The Challenges of Teaching English for Business: A Case Study at LPP Quantum

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Abstract

This article investigates the challenges faced in teaching English for Business (EFB) to students taking a vocational education program at LPP Quantum, one of the vocational education institutions in Sampit City. This study uses a qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, direct classroom observations, and analysis of learning documents to obtain a comprehensive picture of the problems that arise in the teaching process. The results of the study reveal a number of significant obstacles, such as limited English vocabulary relevant to the business world, low motivation to learn among students, lack of initial understanding of the business context, and limited learning support facilities available. These factors collectively affect the effectiveness and success of teaching Business English in the context of vocational education. Therefore, this study recommends the need for the implementation of a more adaptive, contextual, and responsive pedagogical approach to students' needs, as well as the importance of institutional support in creating a conducive and industrially relevant learning environment.

Keywords: Business English; Teaching Challenges; Vocational Education; LPP Quantum

INTRODUCTION

In the context of vocational education in Indonesia, teaching Business English plays a very strategic role in equipping students with communicative competencies that are relevant to the needs of the global workplace. English, which functions as a lingua franca in international business interactions, is an important skill that not only supports cross-cultural communication but also determines the competitiveness of graduates in an increasingly demanding job market (Harmer, 2015). Furthermore, learner-centered and task-based language learning has long been recognized as an effective way to connect language use with authentic tasks in the workplace, making it very suitable for the vocational context (Nunan, 2004).

LPP Quantum Sampit as one of the non-university vocational education institutions that organizes the Business Administration Management study program places the teaching of Business English as an important component in its curriculum. In its implementation, this institution refers to the Indonesian National Work Competency Standards (SKKNI) to ensure that English learning not only hones basic language skills but also supports the achievement of work competencies that are in accordance with the needs of the service and trade industry. Learning is designed in such a way that students can develop contextual communication skills, such as the ability to create business documents, understand company terminology, and conduct professional oral communication in daily business activities.

LPP Quantum Sampit is a non-university vocational education institution designed to combine academic knowledge and practical skills, including English language competence in a professional context. Students of the Business Administration Management program are expected to have the ability to understand and use English that is commonly used in various business activities such as preparing financial reports, formal communication, understanding

work processes, and interacting with international business partners. These skills are becoming increasingly important along with the increasing demands of the industrial world for vocational education graduates who are not only technically competent, but also have communication skills in international languages, especially in the business sector.

However, the implementation of Business English learning in non-university vocational institutions such as LPP Quantum Sampit still faces various significant challenges, both from internal aspects of students and from external factors of the institution. One of the main challenges is the low mastery of technical vocabulary and business terminology among students. This has a direct impact on their ability to understand the material thoroughly, as well as in carrying out business communication simulations effectively. On the other hand, low learning motivation is also a crucial problem that is often influenced by the perception that English courses are considered difficult, not directly relevant to job needs, or not urgent to master in the short term. This condition then affects the level of participation and active involvement of students in the learning process. In addition to these linguistic and affective factors, another challenge arises from the lack of student exposure to authentic business contexts. The absence of a project-based learning approach or field practice that requires the use of English in real situations makes it difficult for students to connect open material with work world applications. On the other hand, limited learning infrastructure such as language laboratories, access to digital interactive media, and the lack of availability of authentic materials also affect the effectiveness of learning. The dense curriculum and limited time allocation for teaching English in vocational programs further add to the complexity of the challenges faced.

These challenges are in line with the findings of several previous studies. According to Xie (2021), limited learning resources and the lack of alignment between learning content and real industry needs are among the main obstacles in teaching Business English to vocational students. Yang (2021) also emphasized that traditional methods are often ineffective in vocational settings, highlighting the benefits of case-based learning to bridge theory and practice. Irawan, et.al. (2023) found that students in vocational schools often struggle to master technical vocabulary due to a lack of context-based exposure and inadequate vocabulary learning strategies. In addition, Tanila et.al. (2022), emphasized that teachers in vocational schools recognize the value of project-based learning but face challenges in terms of planning, resource support, and student readiness.

However, most of these studies focus more on general higher education institutions, both national and international, and have not specifically highlighted the context of Business English learning in non-university vocational institutions such as LPP Quantum. The characteristics of these institutions that emphasize work readiness and competency certification through a practical approach require a more contextual, applicable, and oriented English learning model to the needs of the local and global industrial world. Research that discusses the challenges of learning in this environment is still very limited, especially in describing how factors such as low vocabulary, minimal motivation, and limited facilities have a direct impact on the effectiveness of teaching in vocational classes. Therefore, this study is important to fill this gap. The focus of the study is directed at an in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by instructors in teaching Business English to non-university vocational program students at LPP Quantum Sampit. This study aims to produce contextual findings that can contribute to the development of a more effective, adaptive, and appropriate teaching approach to real conditions in the field, as well as support the strengthening of students' professional communication competencies. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), the effectiveness of language learning is greatly influenced by the suitability of the method to the needs of students and the conditions of the learning environment. This shows that the approach used in the learning process must be contextual and flexible in order to be able to respond to the diversity of student

characteristics and the dynamics of the learning situation. In the context of vocational education, where mastery of Business English is one of the main competencies, the application of an adaptive pedagogical approach is very crucial. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze various challenges that arise in the process of learning Business English at LPP Quantum, especially in the context of vocational education that demands integration between theory and real-world situations.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with field research methods and a phenomenological approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives which want to understand in depth the instructors' experiences in implementing teaching strategies and facing challenges in learning Business English in vocational education environments. According to Sugiyono (2013), a qualitative approach is used to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically, through descriptions in the form of words and language, and by using various scientific methods naturally.

