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An Analysis of the Implementation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Vocational High Schools: A Case Study of the Visual Communication Design Program at SMK Negeri 2 Gorontalo

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in English instruction within the Visual Communication Design (DKV) program at SMK Negeri 2 Gorontalo. The research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the extent to which classroom practices align with ESP principles, particularly in terms of needs analysis, materials development, and assessment. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with one English teacher, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that instruction has begun to reflect contextual ESP principles through the integration of digital design projects and vocabulary relevant to the students' field of study. However, the implementation remains adaptive in nature and is not yet grounded in a systematic and formal needs analysis. Gaps were also identified in the reinforcement of technical vocabulary, pronunciation development, and performance-based assessment. The study underscores the importance of industry-oriented needs analysis and authentic evaluation strategies to strengthen ESP implementation in vocational education.
Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, vocational education, needs analysis, case study

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi English for Specific Purposes (ESP) dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris pada program keahlian Desain Komunikasi Visual (DKV) di SMK Negeri 2 Gorontalo. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus untuk mengeksplorasi kesesuaian praktik pembelajaran dengan prinsip ESP, khususnya dalam aspek needs analysis, pengembangan materi, dan evaluasi pembelajaran. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan satu guru Bahasa Inggris, observasi kelas, serta analisis dokumen pembelajaran. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran telah mengarah pada prinsip kontekstualitas melalui integrasi proyek desain digital dan penggunaan kosakata yang relevan dengan jurusan. Namun demikian, implementasi ESP masih bersifat adaptif dan belum didasarkan pada analisis kebutuhan formal yang sistematis. Kesenjangan juga ditemukan pada penguatan kosakata teknis, pelafalan, serta asesmen berbasis performa profesional. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya perencanaan berbasis kebutuhan industri dan pengembangan evaluasi autentik untuk memperkuat implementasi ESP di sekolah vokasional.
Kata Kunci: *English for Specific Purposes, pendidikan vokasional, needs analysis, studi kasus*

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INTRODUCTION

Vocational education carries a strategic responsibility to prepare graduates who possess not only technical expertise but also professional communication skills relevant to their specific fields. In the era of globalization and workforce mobility, English functions as a vital cross-border communication tool, particularly in creative industries such as visual communication design, which operate within global networks (Kóris, 2023). For this reason, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become increasingly relevant in vocational education, as it emphasizes language instruction tailored to learners' specific professional domains (Anqi Dou, 2024).

Conceptually, ESP is grounded in the principle that language instruction should be designed based on systematic and comprehensive needs analysis. Day and Krzanowski (2011) emphasize that identifying target communication needs forms the foundation of ESP curriculum design, ensuring that objectives, materials, methods, and assessment reflect real professional demands. Similarly, Basturkmen (2010) highlights the importance of both target situation analysis and learning situation analysis to ensure that ESP courses are not merely thematically relevant but also professionally accurate in discourse. Tomlinson (1991), through his learning-centered approach, positions learners' needs and language use contexts as the starting point for materials and instructional planning. Thus, ESP is not simply about introducing vocabulary related to a specific major; rather, it represents a systematic instructional design based on authentic needs and oriented toward professional communication performance.

Despite this well-established theoretical framework, recent studies indicate that ESP implementation in vocational education continues to face challenges in translating these principles into classroom practice. Puspitaloka, Ambarwati, and Nurjanah (2024) found that successful ESP implementation depends largely on accurate needs identification and the integration of materials with authentic professional tasks. Nabung, Emilia, and Purnawarman (2024) argue that without formal needs analysis, ESP risks becoming superficial thematic adaptation. In the Indonesian context, Suri and Bawamenewi (2025) report that ESP implementation in vocational schools often remains adaptive and heavily dependent on individual teacher initiative. These findings suggest a gap between the systematic theoretical construction of ESP and its practical implementation in vocational school settings.

