

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH LEARNING MATERIALS AND MEDIA AT SMK SWASTA IMELDA MEDAN

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze students' perceptions of English learning materials and learning media at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan. The research focuses on students' opinions regarding the relevance and effectiveness of the materials and media used in English classes. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The participants were students of the Fashion Department (Busana) at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan. The data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, then analyzed descriptively to identify and interpret students' responses. The findings showed that students generally have positive perceptions toward the English learning process, especially regarding teachers' explanations and classroom atmosphere. However, many students stated that the learning materials were still too general and less relevant to their vocational majors because the materials mainly focused on grammar and daily conversations rather than workplace communication related to fashion and business. Students expected more contextualized materials connected to their vocational needs. In addition, students responded positively to the use of learning media such as videos, pictures, PowerPoint presentations, and audio recordings because these media helped them understand the materials more easily and increased their motivation in learning English. Nevertheless, the use of interactive and technology-based media was still limited, as teachers relied mostly on textbooks and conventional teaching methods. Therefore, more relevant materials and varied learning media are needed to improve English learning in vocational education.

Keywords: Students' Perceptions, English Learning Materials, Learning Media, Vocational School, ESP

Introduction

English is widely recognized as an international language that plays an essential role in communication, education, technology, business, and professional development. In the era of globalization, the ability to communicate in English has become increasingly important because English functions as a global language used by people from different countries and cultural backgrounds. English is not only used in academic contexts but also in various professional fields such as tourism, business, healthcare, fashion, and technology. Consequently, mastering English is considered one of the important skills needed to compete in the modern world and to access wider educational and employment opportunities.

In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), where students mainly learn English through formal classroom instruction because opportunities to use English in daily communication are still limited. This condition makes the learning process more challenging for

students because they have less exposure to authentic English communication outside the classroom. Therefore, the success of English learning is highly influenced by several factors, including teaching methods, learning materials, classroom atmosphere, and learning media used by teachers. Effective learning materials and media are needed to support students in understanding English and improving their language skills.

In vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK), English learning has a more specific purpose compared to general senior high schools. Vocational education is designed to prepare students to enter the workforce after graduation by developing practical knowledge and professional skills related to their vocational majors. As a result, English learning in vocational schools should ideally focus on practical communication skills that are relevant to students' future careers. This concept is closely related to English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which, according to Hutchinson and Waters, is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes learners' specific academic and occupational needs. ESP highlights the importance of designing learning materials that are contextualized and related to students' vocational fields so that students can understand the practical value of English learning in professional situations.

However, in many vocational schools, English learning materials are still dominated by general English topics such as daily conversations, grammar exercises, descriptive texts, and general reading passages. Although these materials are useful for building basic English competence, they are often less relevant to students' vocational majors and workplace needs. Students in vocational programs such as Fashion Design (Busana), for example, may require English materials related to fashion terminology, customer service, workplace communication, product descriptions, and professional presentations. When the materials used in the classroom are not connected to students' vocational needs, students may perceive English learning as less meaningful and less useful for their future careers. This condition can reduce students' motivation, participation, and interest in learning English.

Besides learning materials, learning media also play an important role in supporting the teaching and learning process. Learning media refer to the tools and technologies used by teachers to deliver learning materials and facilitate students' understanding. According to Richard E. Mayer, students learn more effectively when information is presented through both verbal and visual forms. This theory, known as the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, explains that combining text, images, audio, videos, and interactive activities can improve students' comprehension and retention because students process information through multiple sensory channels. In English language learning, media such as videos, audio recordings, PowerPoint presentations, pictures, and digital platforms can help students understand pronunciation, vocabulary, communication contexts, and language use more effectively.

The use of interactive and technology-based media can also create more enjoyable and engaging classroom environments. Students often become more interested and motivated when teachers use videos, games, role plays, and multimedia presentations because these media make learning more dynamic and less monotonous. On the other hand, classrooms that rely only on textbooks and conventional teaching methods may cause students to lose interest and become passive during learning activities. Unfortunately, in many schools, including vocational schools, teachers still rely mainly on textbooks and traditional teaching methods due to limited facilities, limited technological skills, or lack of access to interactive learning resources.

