

Language in the Fast Lane: Perspectives from Trainers and Managers on BPO Curriculum Design

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges and strategies involved in designing English language curricula for the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry in the Philippines, a sector central to the country's economic growth and linguistic labor landscape. It explores how communication trainers and managers reconcile pedagogical goals with client-driven demands and global linguistic hierarchies that privilege “native-like” English. Using a descriptive qualitative research design, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with ten BPO communication trainers and managers. Thematic analysis reveals tensions between foundational English instruction and account-specific adaptations, as trainers work to balance conversational fluency, grammatical accuracy, and operational expectations under tight timelines. Frequent curriculum updates, performance metrics, and disparities in digital literacy further shape training decisions, especially in hybrid learning environments. Grounded in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the findings highlight the need for flexible, context-responsive curricula that integrate localized English varieties and support collaboration among trainers, clients, and quality teams. Positioned within the global service economy, the study contributes to discussions on linguistic inequality and the role of pedagogical agency in professional communication training. It calls for inclusive and sustainable training models that strengthen communicative competence while affirming the legitimacy of Philippine English as a professional and globally intelligible variety.

Keywords: Business Process Outsourcing (BPO); English for Specific Purposes (ESP); Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); Philippine English; curriculum design

Introduction

The dynamic relationship between language education and industry is most evident in the Philippines' Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector, where communication competence drives both employability and economic growth. The country remains one of the world's leading destinations for customer service and back-office support, with over a million Filipinos employed across major urban hubs. English language proficiency is a key contributor to this success, particularly in customer-facing accounts where agents must manage intercultural communication, service recovery, and emotional labor. Within this context, trainers and managers assume a central role in preparing employees to meet global client expectations through targeted communication training programs. Designing these programs, however, requires continuous negotiation between linguistic instruction and operational demands.

This study engages with ongoing discussions in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), two frameworks that view language as functional, contextual, and inseparable from communicative purpose.¹ In the BPO setting, ESP and CLT take on new urgency as trainers navigate the intersection of pedagogical principles, technological integration, and performance metrics. These challenges unfold within a broader sociolinguistic landscape shaped by global linguistic hierarchies. The continued preference for American Standard English and “neutral” accents underscores the persistence of *unequal Englishes*, where certain varieties are privileged over others.² Conceptually, these dynamics reflect what Park describes as *linguistic labor*, where language becomes a site of economic value, professional identity, and institutional control.³ Pennycook's notion of language as local practice further clarifies how English is shaped by the social,

¹Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie Jo St. John, *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²Ruanni Tupas and Aileen Salonga, “Unequal Englishes in the Philippines,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 20, no. 3 (2016): 367–76, <https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12185>.

³Joseph Sung-Yul Park, *Class and Cosmopolitanism: English and Globalization in South Korea* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

cultural, and material environments in which it is used.⁴

While prior research has examined call center discourse, communication practices, and workplace English ideologies, less attention has been paid to how trainers themselves negotiate curriculum design amid these global linguistic hierarchies.⁵ Existing studies often focus on agent performance or customer interactions, leaving a gap in understanding how training programs are conceptualized, adapted, and implemented by the educators who shape communicative readiness from within. This study addresses that gap by examining how English language trainers interpret industry demands, design instruction, and respond to structural constraints in the Philippine BPO sector.

The study investigates the challenges and strategies involved in designing English language curricula for BPO employees. It proceeds from the understanding that language training reflects ongoing tensions between pedagogy and productivity, between communicative competence and client-imposed performance norms. Specifically, the study explores the obstacles faced by trainers and managers, the strategies they use to balance fluency and accuracy, the role of data and technology in curriculum design, and the implications of linguistic ideologies that privilege certain Englishes over others.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both academic and professional discourse. Academically, it expands applied linguistics and ESP scholarship by situating language instruction within the global service economy, where communication operates as both skill and labor. Professionally, it highlights the experiences of communication trainers who are responsible for aligning instruction with operational realities while promoting learner confidence and inclusivity. The findings offer insights for designing responsive, equitable training models

⁴Alastair Pennycook, "Language as a Local Practice," *Routledge*, 2010.

⁵Jane Lockwood, "English Language Assessment for the Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) Industry: Business Needs Meet Communication Needs," *English Language and Literature Studies* 2, no. 4 (2012): 28–29, <https://doi.org/10.5539/ells.v2n4p22>; Tupas and Salonga, "Unequal Englishes in the Philippines," 367–76.

that strengthen communicative competence without compromising the legitimacy of Philippine English as a professional and globally intelligible variety.

