indefinitely, or abruptly replacing it with highly specialized theological English beyond learners' current reach. Instead, the evidence points toward a scaffolded model in which foundational language support is retained but recontextualized within theology-related tasks and texts. Such a model is more consistent with a learning-centred view of ESP, where target needs and learning realities must be considered together (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Hyland, 2022).

The first major domain of need that emerges from the data is academic theological literacy. When students were asked to rank priorities, reading theological texts received the highest priority. Importance-scale items also showed that understanding theological and Bible-study terms, presenting in theology class, and writing summaries of readings were all valued. Stakeholder interviews clarify why these tasks matter. Academic leaders emphasized that students need English to access books, commentaries, journal articles, abstracts, and other theology-related sources, and to transform that input into summaries, reflections, and classroom presentations. This means that academic need in the present case cannot be reduced to generalized reading practice; it concerns the development of disciplinary literacy for theology.

Academic theological literacy is best understood as more than vocabulary acquisition. It includes the ability to decode genre conventions, recognize key concepts, follow argument structure, and re-express understanding in writing or speech. For theology students, this may involve reading short commentary-like passages, identifying doctrinal or biblical concepts, distinguishing main ideas from supporting detail, summarizing readings, and discussing or presenting theological ideas in class. Such tasks align with broader accounts of English for academic purposes, but they also have field-specific features because theological discourse is lexically dense and conceptually loaded (Hyland, 2022; MacDiarmid & Haghi,

2024). A curriculum for this context should therefore include not just general reading comprehension but guided engagement with theology-related genres and vocabulary.

The documentary evidence reveals why this need remains under-served. The current teaching material does contain some theology-themed readings and a vocabulary section, yet its dominant structure remains closer to beginner-level General English than to a curriculum organized around academic theological literacy. The readings are relatively short and controlled, and they do not yet represent the full range of genres students are expected to encounter, such as commentary excerpts, journal abstracts, response writing, or reflection tasks. From a curriculum perspective, then, the issue is not total absence of relevance but insufficient depth and integration. The existing material offers a starting point, but it does not yet provide a sufficiently systematic pathway from foundational reading to discipline-specific academic performance.

The significance of this domain also becomes clearer when compared with previous studies. Research in theology-related ESP has repeatedly shown that learners need access to specialized texts and support for academic expression, not merely conversational English (Deressa et al., 2022; Manurung & Sinambela, 2023). The present case confirms that finding, but it extends it by showing that academic literacy needs to be embedded in a curriculum that also recognizes ministerial performance and low current proficiency. In other words, reading and writing cannot be treated as a separate elite track for the strongest students; they must be built into a staged curriculum that begins with manageable, structured texts and gradually moves toward more discipline-relevant literacy tasks.

The second major domain of need is ministerial and mission performance. On the importance-scale items, leading prayer or Scripture reading in English worship received the highest score, and students also attached high value to presenting theological ideas in class. Interview data extend this picture by highlighting prayer, worship leading, testimony, short sermon-related talk, Bible study discussion, and communication in mission or partnership settings. These tasks are not marginal add-ons to theology students' future roles. They are central to how graduates imagine service and how

institutional stakeholders define readiness for ministry. This finding is especially important because it complicates a reading-only view of theological English. The students do need access to theological literature, but they also need intelligible spoken performance in settings where confidence, pronunciation, sequencing of ideas, and appropriate language choice matter. The current case therefore supports a dual-domain understanding of English for Theology: students need to function in academic discourse and in ministry discourse, and the two domains reinforce each other. For instance, a student who reads a short theological text may need to summarize it orally, connect it to a testimony or Bible study, or use theology-related vocabulary in a worship context. Curriculum design that isolates the academic and ministerial domains too sharply will fail to represent the lived integration of study and ministry in theological education.

Here again, the existing teaching material only partially addresses the target situation. Although it includes some prayers, Bible verses, and worship songs, the listening and speaking sections remain largely general in orientation. They do not yet focus systematically on the kinds of spoken input and output students actually need, such as sermon excerpts, testimony, Scripture reading, prayer leadership, or brief theology-related presentations. Assessment is likewise weakly aligned with ministerial performance because the material still privileges controlled language practice over authentic target-task performance. The implication is clear: spoken ministry tasks need to become explicit curricular outcomes rather than incidental extensions of a general speaking lesson.

