

Bridging the gap between ESP theory and classroom practice: A study of vocational school teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and instructional practices

ABSTRACT - English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in vocational education has been considered as an essential requirement however, it is not consistently practiced within the classroom. In this context, the study explores Vocational English teachers' conceptual awareness of ESP as well as their pedagogical understanding, orientation and practice concerning its implementation. A quantitative survey approach was employed to gather data and 30 vocational high school English teachers completed a questionnaire measuring familiarity with ESP, conceptual knowledge, perceived competence, attitudes and reported teaching practices. The results reveal that teachers are highly aware of ESP and they have a common idea about its need-analysis and field-specific orientation. Teachers in general also show the favorableness of attitudes to ESP and interest, feeling has to update their professional competence. However, this positive attitude is somewhat not realized in classroom. Although a large number of teachers claim to functionally include materials and vocabulary specific to the area, significant ESP elements such as systematic needs analysis, real material development or involvement with professionals in the industry are irregularly utilized. These results indicate that the ESP implementation in vocational schools is still an ad hoc practice and not systematic support through the curriculum. It is recommended to improve esp teachers' conceptual understanding of esp and their practical classroom work by enhancing teacher development, instructional materials, and institutional correspondences.

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1. Introduction

The demand for advanced English skills has soared under the twin onslaughts of globalization and the global job market it feeds. It is important that ESP develops for the students a language competence that translates naturally into their professional lives (Basturkmen, 2012). As noted by Bolton and Jenks (2022), ESP is a key subsidiary of applied linguistics which focuses on language analysis, description in particular. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses are the teaching language medium, which focus on student-individual needs in learning. This claim is further reinforced by Sjaifullah and Laksmi (2022) which emphasise that ESP involves teaching English for occupation such as banking, medicine and accounting. Taken together, these perspectives highlight the central role of ESP in aligning language learning with professional needs.

Unlike English for General Purposes (EGP), which focuses on broad language proficiency, ESP helps students understand and use the language of their profession (Swales, 1990). Contrary to English for General Purposes (EGP), ESP is more concerned with the question of relevance and purposefulness, with a strong focus on providing learners with language tools necessary to successfully function in particular occupational environments (Anthony, 2018). In contrast, teaching focuses on lexical and grammatical accuracy (Zhou et al., 2022). This distinction shows that ESP is more context-driven compared to EGP, particularly in relation to workplace communication.

Furthermore, such problems served as indicators that the instruction methodologies and tools were not serving the purpose well. The ESP lessons are, however, to cater for such needs and motivate the students. By the studies of Martín-González and Chaves-Yuste (2024) ESP students showed high motivation to learn and above average L2 skills. The increase in closeness is created from teachers and students getting closer, not more work which makes them feel anxious. These findings suggest that effective ESP implementation can enhance both motivation and interaction in the classroom.

Besides, ESP courses have been incorporated to the English language education curriculum as a novel strategy of aiding students prepare themselves for the working world beyond teaching. ESP course are those in which teaching activity as well as instructional tactics, materials and assessment is systematized around the world (Basturkmen, 2022). ESP courses, focusing on specialized vocabulary and skills in specific fields, have become part of teaching English as a second or foreign language (Sjaifullah & Laksmi, 2022). Therefore, ESP can be seen not only as an approach but also as part of curriculum development.

Despite its advantages, ESP has its drawbacks such as students' dependence on the teachers to ask for assistance, students having a communication barrier and teachers' unpreparedness to incorporate discipline-specific environments (Sjaifullah & Laksmi, 2022). Belcher (2006) added that a pragmatic needs-based, simply-professed mindset is more useful in preparing learners for the global world of work to tackle these conditions. Bui (2022) also highlighted the importance of including real materials, particularly those exhibiting both

syntactic and lexical dimensions. However, these challenges indicate that ESP implementation is not always straightforward in practice.

These issues become more evident in specific educational contexts such as vocational schools. ESP Practice at Vocational High Schools in Indonesia face their own challenges in implementing ESP. The differences among professional fields of study call for tailored ESP modules. But a lowly qualified teacher, inadequate facilities and lack of cooperation with the industry experts may prevent the provision of ESP at these institutions (Widodo, 2016). Research suggests that incorporating the ESP can also provide students with richer preparation for a job because it enhances their communication skills in technical areas and increases their confidence when working (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). ESP does not always get developed well in vocational education although as valuable as it is. This condition reflects a gap between the expected role of ESP and its actual implementation.

But integrating ESP into the curriculum of vocational schools is confronted with various difficulties, especially teachers' lack of ability to integrate ESP. There are many teachers who still regard teaching General English and not adjusting the materials accordingly as their central purpose (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). This study examines the knowledge, attitude, and practice of vocational school teachers when providing ESP teaching. This raises questions about how teachers understand and apply ESP in their teaching practices.

