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AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENT'S PERCEPTIONS ON ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP) MATERIALS IN ENGLISH TEXTBOOK USE IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian kualitatif deskriptif ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi kesesuaian materi *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) dalam buku teks *English for Professional Hotel Staff* terhadap kebutuhan vokasi siswa perhotelan sekaligus menganalisis persepsi siswa terhadap materi tersebut. Data dihimpun melalui analisis dokumen terhadap Unit 1–7 dengan panduan kerangka evaluasi bahan ajar serta diskusi kelompok terpumpun (*focus group discussion*) bersama 10 siswa perhotelan di sekolah menengah kejuruan. Hasil analisis dokumen menunjukkan bahwa materi menyajikan kosakata perhotelan dan fungsi bahasa yang sesuai dengan tugas kerja secara konsisten, namun cakupan empat keterampilan bahasa belum seimbang karena keterampilan menyimak dan menulis kurang terwakili serta materi autentik masih minim. Hasil diskusi kelompok terpumpun mengungkap bahwa 8 dari 10 siswa menilai materi relevan secara parsial pada tingkat dasar, 7 siswa memandang materi berguna namun belum memadai untuk kesiapan kerja industri, dan keterlibatan belajar siswa bersifat kondisional dengan preferensi tertinggi pada aktivitas simulasi kerja (*role-play*). Kedua temuan mengonfirmasi bahwa buku teks ini berfungsi sebagai fondasi awal yang baik namun memerlukan materi suplemen autentik dan variasi tugas untuk mengoptimalkan kompetensi komunikasi kerja siswa.
Kata Kunci: *English for Specific Purposes, materi ajar, perhotelan, persepsi siswa.*

ABSTRACT

This descriptive qualitative study aims to evaluate the alignment of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) materials in the textbook English for Professional Hotel Staff with hospitality students' vocational demands and explore students' subjective perceptions of the materials. Data were gathered through document analysis of Units 1–7 employing a materials evaluation checklist and a focus group discussion with 10 hospitality students at a vocational high school. The document analysis revealed that the textbook consistently presents industry-relevant vocabulary and workplace communicative functions, yet it exhibits an imbalance in language skills where listening and writing are underrepresented alongside irregular authentic materials. The focus group discussion showed that 8 out of 10 students perceived the content as partially relevant to entry-level tasks, 7 students deemed it fundamentally useful but insufficient for workplace readiness, and their classroom engagement was conditional with a strong preference for hands-on role-play activities. These convergent findings indicate that while the textbook offers a solid instructional basis, supplementary authentic tasks and pedagogical adaptations are necessary to foster comprehensive occupational competence.

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Keywords: *English for Specific Purposes, hospitality, instructional materials, student perceptions.*

INTRODUCTION

English has become an indispensable communicative tool in the international service industry, positioning specialized language competence as an essential qualification for vocational graduates. In the hospitality sector, service personnel are required to perform complex communicative duties ranging from handling reservations and managing guest complaints to providing food and beverage recommendations (Ma'fiyah & Sumardiono, 2023). Consequently, vocational high schools are expected to equip hospitality learners with practical language competencies that directly match actual workplace situations (Widodo, 2016). English for Specific Purposes (ESP) serves as a pedagogical approach designed to fulfill these occupational demands by tailoring instructional content to the target communicative environment (Basturkmen, 2010). Without targeted instructional resources, vocational learners frequently experience communication apprehension and struggle to interact effectively with international hotel guests (Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017).

In practice, instructional resources utilized in vocational secondary schools often fail to reflect the authentic linguistic conventions and communicative challenges of specific service departments (Ma'fiyah & Sumardiono, 2023). Many commercial textbooks present generic conversational templates that treat hospitality language superficially, thereby widening the gap between classroom instruction and real-world hotel operations (Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2021). Previous studies have predominantly investigated English language needs analysis in vocational secondary schools or assessed stakeholder perspectives on tertiary ESP curricula (Ma'fiyah & Sumardiono, 2023; Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017). However, those empirical inquiries frequently evaluated curriculum needs in isolation without examining how prescribed textbook contents are realized and experienced in the classroom setting. A critical empirical gap therefore persists regarding how instructional content within vocational textbooks aligns with operational standards and how students interact with such learning materials.

