

Bridging Language Barriers in Law Enforcement: A Study on the English Language Needs of Indonesian Police Officers

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Abstract: Bridging Language Barriers in Law Enforcement: A Study on the English Language Needs of Indonesian Police Officers. **Objective:** Policemen more often communicate in English when dealing with non-nationals, cooperating internationally, or dealing with international crime in general. However, in Indonesia, where English is used as a foreign language and is not widely used in society, achieving working proficiency becomes a significant challenge. The present study addresses the English language learning needs of police officers working in operational duties and responsibilities within a district-level police unit in West Java Province, Indonesia. **Method:** Data was collected through a qualitative case study involving 30 rank-and-file officers. These three types of data were gathered via in-depth interviews, structured questionnaires, and workplace observations. This approach provided a full picture of the linguistic difficulties as well as the language required for the task. **Findings:** The Results indicate that, despite their low level of English proficiency, most officers acknowledge the language as fundamental for a significant portion of their work, including daily interactions with foreign visitors, writing reports to support cases involving foreign nationals, and situations requiring knowledge of legal and procedural terminology in cross-border contexts.. The needs analysis identifies three key areas for growth: oral skills for basic conversation and emergencies, reading and writing skills for writing police reports, and proficiency in English documentation, as well as an understanding of specialized legal vocabulary relevant to policing. **Conclusion/Implications:** As a result, an English for Specific Purposes, task-based, and contextualised training program is proposed based on these findings. This would enhance the officers' performance in the field, improve public service quality, and bolster Indonesia's engagement in international law enforcement networks.

Keywords: english for specific purposes, law enforcement training, needs analysis, operational language skill, police communication.

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■ INTRODUCTION

The globalized nature of security problems and the cross-border movement of people have made policing an intrinsically global affair (Walters & Reeve, 2023). They have ceased to be limited in their work to interactions with domestic citizens and are now increasingly required to engage with foreign nationals, foreign agencies, and transnational crimes. In these situations,

international communication is often conducted in English, making it a crucial and essential skill in policing and public service (Leclercq & Moore, 2022). Multilingualism has recently been recognized as a valuable asset for global policing, particularly in border security and transnational operations. In addition, Capgemini's 2025 security outlook reveals the impact that digital transformation and transnational threats are having

on enforcement priorities in ways that will further require linguistic agility and intercultural communication skills at the frontlines of policing (Bhat et al., 2025). This is especially difficult for police personnel in Indonesia, where English is considered and treated as a foreign language and is rarely used in daily life. Meanwhile, limited exposure to and opportunities for training in English, as well as the absence of institutional policies to support proficiency in English, increase the barriers to communicating with non-Indonesian speakers.

The district-level police unit that was investigated is a typical case in which knowledge of English is becoming increasingly necessary. The region encompasses industrial, tourism, and transit areas in West Java that attract occasional foreign

visitors. Figure 1 shows the trend of international tourist visits to the district where the police unit is under investigation. Although not a primary tourist destination, lost property, traffic offenses, and minor criminal cases also occasionally require some form of contact with foreigners. The recent needs analysis conducted in the police unit revealed that 85% of the officers interviewed had some contact with non-Indonesian speakers, but that these contacts were most frequently for simple transactional purposes, such as giving directions or handling minor complaints. However, most officers reported experiencing some sort of language barrier, including a lack of vocabulary, a deficiency in legal English vocabulary, and low confidence in their spoken English.

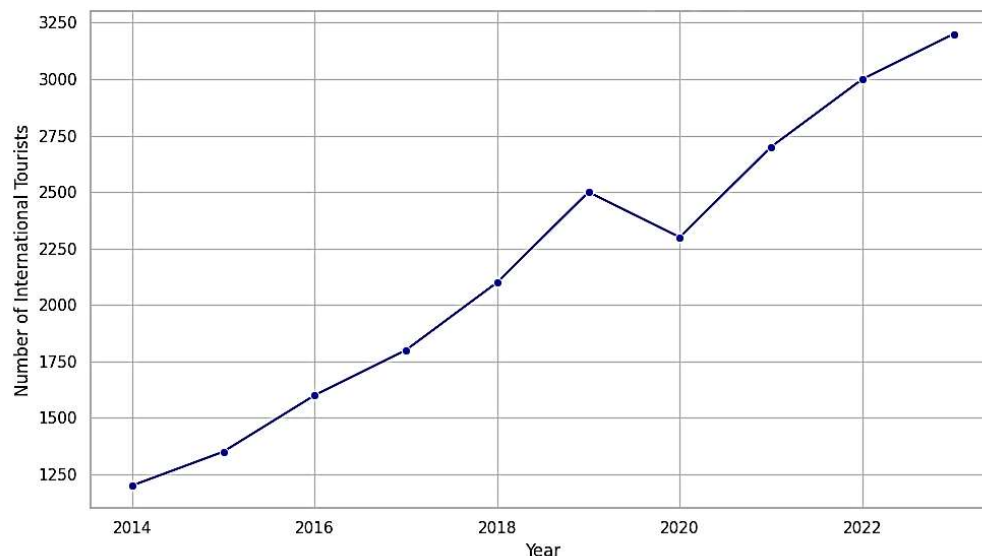


Figure 1. Trend of international tourist visits to the district researched 2014-2023 (data.go.id., 2024)

Not surprisingly, this is not unique to the particular context of this case and is common in most countries where English is not a majority spoken language, with police often handling it on a case-by-case basis through online translators or with the help of bilingual coworkers (Bremner, 2023). Although these methods of improvisation

help to meet immediate needs, they are often inefficient, time-consuming, and can result in miscommunication, especially in sensitive and important legal matters. In addition, other research indicates that language barriers can decrease public trust, increase response times in emergencies, or negatively impact career path

development if officers are required to attend international training or engage in cross-border collaborations (Suwannarak & Chantarawiroe, 2022; Shah et al., 2023).