Although a good deal of experimentation in ESP has taken place, it is generally from an instructional perspective. There have been many past studies that are also based on theory, and target ESP. Studies in very similar areas have been conducted on shift from EGP to ESP in higher education (Martín-González & Chaves-Yuste, 2024), intercultural awareness and inclusion and learning experiences in ESP courses (Tevdovska, 2024), teaching strategies used in ESP classrooms and challenges of EFL for students in an ESP course which is also close to focus of the present study. However, such inquiries often focus on the instructors' perspectives or theoretical orientations. There is still limited research that simultaneously examines teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and classroom practices, particularly in vocational education context. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by answering the following research question:

1. What is the level of vocational school teachers' conceptual knowledge of ESP?
2. What are teachers' attitudes toward ESP and its implementation?
3. To what extent do teachers' classroom practices align with ESP principles?

2. Literature review

Once a sub-discipline of applied linguistics in the 1960s, ESP has developed into an international lingua franca for economic processes such as demand and supply of natural resources. Besides, at the beginning ESP was an area focused on satisfying the needs of science and technology. This branch of register analysis concentrates attention on the syntax and lexis of scientific texts, focusing projects for its attack on sentences (Bolton & Jenks, 2022). More recent scholarship, however, suggests that ESP moved beyond its early focus on linguistic forms toward a more contextualized and practice-oriented approach that integrates communication, pedagogy, and professional relevance (Basturkmen, 2022, Anthony, 2018)

ESP loses its rhetorical role in the 1970s and becomes an activity in its own right. This change was motivated primarily by the demand for study programmes in teaching English particularly in the Middle East and a number of former British territories. Thus, the method was centred in cause and effect, definition, and comparison. Munby's (1978) communicative curriculum starts to bring in the needs-based attitude, turning ESP into a needs-based syllabus (Bolton & Jenks, 2022). This shift toward needs analysis remains a central principle in contemporary ESP, although recent studies argue that needs should be viewed as dynamic and shaped by evolving workplace demands (Belcher, 2006; Basturkmen, 2022).

In the 1980s, authors of ESP courses issued a 'learning-centred' view which concentrated on who the target learner is their current and future learning need. The taking of ESP into research took place in the 90s with ESP as a more sophisticated course as well as vocational ESP. ESP has been identified as an important subfield of applied linguistics and English language studies, and linguists, educators and language teachers around the world have strong interest in it (Bolton & Jenks, 2022). In recent decades, ESP has increasingly been associated with vocational and workplace-oriented education, where language learning is closely tied to employability and professional communication (Bui, 2022, García-Sánchez & Gimeno-Sanz, 2022).

There are three basic features of ESP courses: (1) concentration on special purpose clientele, (2) focus on situation-based language use, and (3) emphasis given to needs analysis, curriculum development and relevant discourse in a genre specific area (Mostavi, 2021; Bui, 2022; Bolton & Jenks, 2022). So, correctness in written or spoken English usage in disciplinary settings and clarity in the expression of knowledge and reasoning in professional contexts stand out among the skills to be developed as part of an ESP curriculum endeavour (García-Sánchez & Gimeno-Sanz, 2022). However, some scholars argue that focusing solely on linguistic accuracy may overlook broader communicative and intercultural competencies required in professional context, indicating an ongoing debate within ESP research.

ESP (English for specific purposes) courses have been incorporated into English Language Education programs as a new means to prepare students for the world of work beyond teaching. As per Basturkmen (2022), ESP courses are a movement that gives attention to teaching methods, content, and how learning results are measured. According to Sjaifullah and Laksmi (2022), ESP courses, which focus on specialized vocabulary and skills in relation to specific areas, are part of teaching ESL/ EFL. In the Indonesian context, this integration is particularly relevant in vocational education, where ESP is expected to directly support students' readiness for specific occupations.

2.1. Classification of ESP

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Employment Purposes (EOP) form two main peripheral branches of the ESP course taxonomy. But there is one study that says (Bolton & Jenks, 2022) the EAP is the most popular and well-known ESP course. Jordan (1997) states that EAP is a course which improves English language for learning in the formalised education context. The active language practice "talking about text" or "academic

literacy” is the central means through which this development is realised in EAP classes (Lillis & Scott, 2007). While EAP courses are normally divided into two types. The Foundation is one example of a course that offers "direct entry" preparation for university. Students are required to have a lower English result for the chosen study in this course. Both are three-hour classes, more specific, designed to help students with their studies.

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) falls into two groups: English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). EGAP is open to students from non-English backgrounds. Undergraduate history, mathematics, and primed majors can all populate the same English class. Scholastic interest in the subject is wide spread and international. By contrast, Academic English in general (the subject of EGAP courses) represents a range of overall knowledge of how to use English for academic purposes across any content area or context.

For example, the business students from ESAP have a common background. The field of specialization pursued by the students is very closely related to the topics covered in the course. There are a lot in common pedagogically and empirically between ESP and EAP. However, instead of the ‘didactic’ goal of developing more native-like language skill, the core missions of each course are centred not around essential objectives such as communication and understanding – learning what is being said. The English language learnt in each course is affected by local and international context, even the overlaps and differences between ESP and EAP (Bolton & Jenks, 2022). This overlap suggest that boundaries between ESP and EAP are not always rigid, but rather context-dependent, especially in multilingual and multicultural settings such as Indonesia.

