CLASSROOM-CAREER GAP: A QUALITATIVE NEEDS ANALYSIS OF ESP IN INDONESIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Nanda Pambudi

Universitas Pignatelli Triputra
E-mail : nandapambudi12@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In an increasingly globalized world, English proficiency has become a crucial requirement for employability across various professional sectors. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) plays a vital role in equipping students with the language skills tailored to their academic and occupational needs. However, many university ESP programs in Indonesia still rely on general English materials that do not reflect authentic workplace communication, creating a persistent gap between classroom instruction and industry requirements. This study investigates the role of ESP in preparing university students to meet the linguistic and communicative demands of the global job market through a needs analysis approach. Using a qualitative method, data were collected from students and a lecturer to identify the specific language competencies required in professional contexts. The findings reveal a significant gap between the current English curriculum and the actual communicative needs of students entering international workplaces. The study emphasizes the importance of aligning ESP course content with industry expectations to foster students' professional readiness, intercultural communication competence, and global competitiveness. Recommendations are provided for curriculum developers, educators, and policymakers to design ESP programs that are responsive, industry-relevant, and future-oriented.

Keywords : *Curriculum Alignment; Employability; English For Specific Purposes (ESP); Global Job Market; Need Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English has become the dominant language of international communication, education, business, and technology. As a result, mastery of English is no longer considered an additional skill but a fundamental requirement for employability in the global job market (Crystal, 2012). However, general English proficiency alone is often insufficient for students to meet the communicative and linguistic demands of specific professional contexts. This need has led to the growing importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as an approach to language teaching that focuses on developing learners' abilities in particular fields such as business, engineering, tourism, and healthcare (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Basturkmen, 2010; Belcher, 2009)

ESP is characterized by its learner-centered approach and its emphasis on the specific communicative needs of the target discipline or profession. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), ESP courses are designed based on an analysis of learners' needs, including their target situation, discourse practices, and the linguistic features relevant to their field. Thus, need analysis serves as the foundation for designing ESP curricula that are both relevant and practical. As Hyland (2006) argues, ESP instruction should not only provide linguistic knowledge but also develop learners' genre awareness, intercultural competence, and professional identity. (Hyland, 2002; Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993)

In Indonesia, the implementation of ESP in higher education has become increasingly significant as universities strive to produce graduates who can compete internationally. Nonetheless, many ESP programs still rely on general English materials and fail to address the authentic communicative tasks encountered in professional environments (Saragih, 2014). This gap between academic preparation and workplace demands highlights the necessity of conducting systematic need analysis to identify what students truly require to succeed in their future careers.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of ESP in preparing students for the global job market using a need analysis approach. Specifically, it seeks to identify the linguistic, communicative, and cultural competencies required by students in various professional contexts. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the development of more relevant and effective ESP curricula that align with industry expectations and enhance graduates' global employability.

Despite the recognition of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as an essential component in higher education, several issues are evident in its implementation across universities, particularly in non-English departments. Field observations and preliminary interviews with lecturers and students reveal that most ESP courses are still conducted using general English materials that do not reflect the actual language needs of the target professions. Consequently, students often struggle to apply their English skills in authentic workplace situations.

First, there is a mismatch between the ESP curriculum and industry requirements. Many syllabi are designed without a systematic need analysis, leading to materials that are overly theoretical and disconnected from the real communicative demands of professional settings (Basturkmen, 2010). As a result, students may achieve grammatical accuracy but lack the pragmatic competence needed for effective workplace communication.

Second, lecturers face challenges in developing specialized ESP materials. Some instructors lack sufficient background in the target disciplines, making it difficult for them to design field-specific learning activities (Belcher, 2009). This issue is compounded by the limited

availability of authentic teaching resources that integrate technical vocabulary, professional genres, and cultural aspects relevant to each field.

Third, students' motivation and awareness of ESP's relevance remain low. Many learners perceive ESP as merely an extension of general English, without understanding its direct benefits for employability and career advancement. This perception reduces engagement and limits their active participation in communicative tasks during ESP classes (Anthony, 2018).

Finally, institutional support for ESP programs is still inadequate. Universities often prioritize general English courses and allocate insufficient time or resources for ESP development. Collaboration between academia and industry, which is crucial for aligning course content with real-world practices, is still minimal.