This study draws on the perspectives of ten communication trainers and managers employed in Philippine BPO companies. It examines how they conceptualize and implement English language curricula in response to client expectations, technological tools, institutional constraints, and shifting performance metrics. While context-specific and not intended for statistical generalization, the findings offer qualitative insights into how language pedagogy evolves within one of the country's most dynamic and globally connected industries.

To guide this inquiry, the study addresses one main research question: How do trainers and managers navigate the challenges of designing English language curricula for the Philippine BPO industry? This question is supported by three sub-questions that examine specific aspects of curriculum design: (1) How do trainers ensure that language training reflects the communication needs of particular BPO accounts? (2) What role does industry-specific vocabulary and communication style play in shaping the curriculum? (3) How do trainers balance fluency, accuracy, and performance requirements in environments driven by metrics and client expectations?

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the challenges and strategies involved in developing English language curricula for the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector in the Philippines. This design was appropriate because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the perspectives of trainers and managers whose work involves daily decisions about language instruction, curriculum alignment, and client expectations.

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source, while thematic analysis provided a systematic framework for identifying

recurring patterns across participant accounts. Rather than seeking generalizable results, the study aimed to generate in-depth insights into the contextual realities and pedagogical decisions that shape language training practices.

Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants with direct experience in communication training, learning and development, curriculum design, or training management in BPO organizations. These roles were chosen because they are central to instructional planning and the communicative expectations of the industry. Recruitment was conducted through LinkedIn using search filters such as industry (BPO/Call Center/Outsourcing), location (Philippines), and keywords (e.g., “communication trainer,” “language curriculum,” “L&D,” “BPO training”). Inclusion criteria required at least one year of relevant training experience and current or recent employment in the BPO sector.

Ten participants met the criteria and consented to join the study. To protect participant identity, pseudonyms were assigned and company names were anonymized. Trainers were labeled as *BPO Trainer 1-5* and managers as *BPO Manager 1-5*. Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of the participants, including role category, position, account type, and years of experience.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Profile

Pseudonym	Role Category	Current Position	Company (Pseudonym)	Account Type	Years of Training Experience
BPO Manager 1	Training Manager	Senior Training Manager	Company A	SaaS	10 yrs
BPO Manager 2	Training Manager	Training Manager	Company B	Financial Services	15 yrs 4 mos
BPO Manager 3	Training Manager	Training Manager (Support Function)	Company C	Real Estate	6 yrs
BPO Manager 4	Training Manager	Global Communications Training Manager	Company D	Financial Services	12 yrs
BPO Manager 5	Training Manager	Training Manager	Company E	SaaS	4 yrs
BPO Trainer 1	Communications Trainer	Communications Trainer (Mid-Level)	Company D	Financial Services	1 yr 11 mos
BPO Trainer 2	Communications Trainer	Operations Trainer	Company F	Health-care	2 yrs 6 mos
BPO Trainer 3	Communications Trainer	Communications Trainer	Company E	Telecommunication	4 yrs
BPO Trainer 4	Communications Trainer	Instructional Design Consultant	Company G	Health-care	4 yrs
BPO Trainer 5	Communications Trainer	Communications and Culture Trainer	Company H	Health-care	3 yrs

Recruitment Procedures

Recruitment followed a systematic workflow designed to ensure transparency and dependability. Potential participants were first identified through LinkedIn searches using the filters described above. Each candidate's job role, training background, and years of experience were reviewed to verify eligibility. A spreadsheet was used to track outreach efforts, including participant names (later pseudonymized), roles, companies, experience, and response status. Personalized invitations were then sent to eligible participants, explaining the study's purpose and the relevance of their expertise. Interviews were scheduled based on participant availability, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Data Collection Procedures

Semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom were used as the primary method of data collection. Each session lasted 45-60 minutes and followed an interview guide focused on curriculum development processes, training challenges, balancing fluency and accuracy, integrating industry-specific communication needs, and managing client-driven revisions.

Before each interview, participants received a privacy statement and consent form outlining the voluntary nature of participation, data handling procedures, and confidentiality measures. Permission to record the session was obtained for all interviews.

During interviews, informal member checking was used by paraphrasing or summarizing participant responses to confirm accuracy. Reflexive notes were written immediately after each session to capture emerging insights, potential biases, and analytic considerations.

