

## Improving Employees' English Competency through a General Business Conversation Program

Ardi Nugroho<sup>1\*</sup>, Jonathan Tanihardjo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer, English Department, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Bunda Mulia University, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, English Department, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Bunda Mulia University, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author: ardi\_n4382@yahoo.com

### Article History

Received: 31 Juli 2024

Revised: 12 Agustus 2024

Accepted: 15 Agustus 2024

Published online: 30 Agustus 2024

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** English has become an international and global language with the most speakers or users. Considering that English is used worldwide and has the most speakers, it has become increasingly important to understand and be able to communicate in English, including in Indonesia. PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara, a company based in Jakarta which specializes in the field of ICT, has requested the help of Bunda Mulia University to assist them in providing an English course for their employees. The company would like their employees to improve their English competency, more specifically their conversational skills.

**Methods:** The community service conducted by Bunda Mulia University in PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara is in the form of an English program or course in which the objective is to improve the employees' English competence in speaking, especially in a business-oriented context. As a whole, the community service itself is divided into three main phases, namely the initiation, execution, and implementation phase.

**Results:** The result of the community service shows that the employees were able to practice using their English in various spoken contexts. Since only 7 meetings were held, it may not have been able to improve their speaking capabilities overall, but at least they had more opportunity to practice speaking in English.

**Conclusion:** English courses can be an effective way to improve employees' English skills, but they need to be conducted more frequently and more intensively.

### ABSTRAK

**Pendahuluan:** Bahasa Inggris telah menjadi bahasa internasional dan global dengan penutur atau pengguna terbanyak. Mengingat bahasa Inggris digunakan di seluruh dunia dan memiliki penutur terbanyak, maka memahami dan mampu berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris menjadi semakin penting, termasuk di Indonesia. PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara, sebuah perusahaan berbasis di Jakarta yang bergerak di bidang ICT, telah meminta bantuan Universitas Bunda Mulia untuk membantu mereka dalam menyediakan kursus bahasa Inggris bagi karyawannya. Perusahaan ingin karyawannya meningkatkan kompetensi bahasa Inggris mereka, khususnya keterampilan percakapan mereka.

**Metode:** Pengabdian masyarakat yang dilakukan oleh Universitas Bunda Mulia di PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara berbentuk program atau kursus bahasa Inggris yang bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kompetensi bahasa Inggris karyawan dalam berbicara, khususnya dalam konteks yang berorientasi bisnis. Secara keseluruhan, pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini sendiri terbagi dalam tiga tahap utama, yaitu tahap inisiasi, pelaksanaan, dan pelaksanaan.

	<p><b>Hasil:</b> Hasil dari pengabdian masyarakat menunjukkan bahwa karyawan mampu berlatih menggunakan bahasa Inggris mereka dalam berbagai konteks lisan. Karena hanya dilakukan 7 kali pertemuan, mungkin belum mampu meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara mereka secara keseluruhan, namun setidaknya mereka mempunyai kesempatan lebih banyak untuk berlatih berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris.</p> <p><b>Kesimpulan:</b> Kursus bahasa Inggris dapat menjadi cara yang efektif untuk meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa Inggris karyawan, namun perlu dilakukan lebih sering dan lebih intensif.</p>
<b>DOI:</b>	<p><b>Keywords:</b> Business English, Conversation, Employees, Industry.</p> <p><b>Kata kunci:</b> Bahasa Inggris bisnis, percakapan, karyawan, industry.</p>

## INTRODUCTION

With the advancement in technology, English has become a language that is increasingly used among people from all over the world. For instance, people from Indonesia can communicate with people from America, Canada, England, or even from other countries like Japan or Korea whose national language is not English using the English language. In other words, English has become an international and global language (Crystal, 2003; Silalahi, 2019) with the most speakers or users. Considering that English is used worldwide and has the most speakers, it has become increasingly important to understand and be able to communicate in English, including in Indonesia.