Students' perceptions toward learning materials and learning media are important because they reflect students' experiences, opinions, attitudes, and feelings about the learning process. According to Robbins and Judge, perception is the process through which individuals interpret and give meaning to their environment. In educational contexts, students' perceptions can influence their motivation, participation, confidence, and overall learning outcomes. Students who perceive learning materials as relevant and useful are more likely to participate actively and develop positive attitudes toward

English learning. Similarly, students who experience engaging and interactive learning media may become more motivated and enthusiastic during classroom activities. Conversely, negative perceptions toward materials and media may reduce students' interest and involvement in the learning process.

Several previous studies have discussed the importance of learning materials and learning media in English language teaching. Research conducted by Gilakjani found that audio-visual media improve students' listening skills, comprehension, and classroom participation because students can observe authentic communication directly through videos and audio recordings. In addition, Harmer emphasized that varied teaching aids and interactive learning activities are important for maintaining students' attention and preventing boredom during lessons. Other studies also revealed that vocational students prefer contextualized English materials that are directly related to workplace communication and professional situations.

Although many previous studies have examined learning materials, learning media, and students' perceptions, research specifically focusing on vocational school students, particularly at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan, is still limited. Most previous studies focus only on one aspect, either learning materials or learning media, rather than analyzing both aspects simultaneously in vocational education contexts. Therefore, this study is important because it aims to provide a deeper understanding of how vocational students perceive English learning materials and media used in the classroom.

The objective of this study is to analyze students' perceptions of English learning materials and learning media at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan. Specifically, this study aims to identify students' opinions regarding the relevance, usefulness, and effectiveness of English learning materials and to analyze students' responses toward the use of learning media in English classes. This study also seeks to identify students' expectations and difficulties in learning English, particularly in relation to vocational needs.

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of English language teaching, especially in vocational education. The findings of this study may provide useful insights for teachers in developing more contextualized English materials and using more interactive learning media that support students' vocational needs and learning motivation. In addition, this study may help schools improve the quality of English learning by integrating vocationally relevant materials and technology-based media into classroom activities. Furthermore, this study can serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in investigating students' perceptions, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), learning materials, and learning media in vocational school contexts.

Method

Participants / Subject / Population and Sample

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze students' perceptions of English learning materials and learning media at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan. A descriptive qualitative method was considered the most appropriate approach because this study focused on understanding, describing, and interpreting students' opinions, experiences, attitudes, and responses toward the English learning process conducted in the classroom. According to Creswell, qualitative research is used to explore and understand social phenomena by focusing on participants' perspectives and experiences in natural settings. Therefore, this method enabled the researcher to obtain detailed and comprehensive information regarding how students perceive English learning materials and media used in vocational education.

The research was conducted at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan, one of the vocational high schools in Medan that provides several vocational programs, including the Fashion Department (Busana). The

participants of this study were tenth-grade students from class X Busana 1 who regularly attended English classes and had direct experience with the learning materials and media used by the teacher during classroom instruction. The students were selected because they were considered capable of providing relevant information regarding the implementation of English learning in vocational education contexts.

The population of this study consisted of vocational students at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan who participated in English learning activities. Meanwhile, the sample of this study focused specifically on students from the Fashion Department because English learning in vocational schools should ideally support students' vocational competencies and future professional needs. Students in the Fashion Department are expected to use English in professional situations related to fashion design, customer service, product promotion, and workplace communication. Therefore, students' perceptions regarding the relevance and effectiveness of English learning materials and media become highly important to investigate.

The researcher selected the participants purposively because the students had sufficient experience with English learning activities and could provide information based on their actual classroom experiences. In qualitative research, purposive sampling is commonly used because the researcher selects participants who are considered able to provide rich and meaningful information related to the research topic. By involving students from the Fashion Department, the researcher expected to obtain deeper insights into students' needs, expectations, difficulties, and perceptions regarding English learning in vocational education.

In addition, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study before the data collection process was conducted. The researcher explained that the study was intended for academic purposes and that all responses provided by the students would remain confidential. Students participated voluntarily in the research, and the researcher ensured that the participants felt comfortable and free to express their opinions honestly during the research process. Ethical considerations were important in this study because they helped create trust between the researcher and the participants, allowing the researcher to obtain more accurate and authentic data.

The focus of this study was limited to students' perceptions of English learning materials and learning media used in English classes. The study did not investigate teachers' perspectives or evaluate students' academic achievement. Instead, it concentrated on students' experiences, opinions, feelings, and responses regarding the learning process, particularly related to the suitability of learning materials and the effectiveness of learning media in supporting English learning.