Recordings were transcribed verbatim, and key excerpts were collated in a spreadsheet to support early familiarization and cross-case comparison.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis.⁶ The process began with repeated readings of the transcripts to achieve familiarization, followed by systematic inductive coding, where codes were generated directly from participant accounts rather than predetermined categories. Coded segments were then grouped into potential themes, which were reviewed for coherence, refined through iterative comparison, and formally defined to capture their analytic scope.

Transcripts were uploaded to Delve, which provided structured documentation of codes, analytic memos, and theme development. Throughout the analysis, the researcher wrote memos to trace interpretive decisions and bracket personal assumptions.

While coding was inductive, the themes were later interpreted through the lenses of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).⁷ These frameworks were not used to generate codes but helped situate the findings within broader theoretical conversations about contextualized instruction, communicative competence, and industry-specific language needs.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher has professional experience as a communications trainer in the BPO industry. This insider background provided familiarity with training processes, linguistic expectations, and the everyday realities shaping curriculum design. At the same time, it introduced potential bias, particularly in interpreting practices that the researcher has previously engaged in. To mitigate this, reflexive notes were written during and after interviews to track assumptions, emotional reactions, and analytic decisions. Throughout coding and theme development, the researcher

⁶Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>.

⁷Dudley-Evans and St. John, *Developments in English for Specific Purposes*; Richards and Rodgers, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*.

intentionally bracketed personal perspectives and repeatedly returned to raw data to ensure that participant voices, not professional familiarity, directed the emerging analysis. This positionality also meant navigating power dynamics, especially when speaking with managers or peers in similar training roles. Being aware of these dynamics made reflexivity even more important in maintaining analytic integrity and ensuring that participant perspectives were represented accurately, fairly, and without distortion.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were used to support the trustworthiness of the study. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their experiences in detail, which supported credibility, while informal member checking during the interviews strengthened accuracy and clarity. Credibility was further reinforced through prolonged engagement with the interview transcripts and through detailed reflexive notes documenting analytic decisions and researcher assumptions. The documentation of coding decisions, analytic memos, and a clear audit trail supported dependability by making each stage of analysis traceable. Triangulation across different participant roles and account types enhanced confirmability by drawing from multiple viewpoints and minimizing the influence of individual bias. Detailed descriptions of the research context, sampling process, and participant backgrounds allowed readers to assess the transferability of the findings to similar BPO settings. All these strategies ensured that the analysis remained systematic, transparent, and grounded in participant accounts.

Scope and Limitations

This study is limited to the perspectives of communication trainers and managers working in Philippine BPO companies. It does not include agents, QA analysts, or clients, nor does it attempt to measure training outcomes quantitatively. As a qualitative inquiry with a small, context-specific sample, the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable. However, they provide valuable interpretive insights into how English language curricula are designed, adapted, and negotiated in one of the country's most dynamic and globally integrated industries.

Researcher positionality, particularly the dual role as practitioner and analyst, may have influenced interpretation, although reflexive strategies were used to minimize bias and uphold analytic rigor.

Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis of interview data revealed six interrelated themes that illustrate how trainers and managers navigate the competing demands of pedagogy, client expectations, and linguistic ideologies in designing English language curricula for the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry. These themes are: (1) Foundations and Adaptation in Language Training, (2) Balancing Fluency and Accuracy in Communication, (3) Data-Driven and Feedback-Oriented Training Design, (4) Leveraging Technology for Effective Training Delivery, (5) Curriculum Updates and Adaptability, and (6) Overcoming Challenges and Constraints. Collectively, they demonstrate the ongoing negotiation between communicative competence as an educational ideal and linguistic performance as an economic requirement within the global service economy.

Foundations and Adaptation in Language Training

Trainers repeatedly emphasized the dual nature of their curriculum: the need to establish solid linguistic foundations while responding to the communicative realities of specific accounts. Grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary formed the base of instruction, but these were quickly adapted to fit the communicative demands of particular industries.

Excerpt 1

“You have to start with the basics, like grammar and pronunciation, because if they can’t get those right, they’ll struggle with more advanced tasks.”

—*BPO Manager 1*

As seen in Excerpt 1 above, foundational competence is treated as a prerequisite for more complex communicative tasks. This reflects a core principle of ESP, where learners must develop general language

competence before engaging with specialized, context-driven language.⁸ Trainers therefore position foundational instruction as the linguistic scaffolding that allows trainees to function effectively in later modules tied to account-specific communication.

