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MAPPING SOFT SKILLS IN MANAGEMENT ESP: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SYLLABUS INTEGRATION AND GAPS

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Abstract: In the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for management students, integrating soft skills into the curriculum has become increasingly essential. This study investigates the extent to which soft skills are embedded in an Intermediate Business English syllabus using a single-case qualitative content analysis. The analysis is guided by a predefined soft skills framework comprising five categories: communication, lifelong learning, teamwork, initiative, and problem solving. Document evaluation was conducted by a panel of seven experienced ESP teachers and triangulated with semi-structured interviews to enhance methodological credibility. The findings reveal that the syllabus strongly promotes verbal communication and demonstrates moderate integration of teamwork, initiative, and lifelong learning. However, aspects such as written communication, peer feedback, and open-ended critical thinking are underrepresented. Problem solving was identified as the weakest integrated skill. These results highlight the need to revise and enrich ESP syllabi to ensure balanced development of both language and essential soft skills. This study offers a detailed evaluative framework for examining soft skills integration in ESP curricula and provides practical implications for syllabus designers and educators seeking to align instructional practices with 21st-century workforce demands.
Keywords: *ESP syllabus,soft skills, content analysis, curriculum evaluation*.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in higher education contexts becomes more widely employed as it helps students meet the language and professional requirements of their job. However, the teaching mostly focuses technical and subject-specific knowledge, giving less attention to soft skills (Aghaee & Karunaratne, 2023; Hashim et al., 2025). Meanwhile, for students of management study program, where communication and leadership play an essential role, it is envisaged that the ESP courses should offer not just languages but also soft skills like teamwork, negotiations, and problem-solving. This can lead to graduates who speak fluent English but are not ready for the people and leadership issues they will face in their jobs.

Soft skills are becoming more important in business. Employers want specialist who can perform not only technical tasks but also can help lead teams, communicate, and adjust to a variety of situations (Bisschoff & Massyn, 2025; Robles, 2012; Romanenko et al., 2024). Students majoring in management must possess the right amount of language proficiency, soft skills to perform effectively in team leading, negotiating deals, making presentations, etc. As more demand emerges for these skills, it comes to light how relevant ESP curriculum must be to address them (Cimatti, 2016).

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of soft skills, there's still a noticeable gap in the research. Specifically, there has been little exploration into how ESP syllabi in management education incorporate soft skills alongside language learning (D'Souza et al., 2022; Hyland, 2006; Jiménez-Muñoz, 2019). While ESP research often focuses on specific language needs, few studies consider whether students are being adequately prepared with the

interpersonal skills that are critical in today's business world. This gap reveals the necessity of taking a deeper look at the current ESP syllabi, especially in management study programs to ensure equipping students with the right input.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become a central component of English language teaching in higher education, particularly in disciplines where students require language skills aligned with specific academic and professional contexts. In business and management major, ESP courses are designed to equip learners with communicative competence for workplace interaction, decision-making, and professional collaboration. Syllabus evaluation in ESP contexts has been shown to be essential for identifying how language instruction implicitly supports broader competencies such as learner autonomy, discipline, and professional readiness, highlighting the importance of systematically examining syllabus content beyond linguistic objective (Farahsani & Harmanto, 2022). However, a recurring concern in ESP scholarship is the tendency of curricula to prioritize domain-specific terminology and genre conventions at the expense of broader interpersonal and cognitive competencies (Hyland, 2006). While linguistic accuracy and technical vocabulary remain essential, this narrow focus has been criticized for limiting graduates' preparedness for the complex social and communicative demands of professional environments (Cimatti, 2016).

Across educational research, there is strong consensus that soft skills are indispensable alongside hard skills in preparing learners for the 21st-century workforce. Studies consistently highlight lifelong learning as a foundational competency, emphasizing learner autonomy, adaptability, and continuous professional development in rapidly changing contexts (Arini et al., 2025; Landberg & Partsch, 2023). Autonomy in learning is one indicator of lifelong learning, and in today's era AI facilitates independent learning through personalized learning and realtime feedback. However, it must be designed based on pedagogical ethics that are centered in learners (Navas et al., 2025). This is essential as lifelong learning promotes learning autonomy as learners will be able to grab learning opportunities anywhere, anytime, and with any means. For sustainable lifelong learning to take place, it needs educators' commitment. In Indonesian context, a study undertaken by Musa et al., (2024) shows that educators' commitment to continuous professional growth is driven by personal motivation and ability to adapt with technology as well as collaboration in a lifelong learning ecosystem.

