EXPLORING ESP NEEDS IN CULINARY VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS THROUGH A DEEP LEARNING PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the English learning needs of culinary arts students in vocational high schools, analyzed through the framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Mendikdasmen's Deep Learning perspective. Data were collected from 22 eleventh-grade students of the culinary arts study program at SMKN 3 Sungai Penuh using questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. The results show that vocabulary, speaking, and reading are the most essential skills, while writing and grammar remain secondary but still necessary for workplace communication. Students report difficulties in fluency, vocabulary recall, and comprehension, which reflect a substantial gap between their current competence and workplace demands. They also express strong preferences for interactive, context-based learning activities such as role-plays, recipe reading, and customer service simulations. From a Deep Learning perspective, these findings demonstrate students' aspirations for learning that is meaningful, mindful, and joyful. The study concludes that ESP instruction in vocational contexts should move beyond general English textbooks and adopt a needs-based approach aligned with Deep Learning principles. Such an approach ensures that language education equips SMK students with both professional competence and lifelong learning readiness.

Keywords : *English for Specific Purposes, Needs Analysis, Culinary Vocational Education, Deep Learning, Meaningful Learning, SMK*

INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) plays a critical role in vocational education, as it prepares students with communicative competencies tailored for professional contexts [1]. Unlike general English, ESP focuses on the specialized discourse, terminology, and communicative practices required in industries such as hospitality, tourism, and culinary arts [1]. In vocational high schools (SMK), this focus is particularly urgent because graduates are expected to transition directly into the workforce.

Government policies further highlight the importance of strengthening language education in vocational schools. Presidential Regulation Number 68 of 2022 emphasizes revitalization of vocational education and training to match global standards [2]. Complementing this, the Directorate General of Vocational Education Regulation Number 31 of 2025 mandates foreign language certification for SMK students [6]. These initiatives are closely aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum [7], which emphasizes flexible, practical, and competency-based learning.

To address this gap, the Deep Learning approach, promoted by Mendikdasmen, provides a promising pedagogical framework. Deep Learning emphasizes meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning [3]. Unlike surface learning, which is focused on memorization, Deep Learning encourages learners to connect knowledge with real-world applications, reflect critically, and engage joyfully with content.

Literature Review

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

ESP has been described as a learner-centered approach in which the selection of content and methodology is based on the learners' specific purposes for learning English (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) [8]. Basturkmen (2010) adds that ESP is not merely about vocabulary or register but about preparing students for authentic communicative practices in their fields [4]. These definitions highlight two key aspects of ESP, the individualization of learning and the situational authenticity of instruction. While Hutchinson and Waters stress the importance of aligning instruction with learners' purposes. Basturkmen reminds us that the effectiveness of ESP lies in preparing students for the actual communicative demands of their professions. Together, these perspectives underline that ESP should not be treated as a simplified version of general English, but as a pedagogical approach that requires careful adaptation to the context, tasks, and identities of its learners. For culinary students, this means English learning should not stop at basic grammar or conversational drills but extend to authentic professional tasks such as interpreting recipes, communicating with customers, or collaborating with kitchen staff in English.

Needs Analysis in ESP

Needs analysis forms the foundation of ESP. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define needs as encompassing necessities, lacks, and wants [8]. Necessities refer to what learners must know to function effectively in their target context, lacks are the gaps between learners' current competence and required competence, while wants reflect learners' subjective preferences.

Recent studies have also highlighted the continuing importance of needs analysis in ESP course design. Santika, Wirza, and Emilia (2022) conducted a needs analysis in a vocational high school multimedia program and found that students struggled with grammar, vocabulary, and speaking, but needed competencies in listening, reading, and writing for professional multimedia tasks. They also identified the need for specialized materials such as copywriting, technical

vocabulary, and authentic multimedia content showing that vocational ESP must go beyond general English.

Similarly, Sari and Wirza (2021) examined ESP needs among office administration vocational students and confirmed that speaking and writing in business contexts (e.g., report writing, professional communication) were highly prioritized by students for their future roles. Their findings revealed a misalignment between the general English taught and the specific English skills required in the workplace.

These two studies demonstrate that ESP must be tailored closely to learners' professional environments. Without a careful needs analysis, materials risk being irrelevant to real-world requirements. For culinary students, this means that teaching English limited to grammar drills or general vocabulary will be insufficient unless it is connected to authentic culinary contexts such as recipes, menus, and customer service dialogues.

Deep Learning Perspective

The Deep Learning framework promoted by Mendikdasmen emphasizes meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning [3]. In ESP, meaningful learning ensures that content is tied to students' professional realities, mindful learning encourages reflective engagement with tasks, joyful learning fosters intrinsic motivation. Few studies have explicitly connected needs analysis with Deep Learning, which makes the present research both timely and original.

Moreover, Deep Learning goes beyond the acquisition of linguistic forms it emphasizes the integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable students to use English not only in classroom tasks but also in authentic professional environments. In the culinary context, this means learning English through real-life simulations such as recipe interpretation, menu presentation, or customer interaction, which allows students to see the relevance of language to their daily practices. By engaging in reflective dialogue, students develop critical awareness of how language functions in professional communication, while interactive and creative activities sustain their intrinsic motivation.

