


## English for the Apparel Merchandisers in Bangladesh: A Needs Analysis


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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** Needs analysis, Apparel merchandisers, English language skills, Bangladesh

Despite the increasing demand for English proficiency in Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) industry, there is limited research on the specific English language needs of apparel merchandisers. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the English communication challenges and course preferences of merchandisers in Bangladesh. Utilizing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, data were gathered from 30 junior to mid-level merchandisers through surveys and interviews. The findings show that merchandisers often use English for emailing and video conferencing with buyers but struggle with their speaking and writing skills. Despite their hectic schedules, participants were motivated to enhance their English and preferred flexible, context-based courses. The study recommends a customized English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course focusing on practical communication, particularly speaking and email writing. This research underscores the urgent need for tailored ESP programs to align English education with the professional demands of Bangladesh's RMG sector, providing a model that can guide global ESP course design in similar industries.

### Introduction

The role of an apparel merchandiser involves designing, procuring, and promoting clothing and fashion items within retail environments. Merchandisers utilize market trends, consumer behavior, and sales data to inform product selection, pricing, and inventory management decisions to maximize profitability and meet client demand (Rabolt & Fisher, 2016). Apparel Merchandising is one of the most sought-after careers in Bangladesh, as the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector plays a crucial role in the country's economy, contributing 85% of total export earnings and 10.35% of the national GDP in the fiscal year 2019-20 (Rashid, 2023). Bangladeshi apparel merchandisers (hereafter referred to as AM) primarily communicate with foreign clients in English. It is undeniable that English is the most prominent lingua franca in international business contexts (Nickerson, 2005; Roshid et al., 2022; Sing, 2017). Furthermore, proficiency in the English language is widely regarded as an important criterion for securing a good job in the country (Ahmad & Rahman, 2021). Therefore, AMs must possess fluent English skills to succeed in the competitive job market.

Apparel merchandisers can work in buying houses or in RMG factories. An AM begins their career as an assistant or trainee merchandiser and gradually earns promotions to merchandiser, senior merchandiser, merchandiser manager, or team leader. Fresh graduates may start working as merchandisers, while candidates with training or degrees in the textile sector are preferred (The Daily Kaler Kontho, 2016). Since merchandisers' primary responsibility is handling clients and suppliers, strong proficiency in English is essential for success in merchandising (Bekar.com, 2019). Adopting an apparel merchandising competency framework, Jacobs and Karpova (2023) identified communication skills as one of the twenty-nine “must-have skills” for apparel merchandisers. While experts recommend that fresh merchandisers take English language courses (Anik, 2020), there is a lack of suitable English language courses explicitly tailored for merchandisers in Bangladesh. All these factors highlight the practical significance of this study.

In addition to its pragmatic significance, the research holds importance from an epistemological perspective because “needs analysis, carried out to establish the 'what' and the 'how' of a course, is the first stage in ESP course development” (Flowerdew, 2013, p. 325). Needs analysis plays a crucial role in designing a practical language course or curriculum (Briana & Mutia, 2019). The cyclical process that follows needs analysis progresses through these steps in order: course design, teaching and learning, assessment, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the course to inform the next needs analysis (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998).

Therefore, this research aims to address the gap in English language education tailored for apparel merchandisers in Bangladesh and to outline an appropriate ESP course based on a needs analysis. The findings will benefit apparel merchandising professionals in Bangladesh and provide a global framework for English for Professional Purposes (EPP) practices.

## Literature review

### *Global perspectives on English in apparel and business*

Research on the English language needs of apparel merchandisers has identified a variety of communication demands in the international marketplace (So-mui & Mead, 2000). Specific competencies emphasize soft skills such as teamwork, leadership, and communication, along with the necessity for experiential and collaborative learning (Frazier, 2016). Understanding cross-cultural consumer values, needs, and purchasing behavior is fundamental, especially in Asian markets (Kim et al., 2002).

Speaking a foreign language is one of the most crucial communicative skills for a prospective marketer. Given the rapid pace of integration and globalization, proficiency in English is essential for modern professions. The need for higher education students to develop their academic and professional foreign language communication skills arises from the growth of international relations, the active adoption of foreign experiences in various areas of public life, and other trends in globalization. Learning English involves becoming a proficient communicator and achieving language proficiency focused on professional goals to assist individuals in pursuing their future careers (Romaniuk et al., 2022). Another study examined how English promotes fashion on social media (Andriani, 2021). It collected data from social media posts made by merchants. The study's findings revealed that the English merchants' usage of English to promote fashion is improper and does not follow correct word order or grammar.

Viet-Nga (2020) investigated the motivation levels of fashion design and garment technology

students to learn English, identified the factors influencing their motivation, and suggested potential solutions. The results revealed that the professor played a crucial role in boosting students' motivation. Furthermore, their teaching methods ranked highest on the incentive-building scale. The enthusiasm of the lecturers was also seen as the most effective remedy. Increasing students' eagerness to learn English has long been a priority for educators worldwide (Viet-Nga, 2020).