Recent other Indonesian research also highlights how competency-based learning significantly improves students' English-speaking ability, self-confidence, and industry relevance. These studies reaffirm that ESP programs must integrate professional discourse and authentic communication to meet the demands of employability (Pambudi et al., 2024; Pambudi & Nurhastuti, 2024).

These problems indicate the urgent need for a comprehensive needs analysis to bridge the gap between academic instruction and professional requirements. By identifying specific linguistic and communicative competencies required in various job sectors, ESP programs can be restructured to better prepare students for the global job market.

This study is conducted to address several critical issues found in the implementation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses in higher education. Based on the field observations and previous studies, there is a clear gap between the current ESP curriculum and the actual language needs required in the global job market. Many universities still use general English materials that do not reflect the real communicative tasks encountered in professional settings. As a result, students often struggle to apply their English skills effectively in workplace situations. This study, therefore, aims to explore how ESP can better prepare students to meet international employment demands through a comprehensive needs analysis approach.

The research seeks to identify the specific linguistic and communicative needs of students based on their target professions, evaluate the extent to which the existing ESP curriculum meets those needs, and uncover the challenges faced by both lecturers and students in implementing ESP instruction. Through this process, the study intends to provide a clearer understanding of how need analysis can be applied to improve the relevance and quality of ESP programs in universities. The ultimate goal is to design an ESP framework that not only supports students' academic development but also enhances their employability and global competitiveness.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it enriches the understanding of ESP as a field of applied linguistics by emphasizing the importance of need analysis in curriculum design. Practically, the findings are expected to assist educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in designing English courses that are more closely aligned with the real demands of the professional world. For universities, the study provides insights that can be used to improve the quality and effectiveness of ESP programs, ultimately producing graduates who are linguistically competent, professionally skilled, and ready to compete in the global labor market.

The rationale for conducting this study is rooted in the increasing importance of English as a global language of communication and the growing expectation for graduates to possess specialized language competence relevant to their chosen fields. Although ESP has been

implemented in many institutions, its effectiveness often remains limited due to the absence of systematic need analysis and the lack of collaboration between academia and industry. As globalization and technological advancement continue to reshape professional communication, universities must adapt their language education programs to meet these evolving demands. Therefore, this study is designed to bridge the gap between academic English instruction and the real communicative needs of the global workplace, ensuring that ESP becomes a more responsive and effective tool for student development.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to conduct a needs analysis of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Indonesian higher education and to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' English language needs in relation to the global job market. The qualitative approach is used to explore perceptions, experiences, and challenges faced by both students and lecturers in the implementation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. (Long, 2005)

The study was conducted at one of the private universities in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia, where ESP is offered as a compulsory subject for students in non-English departments. The participants of this research consisted of five university students and an ESP lecturer. The selection of participants was carried out through purposive sampling, ensuring that those involved had direct experience or engagement with ESP learning and its practical application in professional contexts. (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a lecturer to obtain qualitative insights regarding the existing curriculum, teaching methods, and language competencies required in the workplace. Additionally, syllabus documents and ESP materials were analyzed to identify how far they align with the communicative and linguistic demands of global employment contexts.

The data analysis process for qualitative data from interviews and document reviews was analyzed through thematic analysis, following the procedures of coding, categorizing, and interpreting emerging themes. For trustworthiness, this study applied triangulation and peer debriefing during coding discussions. Member checking was carried out to verify the interpretive accuracy of themes.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to protect the participants' identities and ensure the integrity of the research.

Through this methodological framework, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of how ESP instruction can be improved based on an evidence-driven understanding of students' real communicative needs. The ultimate goal of the methodology is not only to describe the existing situation but also to generate actionable insights that can contribute to curriculum improvement, material design, and pedagogical innovation in English for Specific Purposes programs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study reveal several important aspects concerning the current implementation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses and their effectiveness in preparing students for the global job market. Based on the data collected from interviews and document analysis, it was found that most students perceive ESP as relevant to their future careers, yet they feel that the current curriculum and materials do not fully meet their professional needs. Students generally recognize that English competence is essential for employability, especially in international or multicultural work environments. However, many report that the content of their ESP courses remains too general and lacks a direct connection to their chosen disciplines.

The results from the needs analysis indicate that students require more exposure to job-related communicative activities such as writing professional emails, participating in meetings, making presentations, and understanding industry-specific terminology. While the current ESP syllabus includes general communication skills, it does not sufficiently address the linguistic and pragmatic competencies that are directly applicable to real-world professional contexts. For instance, management students expressed the need for more practice in communicating and negotiation, while tourism students emphasized the importance of learning to communicate, make a brochure, handle tourists, and convey the information for tourist or visitor needs. This discrepancy between course content and students' occupational needs supports the argument that ESP programs should be designed based on detailed need analysis rather than relying on generic English instruction.

