

**English for Specific Purposes: Teaching to Perceived Students' Needs from Teachers'  
Perspective in Solo, Indonesia**

*Nurlia Irvani*

*Nur Kartika Soffiany*

*Solo State University, Indonesia*

### **Abstract**

Nowadays, English worldwide transmission has led to a diversity of English language needs. There is an obvious need for pedagogical practitioners to be aware of and understand this trend. This is extremely reflected in the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This paper argues that the current general English courses offered in Solo Vocational High Schools (VHSs) are not adequate in terms of relevance and connection to students' future jobs, and proposes that a possible solution is in the way of English for Specific Purposes, which may bridge the gap between the general English curriculum offered in VHSs, and the needs of students for their future careers. This study explores teachers' perspective to perceived students' needs in VHSs in Solo. This research uses qualitative in nature and employs some VHSs in Solo. Finally, the implications of the result are discussed.

*Keywords:* English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Vocational High School (VHS), students' needs, teachers' perspective.

## **English for Specific Purposes: Teaching to Perceived Students' Needs from Teachers' Perspective in Solo, Indonesia**

The study of English for specific purposes has been widely known as a long and varied history (Strevens, in Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991)). It gives big influence toward English, as it has obtained ascendancy in international issues such as science, technology, and trade. The English for specific purposes (e.g., English for business, English for science and technology, and English for vocational high schools) becomes crucial throughout the worldwide necessities.

This research focuses on the current state of English for Specific Purposes for Vocational High School by surveying key issues: needs analysis and its goals, especially in instructional methods, the role of the teachers and the role of the learners. A view of ESP as it is proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) in the statement, 'Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need' (Belcher, 2006).

Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at a Vocational High School has its own challenge. Teacher has to answer a lot of questions; Are there really major differences between teaching English for Specific Purposes and teaching general English? Do the goals of the students differ widely? Is there a noticeable difference in motivation?

To address these questions specifically, the writers interviewed some teachers of the English language to brainstorm the differences and the similarities between general and specific English. This study also explores the teachers' perspective to perceived students' needs in VHSs in Solo. Finally, the writers hope that this study will lead to the discussion about the important issue of teaching English for VHSs.

### **Method**

This research used qualitative study in nature. Creswell (2003) stated more of text and images were collected than numbers. This type of research was qualitative case study. It was intended to explore a phenomenon in depth. It meant that the researcher examined in-depth condition about the teaching of English in some vocational high schools in Solo. The case was limited by time and activity. Moreover, the researcher used purposive samples and collects detailed information regarding the unit of analysis. It concerned with the English teacher' perspectives.

### **Techniques and Data Collection Instruments**

The research data was collected through three techniques, namely: interview, observation, and documentation. First, interview technique was used to obtain the data related to the English teachers' perspective in the VHSs in Solo. The writers used an interview guideline as the research instrument. Then, the result of the interview is typed into the transcript. Second, the observation was used to obtain a general overview of teaching English in VHSs. This technique helped the researchers to describe perfectly about the students needs and the learning needs. Third, documentation was used by the writers to enrich their findings. Some documents such as pictures, module, books and others data were used to support the result of their research.

### **Data Validity Procedures**

To ensure the data obtained by the researcher was valid, the researchers used triangulation and thick description. The triangulation was conducted by comparing the data resulted from interview, observation, and documentation. Then, the thick description was used to gain an overview of the result of the research.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The research data was analyzed through six steps as presented by Creswell (2003). *First*, the researcher organized and prepared the data from interview, observation, and documentation for analysis. *Second*, the researchers read through all the data in order to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect its meaning. *Third*, the researchers began detailed analysis with a coding process. *Fourth*, the researchers used the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis. *Fifth*, the writers represented the data from the previous steps in the qualitative narrative. Then, in the final step, the researchers interpreted the data. This interpretation or meaning of the data was based on comparison between the result of the study with the information from literature or theories.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **RQ. 1 What are VHS students' perspective of their English language study?**

- (1) The first set of questions aimed to extract information the needs, reasons and motivations for learning English. Besides, the student's response were the recognition of the global status of English and the beneficial of English for their future career development. The typical of statement as follows:

*'Because English is international language, students should master it. '*

*'Because English is important language for communicating, if we don't learn we will left behind.'*

*'English is important in workplace, it will help us to get better job.'*

(2) The second set of questions was associated with students' English learning experiences in and opinions on their VHS English courses. Several points were drawn from their responses and were summarized as follows:

a. Content: The content of textbook is grammar oriented. There is only few contextual text. It makes the student become difficult to gain their capability in their major to communicate it in everyday life. For example, one student states:

*'Everything is about grammar, there is no text, I get confuse when find the text in the exam test.'*

b. Teaching method: The teacher uses traditional method. It makes the students lack of motivation to receive the material. The students need interesting material, method, and media to help them getting maximal understanding about the course. Besides, the English skill training is focused more on reading and writing than on speaking skills. However, communication skills are the skills that students would like to improve and practice more. Respondents stated that:

*'It is more about writing and reading. It is difficult for us to learn how to speak. I think speaking skill should get more concerning in the term of practicing for communication. In addition, vocabulary seems to be the main element of English, but students don not see the value of memorizing vocabulary mechanically'*

c. Practices: English learning in school lacks practicality, applicability, and flexibility. The text or articles is not practical enough to show students the real application of English. Typical responses were:

*'Even though the text/ article in English textbooks contain many common words; I still feel they do not really approach our daily life conversation.'*

### **RQ. 1 What are VHS students' perceived needs from their English study?**

After finding the students' perspectives and experiences of English study in VHSs the researcher further explored their perceived English learning needs by asking the following questions about the areas, and types of English learning that students want to learn, and what VHS courses actually provide. The students were then asked to what extent they thought the courses fulfill their English learning needs.