### *Significance of needs analysis in ESP course design*

Needs analysis is standard in academia for designing and improving courses. For example, Briana and Mutia (2019) conducted a language needs analysis (LNA) of information technology students. They found that speaking skills in English are essential for students' future employment in the IT industry. They also revealed that students need to learn the contextualized use of the English language and communicate in a multicultural environment. Todea and Demarcsek (2017) used needs analysis to improve and revise a language course for engineering and business students. They measured the students' satisfaction levels and incorporated their suggestions to enhance the course's quality. In Bangladesh, Hossain (2013) conducted an ESP needs analysis for engineering students at a university. His study suggests that needs analysis can be considered the cornerstone of designing an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course.

### *English Language competencies in Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) sector*

A range of studies has highlighted the importance of English proficiency for Bangladeshi professionals. Roshid (2018) interviewed three groups of business professionals involved in three tiers of communication within the ready-made garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh and demonstrated that proficiency in the English language empowers businesspeople and organizations, opening doors to material gains such as better positions, pay, and status. These benefits support the nation's economic growth, combat poverty, and promote sustainable development (Roshid, 2018). Additionally, Islam and Islam (2018) found that Bangladeshi RMG employees' competencies, including presentation, leadership, decision-making abilities, and English skills, are somewhat low.

Roshid and Kankaanranta (2023) argued that skills gaps between industry expectations and university preparation are increasingly common in the global labor market. English is frequently used as a lingua franca in international business, so English communication skills (ECS) are essential soft skills in all organizations. By gathering information from forty-three employees in Bangladesh's international ready-made garment (RMG) sector to explore the relationship between academia and industry regarding ECS training and its suitability to meet the demands of the globalized business landscape, it was found that English courses in higher education fall short of achieving the communication objectives of the global RMG industry, which prioritizes clarity over fluency and requires trade-specific vocabulary, practical workplace experience, and intelligibility (Roshid & Kankaanranta, 2023).

Ebling and Kavanaugh (1980) studied the implementation of a Mini-French course specifically designed for fashion merchandising majors at Western Michigan University in the USA. This course exposes students to relevant fashion terminology, cultural insights, and written and spoken French practice. The need for this course arose from the diverse career goals of fashion merchandising students, which include roles in retail, buying, management, distribution, writing, photography, and more. The curriculum included units focused on contexts where French language skills, such as buying trips to Europe, might be necessary. The success of the course in attracting high enrollments and expanding to include interior design students highlighted the potential for language departments to collaborate with other disciplines and

reach a broader audience. In Bangladesh, Ahmmmed et al. (2020) identified the English language needs of Bangladeshi seafarers for working onboard ships and securing employment opportunities in the maritime sector. They found that maritime seafarers require a high level of English proficiency, particularly speaking, for effective communication onboard ships. The study presented sixty-eight maritime tasks ranked by priority. It also suggested that communication efficiency, specifically speaking skills, is essential for Bangladeshi seafarers. Chowdhury and Anon's (2021) study aimed to examine the skill needs of local and multinational corporations (MNCs) and provide an 'employability skill index' for entry-level marketing professionals in the Bangladeshi garment industry. The study produced a 22-item, six-dimensional skill index that revealed a significant disparity in the skill requirements between MNCs and local businesses. Major completed courses, research-based internships, written communication abilities, and English fluency are the capabilities that MNCs value most. In contrast, local businesses prioritize experience, teamwork, and networking (Chowdhury & Anon, 2021).

Similarly, Khan and Chaudhury (2012) emphasized the crucial role of English in the corporate sector, with employers reporting a significant gap between the English proficiency levels required and those possessed by employees. Amin and Greenwood (2018) further underscored the need for qualified and trained English teachers to bridge this gap, particularly within the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. However, Hamid (2020) cautioned that the capacity of English teaching professionals in Bangladesh may not meet these demands, suggesting a potential mismatch between the necessity for English proficiency and the resources available for English education. Regarding the apparel industry, English plays a critical role. As English and American companies lead the global fashion industry, English has become the international and dominant language in this sector (Xydopoulos & Papadopoulou, 2018).

### *Research gap*

This literature review reveals that English proficiency is vital for apparel merchandisers, particularly in international business contexts where communication with foreign clients and stakeholders is essential (Roshid, 2018; Roshid & Kankaanranta, 2023). Studies have emphasized the importance of communication skills, including business writing, speaking, and cross-cultural competence, for professional success (So-mui & Mead, 2000; Romaniuk et al., 2022). While research has explored English needs in various industries, such as IT (Briana & Mutia, 2019) and engineering (Hossain, 2013), a significant gap remains in understanding the specific English language requirements of apparel merchandisers in Bangladesh. The lack of targeted English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses designed for this professional group further exacerbates the problem (Islam & Islam, 2018). Although studies like Ebling and Kavanaugh (1980) have examined language programs tailored to niche industries, there is still a lack of research on industry-specific, structured English courses for apparel merchandisers in Bangladesh. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a needs analysis to inform the development of a specialized ESP course, ensuring that English language education aligns with the professional demands of the apparel merchandising sector.

### *Theoretical framework*

This study is guided by the comprehensive needs analysis framework proposed by Dudley-Evans and John (1998), which is foundational in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course design. Their model emphasizes a multi-dimensional approach to identifying the specific language needs of a target learner group. It includes not only what learners must do with language (target situation) but also what they currently can do, how they prefer to learn, and

what resources and constraints they face.

