



Improving Students' English Language Skills with an English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Approach in the Center of Excellence Vocational School Curriculum

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Abstract. This study investigates the effectiveness of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach in improving English language skills among students in Indonesia's Center of Excellence Vocational Schools (SMK), which are known for preparing job-ready graduates. The ESP approach focuses on teaching English relevant to the students' vocational fields. The research compared the English skills of students in a control class using the standard curriculum with those in an experimental class using the ESP curriculum. Both pre- and post-tests were administered. The results were promising: the average score in the experimental class (79.71) was significantly higher than the control class (77.30). Statistical analysis using regression further confirmed this positive impact, with a significance value (sig.) of 0.16, which is lower than the standard threshold of 0.05. These findings strongly suggest that the ESP approach leads to significant improvement in English language skills for students in SMK's Center of Excellence program.

Keywords: English; English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Approach; Center of Excellence, Vocational School Curriculum

1 Introduction

In Indonesia, vocational high schools, or SMKs, play a bigger role in stimulating the labor market by producing workers who are qualified and prepared to make both professional and direct contributions to the advancement of the industrial world. According to Jenny Lee et al. (2017), the vocational education sector in Indonesia maintains a vast network of more than 13,000 vocational schools, offering specialized training in a wide range of professions that contribute to the creation of millions of workforces. This helps the industrial world through graduates who flood the country's industrial market every year and penetrate world or foreign markets through professional skills created by Vocational Schools through the role of ready-to-use Student Professional Workers.

English language skills are a must-have skill for vocational school students and this ability provides added value for prospective vocational school workers globally. English is an embodiment of an international language; this ability is a must for students who will become candidates for professional employment.

Vocational Schools, in this case, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) through the Directorate General of Vocational Education, continue to transform vocational school education in Indonesia. This is stated in the Decree of the Minister of Education Number 464/M/2021 concerning one of the programs being implemented, namely the SMK PK program or known as the SMK Center of Excellence. Through this program, schools are given the freedom to design the learning process using a Project Based Learning system involving several lessons.

The Center of Excellence Vocational School Program (CoE) is designed to elevate vocational schools (SMK) in Indonesia. This initiative focuses on developing specific skill sets within these schools. The program emphasizes partnerships and collaboration with businesses and industries, ensuring graduates are well-prepared for the workforce. Ultimately, CoE schools aim to become models of excellence, providing guidance and inspiration for continuous improvement across the vocational school system. The program also offers mentoring support from qualified universities, helping CoE schools build upon their achievements.

The SMK PK curriculum also has special things, namely the curriculum structure, especially in English subjects. The method and process uses a PBL-based learning process connected to every skill in the education unit. Vocational School of Technology is one that carries out the mandate of the school in the Center for Excellence School program where this process is carried out starting from the first stage in 2020 to 2023 with various program contexts that focus on the concept of paradigm change which is presented on the Education map of the Ministry of Education and then in represented by the Education unit, in this case the Technology Vocational School.

The learning process carried out is a process that gives students or students the freedom to explore themselves through the PBL and PJBL approaches. In the learning process, English is a subject that is affected by the PK Vocational School program. With this PJBL concept, teachers are required to apply a learning process that not only meets writing, reading and other skills. The process itself still requires thorough in-depth study by the teacher and this is mapped out comprehensively in order to produce what is required in the standards of graduates in the center of excellence school program.

The English language learning process at Technology Vocational Schools applies the Merdeka curriculum or center of excellence curriculum with a PJBL-based learning process with an ESP (English for Specific Purpose) approach. The results he obtained were very representative of what the curriculum expected by focusing more on skills in each major concentration. That is the effort that is expected based on the flow of educational goals and learning objectives in English subjects in particular.

Based on the background presented, this research aims to carry out an improvement process related to English language skills using the ESP (English For Specific Purpose) Approach in the Center of Excellence Vocational School curriculum.

2 Literature Review

The appropriate learning method is the method needed to convey a meaningful learning process that will be obtained by students. This is in line with the opinion of Sudjana (2005: 76) who says that the method is a comprehensive plan for presenting language learning material regularly, there is no one conflicting parts, and all are based on a particular approach. Another thing says that "a plan of operation achieving something" while the method is "a way in achieving something" (Sanjaya, 2010). In other words, a method is a method that is applied and is a regular and gradual step to achieve certain goals under certain conditions.