Yet the curriculum rarely stopped at foundational competence. Lessons often integrated culturally situated content, such as U.S. television or sports for cable accounts, or empathy-based phrasing for healthcare clients.

Excerpt 2

“For a cable account, we included lessons about U.S. sports, late-night TV, and other cultural aspects to bridge gaps. It’s not something the client specifically requested, but it’s helpful for agents to have that knowledge. This helped them build rapport during calls.”

–BPO Trainer 4

Excerpt 3

“When I design training for healthcare accounts, it’s all about active listening and emotional phrasing because empathy matters more than just saying the right words.”

–BPO Trainer 5

As seen in Excerpts 2 and 3, trainers strategically contextualize lessons to reflect the communicative ecology of different accounts. ESP’s emphasis on relevance, authentic language use, and alignment with the communicative demands of the target situation mirrors this practice.⁹ Cultural content, empathy markers, and industry-specific discourse are not treated as embellishments but as communicative tools that enable agents to perform relational work effectively. As Pariscal and Gonzales-Aboy observe, contextualized content fosters learner engagement and communicative confidence by situating English use in culturally meaningful situations.¹⁰ This is precisely what trainers achieve when

⁸Dudley-Evans and St. John, *Developments in English for Specific Purposes*.

⁹Dudley-Evans and St. John, *Developments in English for Specific Purposes*.

¹⁰Pariscal, Dyna Rose P., and Ivy Gonzales-Aboy. “Practices in the

they tailor materials to the cultural and emotional dimensions of each account.

In practice, trainers often used authentic materials, including client-provided glossaries, call recordings, and simulated scenarios, to mirror actual customer interactions and help trainees navigate the complex pragmatics of real-world communication. However, these adaptations also reveal the pressures of linguistic hierarchy. Trainers described clients' insistence on "neutral" or "American-sounding" speech as a persistent barrier to valuing local identity.

Excerpt 4

"Some clients even say, 'We don't want to hear any regional accent,' and I'm sitting here thinking, 'We're in the Philippines, of course there's going to be some accent.' But we work on neutralizing it as much as possible."

—BPO Manager 3

Such statements, as seen in Excerpt 4, echo Tupas and Salonga's critique of *unequal Englishes*, where global corporate standards privilege Western norms and marginalize localized forms like Philippine English.¹¹ This dynamic reflects linguistic subordination in which certain Englishes, usually those associated with the Global North, are constructed as "legitimate," while others are framed as deficient or in need of correction. In the BPO context, expectations for "neutral" or "American-sounding" speech reproduce this hierarchy by positioning Filipino accents as deviations that must be minimized, despite being natural features of an equally valid English variety.

Despite these constraints, trainers found subtle ways to validate their trainees' identities, chiefly by emphasizing clarity and comprehensibility over imitation. This negotiation between linguistic accommodation and self-affirmation foregrounds the ideological complexity of BPO English:

Contextualization of the English Curriculum in the Public Secondary Schools." *Technium Social Sciences Journal* 37 (November 2022): 60–75. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v37i1.7594>.

¹¹Tupas and Salonga, "Unequal Englishes in the Philippines," 367–76.

a site where communication, identity, power, and linguistic labor constantly intersect. It also demonstrates trainer agency in mediating between client expectations and the linguistic realities of Filipino agents.

Balancing Fluency and Accuracy

An enduring challenge in BPO language training lies in balancing conversational fluency with grammatical accuracy. Trainers recognized that focusing solely on correctness often inhibited learner participation.

Excerpt 5

“Focus on fluency first, getting them to speak, and refine accuracy as we go.”

–BPO Manager 3

Excerpt 6

“Agents are often hesitant to speak because they’re afraid of making mistakes. We focus on fluency first to help them gain confidence.”

–BPO Trainer 1

As seen in Excerpts 5 and 6, trainers consistently emphasized fluency as the initial priority because many trainees enter training with heightened anxiety around grammatical errors. This approach reflects the core logic of CLT, which prioritizes authentic language use and functional interaction over prescriptive correctness.¹² Trainers reported that early fluency-building activities, such as storytelling, impromptu speaking, and low-stakes discussions, helped agents overcome hesitation and take communicative risks.

These fluency-oriented activities align with Canale and Swain’s concept of *communicative competence*, which integrates grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic dimensions of language ability.¹³ Trainers recognized that encouraging agents to speak freely builds the interactional

¹²Richards and Rodgers, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*.