ESP, as an area of study and, more specifically, of teaching, seems to provide a suitable context to work in order to fill these gaps. ESP poses its main concern as preparing learners to use the language effectively in their specific work environments, thereby developing a task-based focus and situated vocabulary learning (Paltridge & Starfield, 2023). A needs analysis is crucial as the first step in ESP course development because it provides insights into the learners' particular communicative contexts, their actual proficiency level, and the distance between these two (Basturkmen, 2022). In the case of law enforcement, ESP training usually focuses on face-to-face communication skills for public service, report writing, and legal or procedural jargon (Krishnan & Ward, 2023).

However, systematic English training for Indonesian police officers remains rare. A study of the police unit's internal documentation revealed that the English language has not been part of the unit's training program for the last three years, and that there were no standard operating procedures (SOPs) established to assist foreign nationals. As a result, officers use short sentences, gestures, and technology to intervene in multilingual situations, which often leads to an ineffective provision of service. In addition, even if the officers have minimal knowledge of English, the 'fear of making mistakes' psychological barrier limits their intention to practice spoken English (Prasetyo, 2024). So this obstacle originates from psychological pressure from social anxiety and cultural embarrassment.

Reluctance to use a foreign language spontaneously is also reinforced by the Indonesian national culture of being modest and careful about what is being said in public (Damayanti, 2025). At the level of the individual student, lack of confidence and anxiety when

speaking are highly influential; Maulida, Khotib, and Rahmatul 'Izza (2023) reveal that students at Indonesian universities feel high levels of anxiety when speaking English out of fear of being judged and a lack of speaking experience. There is also added pressure to perform perfectly due to the rigid and extremely formal culture within the police organization, where mistakes in communication can be perceived as a lack of professional preparedness (Nurhidayah, Hijjang, & Yusuf, 2025). These individual psychological factors, combined with a broader national culture that discourages verbal expression, and a police organizational culture that emphasizes conformity and accuracy, create a situation in which police officers' desire and willingness to engage in spoken English within their profession is constrained.

In this light, this research aimed to systematically analyze the English language needs of police officers within the police unit. Unlike general English teaching, they aim to suggest a contextualized, task-oriented program that meets the actual communicative requirements of policing. Through a qualitative case study approach that utilizes interviews, questionnaires, participatory observation, and document analysis, this study offers a data-informed perspective on the linguistic, psychological, and structural constraints that hinder effective communication in English. Therefore, to guide the study, a research question was proposed: What are the English language learning needs of police officers working in operational duties and responsibilities in a district-level police unit?

The study's results are both practical and academically relevant. In a more practical sense, they are beneficial for designing an English training program specifically tailored to police work, aiming to produce more professional police officers and enhance public service in cross-cultural encounters. From an academic standpoint, the research contributes to the existing body of work on ESP needs analysis in less-

studied professional fields, such as law enforcement in non-English-speaking countries. Additionally, the findings reiterate the importance of institutions, beyond personal language skills, in overcoming communication deficits in policing.

Literature Review

English for Specific Purposes in Law Enforcement

English for Specific Purposes, or ESP, is an offshoot of applied linguistics that caters to developing language learning suited to the learners' field or discipline. Unlike GE, ESP focuses on the functional deployment of language within specific communicative situations, thereby helping learners handle tasks more appropriately and efficiently in contexts relevant to their needs (Paltridge & Starfield, 2023). In police work, this is particularly important, as ESP allows officers to prepare for public services, emergencies, or investigations that go beyond their own country in multilingual environments. The need for an ESP approach to police work is critical as, according to Mora-Rodriguez (2024), "police officers' command of English at border checkpoints is usually limited to a basic level, a fact that compels them to modify language through simpler vocabulary and gestures to communicate a sufficient level of understanding to perform their job". In the same vein, Balendr et al. (2023) demonstrate the success of an ESP course for border guard officers in Ukraine, where online training through the facilitation approach made a noticeable difference in area-specific communicative competence under high-stress law enforcement circumstances.

Recent research indicates that the globalization of policing has led to an increased emphasis on English as a lingua franca for law enforcement. According to Walters and Reeve (2023), higher levels of international tourism, transnational crimes, and global security collaborations have rendered English not as an

additional asset but as a "functional requirement". Officers without English skills face particular challenges in interviewing foreign victims, taking reports from tourists, or collaborating with international agencies (Bremner, 2023). Additionally, unclear understandings in these spaces could be detrimental to the initiation of an investigation or the provision of support for the victim.

Several countries have developed ESP programs tailored to the functioning of their police forces. Thailand and Malaysia have also incorporated task-based English modules to prepare their officers for specific language tasks, including giving directions, writing incident reports, or explaining legal procedures to foreigners (Suwannarak & Chantarawirote, 2022). Related to this, these programs differ from traditional grammar in that they represent a move towards teaching communicative competence based on actual policing situations. Significantly, these studies indicate that ESP for law enforcement is not merely the mastery of vocabulary, but rather the acquisition of pragmatic techniques, intercultural communication skills, and exercises that build confidence, which prepare officers to act in unpredictable and high-stakes situations. For example, Zakaria and Aziz (2023) demonstrated that simulation-based ESP training, which incorporates both legal vocabulary and situational role-play, is more beneficial for police trainees in Malaysia in developing both linguistic fluency and professional preparedness. Likewise, in Karnchanachari (2024), a collaborative and task-based learning process was devised to improve Thai metropolitan police officers' interaction with international tourists and multilingual situations. In this sense, the results advocate for an ESP program adapted to officers' communicative needs and sociocultural contexts.

Nevertheless, Indonesia has not developed ESP for law enforcement. Police training today primarily focuses on legal knowledge and tactical

skills, rather than language. This creates a disconnection between the growing importance of English in professional practice and the linguistic training that officers actually undertake.

Needs Analysis as the Foundation of ESP Course Design

Needs analysis is a method for exploring what learners need as a target language to learn, what they can already do, and identifying the differences. It is the foundation of ESP course design because it ensures that the training is based on real communicative needs, rather than linguistic competencies in an abstract language ability (Basturkmen, 2022). Although the theory of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) is a classic of such approaches, it remains alive and has been recently enhanced by more context-sensitive approaches.