Similarly, communication skills are widely recognized as critical for academic success, employability, and effective participation in diverse and globalized workplaces (Putri et al., 2022; Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). A study carried out by Harun et al. (2025) shows that ideal employees are those who can adapt their communication style and English to the targeted audience and various professional situations. Thus, it is no wonder that communication skills are instilled in many curricula. Communication skills are one of the main soft skill indicators that strongly relates to graduates' readiness in facing work challenges in the digital era (Aprilita et al., 2024). Nowadays, incorporating communication skills in teaching can be done through various digital technologies or platforms. A study carried out by Lestari (2025) for example, shows how communication skills are incorporated into teaching by using Padlet application, facilitating writing collaboration, peer feedback, and accuracy improvement. The importance of of communication skills is also highlighted in Pham et al., (2025) which suggests that multidimensional communication skills (digital and non-verbal), have now become "survival skills" that most employers are looking for in the global workforce.

Another dominant trend in the literature underscores teamwork as a key employability skill, reflecting the collaborative nature of most contemporary workplaces. Research shows that curricula promoting collaborative learning not only enhance students' readiness for professional life but also increase engagement and motivation during the learning process (Kurniawati et al., 2025; Ngoc et al., 2025). This shows that teamwork skill is significant especially for learners' future careers as most workplaces and many jobs require good ability of collaboration. Teamwork can be promoted through collaboration and gamification. This approach is effective to manage learners' emotion. (Perez et al., 2023). However, it is essential to measure learners' involvement in collaborative larning. Validating the effectiveness of peer interaction in a team is necessary in order to reach the common goals (Xu et al., 2024). Learners who can sharpen their teamwork skills will likely be motivated and engaged in their current learning process. Therefore, most curricula promote teamwork skills as reflected in their employed teaching

methods, techniques, or activities, as stated by Goldsmith et al. (2024).

In parallel, initiative and problem-solving skills are increasingly framed as essential attributes sought by employers, as they reflect independence, proactive behavior, and the ability to address complex, real-world challenges (Calma, 2025; Sumarni et al., 2025; Vudzijena et al., 2026). Problem solving skills train learners to analyze complex problems and take initiatives to implement creative solutions, which are crucial for academic and professional success (Adeoye & Jimoh, 2023). Despite this broad agreement on the importance of soft skills, a notable tension emerges while these competencies are widely endorsed in theory and policy, their systematic and balanced integration into formal curricula—particularly language curricula—remains inconsistent.

Soft skills are particularly salient in business and management education, where professional success depends heavily on interpersonal skills such as leadership, negotiation, flexibility, and emotional intelligence (Robles, 2012). Employers repeatedly report that graduates often possess adequate technical knowledge but lack the soft skills required to function effectively in managerial roles (Cimatti, 2016). Management positions, which involve leading teams, resolving conflicts, and making strategic decisions, demand advanced communication and problem-solving abilities that cannot be developed through content knowledge alone. Studies have illustrated that by incorporating these skills in higher education, students get ready to face the world (Tymon, 2013). Although higher education institutions increasingly acknowledge this mismatch, soft skills are still frequently treated as secondary to hard skills in curricular design.

Within ESP, the imbalance between soft skills and hard skills is even more pronounced. ESP pedagogy commonly employs content-based and task-based approaches that simulate real-world professional contexts, theoretically offering fertile ground for soft skills development (R. Ellis, 2003). Nevertheless, empirical studies indicate that ESP programs continue to focus predominantly on linguistic outcomes, providing limited opportunities for students to develop interpersonal and higher-order thinking skills essential for workplace success (M. Ellis et al., 2014; Robles, 2012).