The main components of the framework and how they relate to the present study are outlined below:

**Table 1**

Theoretical framework of the study

Framework component	Function	Relevance to the study
Target Situation Analysis (TSA)	This analyzes what learners need to do in English in real-life professional settings.	Bangladeshi apparel merchandisers regularly use English for email communication, videoconferencing, negotiating with foreign buyers, and explaining order requirements. These communicative functions define the target situation.
Present Situation Analysis (PSA)	This examines the learners' English proficiency, language use, and educational background.	The study investigated self-reported English proficiency, prior English language training, and the frequency and type of English usage at work. The findings indicated that although English is commonly used in the workplace, many merchandisers lack confidence and formal training to use it effectively.
Learning Situation Analysis (LSA)	This emphasizes the best ways learners absorb information, including learning styles, motivation, and contextual factors.	The study revealed that merchandisers are motivated to improve their English, prefer weekend or online courses, and value friendly and supportive teachers. Their willingness to invest time and money shows a strong commitment to learning.
Deficiency Analysis	This highlights the gap between learners' current abilities (PSA) and the demands of their professional tasks (TSA).	The study indicates gaps that, while many merchandisers frequently use English, they struggle with convincing buyers, accurately communicating in writing, and understanding order details, especially among junior staff.
Strategy Analysis (Learning Needs)	This component analyzes learners' goals, strategies, and expectations for learning.	In this research, merchandisers preferred practical, context-based instruction focused on speaking, email writing, and listening comprehension. They also requested training using English apps and tools, emphasizing their desire for self-directed and applied learning.
Means Analysis	Means analysis evaluates institutional and contextual constraints, including available resources, time, and support.	Merchandisers reported long working hours, a lack of in-house English training, and a preference for flexible learning formats, such as short-term courses and online modules. These factors greatly influenced the proposed course design.
Language Audit	This entails analyzing genuine spoken or written communication samples used in the relevant professional context.	This study did not perform a complete language audit but collected significant qualitative and self-reported data regarding the nature of language used in merchandising contexts.

By addressing six of the seven core components (excluding the language audit) from Dudley-

Evans and John's (1998) framework, the study ensures a comprehensive analysis of the English language needs of apparel merchandisers in Bangladesh. This framework guided the data collection and interpretation and provided the foundation for designing a tailored English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course for this professional group.

Guided by this framework, the study aims to explore the real-world English communication challenges that Bangladeshi apparel merchandisers face and propose a customized ESP course to meet those needs. The following research questions were formulated to guide the investigation.

### *Research questions*

The research questions below have generated the necessary data through a survey and interviews to provide guidelines for syllabus designers of an ESP course for apparel merchandisers in Bangladesh.

1. What challenges do merchandisers face with English skills?
2. To what extent do merchandisers need a specialized English course?
3. What would be the characteristics of a suitable English language course for apparel merchandisers?

## **Methods**

### *Sampling and population*

This study's population consisted of all current and aspiring apparel merchandising professionals in Bangladesh, including merchandising students and employees ranging from junior to high-level positions. Out of thirty research participants, eight completed the questionnaire, while the others were interviewed to gather qualitative data. This study employed a mixed sampling technique, utilizing convenience sampling as the primary method and snowball sampling as the secondary method for both data collection tools: survey questionnaire and interview schedule. Lavrakas (2008) defined convenience sampling as a nonprobability sampling technique where participants are selected because they are 'convenient' data sources for researchers. Since the researchers were familiar with some targeted participants, it was easy for them to reach out to these individuals for data collection. Additionally, snowball sampling, another nonprobability sampling technique (Lavrakas, 2008), was employed as the researchers sought help from participants to connect with more members of the targeted population and achieve an adequate sample size.

### *Data collection*

This study adopted the Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design (Creswell & Clark, 2018), which includes an initial quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase. First, primarily quantitative information regarding the English language requirements and challenges faced by Bangladeshi clothing merchandisers was collected using a survey questionnaire. The survey included Likert-scale questions (e.g., self-rated English proficiency), multiple-choice questions (e.g., prioritized skills), and open-ended questions (e.g., workplace challenges). Second, based on these results, lead merchandisers participated in semi-structured interviews to explore their perspectives more deeply. Spontaneous discussions led by the interviewer facilitated the generation of authentic data from the interviewees.



### *Piloting*

A small-scale pilot study involving 2 participants was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collection tools. Based on the shortcomings identified in the piloting, the draft survey questionnaire and interview schedules were revised. For example, the language used in the questionnaire was simplified, unnecessary Likert scale items were reduced, and a clear description of the research was included.

### *Data analysis*

The gathered data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methodologies to ensure a thorough understanding of the English language requirements of apparel merchandisers. With the assistance of SPSS V.25, descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency distributions and percentage analysis were employed to interpret the quantitative data from survey responses, identifying common patterns in learning preferences, competency levels, and English language usage. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and anonymized. The sequential design allowed interview questions to explore themes emerging from the survey data. Thematic analysis was conducted to uncover recurring themes regarding challenges and recommendations related to English language instruction based on the qualitative data obtained from lead merchandiser interviews. By comparing the quantitative trends with qualitative insights, this mixed-methods approach facilitated triangulation and enhanced the validity and reliability of the results.