Instruments

The main instruments used in this study were questionnaires and interviews. These instruments were selected because they allowed the researcher to collect both broad and in-depth information regarding students' perceptions of English learning materials and learning media at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan. The use of multiple instruments also helped the researcher obtain more comprehensive and reliable data because the information collected from one instrument could support and strengthen the findings from the other instrument.

The first instrument used in this study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to collect data regarding students' opinions, attitudes, and experiences related to English learning materials and media used during classroom instruction. The questionnaire consisted of several statements and questions divided into two main categories: English learning materials and learning media.

The statements related to learning materials focused on several aspects, such as the relevance of the materials to students' vocational majors, the clarity of explanations, the usefulness of the materials, the level of difficulty, and students' interest in the materials. Students were asked whether

the English materials used in the classroom were connected to their vocational field, whether the materials helped them understand workplace communication, and whether the materials were interesting and meaningful for their future careers.

Meanwhile, the statements related to learning media focused on the use of media such as textbooks, PowerPoint presentations, videos, pictures, audio recordings, games, and other interactive learning tools. Students were asked whether the media used by the teacher helped them understand the lessons more easily, increased their motivation, created a more enjoyable learning atmosphere, and encouraged their participation during classroom activities.

The questionnaire also included questions regarding students' difficulties in learning English, such as vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, grammar, speaking confidence, and reading comprehension. In addition, students were asked to provide suggestions and expectations for improving English learning in vocational education.

The questionnaire was distributed to students of class X Busana 1 and X Busana 2. The researcher used clear, simple, and understandable language in designing the questionnaire so that students could respond easily and accurately. Before distributing the questionnaire, the researcher explained how to answer each question and ensured that students understood the instructions clearly. This step was important to avoid misunderstandings and ensure the validity of the collected data.

Besides questionnaires, interviews were also used as a research instrument to obtain deeper and more detailed information about students' perceptions. The interviews were conducted with several students selected from the participants. Through interviews, students were able to explain their experiences, opinions, and feelings more freely and openly compared to written questionnaire responses.

The interview questions focused on students' opinions regarding the suitability of English learning materials to the Fashion Department, the effectiveness of learning media used by teachers, classroom atmosphere, students' difficulties in learning English, and their expectations for future English learning. Students were also asked about the types of materials and media they considered more interesting and useful for vocational learning. The interviews were conducted in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere to encourage students to express their thoughts honestly. During the interviews, the researcher carefully listened to students' responses and asked follow-up questions when necessary to obtain clearer and more detailed explanations. The interview data were important because they provided more in-depth insights into students' learning experiences and helped support the findings obtained from the questionnaires.

Overall, the use of questionnaires and interviews as research instruments allowed the researcher to gather detailed information about students' perceptions of English learning materials and learning media comprehensively. Both instruments complemented each other and helped the researcher understand students' needs, preferences, difficulties, and expectations in learning English at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected from questionnaires and interviews were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. Data analysis is an important process in research because it helps the researcher organize, interpret, and draw conclusions from the collected data systematically. According to Miles and Huberman, qualitative data analysis consists of three main activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. These steps were applied in this study to analyze students' perceptions of English learning materials and learning media at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan.

The first step in the analysis process was data reduction. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, simplifying, organizing, and focusing the collected data according to the objectives of the study. After collecting the questionnaires and interview results, the researcher carefully read all

students' responses and identified information related to English learning materials and learning media. The researcher then classified the data into categories such as students' opinions about material relevance, classroom atmosphere, learning difficulties, use of media, and students' expectations for English learning.

This step was important because the collected data contained large amounts of information, and not all responses were directly related to the focus of the study. By reducing and organizing the data, the researcher was able to focus on important findings related to students' perceptions and make the analysis process more manageable and systematic.

The second step was data display. In this stage, the researcher organized and presented the data in descriptive forms such as explanations, classifications, and grouped findings. The questionnaire results were categorized into positive and negative perceptions regarding learning materials and media. Meanwhile, the interview results were presented descriptively by explaining students' experiences, opinions, and responses in detail.

