

TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN TEACHING ESP FOR FASHION DESIGN STUDENTS AT SMKS IMELDA MEDAN

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the teaching strategies used by an English teacher in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for Fashion Design students at SMKS Imelda Medan. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The participant of the study was one English teacher and a class consisting of 24 Fashion Design students. The data were collected through classroom observations. The recorded data and interview results were subsequently transcribed for analysis. The study was guided by the ESP framework proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), which was used to identify the types of ESP teaching strategies. The findings revealed that four types of ESP teaching strategies were employed by the teacher, namely Needs-Based Strategies, Communicative Strategies, Task-Based Strategies, and Authentic Material Strategies. Among these strategies, Communicative Strategies were the most dominant, with a frequency of 18 occurrences (36%), while Authentic Material Strategies were the least frequently used, with 9 occurrences (18%). The findings indicate that the teacher emphasized communication to support students' English learning while adapting instruction to the vocational needs of Fashion Design students.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Teaching Strategies, Vocational Education, Fashion Design Students, Descriptive Qualitative Research

Introduction

English has become an essential means of communication in various professional fields, including industries that increasingly require workers to possess both technical expertise and effective communication skills. In response to these demands, English language teaching has evolved beyond General English toward more specialized approaches that address learners' specific academic and occupational needs. One such approach is English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which focuses on developing language competencies relevant to learners' particular disciplines and future professions (Basturkmen, 2020). ESP aims to equip learners with practical language skills that can be directly applied in authentic workplace contexts, making it especially relevant in vocational education (Hyland, 2022).

The implementation of ESP has become increasingly important in vocational high schools, where students are prepared to enter specific professions after graduation. Unlike General English, ESP emphasizes the language, terminology, and communication practices required within a particular field of study or occupation (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Through ESP, students are expected to acquire language skills that support their future careers and enable them to communicate effectively in

professional settings. Therefore, ESP serves as a bridge between classroom learning and workplace communication needs, helping students develop competencies that are relevant to their vocational fields (Belcher, 2021; Widodo, 2022).

In the teaching and learning process, teachers play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of ESP instruction. Teaching strategies refer to the methods, techniques, and classroom practices employed by teachers to facilitate learning and achieve instructional objectives (Harmer, 2021). Effective teaching strategies can help students engage actively in learning, improve their understanding of specialized language, and develop the ability to use English in meaningful contexts. In ESP classrooms, teaching strategies should be carefully adapted to learners' vocational backgrounds and workplace needs. These strategies may include contextualized instruction, authentic materials, task-based activities, collaborative learning, guided practice, and opportunities for students to perform language tasks that reflect real-world situations (Richards, 2021).

Recent studies have highlighted the growing significance of ESP in vocational education. Munir et al. (2025) found that Fashion Design students require English materials closely related to their field, particularly in understanding fashion terminology, describing products, and communicating in professional contexts. The study also revealed that students prefer interactive learning activities that allow them to use English in meaningful situations. Similarly, Lubis et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of developing ESP materials that are integrated with vocational content and problem-solving activities to enhance students' professional communication skills. Their findings suggest that English instruction in vocational schools should be designed based on students' specific academic and workplace needs.

Preliminary observations conducted at SMKS Imelda Medan indicate that English instruction for Fashion Design students still relies heavily on general English materials, while fashion-related content receives limited attention. Students often experience difficulties in understanding and using vocabulary related to fashion design, including fabric types, garment descriptions, design concepts, and presentation expressions. In the implementation of English instruction at SMKS Imelda Medan, the learning process primarily utilizes government-issued textbooks as the main teaching resource. Although these materials provide a foundation for English learning, teachers often recognize the need to adapt and enrich classroom instruction to better accommodate the vocational background of Fashion Design students. To create a more engaging learning environment, teachers frequently employ various teaching strategies and classroom activities rather than relying solely on textbook-based instruction. These efforts are intended to encourage students' participation, improve their understanding of English materials, and connect language learning with their field of study.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate teachers' strategies in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for Fashion Design students at SMKS Imelda Medan. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the types of teaching strategies employed by English teacher in classroom activities. By exploring teachers' classroom practices, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of ESP instruction in vocational education and contribute to the development of more effective teaching practices for Fashion Design students.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore the strategies used by an English teacher in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to Fashion Design students at SMKS Imelda Medan. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of classroom practices and to describe how teaching strategies are implemented in real educational settings.

The study was conducted at SMKS Imelda Medan and involved one English teacher and a class of 24 Fashion Design students. Since the focus of the study was on teachers' strategies in ESP instruction, the English teacher served as the primary participant. Meanwhile, the students participated as part of the classroom environment where the teaching strategies were applied and observed.

The data were collected through classroom observations. Classroom observations were carried out during two teaching sessions to capture the teacher's instructional practices and classroom activities. Throughout the observations, the teaching and learning process was recorded using video recordings to ensure that all relevant interactions and teaching activities were documented accurately. After that, the recorded interactions were transcribed into written form to identify the teacher's oral feedback.