## **Results/Findings**

### *Data from the survey questionnaire on merchandisers*

#### *Demographic, professional background, and language learning experience of merchandisers*

**Table 2**

Profile of the merchandisers who participated in the survey

No.	Working Position	Educational Qualification	Age	Experience in Merchandising
a	Student	MBA in Apparel Merchandising (On course)	25	NA
b	Assistant Merchandiser	Bachelor (On course)	20	2 years
c	Assistant Merchandiser	Master's	25	2.5 years
d	Merchandiser	B.Sc. in Textile Engineering	29	3 years
e	Merchandiser	B.Sc. in Textile Engineering	29	3 years
f	Merchandiser	Master's	34	7 years
g	Senior Merchandiser	BBA	30	5 years
h	Senior Merchandiser	B.Sc. in Merchandising	30	5 years

### *Merchandisers' schedules, English training history, and foreign language proficiency*

The merchandisers in this study operate under extremely tight schedules, working six days a week with Fridays off. They typically work nine to twelve hours a day and often stay late at the office to meet job demands. Due to such rigorous work commitments, opportunities for formal English language training are limited. Among the eight participants surveyed, only one reported attending weekend English classes. In contrast, the others had no prior experience with English courses for professional development, though they were willing to pursue them despite time constraints. Regarding multilingual competencies, only one participant attempted to learn

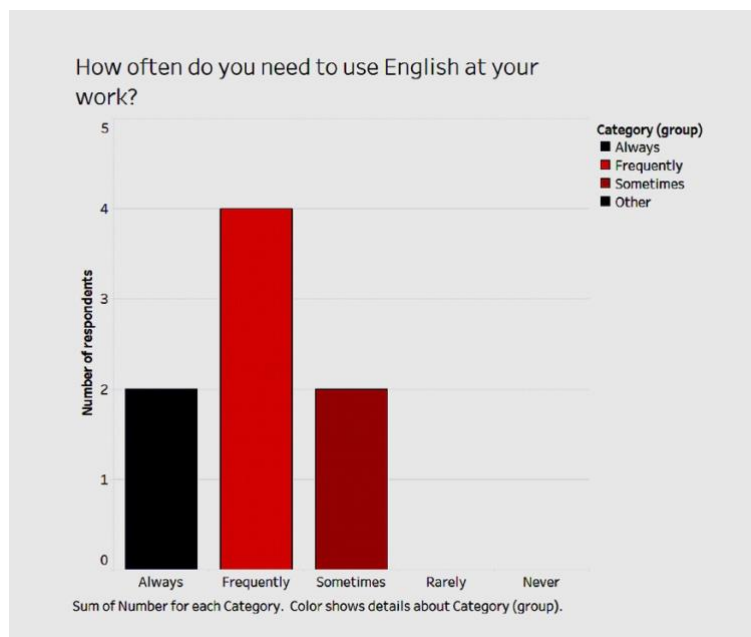
German, while the remaining seven were familiar with English only, indicating limited exposure to foreign languages beyond English.

### *English language use in merchandising*

**Question: How often do you need to use English at your work?**

**Figure 1**

Frequency of using English at work

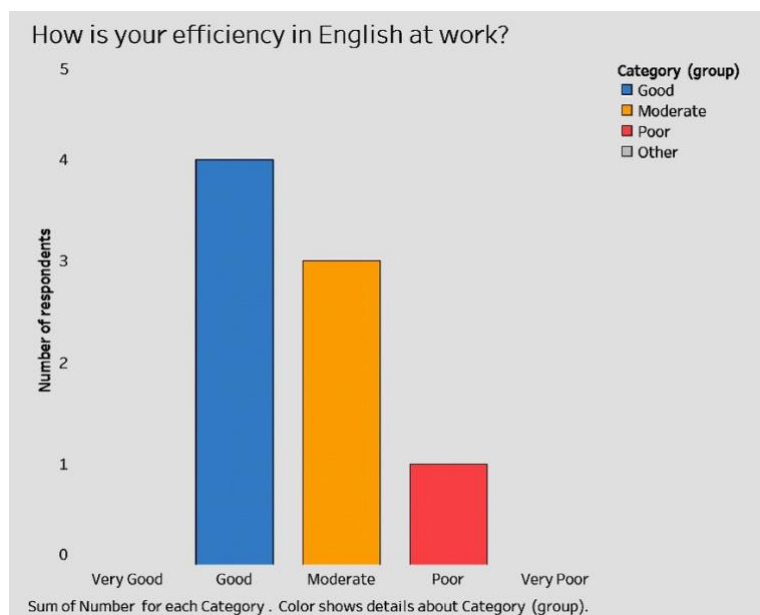


According to Figure 1, merchandisers frequently use English in the office. This indicates that English is the medium for a significant portion of their work.

