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ESP teaching challenges of novice English lecturers in Indonesia: A descriptive qualitative approach

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Article Info

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore novice English lecturers' challenges in teaching ESP at non-English departments. The challenges are essential to be investigated as a basis for stakeholders of higher education to make policies related to ESP improvement. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to gather the data from lecturers in three higher education institutions in Sumatra, Indonesia. The participants of this study were 5 novice English lecturers selected using a purposive sampling technique and the data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis was used to analyze the data by comparing each participant's interview transcript. The findings provide evidence that participants encountered a lack of knowledge of students' discipline, no proper analysis of students' needs, and classroom conditions in terms of large classes and students' heterogeneous English proficiency. This study recommended tertiary education stakeholders provide and prepare important factors which can support ESP teaching, and the lecturers need to be well-prepared before starting to teach the ESP class to achieve the learning goals.

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Introduction

English had been taught since the era of the Dutch colonial period in 1914 in Indonesia for the Dutch and important local officials, but not for all Indonesian citizens (Yusny, 2013). However, it started to be taught as the first foreign language to students in Indonesia after independence (Lie, 2007). The international language is a door to achieving better employment, higher social status and a requirement in facing the globalization era, because without English, Indonesia is unable to compete with other countries in the world (Jayanti & Norahmi, 2014). Considering the importance of English in the world, the Indonesian Government declared English as the first foreign language learned in Indonesian education.

The teaching approach in non-English departments of higher education is mostly known as English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It is based on the aims of English language teaching in higher education to equip learners with comprehension ability of English scientific text for the specific purposes under their disciplines (Rokhyati, 2013; Tymbay, 2022), and autonomy of each higher education institution in Indonesia to design the curriculum (Akhiroh, 2017). Through the ESP approach, the learners can learn English under their discipline and as preparation to apply for a job (Septiana, 2018). However, teaching ESP classes is still a problem for English lecturers because most of them are accustomed to teaching English for general purposes (Pei & Milner, 2016). Besides, the lecturers have also faced a lack of knowledge related to learning content with the student's field of study Luo & Garner, 2017). Hence, competency, one of the main characteristics of an ESP instructor, lies in mastering the subjects in class and showing the ability to manage the class in the process of teaching and learning (Melouka, 2018)

Some studies have been conducted by researchers dealing with teaching ESP in non-English departments. The study conducted by Alsharif and Shukri (2018) revealed that lecturers faced an education inappropriateness. Iswati (2021) and Khazaal (2023) noted a problem with online instruction platforms during Covid-19. Moreover, a study carried out by Sari and Sari (2022) revealed that English lecturers faced low English proficiency students which affects learning participation and motivation. Septiana (2018) pointed out that ESP lecturers find it hard to find teaching materials and assessment standards. Finally, Solihah et al. (2023) revealed ESP teaching challenges related to knowledge of specific fields in their research entitled "Challenges on teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for Indonesian undergraduate students". The challenges related to novice English lecturers are limited. Fitria (2023) investigated the difficulty of new English lecturers using qualitative descriptive and found that they faced adaptation problems with base materials, ESP instruction, and an overload of teaching obligations given by the faculty. Therefore, such necessitates an investigation concerning challenges underlying ESP teaching of novice lecturers. Considering the importance of ESP teaching knowledge, this qualitative approach aims to answer the research question: What are the challenges faced by Novice lecturers in teaching ESP in non-English majors?

Literature Review

The Concept of ESP

ESP is defined as an approach which constitutes learners' specific discipline and needs. Specifically, the learners' discipline and needs are integrated into learning material. The ESP focus is on assisting learners to master English more specifically based on their field of study and profession to achieve the learning objective (Basturkmen, 2010; Mauludin, 2021) in order that they can use it in particular situations and certain workplaces (Kusni, 2013) to support future careers (Sari, 2018). Moreover, Solihah et al. (2023) argued that ESP teaching is taught to students of certain fields of study, especially those who are non-English majors and have no English learning background, for example, Business, Medicine, Accounting, Engineering, and many others. Through the ESP approach, the learners can learn English under their discipline and as preparation to apply for a job (Septiana, 2018). Therefore, the lecturers are professionally required to design and select the teaching materials related to students' field of study and needs (Akhiroh, 2017; Alemi & Pazoki, 2021) to develop the students' competencies (Basturkmen, 2010).