In response to this gap, this study critically examines the implementation of ESP in the Visual Communication Design program at SMK Negeri 2 Gorontalo. The analysis focuses on the extent to which classroom practices align with needs analysis principles, how materials are developed within the vocational context, and how assessment reflects professional communication demands. By positioning ESP theory as an analytical framework and comparing it with actual classroom practices, this study seeks to identify areas of misalignment while providing contextual empirical evidence on ESP implementation at the vocational secondary level. The study contributes to clarifying the distance between conceptual ESP design and pedagogical realities in vocational education in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth the implementation of English instruction within the Visual Communication Design program at SMK Negeri 2 Gorontalo. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables researchers to understand phenomena contextually and interpretively within their natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design provided a comprehensive analytical framework for examining a specific phenomenon within its institutional context (Yin, 2018).

The participant in this study was one English teacher who was interviewed using a semi-structured format to gain insights into lesson planning, classroom implementation, and evaluation practices related to ESP. Additional data were collected through classroom observations and analysis of instructional documents to enrich and validate interview findings.

Data were analyzed thematically through processes of reduction, categorization, and interpretation to identify patterns relevant to the research focus. The analysis centered on three main aspects: (1) alignment with needs analysis principles, (2) materials development and instructional strategies, and (3) ESP-based assessment practices. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing interview data, observation findings, and documentation to ensure credibility and consistency (Yin, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. ESP Implementation and Alignment with Needs Analysis Principles

Interview data from the English teacher reveal a pedagogical awareness of the importance of connecting instructional materials with the students' vocational major. The teacher explained that learning activities should be "adjusted to the students' field so they feel that the lesson is relevant." This statement reflects an initial understanding of contextual principles in ESP, as emphasized by Tomlinson (1991), who argues that learners' needs and language-use contexts should serve as the starting point in instructional planning.

Classroom observations further indicate that English instruction has been integrated with digital design projects using Canva, enabling students to present their visual products in English. Thematically, this reflects an effort to move toward domain-based learning aligned with professional practice. However, analysis of lesson plans and instructional documents shows that no formal needs analysis procedures were conducted to identify specific communication demands within the design industry, such as delivering a design brief, explaining concepts to clients, or presenting ideas persuasively.

From a theoretical perspective, needs analysis constitutes the foundation of ESP curriculum design (Day & Krzanowski, 2011; Basturkmen, 2010). Without systematic mapping of target situation requirements, instruction risks remaining at a contextual or thematic level. This finding aligns with Nabung, Emilia, and Purnawarman (2024), who argue that ESP implementation in Indonesia often remains adaptive rather than grounded in structured needs analysis. However, unlike their study, which highlights weak contextual integration, the present research shows that thematic integration has already occurred, although it is not yet supported by formal analytical foundations. This constitutes one of the study's key contributions: demonstrating that contextual relevance does not automatically equate to a genuinely needs-based design.

The practical implication of this finding is the need to strengthen industry-based needs analysis through collaboration among English teachers, vocational subject teachers, and design practitioners. Such collaboration would ensure that ESP implementation is not only thematically relevant but also professionally accurate.

2. Materials Development and Depth of Professional Discourse

Classroom observation shows that the digital poster project significantly increased student participation and created a more meaningful learning environment. Students worked in groups, designed visual products, and presented them in English. This approach is consistent with the principles of learning-centered ESP, which emphasize active learner engagement within authentic contexts (Tomlinson, 1991).

However, analysis of student outputs and instructional materials reveals that language use remained limited to general vocabulary, such as naming body parts and providing simple descriptions. Professional design terminology—such as branding identity, visual hierarchy, or client presentation strategy—did not appear explicitly in student work. This suggests that professional discourse depth has not yet been fully integrated into the instructional materials.

These findings reinforce Puspitaloka et al. (2024), who emphasize the importance of incorporating authentic professional tasks into vocational ESP. At the same time, this study extends their findings by showing that limited professional depth is not necessarily the result of teachers' lack of awareness, but rather of their consideration of students' varying levels of linguistic readiness. Thus, a pedagogical tension emerges between professional depth and students' foundational language competence.

Theoretically, this indicates that ESP implementation requires gradual scaffolding toward professional terminology rather than mere thematic integration. Contextual relevance may represent an important starting point, but it should not be regarded as the final indicator of successful ESP implementation.