2.2. English for general purpose vs English for special purposes

English for General Purpose (EGP) is not only designed to support students in developing their general communicative competency in English (Wei, 2015). EGP aims to develop student second or foreign language in four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing (Ning & Zhao, 2014). The subject of the EGP course assessments are mostly grammar and vocabulary. EGP is a course of study that entails considerable amount of time, reported in terms of 2 hours per week or equivalent, to gain particular level of language proficiency.

ESP courses are more concerned with the language for specialised topics, and EGP is based on general English learning. In order to help learners in learning the "target language" with clear perspective related English for Special Purposes (ESP), it is important for an ESP learner to know how they perceive motivational strategies. As Martín-González and Chaves-Yuste (2024) indicates in their findings, students that had been taught at an EGP level and had just finished an ESP course felt attached to the language while, they also regarded it as more useful to be employed in the future. This suggests that the transition from EGP to ESP involves not only changes in content but also shifts in learners’ perception of relevance and usefulness.

Most of ESP students have studied the EGP courses and transfer to the ESP courses without general ESP courses, far fewer training programmes focus on ESP, although they are experiencing a constant increase in the number of ESP courses. Perhaps a challenge for ESP

practitioners and the ESP courses they develop is this absence of activity. Ding and Campion (2016) assert, the methods and tactics taught in EGP teacher training programs pertain to different types of ESP. For example, college level business English students are not going to find an oral game making them guess what is written on the notes pasted to their heads a useful communication activity.

Like English that is often part of the secondary school curricula in many countries, courses for EGP are also generally long-lasting and concentrate on content motivated by students' interests rather than choosing as input the "target communicative situations" most needed by learners. On the other hand, ESP courses are based on needs analysis and focus on a number of grammar and vocabulary commonly found in an academic or professional environment. These courses focus on the "target communicative situations" learners might encounter, providing key content about what is learnable in a course. However, empirical studies shown that there is often a gap between ESP principles and their implementation, particularly in vocational education, where teachers may lack of sufficient training or resources to design context-specific materials (Widodo, 2016). Therefore, drawing on teacher cognition research, this study adopts a knowledge, attitude and practice framework to examine how teachers understand ESP, how they perceive its importance, and how these perceptions are reflected in their classroom practices.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

A quantitative descriptive research design is used in this study for its systematic description and presentation of prevailing current measurable facts about the teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices towards English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This approach is suitable for analysing collected data by portraying it without drawing generalizable conclusions (Wati, 2018). A descriptive research design is considered appropriate for gaining insight into the current condition of ESP teaching in vocational schools, especially among the members of MGMP SMK Malang Raya. Through use of quantitative approaches, the research serves to highlight some patterns present in the data and associations that exist but without attributing cause.

Only the quantitative information gathered is addressed in the study. This method allows for a systematic assessment of variables through objective measurement and numerical data collection, facilitating statistical analysis to identify patterns and trends within the observed phenomena (Ch'ng et al., 2024). The systematic layout of the framework provides transparency and precision in order to reduce data collection and interpretation subjectivity. In addition, the easy quantification of this method allows for statistical treatment to provide consistent and unbiased results.

The descriptive method is especially appropriate for the assessment of teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices because it yields rich descriptions of existing situations rather than experimental or predictive ones. This is indeed consistent with the purpose of the study, which is to establish strengths as well as drawbacks and areas of potential improvement in ESP

instruction in vocational contexts. Finally, the quantitative approach guarantees that the study is concentrated, feasible and evidence-based.

3.2. Research setting and participants

The research has been carried out in Malang Raya-region, East Java, which is famous as an educational area with a wide range of vocational school. The participants are recruited from MGMP SMK (a professional forum for vocational school teachers). This condition provides a good chance for assessing ESP teaching practices among teachers with different backgrounds and skills from various vocational fields. The region's stature in supplying vocational education makes the findings relevant and influential.

Thirty teachers were selected through purposive sampling in order to include subjects who had particular experience in teaching ESP. Purposive sampling is appropriate in this situation by selecting the participants who are directly engaged in teaching vocational English. These instructors come from diverse areas of specialization, such as tourism, business or engineering and therefore present a panoramic view of ESP practices in the area.

Inclusion criteria for participants were used to maintain the relevance of their contributions. They should be actively teaching ESP in one of the SMKs and have at least a year experience teaching it. Being a member of MGMP SMK Malang Raya became the other criteria, since it represented active professional involvement and participating in raising the quality of vocational education level. These criteria guarantee that the sample is representative of a well-prepared group of educators.

3.3. Research instrument

The main research instrument in the present study is a questionnaire that has been developed to assess teachers' ESP knowledge, attitudes, and practices. The questionnaire had been formulated according to the common practices in ESP pedagogy with modifications due to specific vocational education setting in Indonesia. Its format provides structure to minimize problems for comparison across studies, it is reliable and consistent for recording the symptoms that are utilized in a quantitate analysis. A questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection, designed to elicit comprehensive insight into teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practice concerning ESP instruction (Hakim & Mauliyah, 2025; Maruf, 2023).