Nowadays, many people in Indonesia use English on a daily basis for various usages such as for entertainment (watching movies in English), to communicate with people abroad, for study purposes, as well as for business purposes. Therefore, it can be said that English has spread to numerous aspects in people's lives (Santoso & Kinasih, 2022). Especially in the work industry, English is becoming more and more important since companies do not only interact with other companies and clients in Indonesia, but with various parties from outside of Indonesia. This kind of interaction and business relation can be done and maintained by communicating in English. Therefore, companies in Indonesia encourage their employees to be able to use English well. One way to improve employees' overall English competency is to hold trainings or English classes.

Based on this background, PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara, a company based in Jakarta which specializes in the field of ICT, has requested the help of Bunda Mulia University to assist them in providing an English course for their employees. The company would like their employees to improve their English competency, more specifically their conversational skills. Seeing as this company is a business oriented one, Bunda Mulia University decided to fulfill their request and hold a 'General Business Conversation' program to help improve their employees' ability to communicate orally in English. In the teaching of Business English, there are several topics that are normally included such as telephoning, making appointments, presentations, dealing with complaints, organizing meetings, and many others (Helliwell, 2014; Helliwell, 2014).

Nonetheless, before going into more detail regarding the business English conversation program, it is worth mentioning that several studies have been conducted with the topic of business English. For instance, some studies have focused on how business English is taught either in high school (Nurdiana, Taufik & Silalahi, 2022) or in university and college (Intan, Muthalib & Samad, 2021; Cheng & Liu, 2021; Vo, 2022). Other studies have also focused on Business English conversation (Werdiningsih, 2020; Ramadhani & Ngadiso, 2022). Besides the venue and focus on different aspects of Business English, these studies have also highlighted different methods used in teaching Business English. For example, the study by Vo (2021) emphasized on online tasks while the study by Ramadhani & Ngadiso (2022) focused on the use of project-based learning. Although various studies have explored the topic of business English, few have highlighted the teaching of business English focusing on conversation or speaking skills for employees. There is actually another research that deals with teaching English for employees (Silalahi, Murniati & Widianingtyas, 2023), but it does not focus solely on conversation or speaking skills. Therefore, this study tries to fill this gap, especially as it tries to underscore the importance of speaking skills in a business context.

According to Hedges (2000), speaking involves four components, namely content, fluency, eye contact, and pronunciation. Seeing as speaking includes various elements that must be incorporated simultaneously when communicating, it can be seen why PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara decided to focus on improving this particular

aspect of English competence for their employees. In other words, the company specifically requested that Bunda Mulia University provides a program that can fulfill this need. It should be noted that the ‘General Business Conversation’ program that was conducted in this company is considered as community service and is then disseminated into an academic article.