Interviews with the lecturer revealed another critical issue regarding teaching resources and instructor preparedness. The lecturer reported difficulties in developing specialized materials because of the limited background knowledge in the students' professional fields. They often rely on textbooks that provide general content and avoid specific industry-related language tasks. This finding aligns with Belcher (2009), who argued that ESP teachers often struggle to balance linguistic competence with content expertise, resulting in less effective instructional delivery. Furthermore, the lecturer emphasized the lack of institutional support, such as professional development opportunities and collaboration with industry experts to compile the materials related to the industry target, which are essential for creating authentic and relevant ESP materials.

From the perspective of industry professionals, graduates entering the workforce often possess adequate grammatical competence but lack confidence and fluency in performing communicative tasks required in real situations. Employers reported that the ability to use English effectively in professional interactions such as teamwork, problem-solving, and cross-cultural communication is as important as technical knowledge. These findings reinforce Hyland's (2006) statement that ESP instruction should not only focus on language accuracy but also on communicative competence, intercultural awareness, and professional literacy.

The analysis of ESP syllabus documents further supports the conclusion that many programs are still oriented toward academic English rather than professional or occupational English. Course objectives and learning outcomes often emphasize reading and writing skills for academic purposes, while listening and speaking skills for workplace interaction receive less attention. This imbalance may contribute to the limited readiness of students to perform effectively in real work environments, particularly in global and multilingual settings. The review of syllabus documents revealed that most ESP courses emphasized reading and writing activities for academic purposes, while speaking and listening for workplace communication were minimally represented.

Only two syllabi included modules on professional correspondence or oral presentation. Furthermore, assessment components are largely focused on grammar accuracy rather than communicative performance. These findings indicate that ESP materials remain oriented toward academic rather than occupational English, confirming the curriculum-industry misalignment discussed earlier.

These findings resonate with national studies emphasizing the effectiveness of competency-based instruction for aligning English learning outcomes with workplace requirements (Pambudi et al., 2024). Their survey-based evidence confirmed that students who engaged in contextualized tasks performed better in professional communication.

This observation supports previous studies emphasizing the importance of authentic, workplace-oriented ESP content (Elyazale, 2025; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

The findings highlight the need for a paradigm shift in the development of ESP curricula in Indonesian higher education. A more dynamic, need-based approach is required, one that integrates authentic materials, professional genres, and communicative tasks relevant to students' future careers. Collaboration between universities and industry stakeholders should be strengthened to ensure that ESP courses reflect real-world language demands. Moreover, continuous professional training for lecturers in both language pedagogy and disciplinary knowledge is essential to enhance the quality and relevance of ESP instruction.

Overall, the parallel outcomes of both studies underscore the universal need for curriculum reform that is evidence-based and industry-oriented. As Nawe and Omar (2025) concluded in their evaluation of the EFL curriculum, continuous adaptation and close collaboration with professional sectors are essential to bridge the gap between academic instruction and workplace requirements. This research supports that view by demonstrating that the effectiveness of ESP education in Indonesia depends on its ability to respond to learners' actual needs, promote practical communication skills, and foster intercultural competence. By integrating need analysis and industry input into curriculum design, ESP can serve as a powerful medium for preparing students to participate confidently and effectively in the global job market.

Curriculum Industry Misalignment

Moreover, the two studies converge on the significance of aligning ESP course objectives with labor market expectations. Elyazale (2025) found that graduates' employability is heavily influenced by their ability to use English appropriately within their professional contexts, rather than by general linguistic competence alone. Similarly, the present research demonstrates that students may possess basic language proficiency but still struggle to use English functionally in job-related situations. This reinforces the need for ESP instruction to emphasize not only accuracy and fluency but also context-specific communicative competence, as suggested by both Elyazale (2025) and Hyland (2006). (Araminta & Halimi, 2015; Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017)

The findings of this study are further supported by the research of Syafitri, Artika, Rahman, and Triannisa (2025), who explored students' perspectives on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction in their study "Bridging Classrooms and Careers." Their research emphasized the crucial role of ESP in connecting academic learning with real-world professional demands. They found that students generally perceive ESP as a bridge between classroom knowledge and the communicative skills required in the workplace, but also expressed that current instructional practices are not yet fully responsive to those professional expectations. This finding strongly resonates with the results of the present study, which also revealed that students recognize the

importance of ESP for their employability, yet feel that the existing curriculum and materials remain too general and insufficiently aligned with job-related tasks.

