

The Role of Elective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Preparing Beauty Vocational Students for the World of Work: A Qualitative Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of elective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in preparing beauty vocational students for participation in the global workforce. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research was conducted at SMKN 2 Selong, East Lombok, and involved 15 participants comprising students, teachers, and a curriculum coordinator. Data was gathered through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and then analyzed thematically to identify patterns in instructional practices and stakeholder perceptions. The findings indicate that integrating beauty-specific English content into ESP instruction enhances students' communicative competence, motivation, and confidence in professional contexts. The use of authentic materials such as product catalogs, salon manuals, and customer-service simulations was found to increase classroom engagement and support practical language use. However, the study also identified key challenges, including limited instructional resources, inadequate teacher training, and the lack of performance-based assessment. The study implies that ESP is essential for bridging language education and industry needs in vocational settings. To maximize its effectiveness, stronger institutional support, targeted teacher development, and collaboration with the beauty industry are recommended.

Keyword: English for Specific Purposes; vocational education; beauty program; employability; qualitative study

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran English for Specific Purposes (ESP) dalam mempersiapkan siswa Sekolah Menengan Kejuruan di bidang kecantikan untuk berpartisipasi dalam dunia kerja secara global. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dan dilaksanakan di SMKN 2 Selong, Lombok Timur, dengan melibatkan 15 partisipan yang terdiri atas siswa, guru, dan koordinator kurikulum. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi kelas, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola dalam praktik pembelajaran serta persepsi para pemangku kepentingan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi English for Specific Purposes di bidang kecantikan meningkatkan kompetensi komunikatif, motivasi, dan kepercayaan diri siswa dalam konteks profesional. Penggunaan materi autentik, seperti katalog produk, buku panduan salon, dan simulasi layanan pelanggan, terbukti meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa di kelas dan mendukung penggunaan bahasa secara praktis. Namun, penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi beberapa tantangan utama, termasuk keterbatasan sumber daya pembelajaran, kurangnya pelatihan guru, dan tidak tersedianya metode penilaian berbasis kinerja. Penelitian ini menyiratkan bahwa ESP berperan penting sebagai penghubung antara pembelajaran bahasa dan kebutuhan industri dalam pendidikan kejuruan. Untuk memaksimalkan efektivitasnya, diperlukan dukungan institusional yang lebih kuat, pengembangan profesional guru yang terarah, serta kolaborasi dengan industri kecantikan.

Kata Kunci: English for Specific Purposes; Pendidikan Kejuruan; Program kecantikan; Kesiapan kerja; Studi kualitatif

Introduction

In an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, English proficiency has become a fundamental component of professional competence rather than a supplementary skill. As English functions as the global lingua franca in business, science, technology, and digital communication, proficiency in English is closely associated with employability, career mobility, and professional advancement (Wahyudi, 2023). Prior research indicates that effective English communication enables professionals to access international markets, build professional networks, and engage in cross-border collaboration (Putri & Setyowati, 2021; Rahmawati & Nugraha, 2022). In the context of a rapidly expanding digital economy, English also underpins communication in multinational corporations and online business platforms, positioning it as a critical skill for sustainable career development. Consequently, employers across diverse sectors increasingly prioritize English proficiency as a key recruitment criterion (Fadilah & Kurniawan, 2024).

Within this global landscape, vocational education plays a strategic role in preparing work-ready graduates who meet labor market demands. Vocational institutions are expected to equip students with practical, occupation-specific competencies aligned with industry needs. In this context, English instruction should function as a supportive tool that enhances vocational expertise rather than as a purely academic subject. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has therefore emerged as a pedagogical approach that links language learning with professional practice, enabling vocational students to acquire communication skills relevant to their future workplaces (Sari & Dewi, 2021).

The relevance of ESP is particularly evident in the beauty and cosmetology sector, which is increasingly shaped by global trends and international professional standards. Beauty professionals are frequently required to understand English-language product information, cosmetic manuals, training materials, and digital marketing content. In addition, interaction with international clients and participation in professional development activities often demand functional English communication skills. Without field-specific English competence, beauty vocational graduates may encounter difficulties in interpreting technical terminology, delivering effective customer service, and competing in globalized and digitally mediated labor markets.