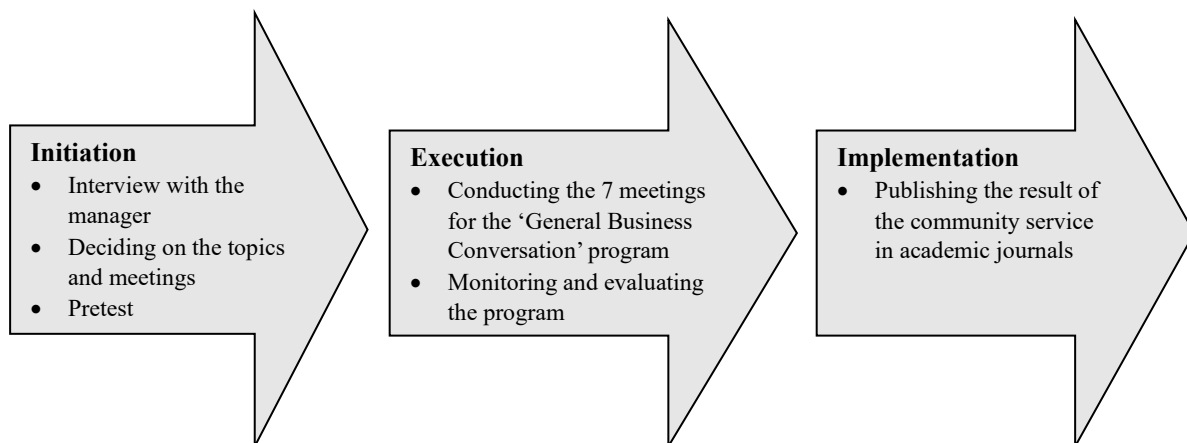
## METHODS

Based on the background described in the previous section, the community service conducted by Bunda Mulia University in PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara is in the form of an English program or course in which the objective is to improve the employees’ English competence in speaking, especially in a business-oriented context. It should be noted that PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara and Bunda Mulia University have a formal relation as the two parties have signed an MoU to cooperate in several activities. As a whole, the community service itself is divided into three main phases, namely the initiation, execution, and implementation phase. These three phases are briefly described below. A more detailed elaboration can be found in the Results and Discussion section.

First of all, for the initiation phase, Bunda Mulia University conducted a sort of needs analysis, which involved interviewing one of the managers to find out what was needed by the company. Based on the result of the interview, it was decided that the company wanted their employees to be more active in using spoken English. Afterwards, the number of meetings was decided along with the topics for each meeting. The last part of the initiation phase is the pretest to find out the English level of the participants.

Next, in the execution phase, Bunda Mulia University, more specifically the lecturers from the English Department accompanied by some students, conducted the English course. In total, seven meetings were held onsite in the company’s office in Jakarta. The meetings had different topics and were handled by different lecturers and students. Nonetheless, all of the topics still focused on speaking skills such as the first meeting with the topic of introductions and socializing.

Lastly, the implementation phase deals with the dissemination of the community service into an academic article published in a journal. In the academic field, especially at the university level, it is encouraged that all community service activities are disseminated and published in journals so that the results can be shared to a wider audience. Simply put, lecturers are expected to apply the theories and concepts that they have learned to help solve issues in society, which is why community services are conducted. After the activities are finished, the last step is to publish the results of these activities in journals so that it can serve as reference for future activities. A summary of these three phases is illustrated in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1.** Summary of the Community Service Phases

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The result of each phase is elaborated in detail in this section, starting from the initiation phase up until the implementation stage. Particularly for the execution phase, it is further divided into the seven meetings that were conducted in the company's office.

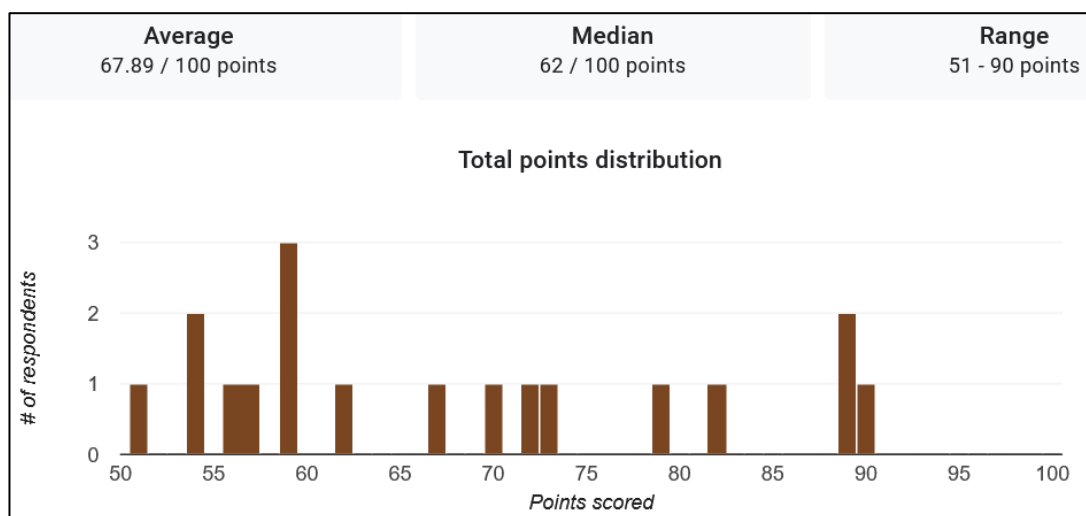
#### a) Initiation Phase

In this first phase, Bunda Mulia University held several online meetings with one of the managers in PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara. In these meetings, several things were discussed such as the background for requesting Bunda Mulia University to have an English course for their employees, determining the topics and number of meetings as well as the schedule for these meetings, the number of participants that would join, and several others points related to this program. After all of the details had been sorted out, both parties signed an agreement to make it official. A brief summary of the topics and dates for the English classes can be seen in **Table 1** below.

