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ESP in Indonesian vocational high school: A need analysis of office administration students

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Abstract

Although English instruction in Indonesian vocational high schools is formally framed as ESP, teaching materials and practices often remain generic and poorly aligned with students' occupational needs. Addressing the limited ESP needs-analysis research on Office Administration programs, particularly in regional contexts, this study examines the English learning needs of vocational high school students in South Kalimantan, Indonesia. Employing a descriptive needs-analysis design, the study involved 70 Grade X students selected through total population sampling. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire based on established ESP and needs-analysis frameworks and were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings indicate that students primarily require English for workplace oral communication, yet their proficiency remains at a basic level, with significant deficiencies in speaking, listening, and vocabulary mastery, as well as grammar-related difficulties in writing. These results reveal a clear mismatch between students' communicative goals and their current language competence. The study highlights the necessity of ESP-oriented English instruction that prioritizes communicative tasks, job-related vocabulary, and functional grammar relevant to administrative contexts. The findings offer empirical guidance for curriculum design and instructional material development in vocational education.

Keywords: *English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Needs Analysis, Office Administration Students, Vocational High School, Workplace Communication.*

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1. Introduction

English proficiency has become an essential competency for vocational high school students in preparing for employment in increasingly globalized and competitive labor

markets. English functions not only as an international lingua franca but also as the official working language of the ASEAN Economic Community (ASEAN Charter No. 34/2007). As a member of ASEAN, Indonesia requires vocational graduates who are capable of communicating effectively in English to meet both regional and international workplace demands. Consequently, the ability to use English appropriately in professional contexts is a critical requirement for vocational high school graduates.

In vocational education, English instruction is expected to serve practical and occupational purposes and is therefore categorized as English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP emphasizes the alignment of language instruction with learners' specific academic or professional needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Scholars such as Strevens (1988) and Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) highlight that ESP is characterized by the adaptation of content, language features, and teaching methods to particular disciplines and workplace contexts. Recent Indonesian studies support this view, demonstrating that vocational students across different majors, such as Visual Communication Design, Electronics Engineering, Computer and Network Engineering, Hospitality, and Fashion Design, expect English instruction to be directly related to their field of expertise and future workplace tasks (Saputro & Savitri, 2023; Wahyudi & Jufrizal, 2023; Nurhasanah & Kurniawan, 2023; Ma'fiyah, 2022; Munir et al., 2025). These findings indicate that English instruction in vocational high schools should prioritize discipline-specific communication rather than general communicative competence alone.

Recognizing the strategic importance of English, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture has introduced initiatives such as international English certification through the TOEIC test to enhance the employability of vocational graduates. Despite these efforts, empirical data indicate that vocational students' English proficiency remains relatively low. The average TOEIC score of vocational students is reported to be 363 (ITC, 2016), which is below both the national standard (405) and the international benchmark (475) (Lee et al., 2017). This condition aligns with findings from recent Indonesian vocational studies, which consistently report that students experience difficulties in mastering workplace-relevant English skills, particularly speaking, listening, and field-specific vocabulary (Saputro & Savitri, 2023; Hajar & Triastuti, 2024). These results suggest that existing English instruction has not adequately equipped vocational students with the language skills required by the workplace.

In response, the government issued Presidential Regulation No. 68 of 2022 on the Revitalization of Vocational Education and Vocational Training, which mandates a tighter alignment between vocational curricula and the evolving demands of the global labor market. This regulatory shift has been materialized through the Merdeka Curriculum, which moves away from the rigid, uniform "Core and Basic Competencies" of the previous 2013 Curriculum that treated vocational and general senior high schools identically. However, despite this transition toward Learning Outcomes intended for flexibility, the implementation continues to face hurdles. Similar concerns have been

reported in contemporary Indonesian vocational contexts, where curriculum design and classroom practices often fail to reflect the specific communicative demands of different vocational programs (Nurhasanah & Kurniawan, 2023; Matin, 2025). This lack of practical differentiation means that English instruction remains overly general. As a result, vocational students frequently struggle to develop English competencies that correspond to their specific fields of expertise, perpetuating the proficiency gap in professional settings.