¹³Michael A. Canale and Merrill Swain, “Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing,” *Applied Linguistics* 1, no. 1 (1980): 28–31, <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/1.1.1>.

confidence needed to perform in fast-paced call center environments where spontaneous communication is the norm.

Yet trainers also noted that fluency must eventually give way to precision, especially in high-stakes accounts such as healthcare or finance where compliance and accuracy are essential.

Excerpt 7

“For financial accounts, we emphasize grammatical accuracy and compliance because even a small error can impact the client’s trust.”

—BPO Trainer 5

As seen in Excerpt 7, grammatical accuracy becomes indispensable in specialized contexts where miscommunication carries consequences. Trainers address this by integrating accuracy-building moments into simulations, audits, and structured practice tasks. Activities such as role-plays require agents to shift between conversational tone and technical precision, allowing them to rehearse both clarity and correctness in realistic scenarios.

Excerpt 8

“We use role-plays where agents have to respond to irate customers, focusing on both clear explanations and a conversational tone.”

—BPO Manager 4

Excerpt 8 illustrates how simulation-based activities function as a bridge between fluency and accuracy. Through these activities, agents are able to practice de-escalation, tone control, and technical explanations at the same time. These practices reflect CLT’s emphasis on integrating linguistic form with communicative function, as opposed to treating them as separate instructional goals.¹⁴

However, the tension between fluency and accuracy is not merely pedagogical. It is also ideological. Preferences for “native-like” accuracy often originate from client expectations shaped by global corporate norms

¹⁴Canale and Swain, “Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches,” 28–31.

that idealize Western Englishes. This reflects neoliberal ideologies of English proficiency, where language becomes a form of linguistic capital tied to employability.¹⁵ Under this logic, “good English” is often equated with “market-ready English,” narrowing communicative competence to a skillset that aligns with client branding and customer experience expectations.

Trainers in this study act as linguistic mediators who must reconcile these market-driven demands with the communicative realities of Filipino English users. While they teach strategic accuracy and account-specific terminology, they also resist reductive norms by foregrounding clarity, empathy, and relational communication as legitimate forms of competence. Their pragmatic approach challenges the assumption that linguistic perfection is synonymous with professionalism. As several participants emphasized, effective communication can, and does, coexist with accent, cultural expression, and the authentic features of Philippine English.

Validating these communicative resources allows trainers to help agents develop not only linguistic skills but also confidence in their linguistic identity. This process illustrates how trainers navigate, reproduce, and subtly resist global hierarchies of English.

Data-Driven and Feedback-Oriented Design

Curriculum design in the BPO sector is a dynamic, data-intensive process shaped by quantitative metrics and continuous feedback loops. Trainers relied on performance evaluations, client scorecards, and Quality Assurance (QA) feedback to identify communication gaps.

Excerpt 9

“We look at communication skills scores from QA to decide which areas to focus on, like vocabulary gaps or improper use of terms.”

—BPO Trainer 5

¹⁵ Alastair Pennycook, *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Joseph Sung-Yul Park, *Class and Cosmopolitanism: English and Globalization in South Korea* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

As seen in Excerpt 9, trainers consistently use QA data to identify patterns across trainee performance. This cyclical process resembles an ESP-based needs analysis, where instructional content evolves directly from workplace demands and communicative requirements.¹⁶ The reliance on QA metrics ensures that training remains responsive to the linguistic expectations of clients and the operational goals of the industry.

The incorporation of industry-specific vocabulary emerged as a central feature of this design. On the one hand, technical terms equip agents with the linguistic precision needed to resolve customer concerns. On the other, they enable relational communication by helping agents engage customers in a manner that is both accurate and personable.

Excerpt 10

“The curriculum must reflect industry-specific terms like ‘resolution’ or ‘chargeback,’ so agents understand and apply them in real scenarios. We make sure they’re not just memorizing terms. Like, it’s one thing to know what a ‘chargeback’ is, but it’s another to explain it fluently to a frustrated customer. That’s why we do a lot of scenario-based training.”

—BPO Manager 4

As seen in Excerpt 10, scenario-based work ensures agents can use technical language within the relational and emotional contexts of customer interaction. Lockwood, Forey, and Price argue that effective communication in call centers depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on discourse competence or the ability to manage rapport, empathy, and interactional flow.¹⁷ Trainers in this study clearly recognized this dual demand, designing lessons that fuse technical precision with the relational aspects of service work

Trainers also noted that client expectations for instant mastery of

¹⁶Dudley-Evans and St. John, *Developments in English for Specific Purposes*.

