

Needs Analysis of English Teaching Materials for Vocational High School Students: Preparing for the World of Work

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ABSTRACT

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in vocational education plays a pivotal role in preparing students for professional communication in their future workplaces. However, many English materials used in Indonesian vocational high schools (SMK) still focus on general English, with limited relevance to the students' vocational fields. This study aims to analyze the English material needs of SMK students to ensure alignment with the linguistic demands of the world of work especially in tourism. Using a qualitative descriptive method, interview to the students, literature-based analysis, the study identifies the gaps between current teaching materials and workplace communication needs. Findings reveal that English materials should emphasize job-related communication, technical vocabulary, and intercultural competence. The study suggests that English teachers and curriculum developers integrate authentic workplace tasks and collaborate with industry professionals to design effective, context-based learning materials.

Keywords: Needs Analysis, ESP, Vocational Education, English Materials

1. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia's rapidly evolving job market, English proficiency has become a key employability skill. Vocational high schools (SMK) are designed to prepare students for specific professions, yet English teaching in these schools often fails to reflect the language demands of real workplaces. Many SMK English courses still adopt general English textbooks emphasizing grammar and reading comprehension rather than communicative competence relevant to specific industries.

Needs analysis is a vital process in designing effective English teaching materials for vocational purposes. It identifies the linguistic skills, vocabulary, and communication tasks required in particular professions (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) [1]. When English instruction matches workplace needs, students become more motivated and better prepared for employment. To implement English for Specific Purposes (ESP), appropriate teaching materials are required. It cannot be denied that teaching materials play an important role in determining the success of learning (see Richards, 1998 [2]; Harmer, 1996 [3]; Hutchinson & Torres, 1994 [4];

Cunningsworth, 1995 [5]; Richards, 2001 [6]; and Karomouzian, 2010 [7]). Richards (2001:225) [8], for instance, clearly states that teaching materials are a key component in language teaching and serve as the foundation for learners in learning a language.

This paper aims to analyze English learning materials for vocational high school students majoring in tourism, the English material needs of SMK students, identify the gaps between existing resources and job requirements, and propose recommendations for developing relevant teaching materials aligned with ESP principles.

1.1. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Vocational Education

ESP focuses on teaching English tailored to specific professional or academic contexts. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) [9], ESP emphasizes learner-centeredness, relevance, and practicality. In vocational schools, ESP connects language learning with technical subjects such as hospitality, tourism, automotive engineering, and business.

Basturkmen (2010) [10] highlights that ESP courses should start with needs analysis — the process of identifying what learners must do with English in their target workplace. This ensures that learning materials contain realistic communication tasks, such as making reservations, writing reports, or responding to clients.

1.2. Needs Analysis in English Language Teaching

Needs analysis examines what learners know, what they need to know, and how they will use the language (Richards, 2001) [11]. It involves three dimensions:

1. Target needs: what students will need English for in their future jobs.
2. Learning needs: what students need to learn effectively.
3. Present situation analysis: the learners' current proficiency levels and resources.

A well-conducted needs analysis provides a foundation for developing relevant materials, selecting appropriate teaching methods, and designing assessments aligned with vocational goals.

1.3. English Material Development for Vocational Contexts

Material development in vocational English must incorporate authentic tasks, job-related vocabulary, and communicative situations. Nation and Macalister (2010) [12] emphasize that materials should balance meaning-focused input (listening and reading), meaning-focused output (speaking and writing), language-focused learning (grammar and vocabulary), and fluency development.

In SMK contexts, English materials should reflect workplace realities — for example, hospitality students practicing guest interactions, or engineering students reading manuals and safety instructions. Authenticity and practicality make learning more meaningful and effective.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method. According to Boyd (2007: 1) [13], qualitative research is a systematic process of collecting information about what people naturally say and do in order to understand situations realistically. The primary data sources in this study are ten vocational high school students majoring in tourism, while the secondary data sources come from various textbooks. The researcher collaborated with the teacher in conducting interviews and searching for books relevant to the study.

Data were collected through interviews and document analysis. The interviews were conducted with the research subjects, consisting of vocational high school students, while document analysis was carried out by collecting all relevant English teaching books. The analysis focused on identifying the types of English skills and competencies needed in various vocational fields, the gaps between current English materials and workplace communication requirements, and strategies for developing English teaching materials that reflect industry needs.

This method was chosen to synthesize insights from multiple studies and formulate practical recommendations for teachers and curriculum developers. Data analysis was performed using the interactive analysis technique proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984) [14]. There are four steps in this analysis: (1) data collection; (2) data reduction; (3) data display; and (4) conclusion drawing or verification. Each stage was conducted in a structured and well-planned manner.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher conducted interviews with ten (10) respondents who were vocational high school students majoring in tourism in Bojonegoro. The questions asked were:

- (1) Are you interested in learning English?
- (2) In learning English, what skills or abilities do you need?
- (3) What kind of English learning conditions or classroom situations do you prefer?
- (4) What types of English learning tasks do you need?