While global frameworks such as the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) (Gorgievski et al., 2024; Singsuriya & Rimpeng, 2025) explicitly emphasize competencies like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and lifelong learning, there is limited research examining how these competencies are operationalized within ESP syllabi, particularly in management education. Existing studies tend to advocate integration conceptually, yet few offer systematic evaluations of how soft skills are embedded at the syllabus level or assess the balance among different soft skill categories. In EFL setting, collaboration is placed as a key element that must taught along with communication skills and critical thinking (Hapsari & Prasetyarini, 2025). In line with that, continuous evaluation on the development of collaboration in higher education shows that teamwork is the main pillar in the 21st century skills evolution (Romero, 2026).

Consequently, although soft skills are widely recognized as crucial "everywhere," their concrete integration into management-focused ESP curricula remains an underexplored and methodologically underdeveloped area. This gap underscores the need for focused investigations that examine not only whether soft skills are included in ESP syllabi, but also how comprehensively and coherently they are embedded alongside language learning objectives.

Rather than aiming for generalization, this study seeks to offer transferable insights and a replicable evaluation framework that curriculum developers and ESP practitioners can adapt in their respective institutions. It contributes an innovative perspective by positioning soft skills not as supplemental elements, but as integral learning outcomes within the ESP syllabus, thus offering a replicable evaluative model for ESP curriculum design in business-related programs. The aim of the study is to analyze the ESP syllabus employed in a management study program and the integration of soft skills in the language learning process of the learners. The research intends to reveal how the existing curriculum of an ESP course can be enhanced towards developing students' soft skills apart from language skills to meet the academic and professional demands of students' real-life future. Therefore, the research question of this study is: *To what extent are five critical soft skills - communication skills, lifelong learning, teamwork, initiative, and problem solving - integrated into an ESP syllabus for management students?*

METHOD

The study follows a single-case qualitative content analysis framework to identify and explore the presence and integration of soft skills within the ESP syllabus. It adopts a single-case design to enable an in-depth analysis of soft skills integration within an Intermediate Business English syllabus for a management program. The syllabus constitutes an information-rich case, and this approach allows for analytical depth and transferability in an area where empirical research remains limited. This method allows for a systematic evaluation of text-based material by coding for specific categories (Cohen et al., 2018). The analysis is primarily deductive, using predefined categories derived from the literature on soft skills and communicative competence. Single-case studies are particularly valuable when the case is unique, bounded, and capable of illustrating broader pedagogical phenomena. (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Seven experienced English teachers of tertiary education participated as evaluators of the syllabus. There are three criteria of participants involved in this study. First, they must have at least 5 years English teaching experience in tertiary level. Second, they must have experience in teaching ESP classes. Third, they must have experience in developing syllabus and teaching materials for ESP. The participants' teaching experience is shown in the following table.

Table 1. *Participants' experience in teaching ESP and materials development*

Participant	Years of experience
BI	5-10 years
WE	> 10 years
IW	> 10 years
NI	5-10 years
BA	> 10 years
MA	5-10 years
AN	> 10 years

An evaluation form was developed to evaluate the syllabus. The form contains five categories of soft skills in educational contexts (Cimatti, 2016; Robles, 2012) which include communication skills, lifelong learning, teamwork, initiative, and problem solving. There are 15 sub-categories concerning each category of soft skills. Each question is responded using a five-scale point of evaluation (1=not evident, 2=minimally evident, 3=moderately evident, 4=evident, 5=strongly evident).The key categories are developed into some sub-categories:

Table 2. *Soft skills and sub-soft skills*

Soft skills	Sub-soft skills		
1. Communication skills	1.1. Are there activities that promote verbal communication (e.g., presentations, group discussions)?	1.2. Does the syllabus include tasks that involve writing or producing formal documents (e.g., reports, emails)?	1.3. Are students required to collaborate with peers, and is clear communication emphasized in team activities?
2. Lifelong learning	2.1. Does the syllabus encourage self-directed learning (e.g., independent research, reflective journals)?	2.2. Are there resources or references that support continuous learning beyond the course (e.g., further reading, professional development opportunities)?	2.3. Is there a focus on skills or knowledge that students can apply in future learning or career contexts?
3. Teamwork	3.1. Are there collaborative projects or group tasks included in the syllabus?	3.2. Does the syllabus mention specific roles or responsibilities within team activities?	3.3. Is peer feedback or peer evaluation part of the assessment?
4. Initiative	4.1. Does the syllabus encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning or project direction?	4.2. Are students given opportunities to propose their own topics or areas of exploration?	4.3. Is there a focus on developing creative thinking or innovation in course activities?
5. Problem solving	5.1. Are there case	5.2. Does the syllabus	5.3. Are students

	studies, scenarios, or problems for students to solve as part of the syllabus?	include open-ended questions or complex issues requiring analysis and critical thinking?	encouraged to identify problems and develop solutions in real or simulated contexts?

To triangulate the document evaluation data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three participants. The interviews were held online via Zoom, audio-recorded with consent, and focused on clarifying evaluators' judgments and perceptions of soft skills representation in the syllabus.

The analysis followed a qualitative content analysis approach using a deductive coding framework (Cohen et al., 2018). Five main categories of soft skills—communication, teamwork, initiative, lifelong learning, and problem solving—were used as predefined codes, based on previous research (Cimatti, 2016; Robles, 2012).

The syllabus was read thoroughly to identify instances (textual elements) where these soft skills were explicitly or implicitly embedded. Each unit, learning objective, and activity description in the syllabus was examined and manually coded. A codebook was developed using a table that mapped each soft skill to relevant sub-categories and representative indicators (e.g., "verbal communication", "self-directed learning", "peer feedback"). The coded data were then tabulated and interpreted. Representative excerpts from the syllabus were used to illustrate the presence or absence of soft skills. Each sub-skill was given a numerical rating from 1 (not evident) to 5 (strongly evident), based on the evaluators' consensus and cross-checking with the actual content. Finally, the coded results were synthesized thematically (Hatmanto & Rahmawati, 2023) and presented in a matrix that compared the strengths and gaps of soft skills integration across the syllabus.

Interview data were analyzed thematically to support and contextualize the document analysis findings. Interview transcripts were reviewed to identify recurring themes related to evaluators' interpretations, areas of agreement or uncertainty, and perceived strengths and gaps in the syllabus. These themes were used to corroborate, explain, or nuance the results of the content analysis, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports to what extent the five soft skills i.e. communication skills, lifelong learning, teamwork, initiative, and problem solving are integrated in the evaluated syllabus. Data from the evaluation form, the codebook, and interviews are presented and discussed.

Communication skills

Communication skills analyzed in the syllabus are divided into three aspects: verbal communication, written communication, and communication in team activities. The result indicates that the syllabus is strong in promoting verbal communication.

Table 3. *Communication skills evaluation*

Soft skill	Sub-soft skills	Mean score
Communication skills	The syllabus includes activities that promote verbal communication (e.g., presentations, group discussions)	5
	The syllabus involves tasks that involve writing or producing formal documents (e.g., reports, emails)	2.4
	The syllabus requires collaboration with peers among students and communication emphasized in team activities	4.6

Table 2 shows the participants' evaluation of communication skills, showing high mean score on verbal communication. This could be because of well-designed activities that emphasize student participation in presentations, discussions, and oral exchanges. This finding corroborates an earlier study (Bylkova et al., 2023) that emphasized designing oral activities to promote the development of communication skills in a business English class or in an English as a foreign language context (Sorohiti, 2016). Consistent with this, one study (Putri Utami & Drivoka Sulistyaningrum, 2022) also established the importance of including communication skills in a syllabus through presentations. Strong ratings, 5 = strongly evident, indicate that the students are sufficiently exposed to the development of verbal communication skills through structured speaking.

The analysis of communication skills in the codebook confirms the dominance of verbal communication over written communication.