¹⁷Jane Lockwood, Gail Forey, and Helen Price, “English in Philippine Call Centers and BPO Operations: Issues, Opportunities, and Research,” in *Philippine English: Linguistic and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Ma. Lourdes S. Bautista and Kingsley Bolton (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 230–31, <https://doi.org/10.5790/hongkong/9789622099470.003.0012>.

complex terminology could be unrealistic. Scenario-based learning became a bridge between linguistic instruction and real-world communication.

Excerpt 11

“Clients often have very specific and sometimes unrealistic expectations. For example, a tech client might request agents to deliver highly technical solutions in a conversational tone and master technical terms immediately, which can be a tall order for trainees just entering the industry. We must gradually integrate these into training after they’ve mastered foundational skills.”

–BPO Trainer 3

As seen in Excerpt 11, trainers adopt a phased approach, layering technical language onto foundational skills to avoid overwhelming trainees. This gradual integration shows how they mediate the tension between operational demands and learner readiness. It ensures that industry-specific vocabulary develops alongside communicative confidence.

A crucial component of this data-driven approach concerns the communicative metrics that define how QA rubrics operationalize communicative success. These metrics typically quantify communication across several categories, including the accuracy of terminology, adherence to call flow, tone and politeness markers, de-escalation and empathy statements, customer rapport, resolution framing, and compliance language.

These metrics break down communication into discrete, measurable components, enabling trainers to identify specific areas for improvement. However, they also reflect a broader neoliberal logic of accountability in education, in which communication is conceptualized as a quantifiable commodity tied to productivity.¹⁸ Progress becomes something to track numerically through rubrics, surveys, and client scorecards, sometimes narrowing the definition of communicative success.

¹⁸Alastair Pennycook, “Language as a Local Practice,” *Routledge*, 2010.

Despite this constraint, many participants viewed data not as a limitation but as an opportunity for reflection. The constant flow of performance information enabled trainers to make targeted adjustments that include revisiting weak content, refining scripts, or incorporating new practice activities. This iterative cycle of evaluation and adjustment reveals the adaptive nature of BPO curriculum design, where feedback continually informs revisions to meet evolving client expectations and learner needs. In this way, trainers use data not only to align with industry standards but also to support more holistic development, balancing technical precision with the relational demands of customer service work.

Leveraging Technology in Training

The integration of digital platforms has transformed how trainers deliver language instruction, especially in remote or hybrid setups. Tools such as Kahoot, Mentimeter, and Zoom breakout rooms enabled more interactive and collaborative sessions.

Excerpt 12

“We use tools like Kahoot and breakout rooms to keep trainees engaged, especially in virtual setups.”

—BPO Manager 4

As seen in Excerpt 12, trainers leveraged interactive technologies to sustain engagement and promote participation in virtual environments. Trainers also created shared digital workspaces where trainees could review feedback asynchronously, promoting autonomy and allowing learners to revisit materials at their own pace.

Excerpt 13

“We have to make sure the tools are user-friendly, or we risk losing some trainees.”

—BPO Trainer 2

Excerpt 13 illustrates how trainers had to balance technological innovation with accessibility. Tools that enhanced interactivity could also alienate trainees who struggled with digital interfaces. These

choices highlight trainers' ongoing effort to maintain inclusivity while integrating digital tools into pedagogy.

Such practices demonstrate the adaptive capacity of trainers to merge technology with instructional design. Akintunde and Abdallah argue that blended learning enhances engagement when it complements human facilitation rather than replacing it.¹⁹ The trainers in this study corroborated that technology was most effective when used to simulate authentic communication as opposed to functioning as an isolated add-on.

However, technological innovation also revealed structural inequalities. Trainers reported that poor connectivity, unequal access to devices, and varied levels of digital literacy limited participation for some trainees. This digital divide complicates assumptions about the universal accessibility of online learning.

Excerpt 14

“We use tech to connect, not to exclude.”

–BPO Trainer 1

Excerpt 14 shows trainers' awareness of the digital divide and their effort to ensure that technological integration remains inclusive. This sensitivity reflects a socially responsive pedagogy that emphasizes empathy, patience, and adaptability, which, although often undervalued in corporate performance metrics, are essential for promoting equitable learning environments.