Based on the interview results from the ten vocational students, it was found that, in general, they need to learn English for specific purposes (English for Specific Purposes). This can be seen from the results of the interview transcripts as follows:

Table 1. English Learning Needs

S1: Saya butuh menguasai dan belajar bahasa Inggris agar saya mampu berkomunikasi dengan orang Asing dan dapat mempraktekkannya.
S2: Saya ingin bisa ngomong bahasa Inggris dengan lancar dan cas cis cus
S3: Saya ingin belajar bahasa Inggris agar tahu informasi
S4: Saya tertarik belajar bahasa Inggris agar bisa bekerja di perusahaan

S5: Saya tidak tertarik belajar bahasa Inggris karena susah terutama di grammarnya
S6: Saya mau belajar bahasa Inggris agar mengerti apa yang disampaikan bule.
S7: Saya bersedia belajar bahasa Inggris setiap hari
S8: Mau sekali belajar speaking, agar bisa terlihat keren.
S9: Saya sangat mau belajar bahasa Inggris demi masa depan yang lebih baik
S10: Saya suka bahasa Inggris agar setelah lulus bisa jalan-jalan ke luar negeri.

Students' needs in terms of language skills vary. Speaking skill is the most needed ability. However, some respondents also expressed their desire to improve their listening and writing skills. The following are the detailed responses from the students:

Table 2. Required Language Skills

S1: Saya ingin kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris, sehingga saya dapat berkomunikasi dengan turis.
S2: Saya memerlukan keterampilan Speaking dan Listening karena keduanya saling berkaitan
S3: Speaking dan writing sangat penting dan yang paling saya perlukan adalah Speaking.
S4: Intinya saya bisa ngomong bahasa Inggris
S5: Bisa praktik langsung ngomong bahasa Inggris yang sederhana
S6: Bisa langsung bertemu turis dan ngomong bahasa Inggris
S7: Bahasa Inggris yang sederhana yang setiap hari digunakan
S8: Yang sangat dibutuhkan di dunia pariwisata kayaknya hanya lancar speaking
S9: Harus bisa speaking dan writing karena suatu saat kita disuruh menulis
S10: Intinya saya paham turis berbicara bahasa Inggris

The ideal learning atmosphere for students is one that is comfortable, relaxed, and not burdensome. In a calm and relaxed environment, students can concentrate and focus on learning. This is reflected in their responses below:

Table 3. Preferred Learning Situation

S1: Saya ingin suasana santai dan tetap fokus
S2: Suasana tenang dan bisa di mana saja
S3: Situasi menyenangkan dan tidak terlalu formal
S4: Nyaman dan santai
S5: Hening dan focus dalam belajar
S6: Santai dan bercanda ria
S7: Belajar sambil ngemil makanan ringan
S8: Belajar di bawah pohon rindang
S9: Di aula yang luas
S10: Santai dan ada musiknya

Students generally do not like being given learning tasks. They prefer to study in class together with their friends and, as much as possible, avoid homework, as it would add to their burden. The time at home, according to them, can be better used to help their parents with household chores. This is illustrated in the table below:

Table 4. Required Project Assignments

S1: Saya tidak ingin ada PR karena malas mengerjakannya
S2: Saya lebih suka praktik saja dari pada diberi tugas proyek
S3: Saya lebih suka tugas yang nyata di kehidupan sehari-hari
S4: Jangan ada tugas
S5: Saya tidak suka diberi beban saat di rumah
S6: Tugas bisa dikerjakan bersama-sama
S7: Saya ingin tugas yang mudah saja dan tidak terlalu banyak
S8: Tidak ada tugas atau proyek
S9: Lebih baik belajar di kelas dari pada mengerjakan tugas
S10: Tugas sangat memberatkan

3.1. Workplace English Needs

The tourism industry requires employees to possess adequate English communication skills to interact effectively with international visitors. Workplace English for tourism refers to the specific language competencies, vocabulary, and communicative strategies used in real workplace contexts such as hotels, travel agencies, restaurants, and tour operations. These language needs encompass speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, with a strong emphasis on politeness, clarity, and intercultural communication. For instance, tourism employees are expected to greet guests warmly, provide accurate information about services or destinations, handle complaints professionally, and respond to written inquiries appropriately. In addition to language proficiency, cultural awareness plays a crucial role in ensuring respectful and effective communication with visitors from diverse backgrounds.

Research in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) highlights that English instruction for tourism should integrate authentic materials, situational role plays, and task-based learning activities that mirror real workplace interactions (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987 [15]; Basturkmen, 2010 [16]). Therefore, English language programs designed for tourism students or professionals must be based on a thorough needs analysis to ensure that the materials and teaching methods address their actual communicative demands in the workplace.

