

**LOOKING INTO THE PROCESS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH
FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP) AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN INDONESIA:
PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

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Abstrak

Kendala pada proses pembelajaran ESP (*English for Specific Purposes*) di tingkat universitas di Indonesia datang dari berbagai sisi, yakni berupa permasalahan dari sisi mahasiswa, dari sisi dosen, dan dari sisi sistem pembelajaran yang diterapkan di tiap-tiap universitas. Untuk menyelesaikan masalah-masalah tersebut, dosen/pengajar ESP disarankan untuk mengaplikasikan proses langkah demi langkah yang berfokus pada tahapan persiapan pembelajaran, dimulai dengan mengadakan *needs analysis* (analisis kebutuhan terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggris), menyusun rancangan pembelajaran, serta memilih dan mengembangkan bahan ajar yang sesuai. Oleh karena solusi tersebut telah dibuktikan secara teori dan praktek, diharapkan proses pembelajaran ESP di level universitas meningkat, khususnya untuk membantu mahasiswa dalam mencapai tujuan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang sesuai dengan bidangnya.

Kata Kunci: ESP (English for Specific Purposes), Proses Pembelajaran, Tingkat Universitas, Permasalahan, Solusi

Abstract

A number of problems found in the process of teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at universities in Indonesia include the challenges from the students' side, the lecturers' side and the university education system's side. In order to solve the problems, the lecturers are suggested to apply a step-by-step process in the planning stage, started from conducting needs analysis, organizing the course design, and selecting and developing materials. As this solution has been supported theoretically and practically, it is hoped that the process of teaching and learning ESP at the university level in Indonesia will improve, particularly to help students to achieve the specific language learning targets based on their areas of professional.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Teaching and Learning Process, University Level, Problems, Solutions

In Indonesia, English has been increasingly important especially due to the fact that it has reached the global language status (Crystal, 2003). English is a compulsory subject that Indonesian students should learn in formal classrooms, including at the university level (Saimah, 2016). However, the English courses that the students learn in the university level are often not directly related to their specific major in the university. In fact, the university students are expected to learn English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to support their study, not the general English, which is a typical

English course taught in the secondary schools in Indonesia. Day and Krzanowski (2011) define ESP as the process of teaching and learning specific English to support the students' study in their specific areas of expertise and to assist their future career in the workplace. The situation where most Indonesian university students learn general English in the ESP classrooms supports the writer's belief that ESP teaching and learning process in universities in Indonesia is problematic and needs improvement in order

to help the students achieve the expected language learning goals.

A. Problems in the Process of Teaching and Learning ESP in the University Level

The problems commonly faced in the teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the university level in Indonesia can be derived from the students and lecturers as well as the education system.

1) Students' Side

The problem related to the students is the fact that the students in the ESP classroom in Indonesia have a low level of English proficiency (Marwan, 2009) even though they have learned general English for about 6 years before entering the university. This fact is also supported by the writer's personal teaching experience in teaching English to engineering students in Serambi Mekkah University in Aceh, Indonesia. The writer found that most of the students were in the pre-intermediate and beginner level; none of them were in the advanced level. In addition to the low level of English proficiency, most Indonesian university students also do not have motivation to learn the language (Marwan, 2009). This is also confirmed by Stoller, White and Wong (1998) who state that most students in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at Northern Arizona University are passive learners and are not intrinsically motivated in learning English, especially because they are forced to attend the program by their parents. The students' low motivation in learning English might also be due to other various reasons, such as the previous bad experience or failure in learning English (Nunan, 1999) and uninteresting approach in the process of teaching and learning English (Dornyei, 2001). These problems challenge the lecturer in creating and teaching an ESP course that could both improve the students' level of proficiency and their motivation in learning ESP.