The questionnaire includes three main parts focusing on a particular aspect of the research objectives. Knowledge section determines teachers' comprehension of main concepts in ESP, such as needs analysis, curriculum design and material development. 5-point Likert scale is employed in attitudes part for the respondents' assessment of the role, significance and problematics of ESP in vocational education. Items are intended to measure their attitude toward teaching ESP and the extent to which the school facilitates, encouraging professional development, and curricular coordination. The instrument has been validated by expert judgement, achieving a validity score of 93.75%, indicating a high level of content validity. Furthermore, the reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.970, demonstrating excellent internal consistency of the questionnaire

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.970	18

Figure 1. The result of Cronbach's Alpha

The practices section centres on self-reported teaching such as authentic material and task-based learning, and combining language and employability skills. This section is important in terms of seeing how knowledge and beliefs at the theoretical level are realized in actual classroom life. A hypothesis-generating research tool: The questionnaire that we designed is intended to be comprehensive, in order to offer a well-rounded picture of ESP teaching in vocational schools.

3.4. Data collection procedures

A questionnaire was administered to a meeting participant of MGMP SMK Malang Raya as the data gathering. This face-to-face dissemination made sure that instructions were clear and participants could get clarification if they needed it. The teachers who were unable to attend the meeting, received links for digital questionnaires in their email or mobile chat and maximum responses were taken.

The questionnaire is composed of an informed consent form detailing the purpose and confidentiality of the study, as well as voluntary participation. They were provided with 2 weeks to fill out and return the questionnaire, which was enough time for thoughtful answering. This timing had also allowed the study to keep on schedule according with its pre-established timeline without sacrificing the data quality. To encourage participation, follow-up was done via the MGMP SMK network in order to maximize response rate. This approach allowed us to meet our desired sample size with high-quality responses. Data acquisition was stopped when no additional answers were obtained, and non-complete questionnaires were not considered in the analysis.

To avoid possible bias and error, the questionnaire was designed rigorously and distribution of it was strictly controlled. The reliability and validity of the data were improved by making sure that participants clearly understood the objectives and items of the questionnaire. This level of detail in data collection is required to extract the information from these consumer areas.

4. Findings and discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the current teaching practice of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) at vocational school based on teacher's knowledge, attitude and classroom practices. The findings give an overall view of the way vocational school teachers construe ESP Principles, their perception of the applicability of ESP in their teaching situation and how these are reflected in the choice they make when they decide to teach. Taken as a whole, these results suggest differences in teachers' conceptualization of ESP, their acceptance

to use industry-linked materials and the supportive nature of classroom practices relative to competency-based learning.

Table 1

Teachers knowledge.

Statements	N=30	Percentage	
		Yes	No
Have you ever heard of "English for Specific Purposes (ESP)"?	30	96.7%	3.3%

Results in Table 1 show that many vocational school teachers (96.7%) know about ESP. Such a high level of awareness indicates that ESP is not a new or strange concept to teachers in vocational education sites. Awareness of this kind is a key prerequisite for ESP, as the concept makes it possible to perceive the appropriateness and motivation of content teaching in relation to vocational learning objectives and workplace language use.

Nevertheless, knowledge in relation to ESP exists in the same way as it does for ill-structured concepts and teaching practice does not mean an easy transfer from theory to pedagogical application. Prior studies revealed ESP in vocational high schools in Indonesia was having a general concept so that the students had informed English learning cannot be specific to their field (Purwanti, 2018). This result places the present findings into perspective showing that although most teachers have heard from ESP, this fact does not mean knowing it beyond a superficial recognition.

The pool of a few teachers (3.3%) who have never had any information about ESP additionally reinforces the far from uniform spread of ESP-type information among schools and teaching communities. Although the number of responses is scant, the finding serves as a reminder for inclusive and systemic professional development that provides all vocational English teachers with common ESP teaching knowledge.

Taken together, the findings of Table 1 indicate that the level of knowledge of ESP is quite high among vocational school teachers but still far from being systematically implemented. To address these gaps there are needs for more well-defined curricular guidance, an increase in access to vocationally relevant instructional materials and the launch of capacity-building initiatives that can support teachers in establishing and implementing strong ESP-focused instruction designed by vocational students.

Table 2

Teachers knowledge.

Statements	N=30	Percentage
		English tailored to specific fields or needs
How do you define English for Specific Purposes (ESP)?	30	100%

Table 2 shows that all teachers (100%) agree on the agreement about the meaning of ESP, describing it as English for specific purposes or for special purposes. This finding implies an overwhelming agreement in the vocational school teachers' perception of ESP as context based, relevant and purpose-oriented language teaching. This level of alignment indicates that ESP is not seen only in a theoretical sense but as a socio- and academic linked genre, e.g., with business, tourism and in civil engineering and profession.

However, in spite of this sound theoretical congruence, literature suggests that the teaching of vocational English remains far from easy. Heterogeneity of vocational students who typically exhibit different levels of language competence, diverse educational back grounds and occupational aspirations represent one important source of difficulty (Ciornei & Dina, 2015). These circumstances make it difficult for ESP to function, because our teachers also need to deal with basic language skills and cater for some vocational purposes at the same time.