Existing needs analysis models within the realm of ESP focus on the following three related domains: Target Situation Analysis (TSA), which prerogatively prescribes the language needed in contextually specific professional realms; Present Situation Analysis (PSA), which measures the actual proficiency of the learners; and Learning Needs Analysis (LNA), which addresses the strategies and tactics assumed by learners towards language skill acquisition (Krishnan & Ward, 2023). In law enforcement, TSA involves mapping communication situations, such as front-desk interactions between officers and foreign tourists, providing explanations of paperwork to limited English speakers, questioning suspects, and handling emergency calls in multilingual settings (Karnchanachari, 2024). PSA commonly finds that law enforcement officers lack vocabulary, have a deficiency in grammatical accuracy, and insufficient confidence in communication, which are problems, besides limited institutional support for learning and exposure to authentic English use in an operational setting (Zakaria & Aziz, 2023). LNA, in the same vein, suggests the need for learner-centred

principles, as preferred by officers in terms of task-based learning and role play as devices and materials in real work-intensive curricula from the police (Nugraha et al., 2024). Taken together, these three dimensions provide a framework for designing ESP courses that are contextually and pedagogically informed by the needs of law enforcement communication.

In law enforcement, a multi-method approach is often employed to conduct a robust needs analysis through a combination of interviews, questionnaires, and participatory observation. Suwannarak et al. (2022) have demonstrated how blending observational data provides a more nuanced understanding of the real communicative impediments police officers encounter in the process of interpreting real-time interactions. Likewise, Krishnan and Ward (2023) suggest that an examination of the workplace literature (e.g., reports, SOPs) will reveal where institutional knowledge gaps exist, which need to be addressed within training.

Gaps in Literature: Policing in Non-English-Speaking Contexts

While there is a rich literature on needs analysis in workplace contexts, such as business, medicine, and aviation, the same cannot be said for law enforcement, especially in non-English-speaking countries. The largest body of ESP activity, in the context of police, has come from European and Southeast Asian destinations heavily involved in tourism (Leclercq & Moore, 2022). Yet, Indonesia lacks a substantial body of scholarly work to describe the communicative challenges faced by police officers, particularly at the provincial or district level. This mismatch is more pronounced in operational sectors that require multilingual interaction and culturally sensitive participatory activities (Zakaria & Aziz, 2023).

One urgent research gap is the paucity of formal English language training in the Indonesian

police force. Documentation reviews from the current study indicated that English has not been incorporated into training plans for at least three years, and there are no standard operating procedures (SOPs) in place to support foreign individuals. This context is consistent with insights from Bremner's (2023) work, who found that in many developing countries, officers have no alternative but to use ad hoc support (such as Google Translate or a colleague), which may work for basic tasks but not for complex or high-stakes interactions.

Hence, a needs analysis at the ground level is not only imperative for planning an effective ESP curriculum, but it is also a strategic reference for institutionalizing policies that prioritize English language capability as a professional requirement for Indonesian police officers. This type of analysis contributes to ensuring that the development of curriculum is based on authentic communicative needs, which may include diverse needs, such as interactions in different languages with tourists and cross-border law enforcement cooperation (Baker, 2021). It also enables policymakers to address systemic training gaps by incorporating language proficiency standards into their recruitment, promotion, and in-service training mechanisms (Widyanto & Jannah, 2025). Failing to utilize its focused effort in this area will render ESP efforts generic and irrelevant to operation-based scenarios, thereby falling short of achieving application to professional performance and global reach.

To sum up, the review has demonstrated the significance of ESP, as it can equip personnel with the appropriate language skills necessary for the global law enforcement environment. Police officers must communicate directly with the public, which requires effective communication skills in practice. Needs analysis appears as the cornerstone of the process in which language instruction mirrors the requirements of employment. However, there is a significant literature gap regarding district-level police units

in Indonesia, where English is seldom used but is increasingly demanded. This paper aims to fill this gap by offering an evidence-based needs analysis of police officers at a police unit and providing implications for course design and institutional policy development.

■ METHOD

Research Design

This research employed a qualitative case study to address the research question regarding the English language requirements of police officers in a district-level police unit in West Java, Indonesia. This design was particularly suitable, as it supports the comprehensive investigation of language challenges specific to the participants' natural working environment (Creswell & Poth, 2023). Through multiple sources of data (interviews, questionnaires, participant observation, and document analysis), the study aimed to triangulate an in-depth understanding of officers' current English proficiency, communication needs, and institutional constraints (Yin, 2018; Stroupe & Roosman, 2025). At the same time, this approach facilitated a more nuanced understanding of the societal and occupational factors that influenced language practices in the police.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in one of these police units located in the western part of West Java province, specifically in a sub-district police unit area with a territory comprising an industrial area, tourism areas, and national transit roads. However, it is not a major city or tourist destination, and the police agency frequently comes into contact with foreign citizens due to its thriving economy and diverse social life.

Participants with occupational exposure to foreign nationals were recruited using a purposive sampling approach. The study included all 30 police officers deployed in the district unit. They were from different positions within the ranks and

units, such as at the Integrated Police Service Center (SPKT), the Traffic Unit, the Criminal Investigation Unit (Reskrim), and the Intelligence Division. Eighteen of whom were purposively recruited for in depth interviews, and all 30 officers completed structured instruments. Data saturation was achieved at the 18th interview. Two top officials in charge of training and human resources development also offered perspectives on organizational practices and training.

Data Collection Procedures

Four triangulated methods were used to ensure methodological triangulation: semi-structured interviews, structured questionnaires, participant observations, and document analysis. To obtain a detailed picture of the English language needs of Indonesian police officers, the research employed semi-structured interviews with 18 participants from various divisions within the district-level police. We specifically adopted this approach to allow the richness and depth of individual experiences to emerge and facilitate comparisons across key themes (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Yin, 2018). The interview guide aimed to investigate the frequency of English use, typical communicative situations, perceived obstacles to communication (including linguistic barriers, psychological reasons such as language fear or lack of self-confidence, and structural/institutional reasons like inadequate support provision), and desired language learning outcomes.