Digital technologies offer the potential for more personalized and dynamic learning experiences, and that is contingent upon addressing both trainee needs and systemic infrastructural challenges. Trainers proposed that expanding digital literacy initiatives and developing blended learning models that combine online and face-to-face instruction

¹⁹Abraham Femi Akintunde and Fatima Seifeldeen Abdallah, “Blended Learning in a Language Classroom: Implication for Pedagogy,” *European Journal of Contemporary Education and E-Learning* 2, no. 6 (2024): 200–11, [https://doi.org/10.59324/ejceel.2024.2\(6\).12](https://doi.org/10.59324/ejceel.2024.2(6).12).

may help mitigate disparities in engagement and comprehension. Alternating between digital tools and interactive sessions can also cultivate adaptability, participation, and sustained learning outcomes.

Trainers further proposed administering digital literacy assessments at the beginning of each course to align teaching strategies with individual competencies. Such measures ensure that technological integration remains learner-centered and equitable. These approaches reaffirm the pivotal role of technology in BPO training, and one that is grounded in the principle of thoughtful, inclusive implementation. Furthermore, the adaptability of digital platforms allows trainers to revise and disseminate materials instantaneously. This reflects the industry's enduring emphasis on curricular agility and responsiveness to client expectations.

Curriculum Updates and Adaptability

Constant change defines curriculum development in the BPO sector. Trainers described frequent revisions driven by new client accounts, shifting key performance indicators (KPIs), or product updates.

Excerpt 15

“It’s like building while running.”

–BPO Manager 2

Excerpt 16

“If a client changes their KPIs or adds a product line, we adjust the curriculum immediately, but it can disrupt the flow of existing lessons.”

–BPO Manager 1

As seen in Excerpts 15 and 16, curriculum updates often occur with little notice, reflecting the urgency and pace of BPO operations. This culture of immediacy mirrors what Park calls *linguistic labor*, where workers continually reshape their communicative repertoires to meet the demands of global capitalism.²⁰ In this sense, language learning becomes an ongoing process of adaptation and emotional flexibility, which trainers must navigate as they adjust content to meet new client expectations.

²⁰Park, *Class and Cosmopolitanism: English and Globalization in South Korea*.

Responsiveness remains a defining feature of BPO training, and one that is not without consequence. Trainers noted that frequent curricular revisions often undermine lesson coherence and compromise foundational learning. Lockwood cautions that excessive responsiveness risks fragmenting communication training, shifting attention from sustainable skill development to short-term operational goals.²¹ To mitigate these effects, trainers proposed modular course designs that allow targeted updates without requiring a full curriculum overhaul. This modularity, rooted in ESP's needs-based framework, preserves the stability of core content while accommodating the fast-changing demands of particular accounts. By structuring modules so they can be revised independently, trainers maintain pedagogical consistency and protect foundational learning even as they respond to external pressures.

These cycles of adjustment and refinement show how trainers navigate the tension between corporate priorities and meaningful educational outcomes. Their work involves balancing the need for curricular agility with the responsibility to maintain instructional coherence. This balance highlights the resilience of trainers who continuously adapt their materials while still striving to create learning experiences that support both immediate operational goals and longer-term communicative competence. These patterns of rapid adjustment and constant recalibration form part of the wider constraints that trainers navigate. They reveal how structural expectations influence everyday pedagogical practice.

Overcoming Challenges and Constraints

All six themes converge in a shared understanding of constraint, including time, ideology, and institutional expectation. Trainers consistently face limited timelines, fluctuating standards, and entrenched client biases.

Excerpt 17

“The biggest challenge is time. We sometimes have to skip grammar

²¹ Lockwood, “English Language Assessment,” 28-29.

basics to focus on account-specific skills.”

–BPO Trainer 5

As seen in Excerpt 17, time pressure often requires trainers to prioritize account-specific content over foundational instruction. These conditions shape the everyday realities of BPO language training and reveal how pedagogical choices are influenced by operational urgency. Yet these constraints have also encouraged trainers to cultivate collaborative practices that help maintain both efficiency and instructional quality.

Participants described several strategies that allow them to sustain pedagogical integrity despite institutional pressure. Trainers regularly engaged in peer observation to calibrate delivery styles and improve consistency across batches. Informal mentoring provided new trainers with guidance in lesson pacing, feedback strategies, and handling difficult training scenarios. QA teams and trainers conducted feedback cycles that included call listening, rubric reviews, and shared reflections on common agent challenges. Client-trainer calibration meetings helped align expectations, ensuring that curricular revisions remained feasible and pedagogically sound. These collaborative practices demonstrate the collective effort required to uphold instructional coherence in a fast-moving industry.