The identified teaching practices were then analyzed based on the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) framework proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998). This framework was used to identify the types of teaching strategies employed by the teacher, including needs-based strategies, communicative strategies, task-based strategies, and authentic material strategies. These transcripts enabled the researcher to examine the teacher's strategies and classroom practices in detail. The data were then analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

Results

Data Analysis

Types of ESP Teaching Strategies Used by the Teacher

Based on the classroom observations conducted during two meetings and the interview with the English teacher, four types of ESP teaching strategies were identified. These strategies were analyzed using the ESP framework proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998).

Table 1. Frequency of ESP Teaching Strategies

No	Types of Strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Needs-based Strategies	12	24%
2	Communicative Strategies	18	36%
3	Task-based Strategies	11	22%
4	Authentic Material Strategies	9	18%
Total		50	100%

Table 1 shows that Communicative Strategies were the most frequently used strategy, accounting for 36% of the observed teaching activities. This finding indicates that the teacher emphasized interaction and communication during the learning process. The teacher frequently encouraged students to answer questions, participate in discussions, and express ideas related to fashion design using English.

Communicative Strategies

This finding indicates that the teacher placed considerable emphasis on interaction and communication during the learning process. Rather than focusing solely on grammar explanations or textbook exercises, the teacher frequently encouraged students to express their ideas, respond to questions, and participate in classroom discussions related to Fashion Design topics. Such practices reflect one of the key principles of ESP, which emphasizes the use of language for meaningful communication within a specific professional context (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

During the classroom observations, the teacher regularly initiated interactions by asking students questions related to fashion products, fabrics, and clothing designs. The questions were designed not only to check students' understanding but also to encourage them to use English actively. For example, when discussing fabrics, the teacher asked students to identify different types of materials and explain their functions.

Data 1

Teacher: "What kind of fabric is used for this dress?"

Student 1: "Cotton, Miss."

Teacher: "Why do you think cotton is suitable?"

Student 1: "Karena nyaman dipakai... because it is comfortable."

Teacher: "Very good. Cotton is comfortable and easy to wear."

The data illustrates how communication occurred naturally in the classroom. Although the student initially responded in Indonesian, the teacher encouraged the use of English by reformulating the answer and providing positive feedback. This practice demonstrates the teacher's effort to create a supportive learning environment where students felt comfortable using English despite their limited proficiency. Such an approach is particularly important in EFL contexts, where students often experience anxiety when speaking a foreign language.

Needs-Based Strategies

Needs-Based Strategies were identified in 20% of the observed teaching activities. These strategies were reflected in the teacher's efforts to select learning materials and classroom activities that were closely related to the students' vocational specialization. According to ESP principles, instruction should be based on learners' specific needs, interests, and future professional requirements (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Therefore, the teacher attempted to ensure that the content of the lesson was relevant to the Fashion Design program.

During the observations, the teacher introduced vocabulary related to fabrics, garment styles, accessories, measurements, and fashion products. Instead of using examples commonly found in General English textbooks, the teacher frequently connected the lesson to situations that students might encounter in their future careers. This approach helped students understand the practical value of learning English.

Data 2

Teacher: "Today we will learn vocabulary about fabrics. Can anyone mention different types of fabrics?"

Student 2: "Cotton."

Student 3: "Silk."

Teacher: "Good. These materials are often used in fashion design."

The data demonstrates how the teacher linked English learning to students' vocational knowledge. By using familiar concepts from Fashion Design, students were able to connect new vocabulary with their existing knowledge.

Task-Based Strategies

Task-Based Strategies were identified as one of the strategies employed by the teacher during ESP instruction. This strategy was observed when students were required to complete tasks that involved the use of English to accomplish specific objectives related to their vocational field. According to ESP principles, task-based activities enable students to practice language in meaningful contexts while simultaneously developing skills relevant to their future professions. In the Fashion Design classroom, the teacher frequently designed activities that encouraged students to apply English in describing fashion products, discussing design characteristics, and presenting simple information related to clothing items.

During the observations, students were often assigned pair-work and group-work activities that required them to use English while completing a specific task. Rather than focusing solely on grammar exercises, the teacher encouraged students to use English as a tool for communication. One activity involved students describing clothing items displayed in pictures provided by the teacher.

Data 3

Teacher: "Work with your partner. Look at the picture and describe the outfit."

Student 1: "The dress is pink."

Student 2: "It has long sleeves."

Student 1: "The material is silk."

Teacher: "Good. Try to make a complete description."

The data demonstrates that students were engaged in a task that required them to observe, analyze, and describe a fashion product using English. The task encouraged students to utilize vocabulary related to colors, materials, and clothing characteristics while collaborating with their peers. Such activities allowed students to practice language that is directly relevant to the Fashion Design field.

Another task observed during the lesson required students to present a simple description of their favorite fashion item. In this activity, students prepared short explanations and delivered them orally in front of the class

Data 4

Teacher: "Please describe one fashion item that you like."