**Question: How is your efficiency in English at work?**

**Figure 2**

Efficiency in using English





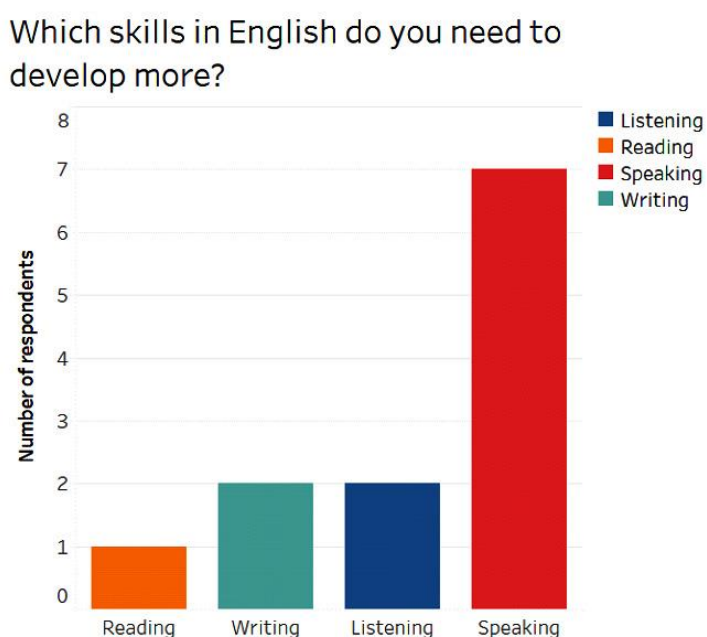
Although participants in this survey reported that they must use English very frequently at work, they need to be more confident in using it. Figure 2 shows that only four respondents considered themselves ‘good’ in English, while three participants rated their proficiency as ‘moderate’ and one as ‘poor.’

When asked about the use and nature of English communication in the workplace, the survey participants reported that they primarily use English for email communication and video conferencing with foreign buyers and suppliers. Buyers typically send product requirements in English, and merchandisers must accurately interpret these details and respond convincingly via email or live virtual meetings. In describing the nature of their English, all respondents emphasized that it does not need to be sophisticated or grammatically perfect. Instead, they utilize simple, direct, and functional English to communicate effectively. Spelling and minor grammatical errors are generally overlooked, as the focus is on clarity and mutual understanding rather than linguistic accuracy.

**Question: Which skills in English do you need to develop more?**

**Figure 3**

The most required skills in English



The participants were asked to mention their most crucial skill(s). They were able to select multiple options. We found that most (87.5%) marked ‘Speaking’ as their most needed skill.

#### *Perceived need for English skill development*

**Question: Justify: I think I need to enhance my English skills for my professional growth.**

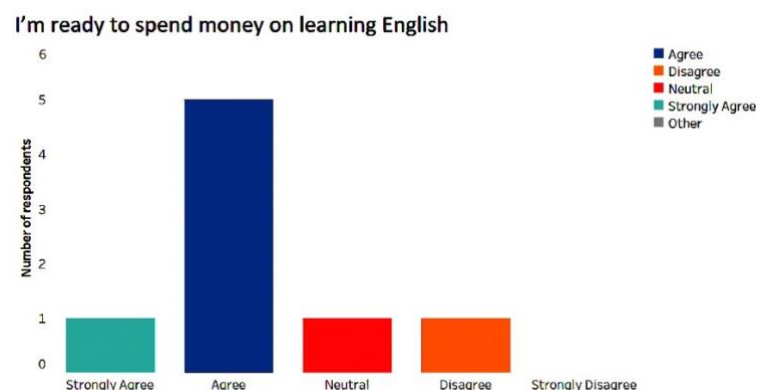
**Figure 4****Necessity of English skills in professional life**

All the respondents (Strongly Agree-7 + Agree-1) concurred that they must enhance their English skills to advance professionally. Respondents also discussed English proficiency's perceived benefits and willingness to develop it further. They have identified several advantages they would gain from improving their English skills:

1. Communicate with buyers more fluently
2. Handle buyers more effectively and persuade them
3. Receive priority in the office
4. Write emails in a more sophisticated and organized manner
5. Achieve quicker promotions

All the participants confirmed their determination to work hard to learn English, a necessary skill for advancing their careers.

**Question: Justify: I am ready to spend money on learning English.**

**Figure 5****Readiness for spending money on learning English**

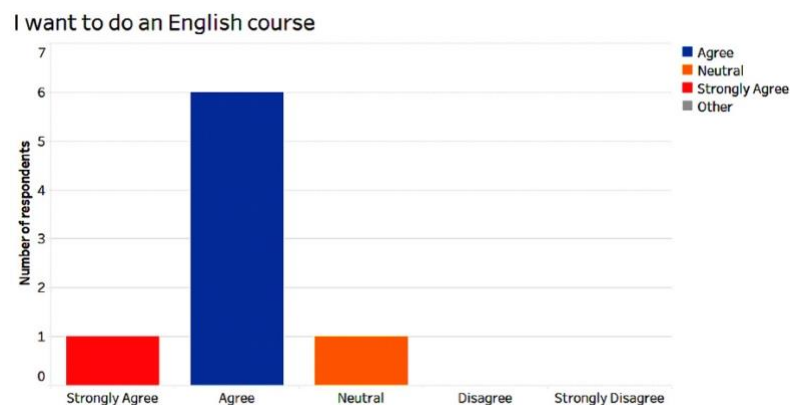
Only one participant remained neutral, while another disagreed about whether they were ready to spend money on learning English. However, most of them (Strongly Agree-1+ Agree-5)

responded positively. This indicates that the respondents are eager to develop their proficiency in English.

