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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARD ENGLISH TEACHING MATERIALS AT SMKS IMELDA MEDAN

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Abstract

This study explores students' perceptions toward English teaching materials at SMKS Imelda Medan, particularly examining how well materials align with vocational learning needs in the Fashion Design program. The research employed a descriptive qualitative design supported by quantitative data, utilizing a Google Form questionnaire distributed to 10 students of Class X Tata Busana. The analysis focused on four main indicators: relevance, clarity, attractiveness, and usefulness. Findings reveal that although students generally hold positive perceptions toward the materials across a ll dimensions, with 70% finding them clear and interesting, the materials only partially meet vocational learning needs. Specifically, 30% of students perceived materials as not quite relevant to their Fashion Design major, indicating a gap between general English instruction and field-specific requirements. The study concludes that while current materials provide a foundation for language learning, they require greater specialization in fashion-related content, more emphasis on communicative and practical activities, and stronger connections to real workplace scenarios. This research contributes to understanding the importance of materials alignment with vocational contexts and provides implications for English language teachers and institutions in developing more effective ESP-based instruction

Keywords: Students' Perception, English Teaching Materials, Vocational Education, ESP

INTRODUCTION

English has become one of the most important international languages used in communication, education, technology, and employment. In Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory subject at various educational levels, including vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK). However, unlike general senior high schools, vocational schools are designed to prepare students for specific professional fields and workplace environments. Therefore, English learning in vocational education should not only focus on general language

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competence but also support students' vocational needs and future careers. English teaching materials play an important role in this process because they function as the primary source of language input and learning activities in the classroom. Materials that are relevant to students' vocational fields can help students develop practical communication skills and understand how English is used in real professional situations.

In vocational education, the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) becomes highly important because it emphasizes the relationship between language learning and learners' professional needs. According to Hutchinson and Waters, ESP is an approach to language teaching that is based on learners' specific target needs and learning needs. Target needs refer to what learners need to do with English in future professional situations, while learning needs refer to how learners can effectively acquire the language during the learning process. This means that English teaching materials in vocational schools should be contextual, practical, and closely related to students' majors. In the context of Fashion Design (Tata Busana), for example, students need English materials related to fashion vocabulary, customer communication, product description, and workplace interaction in the fashion industry. When materials are aligned with students' vocational needs, students are more likely to perceive English learning as meaningful and useful for their future careers.

Besides ESP theory, this study is also grounded in the theory of perception proposed by Stephen P. Robbins. Robbins explains that perception is the process through which individuals select, organize, and interpret information in order to give meaning to their environment. In educational contexts, students' perceptions are formed through their experiences during the learning process, including how they interact with teaching materials used in the classroom. Robbins further explains that perception consists of three interconnected processes: selection, organization, and interpretation. Students first select information they consider important or interesting, then organize that information based on their prior knowledge and experiences, and finally interpret it by forming judgments or evaluations. In this study, students' perceptions toward English teaching materials are reflected through four aspects, namely relevance, clarity, attractiveness, and usefulness. These aspects are important because they show how students evaluate whether the materials support their learning needs and vocational preparation.

The suitability of English teaching materials has become an important issue in vocational education because many vocational students still experience difficulties in connecting classroom learning with workplace demands. Teaching materials that are too general may reduce students' motivation and make learning less meaningful because students cannot see the relationship between English lessons and their future professions. Recent studies have shown that vocational students tend to respond more positively to contextual and profession-related materials that reflect authentic communication and workplace situations (Rahmawati & Fitriani, 2022; Sari et al., 2023). This indicates that vocational students need English learning materials that are not only understandable but also applicable to their future professional contexts.

Based on the preliminary data, several students felt that the English teaching materials used in the classroom were still too general and not sufficiently related to the field of fashion design. Students expected more practical materials related to fashion vocabulary, workplace communication, and customer interaction. One of the students, identified as "AR," expressed her opinion during the preliminary interview as follows:

Researcher: Is English helpful for majoring in Fashion Design?
AR: Not very helpful.
Researcher: Why not?
AR: Because Fashion Design focuses more on practical sewing and design. I don't think it has much to do with English, except perhaps for majors like hospitality.
Researcher: So it's not the English that's boring, but the material isn't very geared towards Fashion Design?
AR: Yes, because the material related to fashion design is only introductory.

The interview transcript above indicates that students do not reject English learning itself, but they feel that the materials provided are not sufficiently connected to their vocational field. The statement that fashion-related content is "only introductory" shows that the materials have not fully integrated English learning with the practical communication needs of Fashion Design students. This phenomenon demonstrates the importance of investigating students' perceptions because students are directly involved in the learning process and can provide valuable insights regarding the effectiveness and suitability of the materials used in the classroom.