Student: "I like denim jacket because it is comfortable and fashionable."

Teacher: "Very good. Can you explain when people usually wear it?"

Student: "People wear it for casual activities."

This activity reflects the characteristics of task-based learning because students were required to use language to complete a communicative objective. Rather than memorizing vocabulary lists, students actively used English to express ideas and convey information.

Authentic Material Strategies

Authentic Material Strategies were also observed during the teaching and learning process. Although they appeared less frequently than communicative and task-based strategies, authentic materials played an important role in connecting classroom learning with real-world fashion contexts. In ESP instruction, authentic materials refer to resources that originate from actual professional or social settings rather than materials specifically created for language teaching. Such materials expose students to realistic language use and help them understand how English is applied in their future occupational environments.

During the observations, the teacher utilized various visual materials related to fashion, including clothing catalogues, fashion photographs, product advertisements, and images of garments. These materials were used to introduce vocabulary, stimulate discussion, and provide examples of fashion products.

Data 5

Teacher: "Look at this catalogue. What can you see?"

Student 1: "A dress."

Teacher: "What color is it?"

Student 1: "Blue."

Teacher: "What material do you think is used?"

Student 2: "Maybe silk."

Teacher: "Good. Let's describe it together."

The data shows that authentic visual materials were used as a basis for language practice. The catalogue provided a realistic context that enabled students to discuss fashion products while simultaneously learning relevant vocabulary and expressions.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that Communicative Strategies were the most frequently employed ESP teaching strategy in the Fashion Design classroom. The teacher consistently encouraged students to participate in classroom discussions, answer questions, and describe fashion-related products using English. This finding is in line with Aziz and Anjaniputra (2025), who reported that vocational school teachers frequently use communicative activities to help students connect English learning with their vocational background. In both studies, communication was not treated merely as a language exercise but as a means of preparing students for future workplace interactions. For Fashion Design students, the ability to explain designs, describe products, and communicate ideas is particularly important, making communicative activities highly relevant to their learning needs.

The dominance of communicative strategies also supports the findings of Munir et al. (2025), who found that Fashion Design students preferred interactive learning activities that allowed them to actively use English. In the present study, students were given opportunities to respond to questions, participate in discussions, and express their opinions about fashion products. These activities appeared to increase students' involvement in the learning process and created a more student-centered classroom environment. Similar to Munir et al. (2025), the findings suggest that active communication can help vocational students engage more meaningfully with ESP instruction.

Another important finding was the implementation of task-based strategies. Students were frequently assigned tasks such as describing clothing items, analyzing fashion products, and presenting simple information related to fashion design. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Lubis et al. (2025), which emphasized the importance of integrating vocational content into classroom activities. Both studies demonstrate that learning tasks become more meaningful when they are closely related to students' field of study. In the context of Fashion Design, task-based activities enabled students to practice English while simultaneously applying their vocational knowledge, making the learning process more relevant to their future professional needs.

The findings also revealed the use of needs-based strategies through the teacher's selection of vocabulary and learning materials related to fabrics, clothing styles, accessories, and garment descriptions. This result supports the findings of Maulana and Priyana (2024), who highlighted the importance of providing learning materials that match the specific needs of Fashion Design students. In both studies, vocational relevance played a significant role in helping students understand and

appreciate the purpose of learning English. When students encountered vocabulary and topics related to their specialization, they appeared more interested and actively participated in classroom activities.

In addition, authentic material strategies were identified through the use of fashion catalogues, clothing images, and product descriptions. Although these strategies appeared less frequently than communicative and task-based activities, they contributed to making the learning process more contextualized. This finding is similar to that of Ulyani (2025), who found that authentic materials helped vocational students understand how English is used in real workplace situations. The use of authentic resources in both studies provided students with exposure to language that closely resembles professional communication, thereby strengthening the connection between classroom learning and industry practices.

Overall, the findings of this study largely support previous research on ESP in vocational education. Similar to earlier studies, the teacher attempted to make English learning more relevant to students' vocational needs through communicative interaction, task-based activities, and needs-based content, and authentic materials. However, this study contributes additional insights by specifically examining how these strategies were implemented in a Fashion Design classroom. The findings highlight that, even when government-issued textbooks remain the primary teaching resource, teachers can still adapt classroom instruction to create more meaningful and vocationally relevant learning experiences for ESP students.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis, it was found that there were four types of ESP teaching strategies used by the English teacher in teaching Fashion Design students at SMKS Imelda Medan, namely Needs-Based Strategies, Communicative Strategies, Task-Based Strategies, and Authentic Material Strategies. Among the four types of strategies, Communicative Strategies were the most frequently used, with a frequency of 18 occurrences (36%). Meanwhile, Authentic Material Strategies appeared least frequently, with a frequency of 9 occurrences (18%). These strategies helped create a more meaningful learning environment and enabled students to connect English learning with their field of study.

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