Based on what was explained by Uno Hamzah B. (2011:17) learning methods are the methods used by educators to achieve learning. In line with what Ahmadi (1985:152) said, learning methods are the way educators provide learning, the way students receive lessons during the lesson, either in the form of informing or awakening. In other words, based on the explanation above, the method is a process that is needed to produce learning objectives that are adapted to the students. When using a method, we must focus on thinking about the subjectivity of the method. This principle will later function as a process of strengthening what is done later so that in the end there is a strong reason for the achievement process.

Djamarah (2022:82) said that the method is an extrinsic motivation tool that functions actively because of external stimuli that can stimulate a person's learning. In other words, the method as a tool of extrinsic motivation means that the method is a means of external stimulation, which can stimulate students to learn from the outside and make students accept lessons easily and happily.

There are several things conveyed by Zainal (2016) that there are several principles that need to be considered when using teaching methods, which are related to factors in the development of students' abilities, including the following:

- a. Teaching methods must enable students to arouse further curiosity about the subject matter (curiosity).
- b. Teaching methods must enable opportunities for creative expression in aspects of art.
- c. Teaching methods must allow students to learn through problem solving.
- d. Teaching methods must enable students to always want to test the truth of something (skeptical attitude).
- e. Teaching methods must enable students to make discoveries (inquiry) regarding a problem topic.
- f. Teaching methods must enable students to be able to listen.
- g. Teaching methods must allow students to learn independently (independent study).
- h. Teaching methods must allow students to learn collaboratively (cooperative learning).
- i. Teaching methods must enable students to be more motivated in their learning.

It can be seen that the principle that needs to be considered in the process of applying teaching methods is that teaching methods must enable students to see and pay attention

to the teacher's explanation, which is related to factors in the development of students' abilities. To create an efficient and effective atmosphere.

Based on Ramayulis (2005:12), the factors that must be considered in choosing a teaching method are as follows:

- a. Goals to be achieved. Everyone who does something must clearly understand the goals they want to achieve. Thus, educators or every teacher whose main job is to educate and teach must clearly understand the goals of education. Apart from being a target and being a director, educational goals and direction also function as criteria for selecting and determining the tools (including methods) that will be used in teaching.
- b. Learners. The students who will receive the learning materials presented must also be considered by the teacher in choosing teaching methods. The use of teaching methods must be appropriate to the developmental abilities and personalities of the students.
- c. Lesson material. Learning materials that require investigative activities by students should be presented through the unit method or project method.
- d. Facility. Included in these facility factors include teaching aids, space, space and practicum equipment, books, libraries. This facility also determines the teaching methods that will be used by teachers.
- e. Situation. What is included in the situation here is the condition of the students which concerns their fatigue, their enthusiasm, the weather conditions, the condition of the teacher, the condition of the classes adjacent to the class that will be taught using a particular method.
- f. Participation. Participation is taking an active part in an activity. If the teacher wants students to be equally active in an activity, the teacher will of course use the group method. Likewise, if students are desired to participate in a scientific activity, for example collecting data which is then presented in a scientific discussion, then of course the teacher will use the unit method or seminar method.
- g. Teacher. The use of teaching methods requires conditions that need to be met, for example, every teacher who will use a particular method must understand that method.

It can be concluded that the factors that must be considered in choosing a teaching method must be consistent with the content delivered by the teacher to create a learning process.

This section explores the impact of SMK Technology's Center of Excellence status on its English language learning process. The school utilizes an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) approach, where instruction is customized to each technical department. This aligns with Hutchinson and Waters' (1994) definition of ESP, which emphasizes tailoring learning content and methods to the students' specific reasons for learning English. In essence, ESP focuses on using English within specialized fields and professions. It caters to the needs of scientific and practical domains that rely on English, such as law, medicine, engineering, and economics. The ultimate goal is to equip students with the English skills they need to thrive in academic, professional, or workplace

settings. The curriculum is meticulously designed based on a thorough analysis of these specific requirements.