Their challenges included explaining the legal process to foreign nationals, fear of making mistakes that could delay cases, and the frequent use of ‘digital translation’ tools like Google Translate. In these stories, the practical difficulties of not mastering English in the disciplinary affiliation are exposed (Zakaria & Aziz, 2023). Interviews were conducted in private, lasted 30–45 minutes, and were audio-recorded. After obtaining informed consent, the recordings were

transcribed verbatim, and themes were extracted. The semi-structured nature also allowed for the emergence of themes, further contributing to the depth and credibility of the data (Ruslin et al., 2022).

All 30 officers completed profile-based questionnaires on their English language use and language learning requirements. It was developed to measure commonly reported aspects of fluency or communicative competence, such as the frequency of interactions in English, types of communication situations, comfort in speaking/listening, and areas where participants thought they could improve. Core language skills, including speaking, listening, language, and grammar performance, were assessed via a 20-item questionnaire on a 4-point Likert scale. This method enabled the researcher to observe officers’ language and confidence patterns, and to design a context-regardful ESP curriculum that reflects the needs of officers in their daily law enforcement operations.

The questions were designed by the researchers, based on existing ESP models and studies of police dialogue. Although some items originate from established tests of occupational English or tests used in other workplace contexts of interpreting (e.g., Kazemi & Tabatabaei, 2015), the majority were specifically designed for the multilingual work environment of law enforcement in Indonesia. This aligns with the fact that ESP tools should be highly contextualized and based on a needs analysis (Javid & Mohseni, 2020). The measures were developed through review of the literature, consultation with experts in the field, and consideration of feedback during pre-testing “pilot” studies.

The 20 items represented measurements of four main constructs: readiness in language, strategies in interpretation, confidence in the situation, and support within the institution. Linguistic preparedness measured officers’ skills in using minimal English, including interpreting

strategies such as paraphrasing, clarifying, and turn-taking. Situational confidence measured perceptions of readiness, while institutional support assessed knowledge of training opportunities and the clarity of SOPs (Ulum, 2017; Fountoulakis, 2024).

Validity and reliability were established through a pilot test conducted with 15 bilingual officers, who provided feedback on the clarity and relevance of the items. Content validity was determined by three experts in the fields of ESP and law enforcement pedagogy. The alphas were found to be between 0.78 and 0.85, demonstrating good internal consistency and soundness of the methods used in those studies (Kazemi & Tabatabaei, 2015; Javid & Mohseni, 2020).

My qualifications as an academic and professional expert in curriculum design for English for Specific Purposes, particularly for the police, significantly impacted the data collection process. Although my local insider status helped me gain access to these households and provided contextual depth, it is not without the danger of interpretive bias and power dynamics, particularly to the extent that respondents may have viewed me as an evaluator or an agent of a larger institution. To counter these impacts, I purposefully engaged in informal, empathetic conversations, reinforced my non-judgmental role, and emphasized the significance of their lived experiences. The use of reflexive journaling and peer debriefing helped track assumptions and maintain transparency in the analysis, while member checking enabled participants to authenticate or elaborate on their stories. These strategies were incorporated into the research design to ensure credibility, build trust, and maintain an ethical standard throughout the research process.

To support the interview data and to generate situated insights on officers' communicative practices as they occur, the researcher conducted three days of shadowing

at two main sites where officers communicate directly: the Integrated Police Service Center (SPKT) and the traffic unit. This ethnographic method enabled the researcher to observe unplanned encounters between officers and foreign nationals, thereby providing a situated view of English language use in practice (Emerson et al., 2011).

There were two recorded incidents of interest involving foreign nationals during the observation period: 1) An Australian tourist who had claimed to have lost her wallet, and a non-Indonesian looking for directions to a nearby hotel. These interactions were key nodes for studying officers' ad hoc communicative tactics. Ability to communicate. The researcher observed that officers predominantly relied on non-verbal signals, such as gestures and facial expressions, as well as basic English phrases, and the assistance of other officers to communicate (referred to as "peers-assisted communication"). These have the atmosphere of the sorts of informal coping strategies we would expect within an environment where no formal language learning has taken place, and I would suggest are indicative of some of the communicative difficulties experienced by those at the front lines (Oxholm & Glaser, 2023; Brower, 2024).

The participatory observation approach yielded detailed, contextually embedded data to complement the interview findings and to expose the embodied and collaborative character of the language negotiation process in high-stakes, multilingual events. Such an approach also facilitated the discovery of interactional patterns and the contextual barriers that may not emerge from self-reported data only (Yin, 2018). Field notes were used to record the observation.

To understand the current state of institutional structures for English use, we reviewed internal reports. These ranged from SOPs for public service to daily operating reports, internal training seminars, and records of complaints. The work aims to explore the extent to which the use

of English forms an integral part of institutional protocols and practices in areas of daily practice and professional development, providing the contextual basis for understanding communicative expectations and readiness.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This research utilised a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to refine qualitative and quantitative data sources. The manually coded transcripts from these interviews were iteratively reviewed to develop related themes of officers' communication needs, barriers, and coping foci. Coding was conducted using the six-step process described by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Nowell et al., 2017), which included familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme identification, and review of themes to ensure depth and clarity in analysis.

A descriptive analysis of the quantitative data from the administered structured questionnaires was conducted. The distributions of frequencies and percentages were used to describe patterns of English language use, self-rated levels of comfort, and preferences for training. These measurements provided a different perspective on the qualitative results, facilitating cross-validation and the identification of similar trends.

Observation reports were reviewed to document immediate communicative patterns, such as unsolicited talk, nonverbal tactics, and peer-mediated interactions. Such field findings validated self-reported difficulties and supplemented the themes extracted from the interviews. Institutional texts (for example, SOPs, training schedules, service delivery reports) were also consulted to place officers' language practices in the context of institutional and policy frameworks.