The effectiveness of any instructional resource cannot be evaluated solely through its structural features, as learning outcomes are fundamentally mediated by students' subjective reception of the materials (Bui, 2022). In vocational education, material suitability is governed by the core dimensions of relevance, usefulness, and engagement (Tomlinson, 2013). Perceived relevance ensures that pedagogical activities mirror genuine workplace communicative tasks, while perceived usefulness motivates learners by demonstrating a clear pathway to occupational competence (Bui, 2022; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Furthermore, student engagement operates as the active catalyst that transforms relevant content into sustained classroom participation and practical mastery (Mauludin, 2021; Skarpaas, 2023). Combining document analysis with student perceptions provides an ecological evaluation model that bridges theoretical curriculum design with learners' authentic instructional realities.

To address this gap, this study presents a dual-perspective evaluation of a designated vocational textbook by integrating systematic document analysis with an in-depth exploration of student experiences. This investigation is guided by two specific research questions: (1) To what extent do the ESP materials in the textbook align with the vocational needs of hospitality students? and (2) What are students' perceptions of the ESP materials in terms of relevance, usefulness, and engagement? Accordingly, this study aims to examine the vocational alignment of the instructional materials across core evaluative criteria and analyze students' nuanced

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evaluative perceptions regarding their classroom learning experiences. The resulting insights are anticipated to provide targeted pedagogical recommendations for vocational teachers and curriculum developers in selecting and adapting hospitality English learning resources.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to investigate the content alignment of an ESP textbook and capture students' subjective learning experiences. The research was conducted within the hospitality department of a vocational high school (*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan*) that has implemented specialized vocational English instruction. The participants comprised 10 eleventh-grade hospitality students who were selected through purposive sampling based on their completion of the instructional units and their willingness to share detailed reflections. The document analysis focused on Units 1–7 of the textbook *English for Professional Hotel Staff*, which constituted the core instructional syllabus taught during the academic semester covering front office and food service encounters.

Data were collected using two complementary methods: document analysis and a semi-structured focus group discussion (*FGD*). The document analysis utilized an evaluation checklist adapted from Tomlinson (2013), operationalized into three key dimensions: vocational relevance, linguistic authenticity, and engagement potential. Each indicator within the seven units was appraised using dichotomous evaluation criteria, where an indicator was classified as adequate if it provided clear, industry-standard communicative practice, or inadequate if it lacked sufficient contextualization or operational depth. Following the textbook evaluation, a 75-minute *FGD* was conducted with the 10 student participants using an open-ended interview protocol exploring their perceptions of material relevance, functional usefulness, and learning engagement (Nurmasitah et al., 2018). The discussion was audio-recorded with explicit consent from the participants, supplemented by observational field notes, and transcribed verbatim into full textual transcripts for qualitative coding.

The qualitative data were analyzed following a systematic thematic analysis procedure consisting of transcript immersion, initial code generation, theme searching, and theme definition. Initial coding identified recurrent textual patterns, such as comments regarding basic vocabulary and lack of bar service simulations, which were subsequently collated into broader conceptual themes representing relevance, usefulness, and engagement. Methodological credibility was established through data source triangulation, wherein findings from the objective textbook checklist were cross-examined against students' subjective accounts from the *FGD*. In addition, member checking was conducted by returning summarized transcript statements to three student representatives to verify the factual accuracy of their quoted expressions. Ethical integrity was preserved throughout the inquiry by anonymizing participant identities using alphanumeric codes (S1 to S10) and maintaining data confidentiality.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The empirical findings are structured into two distinct subsections: the objective document analysis of the textbook and the subjective themes derived from the student focus group discussion. The document evaluation examined seven instructional units of *English for Professional Hotel Staff* across vocational relevance, language authenticity, and engagement potential. Meanwhile, the focus group discussion captured how 10 vocational learners perceived these instructional components during their actual classroom learning. Separating

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these two data sets ensures that textual characteristics of the instructional material are clearly delineated from the students' lived pedagogical experiences.

The document analysis was conducted on Units 1 to 7 using an operational checklist to assess the presence and pedagogical adequacy of core ESP components. Evaluative judgements were recorded using specific indicators where a checkmark indicates an adequate standard and an exclamation symbol denotes present but pedagogically inadequate execution. The complete distribution of these evaluative indicators across all seven units is presented systematically in Table 1. This tabular mapping illustrates both the consistent vocational strengths and the structural shortcomings embedded within the instructional syllabus.

Table 1. Document Analysis Results across Units 1–7 of the Textbook

No.	Evaluative Aspect	Analytical Indicator	U1	U2	U3	U4	U5	U6	U7
1.	Vocational Relevance	1.1 Hospitality-specific vocabulary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		1.2 Language functions match staff duties	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		1.3 Topics align with real workplace situations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		1.4 Balanced coverage of all four language skills	!!	!!	!!	!!	!!	!!	!!
2.	Linguistic Authenticity	2.1 Authentic and near-authentic text materials	!!	!!	✓	!!	✓	✓	!!
		2.2 Polite, service-oriented expressions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		2.3 Naturalness of communicative language	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3.	Engagement Potential	3.1 Variation of pedagogical task types	!!	!!	!!	!!	!!	!!	!!
		3.2 Interactive and learner-centered activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Legend: ✓ = Present and adequate (clear, industry-standard execution); !! = Present but inadequate (lacks depth, contextualization, or balance).