This curricular mismatch is further evident in the English textbooks used in vocational high schools, which largely emphasize general English rather than occupation-specific content. Many instructional materials do not reflect ESP principles in terms of relevant vocabulary, communicative tasks, and workplace-oriented texts. Recent Indonesian needs analysis studies reveal that textbooks commonly used in vocational schools do not sufficiently support students' professional communication needs and lack authentic tasks related to real workplace situations (Wahyudi & Jufrizal, 2023; Matin, 2025). Previous research also emphasizes that ESP materials play a vital role in enabling learners to acquire language skills relevant to specific professional contexts (Kausar, 2025; Pilla et al., 2025), while textbooks significantly influence classroom practices, instructional focus, and teacher decision-making (Erkir & Alkhaldi, 2025).

Within the ESP framework, needs analysis is widely recognized as a foundational step in designing relevant and effective language instruction. Hyland (2006) asserts that English teaching and learning should be grounded in learners' actual needs. Needs analysis is a process in which instructional decisions are determined by learners' purposes for learning English (Wu, 2025) and it emphasizes the importance of examining both target needs and learning needs (Meilyani et al., 2025). Recent Indonesian studies confirm that systematic needs analysis helps identify priority language skills, preferred learning activities, and relevant workplace genres in vocational settings (Saputro & Savitri, 2023; Hajar & Triastuti, 2024). However, despite the growing body of research on ESP needs analysis in Indonesian vocational education, empirical studies that examine the English learning needs of vocational high school students in Office Administration programs remain scarce. This gap is critical, as the Office Administration field requires distinct communicative competencies, such as handling professional correspondence, managing documents, and engaging in workplace interactions that differ substantially from those demanded in other vocational specializations (Widianingrum et al., 2020). In the regional context of South Kalimantan, where administrative graduates are directly prepared for immediate entry into local and regional labor markets, the absence of program-specific needs analysis risks misalignment between English instruction and actual workplace demands, thereby underscoring the urgency of focused investigation in this area.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the English learning needs of Office Administration students in vocational high schools in South Kalimantan. By examining students' target needs and learning needs, this study aims to provide

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empirical evidence that can inform the development of ESP-oriented English instruction, curriculum design, and teaching materials that are more relevant to vocational students' professional contexts.

2. Literature review

2.1. English for Specific Purpose

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has expanded rapidly over the past four decades and has become a prominent strand of English language teaching and research because it is explicitly designed to meet the communication needs of particular professional and occupational communities (Bevilaqua & Didoné, 2022; Li et al., 2018). Instead of being anchored in a single theoretical tradition, ESP draws on multiple perspectives while maintaining a strong emphasis on research-based pedagogy. At its core, ESP seeks to show how language choices are shaped by social and institutional contexts and to equip learners with the ability to participate effectively in the linguistic practices valued in their target settings (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

This focus distinguishes ESP from general English instruction. Whereas general English often treats language as an object of study, ESP frames English as a functional resource for accomplishing discipline-related academic tasks and workplace goals (Al-Roomy, 2017; Shalash, 2024). Because of this practical orientation, ESP instruction must be aligned with the real communicative demands learners encounter in specialized study and employment, including mismatches between learners' current abilities, institutional expectations, and curriculum design (Sintia et al., 2025). Consequently, ESP courses are commonly tailored to specific fields, such as mechanical engineering or medicine, through materials and learning activities that reflect the genres, terminology, and communication routines typical of those disciplines (Ningsih et al., 2023). Designing such courses therefore requires a detailed understanding of the relevant discourse communities to ensure that instructional content remains closely tied to learners' professional realities and is guided by systematic needs analysis (Shalash, 2024).

2.2. Need analysis

Needs analysis is widely recognized as a core stage in ESP curriculum design because it clarifies the specific language demands learners must meet in order to achieve their academic and workplace goals (Rahman et al., 2023). By systematically investigating what learners *need to do* with English, this process identifies not only required language skills (e.g., reading technical texts, presenting, negotiating) but also the discipline-specific genres, discourse patterns, and specialized terminology that enable effective communication in particular fields (Sintia et al., 2025). In practice, researchers often operationalize needs analysis by examining the linguistic features that structure professional and academic texts, such as move structures, recurrent multiword

expressions, and key lexical patterns, across diverse contexts, including occasional speeches as well as medical, computing, and other specialized domains (Supunya, 2023).