The responses to the question of the areas that students wanted to learn mainly concerned job-related English, with good communication skills needed. For example, students stated:

*'I may want to learn English more if it is related to my future career'. Maybe the teacher can learn me more about the things related with my major.'*

The data reveals that the English taught in VHSs is general English with only mechanical engineering. The material taught by student is also only about the grammar without context. Students feel that their General English courses are neither practical nor helpful for their future job prospects. For example:

*'I think that the content in the English course book fails to meet my future job which means I am not learning at all'.*

Students point out that English will become more meaningful if they can see its relevance to their specific major and potential to their future career. The typical statements were:

*'Because the things we learned are not related to our major, they are very general, that is way I think there is no connection between English I learn in school and the English that I will be required by my future career or job interview'.*

In addition, there is a number of students who give positive opinions towards rewriting English textbooks to put more focus on job-related English. For example:

*'I think it would be better if textbooks were revised to prepare vocational students for future career preparation and English ability improvement. It is the reason learning English is more useful for our future.'*

By seeing the above explanation, this research has looked at students' perspective of, and perceived needs from, their English study in VHSs. VHSs students think that job-related English is important and beneficial in terms of increasing their competitiveness in the job market. However, there is positive feedback from some students about English course textbooks.

## **RQ. 2 What are VHS teachers' perspective on English courses offered in VHSs?**

Teachers' perspective on English course provided by VHSs reflected three types of English taught in VHSs:

- (1) The course is grammar oriented. The topic in English courses is about grammar. It is about present tense, past tense, future tense, etc. The students tend to achieve their competence in grammar mastery. It will be the problem for students for using English in their daily life and in their future career.
- (2) The textbook is general for all majors. Teacher finds the course book that students used is same for all majors. It means the topic of student in mechanical engineering is the same as the topic for secretary student. Whereas, the implementation both of the major in the job areas are different.
- (3) Students need motivation from the teacher. The role of teacher in English course is big in the term of giving them high motivation. The psychological of vocational



student and senior high school student is different. Since, the aims of both student give two sides of perspective senior high students struggle to get the best university as their further study. Meanwhile, vocational student oriented are getting job. They think mastering their major is enough. English is a subject that is quiet important.

Typical responses to the three types of English currently taught are:

- (1) *'I consider English learning is very important to be learned in Vocational High School. Since, the output of VHSs are ready to get the job. Learning process in VHSs is good. But, in my opinion, it will be better if the speaking area is getting focused on than grammar oriented. Although, the grammar is important, but the ability for using English in daily life for communication is needed for VHSs.'*
- (2) *I think the government should consider about the need of student. It is better if the textbooks for every major be specified. So, the student will be easily to implement in the working area. For example: mechanic student is well known with the word liquid than water.*
- (3) *There were many factors making student difficult to communicate using English. They were lack of vocabulary, feeling shy, afraid of making mistake. Therefore, the role of English teacher to build up the VHSs' motivation is exactly needed.*

**RQ.2 To what extent do the English courses have beneficial for students in respect of their future job competitiveness?**

Teachers' responses revealed that English in VHSs appears to be a supporting subject for advancing students further education. Teachers consider that subject of English is suitable for VHS students because:

1. English course can help student to struggle in getting job. Since, the syllabus is planned to prepare the students for getting a job.
2. English is a global language. It can help student to get best job in abroad.

Teacher shows positive views towards the potential of English courses to be either a combination of general and career English or more subject/ job-oriented English.

Typical statements were:

- (1) *The job life demands the students to have better communication in English. English course helps VHSs to use English in the real context. Because, the syllabus, the lesson plan, and teaching strategies is planned for the students' need.*
  
- (2) *I think English is very important today. Because, English is international language. We live in very fast globalization area. If the students can master English well, they will be powerful to get better job than the others.*

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the English education offered in VHSs has been criticized for the domination of the English textbook and lack of consideration of the English practices appropriate to the job life setting into which VHSs graduates tend to be recruited. The case shows that the general English curriculum provided by VHS is left behind with the goal of training students for specific professional competency.

Dealing with the focus on *English for Specific Purposes* applications for particular learners in specific contexts, this study suggests that an ESP approach may be to general English in VHS contexts, so that students' perceived needs from their English courses and specific

reasons for learning English are addressed. As an ESP approach, it also gives the bridge gap between curriculum offered in VHD and the students' preparation for their further job.

ESP is currently implemented in vocational language training program for refugees and business. Within the standard educational framework, ESP mainly offered at university level, with general English at school level. Numerous ESP studies have been conducted at university level (Crosling and Ward, 2002; Kaewpt 2009). In addition, the vast majority of the ESP development and its pedagogical practices is carried out at this level (Hyland, 2002).

According the perception of theory ESP above, there are some arguments against the practice of reserving ESP primarily for higher education, particularly for VHSs. (1) VHSs provide special curriculum to meet the necessities of different disciplines. General English is not focuses on vocabulary and language skill required to complement this specialized knowledge. Besides, ESP focus on students' target goals and to prioritize specific competencies. (2) Arguing the statement that secondary level students are not ready to learn ESP as they do not have the relevant English. The ideas of Widdowson (1984), he said that the idea of language learning happens when the learning suits the learners' needs and purposes.

Nevertheless, as an ESP need analysis, it is not only just based on learners' perceived needs, but also the further study of the student that should be carried out to determine the actual English needs for VHS students in their chosen job life.

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