**Table 1.** Summary of the Schedule and Topics

No.	Date	Duration	Time	Topics
1	7 February 2024	120 minutes	09.30 - 11.30	Introducing yourself and socializing
2	21 February 2024	120 minutes	09.30 - 11.30	Telephoning
3	28 February 2024	120 minutes	09.30 - 11.30	Presenting products / services (1)
4	6 March 2024	120 minutes	09.30 - 11.30	Presenting products / services (2)
5	13 March 2024	120 minutes	09.30 - 11.30	Conducting negotiations with customers / suppliers
6	20 March 2024	120 minutes	09.30 - 11.30	Handling complaints
7	27 March 2024	120 minutes	09.30 - 11.30	Conducting meeting

The last stage in the initiation phase is the pretest that was given to the participants. The pretest itself was conducted online via Google Form on Wednesday, 24 January 2024. It should be noted that it was decided by both parties that the pretest would be in this form as it would have been difficult to do a pretest that really focuses on measuring the participants' speaking skills. More specifically, it would have been challenging to hold interviews and other similar forms of tests since the participants are all from different departments and could not be gathered together at a specific schedule. It would have also taken up too much time to do such a pretest. In the end, a total of 18 participants did the online test. The pretest itself consisted of several parts such as Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary, and Grammar sections. Although the pretest does not really give a good illustration of the participants' speaking ability, it at least gives the English Department of Bunda Mulia University a general idea of their overall English competence. A brief summary of the result of the pretest can be seen in **Figure 2** below.



**Figure 2.** Summary of the Result of the Pretest

As can be seen from the figure above, only 4 people out of the 18 that did the pretest were able to get a score of above 80, while the rest did not do so well. As a matter of fact, there are 7 people who got below 60. In other words, it can be said that there are quite a number of employees who still have a relatively low level of English competence. Only 4 of them can be categorized as having a pretty high level of English since they scored above 80. In fact, for those who scored 90 or close to it, they seem to be quite proficient in English as they made very few mistakes on the pretest. It is worth mentioning that the scale used in the pretest is 0-100, with 100 being the perfect score, meaning that no mistakes have been made on the test.

Based on the result of the pretest, considering that there were still quite a number of participants whose English competency are still at the intermediate level or lower, it was decided that the materials that will be delivered to them would not be too advanced. In other words, the language expressions, vocabulary, grammar, and other aspects of the materials would be kept simple to accommodate those who were not very proficient with their English. Moreover, seeing as the purpose of the course is to improve their speaking skills, a lot of the materials were more focused on practice to give the participants more opportunity to speak in English.

### ***b) Execution Phase***

For this phase, the execution of the English program for each session or meeting are elaborated in detail. There is a total of 7 meetings. The topic for each meeting can be seen in Table 1 above.

#### ***- 1) Meeting 1 (7 February 2024)***

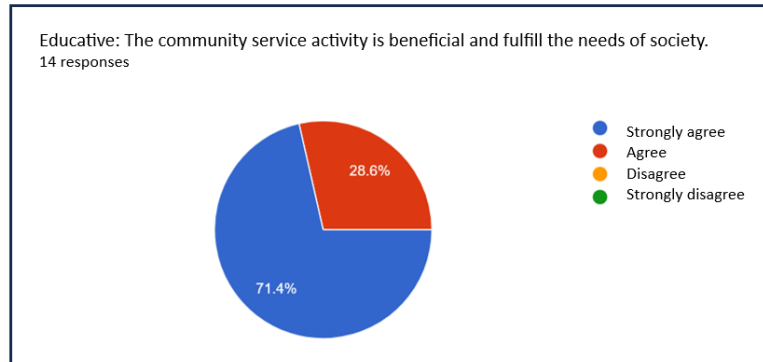
The first meeting was held on 7 February 2024. A total of 14 employees participated in this first session. Since it is the first time meeting all of the participants, the topic of the class is 'Introducing yourself and socializing.' There are two main focuses for this session, namely language expressions related to introducing and socializing, and some grammatical points related to the simple present tense. According to Gewerhr (1998), grammar is an essential element in language learning. Therefore, even though the main purpose of the course is to improve the employees speaking abilities, it is still important to include some grammatical points in the lessons since being fluent but ungrammatical may also cause confusion when communicating.