The field method was chosen because the research was conducted directly in a natural learning environment, without intervention, so that researchers could observe reality as it is. As explained by Biak (2020), field studies are used to realistically find out the conditions that are currently taking place in society. Meanwhile, the phenomenological approach allows researchers to capture the instructors' perceptions and in-depth meanings of obstacles such as low student vocabulary mastery, weak learning motivation, and limited learning media.

The data source for this study came from two active instructors of the Business English course who teach at the Business Administration Management Study Program at LPP Quantum Sampit. The selection of participants was carried out purposively, taking into account their direct involvement and experience in teaching. The research location is the classroom where the learning activities take place, where the researcher directly observes the teaching process and interactions that occur.

The data analysis process in this study uses an interactive model from Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification. Data reduction is carried out to simplify, select, and focus raw data that is relevant to the research objectives. Data presentation is carried out by organizing data in narrative or matrix form that facilitates analysis. The last stage is drawing conclusions which is carried out continuously during the collection and analysis process, in order to obtain a deep and meaningful understanding of the phenomena being studied. The types of data collected consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data is obtained from direct observation and interviews with instructors, while secondary data comes from the official lesson plan used at LPP Quantum. Both types of data are analyzed holistically to provide a comprehensive picture of the teaching strategies and learning challenges that arise in the context of vocational education

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study was conducted within the context of Business English instruction at LPP Quantum Sampit, several critical challenges were identified through field observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. These challenges emerged not only as isolated technical difficulties but also as part of a broader pattern of cognitive, motivational, and contextual issues faced by vocational students. The findings reflect the lived experiences of instructors dealing

with students who are still adjusting to the demands of a specialized language learning environment. Each of these challenges is discussed below to understand the underlying causes and implications for Business English teaching at the vocational level.

1. Low Mastery of Business English Vocabulary

The limited vocabulary mastery of students was one of the most frequently observed issues during class activities. Students had difficulty expressing their thoughts fluently and accurately, especially when dealing with business-specific topics such as transactions, negotiations, or marketing. This problem often manifested during group presentations or when students were asked to create dialogues in business scenarios. Their responses tended to be fragmented or overly simplistic due to a lack of lexical resources.

This challenge was reinforced by the review of teaching materials and lesson plans, which already included authentic texts such as company profiles, advertisements, and memos. Despite the presence of relevant resources, students were not able to grasp the vocabulary fully due to a lack of exposure and foundational understanding. The vocabulary gap also reduced student confidence and hindered their willingness to participate, making the learning process less communicative and interactive.

2. Low Learning Motivation

Another recurring issue was the generally low level of motivation among students. During classroom observations, many learners showed minimal enthusiasm. They often seemed disengaged during individual tasks and group discussions, with some appearing indifferent or distracted. The lack of intrinsic motivation evident from students' passive responses contributed to reduced learning outcomes.

This phenomenon appears to stem from students' perception that English is difficult and not essential to their immediate goals. For many vocational students who have yet to enter the workforce, the relevance of Business English may not be immediately apparent. Furthermore, when students do not see the practical utility of the subject or lack external support systems to encourage engagement, motivation can decline. Without both internal drive and external reinforcement, learners are unlikely to commit fully to the learning process.

3. Low Student Participation in Class

Limited classroom participation was another challenge that affected the effectiveness of Business English instruction. Despite the use of pair work, group tasks, and role-playing activities, instructors observed that only a few students contributed actively. In many group tasks, the same students repeatedly dominated discussions, while others remained silent or passively agreed with the dominant voice.

This uneven participation suggests a deeper issue with learner confidence and speaking anxiety. Many students appeared reluctant to speak in English, possibly due to fear of making mistakes or being judged. The classroom culture did not seem to foster risk-taking in language use, which is crucial in acquiring communication skills. Consequently, the full potential of collaborative learning and speaking practice could not be realized, and opportunities for peer learning were lost.

4. Disturbances in Focus and Concentration

Students' focus and attention span during lessons were consistently interrupted by external distractions, especially the use of mobile phones. Even when engaging tasks were assigned, some students diverted their attention to chatting or scrolling through social media. These distractions had a direct impact on the quality of learning, as students missed instructions or failed to grasp key concepts presented in the lesson.