The researcher identified patterns, similarities, and differences in students' responses to understand the overall tendencies of students' perceptions. For example, the researcher analyzed how many students perceived the materials as too general, how students responded to the use of videos and PowerPoint presentations, and what kinds of media students considered more interesting and effective for English learning. The final step was conclusion drawing and verification. In this stage, the researcher interpreted the findings and connected them with relevant theories related to English language teaching, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), multimedia learning, and students' perceptions. The findings obtained from questionnaires and interviews were compared and interpreted to answer the research objectives. The researcher concluded whether the English learning materials used in the classroom were considered relevant to students' vocational majors and whether the learning media used by teachers were effective in supporting students' understanding and motivation. In addition, the researcher identified several important issues, such as students' expectations for more contextualized materials and more interactive technology-based media.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, the researcher reviewed the data repeatedly and compared the information obtained from questionnaires and interviews. This process helped the researcher verify the consistency of students' responses and avoid misinterpretation during the analysis process. Through these data analysis procedures, the researcher was able to describe students' perceptions of English learning materials and learning media comprehensively, systematically, and accurately. The analysis also helped the researcher identify strengths and weaknesses in the English learning process at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan and provide recommendations for improving English learning in vocational education contexts.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study based on the data collected through questionnaires and interviews conducted with students of class X Busana 1 and X Busana 2 at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan. The findings focus on students' perceptions of English learning materials and learning media used during classroom instruction. The data were analyzed descriptively to identify students' opinions, experiences, difficulties, and expectations regarding English learning in vocational education. The findings are presented objectively based on students' responses obtained from the research instruments.

Students' Perceptions of English Learning Materials

The findings showed that students generally perceived the English learning materials positively in terms of teachers' explanations and classroom guidance. Most students stated that the teacher explained the materials clearly and provided understandable examples during lessons. Students also reported that teachers gave them opportunities to ask questions whenever they experienced difficulties in understanding the materials.

However, the findings also revealed that many students perceived the learning materials as too general and less relevant to their vocational majors. Most students explained that the materials mainly focused on grammar exercises, daily conversations, descriptive texts, and general reading passages rather than vocationally related topics connected to the Fashion Department (Busana). Students expected more contextualized materials related to fashion design, customer service, workplace communication, product descriptions, and professional interactions.

The questionnaire results indicated that students preferred English learning materials that were directly related to real workplace situations because they believed such materials would be more useful for their future careers. Several students also mentioned that repetitive textbook-based activities made classroom learning less interesting and reduced their motivation during lessons.

The findings also showed that vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, and speaking confidence were among the major difficulties experienced by students in learning English. Many students stated that they often struggled to understand unfamiliar vocabulary and felt afraid of making mistakes when speaking English in front of the class.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of English Learning Materials

Aspects	Findings
Clarity of teacher explanation	Most students considered the teacher's explanation clear and understandable
Relevance of materials	Many students stated that the materials were too general and less connected to vocational needs
Students' interest	Students preferred practical and contextualized materials related to fashion and workplace communication
Learning difficulties	Students experienced difficulties in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and speaking confidence
Students' expectations	Students expected more vocationally relevant and interactive learning materials

Based on interview results, students expressed that English learning would become more meaningful if the materials included topics related to the fashion industry and workplace communication. Students also suggested more practical learning activities such as role plays, group discussions, presentations, and simulations related to professional situations.

Students' Perceptions of English Learning Media

The findings regarding learning media showed that students generally had positive perceptions toward the use of media in English learning. Most students stated that learning media such as videos, PowerPoint presentations, pictures, and audio recordings helped them understand the materials more easily. Students explained that visual and audio elements made lessons more interesting, interactive, and less monotonous.

Several students stated that videos were particularly helpful because they allowed students to observe pronunciation, gestures, and real communication directly. Students also explained that videos and pictures helped them understand vocabulary more effectively because they could connect words with visual representations. In addition, students reported that interactive learning media increased their motivation and participation during classroom activities.