Besides, ESP needs a design of instruction that combines language teaching with the technical and communicative requirements of specific occupations as well (Sintia et al., 2025). Teachers seem to conceptualise this need yet institutional practices seem to prevent it. However, even though the curricula might in principle be sufficiently flexible to allow ESP-based teaching, English language instruction continues largely to be dominated by General English content due to its availability while the introduction of an ESP-style curriculum would divert resources from limited funding channels (Fadlia et al., 2020). This indicates that it is not enough to have conceptual knowledge for a pedagogical shift.

In a word, the findings imply that English for vocational purpose teachers have a firm understanding of what ESP is. The challenge, then, is not so much to redefine the nature of ESP but in developing instructional, curricular and assessment circumstances that enable teachers to effectively enact this understanding. Aligning the ESP principles with institution practice is necessary for ensuring the conceptual clarity of teachers materialize into practice in meaningful teaching and learning activities in context of vocational students.

Table 3

Teachers knowledge.

Statements	N=30	Percentage	
		Tailored to a specific professional field or occupation	English Literature
English for Specific Purposes focuses on learners' specific needs.	30	96.7%	3.3%

The results illustrated in Table 3 show that most participants (96.7%) know the main concern of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) which is to be based on particular professional or occupational interests of the learners rather than its reality in implementation alone with General English. This finding indicates that the majority of vocational school teachers can

correctly identify ESP as a needs- and goal-based course aimed at facilitating language application in discipline fields. Such awareness is an essential foundation for successful implementation of ESP in vocational education where English language teaching should be geared to future, profession- related needs.

However, the existence of a small percentage (3.3%) of teachers who linked ESP to English Literature demonstrates that there are some conceptual fallacies although minimal. Although relatively small in numbers, this linguistic void is pedagogically important as discrepancies on what ESP is focusing on could result in uneven emphases and practices in the classroom. What is also still very important in achieving uniformity and coherence of vocational language teaching is that all teachers make a distinction between ESP on the one hand and other branches of English studies.

Importantly, the results also bring a larger structural problem of vocational education into focus: the fact that correct teacher perceptions about ESP do not guarantee systemic classroom application. Previous studies also indicate that ESP is rarely integrated into vocational curricula due to vague instructional models and textbooks not developed specifically for the context of vocational high school (Fadlia et al., 2022; Saputri et al., 2025). Thus, some teachers who know how ESP should be are forced to turn to their General English books and ways because the ones available for them do not cover what they really need in terms of vocational language.

In general, from Table 3 results we can conclude that teachers seem not to have a problem of awareness about ESP in specific vocational fields but with the different conditions, at structural and pedagogical levels, affecting teaching. Tackling these challenges will mean more support for ESP in the curriculum, better access to vocationally appropriate resources and focused professional development that allows teachers to be able to use their understanding of ESP it more successfully in practice.

Table 4

Teachers attitude.

Statements	N=30	Percentage		
		Always	Often	Sometimes
How often do you apply the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in your teaching?	30	16.7%	46.7%	36.7%

It is shown in Table 4 that teachers have a positive belief with teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) generally. By the sound of these numbers, most teachers appear to be consciously working to cater for vocational linked English instruction since 63.4% stated that they “always” or “often” implement ESP principles. The positive trend indicates integration of the role ESP plays in providing students with good preparation for real world communication requirements as particular professional fields are concerned (Candrawati et al., 2024; Saputri et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, response distribution also indicates variability in how often ESP is used. Although, close to half of the teachers implement ESP “frequently,” quite few (16.7%) incorporate it into teaching on regular basis. Such a trend implies that ESP is often practiced in partial or intermittent rather than fully integrated mode. This kind of inconsistency is congruent with the findings mentioned earlier that often times not only vocational schools but also tertiary education institutions have the tendency to depend on General English instruction in place of systematising teaching languages for their own unique vocational purposes (Fadlia et al., 2020).

This imbalance of ESP principles has significant pedagogic consequences. When ESP was only rarely applied, the lack of ordinary language training received by students prevents them from mastering specialized language functions that they will be required to possess in their work environment (Dewanto et al., 2024; Sintia et al., 2025). This chasm, as demonstrated in other researches, may have an impact on the students’ preparedness to perform successfully in the field they wish to engage themselves, especially those fields forced by communicative competences.

The high percentage of teachers who feel they use ESP only ‘sometimes’ (36.7%) adds weight to this interpretation, there are clear structural and pedagogical barriers which are preventing their full implementation. The shortcoming of language activities has been mainly due to the increasing preference for General English over ESP in vocational curricula, which focuses more on grammar practice rather than occupational discourse and communicative competence (Saputri et al., 2025; Sintia et al., 2025). As a consequence, even teachers who agree with ESP may experience difficulties to implement it in a more extensive way.

When viewed in combination, the findings listed in Table 4 indicate that there is a requirement for more substantial curricula support (rather than add-ons), development of vocationally-relevant materials and targeted teacher education efforts to facilitate more consistent and widespread ESP use. They must be addressed if ESP is to take its place in providing vocational students with language needed for effective on-the-job communication.

Table 5

Teachers attitude.