The study employed triangulation techniques to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings, utilizing multiple sources of data and

analytic methods to validate results and minimize biases (Flick, 2023; Yin, 2018). This process allowed for varied perspectives and a complex mapping of English language use in Indonesian law enforcement to be considered in rendering interpretations.

Contradictory data, such as instances where officers reported feeling confident in their basic English use but also reported avoiding it, were countered through triangulation. An exploration of the differences between interview responses, questionnaire data, and observational findings revealed situational anxiety and the absence of institutional reinforcement as underlying factors contributing to these inconsistencies. Instead of being interpreted as false, they were seen as signs of a larger struggle between what was considered competent and what was necessary for operation. This perspective provided a deeper understanding of the students' reality and called for ESP instruction that aimed not only at linguistic competence but also at psychological coping skills.

Ethical Consideration.

Research conducted in a policing environment presents its own specific challenges, including bureaucratic red tape, hierarchical approvals, and issues related to institutional image and data secrecy. Approvals typically require review by several local commanders and regional administrators, each with their own processes, protocols, and concerns. Gatekeepers prioritize other tasks, are unavailable, or fear outside attention, causing researchers to move slowly.

Addressing these challenges, the study began respectfully and transparently by contacting individuals with letters, obtaining endorsements from professional schools, and emphasising that the research complemented development plans. Establishing trust through initial meetings, discussing ethical protections, and providing anonymized reports also facilitated access and cooperation.

This methodology provided a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic, cognitive, and organizational aspects that characterize English interaction in the police. Augmenting self-report, the triangulation of self-reported data with observed behavior and institutional documentation provided a solid evidential basis upon which to design context-specific ESP programs in law enforcement.

Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted in one district police unit in West Java and may not apply to other areas with different operational pressures or exposure to foreign nationals. The number of participants in this sample is adequate for a qualitative study; however, it remains limited and may not encompass the full range of experiences within each rank and department. Self-reporting also raises concerns about bias, as officers could potentially exaggerate or minimize their proficiency in English or their difficulties in communicating. Similarly, the lack of longitudinal data limits knowledge of the long-term effects of language barriers or training interventions. Subsequent studies might consider moving to multi-site jurisdictions, adding assessments of performance or readiness of the institution, as well as the possibility of institutional readiness for ESP implementation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was (a) to establish what the needs of officers are as far as their use of English is concerned at the police unit, and (b) what role the police officers’ communicative needs, proficiency, and institutional frames play in English usage at law-enforcing police. Information was obtained using interviews, questionnaires, participatory observation, and document review. The results are reported in three themes: (1) present use of English and communicative needs; impeding effective communication, and (3) institutional and structural shortfalls.

Current English Use and Communicative Needs

Regarding multilingual public service again, the use of English by police officers in day-to-day interactions is not sporadic, but rather relatively consistent. Table 1 illustrates that, in addition to other common uses, English was most often employed by the respondents to give general information to foreign nationals (93%), followed by responding to traffic questions (67%) and responding to reports of minor losses such as stolen or lost objects (55%). Such interactions occur on average two to three times a month; thus, English is required in a non-spontaneous but non-occasional manner for predictable communicative purposes (Author, 2025).

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of english use in routine police interactions

Type of Interaction	Average Monthly Frequency	Percentage of Respondents Reporting Use
General information provision	2–3 times	93%
Traffic-related inquiries	2–3 times	67%
Minor loss reports (e.g., stolen items)	2–3 times	55%

The interview findings supported these quantitative results. Officers often cited cases of tourists who had lost documents or needed directions. As Respondent 4 (SPKT) stated: “When there was a tourist who lost their wallet

and passport, I was confused about what to say. In the end, I called a member who could speak a little English.” And Respondent 11 (Traffic Unit) said: “I often meet foreigners asking for directions. I just say ‘go straight’

or use hand gestures. Sometimes they understand, sometimes not."

These communicative requirements are similar to those reported in other Southeast Asian law enforcement contexts, where officers typically need transactional and interactional language for routine policing duties (Suwannarak & Chantarawirote, 2022). However, the interviews also revealed more specialized language needs, particularly among officers in the Criminal Investigation Unit, who occasionally had to describe legal procedures or take down complaints related to foreign matters.

Participatory observation also supported the character of English interaction. When an Australian tourist reported a lost wallet, for instance, the responding officer relied on a flurry of hand-pumping gestures and fragmentary phrases, including "Wait, wait," along with Google Translate to refine the details. This method averted total miscommunication, yet service was severely slowed. This is consistent with Walters and Reeve (2023), who suggest that even district-level police offices in non-tourist areas require increasing levels of minimal oral proficiency and "recognition of legal labels" in providing public service in a global world.

Barriers to Effective Communication

Results in the category of Barriers to Effective Communication demonstrate that complex sociolinguistic, psychological, and structural factors hinder the officers' ability to communicate effectively in English. The most often cited perceived obstacles to language learning were restricted vocabulary (82% of respondents in the questionnaire part survey), followed by grammar (63%) and listening skills (59%); see figure X. And these restrictions were not just academic: officers had difficulty explaining procedures, producing rudimentary reports, and responding to emergencies that involved foreign nationals. This finding is consistent with recent

work highlighting the operational hazards of LEP in law enforcement environments, particularly in multilingual settings (LawShun, 2025; Language Connects Foundation, 2025).

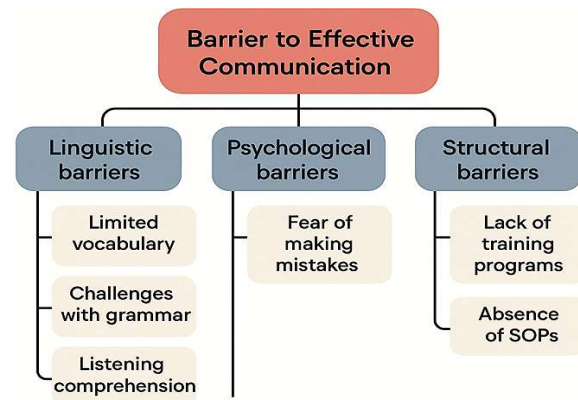


Figure 2. Barrier to effective communication

There were also psychological obstacles in addition to these linguistic hurdles. Interviews revealed a culture of fear of making mistakes, which meant that many officers refused to initiate conversations in English unless necessary. This was especially true in a legal setting. According to a Criminal Investigation Unit officer, relying on tools like Google Translate was insufficient, particularly when dealing with legal language, as it would leave them feeling embarrassed and useless. These results parallel the Department of Justice (2023) report that suggests stigma and fear of making mistakes hinder help-seeking and language use among law enforcement, which can have implications for public safety and the health of officers. The following quotes are representative of how officers respond in real communication practices.