3. Lexical and Phonological Challenges in Professional Contexts

Observation findings indicate that some students continue to experience difficulties with the pronunciation of English terms. In several cases, presentations were delivered by reading prepared scripts rather than through spontaneous speech. Interviews suggest that the teacher intentionally prioritizes students' confidence before emphasizing error correction, aiming to foster a supportive learning environment.

This approach reflects sensitivity to the affective dimension of language learning. Nevertheless, from an ESP perspective that prioritizes professional communication, intelligibility and terminological accuracy are crucial components (Anqi Dou, 2024). Without systematic reinforcement of lexical and phonological competence, students may encounter communication barriers in real industrial contexts.

These findings strengthen previous research indicating that technical vocabulary development remains a major challenge in vocational ESP (Puspitaloka et al., 2024). However, this study adds an

additional dimension by showing that pedagogical strategies overly focused on fluency without sufficient attention to accuracy may slow the development of professional communication competence.

The implication is that a balanced approach is required—one that simultaneously supports students' confidence while gradually reinforcing linguistic precision—so that ESP fosters not only willingness to speak but also measurable professional competence.

4. Design-Based Projects as a Contextual Strategy in ESP Implementation

The implementation of digital design projects created a collaborative and participatory classroom environment. Students engaged in group discussions, divided responsibilities, and developed visual products that were subsequently presented in English. These activities supported the development of creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy—key components of twenty-first-century competencies (Kóris, 2023). Within the ESP framework, this strategy reflects an attempt to integrate language learning directly with vocational practice.

However, analysis of presentation sessions reveals that English usage tended to be textual and script-dependent. Students' ability to explain design concepts argumentatively or respond spontaneously to questions remained limited. This suggests that the integration of projects was stronger in the visual and technical dimensions than in the reinforcement of professional communication performance.

In line with Marzuki and Hamid (2023), project-based learning in ESP must be accompanied by explicit linguistic design to effectively support professional communication competence. Without clearly defined language indicators, projects risk becoming engaging contextual activities that do not fully maximize the development of field-specific communicative skills. Therefore, this study underscores that project integration in ESP should be supported by structured language planning in order to produce a more significant impact on students' professional communication readiness.

5. Evaluation and Assessment: The Gap Between Objectives and Measurement

Assessment documentation indicates that evaluation was conducted through group presentations, focusing primarily on participation and students' willingness to speak. While this approach encourages active involvement, no explicit rubric was found that measures professional terminology use, sentence structure accuracy, or communication fluency.

Within the ESP framework, assessment should reflect authentic professional tasks and employ performance-based criteria (Basturkmen, 2010). Without structured evaluation instruments, professional competence outcomes cannot be measured objectively.

These findings confirm Iskandar and Lestari's (2024) argument regarding the importance of authentic assessment in vocational ESP. However, this study further demonstrates that the absence of performance-based rubrics does not merely affect measurement outcomes; it also influences instructional direction, as students naturally focus on what is formally assessed.

The practical implication is the need to develop performance-based assessment rubrics that explicitly include design terminology usage, pronunciation clarity, argumentative explanation, and interactive responsiveness. Such structured evaluation would ensure that contextual learning is aligned with measurable professional communication standards.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the Visual Communication Design program at SMK Negeri 2 Gorontalo, focusing on needs analysis, materials development, and assessment. The findings indicate that English instruction has adopted a contextual orientation aligned with the characteristics of the major through digital design projects and relevant vocabulary integration. This reflects pedagogical awareness of learner-centered ESP principles.

However, ESP implementation remains adaptive rather than systematically grounded in formal needs analysis. Instructional planning has not yet incorporated structured identification of industry communication requirements, resulting in limited depth of linguistic materials and assessment practices that do not fully reflect professional demands. Consequently, the objective of developing measurable professional communication competence has not yet been fully achieved.

It is therefore recommended that the school conduct industry-based needs analysis collaboratively with design field stakeholders to strengthen curriculum relevance. English teachers should also develop materials and performance-based assessment rubrics that explicitly measure

students' linguistic and communicative competencies. Future research may consider comparative studies across different vocational programs or incorporate perspectives from students and industry practitioners to provide a more comprehensive understanding of ESP implementation.

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