Statements	N=30	Percentage		
		Fully Understand	Fairly Understand	Poorly Understand
Do you feel that you have a sufficient understanding of ESP?	30	16.7%	46.7%	36.7%

The results in Table 5 show the degree to which teachers believe they are knowledgeable about English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Even though most participants (63.4%) responded having a “fair” or “full” understanding of ESP, very few (16.7%) reported being very confident about their level of knowledge. In contrast, more than one third of the teachers (36.7%) reported to have poor understanding. This distribution demonstrates that although ESP is generally

known among vocational school teachers, confidence in following its theoretical and practical aspects is low.

This pattern implies an empirical dissociation between ESP awareness, and perceived efficacy of ESP use. As stated by Purwanti (2018), ESP in Vocational High School is commonly misinterpreted or weakened, hence it becomes difficult to describe why most teachers are uncertain of the coverage despite they know well on its meaning. For ESP that lacks clear operationalization, teachers may have difficulty embedding it operationally as a principle in their work beyond something they do because they perceive cross-vocational relevance.

The small numbers of teachers who feel they have a clear grasp of ESP may contribute to an explanation that vocational English language teaching often looks like General English teaching. According to the findings of other researchers, English curricula including teaching materials at vocational high school were sometimes identical or overlapping with those in general high schools and were not sensitive enough towards the professional language needs of the students (Astuti & Nurjanah, 2023; Mahbub, 2022). The implication seems to be that lack of confidence in teachers' ESP knowledge may limit how far those same teachers can or want to re-cast their teaching into vocationally relevant moulds.

Additionally, a higher number of teachers claiming low comprehension of ESP are also indicators of insufficiencies in available training opportunities. Teachers who lack confidence in their conceptual and pedagogical understanding of ESP are less likely to straying from General English methods that are familiar to them, rather than attempt a specially-designed program. Consequently, vocational graduates may not have been adequately socialised to meet the language-related requirements of their future vocations creating or widening the gap between school outcomes and industry needs (Dewanto et al., 2024).

Overall, as can be seen from Table 5, most of the teachers have basic awareness or partial understanding and hence do not feel well enough armed to deliver ESP confidently and consistently. This gap must be met by specific professional development through which teachers can develop conceptual and practical proficiency in ESP that helps to create more congruent ESP instruction with the vocational language needs of their students.

Table 6

Teachers attitude.

Statements	N=30	Percentage				
		Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree
I have knowledge of different types of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), including English for Business, English for Tourism, etc.	30	26.7%	66.7%	6.7%		

I have a good understanding of how to carry out needs analysis in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction	10%	70%	20%	
I am capable of developing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instructional materials tailored to particular professional or academic fields	10%	66.7%	20%	3.3%

Results of the analysis in Table 6 shed light on teachers' perceived knowledge and skills regarding crucial competencies for implementing English for Specific Purposes (ESP), including evolving a familiarity with various ESP domains, mastering needs analysis, and creating ESP materials. Overall, attitudes are mostly positive to taking competences into ESP but differing levels of confidence surface in relation to the three areas.

Significant agreement among teachers with respect to their share of acquaintance with different types of ESP like English for Business and English for Tourism indicates varied knowledge of ESP as a learner-centred practice comprised of many work-based and academic areas. This is consistent with earlier researches that have accounted for a variety of ESP genres encompassing business, tourism, engineering and medicine (Sekhar & Chakravorty, 2017; Işık-Taş & Kenny, 2019; Pilla et al., 2025; Kausar, 2025; Shalash, 2024). It suggests that teachers are conceptually understanding ESP as an eclectic of various occupational situation rather than monolithic one-size-fits-all model.

Notwithstanding this recognition of ESP, teachers' conviction seems to be weaker in the case of core procedural competences, namely needs analysis. However, the existence of neutral responses (20%) indicates that they are not sure how they can translate their knowledge into practice. As ESP is primarily focused on recognizing and catering for learners' particular academic and professional needs (Anthony, 2018; Hyland, 2022), teachers' partial confidence in needs analysis can hamper their capacity to design instruction that is truly representative of the communication demands of the workplace.

The same account is behind the development of ESP materials. Teachers' ESP material development, the vast majority of teachers indicated that could produce their own materials for teaching ESP, although nearly a quarter were neutral or disagreed. This result is in line with previous research which indicates that ESP teaching has faced similar problems as those of teacher qualifications, insufficient training, and contextual factors (Fitria, 2020). The practice of making ESP materials necessitates both awareness towards the learners' needs and creativity in

fusing jargons with authentic materials, an issue that constantly proves to be a challenge in vocational education domains (Ma'fiah & Sumardiono, 2023; Sintia et al., 2025).

Besides, the results of Table 6 also reinforce the previous perception that ESP research as well as practice tend to emphasize on individual aspects (assistant attestations, materials development or teaching experience) for which little emphasis is given to how teachers can accommodate these components in actual classroom contexts (Saputri et al., 2025). Neutral and negative responses found in the study indicates that ESP competences of teachers are not merely isolated skills but interlinked one, which demands planned consistent professional assistance.