This evidence-based focus strengthens the coherence of ESP course design by keeping instruction goal-oriented and learner-centered, with an emphasis on the communicative competencies most relevant to targeted scientific disciplines and professional environments (Alousque, 2016). Ultimately, ESP programs share a common aim: to develop learners' ability to use English in ways that align with the communicative practices of their disciplines and working lives (Dou et al., 2023). For this reason, an effective ESP course is typically defined by how carefully its objectives and materials are customized to learners' identified needs, highlighting the language resources, skills, and genres learners must master to perform required tasks efficiently in English (Dou et al., 2023).

2.3. Office Administration Study Program in Vocational High School

The Office Administration study program in vocational high schools is designed to equip students with practical competencies required in modern office environments. The curriculum emphasizes technical and procedural skills such as document management, business correspondence, data processing, and the use of digital office applications, aligning vocational education with workplace demands (Saputro & Savitri, 2023). Studies indicate that curriculum reforms in Indonesian vocational education, particularly the implementation of competency-based and outcome-oriented curricula, have reshaped instructional priorities in Office Administration programs, placing stronger emphasis on employability and industry relevance (Hajar & Triastuti, 2024). However, research also highlights persistent challenges in instructional implementation, including unequal access to learning resources, varying teacher readiness, and limited contextualization of learning materials to authentic office tasks, which may hinder optimal skill development among students.

In addition to technical competencies, effective performance in office administration roles requires strong communication skills, including English proficiency for handling professional correspondence, workplace documents, and interpersonal interactions. Previous studies on vocational education emphasize that Office Administration students have distinct language needs compared to learners in other vocational fields, as their future work involves administrative communication rather than technical or manual operations (Hyland, 2006; Wu, 2025). Nevertheless, existing English instruction in vocational high schools is often generic and insufficiently aligned with the communicative demands of administrative workplaces (Meilyani et al., 2025). This gap is particularly evident in regional contexts, where graduates are expected to enter the workforce immediately after graduation. Consequently, a program-specific needs analysis for Office Administration students is essential to ensure that English learning

objectives, materials, and activities correspond directly to their professional roles and local labor market requirements.

3. Method

This research was conducted in the academic year 2024/2025 at SMKN 2 Simpang Empat, South Kalimantan. The participants were selected using a total population sampling technique, involving all 70 Grade X students from the Business and Management Study Program, specifically from two Office Administration classes. Each class consisted of 35 students, resulting in a total of 70 participants (20 males and 50 females), aged between 14 and 16 years. This sampling technique was employed to ensure comprehensive representation of the entire target population within the Office Administration program at the school. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design supported by quantitative data obtained through a needs-analysis questionnaire. The research procedure followed several stages, beginning with preparation, which included determining the research site and participants, reviewing ESP and needs-analysis literature, developing the questionnaire based on the frameworks of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Nunan (2004), and conducting expert validation. The data collection stage involved administering a previously validated questionnaire during regular class hours. Content validity was ensured through expert review and a pilot study, while reliability was established using internal consistency analysis (Cronbach's alpha). Clear instructions were provided to ensure students' understanding and to enhance the accuracy of their responses. In the analysis stage, data were categorized according to the needs-analysis components and examined using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage), followed by qualitative interpretation. Finally, the findings were synthesized and compared with existing ESP literature to determine the students' English needs within administrative contexts and identify implications for instructional design.

The instrument used in this research was a needs-analysis questionnaire consisting of eight sections aligned with key components of ESP needs assessment. Each section targeted specific aspects of students' target and learning needs, including necessities, lacks, wants, preferred input and procedures, and expectations regarding learning settings and roles. To enhance clarity, the structure and focus of the questionnaire sections are presented in the table below.

***Table 1**. Structure of the Needs-Analysis Questionnaire*

Section	Item Focus
Necessities	1 item – Identifies English skills required in administrative workplace contexts
Lacks	7 items – Explores gaps between current proficiency and workplace demands

Wants	1 item – Examines students' personal priorities in learning English
Input	4 items – Identifies preferred learning materials
Procedure	7 items – Investigates preferred learning activities and methods
Setting	1 item – Determines preferred classroom arrangements (individual, pair, group)
Students' Role	1 item – Explores learners' preferred roles in the learning process
Teachers' Role	1 item – Examines expectations regarding the teacher's instructional role

Overall, the distribution of items across the eight sections indicates a deliberate emphasis on identifying proficiency gaps and instructional preferences, particularly through the Lacks and Procedure components. This structure ensures that the questionnaire not only captures target workplace requirements but also generates actionable pedagogical insights to inform the design of contextually relevant and learner-centered ESP instructional materials.