In the Indonesian vocational education system (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan [SMK]), English instruction has traditionally emphasized General English, which often fails to address the specific communicative demands of different vocational programs. This mismatch creates a gap between classroom instruction and workplace language requirements, particularly in specialized fields such as beauty and cosmetology. To respond to this issue, some vocational schools have introduced elective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses tailored to specific programs. One such institution is SMKN 2 Selong, a public vocational high school in East

Lombok, which has implemented an elective ESP course for its Beauty and Cosmetology program by contextualizing English instruction through salon-related terminology, customer-service simulations, and professional communication tasks aligned with industry practices.

Several previous studies have examined the implementation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Indonesian vocational education and have highlighted both its potential and its challenges. Mulyah (2020), in a qualitative study conducted in technical vocational schools, reported that English teachers acknowledged the importance of ESP in enhancing students' workplace readiness but faced obstacles such as limited instructional time, large class sizes, and a lack of field-specific teaching materials. Similarly, Wahyudi and Jufrizal (2023) conducted a needs analysis among vocational students and found that the majority preferred English materials tailored to their occupational fields, particularly those emphasizing oral communication skills required for professional interaction. These findings indicate a strong demand for contextualized English instruction that aligns with vocational competencies and workplace communication needs.

Other studies have focused on ESP material development and curriculum alignment in vocational contexts. Fadlia et al. (2022) developed digital-based ESP learning materials for vocational high school students and found that learners perceived these materials as more engaging and relevant than General English resources. Kamaruddin, Fitria, and Patmasari (2021) emphasized that effective ESP course design should be grounded in a comprehensive needs analysis to ensure alignment with authentic workplace tasks. However, much of the existing research has concentrated on vocational fields such as engineering, multimedia, agriculture, and pharmacy, often employing quantitative or product-oriented approaches (Santika, Wirza, & Emilia, 2022; Saputro & Savitri, 2023). Consequently, limited attention has been given to how ESP is implemented in practice and experienced by stakeholders in beauty and cosmetology programs.

However, there is still limited qualitative research that specifically examines how elective ESP courses are implemented and experienced within beauty vocational programs in Indonesia. Although prior studies have addressed ESP needs analysis, material development, and learner perceptions across various vocational fields, few have focused on beauty and cosmetology programs. Moreover, much of the existing literature relies on quantitative or survey-based methods, offering limited insight into classroom practices, teacher strategies, and stakeholder experiences. As a result, there remains insufficient understanding of how elective ESP is designed, delivered, and perceived by both teachers and students in beauty vocational contexts.

Based on this gap, the research problem addressed in this study is the lack of in-depth qualitative understanding of the implementation and perception of

elective ESP in beauty vocational education. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How is elective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) implemented in the beauty vocational program?
2. How do students and teachers perceive the elective ESP course?
3. What challenges are encountered in the implementation of elective ESP in the beauty program?

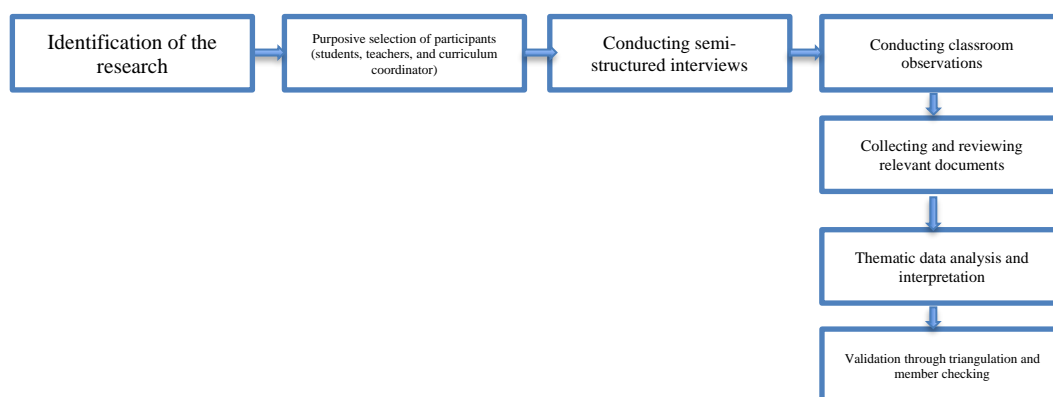
By addressing these questions, this study aims to contribute empirical insights into the role of elective ESP in enhancing professional communication and workplace readiness among beauty vocational students within the Indonesian vocational education context.