Overall, the alignment between the present findings and those of Elyazale (2025) reinforces the argument that needs analysis should be the cornerstone of ESP curriculum development. Both studies demonstrate that a well-structured, evidence-based approach can enhance the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of ESP programs in equipping students with the linguistic and communicative skills required for success in international professional contexts.

Additionally, the findings align with Rohmani and Pambudi's (2023) argument that digital literacy should be viewed as an integral component of language education rather than a supplementary skill. In ESP settings, the ability to navigate digital communication platforms, analyze online resources, and produce professional digital content is directly linked to employability. This study reinforces that perspective by showing how students' familiarity with digital tools can strengthen their confidence and communicative competence in real-world professional situations.

In conclusion, both studies point to the same direction: the modernization of ESP instruction requires the integration of digital learning tools and pedagogical innovation. By incorporating technology and game-based learning strategies, educators can make ESP courses more relevant, interactive, and aligned with the demands of today's globalized and technology-driven job market.

Authentic Workplace Genres and Tasks

The findings of this study demonstrate that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) plays a significant role in preparing university students for the linguistic and communicative challenges of the global job market. However, the current implementation of ESP in higher education remains insufficient in addressing the real needs of students entering professional environments. The study reveals a noticeable gap between the existing ESP curriculum and the expectations of industries that require specific language skills, professional discourse, and intercultural competence. Although students and lecturers recognize the importance of ESP, the learning materials and teaching methods used in most programs are still too general, with limited relevance to authentic workplace communication. (Hyland, 2002; Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993)

Both studies underscore the growing necessity for an ESP curriculum that extends beyond purely occupational or technical language skills. The present study reveals that while many students possess basic English proficiency, they often lack the pragmatic and intercultural competence needed to navigate professional communication in multinational environments. Similarly, Rofi'i et al. (2024) argued that developing cross-cultural competence is essential for bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, enabling learners to adapt successfully to global workplaces. This convergence indicates that ESP education should integrate not only domain-specific vocabulary and discourse but also cross-cultural training to prepare students for the realities of international collaboration.

Similar to the present research, Syafitri et al. (2025) discovered that students desire more authentic learning experiences that mirror workplace communication, such as report writing, professional correspondence, and teamwork-based projects. They also emphasized that effective ESP instruction should foster not only linguistic competence but also confidence, critical thinking, and intercultural communication skills-elements that are essential for success in the global job market. These insights parallel the findings of this study, in which students reported a strong need

for communicative tasks that reflect the language functions they will encounter in real professional settings.

The convergence between the findings of this study and those of Syafitri et al. (2025) demonstrates that the success of ESP instruction largely depends on its ability to integrate academic learning with practical, real-world applications. Both studies advocate for a more student-centered and needs-based approach that empowers learners to become confident communicators in their respective fields. By making ESP instruction more authentic and career-oriented, educational institutions can more effectively bridge the gap between classrooms and careers, helping graduates to thrive in diverse international workplaces.

Consistent with İlter and Yeşilyurt's (2024) conclusions, the current findings highlight that conducting a thorough needs analysis is the cornerstone of effective ESP curriculum design. Both studies demonstrate that understanding learners' professional goals, target situations, and communicative tasks is essential to develop relevant instructional materials. In this study, students expressed the need for more authentic learning experiences, such as exposure to industry-specific documents, simulations of workplace communication, and field-related terminology. This observation mirrors the insights of İlter and Yeşilyurt (2024), who stressed that ESP materials should incorporate authentic content derived directly from professional settings to ensure practical applicability.

The findings of this study are also in line with the research conducted by Elyazale (2025), who carried out a comprehensive needs analysis for Master's students in Economics at Moulay Ismail University. Elyazale's study emphasized that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses must be carefully designed to reflect students' academic and professional requirements rather than relying on generic English instruction. His research revealed that many ESP programs tend to overlook the learners' specific communication needs in their disciplinary contexts, resulting in a gap between academic preparation and real-world language use. The current study echoes these conclusions, showing that many ESP programs in Indonesian universities still fail to integrate authentic, job-related communicative practices that align with students' target professional environments.