"I know some English words, but I am afraid to speak. If I say something wrong, it could be misunderstood, especially in legal cases." Respondent 7 (Criminal Investigation Unit). *"Google Translate helps, but it is not enough when the situation is serious. I feel*

embarrassed when I cannot explain clearly.”
Respondent 15 (Intelligence Division)

Figure 3 below illustrates a “typical” flow of interactions between officers and foreigners, identifying moments where these commonly fail, for instance, at the greeting stage due to language issues, during explanations of the procedures, or at any other time due to cultural barriers. These points of friction also expose institutional voids in multilingual SOPs and ESP training. This also highlights the necessity for policy reform, such as implementing TBL teaching language modules and strategies for intercultural communication, to enhance the delivery of this service as well as its operation.

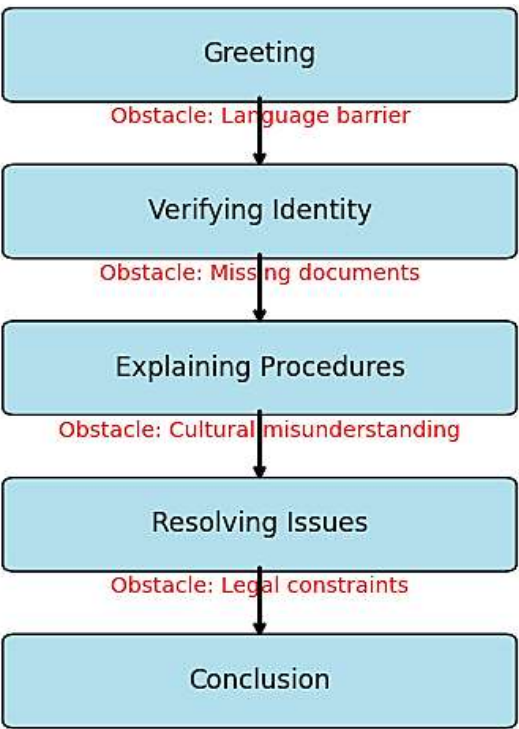


Figure 3. Typical communication flow between law enforcement officers and foreign nationals, with key points of linguistic and procedural friction.

Structural obstacles emerged as a third, equally important dimension. The document review revealed that the police division had not provided any English training courses over the last three years and lacked SOPs for assisting

foreigners. Additionally, complaint forms were only accessible in Indonesian, which made them inaccessible to non-Indonesian speakers. These are institutional gaps that mirror systemic challenges highlighted by Bremner (2023), whose research concluded that in developing country contexts, officers operate without constitutional multilingual service-policy frameworks, instead relying on ad hoc means that undermine both consistency and professionalism.

The proportion of the barriers in communication across police units is illustrated in Figure 4 above. The visualization illustrates the varied experiences of communication barriers by police units. Officers working in SPKT mostly reported difficulty with vocabulary and listening, while Criminal Investigation Unit officers reported a higher level of psychological anxiety. Intelligence officers, on the other hand, highlighted problems with listening as well as structural omissions like the lack of multilingual SOPs. The use of this comparative format serves to reinforce the overarching thesis of the present study, that barriers are linguistic but also psychological and institutional, similar to recent findings of LawShun (2025), Language Connects Foundation (2025), and Bremner (2023).

Institutional inertia results in continuous training gaps for law enforcement, as language skills are not prioritized; ESP modules do not reflect current realities; and SOPs are not designed to accommodate multilingual interactions. Reform is hindered by bureaucratic inflexibility, a lack of intersectoral cooperation, and budget constraints. In the absence of policy intervention, these shortcomings will perpetuate themselves at the expense of service quality and international preparedness. This focus on ESP should ideally be reflected in who gets recruited and trained, as well as how they operate, for effective multilingual public engagement.

Consistent with earlier research, these results support and extend the knowledge base regarding barriers to communication in law