Research Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the implementation and perceptions of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in a vocational beauty program. Rather than emphasizing theoretical justification, the design focused on capturing participants' real experiences and classroom practices in their natural setting. The qualitative descriptive approach was selected to provide a clear and straightforward account of how elective ESP was implemented, perceived, and challenged within a specific institutional context.

To ensure procedural transparency, the research was conducted through a systematic operational sequence consisting of participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. The overall research flow is described as follows:



Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at SMKN 2 Selong, a public vocational high school located in East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The school offers several vocational programs, including Beauty and Cosmetology, Hospitality, and Accounting. The Beauty and Cosmetology program was selected as the focus of this

study due to its implementation of an elective ESP course designed to support professional communication skills.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to obtain information-rich data relevant to the research objectives. A total of 15 participants were involved, consisting of 12 students, two English teachers, and one curriculum coordinator. To enhance transparency and methodological rigor, demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Participant Group	Number	Age Range	Grade Level / Experience
Students (Beauty Program)	12	16–18 years	Grade XI–XII
English Teachers	2	32–45 years	7–15 years of teaching experience
Curriculum Coordinator	1	48 years	20 years of educational experience

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using three main instruments: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis.

Interview Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants’ perceptions and experiences related to the elective ESP course. Interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clarity and participant comfort. Table 2 presents sample interview questions used in the study.

Table 2. Sample Interview Questions

Research Focus	Sample Interview Questions
ESP Implementation	How is the elective ESP course designed and implemented in the beauty program?
Perceptions	How do you perceive the relevance of ESP to beauty-related professional needs?
Learning Experience	What aspects of ESP learning are most helpful or challenging for students?
Challenges	What difficulties are encountered in teaching or learning ESP in this program?

Observation Instrument

Classroom observations were conducted to document real-time teaching practices, student engagement, and the use of ESP materials. Observations were non-participatory and supported by field notes. Table 3 outlines the observation indicators.

Table 3. Classroom Observation Indicators

Observation Aspect	Indicators
Teaching Strategy	Use of beauty-related vocabulary and professional scenarios
Learning Activities	Role-plays, simulations, and task-based ESP activities
Student Engagement	Student participation, interaction, and responsiveness
Language Use	Frequency and appropriateness of English use in class
Learning Materials	Use of authentic materials (e.g., manuals, product descriptions)

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were analyzed through iterative coding to identify recurring patterns and themes. The analysis process involved data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and refinement. To enhance trustworthiness, triangulation across data sources was applied, and member checking was conducted to ensure that interpretations accurately reflected participants' perspectives.

Results and discussion

1.1 Results

1.1.1. Contextual Relevance of ESP Learning Materials

Most students (10 out of 12) emphasized that ESP materials were more relevant than General English because they were directly connected to salon practices and professional communication. Students reported that learning technical vocabulary helped them understand workplace discourse more easily and increased their readiness for real client interactions. One student explained: *"In General English, we learn many things that are not related to beauty. In ESP, we learn words that we will really use in the salon"* (S2). Another student similarly stated: *"When the teacher explains English using skincare or makeup examples, I understand faster and remember the vocabulary better"* (S6). Teachers confirmed this perception, noting that contextualization reduced students' anxiety toward English learning: *"Students feel less afraid of English when the materials are connected to their daily practice in the beauty program"* (T1). This finding shows that contextualized ESP materials increase perceived relevance and comprehension by directly linking English instruction to students' vocational experiences, thereby narrowing the gap between classroom learning and professional practice.

1.1.2. Student Engagement and Confidence in Communication

Nearly all students (11 out of 12) reported increased motivation and confidence in using English during ESP classes, particularly in speaking activities. Role-play and simulation tasks were frequently mentioned as the most engaging components of the course. One student shared: *"At first, I was shy to speak English, but when I act as a beautician talking to a client, it feels more natural"* (S8). Another student added: *"I*

feel more confident because the conversations are about treatments and services, not random topics" (S10). Teachers also observed a noticeable change in student participation: *"In ESP classes, students are more willing to speak, even those who are usually silent in General English"* (T2). This finding indicates that practice-based ESP activities support communicative confidence by providing students with realistic and professionally meaningful opportunities to use English.