For this session, the instructors were Mr. Jonathan Tanihardjo and Mr. Ardi Nugroho. Additionally, two students also helped, namely Kheisya Laurentia Sukamto and Kayla Adwa Juniar. For the language expressions, the participants were taught how to properly introduce themselves and others in English. They were also given examples of how people socialize in English through authentic medias such as videos. The simple present tense was also taught since it is the common tense used when introducing or socializing. The students also gave them some games to make the situation more comfortable and livelier. In the end, the participants were also given the opportunity to practice introducing themselves and socializing in English. During this practice session, the participants were to role play in pairs and practice speaking in English in the context of introductions and socializing. **Figure 3** below is a photo of when Mr. Jonathan Tanihardjo was explaining the materials to the participants.



**Figure 3.** Photo of Meeting 1

At the end of the first meeting, the participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire to provide feedback for this session. Overall, most of the participants were quite happy with the class. Some of them said that they enjoyed it because it was fun and informative. However, there were also some of them who said that the instructors should speak more slowly when delivering the materials. This shows that there are still some participants who still had difficulty following the lesson, probably those whose English level is still below intermediate. A summary of one of the questionnaire items can be seen in **Figure 4** below.



**Figure 4.** Summary of One of the Questionnaire Items

From **Figure 4** above, it can be seen that 71.4% strongly agreed and 28.6% agreed that this community service was beneficial and could meet the demands of society, in this case, PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara's needs to improve their employees' English speaking skills.

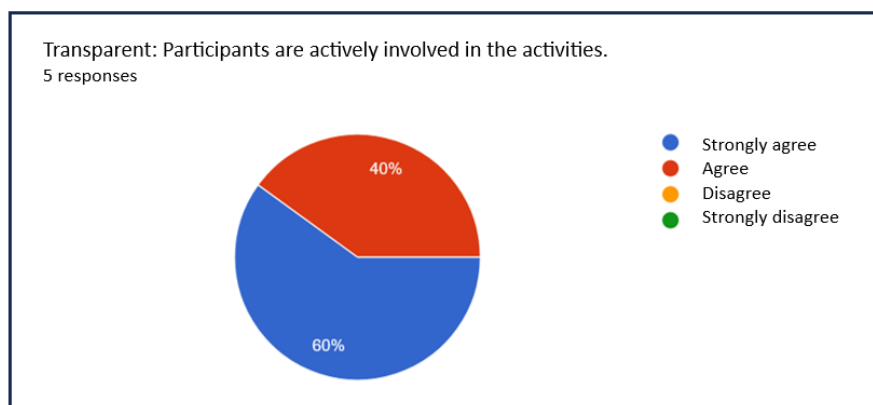
## **- 2) Meeting 2 (21 February 2024)**