4. Findings

The questionnaires were examined using quantitative methods, and their structure was categorized into three aspects of target needs: necessities, wants, and lacks. The results of the needs analysis are outlined below.

4.1 Necessity

Necessities are the type of needs which decided by the demands of the target situation. As mentioned earlier that necessities item consisted of one item. The result is shown in figure 1 below.

In my future workplace, I intend to use English as…

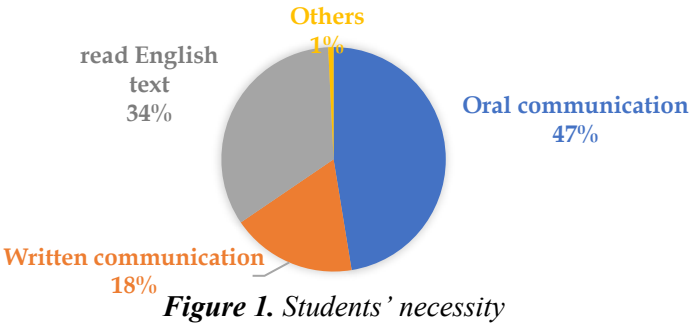


Figure 1. *Students' necessity*

As illustrated in Figure 1, the results indicated that 47% of students believed they would use English primarily for verbal communication. Additionally, 34% stated they would use it for reading English texts related to their field of study, while 18% viewed it as a medium for written communication. Only 1% selected other purposes. These findings

suggest that nearly half of the students perceive English as an essential tool for spoken communication.

The results of the needs analysis revealed that English communication plays a crucial role for vocational high school students, particularly those majoring in Office Administration. The findings from the *necessities* section indicated that almost half of the students (47%) perceived English as essential for verbal communication in their future workplace. This suggests that students are aware of the practical use of English as a communicative tool rather than merely an academic requirement. Such results are consistent with studies by (Rosida & Sujannah, 2023) and (Saputro & Savitri, 2025) highlight the significance of English proficiency for vocational students, emphasizing its role in enhancing career opportunities and meeting industry-specific communication needs.

4.2 Wants

Wants is a special kind of focus group in which the students brainstorm about the English subject should be that they would like to see in the teaching and learning process. the result of the questionnaire is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Students' Want*

Statements	Total of the Students (70)	
	F	P
The English subject should help me to…		
a. be able to communicate effectively in spoken English in the workplace	57	48.3%
b. be able to communicate effectively in written English in the workplace	21	17.8%
c. master vocabulary related to the field of Office Administration	36	30.5%
d. others	4	3.4%

Table 2 indicates that nearly half of the students aimed to learn English to improve their verbal communication skills (48.3%). The second most common goal was mastering vocabulary related to their major (30.5%), followed by developing written communication skills (17.8%). Only a small portion of students selected other reasons (3.4%). These findings suggest that Office Administration students, as vocational high school learners, are well aware of the importance of speaking skills in their field. This is further supported by the consistency between the results for students' necessities and wants, both highlighting a preference for English used in communication.

The *wants* section further supports this finding, as 48.3% of the students expressed a desire to improve their oral communication skills in English. The second most preferred learning goal was mastering vocabulary related to their field (30.5%), reflecting their recognition of English as a tool to understand and use workplace-related terminology. This alignment between *necessities* and *wants* demonstrates that students are both aware

of and motivated to improve the skills most relevant to their future careers. These findings are also in line with the expectations outlined in the literature, which emphasize the importance of equipping vocational students with effective English communication skills to enhance their employability and adaptability in diverse work environments (Romadhon et al., 2024) and to meet the demands of various industries (Kumi et al., 2024). By addressing these needs, educational programs can better prepare students for successful transitions into the workforce.

4.3 Lack

Lacks refer to the students' difficulties related to the subject. As previously mentioned, this section consisted of seven items designed to identify students' understanding of English, covering both macro skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and micro skills (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and spelling). The results are displayed in the following table.

Table 3. *Students' lack*

Statements	Total of the Students (70)	
	F	P
Students' English proficiency …		
a. very good	0	0.0%
b. good	2	2.9%
c. fair	63	90.0%
d. poor	5	7.1%
Students' difficulty in learning English in the skill of …		
a. listening	26	37.10%
b. speaking	28	40.00%
c. reading	8	11.40%
d. writing	8	11.00%

Table 3 illustrates the students' lacks. The data show that 90.0% of students rated their English proficiency as fair, while 7.1% considered their proficiency to be poor. Only 2.9% of the students demonstrated good English skills, and none reached a very good level. These findings indicate that the overall English proficiency of the students remains relatively low. Regarding macro skills, the findings showed that 40.0% of students struggled with speaking, followed by 37.1% who faced difficulties in listening. Both reading and writing skills accounted for 11.4% each. These results clearly indicate that the majority of students have weaknesses in speaking and listening.