### Question: Justify: I want to do an English course

**Figure 6**

Willingness to do an English course



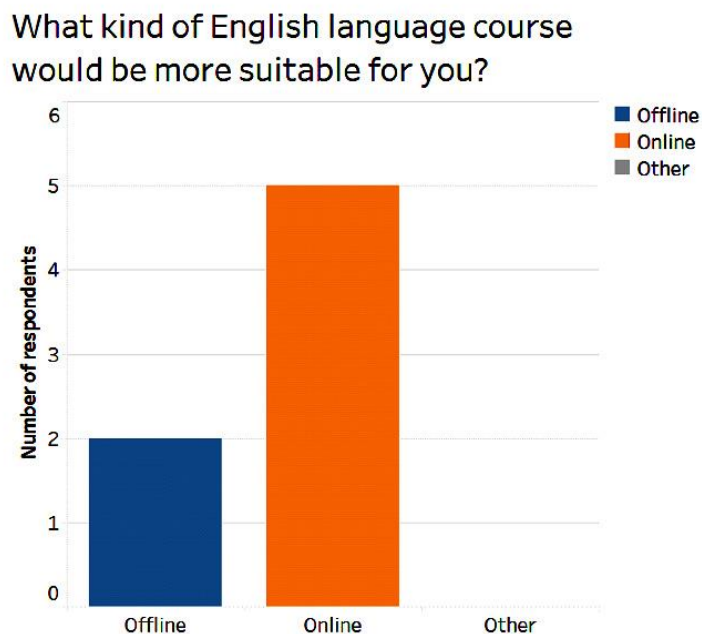
The figure clearly shows that almost all respondents are willing to take an English course to improve their English skills, again proving their motivation for learning English.

### *Preferred learning methods and course features*

### Question: What kind of English language course would be more suitable for you?

**Figure 7**

Mode of English course

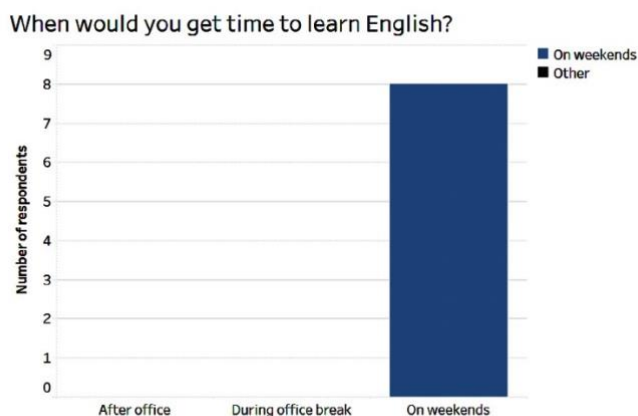


The participants were asked to indicate which mode of English course would suit them best. Out of the seven participants, five voted for an 'online' course, while two preferred offline courses.

**Question: When would you get time to learn English?**

**Figure 8**

Schedule for English learning

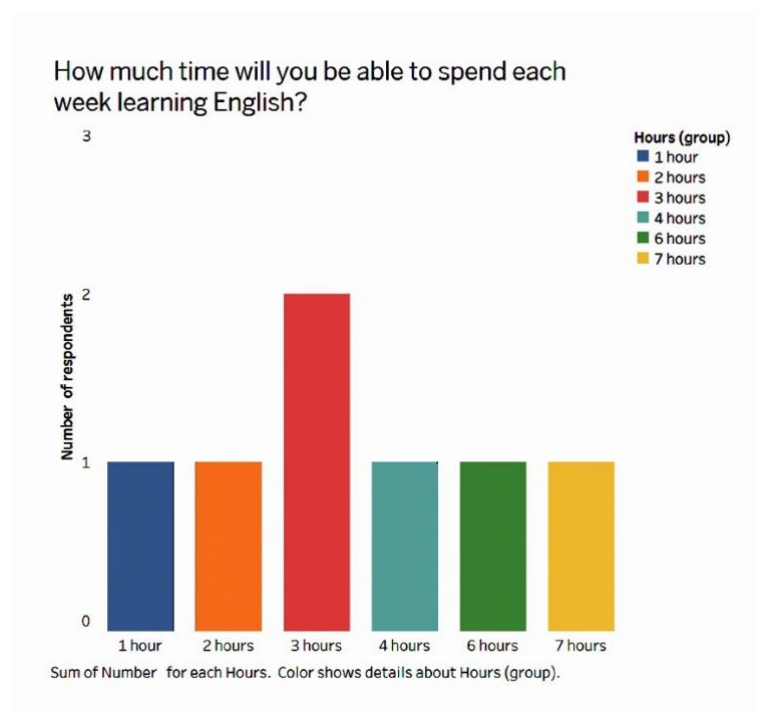


All the participants mentioned that they could only spend some time learning English on weekends. They are busy throughout the week, so they can hardly find time to learn English.

**Question: How much time will you be able to spend each week learning English?**

**Figure 9**

Amount of time for learning English per week



Respondents indicated how much time they could devote each week to learning English. Their responses show they can average 5.7 hours (29 hours divided by seven respondents) weekly.

**Question: What do you expect from an English course?**

All the respondents mentioned that they wanted to improve their skills first and foremost in an English course. They also added other points listed below:

1. They want to learn how to help people understand using simple language, speak flawless English, and comprehend native speakers.
2. The course should focus on business writing.
3. Speaking should be taught in a structured manner.