Table 4. *Codebook for communication skills analysis*

Soft Skill	Sub-Skill	Indicator from Syllabus	Interpretation	Score
Communication	Verbal communication	"Presentation simulation", "Group roleplay"	Strong verbal communication tasks	5
	Written communication	*Not found*	No writing tasks included	1
	Communication in teamwork	"Pair work", "group work"	Peer interaction activities	4

As seen in Table 4, for instance, students are required to engage in role plays and presentation simulations as written in the syllabus: *"Presentation simulation"; "Students act out the dialog based on the given scenario about a business meeting or a business negotiation."* These activities clearly promote oral proficiency and interaction in realistic business contexts, which justifies the high score (mean = 5) for verbal communication. Communication within team contexts is also evident, supported by activities such as *"Group roleplay" and "pair work"*.These promote peer interaction, negotiation of meaning, and collaboration, aligning with team-based communication needs in the workplace. One participant said:

> "I think the most effective parts are meetings 4 and 5, where students can practice business negotiation. The language functions are clear: asking for information, suggesting, compromising, and rejecting a compromise. These are really training their verbal communication." (BI)

However, the syllabus analysis on the written communication skills shows that it is minimally evident (mean score=2.4). The syllabus lacks explicit writing tasks such as business emails or reports. This gap limits students' development in formal business writing, which is essential in management contexts. The imbalance suggests that while oral communication is emphasized, written communication needs greater attention. Therefore, one participant suggested:

> "In business meetings, the most important thing is meeting minutes. Presenting a marketing plan should also begun with writing a marketing plan." (MA)

This finding indicates that written communication skills are still lacking in the evaluated syllabus. This would therefore imply that students might miss an important opportunity to enhance formal writing skills, especially for most professional purposes. It may require an emphasis on structured writing assignments for such. For communication within the activities of teams, the result is 4.6; hence, it is considered evident. Therefore, students could be communicating in the appropriate way within their team activities or even presenting and sharing ideas among each other in group work. This could be improved slightly to make the expectations even clearer and to place an even stronger emphasis on communication in teamwork. The overall result for communication is 4 (evident), indicating that the syllabus is effective in developing communication skills, particularly in verbal and team-based contexts but would benefit from stronger attention to written communication.

Lifelong learning

Concerning lifelong learning, it includes three sub soft-skills – self-directed learning, continuous learning resources, and future learning or career contexts. The evaluation shows that these activities prepare students for future career contexts (mean = 5). However, the syllabus does not reference resources that support continuous learning beyond the course, such as further reading, professional networks, or suggested platforms for skill development (mean = 2.6).

Table 5. *Lifelong learning skill evaluation*

Soft skill	Sub-soft skills	Mean score
Lifelong learning	The syllabus encourages self-directed learning (e.g., independent research, reflective journals)	3.1
	There are resources or references that support continuous learning beyond the course (e.g., further reading, professional development	2.6

	opportunities)	
	There is focus on skills or knowledge that students can apply in future learning or career contexts	5

The codebook for lifelong learning analysis learning as shown below: confirms the participants' evaluation on lifelong

Table 6. *Codebook for lifelong learning skill analysis*

Soft Skill	Sub-Skill	Indicator from Syllabus	Interpretation	Score
Lifelong Learning	Self-directed learning	"Each student prepare a marketing plan... (not limited to...)"	Moderate learner autonomy	3
	Continuous learning resources	*Not found*	No reference to extended learning	1
	Future learning/career preparation	"Presentation about marketing plan", "reporting financial trends"	Strong workplace alignment	5

The syllabus moderately promotes lifelong learning. One notable example is: *"Each student prepares a marketing plan about a product or a service (but not limited to...)"*. This allows for a degree of student autonomy, fostering self-directed learning (mean = 3.1). Moreover, the course includes content highly relevant to real-world applications, such as: *"Students can make a presentation about a marketing plan"* and *"Students can describe and report financial trends."* As a result, lifelong learning is rated as moderately evident overall. One participant stated:

> "It's difficult to find lifelong learning elements in this syllabus. It is not clearly articulated. I think students can be encouraged by making self evaluation or journaling as a habit, even after the course is over." (AN)