The topic of the second meeting is 'Telephoning.' The instructors were Ms. Putu Sita Witari and Mr. Yohanes Maria Restu Dian Raharjo, who were accompanied by two students, i.e., Angelica Louise Gunawan dan Chesya Mapela Syalom Sitorus. The meeting was divided into 4 main sessions. The first was the ice breaking, the second focused on grammar and vocabulary related to telephoning, the third involved listening and an explanation of the language expressions, while the final session was the speaking practice. For the ice breaking, the students gave some games so that the participants would feel more relaxed and ready for the learning session. Next, Ms. Sita explained some grammatical points, including the adjectives "too/enough" and constructing questions and sentences in the context of telephoning. She also tried to relate the material to their actual work in the company. They were also given some practice, including some pronunciation practice. In the third session, Mr. Restu played some audio files for the listening as conversation models in the context of telephoning. He also explained about the order of telephoning conversations along with the associated language expressions. In the final session, the participants were divided into groups of three and were asked to make a dialogue for telephoning. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to do the actual practice. Nonetheless, the participants were able to get feedback on their work from the instructors while they were in the process of making the dialogue. In the end, the participants were also satisfied with the second meeting of the English class. **Figure 5** below is a photo of when Ms. Sita was delivering the materials, and **Figure 6** below shows the result of one of the questionnaire items.



**Figure 5.** Photo of Meeting 2





**Figure 6.** Summary of One of the Questionnaire Items

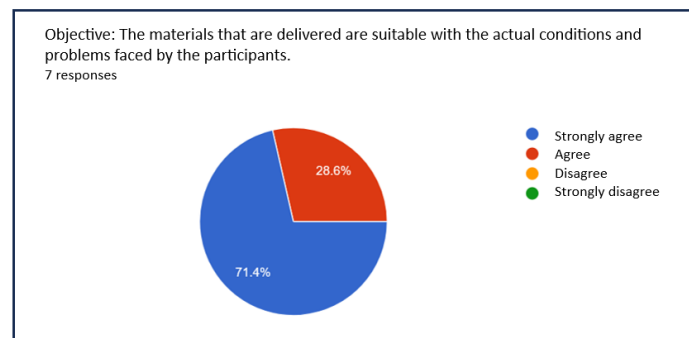
Based on the result of the questionnaire in **Figure 6** above, it can be seen that the participants responded positively when asked about their active participation during the class. More specifically, 60% strongly agreed and 40% agreed that they were actively involved during the lesson.

### **- 3) Meeting 3 (28 February 2024)**

The third meeting was held on 28 February 2024 with Ms. Suwarni Wijaya Halim and Ms. Agustine Andriana Ayu Mahardika as the instructors. They were also assisted by 2 students, namely Eugene Isa Kafka Rahingrat and Degrace Victoria Christy Dasmasele. The topic for this meeting is 'Presenting Products.' In the beginning of the lesson, Ms. Agustine discussed about the simple present tense and passive voice, which are commonly used when presenting products. The participants were also given some practice to help them better understand the materials. The 2 students also helped with the practice. Afterwards, Ms. Suwarni described some vocabularies and language expressions related to this topic. Finally, after all of the materials were delivered, the participants were asked to form groups of three and prepare a short presentation about the products offered by PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara. This is in accordance with Kayi (2006) who stated that English language teachers should create an environment in which the students can use English as they would in real life situations, as well as make meaningful and authentic activities and tasks to promote their learning, including improving their speaking skills. After the presentation from each group, the instructors gave some feedback on their performance. **Figure 7** below is a photo of when Ms. Suwarni was explaining about how to present products in English, whereas **Figure 8** that follows is a summary of one of the questionnaire items distributed to the participants.



**Figure 7.** Photo of Meeting 3



**Figure 8.** Summary of One of the Questionnaire Items

Based on the result of the questionnaire, it was found that the respondents had a positive view regarding the materials that were delivered which were suitable with the real life situations that they normally face. To be exact, 71.4% strongly agreed and 28.6% agreed with this statement.

#### **- 4) Meeting 4 (6 March 2024)**

The instructors for the fourth meeting conducted on 6 March 2024 were Ms. Murniati and Mr. Rex Stardy, accompanied by 2 students, i.e., Seisilia Anolitha Koontud and Cetlyn Aqnesia Purnama. The topic for this meeting is still about 'Presenting Products,' but the focus is more on the continuation, namely 'emphasizing' and 'handling complaints.' In this session, the participants were taught how to handle complaints, be it the oral complaints or the written complaints via emails, which were delivered by Ms. Murniati. Afterwards, Mr. Rex also explained about 'comparative' and 'superlative' which can sometimes be found in the context of presenting products. At the end of the meeting, the participants were given the opportunity to practice what they have learned through role play. **Figure 9** below is a photo of when Ms. Murniati was explaining the materials to the participants.