Factors Influencing ESP Teaching

Knowledge of students' discipline

Knowledge of students' discipline is the first step that should be taken by ESP lecturers (Venkatraman & Prema, 2013), because mastering the specialized knowledge of students' discipline can increase the lecturers' self-confidence in presenting learning material in the process of teaching and learning, compared to inadequate lecturers, which can result in the students' rejection and negative attitudes (Melouka, 2018). This is supported by a research findings of Abedeen (2015), who found that instructors' prior knowledge related to teaching material playing an important role in teaching ESP classes. Knowing students' discipline is meaningless without teaching competency. Teaching competency is intimately linked to the way a teacher conducts the teaching and learning process to assist students in achieving their learning goals (Irmawati et al., 2017). Specifically, ESP lecturers have several important roles in the smooth running of the teaching and learning process, such as understanding what students need and being able to choose suitable material (Basturkmen, 2017). To develop lecturers' competency, ESP training should be provided by the institution (Munthe, 2018).

Need analysis ability

As the ESP course attempts to set out teaching to use English for specific purpose, the need analysis helps the lecturers to determine the suitability between the learning materials and the students involved in the teaching and learning process (Basturkman, 2010; Hyland, 2022), and as basic information for achieving the learning goals (Meiristiani & Ekawati, 2018). In other words, it attempts to find the students' deficiency in learning English related to their specific needs. By knowing the student's needs, it will be easy for lecturers to design the learning materials (Latif, 2019), and to assess the learning achievement at the end of the semester (Basturkman, 2010). Therefore, the needs analysis must be done first before starting to teach in ESP class. The research carried out by (Irwansyah, 2018; Mukhlisin, 2019) concluded that teaching material in Islamic higher education should consist of religious knowledge based on the student's basic field.

The study conducted by Madkur (2018) investigated the needs of the Islamic banking department in IAIN Metro. The research used a descriptive qualitative approach by involving 25 students of the Islamic banking department as the participants. He found that the learning material must focus on communicative proficiency related to banking which can be used by them when they work in the Bank in the future. Moreover, Indrasari (2016), who conducted the research on needs analysis of 40 second-semester students of physics education, revealed that conducting the needs analysis could help the lecturers to get detailed information about the student's learning needs. Thus, designing appropriate teaching material with students' discipline can overcome the students' boredom with learning English (Astika, 1999) and can make them focus their attention on the process of teaching and learning (Trisyanti, 2009). In other words, learners' need identification can influence their awareness and material acceptable in learning in the classroom (Meiristiani & Ekawati, 2018). This English teaching approach follows the Indonesian government policy that attempts to apply appropriate teaching material to students' fields of study (Agustina, 2014). Therefore, an English lecturer needs to have experience with ESP in teaching English in non-English programs, because experienced lecturers do not spend much time preparing teaching material under the students' disciplines (Javid, 2015). Moreover, the lecturers should update their knowledge of course design, technology, and assessment (Velikaya, 2016).

Classroom condition

Classroom condition is associated with class size and students' heterogenous English proficiency. First, the size of the class is very influential on teaching and learning sufficiently. The class size which is defined varies in different countries. 30 students are considered a large class in Western countries (Jokhio et al., 2020). However, the number is considered small in South Korea because in this country 40 to 45 students are considered a large class (Kim 2022), while 50 to 100 students in a class seems common in China and Nigeria (Shehu & Tafida, 2016). A class with a large number of students will find it difficult to interact with each other and be constrained in receiving feedback from the teacher in the teaching and learning process (Foley & Masingila, 2014). Besides, the large class can limit the teachers' engagement with students and the learning material (Adamu et al., 2020). Second, is students' heterogenous English proficiency. It is a common problem faced by English lecturers who teach ESP in non-English majors as found by Hoa and Mai (2016) that students with significantly different English language proficiency can bring a negative impact on ESP teaching. Moreover, Medrea and Rus (2012) highlighted that only students who have English proficiency background and linguistic skills can follow ESP classes efficiently. Therefore, students with low English proficiency must be introduced to basic grammar and vocabulary building first (Brzoza, 2020).

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative approach was chosen in this study to collect data on the lecturers' challenges in teaching ESP in non-English departments. The approach attempts to explore social problems faced by individuals or groups (Creswell, 2014), and has been widely used as an approach to conduct research in a second and foreign language (Basturkmen, 2012). This research approach is characterized by investigating phenomena in a natural setting that aims to understand, interpret, and study the phenomena based on data obtained from research participants (Creswell, 2007). Since this study intends to investigate the challenges of English lecturers in teaching ESP classes, descriptive qualitative approach was adopted to get in-depth data. This type of qualitative approach is used to present the data in the form of words and an interview script (Aziz et al., 2021).