In general, the findings suggest that vocational English teachers are at a baseline level ready to undertake ESP work, although they could improve with regard to understanding what it is and why it matters. Nevertheless, proficiency in carrying out central ESP practices such as needs analysis and coursebook writing is not general. This result highlights the necessity of more robust support mechanisms that enhance teachers' practicability and, in doing so, enable them to instantiate ESP principles more consistently and effectively in vocational education.

Table 7

Teachers attitude.

Statements	N=30	Percentage				
		Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree
Teaching ESP is an important aspect of today's educational landscape.	30	53.3%	36.7%	10%		
I am interested in developing my competence in the field of ESP.	30	50%	43.3%	6.7%		
ESP helps students become better prepared for the professional world.	30	53.3%	40%	3.3%	3.3%	
I feel confident in teaching ESP classes.	30	26.7%	56.7%	13.3%	3.3%	
The curriculum at my institution supports the teaching of ESP.	30	6.7%	63.3%	23.3%	6.7%	

The findings presented in Table 7 revealed insights into teachers' beliefs regarding the importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), their desire for professional development, confidence in teaching ESP, and support from their institution. In conclusion, the data show a positive affective stance toward ESP, a fair amount of individual motivation and concern for curricular and structural support.

Teachers' high level of affirmation that ESP is a significant feature of current educational scene implies their realization as to ESP role in addressing the present academic and job market needs. This interpretation mirrors arguments that ESP as a component in English language teaching because of its close proximity to what professionals use every day (Anthony, 2018; Hyland, 2022). This high consensus could indicate that teachers are now acquainted with the idea of ESP being more than an optional supplement to General English and recognize it as a fundamental strategy geared towards meeting the students' needs in their target occupations.

The good thing is that the teacher's belief in ESP helping students prepare for working life enhances their views of the value of ESP in both vocational and academic contexts. It is consistent with the key tenet of ESP that instruction be tailored education to learners' specific educational and vocational requirements (Hyland, 2022). Nevertheless, the low percent of neutral or disagreeing answers are a possible sign that there is also uneven exposure even to effective practice in ESP, especially if curricula and learning materials do not sufficiently represent professional communicative expectations.

Note that, although the attitudes toward ESP and its advantages receive highly positive ratings from the teachers', their self-perceived confidence in teaching ESP is relatively lower. Even though most people feel confident, the fact that there are also neutral and negative indicates that it's not universally high confidence. It is in line with past researches that have identified educational challenges in ESP, notably for vocational education teachers when they are supposed to reconcile general language learning with specific technical and contextual use of the language (Ciornei & Dina, 2015). Limited experience, inadequate training and existence of genuine materials may be reasons behind this variability in self-reported confidence (Saputri et al., 2025; Sintia et al., 2025).

The most significant challenge expressed in Table 7 is about institutional and curricular support. However, although most teachers do report some degree of support, a significant number are unsure whether or not the curriculum is consistent with ESP principles. These results are in line with previous research, suggesting that the advancement of ESP was hampered by: (1) lack of systemic approaches to teaching that lacked theoretical underpinning as well as clear constraints; (2) difficulties concerning appropriate materials and resources designed for specialized course work; and (3) insufficient curricular frameworks in place compared with the traditional pre-service teacher education program models (Dewanto et al., 2024, Fadlia et al., 2022). Therefore, when these theoretical principles are applied in practice, they may be diluted down into a more generic English curriculum that fails to meet vocational learners' specific need (Purwanti, 2018).

Collectively, the results point to a significant discrepancy between teachers' positive beliefs and their desire to deliver ESP, on one hand, and the structural procedures of implementation that they face, on the other. Although teachers may appreciate ESP, and understand its relevance for students' professional development, deficiencies in curricular provision or pedagogic scaffolding could impede the availability and successful implementation of lessons. This discrepancy highlights the importance of further support for institutional

commitment to ESP, so that teachers' enthusiasm and confidence can be put into practice in pedagogically sound and contextually appropriate ways.

Table 8

Teachers' practice.

Statements	N=30	Percentage				
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Conducting a needs analysis before teaching ESP	30	33.3%	30%	26.7%	3.3%	6.7%
Using authentic materials in ESP instruction	30	13.3%	56.7%	23.3%	3.3%	3.3%
Using materials that match students' needs in their specific fields of expertise	30	20%	50%	26.7%		3.3%
Integrating technical terms or field-specific vocabulary into teaching	30	23.3%	46.7%	20%	6.7%	3.3%
Adapting teaching methods to meet specific learner needs	30	23.3%	46.7%	23.3%	3.3%	3.3%
Collaborating with industry practitioners	30	16.7%	26.7%	36.7%	13.3%	6.7%

The results in Table 8 paint a comprehensive picture of how English for Specific Purpose (ESP) works out in vocational classroom realities. In general, the data indicate that although there are attempts from teachers to include ESP core principles in their teaching practice, the strength and consistency of pedagogical principles within each key component differ.

Most teachers say that they "always", "often" or "sometimes" conduct a needs analysis prior to teaching ESP. This indicates that there is an understanding of the significance of having instruction match students' occupational needs. But the existence of some teachers who seldom or never carry out need analysis, it reflects a continuing mismatch between ESP philosophy and classroom practices. This finding corresponds to previous research that limited ESP needs analysis training often restricts teachers' capacity to systematically pinpoint learners' specific professional language needs (Saputri et al., 2025). This can lead to instructional decisions being based more on assumptions, or generic curricula, than on evidence-based understanding of learner needs.