As displayed in Table 1, the document analysis demonstrates that all seven units consistently incorporate hospitality-specific terminology, task-appropriate language functions, and workplace-aligned conversational topics. However, Table 1 also reveals critical structural deficiencies across several pedagogical indicators, particularly regarding skill coverage where all seven units received inadequate ratings for balanced language skills. Speaking and listening activities heavily dominate each unit through scripted dialogue memorization, whereas reading is restricted to brief descriptive paragraphs and writing is limited to mechanical sentence unscrambling and fill-in-the-blank drills without extended writing tasks such as guest reservation emails or incident reports. Furthermore, Table 1 highlights that authentic workplace artifacts such as registration forms, floor plans, and dining menus are only provided in Units 3, 5, and 6, while the remaining units rely entirely on synthetic illustrated dialogues. This identical mechanical organization across units demonstrates a lack of task variation that risks generating instructional monotony over an extended semester.

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In addition to the textual document analysis, an in-depth focus group discussion was conducted with 10 hospitality students to capture their evaluative perceptions of the learning materials. The qualitative thematic analysis generated three primary themes: perceived relevance, functional usefulness, and conditional learning engagement. To provide a transparent and measurable overview of these findings, the distribution of participant perspectives across these themes is summarized in Table 2. This data compilation outlines the exact proportion of students endorsing each evaluative position alongside representative student quotations.

Table 2. Summary of Student Perceptions from the Focus Group Discussion (N = 10)

Evaluative Theme	Core Sub-Theme Identified	Participant Count	Representative Student Quotations
Perceived Relevance	Partial relevance limited to basic operational phrases	8 of 10 students	*"Masih 50-50 sih, nggak terlalu diperdalamin, cuma kayak luar-luarnya doang, basic."* (S9)
	Omission of practical departmental skills (F&B and bar)	6 of 10 students	*"Bar juga, kita gak diajar cara bikin minuman. Nanti belajarnya pas PKL di hotel."* (S6)
Functional Usefulness	Useful vocabulary base but insufficient for workplace	7 of 10 students	*"Kepake, tapi kalau dipelajarin lebih dalam pasti lebih ketemu lagi... belum cukup buat terjun ke lapangan."* (S9)
	Speaking heavily practiced while listening neglected	8 of 10 students	*"Kalau speaking sering, tapi kalau listening jarang banget dilatih di kelas."* (S2)
Learning Engagement	High engagement driven by role-play simulations	9 of 10 students	*"Role-play seru banget karena langsung simulasi jadi staf hotel!"* (S4)
	Conditional motivation affected by script length	6 of 10 students	*"Kadang dialognya kepanjangan dan dihafal doang, jadi bikin bosan kalau diulang terus."* (S7)

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that 8 out of 10 students perceived the textbook content as only partially relevant to their professional development because it primarily covered basic front-office phrases without addressing specialized food and beverage or bar operations. Regarding perceived usefulness, 7 out of 10 participants acknowledged that while the vocabulary bank was beneficial for basic classroom drills, it was insufficient for complete workplace readiness, leading them to anticipate that actual communicative competence would only be acquired during their upcoming internship (*Praktik Kerja Lapangan*). In terms of classroom engagement, 9 out of 10 students identified collaborative role-play simulations as the most engaging instructional feature, although 6 students noted that overly lengthy scripted dialogues occasionally hindered their learning motivation. Furthermore, all 10 students explicitly stated their preference for ESP materials over general English instruction due to its direct conceptual alignment with their vocational specialization. These focus group findings in Table 2 validate the document analysis by confirming that the pedagogical limitations identified in the textbook directly affect students' classroom engagement and occupational confidence.

Discussion

The document analysis findings indicate that *English for Professional Hotel Staff* successfully incorporates specialized occupational vocabulary and functional speech acts,

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reflecting the target-situation demands highlighted in ESP materials design principles (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Tomlinson, 2013). Nonetheless, the pronounced pedagogical imbalance favoring oral repetition over functional listening and professional writing represents a serious instructional limitation. In contemporary hotel operations, service personnel are required not only to engage in polite face-to-face spoken interactions but also to process authentic accents, draft confirmation emails, log shift reports, and document specific guest requests (Widodo, 2016). Neglecting written occupational genres and natural listening input deprives vocational learners of the holistic communicative repertoire necessary for modern hospitality environments (Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2021). This instructional deficiency explains why 7 out of 10 students felt unprepared for direct workplace immersion and viewed the textbook as an introductory primer rather than a comprehensive training manual.