Nevertheless, the findings also revealed that the use of learning media in English classes was still limited. Teachers mainly relied on textbooks, whiteboards, and conventional teaching methods, while multimedia tools were only used occasionally. Students stated that classroom activities became boring when teachers spent too much time explaining materials verbally without using interactive media. Students expressed expectations for more varied and technology-based media such as educational videos, interactive games, online quizzes, digital learning applications, and group activities. Students believed that these media would make learning more enjoyable and help them become more active during lessons.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions of English Learning Media

Aspects	Findings
Types of media used	Teachers mainly used textbooks, whiteboards, PowerPoint presentations, and videos
Students' responses to media	Students responded positively to visual and audio media
Benefits of media	Media helped students understand materials more easily and increased motivation
Limitations of media use	Multimedia and technology-based media were still used infrequently
Students' expectations	Students expected more interactive and technology-based learning media

The interview findings also indicated that students became more enthusiastic when teachers used videos, pictures, and interactive activities during lessons. Students stated that these media created a more enjoyable classroom atmosphere and encouraged them to participate more actively in learning activities.

Overall, the findings demonstrated that students recognized the importance of both learning materials and learning media in supporting English learning at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan. Although students generally appreciated teachers' efforts during classroom instruction, they still expected more vocationally relevant materials and more varied interactive learning media to improve the quality of English learning in vocational education.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that students at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan generally have positive perceptions toward the English learning process, especially regarding teachers' explanations and classroom interaction. Most students considered the teacher's explanations clear and easy to understand. A supportive classroom atmosphere also helped students feel more comfortable during learning activities. This finding indicates that teachers play an important role in creating positive learning environments that encourage students' participation and motivation in learning English.

However, the study also found that many students perceived the English learning materials as too general and less related to their vocational major. Most materials focused on grammar, daily conversations, and general topics rather than workplace communication connected to the Fashion Department (Busana). According to Hutchinson and Waters, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emphasizes that language learning should be based on learners' academic and professional needs. Therefore, vocational students need more contextualized materials that support their future careers and practical communication skills.

Students expressed interest in materials related to fashion terminology, customer service, product promotion, and workplace interaction because they considered these topics more useful and meaningful. This finding supports the theory of Tomlinson, who stated that effective learning materials should be relevant to students' needs and real-life experiences. Materials connected to vocational contexts can increase students' motivation, participation, and understanding during the learning process.

The findings also revealed that students still experienced difficulties in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and speaking confidence. Many students were afraid of making mistakes when speaking English in front of the class. This condition reflects common challenges faced by EFL learners in Indonesia, where opportunities to practice English outside the classroom are limited. Therefore, teachers should provide more communicative and interactive activities such as role plays, discussions, and presentations to help students improve their confidence and speaking skills.

In terms of learning media, students responded positively to the use of videos, pictures, PowerPoint presentations, and audio recordings. Students stated that these media helped them understand the materials more easily and made classroom activities more interesting and enjoyable. This finding supports the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning proposed by Richard E. Mayer, which explains that students learn more effectively through both visual and verbal information. Multimedia learning also helps students understand vocabulary, pronunciation, and communication contexts more clearly.

These findings are consistent with previous studies conducted by Gilakjani and Harmer, which found that multimedia and interactive learning media can improve students' motivation, comprehension, and classroom participation. However, this study also found that the use of technology-based media in the classroom was still limited because teachers mainly relied on textbooks and conventional teaching methods. As a result, some students felt that classroom activities became monotonous and less engaging.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of developing vocationally relevant English materials and integrating more interactive learning media in vocational schools. English learning in vocational education should not only focus on general language knowledge but also prepare students for workplace communication and professional needs. By using contextualized materials and varied multimedia learning activities, teachers can create more meaningful, engaging, and effective English learning experiences for vocational students.

Conclusion

This study concludes that students at SMK Swasta Imelda Medan generally have positive perceptions toward the English learning process, especially regarding teachers' explanations and classroom interaction. Students considered the teacher's explanations clear and understandable, which helped them participate more actively during lessons. However, many students perceived that the English learning materials used in the classroom were still too general and less relevant to their vocational major, particularly for students in the Fashion Department (Busana). Most students expected more contextualized and practical materials related to workplace communication, fashion terminology, customer service, and professional interaction to support their future careers.

In addition, the study found that learning media such as videos, pictures, PowerPoint presentations, and audio recordings helped students understand the materials more easily and made classroom activities more interesting and enjoyable. Interactive learning media also increased students' motivation and participation during English lessons. Nevertheless, the use of technology-based and multimedia learning media was still limited because teachers mainly relied on textbooks and conventional teaching methods. Therefore, this study suggests that English learning in vocational schools should provide more vocationally relevant materials and integrate more interactive learning media to improve students' communication skills, learning motivation, and readiness for future professional environments.

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