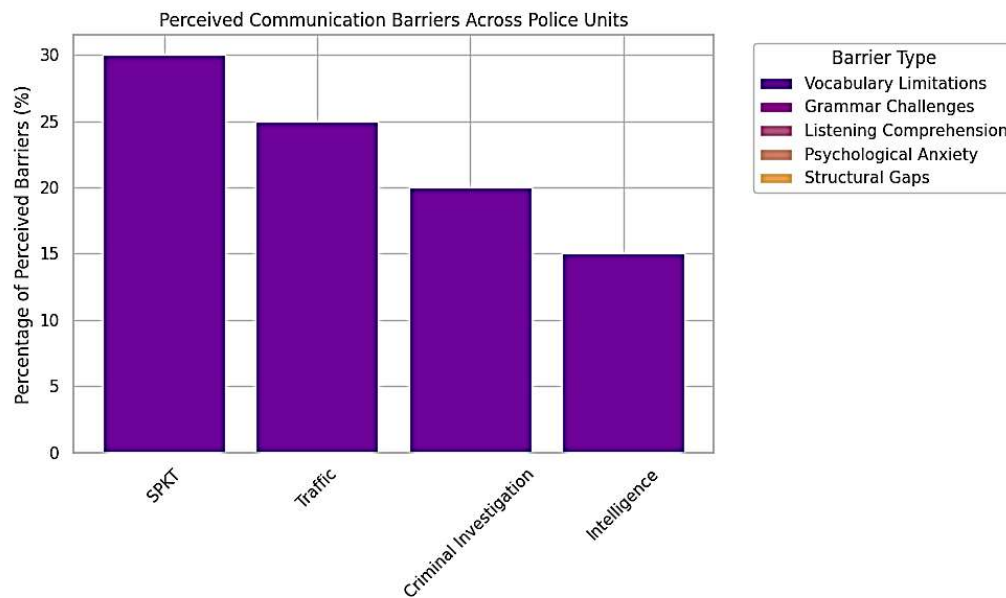


Figure 4. Proportion of communication barriers across police units

enforcement. Bremner (2023) emphasized, when talking about institutional failure: “What is not reported is how and why rival regimes consisting merely of a few hundred valiant people do prevail over these repressive institutions.” The present study highlights how psychological and linguistic issues converge with deficient structures to create a multifaceted crisis of communication. The existing research also suggests the importance of end-to-end language access planning and cultural competence training to address these barriers collectively (Police1, 2025; Canning et al., 2025). Without such intervention, officers continue to be ill-prepared to interact with the communities they increasingly serve, and the potential for miscommunication, especially in the high-stakes context of use-of-force situations, remains far too high.

Institutional and Training Gaps

The outcomes under Institutional and Training Gaps reveal a significant lack of correlation between the institutional setup and the language demands encountered by officers in the field. Despite the rarity of English contacts, a notable 87% of officers reported a great interest in professional, specific training courses. Their

preferred units were competency-based, command-based units that resembled real-life policing situations (e.g., dealing with tourists, explaining a legal process, responding to a crisis). This implies that officers do not necessarily aspire to the level of general language proficiency, but rather context-bound communicative proficiency that fits their work duties.

The results support the design of targeted ESP training within law enforcement, specifically task-based training that focuses on officers’ actual work responsibilities, such as communicating in public service scenarios, explaining legal matters, and communicating in emergencies. Such understandings can translate into policies for integrating English language proficiency into recruitment, training, and ongoing professional development. Policymakers can consider implementing multilingual SOPs, creating complaint forms in both the local language and English, or training bilingual officers in the principles of ESP, thereby increasing their ability to apply these principles effectively. University partnerships and/or mobile apps, digital phrasebooks, and similar tools can make them more accessible and pedagogically effective. By incorporating language competence into

institutional policy, public service delivery, intercultural trust, and Indonesia's ability to partner in international policing collaboration are all strengthened. To meet these needs, a four-part training module was suggested, which would include modules about public service dialogue, procedural explanation, emergency response, and situational roleplaying. This model reflects a growing trend in ESP teaching, which emphasizes content-based, context-relevant instruction. Krishnan and Ward (2023) maintain that, to be successful, ESP course design must be founded on real-world communicative tasks and learner needs, a view shared by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), who underscore the significance of customizing language instruction to learners' professional contexts.

Especially when contrasted with previous ESP models that are very generic in terms of language instruction or syllabus design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), a framework like the one proposed in this chapter represents a movement towards learning-centered and skill-based approaches. These models place a high value on learner involvement and authenticity, in line with Robinson's (1991) declaration that ESP coursework should focus on goals and be time-specific, with relevance to learners' real occupational tasks. In addition, recent research on Indonesian ESP contexts (Marsakawati, 2024) shows the success of both text-based and task-based practices in increasing motivation to learn and learners' performance when practice is scaffolding-based on real professional situations. The following examples represent institutional and training gaps.

"We never had English training in the last few years. It is not part of our routine, even though we meet foreigners sometimes." Respondent 2 (Training Officer). *"There is no SOP for dealing with foreign nationals. We just improvise. Sometimes it works, sometimes it does not."* Respondent 9 (SPKT)

Overall, the training model not only addresses the needs that officers verbalized but is also consistent with modern ESP beliefs that focus on situated learning, communicative authenticity, and professional relevance. This departs from the traditional language program model and confirms the necessity for institutions to be responsive to the need for relevant language education for law enforcement officers.

The analysis of the present data reflects a significant mismatch between the communication requirements set for police officers and their actual abilities in English, specifically, in rural areas such as the police unit. While English is not the day-to-day medium, officers are often placed in high-stakes environments such as emergencies, legal matters, and public-facing roles, where clear communication is crucial. This echoes Leclercq & Moore's (2022) claim that even occasional multilingual engagements in public service contexts require regular language training, rather than the association between low frequency and low priority.

Secondly, the study provides further insight into how linguistic constraints interact with psychological constraints. Lack of English vocabulary and grammar erodes officers' self-assurance, leading to the avoidance of English. This avoidance has been described as maintaining a cycle of underdevelopment, which is consistent with Henry & MacIntyre's (2024) conclusion regarding the fluidity of WTC in multilingual environments. In contrast to research that views linguistic competence as an inherent skill, this study suggests ways in which confidence-building resources can inform ESP training in policing, such as role-playing, simulated environments, and legal English acquisition.

Munks (2024) argues that, though this study's finding identifies 'psychological barriers' such as fear or lack of vocabulary as the main deterrents for the use of spoken English in the context of English learners amongst Indonesian

police officers, translator-mediated by AI can decrease dependency on one's own abilities and encourage higher multilingual interaction. Officers using real-time translation devices felt more confident and effective in linguistic cross-language interactions in San Jose. This implies that external, technological support, rather than intrinsic motivation alone, can be a determining factor in breaking down communication barriers – particularly in resource-rich contexts.

In an institutional context, the absence of multilingual SOPs and targeted training indicates that language proficiency is still viewed as an individual issue rather than a concern for the organization. This result is consistent with Walters and Reeve (2023), who argue that the success of sustainable communication reform in policing depends on systemic structures, including policy directives, resource allocation, and uniform training programs. The present study builds on this by demonstrating how institutional neglect

exacerbates personal predicaments, thereby undermining the overall functioning of services.