1.1.3. Use of Authentic Materials and Learning Media

Most students (9 out of 12) expressed positive attitudes toward the use of authentic materials such as product catalogs, brand manuals, and beauty tutorial videos. These materials helped students visualize real workplace situations and understand how English is used internationally. One student noted: *"When we learn from real product labels and international brands, it feels like we are already working"* (S4). Another student stated: *"Watching beauty tutorials in English helps me learn pronunciation and professional terms at the same time"* (S9). Teachers confirmed that authentic materials enhanced classroom interaction: *"Authentic materials make the class more alive because students see the real use of English in the beauty industry"* (T1). This finding suggests that authentic materials enhance experiential learning by exposing students to real-world language use, thereby strengthening engagement and practical language awareness.

1.1.4. Collaborative Learning and Instructional Practices

Collaborative activities were observed in most ESP sessions. Group discussions and pair work enabled students to practice English collaboratively and learn from peers. One student explained: *"Working with friends makes me more confident because we can help each other when we forget vocabulary"* (S11). Teachers highlighted the pedagogical value of collaboration: *"Group activities allow students to practice English more frequently than teacher-centered instruction"* (T2). The curriculum coordinator also emphasized the alignment between ESP activities and vocational goals: *"ESP is designed to support professional communication, so collaboration and simulation are very important"* (CC). This finding indicates that collaborative learning creates a supportive environment that encourages peer-assisted language practice and reflects teamwork demands in professional beauty settings.

1.1.5. Challenges in ESP Implementation

Despite positive outcomes, several challenges were consistently mentioned by participants. Most students (8 out of 12) reported difficulties with pronunciation and spontaneous speaking, particularly when using unfamiliar technical terms. One student admitted: *"I know the vocabulary, but I still find it difficult to pronounce the words correctly"* (S1). Teachers highlighted structural constraints: *"We need more time for speaking practice, but the class hours are limited"* (T2). Another teacher pointed out the lack of standardized materials: *"There is no official ESP textbook for beauty, so teachers must prepare materials independently"* (T1). The curriculum coordinator also

acknowledged institutional limitations: “ESP is still developing here, so assessment and teacher training need to be improved” (CC). This finding highlights institutional and instructional constraints that may hinder the full effectiveness of ESP implementation, particularly in relation to resource availability, assessment practices, and speaking skill development.

1.2 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that elective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses play a strategic role in vocational education by operationalizing the core ESP principle of needs-based language instruction. From an ESP theoretical perspective, the alignment of English materials with beauty-related professional tasks reflects Hutchinson and Waters’ (1987) assertion that ESP should be designed around learners’ specific occupational needs rather than general linguistic competence. Similar conclusions have been reported in Indonesian vocational contexts by Sari and Dewi (2021) and Wahyudi and Jufrizal (2023), who argue that ESP enhances workplace communication readiness when instructional content mirrors professional realities. Internationally, comparable findings have been documented in cosmetology and service-industry training programs in South Korea and Taiwan, where contextualized ESP instruction significantly improved students’ ability to perform customer-service interactions in English (Kim & Kim, 2018; Chen, 2020). These cross-contextual similarities suggest that contextual adaptation is a universally critical feature of effective ESP implementation.

Beyond linguistic outcomes, the findings can be interpreted through an employability framework that positions communication competence as a key transferable skill in service-oriented professions (Yorke, 2006). The integration of role-play, simulations, and authentic materials enabled students to rehearse professional identities as beauty practitioners, thereby fostering self-efficacy and communicative confidence. This interpretation aligns with national studies by Fadlia et al. (2022) and Santika et al. (2022), which found that practice-based ESP activities strengthen students’ motivation and workplace readiness. International research further supports this view. For instance, Nickerson (2015) reported that ESP programs incorporating professional simulations enhance learners’ confidence and adaptability in multilingual workplaces, while Shin (2016) demonstrated that English-based service simulations in Korean beauty institutes contribute to both linguistic development and customer-handling competence. These findings indicate that ESP supports employability not only by teaching language, but by shaping professional communication behaviors.

The use of authentic materials in the ESP course can also be interpreted as a response to the globalized nature of the beauty industry, where English dominates product documentation, branding, and professional training. From an ESP perspective, exposure to authentic texts enhances pragmatic competence and genre

awareness (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). This finding corroborates national research by Kamaruddin et al. (2021) and Padmawati (2021), who emphasized the importance of real-world materials in vocational ESP. Internationally, Bocanegra-Valle (2016) found that authentic ESP materials in European vocational education improved learners' readiness to engage with industry discourse, while Lee (2019) reported similar outcomes in cosmetology training programs abroad. These studies collectively underscore the role of authenticity in preparing vocational learners for global professional environments.

