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Research Article

Challenges Perceived by Indonesian ESP Teachers in Post-Pandemic Era: A Survey from a Higher Education Institution

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KEYWORDS

ESP teachers;
 Indonesian higher education;
 Teaching challenges.

A B S T R A C T

This study examines challenges experienced by Indonesian ESP teachers in face-to-face education system, and possible solutions they have deployed to tackle the challenges. An online survey was employed to discover challenges the ESP teachers perceived, which was then quantitatively analysed using SPSS software. Besides, semi-structure interviews were carried out to explore solutions the ESP teachers had deployed to resolve the challenges, which was then qualitatively analysed using coding system. The findings show that the ESP teachers are dealing with five major challenges with inadequate teaching material being the most challenging ($M=3.15$, $SD=0.88$) and unsupported institution system being the least challenging ($M=2.34$, $SD=0.62$). To tackle the challenges, the teachers employ several techniques such as adapting ready-made materials, collaborating with specific-subject teachers, and participating in relevant trainings, and asking for IT experts' assistance. As the findings reveal, this study provides us with pedagogical implications such as the need of relevant trainings and adequate textbooks for ESP teachers and placement tests for ESP students. Some limitations and suggestions for future studies are also presented.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, there have been many scholars exploring challenges and constraints faced by ESP practitioners across the globe. For example, in the context of Saudi Arabia higher education, Alsharif and Shukri (2018) examined pedagogical challenges faced by 50 ESP teachers. The finding revealed that although these teachers had good academic qualifications, they were not inadequately prepared to teach ESP programs due to lack of ESP teaching capabilities. Besides, these teachers were found to receive limited ESP training programs from their

institution since they first started their teaching job. Meanwhile, Nezakatgoo and Behzadpoor (2017) explored challenges perceived by 25 ESP stakeholders (teachers, students, and school authorities) in Iranian medical universities. Their finding showed that each group of stakeholders were dealing with a variety of challenges. As for the teachers, they were reported to face challenges including limited content knowledge, unfamiliar with ESP material development, lack of testing skills, and low-level of language proficiency. Similarly, Petraki and Khat (2022) investigated how Cambodian ESP stakeholders (ESP teachers, subject teachers, students, and graduate employee) resolve the challenges in designing an ESP

course. Aside from reporting the challenges, their finding also revealed solutions that each group of stakeholders had to offer. Some of the solutions included providing the ESP lectures with more training programs, administrating placement tests for students before enrolling to ESP classes, and facilitating collaborative work between the ESP teachers and subject teachers.

In Indonesian educational settings, some scholars have also been exploring challenges in teaching ESP program for the last few years. For example, conducting a qualitative study in higher education institutions in Yogyakarta, Iswati and Triastuti (2021) interviewed 5 teachers regarding challenges they had experienced in ESP teachings. Their findings showed that the ESP teachers were dealing with a variety of challenges including lack of trainings, limited content knowledge, need analysis absence, large-size classes, and students' different level of English skills. Aside from a very limited number of participants, this study failed to explore possible solutions to resolve the challenges from the perspectives of the ESP teachers. Meanwhile, Poedjiastuti (2017) investigated challenges perceived by ESP stakeholders (teachers, students, and policy makers) at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang. Her findings revealed different types of challenges experienced by each group stakeholders. Although this study provides significant information regarding challenges in ESP teaching programs, it did not thoroughly focus on examining challenges faced by ESP teachers. Similarly, a study by (Marwan, 2017) in State Polytechnic of Pontianak revealed that the kinds of challenges that ESP lectures have been experiencing were related to students' low-learning motivation, mismatch between real-life situations and expectations, limited teaching facilities, and teachers' heavy workload. This insightful information, however, was obtained from one of the ESP teachers resulting in the finding might not necessarily reflect the perspectives of other teachers in the institution.