As for material, most teachers claim frequent use of authentic and tailor-made materials. This is a deliberate attempt to shift from references to common English materials and include job-related content. However, the teachers' reported low rate of always utilizing authentic

materials indicates influencing factors like technical constraints (eg outdated industry texts) or dependence on commercially prepared textbooks that impact their daily practices. These results support the previous discussion; the existence of an ideal teaching material for vocational English instruction is also consistent with empirical studies suggesting vocational relevance (Astuti & Nurjanah, 2023; Mahbub, 2022). The perpetual dominance of general English in national curricula compounds the problem, necessitating the creation of ESP materials (Husna et al., 2024; Fitria, 2024).

In contrast, the inclusion of scientific terms and discipline-specific discourse is more widely reported, with most teachers reporting that they always or mostly embed specialist language in their teaching. Such a practice is necessary in vocational contexts where learners need to grasp industry-specific language to communicate efficiently in the workplace (Ciornei & Dina, 2015; Dewanto et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the appearance of teachers who seldom or never use such displays obviously shows that a portion of teaching might still affirm generic lexical expressions to specialized-discourse-related ones (which can possibly be interpreted as graduating students who are ill-prepared for real-world occupational communication) (Dewanto et al., 2024).

Likewise, adjusting instructions to serve certain learner demands is carried out widely, signifying pedagogical responsiveness of the teachers. This adaptation embraces the diversity of vocational histories and learning purposes. Despite this, reported evidence seem to suggest these adaptations will be fragmented and entirely dependent on teacher initiative if it is not supported with proper institutional guidance and systematic curriculum design (Fadlia et al., 2022; Mahbub, 2019).

The practice that was least frequently reported (strong agreement) in Table 8 is industry collaboration. Although some teachers claim to regularly work with industry professionals, a significant percentage report infrequent or little collaboration. This result reflect the previous findings on the lack of systemic cooperation between schools and industry partners in vocational education (Sari & Wirza, 2021; Fadlia et al., 2020). Barriers, however, such as restricted." access to industry networks, lack of institutional support and time constraints may prevent the type of collaboration most acknowledged as vital in maintaining a relevant and authentic teaching practice intersecting school-industry boundaries.

The results suggest that overall, the vocational English teachers seemed to make an effort to adopt ESP based practices especially in terms of materials choices; vocabulary infusion and by tuning their teaching. Yet, discrepancies in situational analysis and a lack of industry partnership indicate that ESP development is incomplete and uneven. To make matters worse, dependence on general English books, inexperienced ESP material developers and lack of support at institutional level mean that the syllabus does not provide students with optimal linguistics skills for their fields work (Mahbub, 2022; Saputri et al., 2025; Sintia et al., 2025). In this way, there is indeed an urgent need for robust curriculum models, directed teacher training and a closer connection with industry to guarantee that ESP strategies used in the classroom are pedagogically-sound and vocationally driven.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals a critical misalignment between vocational English teachers' conceptual understanding of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and their actual classroom practices. The findings indicate that, in response to the first research objective, teachers possess a strong theoretical grasp of key ESP principles, including needs analysis, curriculum design, and materials development. Regarding the second objective, teachers demonstrate highly positive attitudes toward the importance, relevance, and professional value of ESP, particularly in preparing students for labor market integration. However, addressing the third objective, the study finds that this robust theoretical endorsement is not consistently reflected in pedagogical implementation. Teachers report limited confidence and engagement in core ESP practices, such as conducting systematic needs analysis, developing context-specific materials, and establishing collaboration with industry stakeholders, resulting in fragmented, individually driven, and institutionally under-supported ESP instruction. This study contributes to ESP teacher cognition research by demonstrating a non-linear relationship among teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and classroom practices, wherein strong conceptual understanding and positive orientations do not reliably translate into effective pedagogical implementation. These findings further highlight the role of contextual and institutional constraints in shaping this gap, suggesting that teacher cognition must be understood within a broader socio-institutional framework rather than as an individual construct alone. The study offers actionable implications for teacher education programs, which should prioritize practice-oriented training in needs analysis, materials development, and industry collaboration; for institutional policy, which should design coherent ESP curricula with clear implementation guidelines and authentic occupational integration; and for systemic support, which requires sustained professional development, industry partnerships, and adequate allocation of time and resources. Acknowledging its limitations, the study calls for future research employing qualitative approaches such as classroom observations, interviews, and case studies to achieve a more in-depth understanding of ESP enactment in authentic teaching contexts. Intervention-based studies are needed to evaluate professional development models designed to enhance teachers' practical ESP competencies, while comparative research across regions, institutional types, or educational levels could illuminate how contextual factors shape ESP implementation. Finally, collaborative models involving partnerships between educational institutions and industry merit further exploration to examine how such initiatives can effectively bridge the persistent gap between ESP theory and practice.

Declaration on the use of AI

The authors used AI-assisted tools solely to support language editing and improve readability. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript, including the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the work.

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