The need for training is supported by the Pearson correlation analysis outcome, as illustrated in Figure 5, indicating significant positive correlations between linguistic readiness, situational self-confidence, and institutional support within the sample of Indonesian police officers. Linguistic readiness correlated with self-confidence at $r = 0.674$ and with institutional support at $r = 0.691$, and self-confidence also correlated with institutional support at $r = 0.621$. These results suggest that officers with better English skills tend to feel higher levels of confidence and institutional support. These findings support the view that a psychological-institutional interaction is involved in language learning and use, particularly in the context of a public service activity with high social value and associated risks (Kittredge et al., 2025; Banaruee, Khatin-Zadeh, & Farsani, 2022).

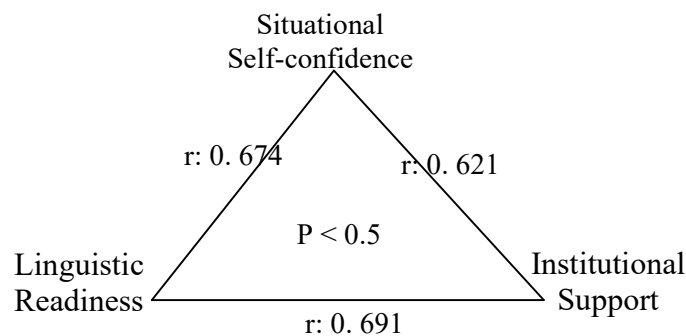


Figure 5. Correlational analysis

The training model identified in this study differs from the generic teaching model, which has been the fundamental principle in ESP (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The model in the present study is tailored to the individual's needs and the communication tasks they will encounter in their professional life. Such a move towards context-relevant and role-based training would not only improve communication skills but also serve to boost public trust and professionalism. With such value, the results provide a solid

empirical basis for advocating ESP courses for police on a selective basis, courses that experience suggests will not only be pedagogically successful but also strategically well-targeted to the communicative practices of policing today.

The findings challenge conventional models of needs analysis by revealing that even linguistic competence does not fulfill the communicative requirements of high-risk occupations such as policing. Traditional ESP models typically do not account for psychological factors (such as fear

of making a mistake or low confidence) or contextual factors within an institution (e.g., the absence of SOPs and lack of training) that can intervene in language use when it is consequential. Building on these insights, the ESP model could benefit from incorporating aspects like confidence building, simulation-based learning, and organizational support. In this way, needs analysis in these types of contexts can move toward a broader consideration of not only the linguistic needs, but also the affective and structural needs related to professional language use.

■ CONCLUSION

This research focused on the needs of English for police officers at the Police Unit, Indonesia, (name of police unit), which covers the area of interactions with foreign people (eg, the industrial, tourism, and transit). Interviews, questionnaires, participatory observation, and document analysis led to three main findings.

First, using the frequency of use of English, despite its low frequency of use in everyday sports contexts (i.e., two or three times a month), English is essential in high-stakes situations, for example, when helping foreign tourists who have lost an item or in explaining the process to handle a wallet loss to a foreigner. Police often rely on rudimentary transactional language, gestures, and translating tools, which can stall service and compromise any sense of professionalism.

Second, there are many obstacles to effective communication. Phonetically, officers often lack a high vocabulary, proper grammar, and familiarity with legal terminology. Psychologically, they are afraid of making mistakes and thus avoid using English. Organizationally, there are no institutional safety nets in terms of multi-lingual SOPs, training policies, or easy documentation for foreign nationals.

Third, interest among the police officers in ESP training related to policing is quite considerable. They would like scenario-based,

task-driven modules that can boost confidence, allow key vocabulary to be learned in stations, and simulate realistic law enforcement scenarios.

These results verify the importance of situation-specific ESP training in closing the gap between actual proficiency and the communicative demands of policing in a global society. Furthermore, an increased level of English competency among officers is not only an individual benefit but also an institutional necessity that will enhance the quality of service delivery to the public, facilitate cultural inclusivity, and strengthen Indonesia's ability to operate within international law enforcement networks.

■ RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study suggest the need for holistic and context-relevant ESP training in law enforcement. A 10-week modularized ESP program is suggested, which includes four main sections: transactions of greetings and public service dialogue, report taking and explanation of procedures, emergency response communication, and role-play simulations (Table 2). This course should utilize task-based learning techniques that incorporate real-life policing scenarios with legal and procedural vocabulary, as well as the basics of grammar in terms of meaning and understanding. It should employ communicative, pair work, and simulation activities to build confidence, enabling the successful application of knowledge and skills.

If we are to make a lasting difference, multilingual service policies must become a part of the fabric of all our institutions. This includes the introduction of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for engagement with foreign nationals, the distribution of bilingual complaint forms and public notices, and the integration of multilingual service training into periodic staff training schedules.

Program design and delivery require a partnership with educational establishments. Academic and language center partners can help

maintain good instruction, and the mentoring of bilingual police is capable of carrying learning beyond formal training. To achieve this, the program requires 1) advocacy of policies and 2) a continuous training model. Optimal integration of technology complements face-to-face teaching. Mobile learning apps can help with vocabulary learning and pronunciation exercises, and curated digital phrasebooks for policing situations can decrease the reliance on generic translation tools (which can also be misleading).

Last, longitudinal studies should be designed to determine the long-term effects of ESP training. Future research should explore not only gains in

FL faculties but also the broader impact on public service and officer morale. Comparative analyses across sites at the district level can offer insights into what works best and can be scaled up for national application. These suggestions, which focus on the individual and institutional domains of language competency, aim to enhance the operational capabilities of the Indonesian police in a multilingual setting. More generally, the research contributes to the spotlight on English for Specific purposes in police work, indicating that need-based learning is correlated with the enhancement of overall communication readiness among first-line public service providers.

Table 2. Key language skills identified, plus 10-week training modules

Main Needs	Training Modules
1. Speaking and Listening Skills (for fundamental interactions and emergency responses)	Module 1: Greeting and Public Service Dialogues.
2. Reading and writing police reports (preparing documentation in English)	Module 2: Report Taking and Explaining Procedures.
3. Understanding legal terminology (key vocabulary)	Module 3: Emergency Response Communication.
	Module 4: Roleplay and Situational Simulation.

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