The analysis indicates that workplace English communication involves a combination of general and job-specific language functions. Common needs include:

- Oral communication: interacting with customers, supervisors, and colleagues in English.
- Written communication: writing emails, reports, and job-related documents.
- Reading comprehension: understanding manuals, instructions, and online information.
- Listening skills: following directions, understanding meetings, and phone conversations.

For example, students in the hospitality sector must learn polite requests, greetings, and complaint handling; students in the automotive field need technical vocabulary and report writing; and those in business programs need to understand invoices, correspondence, and negotiations.

3.2. Gaps in Existing English Materials

Current English textbooks used in SMKs often contain generic topics such as “introducing oneself” or “daily

routines,” which are insufficient for professional communication. Widodo (2016) [17] found that most SMK materials lack authenticity and contextual relevance. Teachers tend to rely on national textbooks without adapting them to local industry needs.

Although vocational schools aim to prepare students for employment, the existing English teaching materials often fail to meet the real communicative demands of the workplace. Most English textbooks used in vocational schools tend to emphasize general English proficiency rather than the specific language functions, vocabulary, and interaction patterns required in students’ future professions. As a result, the materials are frequently limited to grammatical exercises and reading comprehension tasks that do not reflect authentic workplace communication. In the tourism sector, for instance, students are rarely exposed to practical language use such as handling guest complaints, giving directions, responding to customer inquiries, or writing professional emails—all of which are essential in real job settings.

Studies in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) indicate that such mismatches arise from the lack of needs analysis and insufficient collaboration between schools and industry sectors (Basturkmen, 2010 [18]; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998 [19]). Consequently, there exists a significant gap between the English competence developed in vocational schools and the communicative competence required in the workplace, particularly in tourism-related fields. Addressing this gap requires the development of context-based and occupation-specific English materials that align more closely with authentic workplace situations.

Additionally, listening and speaking components are underrepresented, while writing and grammar dominate the lessons. As a result, students are not adequately prepared for real communication in workplaces that require active use of English.

3.3. Developing Context-Based English Materials

The development of context-based English materials is grounded in the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and contextual learning theory, both of which emphasize the importance of relevance and authenticity in language instruction. Unlike traditional materials that focus on general grammar and vocabulary, context-based materials are created based on learners’ specific professional needs and real-life communication situations. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) [20] argue that effective ESP materials should originate from a systematic

needs analysis, which identifies the target situations, communicative functions, and language competencies required in the workplace. Similarly, Tomlinson (2011) [21] highlights that contextualized materials promote deeper engagement and meaningful learning because students can see the direct relevance of language use in their prospective careers. In this sense, context-based English materials serve not only as linguistic input but also as tools for developing learners' problem-solving abilities, cultural awareness, and confidence in authentic communication.

In the context of vocational education, particularly in tourism programs, developing context-based English materials becomes increasingly vital. Tourism students need to master language functions related to customer service, hospitality, tour guiding, and intercultural interaction. However, most English materials used in vocational schools remain dominated by general English content, which fails to address the specific communicative tasks students will face in the workplace. By integrating realistic scenarios—such as greeting guests, giving directions, managing reservations, and responding to complaints—context-based materials enable students to practice authentic communication and develop job-specific competencies. These materials also allow teachers to implement student-centered approaches such as Think-Pair-Share (TPS) and TPACK-based instruction, which combine pedagogical, technological, and content knowledge to create interactive and meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, the development of context-based English materials tailored for tourism students can significantly enhance their readiness to meet workplace demands and improve their overall communicative competence.

Effective vocational English materials should include:

1. Authentic tasks: job interviews, customer service dialogues, technical discussions, and report writing.
2. Industry-based vocabulary: terms and expressions specific to students' vocational majors.
3. Cultural competence: understanding cross-cultural communication in international workplaces.
4. Integration with vocational subjects: linking English learning with professional content (Content-Based Instruction).

Example:

In a tourism program, lessons might involve creating tour brochures or role-playing hotel front desk scenarios.

In business administration, students might practice writing memos and conducting online meetings in English.

3.4. Teacher Roles and Professional Development

Teachers play a critical role in bridging the gap between classroom learning and workplace communication. However, many English teachers in SMKs lack experience or training in ESP and vocational fields (Saragih, 2014) [22]. Therefore, professional development programs should include ESP workshops, collaboration with industry experts, and exposure to workplace communication models.

Teacher collaboration with vocational subject instructors can also lead to integrated lessons that are both linguistically and technically relevant.

4. CONCLUSION

Needs analysis is the cornerstone of designing effective English teaching materials for vocational high school students. By understanding the specific language demands of the workplace, educators can create materials that are both practical and motivating.

English instruction in SMKs should shift from general English to context-based ESP, focusing on communication, authenticity, and intercultural awareness. Collaborative curriculum design, industry involvement, and teacher training are essential to ensure that English education truly prepares students for real-world employment.

Future research should explore the implementation of needs-based materials in different vocational fields and evaluate their impact on students' communicative competence and job readiness.

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