Research Site and Participants

This study was conducted in three higher education institutions in Sumatra, Indonesia recruiting 5 novice English lecturers, who voluntarily agreed to participate. The reason behind choosing the institution as the place to conduct research was because of their accessibility from the author's place. Five novice English lecturers were selected from the three different higher education institutions comprising of three males (Gordon, Danny, and Bill) and two females (Linda and Kathrine) in the age range of 28–32 years old. They were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the criteria: (1) two to three years of English teaching experience, (2) first Experience of teaching ESP class. Fadlillah et al. (2020) argue that the participants of research need to be based on the information from the head of the English department and one of the lecturers in each higher education institution. The pseudonyms in terms of institution and name were used by the researcher in reporting the results to ensure the confidentiality of the participants in giving real answers needed for the study (indrayadi et al., 2021). They are Gordon, Danny, Linda, Kathrine, and Bill.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used for collecting the data from the participants of this study which lasted between 40 and 60 minutes for each individual at the location they chose. The data were collected individually by the author for each participant from July until December 2021 based on the health protocol to avoid the spread of COVID-19. However, before starting the interview, the author informed all participants through whatsApp about the schedule to get their agreement. As a result, the participants agreed with the schedule. Getting agreement, I started to interview each participant in their offices. To confirm and clarify each participant previous answers, a second interview was conducted. The follow up interviews can help the researchers to gather detailed issues and rich information about the problems investigated (Heigham & Croker, 2009).

Using the Indonesian language, the interview was conducted with each participant to scrutinize the participants' ESP teaching challenges, then recorded using a voice recording application on the mobile phone. During the interview, participants were first asked about demographic information related to their master's degree graduation, the year they began teaching ESP in a non-English major, and the majors they had previously taught, then followed by asking about their teaching challenges in detail using probing questions to clarify the challenges. First, the author asked "How knowledgeable are you in teaching English related to students' specific discipline?" to learn their knowledge of a specific discipline. Second, "How competent are you in teaching English related to students' specific discipline?" to learn their teaching competence in the specific discipline. Third, "How do you analyze the students' needs?" to learn their analysis of student needs based on the discipline. Fourth, "How does a large class challenge your teaching?" to learn large class conditions. Finally, "How does students' heterogenous English proficiency challenge your teaching? However, before the interview was conducted, the author explained to the participants the objective of conducting research through email followed by a consent form to be signed by the participants as the research ethic for privacy and confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The interview recorded data were transcribed verbatim and read several times to obtain the overall challenges of the lecturers in teaching ESP classes in non-English departments, and translated into English immediately, then analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis guidance. In doing so, firstly, the author read the data several times for more familarization and understanding. The data in the form of words or statements related to the lecturers' challenges in teaching ESP were identified and coded. The coded data, which represent the participants' views, were related to research themes. Moreover, the author reviewed the themes to make them relevant to the research questions, and identified themes that emerged from the research participants. Finally, the author presented the data in the manuscript. Furthermore, member-checking is applied for the trustworthiness of the data. The member-checking ensures the interview transcript accuracy verification, confirmability, and transferability of the data, and provides necessary suggestions for the researchers (Bingham et al., 2021). In other words, the opportunity was given for the participants to re-check their interview transcripts to ensure the data representation by returning the interview transcripts to each participant (Jirathitikarn, 2020).

Results

In this study, the author investigated the challenges of novice English lecturers in teaching ESP classes in non-English majors using a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the obstacles among the participants. Each participant was interviewed in different places based on his/her agreement. Three challenges of the ESP course emerged in this study: lack of knowledge and competencies, no proper analysis of students' needs, and classroom environment.

Lack Knowledge of Students' Discipline

This theme focuses on participants' challenges in teaching ESP with a lack of knowledge of the student's discipline. This sub-theme is very important in the process of teaching and learning ESP courses. During the interview, the lecturers were asked about their teaching challenges with limited knowledge related to students' fields of study and teaching competencies. The participants viewed that they faced serious teaching problems. The participants were mostly having similar thoughts, but for a different reason.

"I was doubtful when I first taught in Islamic Banking because I didn't have any knowledge related to the program."

(Gordon).

"I must read a lot of material related to Math terms before teaching in the mathematics program. The unfamiliar terms make me nervous when standing in front of the class."