This finding aligns with the results from the International Test Center (ITC, 2016), which reported that Indonesian vocational students' average TOEIC score (363) was below the expected intermediate level (405). This gap indicates that students are aware of the importance of English but still face significant challenges in mastering it. Furthermore, the implications of these findings extend beyond individual student

experiences, suggesting a need for systemic changes within vocational education frameworks in Indonesia. As educational institutions strive to enhance English language instruction, integrating practical communication exercises that mirror real-world scenarios could significantly bolster students' confidence and capabilities. For instance, role-playing activities that simulate office environments or customer interactions can provide students with the contextual practice necessary to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This approach not only aligns with the identified necessities and wants of the students but also addresses the alarming proficiency gaps highlighted by the ITC report, thereby fostering a more competent workforce prepared to meet the evolving demands of various industries (Anhar et al., n.d.). By prioritizing these pedagogical strategies, vocational programs can cultivate a generation of graduates who are not only aware of the importance of English but are also equipped to leverage it effectively in their professional endeavors.

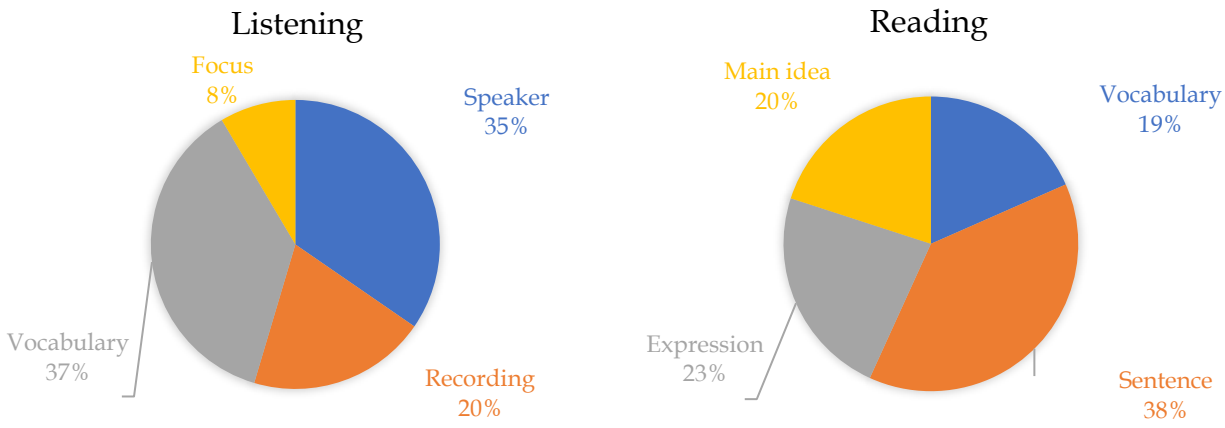


Figure 2. *Lack of receptive skills*

In terms of receptive skills, listening and reading, the findings revealed that most students struggled with understanding words (37%), followed by recognizing words pronounced by speakers (35%), identifying key points in recordings (20%), and maintaining concentration while listening (8%). For reading skills, the greatest difficulty was understanding sentences (38%), followed by interpreting expressions (23%), identifying the main idea in a text (20%), and comprehending word meanings (19%) as the least challenging. These results indicate that a lack of vocabulary is the main issue affecting both listening and reading skills. It can be concluded that the greatest challenge for students lies in understanding what they hear or read, which stems from limited vocabulary mastery.