Based on the problems identified above, this study aims to investigate students' perceptions toward the English teaching materials used at SMKS Imelda Medan and to analyze how students perceive the suitability of the materials for their vocational learning needs. This study specifically focuses on four aspects of perception, namely relevance, clarity, attractiveness, and usefulness of English teaching materials

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design supported by quantitative data to investigate students' perceptions toward the English teaching materials used at SMKS Imelda Medan and their suitability for vocational learning needs in the Fashion Design (Tata Busana) major. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is used to explore and understand participants' experiences and perspectives toward a particular phenomenon. This design was considered appropriate because the study focused on describing students' perceptions and experiences regarding English teaching materials used in the classroom.

The participants of this study were 10 students of class X Tata Busana at SMKS Imelda Medan. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they had direct experience in learning English through the teaching materials evaluated in this research. The main instrument used in this study was a questionnaire distributed through Google Form. The questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale and open-ended questions. The Likert-scale questions were designed based on the theory of perception proposed by Robbins and Judge (2017), which explains that perception is the process by which individuals select, organize, and interpret information. The questionnaire focused on four indicators, namely relevance, clarity, attractiveness, and usefulness of the English teaching materials. Meanwhile, the open-ended questions were used to obtain deeper information regarding students' opinions, difficulties, and expectations toward the materials. Preliminary interviews were also conducted to identify initial classroom phenomena related to the suitability of English teaching materials.

The data were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data obtained from the Likert-scale questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and percentages. Meanwhile, qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions and interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis by categorizing and interpreting students' responses based on the four indicators used in this study

RESULTS

The findings of this study were obtained from questionnaires and preliminary interviews conducted with 10 students of class X Tata Busana at SMKS Imelda Medan. The data focused on students' perceptions toward the English teaching materials and the suitability of the materials for vocational learning needs. The findings were analyzed based on four indicators adapted from Robbins and Judge's perception theory, namely relevance, clarity, attractiveness, and usefulness.

Table 1 Summary of Students' Perceptions toward English Teaching Materials

Indicators	Main Findings
Relevance	Materials were considered too general and less related to Fashion Design
Clarity	Most students understood the materials and teacher explanations
Attractiveness	Students considered the learning activities less interactive
Usefulness	Students realized the importance of English for future careers

Students Perceived the Materials as Less Relevant to Their Vocational Major

The findings revealed that most students perceived the English teaching materials as only partially relevant to the Fashion Design major. The materials mainly focused on textbook translation, general reading texts, and grammar exercises rather than vocational content related to fashion and workplace communication. Several students stated that the materials did not sufficiently reflect the communication needs of Fashion Design students.

One student stated:

"Usually, we only translate and read from the textbook."

Another student explained:

"The material related to fashion design is only introductory."

These responses indicate that the materials had not fully accommodated students' vocational learning needs. Students expected more contextual materials related to fashion vocabulary, customer interaction, sewing tools, and workplace communication. Although students acknowledged that English is important, they felt that the materials used in the classroom were still too general and lacked connection with their vocational field.

The questionnaire results also showed that most students selected "quite relevant" rather than "very relevant" regarding the suitability of the materials for their major. This suggests that students recognized some relevance, but they still expected stronger integration between English learning and the Fashion Design context.

Students Considered the Materials Understandable but Limited in Practice

The findings showed that most students considered the English teaching materials understandable. Students stated that teachers' explanations helped them comprehend the lessons, especially during reading and translation activities. Most students agreed that the materials were not too difficult in terms of language level and classroom instruction.

However, several students still experienced difficulties in speaking and practical communication activities. Some students reported difficulties in pronunciation, grammar, and speaking without written text. The findings suggest that students were more familiar with passive learning activities such as translating texts rather than practicing communicative English.

One student explained:

"I can understand the material, but speaking English directly is still difficult."

Another student stated:

"Grammar and pronunciation are still confusing sometimes."

These findings indicate that although students generally understood the materials, the learning activities still provided limited opportunities for practical communication related to vocational contexts.

Students Preferred More Interactive and Vocational-Based Learning Activities

The findings also revealed that students considered the learning process less interactive because classroom activities mostly focused on reading and translating textbook materials. Students expressed greater interest in learning activities that involved videos, pictures, games, and vocational contexts related to Fashion Design.

One student stated:

"Learning would be more interesting if there were videos or fashion examples."

Another student explained:

"I would be more interested if we learned vocabulary about sewing tools and fashion."

These responses indicate that students preferred contextual and visually engaging learning activities. Students believed that vocational-based materials could increase their motivation and help them understand how English is used in real workplace situations.

The questionnaire data also showed that most students categorized the materials as "interesting," although several students still expected more varied and practical learning activities. This finding suggests that students were not completely dissatisfied with the materials, but they expected improvements in terms of interaction and vocational relevance.

Students Recognized the Importance of English for Future Careers

Despite perceiving the materials as less vocationally relevant, all students agreed that English is important for their future careers. Students believed that English would help them communicate with foreign customers, access fashion information, and improve professional communication skills in the workplace.