2) Lecturers' Side

The problem from the lecturer's side includes the lack of capability and proficiency in designing and teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. The lecturers who are commonly responsible for teaching ESP in most universities in Indonesia are fresh graduate English department students who do not have experience in teaching a specific area

rather than general English. This is in line with Basturkmen (2010) who claims that most ESP lecturers do not have relevant trainings or teaching experience in ESP areas. In addition, the lecturers also have limited background of knowledge in the areas that they are teaching. Ahmed (2014) says that ESP lecturers usually have less knowledge of the subject area than the students. As a result they do not feel confident to teach ESP (Astika, 1999) and tend to teach general English with the focus of grammar. This is relevant with the personal interview result that the writer conducted in 2013 to figure out the students' opinion about the ESP class in the university level and to find out what English topics and materials used by the previous ESP lecturers in engineering faculty. The writer found that most students disliked the English class and complained since during the English class they mostly learnt 'tenses' and other topics that are irrelevant to their specific areas of study. The problem associated with ESP lecturers' competency is, in fact, difficult to solve unless the lecturers have a willingness to improve their teaching proficiency and are supported to do the improvement by the university.

3) Education System's Side

The problems related to the education system in Indonesian university are also encountered in the process of teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP). A large number of students in one class, limited time allocated for the English class as well as insufficient teaching resource and facilities to support the application of ESP are among the most common problems that the ESP lecturers find challenging. The total number of students in one ESP class ranges from 25- 50 students. This means that a good classroom management and organisational skill is highly required in order to have an effective ESP class. Besides, English is mostly learnt for one to two semesters in the university level, with 14 to 16 meetings in each semester. The amount of time allocated for each meeting is approximately 100 minutes per week. This challenges the lecturers to be more selective in choosing the important topics or materials to be included in the ESP courses within the allocated time. Moreover, the institution often does not provide the teaching curriculum or syllabus for the English courses. This makes

the lecturers confused and teaches irrelevant materials, especially because the institutions do not set any particular expectations for the English course. Suhendi (2005) confirms that the English university lecturers in North Sumatra, Indonesia design the teaching syllabus based on their previous experience as the university does not provide the general curriculum for the English course. Additionally, the insufficient teaching facilities provided by the faculty discourage the lecturers to create attractive and stimulating ESP activities. This is in line with Marwan (2009) who claims that inadequate teaching facilities have also been considered as one of the most significant problems in ESP classroom in Indonesia. The problems in the faculty system obviously add up to the two previous main problems and make the process of teaching and learning ESP even more challenging.

B. Step-by-step Solutions in the Process of Teaching and Learning ESP in the University Level

There is a step-by-step process in the preparation stage that the lecturers of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) should apply in order to overcome the aforementioned challenges.

1) Conducting Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is an essential component of the ESP courses, especially to help lecturers determine the learning goals and objectives of the course. This is in line with Flowerdew (2013) who describes needs analysis as the first important step in developing an ESP course. She further explains that needs analysis includes the process of collecting and analysing comprehensive information about the learners, both about PSA (Present Situation Analysis- learners' lacks and wants) and TSA (Target Situation Analysis- learners' future needs). In addition, Day and Krzanowski

(2011) suggest ESP lecturers not only to analyse the learners' needs, wants and lacks but also to analyse the resource available, time constraints and other possible challenges in order to design an effective ESP courses. A list of information needed to consider in the needs analysis is also mentioned clearly by Day and Krzanowski (2011, pp. 9-10). Needs analysis will further provides the lecturer with information about what should be the main focus of the learning, including the learning contents, language skills and language components (Basturkmen, 2010) as well as what facilitates and constraints the ESP courses. In terms of the use of needs analysis in an ESP course, Astika (1999) in her research confirms that needs analysis plays a significant role in improving ESP classroom situations in Indonesia since it assists lecturers to create a more meaningful ESP course.

This needs analysis could be conducted before the course starts as a "pre-course" assessment, on the first day of the course as an "initial" assessment or during the ESP teaching and learning process as an "ongoing" needs assessment (Graves, 2000, p. 110). The pre-course and initial needs analysis is important to provide a general idea to help decide the goals and objectives of the course that could satisfy the learners' needs, lecturer's and/or institution's expectation. The expectation could be derived from the lecturer's belief of why the students need to learn ESP combined with the institution's expectation only if the institution set the goals for the ESP course. The ongoing needs analysis is also important especially to provide information about the students' progress and to assist the process of redesigning the course to meet the set goals better. Graves (2000) further provides a procedure of conducting needs analysis as can be seen in Figure 1:

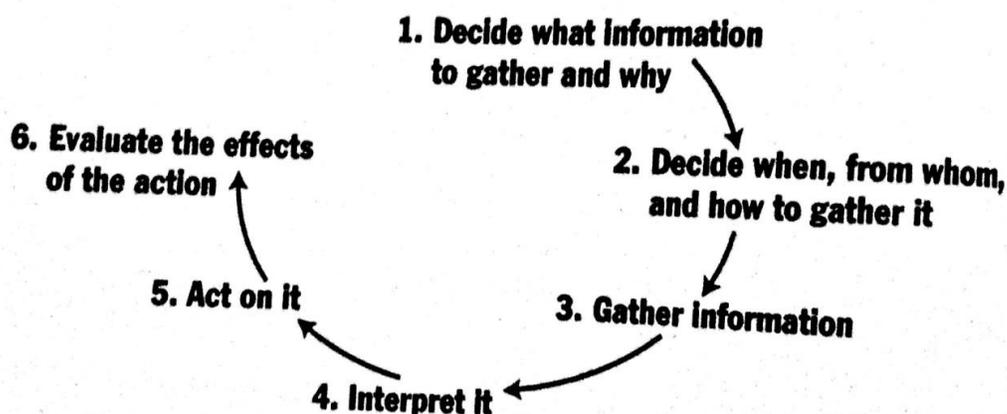


Figure 1. Needs Analysis cycle by Graves (2000, p. 100)

The stages in the cycle clearly show that the lecturers should act as active data collectors, interpreters and evaluators in conducting needs assessment for the students. In collecting the information needed, the lecturers of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) could use several instruments including questionnaire, observation, interview or the combination of them (Basturkmen, 2010). However, to obtain more accurate information, it is important that the lecturer choose the right data collection instrument that could provide them with sufficient essential information they require. Additionally, a large number of needs analysis examples are available in online websites, ESP journals and books that the lecturers could use or adapt depending on their purpose to fit in various ESP courses. Furthermore, the ESP lecturers should be aware that the skills of collecting and analysing the data needs practice as Day and Krzanowski (2011) mention that needs analysis will be much easier when the lecturers get used to doing it. The lecturers with experience will obviously take less time to analyse the students' needs than the inexperienced novice lecturers. Therefore, the lecturers should regularly conduct the needs analysis until they become experts in it.

2) *Designing the English Course*

Having completed the needs analysis, the lecturer could use the information to design effective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. Day and Krzanowski (2011) claim that general English and ESP, in fact, have

much in common, except that ESP focuses specifically on the students' needs in particular professional areas. It means that designing an ESP course is essentially similar to designing a general English course. It includes the process of deciding goals and objectives, organizing the course and selecting and developing materials (Graves, 2000) which should correspond with the results of the needs analysis. The fact that most Indonesian universities do not provide the teaching syllabus allows the lecturer to create their own syllabus. The syllabus in an ESP class is usually a unit-based syllabus where each unit consists of specific language components, such as grammar and vocabulary, language functions, such as speech acts and language skills that vary across different areas of expertise (Basturkmen, 2010). In addition, the ESP lecturers can also use the language skills as the organizing principle (Graves, 2000) in the ESP syllabus. For example, realizing that the most important English skill for engineering students in Serambi Mekkah university is reading skill as the students will have to be able to understand some of the lecture materials that are written in English, the lecturer should then focus this ESP course in readings skills such as helping the students to understand the main ideas and specific English engineering terms from the text. However, the lecturer should find attractive ways of teaching this skill so that the students enjoy learning reading. After choosing the organizing principle for the course, the ESP lecturers' task is to sequence the lesson within

the ESP course. Basturkmen (2010) explains that the lecturer should put each unit in order from more important to less important, easier to more difficult, or sequencing it in a logical flow where the preceding unit acts as the introductory to the next unit. This sequencing depends greatly on the lecturer's belief and will have a direct impact on the students' learning experience. A good sequence will allow the students to see the relevance of one unit to another, which could make learning ESP more meaningful to the students.