This framework aligns with global educational goals that prioritize 21st-century skills, including collaboration, problem-solving, and creativity. As such, embedding Deep Learning into ESP ensures that English is not taught in isolation but as a tool that connects students to their future careers while also fostering lifelong learning competencies. For vocational students, this dual focus on immediate workplace readiness and long-term adaptability is crucial in a world where professional requirements are constantly evolving.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design, which is widely used in ESP needs analysis because it allows researchers to gather comprehensive information about learners' necessities, lacks, and wants without intervention. As Basturkmen (2010) suggests, descriptive research is particularly useful in ESP because it provides baseline data that informs syllabus design, teaching methods, and material development [4].

Participants

The participants were 22 eleventh-grade students enrolled in the culinary arts program at SMKN 3 Sungai Penuh. They were chosen purposively because students at this stage are preparing for industry internships, where English communication becomes essential. Their input is highly

valuable in shaping ESP instruction that aligns with both educational goals and workplace demands.

Instruments

To ensure validity and triangulation, three instruments were used:

- Questionnaire: A Likert-scale survey assessed students' necessities, lacks, and wants in English. Items were designed not only to measure traditional linguistic needs (vocabulary, speaking, reading, writing, grammar) but also perceptions of meaningful (linked to real culinary tasks), mindful (involving reflection or critical thinking), and joyful (motivating and engaging) learning activities.
- Interviews: Conducted with the English teacher to validate student responses and gain insights into how classroom practices align or fail to align with professional needs. The interviews also explored whether instructional strategies currently encourage meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning.
- Observation: Classroom observation provided qualitative data on student engagement. A checklist was used to document when students were engaged in tasks meaningfully (e.g., reading authentic recipes), joyfully (e.g., role-plays simulating restaurant service), or mindfully (e.g., reflecting on language use after an activity).

Data Analysis

The questionnaire results were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean scores, percentages), while interview and observation data were analyzed thematically. Findings were interpreted through the Deep Learning framework, ensuring that the analysis went beyond identifying language needs to also consider how instruction could foster meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning experiences.

Findings

The findings present a holistic view of students' English needs in the culinary program. Data are structured according to Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) framework of necessities, lacks, and wants, then interpreted through Deep Learning principles.

Necessities

Students consistently reported that vocabulary, speaking, and reading were essential:

- Vocabulary: mastery of culinary terms (ingredients, cooking processes, kitchen equipment).
- Speaking: oral communication in customer service, teamwork, and giving/receiving instructions.
- Reading: understanding recipes, menus, food packaging, and hygiene regulations.

This supports Basturkmen's (2010) argument that ESP should prepare learners for authentic communicative events in their target contexts [4].

Lacks

While students recognized the importance of these skills, they struggled with:

- Limited vocabulary recall.
- Weak fluency in spontaneous conversations.
- Difficulty comprehending longer recipes or technical texts.

These findings confirm Long's (2005) idea that needs analysis should not only list required skills but also identify the gap between target and current competence [14].

Wants

Students strongly preferred interactive activities:

- Role-plays (waiter and customer dialogue, teamwork in the kitchen).

- Pair work and group discussions.
- Collaborative reading of recipes.

This echoes Belcher (2006), who argues that learners' wants are not merely motivational but provide important insights into effective course design [15]. In this case, wants overlapped with necessities especially in speaking and vocabulary indicating that activities students enjoy also serve professional goals.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

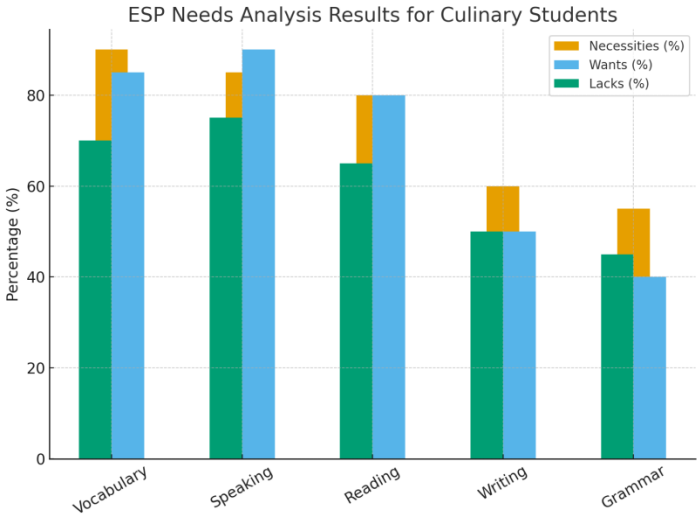
Data Summary

To provide a clearer picture of students' English needs, the results from the questionnaire were summarized into a comparative table that highlights necessities, lacks, and wants across five core skill areas: vocabulary, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar. This summary not only quantifies the data but also illustrates the relationship between what students consider essential, the difficulties they experience, and the activities they prefer. By condensing the findings into numerical values, the table makes it easier to identify priority areas for instruction and to interpret the results through the lens of Deep Learning.