This issue was exacerbated by the lack of classroom management strategies and insufficient learner autonomy. Some students have not yet developed the habit of self-regulation and tend to depend on external prompts to stay on task. The learning environment, while physically adequate, did not consistently support mental focus due to these behavioral patterns. Moreover, the repetitive nature of some lessons and the absence of varied teaching methods might have contributed to student boredom and inattention.

5. Lack of Students' Business Insight

Lastly, a major factor limiting students' engagement with Business English materials was their lack of familiarity with basic business concepts. Many students, being recent high school graduates, had no prior exposure to professional work environments. This lack of background knowledge led to confusion when interpreting business-related texts or role-playing professional scenarios.

During lessons that involved case studies, marketing strategies, or organizational structures, students struggled to make sense of the content. This gap in business literacy rendered much of the lesson abstract or irrelevant from the learners' perspective. It also limited their ability to use English meaningfully, as they lacked the context to apply the vocabulary and structures they were learning. Without a conceptual framework to understand business environments, learners were unable to relate language forms to real-world functions, which is essential in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) instruction.

Discussion

In the context of vocational education, especially in the Business Administration Management Study Program at LPP Quantum Sampit, the process of learning Business English faces a number of complex challenges. These challenges affect the effectiveness of teaching and learning activities, both in terms of cognitive, affective, and learning environment. Through a phenomenological approach, these challenges are understood as realities experienced directly by instructors in the teaching process.

One of the main challenges is the low mastery of Business English vocabulary by students. Vocabulary skills are an important foundation in language skills, especially in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Limitations in vocabulary mastery hinder students from expressing ideas, understanding teaching materials, and participating in discussions in a business context. Hadziq (2015) explains that in language acquisition, difficulties such as transfer, interference, and overgeneralization often become obstacles. Transfer refers to the tendency of students to apply mother tongue patterns to English, while interference occurs when the structure of the mother tongue actually interferes with the process of learning the target language.The next challenge is the low motivation of students to learn. In the learning process, motivation plays a central role in determining student success. According to Aslamiah (2020), motivation is divided into two types, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation comes from within the student, such as interest and curiosity, while extrinsic motivation is influenced by external factors such as parental expectations or the needs of the world of work. When both types of motivation are low, students tend to be passive and not actively involved in learning activities. In this case, many students show minimal interest in English, resulting in low engagement and difficulty in understanding the business material being taught.

Furthermore, low student participation in class is also an important challenge. In learning Business English, active student involvement is essential to practice communication skills, both verbally and in writing. However, in reality only a small number of students are active in class

discussions or group activities. Affective factors such as self-confidence and language anxiety also influence low participation. Kuncoro and Erlangga (2021) state that low self-esteem can reduce students' courage to take risks in using a foreign language. Students with low self-confidence tend to avoid speaking activities because they are afraid of making mistakes or being embarrassed in front of their friends.

In addition, the challenge is the disruption of focus and concentration during the learning process. In class observations, several students were found to be often distracted by digital devices such as mobile phones or conversations that were not relevant to the subject matter. This condition causes students to lose attention and not be able to absorb information optimally. A less conducive learning environment exacerbates this problem. According to Khairunnisa et.al. (2023), a comfortable and minimally distracted learning environment is very important to support student concentration. In addition, teacher involvement in maintaining interactive and focused class dynamics is also an important factor in creating a productive learning atmosphere. Finally, students' lack of business insight is an obstacle in understanding the context of Business English material. Most students do not have work experience or practical knowledge of the business world, so they have difficulty understanding the terminology or situations that often appear in the teaching material. In ESP, contextual understanding is very important so that learning is relevant to students' professional needs. Fitria (2020) emphasized that the material in ESP learning must be adjusted to the background and needs of students, including work experience and areas of expertise. When students do not have real references to business practices, learning becomes less meaningful and difficult to apply. Overall, the findings indicate that the implementation of Business English instruction in vocational education necessitates a pedagogical approach that is adaptive, contextual, and responsive to learners' specific needs. Addressing the identified challenges requires the development of targeted strategies, including the systematic enhancement of students' vocabulary proficiency, the cultivation of intrinsic and extrinsic learning motivation, the promotion of active classroom engagement, the creation of a supportive and distraction-free learning environment, and the integration of authentic business-related content aligned with real-world industry demands. Such a comprehensive and student-centered approach is essential to ensure that Business English instruction effectively supports vocational students' communicative competence and workplace readiness.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions in this study, it can be concluded that learning Business English at LPP Quantum Sampit faces complex challenges, covering cognitive, affective, and contextual aspects. The main challenges such as low vocabulary mastery, weak learning motivation, limited business insight, lack of active participation, and impaired learning focus, indicate that learning success is not only determined by teaching methods, but also by students' readiness to accept and respond to the learning process. Further discussion revealed that these factors are interrelated and need to be addressed holistically. This means that the teaching strategies implemented by instructors must be able to adapt to students' psychological conditions, the relevance of the material, and a supportive learning environment. Therefore, improving the quality of Business English teaching in a vocational environment requires a deep understanding of classroom dynamics and students' real needs, so that learning becomes more meaningful, applicable, and contextual.

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