This finding shows that lifelong learning is not explictily written in the syllabus, although students can be encouraged to do a systematic self-reflection. Students might benefit from more guidance on how to continue learning after the course, such as professional development opportunities or advanced topics for exploration provided that further readings are given. For future learning or career contexts, the result is 5 (strongly evident), which indicates that the syllabus is highly effective in preparing students with skills applicable to their future learning and career development. This suggests a good alignment between course content and real-world applications, equipping students with the knowledge they can use in their professional lives. The overall result of lifelong learning is moderately evident (3.6) with strengths in preparing students for future learning contexts but weaknesses in fostering self-directed learning and providing continuous learning resources. More could be done to encourage independent study and life-long learning habits. The moderate existence of lifelong learning means that this skill is not emphasized in the reviewed syllabus. This finding is in line with a previous study (Lindqvist et al., 2024) which reveals that although important, lifelong learning there is a gap between lifelong learning skill and its implementation in education curriculum.

Teamwork

The analysis of teamwork as one soft skill in the syllabus involves three sub-soft skills: collaborative projects or group tasks, specific roles in team activities, and peer feedback or peer evaluation.

Table 7. *Teamwork skill evaluation*

Soft skill	Sub-soft skills	Mean score
Teamwork	There are collaborative projects or group tasks included in the syllabus	5
	The syllabus mentions specific roles or responsibilities within team activities	3.1
	There is peer feedback or peer evaluation part of the assessment	1.3

Table 7 shows that collaboration is strongly promoted in the syllabus, yet peer feedback or peer evaluation is not sufficiently accommodated. The codebook for teamwork analysis also shows similar results as follows.

Table 8. *Codebook for teamwork skill analysis*

Soft Skill	Sub-Skill	Indicator from Syllabus	Interpretation	Score
Teamwork	Collaborative tasks	"Group roleplay", "pair work"	Collaborative work evident	4
	Defined team roles	*Not mentioned*	No role specification	2
	Peer feedback	*Not mentioned*	No peer review	1

Collaborative elements are present but not sufficiently structured. Group tasks appear throughout the syllabus such as: *"Students work in a group of 3", "Pair work", "Group roleplay."* These encourage collaboration but lack clarity regarding role assignments or responsibilities within teams (mean = 3.1). One participant commented:

> "Role play and pair work are written in the syllabus, but it does not inform students' roles. If students' roles are mentioned in the syllabus, it will quicken the process but reduce teamwork interactions." (MA)

More structured teamwork could enhance leadership development and accountability. Peer evaluation is also notably absent. There is no peer feedback nor assessment mechanism. Respondents gave low score on peer feedback or peer evaluation aspect of the syllabus, meaning that teamwork has not been incorporated in assessment. Employing peer feedback and peer evaluation could increase students' experience in teamwork, not only during class activities. One teacher said:

> "Peer feedback can be included, but training students how to do it is important. Students should firstly know what is expected from peer feedback and how to use a rubric. Then they evaluate with a yes/no rubric concerning fluency, vocabulary, etc." (MA)

This finding asserts that collaboration exists, but it is not well-sructured. Peer feedback is not facilitated, but it can be developed. This could imply that teamwork is only featured in certain parts of the course or that collaboration is not deeply embedded in the learning outcomes. Similarly, the mean score for specific roles in team activities is 3.1 (moderately evident), which indicates that the allocation of specific roles or responsibilities within teams is somewhat evident but not strongly emphasized. Students may be working in groups, but the definition of roles or leadership responsibilities could be unclear or inconsistent, potentially limiting their ability to develop structured teamwork skills. However, the evaluation of the peer feedback or peer evaluation shows that it is minimally evident (1.3), indicating that peer feedback and evaluation are minimally present in the syllabus. This is a key area for improvement, as peer assessment fosters accountability, reflection, and critical thinking. Incorporating more peer evaluations could strengthen students' teamwork and communication skills. Overall, teamwork is moderately evident (3.1) in the syllabus. While collaborative projects are included, there is room for improvement in clearly defining team roles and incorporating peer evaluation as part of the learning process. The moderate prominence of teamwork skills in the syllabus is in contrast with a study (Ghannam & Ahmad, 2020), which emphasized the prominent skills of teamwork in a course designed for engineering students. Thus, it can be assumed that teamwork skills in management study programs are not as prominent as that in engineering programs. The moderate prominence of teamwork skills in the syllabus indicates that most activities are designed for individual students. This is in accordance with an earlier study (Manuel et al., 2025) which argues that while teamwork is a high-demand skill, it remains a "hidden curriculum" rather than an explicitly taught competence in most higher education syllabi.