Skills	Necessity Importance (%)	Lacks Severity (%)	Preferred Activities (%)
Vocabulary	90	70	85
Speaking	85	75	90
Reading	80	65	80
Writing	60	50	50
Grammar	55	45	40

Visualization of Results

The chart comparison highlights the strong overlap between necessities and wants in vocabulary and speaking.



The chart illustrates the comparison between necessities, lacks, and wants in English learning for culinary students. It shows that vocabulary and speaking have the highest overlap

between necessities and wants, reaching more than 85% in both categories. This confirms that students not only recognize these skills as essential but also prefer them in classroom practice.

Reading ranks slightly lower (around 80%), but it still emerges as an important necessity and preference, suggesting that students need continuous exposure to authentic reading materials such as recipes, menus, and hygiene regulations. In contrast, writing and grammar score the lowest across all dimensions, indicating that while these areas remain relevant, students perceive them as less critical compared to oral communication and vocabulary mastery.

The lacks dimension is highest in speaking (75%) and vocabulary (70%), showing that these are the areas where students face the most difficulty despite being necessities and wants. This gap between necessity and current ability highlights the urgency of developing instructional strategies that address these weaknesses.

Deep Learning Interpretation

The results were further analyzed through the lens of the Deep Learning framework, which emphasizes meaningful, joyful, and mindful learning as interconnected principles in shaping effective ESP instruction.

- **Meaningful learning**: Students seek vocabulary and reading tasks linked to culinary realities. This shows that when English instruction is directly connected to professional practices such as understanding recipes, menus, or hygiene regulations students are more motivated and able to see the relevance of their learning. Meaningful learning ensures that classroom activities mirror authentic workplace communication, which enhances both retention and applicability.
- **Joyful learning**: Students enjoy role-plays, group activities, and interactive tasks. These activities not only provide enjoyment but also stimulate creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving. Joyful learning emphasizes that motivation and emotional engagement are essential for sustaining long-term interest in English. In the context of culinary education, this means designing simulations such as customer service scenarios or teamwork in the kitchen, which are both enjoyable and pedagogically effective.
- **Mindful learning**: Students' weaknesses in fluency reveal the need for guided reflection and feedback. Mindful learning requires learners to actively think about their progress, recognize areas for improvement, and reflect on strategies for better communication. Teachers can facilitate this through reflective discussions after activities, peer feedback, or encouraging students to evaluate their own performance during role-plays.

Together, these results confirm that Deep Learning is not just a pedagogical ideal but a practical approach to ESP in culinary education. By embedding meaningful, joyful, and mindful principles into needs-based instruction, ESP can cultivate not only immediate workplace competence but also critical thinking, self-awareness, and resilience—skills that are essential for lifelong learning in a rapidly changing professional world.

Discussion

The findings confirm that vocabulary, speaking, and reading are the most pressing needs for culinary students. This echoes national studies (Melyati, 2024; Melyati & Saswandi, 2024) and recent international research (Santika et al., 2022; Sari & Wirza, 2021). Both local and global evidence suggest that vocational ESP should prioritize domain-specific communication rather than general English.

The reported lacks reveal a troubling gap between current proficiency and workplace demands. Despite years of English instruction, students remain underprepared for real-world communication. Long (2005) emphasizes that this gap must drive course design [14], which in this case means focusing on culinary-specific vocabulary, authentic reading tasks, and oral communication.

Students' wants add another dimension. Belcher (2006) stresses the importance of learners' preferences in ESP [15]. In this study, wants overlapped with necessities particularly in speaking and vocabulary showing that learners are motivated by tasks that are both engaging and professionally relevant. This is a powerful argument for embedding Deep Learning principles: what is joyful for students also happens to be meaningful for their future careers.

Finally, these findings align with Flowerdew's (2013) call for integrating needs analysis with pedagogical frameworks [16]. By interpreting results through the lens of Deep Learning, this study demonstrates how ESP instruction can be both contextually relevant and pedagogically innovative, promoting lifelong learning skills alongside immediate workplace readiness.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that culinary students at SMKN 3 Sungai Penuh need targeted ESP instruction focused on vocabulary, speaking, and reading. Their lacks limited fluency, vocabulary recall, and reading comprehension reveal a significant gap between their current competence and workplace requirements. Their wants interactive and authentic activities overlap with necessities, reinforcing the idea that meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning can be integrated naturally into ESP.

Implications

1. Curriculum: ESP syllabi should be based on systematic needs analysis and aligned with professional contexts.
2. Instruction: Teachers should prioritize interactive, authentic tasks (e.g., role-plays, recipe reading) over isolated grammar drills.
3. Deep Learning integration: Instruction should intentionally foster meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning to support lifelong skills.
4. Future research: Studies could develop and test ESP materials explicitly grounded in Deep Learning principles.

By aligning ESP with Deep Learning, vocational English instruction can become not only professionally relevant but also transformative, preparing students for both immediate career demands and long-term personal growth.

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