**Figure 9.** Photo of Meeting 4

#### **- 5) Meeting 5 (13 March 2024)**

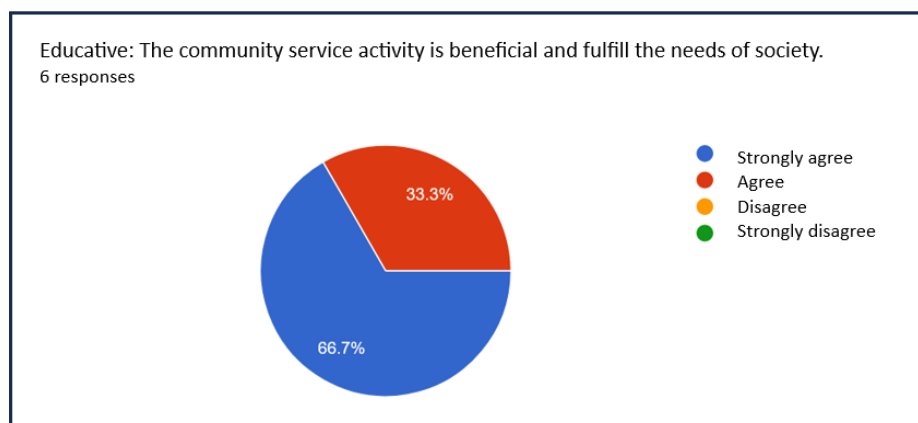
Meeting 5 was held on 13 March 2024, and the instructors were Ms. Suwarni Wijaya Halim and Ms. Agustine Andriana Ayu Mahardika. Two students also participated in this session, namely William Gunawan and Christie Allesia Suherman. The topic for this meeting is 'Conducting Negotiations with Clients.' For starters, Ms. Agustine explained some grammatical points related to this topic, which include the 'simple future tense' and the 'first conditional.' Some practice was also given to the participants, in which the students helped them out with. Afterwards, Ms. Suwarni continued with the language expressions commonly used when negotiating with clients. After all of the materials were explained, the participants were asked to make a short dialogue related to this context and practice it in front of the class. Lastly, the instructors gave some comments and feedback on the participants' conversations. **Figure 10** below is a photo of when William was assisting the participants when they



were preparing for their conversation practice. **Figure 11** below it shows the summary of one of the questionnaire items.



**Figure 10.** Photo of Meeting 5



**Figure 11.** Summary of One of the Questionnaire Items

As can be seen from **Figure 11** above, 66.7% strongly agreed and 33.3% agreed that this lesson was quite beneficial for them. This meeting was probably one of the more complicated ones, but it was definitely something that they needed since negotiating with clients is an important part of their work. From this meeting, they were able to learn and practice negotiating in English, which hopefully will be useful for them in the future.

#### **- 6) Meeting 6 (20 March 2024)**

On 20 March 2024, the sixth meeting was held. It was handled by Ms. Nugraheni Widyaningtyas dan Ms. Putu Sita Witari. This time the topic is about 'Handling Complaints.' In the first part of the meeting, Ms. Sita had a brief discussion with the participants about the kinds of situations that they normally encounter in which they had to apologize to clients or when they would complain. In this occasion, some of the participants shared their experiences related to this context. Afterwards, the participants were presented with an example dialogue between a customer and a customer service officer as an example of how one would handle complaints in English. This dialogue was actually cut into pieces and the participants had to rearrange them correctly. From this activity, they were then introduced to expressions related to handling complaints in English such as the proper way to apologize, give explanations and excuses, offering to improve the situations, and many more. **Figure 12** below is a photo of when Ms. Sita was delivering the materials to the participants.



**Figure 12.** Photo of Meeting 6

After delivering the materials, Ms. Nugraheni handled the practice session in which they had to role play in the context of handling complaints. The participants were also given feedback on their practice so that they could learn from their mistakes.