The participants shared their views on the ideal structure of an English language course designed to meet their needs. In terms of course duration, they proposed various timeframes, including 1, 3, 6, and 12 months, with the 3-month option being the most favored. As for class size, respondents suggested an average of 14 students per class, with a minimum of six and a maximum of twenty. These preferences indicate a desire for a focused and manageable learning environment that balances personalized attention with collaborative interaction.

**Question: What facilities should there be in an ideal English class?**

In response to this question, all the participants emphasized the importance of a good teacher who can motivate students and provide proper guidance for developing English skills. They also stated that the teacher should be able to create a friendly environment and make lessons enjoyable and easy for the students.

**Qualitative data from interviews with the lead merchandisers***Merchandisers' current proficiency and challenges***Question: How proficient are the merchandisers in your organization? What challenges do they face regarding communication?**

According to the lead merchandisers, junior merchandisers encounter various challenges when communicating in English at the office. One significant challenge they face is clearly understanding the clients' order details and serving them accordingly, which requires effective listening and reading skills.

*Merchandisers don't enjoy communicating in English. (Participant 18)*

*At junior levels, the proficiency of the merchandisers depends on academic results. After six months on the job, proficiency changes with the work adoption capability and understanding capacity. Regarding communication, the main challenge is making juniors understand the working procedure. (Participant 9)*

*Their communication is not up to the mark as most are from a general background. They mainly fail to convince the buyer with proper English. Also, correctly writing English has always been a problem. (Participant 7)*

*The first challenge is making the concerned suppliers understand what they must make or supply. Although every booking of the assigned accessories is to be sent over email in English, my team members need to communicate with clients or vendors by translating or interpreting each booking in Bangla to be clear on what they need to do. (Participant 15)*

### *Employer expectations and recommendations*

#### **Question: What initiatives have you taken to develop the English skills of the merchandisers in your company?**

According to the lead merchandisers, it is not always possible for the company to arrange English language courses for them because they work in a highly competitive, time-sensitive environment. Instead, they expect the merchandisers to develop their skills independently. If the junior merchandisers cannot enhance their skills, they will struggle to remain in the company for long. However, one participant confirmed that he personally helps his merchandisers build their English skills.

*To help my assigned merchandisers become proficient in communicative skills, I let them write or speak in English with me and try to help them with corrections. (Participant 4)*

### *Proposed solutions for merchandisers' English development*

#### **Question: What should Bangladeshi merchandisers do to develop their proficiency in English?**

Lead merchandisers emphasized that English is essential for merchandisers to grow professionally. They have also provided various suggestions for junior merchandisers to enhance their English proficiency.

*Merchandisers can take courses like IELTS. (Participant 1)*

*Bangladeshi merchandisers should learn basic corporate English and email communication to achieve better job results. Ridiculous spelling mistakes are common. (Participant 13)*

*They should emphasize the appropriate use of the proper sentence instead of using the same copy-paste sentence for each circumstance. (Participant 20)*

*They should focus on developing skills by attending training sessions, joining speakers' clubs, etc. (Participant 3)*

*The merchandisers should treat the English language as a handsome income tool. (Participant 8)*

*Different apps can be used on smartphones to improve our English proficiency. As we remain very busy with our jobs, we may use them on the go. (Participant 11)*

## **Discussion**

The findings from the survey questionnaire and the interviews provide valuable insights into the English language needs and challenges faced by apparel merchandisers in Bangladesh. These integrated insights from the quantitative and qualitative data can inform the development of tailored English language courses to address the specific requirements of this professional group. The research questions have been answered in the following parts.

### *Q1. What challenges do merchandisers face with English skills?*

The study has shown that apparel merchandisers in Bangladesh often use English in their professional tasks, particularly in email communication and video conferencing with buyers. This highlights the critical importance of English proficiency in their daily job responsibilities. However, frequent usage does not always translate to confidence, as many merchandisers struggle with their English skills. In the survey, all participants reported using English



frequently at work, yet only half rated their proficiency as “good,” while the remainder classified it as “moderate” or “poor.” Due to their limited English knowledge, they face various challenges, such as failing to persuade buyers or misunderstanding product requirements. They sometimes find it difficult to understand the company’s operating procedures. Lead merchandisers indicate that junior merchandisers often have trouble grasping client order details, struggle to persuade buyers with appropriate English, and encounter difficulties in written communication. These findings echo Islam and Islam’s (2018) observation that professionals in the RMG sector in Bangladesh often lack adequate English language competencies, especially in presentation, decision-making, and communication. Additionally, Roshid (2018) emphasized that English proficiency opens up economic opportunities in the RMG sector, but the actual skill level among workers often falls short of industry expectations. Moreover, as Roshid and Kankaanranta (2023) noted, the gap between academic preparation and workplace communication requirements is significant, particularly regarding clarity and trade-specific vocabulary—issues that also emerged from the present study’s interviews with lead merchandisers.