However, the study also reveals structural challenges that limit the sustainability of ESP implementation. From a curriculum perspective, the absence of standardized ESP resources and limited teacher training hinder the systematic alignment between objectives, instruction, and assessment. These challenges echo findings from Indonesian studies by Muliyah (2020) and Fadlia et al. (2022), which identified institutional support as a decisive factor in ESP effectiveness. International evidence further reinforces this concern. Huhta et al. (2013) reported that vocational ESP programs in Europe frequently struggle with teacher preparedness and curriculum coherence, while Basturkmen (2010) emphasized that long-term ESP success depends on institutional investment and industry collaboration. In the context of beauty education, international training models often integrate certification-based assessment and partnerships with industry stakeholders to ensure relevance and sustainability (Shin, 2016). This comparison suggests that strengthening institutional frameworks is essential for maximizing the employability impact of ESP courses.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) research by providing an in-depth qualitative examination of an elective ESP course within a beauty vocational program in Indonesia – an area that has received limited scholarly attention. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on elective ESP implementation in the beauty and cosmetology field and its exploration of how contextualized English instruction functions as a mechanism for linking language learning with employability preparation. By examining classroom practices, participant perceptions, and institutional conditions, this study extends ESP literature beyond needs analysis and material development toward understanding lived instructional experiences in vocational settings.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce core ESP principles that emphasize needs-based, context-specific language instruction (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) and support employability theory that positions communication competence as a key transferable skill in service-oriented professions (Yorke, 2006). The study demonstrates that contextualized and practice-based ESP instruction does not merely enhance linguistic competence but also facilitates the development

of professional identity, communicative confidence, and workplace readiness. This theoretical contribution highlights ESP's role as an integrative framework that connects language education with vocational identity formation and employability development.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest several implications for curriculum design and instructional practice in vocational education. First, ESP courses should be formally integrated into vocational curricula with clear learning outcomes aligned to industry-specific communication demands. Second, performance-based assessment methods—such as role-play evaluations, salon simulations, and oral presentations—should be incorporated to better measure students' communicative competence in authentic professional contexts. Third, systematic professional development programs are needed to strengthen teachers' capacity in ESP pedagogy, material development, and assessment design.

At the policy level, this study underscores the importance of institutional and governmental support in sustaining effective ESP implementation. Vocational schools should be encouraged to establish structured collaborations with beauty industry partners to ensure access to up-to-date materials, industry expertise, and workplace-relevant learning experiences. Policy initiatives that promote curriculum flexibility, industry engagement, and continuous teacher training will be crucial in aligning vocational English education with global labor market demands. In conclusion, elective ESP courses hold significant potential to enhance the employability of beauty vocational students by bridging language education and professional practice. However, realizing this potential requires coordinated efforts at the curricular, institutional, and policy levels. By addressing these dimensions, ESP can function not only as a language subject but as a strategic component of vocational education that prepares students for sustainable professional success in the global beauty industry.

Suggestion

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several targeted and time-bound recommendations are proposed to improve the quality and effectiveness of elective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses in vocational schools. First, English teachers, under the coordination of school management and regional education offices, should receive continuous professional development in ESP methodology, curriculum design, and material adaptation. This can be implemented through annual workshops, peer-learning communities, and collaborative training involving language educators and beauty industry practitioners. These activities should be initiated within one academic year to ensure immediate instructional improvement. Second, vocational schools, in collaboration with curriculum coordinators and local education authorities, should develop standardized ESP syllabi that include clearly defined learning outcomes

and assessment criteria emphasizing speaking and listening performance. The integration of project-based and performance-based assessments, such as client interaction simulations and oral presentations, should be piloted and implemented within one academic year to more accurately evaluate students' communicative competence in authentic workplace contexts.

Furthermore, institutional leaders and government education agencies should strengthen policy and resource support to ensure the sustainability of ESP programs. Formal partnerships between vocational schools and beauty industry stakeholders should be expanded to provide access to updated learning resources, guest speakers, and internship opportunities within the next two years. In addition, collaboration with international beauty training institutions may be pursued in the medium term (1–3 years) to expose students to global standards, professional certifications, and international workplace practices. Finally, future researchers and higher education institutions are encouraged to investigate the long-term impact of ESP learning on graduates' employability and career progression through longitudinal and tracer studies. By implementing these recommendations, vocational education can continue to develop as a responsive, industry-oriented system that equips students with the linguistic and professional competencies required to succeed in the contemporary global workforce.

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