Initiative

As a soft skill, initiative includes three sub-skills: responsibility for own learning, opportunities to propose one own topic, and creative thinking and innovation. The evaluation on this skill shows that the syllabus promotes creative thinking or innovation as the mean score is 4 (evident).

Table 9. *Initiative skills analysis*

Soft skill	Sub-soft skills	Mean score
Initiative	The syllabus encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning or project direction	3.7
	The syllabus gives students opportunities to propose their own topics or areas of exploration	3.6
	There is a focus on developing creative thinking or innovation in course activities	4

Initiative sub skills are moderately evident in encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning (mean score=3.7) and in offering opportunities for exploration (mean score=3.6). The evaluation results are supported with the analysis of initiative skills in the codebook as follows:

Table 10. *Codebook for initiative skills analysis*

Soft Skill	Sub-Skill	Indicator from Syllabus	Interpretation	Score
Initiative	Student responsibility	"Students prepare individually"	Encouraged but not structured	3
	Topic choice	"...but not limited to..."	Some flexibility allowed	4
	Creative thinking	"Create PPT and presentation text"	Creativity task present	4
	Scenario-based tasks	"Marketing plan scenario"	Implied but not explicit	3

The syllabus says, *"Each student prepares a marketing plan... (but not limited to...)"*. Creativity is promoted through project-based tasks as it is written in the syllabus: *"Students make a presentation text and a PPT file"* . The presence of initiative skills in the syllabus is also strengthened by teacher's comment:

> "Students can choose their own product in their marketing plan. It means initiatives and creativity is accommodated in the syllabus." (AN)

It indicates that creativity and initiative is instilled in the syllabus, yet it should be explicitly shown through activity instructions. The syllabus encourages students to take responsibility for their learning, but this is not a major emphasis. It likely provides some autonomy for students in projects, but there could be more opportunities for students to exercise initiative in choosing their own learning paths. Regarding opportunities to propose self-selected topics, the analysis shows that it is moderately evident (3.6), which means that students are somewhat encouraged to propose their own topics or areas of exploration. This suggests that while some flexibility is offered, it could be expanded. One teacher said:

> "It is not mentioned in the syllabus whether students can choose their preferred topics. I think it can be mentioned when students make a marketing plan, in which they can choose any product they want to present." (AN)

Allowing students to have more input in their learning journey could increase engagement and creative thinking. Concerning creative thinking and innovation, the analysis result is 4 (evident), which means that they are well integrated into the syllabus. Students are given opportunities to explore new ideas and think creatively in course activities, though this might not be a central focus of the curriculum. The overall result for initiative shows that the syllabus moderately promotes initiative (3.7). Students are encouraged to take responsibility and think creatively, but further opportunities for autonomy and topic exploration could enhance this aspect. This result supports a study (Triarisanti et al., 2022) which explored how technology-enhanced flipped learning environments enable students to independently plan, execute, and assess their learning activities, fostering a sense of initiative. Likewise, another study (Burgess et al., 2014) reveals how initiative is promoted as students are engaged in and responsible for their learning. The integration of initiative skills is in line with earlier research (Fossatti et al., 2023; Tian & He, 2024) which pointed out the importance of initiative skills to

increase students' employability in the competitive modern workforce.

Problem solving

Problem solving includes three sub-soft skills: case studies or problem-solving scenarios, open-ended questions and critical thinking, and identifying problems and developing solutions. The result shows that case studies or problem-solving scenarios are moderately present (3.7), suggesting that students are given opportunities to solve problems but that this is not a major component of the syllabus.