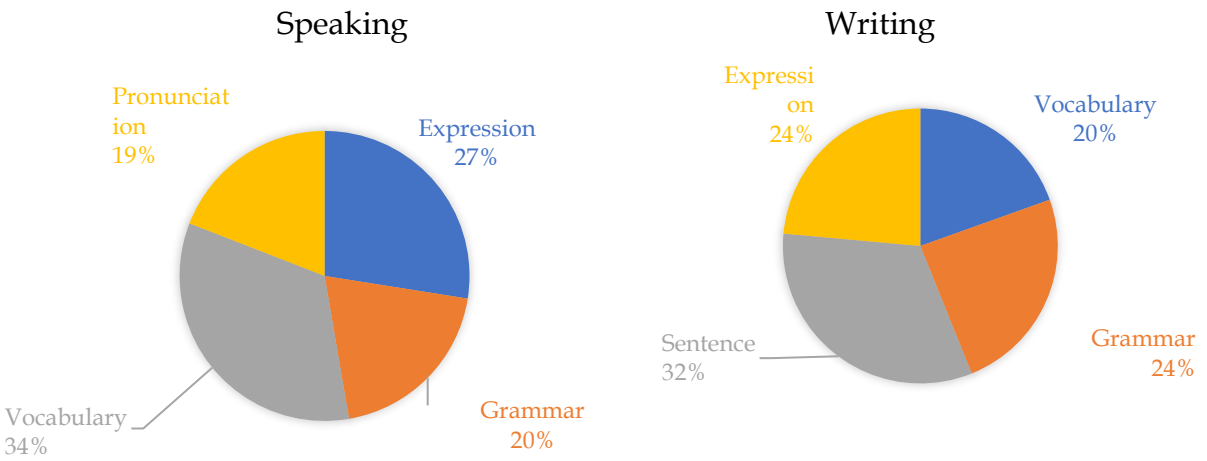


Figure 3. *Lack of productive skills*

In relation to productive skills, speaking and writing, the results showed that the greatest difficulty in speaking was a lack of vocabulary mastery (34%), followed by a lack of expression mastery (27%). Meanwhile, limited grammar and pronunciation mastery were nearly equal, at 20% and 19% respectively. In contrast, for writing skills, the most challenging aspects were constructing well-formed sentences (32%) and applying correct grammar (24%), followed by using appropriate expressions (24%) and vocabulary (20%). Based on these findings, it can be concluded that in speaking, vocabulary poses the greatest challenge, whereas grammar is less problematic. Conversely, in writing, grammar appears to be a more significant difficulty than vocabulary.

This suggests that productive and receptive oral skills pose the greatest challenge for students, reflecting limited exposure and practice in communicative English. The detailed analysis of sub-skills also supports this view. Vocabulary deficiency emerged as the most dominant issue across both receptive and productive skills. Students struggled with understanding words in listening and reading, and had difficulty using appropriate vocabulary in speaking and writing. This supports the findings of previous research, indicating that vocabulary practice is crucial for overcoming difficulties in speaking and enhancing overall communication skills among EFL learners (Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022). Addressing these vocabulary gaps through targeted instructional strategies can significantly improve students' confidence and fluency in English. To effectively enhance students' speaking skills, integrating interactive and immersive learning experiences, such as role-playing and peer interactions, is essential for fostering confidence and fluency in English communication.

Interestingly, while speaking difficulties were largely due to lack of vocabulary, writing difficulties were more related to grammar and sentence structure. This indicates a difference in skill focus, students may need more exposure to contextual grammar practice in writing and more vocabulary enrichment in speaking activities. Incorporating

vocabulary exercises within speaking tasks can significantly aid students in overcoming these challenges and improving their overall fluency in English communication (Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022). To foster better speaking skills, it is essential to implement targeted vocabulary enrichment strategies alongside contextual grammar practice, ensuring students can effectively communicate in English. Ultimately, addressing these challenges through a comprehensive curriculum that combines vocabulary enrichment and contextual grammar practice will empower students to communicate more effectively in their future workplaces.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify and analyze the English learning needs of Office Administration students in vocational high schools in South Kalimantan by examining their target and learning needs. The findings show that students primarily need English for workplace communication; however, their proficiency remains at an elementary level, with major weaknesses in vocabulary mastery, speaking skills, and grammar. This mismatch indicates that students' communicative goals are not yet supported by their current language competence.

The results imply that English instruction for Office Administration students should adopt an ESP-oriented approach that emphasizes communicative speaking activities, job-related vocabulary, and functional grammar relevant to administrative contexts. These findings provide empirical support for designing vocational English curricula and teaching materials that are more aligned with workplace demands.

This study is limited by its focus on a single vocational major and region, as well as its reliance on questionnaire data without qualitative triangulation. Future research is recommended to involve broader samples, apply mixed-method designs, and evaluate the effectiveness of ESP-based materials developed from identified needs.

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