Furthermore, the findings from both studies underline the importance of teacher competence and interdisciplinary collaboration in ESP program development. İlter and Yeşilyurt (2024) argued that ESP instructors must work closely with subject specialists to ensure that language instruction accurately reflects the discourse practices of the field. In line with their argument, the present research also reveals that many ESP lecturers struggle to design specialized materials due to limited familiarity with students' areas of study. This challenge reinforces the necessity of professional development programs and institutional support to enhance lecturers' capacity to create discipline-specific content.

Pragmatic and Intercultural Competence

Overall, the alignment between this study and Rofi'i et al. (2024) highlights the critical role of integrating cross-cultural competence into ESP programs as part of a comprehensive strategy to prepare students for the global job market. Both studies affirm that effective ESP instruction must balance linguistic precision, professional relevance, and cultural sensitivity, thereby equipping learners with the skills needed to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world. (Hyland, 2006)

In addition, the results of this study are consistent with the findings of Rofi'i, Pambudi, Muthawali, Safar, and Kurniadi (2024), who conducted a literature review on integrating global perspectives into English curricula and the development of cross-cultural competence in language

education. Their research emphasized that English instruction in the modern era must not only focus on linguistic accuracy and fluency but also on the cultivation of intercultural awareness, adaptability, and global-mindedness. According to Rofi'i et al. (2024), the inclusion of cross-cultural components in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses enables students to communicate more effectively and appropriately in diverse international settings. This aligns closely with the present study's findings, which show that students and lecturers alike recognize the importance of preparing learners for global interaction through culturally responsive ESP instruction.

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Lecturer Capacity and Collaboration

It can be concluded that the effectiveness of ESP instruction depends greatly on the extent to which it is grounded in systematic need analysis. A well-designed ESP curriculum should be based on a thorough understanding of the linguistic demands of the target professions, integrating practical communication tasks that reflect real job situations. The collaboration between educators, curriculum developers, and industry professionals is essential to ensure that ESP courses are not only academically sound but also practically applicable. Furthermore, lecturers need ongoing training and institutional support to enhance their ability to design specialized materials and adopt learner-centered approaches. In doing so, ESP can become a more powerful tool in improving students' employability and preparing them to participate effectively in international professional contexts. (Belcher, 2009)

Overall, the parallels between the present findings and those of İlter and Yeşilyurt (2024) confirm that ESP effectiveness depends on a curriculum built upon a solid needs analysis and continuous collaboration between educators and professionals. Both studies advocate for a shift from generalized English instruction toward more specialized, learner-centered, and professionally relevant ESP courses. Such alignment ensures that language education contributes meaningfully to students' employability, confidence, and ability to function effectively in global professional environments.

The findings of the current study also extend Elyazale's (2025) insights by underscoring the role of institutional collaboration and curriculum reform. While Elyazale highlighted the need for more student-centered and discipline-oriented course design, this study suggests that partnerships between universities and industries are equally vital for ensuring curriculum

relevance. Such collaborations can provide authentic materials, updated workplace discourse models, and realistic communicative tasks that better prepare students for the global job market.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, this study confirms that while ESP plays a crucial role in preparing students for the global job market, its effectiveness largely depends on how well it responds to learners' actual needs. The alignment between curriculum design, instructional practice, and professional expectations must be systematically strengthened. By grounding ESP programs in comprehensive need analysis and promoting collaboration across disciplines, universities can better equip their graduates with the linguistic and communicative skills necessary to thrive in the increasingly competitive global workforce.

Based on these conclusions, several suggestions can be proposed for future improvement. Educational institutions should regularly conduct need analyses to update their ESP curricula in line with the changing demands of the global workforce. Universities should also establish partnerships with industries and professional organizations to gain insights into the specific communication skills required in different fields. In addition, lecturers should be encouraged to collaborate across disciplines and engage in continuous professional development to strengthen both their linguistic and content knowledge. The integration of authentic materials, such as real business documents, technical manuals, or workplace simulations, is highly recommended to enhance learners' practical communication competence.

For future researchers, further studies may explore ESP implementation in more specific professional areas or compare the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches in improving students' performance. By deepening our understanding of ESP through continuous research and innovation, educational institutions can ensure that English language teaching evolves in harmony with the dynamic realities of global employment. Ultimately, ESP should not only equip students with linguistic skills but also empower them with the communicative confidence and cultural adaptability necessary to succeed in a competitive, multilingual world.

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