According to Robinson (1990), ESP stands out due to three key features: 1) Goal-Oriented Learning: Unlike general English classes that focus on broader cultural understanding, ESP prioritizes specific goals. Students learn English to meet their academic or professional needs in a particular field; 2) Needs-Based Design: ESP curriculum is meticulously crafted through a "needs analysis." This process identifies and integrates the specific requirements of students in their chosen academic and professional fields; 3) Focus on Adult Learners: ESP is typically geared towards adults pursuing vocational or academic studies rather than children or teenagers. By understanding these characteristics, it's clear that ESP offers students significant advantages. This targeted approach equips them with the English skills they need to reach their academic and professional goals more effectively.

Learning English for Specific Purposes has a very important role in vocational school (Vocational High School) education. ESP at SMK allows students to acquire English language skills that are highly relevant to the world of work they are entering. According to education experts, Dudley-Evans (1997) revealed that ESP in the vocational school context helps students to develop communication skills in English that are appropriate to the needs and situations in their future work. By focusing on specific competencies, such as vocabulary and situations related to their profession, students can be more prepared and confident when entering the world of work. Therefore, learning ESP in vocational schools is a very relevant and useful step in preparing students to be successful in their careers.

Another opinion comes from John Swales, a famous ESP expert. Swales (1990) emphasized the importance of ESP in the vocational school context by saying that ESP allows students to develop English language skills that focus on their specific needs in the work or field they are involved in. This allows them to be more efficient and effective in communicating in their work environment. ESP learning in vocational schools also helps students to understand the types of language and terminology used in their profession so that they can easily adapt and develop in an increasingly competitive world of work. The two experts mentioned above agree that ESP learning in vocational schools is very important because it helps students prepare for their careers by focusing on their professional needs and situations. They also agree that ESP leads to learning that has specific objectives and is relevant to the student's professional field.

3 Method

This study employs a quantitative approach, aligning with Nana S. Sukmadinata's (2010) definition. Quantitative research emphasizes objective phenomena that can be measured and analyzed numerically through statistics, structures, and controlled experiments. The specific method used is experimentation, as described by Arikunto (2000). Experimentation aims to determine the impact of a "treatment" on the subjects being

studied. In this context, the "treatment" refers to the implementation of a new curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education, specifically the Center of Excellence Curriculum.

This research aims to find out and test whether there is an effect of increasing English language skills by using the English For Specific Purpose (ESP) approach in the vocational school curriculum at centers of excellence. The population taken in this research included all technology vocational school students and the sample used the Random Sampling Technique. This research begins by examining things that are related to each other based on research variables, then pretests and posttests are carried out on respondents, the data is then processed using quantitative analysis.

Sugiyono (2009:114) stated that this research used a nonequivalent control group design, which can be seen from the table 1.

Table 1. Nonequivalent control group design

Class	Pre-test	Independent Variable	Post-test
Experiment class	01	X	02
Control class	01	-	02

Note: 01: Pre-test; 02: Post-test; X: Treatment

Pretest and posttest data were first studied by looking for descriptive statistical values for each variable based on the variables in this study. This is in accordance with what was conveyed by Sugiyono (2014:21), the descriptive analysis method is statistics used to analyze data by describing or illustrating the data that has been collected as it is without intending to make a conclusion that applies generally. With this statistical test, you can find the Mean, Median, Minimum, Maximum and Standard Deviation values.

This research ensures the validity of the instrument used in the study. Validity, as defined by Arikunto (2006), refers to the degree to which an instrument accurately measures what it's intended to measure. In simpler terms, it reflects how well the instrument captures the relevant variables. To assess this validity, the study employs a formula outlined by Arikunto (2010).

$$r_{xy} = \frac{N \sum xy - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{\{N \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2\} \{N \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2\}}} \quad (1)$$

Note:

r_{xy} : "r" product moment (between variabel X and variable Y)

N : Respondent number

x : Variable score of each item

y : Variable scores for multiple items

Then, after the descriptive statistical test data has been taken, the analysis prerequisite tests are continued by looking for Reliability, Normality and Homogeneity using the help of the SPSS Version 20 application. The research data is then continued with Hypothesis Testing using the Linear Regression statistical test.