(Danny).

"Lack of law knowledge requires me to learn a lot of terms used in law. Understanding terms related to the student's discipline requires more time compared to teaching courses in the English department."

(Linda).

"It was difficult for me to master terms related to student disciplines when I first started teaching in the Islamic education department because these terms sounded strange to me."

(Kathrine).

"I sometimes worry about the suitability of the material I teach because I did not have related knowledge."

(Bill).

The excerpts above show that participants lack knowledge related to the students' discipline. Lack of knowledge of students' discipline negatively affects lecturers' teaching effectiveness. They were not confident in presenting the teaching material in the process of teaching and learning because they could not present the material based on the field of study. This condition was viewed by Gordon, Danny and Bill when first teaching in the ESP class. Then, Linda, and Kathrine revealed that no background of the students' discipline made it difficult to decide the material needed by students.

No Proper Analysis of Students' Needs

Analyzing students' needs also has an important role in teaching ESP to non-English majors. Such refers to the learning materials needed by students according to their disciplines. Under this theme, the participants were asked about the appropriateness of the ESP books designed by the institutions. All participants reported that their institutions did not conduct a needs analysis. They reflected:

"I just analyzed the students' needs with my limited knowledge. I only know that teaching material must be appropriate to students' field of study. I mean, I did not do any confirmation and conduct any observation."

(Gordon).

"I only prepared the learning material under students' general needs without in depth analysis related to medical content."

(Danny).

"After receiving the teaching schedule from the Dean, I only prepared the teaching and learning material based on the students' discipline without asking about their main needs in learning English related to Math."

(Linda).

"I just discussed with the head of department to get the data, because I did not know how to cover the students' needs."

(Kathrine).

"No ESP teaching module provided by my institution made me analyze the students' needs by myself. I only searched for related material from the internet, then selected it as the teaching material. I never think that I have to observe and examine the students' needs first."

(Bill).

It was indicated by the excerpts above that institutions did not conduct a need analysis to guide lecturers in presenting the teaching material to students. The lecturers just analyzed the learning material with their limited experiences. Lack of ability to analyze the material based on the student's needs negatively affects the learning goals, students' interest, and motivation in following the teaching and learning process in the classroom (Septiana, 2018). This challenge was also faced by English lecturers of Engineering faculty at Malikussaleh University in which they found difficulty in identifying specific students' needs from several Engineering departments, namely, Chemical Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, etc (Rasyimah et al., 2017). Furthermore, the study conducted by Rahmawati (2021) revealed that English lecturers of Maritime Higher Education also faced difficulty in teaching students related to the shipping world and sea transportation as the material usually needed by Maritime department students. Thus, need analysis is one of the pivotal factors that can be separated from ESP lecturers, because it is the core of learning that is used to investigate the specific material needed by a particular group of learners (Hyland, 2022), and to determine the learning goals of ESP (Trujeque-Moreno et al., 2021).

Classroom Condition

The classroom condition is associated with large class and students' heterogenous English proficiency, which influence the effectiveness of ESP teaching and learning process. Firstly, the author asked the lecturers to explain the challenges in teaching large classes. However, this issue was not faced by all participants in this study. Only Linda and Kathrine found such difficulties.

"A large number of students in my class made it difficult for me in presenting learning material in the process of teaching and learning, especially in the law department, which has more than 50 students for each of four classes. I could not teach effectively because it was too noisy."

(Linda).

"Islamic Education is one of the favourite majors at the college where I teach. There are several classes in this department which consist of 56 students. This incredible number for Indonesian standards makes it hard to communicate with students when they have different problems in understanding the material being studied."

(Kathrine).

Participants, as shown in the excerpts above, mostly faced a similar problem in dealing with a large class. The overload number of students in ESP class bothers them in delivering teaching materials in the process of teaching and learning.

Having asked the participants about students' heterogenous English proficiency, it was clear that this classroom condition was very influential on learning sufficiently. Students' different English abilities made it difficult for lecturers to determine the appropriate learning materials.

"Teaching students with various English abilities troubles me in achieving my learning goal. I sometimes paid more attention to students with low target language ability to make them understand the learning materials."

(Gordon).

"In teaching English for math, I only found three of thirty students who could follow the learning effectively."

(Danny).

"The English ability of various students who take ESP courses in my class makes it difficult to teach them to build sentences containing terms related to law, both in writing and orally. I still find there are significantly different abilities in grammar."

(Linda).