The inconsistent inclusion of authentic workplace materials across the analyzed units significantly limits learners' exposure to actual industry genres (Tomlinson, 2013). When instructional tasks rely predominantly on synthetic dialogues, students miss valuable opportunities to interact with real registration cards, dining vouchers, and service directories that they will encounter during their industry placements (Ma'fiyah & Sumardiono, 2023). Moreover, the uniform structural progression replicated across all seven units creates task fatigue, diminishing the pedagogical impact of otherwise well-designed role-play sections. As observed in the focus group findings, repetitive task formats led learners to experience conditional engagement, wherein their motivation fluctuated depending on external instructional variables rather than intrinsic curiosity (Skarpaas, 2023). Introducing varied communicative tasks and authentic industry artifacts is therefore vital to sustain student motivation and foster contextualized problem-solving skills (Basturkmen, 2010; Bui, 2022; (Nguyen, 2026; Wijnia et al., 2024; Yang & Wyatt, 2021; Yıldız, 2023).

The empirical outcomes of this study both corroborate and advance previous scholarship on vocational English curriculum evaluation. While Ma'fiyah and Sumardiono (2023) identified general communicative gaps in vocational hospitality programs, this study pinpoints the precise structural loci within textbook units where skill representation fails to meet industry standards. Similarly, whereas Poedjiastutie and Oliver (2017) examined stakeholder perceptions at the tertiary level, the present investigation uncovers how secondary vocational students critically appraise textbook utility based on their anticipation of practical internship duties. In contrast to earlier studies that treated student satisfaction as a monolithic construct, our findings illustrate that vocational learners can simultaneously appreciate the thematic relevance of a textbook while recognizing its functional inadequacy for authentic job execution (Adams & Jessup-Anger, 2025; Liu, 2021; Vukić et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2025). This nuanced finding confirms Mauludin's (2021) assertion that active learning strategies like role-play maintain learner enthusiasm even when instructional materials lack contextual depth.

Integrating document analysis with student focus groups provides an enriched, multidimensional assessment that neither method could achieve independently (Nurmasitah et al., 2018). The objective checklist revealed the absence of authentic texts and extended writing exercises, while the focus group discussions illuminated the affective and practical consequences of these gaps on students' self-confidence (Long & Kim, 2024; Mekheimer, 2025; Sabir, 2025; Saleem et al., 2025). Crucially, the student reflections brought to light omissions that were not captured by the checklist alone, such as the complete lack of specialized terminology for food and beverage mixing and bar service. By demonstrating how document-level deficiencies translate into real communicative anxieties in the classroom, this dual-

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perspective approach establishes an effective framework for vocational materials evaluation. Consequently, vocational educators must move beyond uncritical textbook adherence by actively developing supplementary authentic materials that address both department-specific tasks and receptive-productive skill integration.

CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the vocational alignment of *English for Professional Hotel Staff* and examined hospitality students' perceptions regarding its instructional relevance, usefulness, and engagement. In answering the first research question, the textbook demonstrates robust alignment in hospitality vocabulary, functional expressions, and professional workplace themes, but exhibits substantial imbalances in language skills (with listening and writing severely underrepresented), inconsistent authentic materials, and repetitive task structures. In answering the second research question, students perceived the materials as partially relevant for entry-level tasks, basically useful yet insufficient for complete internship readiness, and conditionally engaging, with role-play simulations being the most preferred activity. The primary contribution of this research lies in its dual-perspective evaluation framework, which links objective document metrics with learners' subjective vocational experiences to reveal specific curricular misalignments.

Based on these empirical findings, vocational English teachers are advised to supplement the textbook with authentic hotel documents, incorporate extended writing tasks such as guest correspondence, and integrate departmental content such as food and beverage service. Curriculum coordinators should also implement varied interactive task structures to prevent instructional monotony and strengthen students' receptive listening abilities against natural speech. Nonetheless, this study has limitations, including its focus on a single textbook, the analysis of only seven units, the involvement of 10 students, and the examination of a single vocational school setting. Future research should expand the evaluative scope by involving larger participant cohorts across multiple vocational institutions, incorporating hotel industry practitioners' assessments, and tracking students' language development longitudinally throughout their industrial internships.

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