Theoretically, this domain also helps sharpen the contribution of the study. Many ESP discussions identify target situations, but the present case demonstrates that in faith-based higher education, vocational performance may involve liturgical, interpersonal, and mission-oriented communication that standard academic ESP models do not foreground. By treating prayer, Scripture reading, testimony, and ministry-related discussion as legitimate target tasks, the study broadens what counts as field-relevant communication in theological education. At the same time, it shows that such tasks still need to be scaffolded through foundational

language work rather than assumed to emerge spontaneously from exposure.

The data show that curriculum design in this context must be shaped not only by what students need to do with English, but also by how they can realistically learn. Students' preferred activities were strongly practical. Role-play for ministry situations received the highest preference score, followed by writing practice with feedback, discussion of theological texts, reading authentic short theological texts, theological vocabulary support, and listening to sermon- or lecture-type audio. These preferences suggest that students do not want a decontextualized language course. They want visible connection between classroom activity and the academic or ministerial realities they value. Feasibility constraints are equally important. Most students preferred printed texts rather than materials heavily dependent on slides or longer video consumption, and the typical amount of study time available outside class was short. Interview data further referred to institutional limitations such as time constraints, dormitory regulations, and limited English-teaching resources. Together, these conditions imply that a curriculum should privilege short, repeatable cycles of input, guided practice, feedback, and performance. Long, highly autonomous study tasks may be ideal in theory, but they are misaligned with the lived study conditions of the learners in this case.

These findings support a learning-centred model of ESP. A course can be highly relevant in content yet still fail if its format and pacing exceed what learners can sustain. In the present case, practical and low-anxiety design principles are essential. Foundational grammar and vocabulary should be taught through theology-related examples; reading tasks should be short and guided; speaking tasks should move from controlled rehearsal to supported performance; and writing should involve feedback on manageable texts such as summaries, reflections, and brief responses. The important point is that feasibility is not a secondary implementation detail. It is part of the need profile itself and should shape sequencing, material selection, and assessment design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nation & Macalister, 2020).

The document analysis is crucial because it reveals the degree of alignment between

identified needs and the material students are actually using. The teaching material currently employed at STT Anugerah Misi Nias Barat was designed to introduce basic English and did include certain theology-related elements, such as theological vocabulary, selected readings, prayers, Bible verses, and worship songs. These features mean that the material should not be dismissed as irrelevant. It already reflects an awareness that theology students need something more than completely generic language instruction. At the same time, the dominant structure of the material is still that of a foundational General English course with partial theological insertion rather than a systematically organized ESP curriculum. This imbalance appears across topics, genres, skills, and assessment.

The content sequence gives substantial space to alphabet work, greetings, self-introduction, and basic grammar, which are useful for beginners but not sufficient as organizing principles for a theology-oriented curriculum. The theology-related reading texts are relevant but still relatively controlled and do not yet represent the full genre range required for academic theological literacy. Writing remains transitional, moving only partially toward theology-related tasks. Listening and speaking are even less aligned, since they remain mostly general rather than focused on sermon-like input, prayer, testimony, Scripture reading, or theology-related discussion. Assessment is still dominated by controlled practice rather than rubrics for authentic target-task performance.

When the questionnaire, interviews, and document analysis are read together, a clear synthesis emerges. English for Theology in this setting is best understood as a dual-domain curriculum: one domain is academic theological literacy and the other is ministerial-mission performance. Both domains must be taught under conditions of limited exposure, low current proficiency, and strong need for scaffolding. The curriculum should therefore adopt several linked principles. First, it should retain foundational language support but embed that support within theology-related and ministry-related contexts rather than teaching it as a separate generic block. Second, it should develop academic theological literacy through guided reading, vocabulary development, summary writing, and reflection

tasks built around manageable texts. Third, it should make spoken ministry tasks explicit curricular targets through rehearsed and supported performance activities such as prayer leadership, Scripture reading, testimony, mini-presentation, and Bible study discussion. Fourth, its assessments should move beyond discrete language knowledge and evaluate intelligibility, task completion, appropriate vocabulary use, and communicative appropriateness in relation to authentic target situations.

A practical curriculum framework for this context would therefore sequence learning gradually. Early units should establish foundational classroom expressions, core grammar, and key theology vocabulary through themes such as church identity, ministry interest, mission, prayer, and worship. Middle units should strengthen guided reading and writing through short theology-related texts, summary tasks, and feedback-supported reflections. Later units should increase performance demands by integrating ministry role-play, Scripture reading, oral testimony, theology-related presentation, and listening to short sermon or lecture extracts. Across all phases, materials should remain print-friendly and manageable, and vocabulary should be recycled across reading, writing, speaking, and listening rather than presented as isolated lists. This progression reflects the need to preserve accessibility for beginner learners while moving the course toward field-relevant communication.