"Sometimes, I have to explain subject matter repeatedly to several students because of their low English proficiency."

(Kathrine).

"Even though I face problems in teaching students who have different language abilities, I determine the material based on the average ability of the students who follow my class."

(Bill).

The excerpts show that students have various abilities in using English, which affects the learning achievement. All participants reflected that most students in their class could not follow the teaching and learning process effectively because of their low ability in English.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to address the challenges of five Novice lecturers in teaching ESP in non-English majors at three higher education institutions in Sumatera, Indonesia. The findings of a recent study showed that although the Indonesia government obliged ESP teaching in higher education to equip the students with English knowledge-based discipline, novice lecturers still faced teaching challenges. Concerning the lack of knowledge of students' discipline, this study showed that the lecturers has limited knowledge to integrate English with students' field of study. This is in line with the study conducted by (Ahmed, 2014; Hoa & Mai, 2016; Luo & Garner, 2017; Meristo & Arias, 2020). No knowledge concerning students' fields of study creates serious problems for teachers, where they find themselves teaching material that they have no knowledge about (Boudersa, 2018). Therefore, lecturers need to consider this ESP teaching aspect to achieve learning goals (Ahmed, 2014). A feeling of nervousness in teaching caused by limited knowledge of student discipline can make lecturers lose self-esteem in front of the students when teaching in class.

The participants also faced problems with no proper analysis of students' needs, a finding consistent with Septiana (2018), lack of ability in analyzing the material based on the student's needs negatively affecting the learning goals, students' interest, and motivation in following the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Moreover, Rasyimah et al. (2017) yielded that English lecturers found difficulty in identifying specific students' needs from several Engineering departments, namely, Chemical Engineering, Industrial Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering. Furthermore, Rahmawati (2021) revealed that English lecturers of Maritime Higher Education also faced difficulty in teaching students related to the shipping world and sea transportation. Thus, need analysis is one of the pivotal factors that can be separated from ESP lecturers, because it is the core of learning that is used to investigate the specific material needed by a particular group of learners (Hyland, 2022), and to determine the learning goals of ESP (Trujeque-Moreno et al., 2021).

Regarding classroom conditions, the lecturers firstly faced managing overcapacity classes. This result is similar to the research findings of Andriani (2014), crowded classes disturb students' learning concentration. Accordingly, the large classes mean that lecturers cannot pay equal attention and interact with all students when they have any problems with the material being studied in the process of teaching and learning (Marais, 2016). Moreover, such also challenged the lecturers to fulfil needs, retain constructive feedback, and manage and monitor each learner (Ouahidi, 2021). On the other hand, good management of spreading the students into smaller classes influences the teaching and learning process effectiveness because the lecturers can focus their attention and assistance on low-proficiency students. Second, lecturers faced students with various English proficiency. The various abilities of the ESP class is similar to the research findings of Rezai et al. (2012), where most Persian learners faced problems in understanding concepts of syntactic units in reading text. The student's language proficiency has a different negative impact on the ESP teaching and learning process (Hoa & Mai, 2016; Poedjiastutie, 2017). Thus, lecturers must be flexible in determining the learning materials used in teaching students who have various English abilities (Wette, 2011), and have the ability of material adaptation and modification to cover students' various needs (Cheremissina & Riemer, 2001). In other words, the lecturers must be able to select appropriate teaching content (Gözüyeşil, 2014).

Conclusion

This descriptive qualitative approach sought to explore the challenges faced by novice English lecturers in teaching ESP classes in the non-English department. The findings of this study revealed that the lecturers faced serious challenges in teaching ESP classes. The problem occurs due to a lack of knowledge of students' disciplines, no proper analysis of students' needs, and classroom conditions in terms of large classes and students' heterogeneous English proficiency. The challenges force the participants to cope with ineffective teaching and learning processes, which impact the goals they want to achieve. Several recommendations are made from the findings of this study. For stakeholders; (1) providing training for novice ESP lecturers; (2) designing ESP books as a teaching guide. For ESP lecturers, (1) searching and comprehending the ESP material before teaching; (2) following ESP teaching training

to equip themselves with knowledge of need analysis; (3) learning about classroom management in teaching large class and various proficiency students. However, the study also has its limitation. Only five novice English lecturers from three public higher education institutions in Sumatera, Indonesia were recruited as participants. This small sample size may not be representative of all the novice English lecturers in Indonesia. Therefore, further research with a large sample from different universities is suggested.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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