In terms of whether or not the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) lecturers should have knowledge on the specific areas they will teach, Taylor (1994) as cited in Pradhan (2013) states that knowledge about the subject-matter is considered less important compared to the lecturers' interest in designing and teaching an ESP course. This is reasonable especially because most ESP lecturers are not subject specialists and are mainly responsible for teaching English. This argument is further supported by Day and Krzanowski (2011) who state that the lecturers do not need an advanced knowledge about the subject matter as they will become more proficient in the language content of certain areas by the time they start teaching and finish teaching the ESP courses. This is proven through the writer's experience in teaching an ESP course for students majoring at fashion design in Syiah Kuala University, Aceh, Indonesia. Although the writer had very limited knowledge about fashion at the beginning of the class, she realized that she had unconsciously learnt a number of English vocabulary related to fashion design. Therefore, having limited knowledge in the subject area in which ESP course takes place should not be an excuse for not teaching a specific course. Indeed it brings a positive benefit for the lecturers themselves.

3) Selecting and Developing the Materials

The next step that the lecturers should do is the selection and development of teaching materials to support the successful application of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. Having previously decided the topics and skills for each unit, the lecturers proceed to finding appropriate materials that are relevant to students' specific areas of expertise. The fact that the institutions do not

provide the textbooks encourages the lecturers to independently find out the relevant materials for the students. The textbook is actually important in giving an overview of what materials to be covered in the ESP courses. Many textbooks could be found or purchases online, such as *Cambridge English for Engineering* and *Cambridge English for Nursing* (Day & Krzanowski, 2011). However, the textbook alone is not sufficient and additional materials are needed to support the textbook (Day & Krzanowski, 2011). In addition to finding the materials that are relevant to the students' specific areas, it is also essential to consider the students' age and level of proficiency when selecting and developing the materials. Sultana (2013) states that the ESP materials should be selected in accordance to the students' English level of proficiency. The level of proficiency obviously plays a significant role in determining what and how to teach (Harmer, 2001). When the students feel that the materials are appropriate to their level, they will be motivated to learn. However, if the ESP materials are too high or too easy, the students will tend to feel frustrated or boring in the class. Moreover, the materials chosen and activities associated with the materials should also be appropriate for the students' age level. This consideration is important as students in different age levels have different learning characteristics (Brown, 2007).

Furthermore, Basturkmen (2010) suggests that the materials should be as authentic as possible to present the real use of English in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms. The authentic materials are also important to create a meaningful learning situation which helps increase the students' motivation to learn the language (Brown, 2007). However, the authentic materials in ESP could be difficult to find especially in expanding circle countries where English is used as a foreign language (Kachru, 1988; 1992) and is not widely used outside the classroom. ESP lecturers in Indonesia could only access the authentic materials through the internet. Additionally, the authentic materials available often need modification as they contain complex language use or contents that are too difficult to understand, especially for low level language learners. The lecturer,

therefore, should adapt the materials (Basturkmen, 2010) to suit the students' needs. Another factor that is also important for materials development is the use of various materials and classroom activities. Bracaj (2014) suggests the ESP lecturers to choose various interesting materials that could be developed to cover more than one language skills. Variation is also vital for catering the students learning styles (Kinsella, 2002). Nevertheless, interesting materials which include activities that require the use of internet and computer are impractical in most of Indonesian universities unless the university allocates more funds for the teaching facilities to support the ESP courses.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms in Indonesia have a number of problems needed to be addressed, including the challenges from the students, the lecturers and the university education system. The possible solutions that are a step by step process in the planning stage started from conducting needs analysis, organizing the course design, selecting and developing materials are well supported by theoretical books, articles in journal and online articles as well as the writer's personal experience in teaching ESP in universities in Banda Aceh. Therefore, it is likely that the improvement in the process of teaching and learning ESP at the university level in Indonesia will help the students to achieve the specific language learning goals based on their areas of professional to support their study and future career.

However, it is paramount important to bear in mind that this step by step solution is not an instant skill to be acquired, yet it needs practice and experience to be experts in it. This study would have been more useful if further research about the successful application of the provided solutions is conducted in order to give a more thorough understanding about whether or not the solutions are applicable and practical in the real ESP classroom context in Indonesia.

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