4 Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis related to the data that have been presented were obtained based on research variables, including; description of respondents, pretest and posttest along with hypothesis analysis based on data findings. Table 2 provides an overview of information related to research respondents. From table 2 it can be seen that respondents were taken using a random sampling technique using 2 classes, namely class XII TJKT 1 as the control class and including pretest and posttest data collection.

Table 2. Research Respondent

No.	Respondent		Total
	Experiment Class	Control Class	
1	30	31	61

An analysis of descriptive statistics reveals differences in test scores between the Control and Experimental classes, as shown in Table 3. The average pre-test score for the Control class was 70.77, while the Experimental class scored significantly higher at 77.30. This trend continued in the post-test results, with the Control class averaging 71.87 and the Experimental class achieving a noticeably higher score of 79.71. These findings suggest a more substantial improvement in the Experimental class compared to the Control class.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistical Test Results

	Pre-test Ctrl	Pre-test Eks	Post-tests Ctrl	Post-test Eks
N Valid	30	31	30	31
Missing	1	0	1	0
Mean	70.77	71.87	77.30	79.71
Std. Error of Mean	1.253	.985	.682	.661
Median	69.50	70.00	77.00	79.00
Mode	66	70	77	79
Std. Deviation	6.862	5.482	3.734	3.681
Variance	47.082	30.049	13.941	13.546
Skewness	.065	.420	-.265	.123
Std. Error of Skewness	.427	.421	.427	.421
Kurtosis	-.705	-.699	-.289	1.172
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.833	.821	.833	.821
Range	27	19	13	17
Minimum	56	64	70	71
Maximum	83	83	83	88
Sums	2123	2228	2319	2471

After the descriptive statistical test is carried out, the reliability is then sought. From Table 4, it shows that the reliability test is $0.210 > 0.05$, so it can be concluded that the reliability of the data is very significant.

Table 4. Reliability Test Results

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.210	4

The next step involved checking if the data was normally distributed, which is a requirement for certain statistical tests. This normality test was conducted for each research variable in both the Control and Experimental classes, including both pre-test and post-test data (as shown in Table 5). The results indicated a significance value of 0.964, which is greater than the threshold of 0.05. In simpler terms, this means the data doesn't exhibit a statistically significant deviation from a normal distribution. Therefore, this analysis confirms that the data meets the normality assumption required for using a regression model in this study.

Table 5. Normality Test Results

		Unstandardized Residual
N		30
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	0E-7
	Std. Deviation	3.36030640
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.091
	Positive	.091
	Negative	-.077
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.500
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.964

a. Test Distribution is normal

b. Calculated from data

Following the normality test, the research examined whether the data exhibited homogeneity of variance. Homogeneity of variance means that the variances between the groups being compared are statistically similar. SPSS 20 software was used to conduct the Levene's statistic test, as shown in Table 6. The analysis revealed a significance value of 0.944, which is greater than the standard threshold of 0.05. In other words, the data doesn't display statistically significant differences in variances. This satisfies the assumption of homogeneity of variance, a prerequisite for using a regression model in this study.

Table 6. Homogeneity Test Results

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.005	1	59	.944

Building on the previous tests that ensured data quality, a hypothesis test was conducted using linear regression to determine the overall impact of the ESP approach. The results, presented in Table 7, show a significance value (sig.) of 0.16, which is lower than the threshold of 0.05. Stated another way, this statistically significant result ($p < 0.05$) confirms that the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach implemented

within the Center of Excellence Vocational School Curriculum has a significant positive influence on English language skills.

Table 7. Hypothesis Test Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t.	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	111.993	13.549		8.266	.000
Post-test_Eks	-.435	.170	-.436	-2.563	.016

a. Dependent Variable: Post-test_Ctrl

5 Conclusion

This study suggests that the Center of Excellence curriculum is a well-suited and beneficial approach for English language learning in Technology Vocational Schools. The findings demonstrate that the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach, tailored to the specific majors offered by these schools, has a positive impact on student outcomes. In essence, the curriculum equips students with the relevant English language skills they need to succeed in their chosen vocational fields.

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