#### **- 7) Meeting 7 (27 March 2024)**

The final meeting was held on 27 March 2024, with Ms. Magdalena Kartikasari Tandy Rerung and Ms. Putri Rindu Kinasih as the instructors. The final topic is 'Conducting Meetings.' The meeting started with a brief brainstorming session about their experiences agreeing and disagreeing with their coworkers, friends, and even family. Afterwards, Ms. Putri delivered the materials related to 'How to be an effective chairman/leader' followed by a conversation practice which highlighted the language expressions and vocabulary commonly used when conducting meetings, especially formal business ones. Next, Ms. Magdalena continued the lesson focusing on how to properly agree and disagree in a meeting. The last part of this meeting was the practice in the form of a role play. The role play itself had three main parts of a meeting, namely describing the problem, giving ideas and suggestions, and reaching an agreement in a meeting. **Figure 13** below is a photo of when Ms. Magdalena and Ms. Putri were explaining the materials to the participants.



**Figure 13.** Photo of Meeting 7

#### **c) Implementation Phase**

It is hoped that this community service is not only beneficial for society, in this case the employees in PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara who joined the English program, but for the academic community as well, especially since it is disseminated and published in a journal. By publishing the result of this community service, it is hoped that it can enrich the existing literature related to teaching English for employees.

## **Discussion**

From the 7 meetings that were conducted, it was found that some of the participants were still not very fluent in their speaking. They still had a limited vocabulary and some of them were also quite shy when asked to practice in front of the class. They were also not very familiar with the language expressions for specific situations such as in negotiations, conducting meetings and others. This is quite similar to the findings of Silalahi, Murniati, and Widianingtyas' (2023) study, where it was found that a lot of the hotel staff also still had low levels of English. Even for departments such as the Front Office where the staff regularly interact with foreigners who stay at the hotel, they were still not very fluent in English. Hence, it can be argued that people working in companies in Indonesia generally still lack English competence, especially in speaking. A possible reason for this is that they do not always use their English on a daily basis, so they do not get enough opportunities to practice speaking in English. So even though they may have previously learned English either in school or during their studies at the university level, they may end up losing their English skills if they do not regularly practice it, especially in terms of spoken English.

Nevertheless, they were generally active when participating in the various activities that the instructors gave. This can be seen from the way they were motivated to do the practices in each session. They were also quite eager in learning English, and some of them even asked for more feedback on their performance. It should also be noted that 7 meetings are not really sufficient to improve their overall speaking ability, but at least they were able to learn something new and had the opportunity to practice speaking in English, which they may not always get the chance to in their daily routines.

## **CONCLUSION**

PT. Murni Solusindo Nusantara is a company based in Jakarta that specializes in the field of ICT. Seeing as some of their clients are international ones, the management of the company felt the need to improve their employees' English skills, especially their speaking ability. Therefore, they requested the help of the English Department from Bunda Mulia University. After conducting the needs analysis, a total of 7 meetings were held onsite in the company's office in Jakarta. Each meeting focused on different topics such as introducing and socializing, telephoning, handling complaints, and several others. During these meetings, the participants were given the opportunity to practice their English speaking in various work-related contexts. In general, the participants responded quite positively to this program which can be seen from the result of the questionnaire that was distributed at the end of each meeting.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

It is hoped that this research can serve as reference for future studies which also focuses on teaching English for company employees. The current study highlights the teaching of English to improve speaking skills. Several methods and techniques were employed during the English program that was conducted over seven meetings. It is hoped that future research can employ an even wider range of methods and emphasize on other skills such as listening and writing.

### ***Practical Implications***

Considering that the program was only limited to seven meetings, it may not have been sufficient to make a significant improvement for the employees' speaking skills overall. Nonetheless, from these seven meetings, it was found that the employees were quite interested in improving their English speaking ability and were quite actively involved in all of the activities given by the instructors. Hence, it is suggested that future programs have a more extensive schedule with more meetings, so that the participants can have even more opportunities to practice what they have learned. After all, practice makes perfect, so by having more time for practice, it is hoped that the participants would be able to slowly but surely increase their English competence overall.

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