The findings also refine how the study relates to prior research. Previous work has rightly underlined the importance of specialized materials, contextualized instruction, and theology-related content. The present study confirms those conclusions, but it extends them in three ways. First, it frames theology students' needs not as a single list of language problems but as a structured dual-domain profile. Second, it links needs analysis directly to curriculum alignment across goals, content, activities, and assessment rather than stopping at problem identification. Third, it foregrounds the pedagogical significance of low-exposure conditions, showing that in such settings, a successful ESP curriculum must integrate specialization and foundational support rather than privileging one at the expense of the other. In this sense, the case contributes to ESP theory by showing how curriculum design for theology

can remain both context-sensitive and conceptually rigorous.

Overall, the study suggests that the existing English course should not simply be replaced wholesale. Instead, it should be reorganized and strengthened within a clearer English for Theology framework. The foundational aspects of the current material remain valuable because students still need support in grammar, sentence building, and vocabulary. What must change is the principle of

organization: theology-related tasks, texts, and performances should become the main curricular spine, while foundational language work should function in service of those ends. Such a shift would create stronger alignment among institutional mission, learner needs, classroom practice, and assessment. It would also provide a more coherent basis for future syllabus development, unit planning, material production, and classroom implementation.

Table 1. Synthesized Needs Profile and Curriculum Response

Dimension	Key Evidence	Interpretation	Curriculum Response
Exposure and mission orientation	English was used infrequently, but mission was the dominant ministry interest and many students had some English worship exposure.	The case is low-exposure but high-value; relevance must be visible from the start.	Use theology- and ministry-linked themes early, while keeping tasks short and manageable.
Present ability	Reading, writing, vocabulary, listening, and speaking were all in the low range; speaking and listening were weakest.	Students need foundational support before they can perform more demanding target tasks.	Retain grammar, sentence building, and core vocabulary support, but teach them through field-relevant contexts.
Academic theological literacy	Students prioritized reading theological texts and stakeholders emphasized commentaries, journals, abstracts, summaries, and presentations.	Academic literacy is a central target domain, not an optional extension.	Include guided reading, terminology work, summary writing, reflection tasks, and theology-related presentations.
Ministerial and mission performance	Prayer, Scripture reading, testimony, and ministry communication were rated highly and repeatedly mentioned in interviews.	Spoken ministry tasks are legitimate ESP outcomes in this context.	Build supported oral-performance sequences for prayer, testimony, Scripture reading, discussion, and mini-presentation.
Learning preferences and feasibility	Students preferred role-play, guided reading, feedback-based writing, print materials, and short study periods.	Format and pacing must match real learner conditions, not only ideal curricular ambition.	Use low-anxiety routines, print-friendly materials, short repeatable cycles, and direct feedback.
Existing material	The current material already includes some theology content, but its dominant structure remains closer to General English.	The problem is partial alignment rather than total irrelevance.	Reorganize existing foundations within a clearer English for Theology framework and align assessment with authentic target tasks.

Conclusion

This study shows that theology students at STT Anugerah Misi Nias Barat need an ESP curriculum built around two mutually reinforcing domains: academic theological literacy and ministerial-mission performance. Students need English to read theology-related texts, understand specialized vocabulary, write summaries and reflections, present theological ideas, lead prayer, read Scripture, and participate in ministry-related communication. At the same time, their present proficiency remains limited, especially in speaking and listening, and their learning

conditions require practical, scaffolded, print-friendly, and low-anxiety instruction. The current course material offers a useful beginner foundation but remains only partially aligned with these target needs.

The main implication is that English for Theology in this context should not be treated as a sudden replacement for foundational English, nor as a minor theological supplement to General English. It should instead be designed as a staged, context-sensitive ESP curriculum in which foundational language development is recontextualized through theology-related texts,

genres, tasks, and assessments. Such a curriculum is more likely to support both academic study and future ministry because it aligns learner profile, institutional mission, classroom activity, and target performance within a coherent framework. The article also contributes to broader ESP discussion by demonstrating that theology is a useful domain for examining curriculum alignment in low-exposure, faith-based higher education. In this setting, academic literacy and vocational performance cannot be separated neatly, and feasible pedagogy matters as much as target-task relevance. Future research may extend this work by implementing the proposed curriculum in classroom practice, developing fuller materials and assessment rubrics, or comparing theology-focused ESP design across different institutions. Even with its single-site scope, the present case provides a grounded model for rethinking English instruction where theological study and ministry preparation are inseparable.

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