One student stated:

"English is important if someday we work with international customers."

Another student explained:
"Many fashion terms use English, so learning English is still necessary."

These findings indicate that students had positive perceptions toward the usefulness of English itself. However, students expected teaching materials that were more contextual and connected to workplace communication in the fashion industry. Overall, the findings suggest that English teaching materials at SMKS Imelda Medan still need improvement in terms of vocational relevance, practical communication activities, and contextual learning experiences for Fashion Design students

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that students generally had positive perceptions toward the English teaching materials used at SMKS Imelda Medan. However, the materials were perceived as only partially suitable for students' vocational learning needs, particularly in the Fashion Design major. These findings indicate that although students recognized the importance of English learning, they still expected more contextual and vocationally relevant materials that could support their future careers and workplace communication. The discussion of the findings is presented based on the two research problems of this study.

The first research problem focused on students' perceptions toward the English teaching materials used in the classroom. The findings showed that students perceived the materials as understandable and useful, but less relevant to their vocational major. Most classroom activities still focused on reading texts, translating textbook materials, and completing grammar exercises. As a result, students experienced limited opportunities to practice communicative English related to their vocational field. This finding supports the theory of perception proposed by Robbins and Judge (2017), which explains that perception is the process through which individuals select, organize, and interpret information based on their experiences and surrounding environments. In this study, students formed their perceptions through their direct experiences with the teaching materials and classroom learning activities. Because the materials were still general and textbook-oriented, students perceived them as insufficiently connected to Fashion Design learning needs.

The findings also revealed that students considered the materials understandable because teachers' explanations helped them follow the lessons. However, students still experienced difficulties in speaking, pronunciation, and practical communication activities. According to Richards (2015), effective language learning should provide opportunities for students to actively use the language in meaningful communication rather than only focusing on passive understanding. The findings suggest that English learning in the classroom was still dominated by passive learning activities such as translating texts and answering written exercises rather than communicative practice. In vocational education, students need opportunities to practice authentic communication that reflects workplace situations and professional interaction.

In addition, students expressed greater interest in learning activities that involved visual media, videos, games, and fashion-related examples. Students believed that contextual and interactive materials could increase their motivation and make learning more meaningful. Tomlinson (2013) states that effective teaching materials should engage learners emotionally and

cognitively in order to improve motivation and participation in language learning. This finding indicates that students' motivation in learning English is strongly influenced by the relevance and attractiveness of the materials used in the classroom. Materials that are closely related to students' vocational interests can help students understand the practical value of English learning and encourage more active participation during the learning process.

The second research problem focused on how students perceived the suitability of the English teaching materials for their vocational learning needs. The findings demonstrated that the materials only partially met students' vocational needs because the content was still too general and lacked specific integration with the Fashion Design field. Students expected more learning materials related to fashion vocabulary, customer communication, sewing tools, product descriptions, and workplace interaction in the fashion industry. This finding supports the theory of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), which emphasizes that language teaching should be designed based on learners' specific academic and professional needs. ESP focuses on developing language learning materials that are directly related to learners' target situations and future workplace demands.

The findings indicate that the current teaching materials had not fully implemented ESP principles because the materials still focused primarily on general English topics. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), vocational English learning should integrate authentic communication and professional contexts relevant to students' future careers. In the context of Fashion Design students, vocationally relevant English materials could help students understand professional terminology and improve communication skills required in the fashion industry. Therefore, the findings suggest that vocational English learning should integrate occupational contexts and practical communication activities more consistently in classroom instruction.

Another important finding of this study is that students recognized the importance of English for their future careers despite perceiving the materials as less vocationally relevant. Students believed that English would help them communicate with international customers, access global fashion information, and improve professional opportunities in the future. This finding indicates that students already have positive awareness regarding the role of English in vocational and professional contexts. However, the mismatch between students' expectations and the materials provided in the classroom may reduce the effectiveness and meaningfulness of English learning. Therefore, English teaching materials in vocational schools should be developed in ways that balance general language competence with vocational communication needs in order to support students' academic and professional preparation

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data analysis, the findings revealed that students generally had positive perceptions toward the English teaching materials used at SMKS Imelda Medan. The analysis was categorized into four indicators: relevance, clarity, attractiveness, and usefulness. Among these indicators, clarity received the most positive responses, with 70% of students agreeing that the materials were easy to understand and supported by the teacher's explanations during classroom activities. In addition, usefulness showed the highest percentage, as all students (100%) believed that English was important for their future careers and workplace communication. Furthermore, 70% of students considered the materials interesting, although some students suggested that the learning activities should include more interactive media such as videos, games, and fashion-related content. However, relevance became the aspect with the lowest level of positive response because several students perceived that the materials were still too general and not sufficiently connected to the Fashion Design major. These findings indicate that although students viewed the English teaching materials positively, the materials still need to be improved by integrating more contextual and vocationally relevant content related to students' professional learning needs.

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