### *Q2. To what extent do merchandisers need a specialized English course?*

The challenges apparel merchandisers face regarding their English skills highlight the need for targeted interventions to enhance their English proficiency. Our findings indicate that merchandisers with limited proficiency in English struggle to succeed in their profession. As a result, merchandisers eagerly seek to improve their English skills for success and professional growth. They also demonstrate a willingness to invest time and money in learning English, underscoring their commitment to professional development. However, due to their demanding work schedules, buying houses or RMG factories cannot arrange specialized English courses for merchandisers. Consequently, this study emphasizes the need for an English course. These findings align with So-mui and Mead’s (2000) study, which emphasized the importance of practical, functional English for textile and clothing merchandisers. Similarly, Briana and Mutia (2019) highlighted the value of contextualized English training tailored to specific industries, as students and professionals often lack the communication skills needed for real-world tasks. Furthermore, the current study confirms Ebling and Kavanaugh’s (1980) argument for the need for field-specific language programs that align closely with workplace communication demands. Given the limited availability of specialized English courses for merchandisers in Bangladesh, the findings support Todea and Demarcsek’s (2017) view that needs analysis is central to designing practical ESP courses that bridge the gap between learners’ current abilities and professional expectations.

### *Q3. What would be the characteristics of a suitable English language course for apparel merchandisers?*

Merchandisers were asked to mention the qualities of a suitable English course. They stressed the following points.

- The teacher should be friendly and capable of motivating students to learn. This aligns with research by Viet-Nga (2020), who highlighted teachers’ critical role in boosting students’ enthusiasm for learning English.
- The course should first focus on teaching simple communicative English, as merchandisers typically do not require sophisticated or advanced English. This supports the findings of So-mui and Mead (2000), who discovered that functional English, not highly academic skills, is what textile and apparel merchandisers need most for business communication.
- Email communication and video conferences in English should be a priority in the course.

Roshid and Kankaanranta (2023) emphasized the importance of English communication skills, particularly in email and virtual meetings in international business situations, lending credence to this.

- The course should place particular emphasis on English speaking skills. Communication competence—especially oral proficiency—is essential for marketing and commercial professionals, including merchandisers, according to Romaniuk et al. (2022).
- The course should teach how to properly use digital technology and tools in writing business correspondence. This supports the findings of Dinh (2023), who discovered that using digital tools and audiovisual aids enhances language learning outcomes in work environments.
- The course instructors should have experience or knowledge concerning apparel merchandisers' educational backgrounds and workplace challenges. According to Islam & Islam (2018), industry-aware teachers are necessary, as English training programs often fail to address the specific skill shortages faced by professionals in the RMG sector.
- The course load should be less than six weekly hours, including class and contact hours. Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) indicate that adult learners frequently encounter time constraints, necessitating flexible learning regimens.
- The course should be held on weekends, as merchandisers are usually busy throughout the week. Roshid's (2018) results demonstrate that working professionals require courses that accommodate their hectic schedules.
- The course duration can range from one month to twelve months; however, merchandisers prefer a three-month course the most. Todea and Demarcsek (2017) note that short-term, needs-based language courses are often more successful in meeting professional expectations.
- The course can ideally be offered online. It should demonstrate using various free apps to enhance English proficiency and check for personal mistakes. According to Briana and Mutia (2019), industry workers greatly benefit from online English classes incorporating technology.
- As reported by merchandisers, the number of students in an English class can range from six to twenty. Roshid and Webb (2022) state that small to medium-sized classes promote better interaction and personalized learning in business English contexts.

Overall, the findings indicate a strong demand from merchandisers for specialized English language or ESP courses that meet the unique needs and challenges of apparel merchandisers in Bangladesh. By integrating these insights into course design and delivery, stakeholders can better support the professional development and success of merchandisers in the industry.

## Conclusion

This study highlighted a noticeable absence of specialized English language courses tailored to the needs of apparel merchandisers in Bangladesh. This dearth underscores the urgency for developing and implementing targeted English language programs to address the specific communication demands of apparel merchandisers. Based on the merchandisers' identified needs and preferences, a detailed outline for an English language course for apparel merchandisers has been proposed here. They need to understand the clients' orders clearly and respond accurately. Hence, they need listening, speaking, and reading skills. This course

emphasizes practical communication skills like email correspondence and video conferencing. It prioritizes speaking proficiency while accommodating the busy schedules of merchandisers through flexible timing and online delivery options.

The study highlights the significance of English proficiency in fostering professional growth and success within the apparel merchandising industry in Bangladesh. It posits that investing in specialized English language education for merchandisers can greatly improve their communication skills and client interactions. In essence, the findings advocate for the development and implementation of targeted English language courses to meet the specific needs of apparel merchandisers in Bangladesh. By closing the gap between industry demands and existing educational resources, such initiatives can significantly benefit the professional development and success of apparel merchandisers, ultimately contributing to the growth and competitiveness of the Bangladeshi apparel sector.

#### *Limitations and future directions of research*

The study has several limitations. Firstly, it has a small sample size of 30 apparel merchandising professionals, which limits the findings' generalizability to the broader industry. Secondly, the study employed non-random sampling techniques that may introduce selection bias and affect the representativeness of the results. Thirdly, due to the busy schedules of apparel merchandisers, the study had to rely on flexible data collection methods, which may have restricted deeper exploration of language-related challenges. Finally, the study primarily identifies needs rather than evaluating the effectiveness of existing English training programs or language courses. Therefore, future research initiatives should incorporate a larger sample size, utilize random sampling techniques, employ longitudinal data collection methods, and assess existing curricula for apparel merchandisers to suggest a more accurate position for English language courses.

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