Table 3. *Evaluation of problem-solving skills*

Soft skill	Sub-soft skills	Mean score
Problem solving	There are case studies, scenarios, or problems for students to solve as part of the syllabus	3.7
	The syllabus includes open-ended questions or complex issues requiring analysis and critical thinking	2.1
	The students are encouraged to identify problems and develop solutions in real or simulated contexts	3.7

However, no explicit case studies or real-world problem-solving scenarios are present (mean = 3.7). Critical thinking is minimally developed due to the lack of *"Open-ended questions or complex issues requiring analysis"* (Mean = 2.1). Students are not consistently required to identify problems and propose solutions in authentic contexts (mean = 3.7). The analysis of problem solving in the syllabus is also shown in the codebook below:

Table 4. *Codebook for problem solving skills analysis*

Soft Skill	**Sub-Skills**	**Indicator from Syllabus**	**Interpretation**	**Score**
Problem Solving	Open-ended questions	*Not found*	Minimal critical thinking	2
	Solution development	"Students identify background/strategy"	Present but needs expansion	3
	Open-ended questions	*Not found*	Minimal critical thinking	2

Problem solving is the weakest skill in the syllabus. There is some evidence of open-ended tasks in the syllabus as it says: *"Students prepare a marketing plan including description, background, strategy."* Overall, problem solving is less evident and needs significant enhancement, such as incorporating case-based learning or critical analysis exercises. In line with this evaluation, one interviewee addressed:

> "Problem solving can be incorporated into business negotiations and meeting – like how to deal with a dispute or to persuade others. Making recommendations in describing/reporting financial situation can be a problem-solving activity." (AN)

This shows that there is potential to develop problem-based activities, although it is not optimally designed in the syllabus. This could be improved by incorporating more real-world problem-solving tasks. Regarding open-ended questions and critical thinking, the result is 2.1 (minimally evident), which means that the inclusion of open-ended questions or critical thinking tasks is minimal, indicating that students are not consistently challenged to think deeply or critically. This limits their ability to engage in complex problem-solving, and it would be beneficial to integrate more open-ended tasks. Concerning identifying problems and developing solutions, the result is 3.7 (moderately evident), which indicates that students are somewhat encouraged to identify problems and develop solutions, but this could be expanded. Offering more real or simulated contexts where students must tackle problems independently would strengthen this skill. The overall result for problem solving is 2.1 (minimally evident). Problem-solving is the weakest area in the syllabus. While some problem-solving activities are present, there is a significant lack of open-ended questions and critical thinking opportunities. A stronger focus on case studies and real-world problem-solving could improve this aspect. The lack of problem solving skills in

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the reviewed syllabus contradicts with a study (Merrill, 2020) which revealed the prominence of problem solving tasks in reviewed syllabi. The lack of problem solving tasks in the syllabus supports a study (Sulistyaningrum & Shopia, 2024) which found that problem solving skill is only partially represented in syllabi, focusing on lower thinking skills.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated how and to what extent soft skills are embedded within an ESP syllabus used in a management study program. Using a single-case qualitative content analysis, the findings indicate that several core soft skills—particularly verbal communication, teamwork, initiative, and career relevance—are meaningfully represented in the syllabus. These results suggest that ESP syllabi, even when not explicitly framed as soft skills–oriented, may implicitly support their development. Notably, the pattern of gaps identified in the analysis points to a tendency to prioritize interactional and performance-oriented skills over reflective, written, and cognitively open-ended competencies. However, the analysis also revealed limited attention to certain sub-skills, including written communication, peer feedback, open-ended critical thinking, and sustained lifelong learning resources, pointing to areas requiring curricular enhancement. It should be noted that this study is limited by its focus on the syllabus as a planned document, which may not fully capture how soft skills are enacted in classroom practice. Despite this limitation, the study offers practical implications for ESP curriculum development by providing a structured analytical framework for examining soft skills integration. Future research is encouraged to apply this framework to multiple syllabi across institutions or to complement document analysis with classroom observations and learning outcome data, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how soft skills are developed in ESP contexts.

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