The participants’ experiences reveal that BPO language training operates within a neoliberal linguistic economy where English proficiency is commodified as productivity. In this context, as Pennycook and Park note, language is treated not merely as a communication tool but as a form of labor shaped by economic forces.²² Trainers are expected to produce agents who can perform communicative labor efficiently and consistently, often under conditions where linguistic performance is strictly evaluated and quantified.

Despite these pressures, trainers resist the narrow framing of English as a purely transactional commodity. They emphasize clarity, empathy,

²²Pennycook, *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows*; Park, *Class and Cosmopolitanism: English and Globalization in South Korea*.

and cultural awareness as equally valuable forms of competence. Instead of focusing exclusively on grammatical accuracy or standardized accents, trainers foreground the relational aspects of communication. This approach reflects a broader pedagogical philosophy that values human connection and communicative authenticity, even within an industry structured around metrics and productivity.

Through the combined lens of ESP, CLT, and linguistic ideology, these findings suggest that effective BPO language training involves more than linguistic transfer alone. It is an act of negotiation, between local identity and global standardization, between pedagogy and productivity, and between human interaction and measurable performance. Trainers occupy a pivotal role in this negotiation, bridging the structural expectations of the industry with the human realities of language learning. In navigating these constraints, they embody the resilience, adaptability, and compassion that sustain not only effective pedagogy but also the human spirit of communication itself. Their work embodies both the pedagogical creativity and sociolinguistic awareness necessary for sustaining the Philippines' reputation as a leading English-speaking hub in the global service economy.

Conclusion

This study examined the challenges and strategies in designing English language curricula for the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry in the Philippines. The findings show that trainers and managers work within an environment shaped by constant adaptation, high performance expectations, and deep-seated linguistic hierarchies. They navigate these pressures by aligning foundational instruction with industry-specific communication needs and by using data-driven adjustments that respond to client requirements. Their work reflects an understanding that language training in the BPO context is a negotiation between pedagogy and productivity, between what learners need and what global service standards demand.

The principles of ESP and CLT remain central to this negotiation. Trainers integrate these frameworks into decisions about lesson sequencing, industry vocabulary, simulation tasks, and performance

feedback. Their instructional choices reflect a commitment to functional, context-sensitive language use rather than prescriptive correctness. Technology also plays a role in this integration, supporting collaborative learning and real-time feedback while highlighting persistent digital divides that shape learner engagement. These combined practices show how the BPO industry has become an evolving classroom where pedagogy meets global communication demands through blended learning, scenario-based training, and modular curriculum design.

At the same time, the findings reveal how corporate expectations perpetuate linguistic inequalities. The preference for “neutral” or “native-like” English privileges Western norms and continues to undervalue localized varieties such as Philippine English. Trainers recognize these hierarchies and respond by emphasizing clarity, empathy, and communicative confidence instead of perfect accent imitation. Their work illustrates how language training is both pedagogical and ideological, shaped by broader expectations about what counts as legitimate English in a global marketplace. As Tupas and Salonga argue, acknowledging *unequal Englishes* opens space for more inclusive understandings of linguistic legitimacy and for communicative practices that do not rely on erasing local identity.²³

The findings also highlight the pressures created by a neoliberal linguistic economy where communication becomes measurable labor. Trainers must interpret QA rubrics, communicative metrics, and calibration feedback in ways that preserve instructional coherence while meeting client expectations. Their collaborative strategies, including peer observations, feedback cycles, and client-trainer calibrations, show how pedagogical integrity can be sustained despite structural constraints. Modularity and ongoing curricular refinement help maintain relevance while protecting foundational learning, demonstrating that responsive training models do not have to compromise depth or coherence.

These insights affirm the need for adaptive and inclusive training models that account for the realities of linguistic labor in a globalized service economy. Flexible curriculum structures, thoughtful use

²³Tupas and Salonga, “Unequal Englishes in the Philippine Workplace: A Sociolinguistic Perspective.”

of technology, and explicit recognition of Philippine English as a professional variety can support more equitable language practices. In strengthening these approaches, the industry can build training programs that value competence alongside identity and that cultivate agents who are not only proficient but also confident in their linguistic voice.

Language training in the BPO sector will continue to evolve, and its success will depend on how effectively it integrates pedagogy, technology, and cultural understanding. The findings invite educators, managers, and policymakers to view language as a living resource shaped by context, purpose, and shared meaning. Such a perspective opens space for a more confident and self-aware English that reflects both the skill and the voice of the Filipino professional.

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