Based on the review above, it is clear that there have been limited studies investigating challenges or constraints received by ESP teachers, and possible solutions to resolve the challenges from the perspective of the ESP teachers in the context of Indonesian higher education. The current study attempts to fill in this gap by answering the following questions:

1. What challenges do ESP teachers perceive in post-pandemic era?
2. How do ESP teachers resolve the challenges in their teaching practices?

It is hoped that the findings of the current study provide us with valuable insights regarding challenges

experienced by ESP teachers and possible solutions to resolve the challenges.

METHOD

Participants

This study was conducted in Mataram University (Indonesia), where the majority of study programs in this particular institution have shifted their teaching system from online mode to face-to-face education, just like before the pandemic came. This university comprises a variety of study programs, and each of them provides an ESP course in the first and second semester. A random sampling technique was employed to select 50 ESP teachers in these study programs to participate in an online survey. The demographic background of the 50 respondents is displayed in the table 1 below.

Table 1. The Demographic Information of the 50 Respondents

Information Background	Category	Number of Participants
Gender	Male	23
	Female	27
Age Range (in years)	20-30	19
	31-40	25
	41-50	6
Academic Qualification	TESOL	16
	Applied Linguistics	10
	English Language Education	24
	Tourism	5
	Statistics	4
	Computer Engineering	8
	Study Programs in which the Participants Teach ESP Program	Primary Teacher Education
Pharmacy	5	
Environmental Engineering	7	
Mathematics Education	6	
Physics Education	5	
Number of Years Teaching ESP	1-5	13
	6-10	27
	11-15	7
	15-20	3

Out of these 50 respondents, 15 of them were then randomly invited to semi-structured interviews. They were voluntarily willing to participate in the interview, and their information background is presented in the table 2 below.

Table 2. Information of the Interviewed Participants

Teachers	Gender	Study Programs	Number of years teaching ESP
T1	M	Tourism	5
T2	F	Computer Engineering	6
T3	F	Statistics	4
T4	M	Primary Teacher Education	1
T5	F	Pharmacy	7
T6	F	Tourism	8
T7	M	Statistics	11
T8	F	Environmental Engineering	5
T9	F	Mathematics Education	7
T10	M	Pharmacy	10
T11	F	Primary Teacher Education	5
T12	M	Computer Engineering	6
T13	M	Physics Education	3
T14	F	Tourism	7
T15	M	Mathematics Education	9

Instruments

In relation to the instrument, this study employed an online survey which comprises of two sections. The first section consists of five main-statements and each has several sub-statements. The participants are required to rank these sub-statements through a Likert scale of one to five, where 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=somewhat agree, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree. The second section requires the participants to answer several open-ended questions regarding techniques they had deployed to tackle the challenges in their ESP teaching practices. This particular online survey was designed by the researcher himself and then piloted with four EFL teachers who had no ESP teaching experiences. After the pilot survey was analyzed, several changes were made including eliminating irrelevant questions and structuring the sentences. The second instrument, semi-structured interviews, was carried out to clarify what the participants have answered in the open-ended questions in the survey. The interviews began with an open-ended question (ex: how long have you been teaching ESP courses?) and followed by specific questions written in an interview checklist. Each interview lasted for about 45 to 60 minutes and was audio recorded. The interview process was carried out in Bahasa Indonesia to allow the

participants voice their opinions without any struggles with English language barriers.

Data Analysis

With regards to the data analysis technique, the quantitative data gained from the online survey were statistically analyzed using SPSS software. Meanwhile, the qualitative data gained from open-ended questions in the survey and semi-structured interviews were coded to be analyzed later.

Table 3. Coding Scheme for the Qualitative Data

Categories	Sub-Categories	Themes	Codes
A. Internal Factor	1. Subject knowledge	a. Teacher collaboration	A-1-a
		b. Training	A-1-b
	2. Digital literacy	a. Training	A-2-a
		b. Internet self-learning	A-2-b
		c. IT-experts assistance	A-2-c
		a. Internet sources	B-1-a
B. External Factors	1. Teaching material	b. Textbooks purchases	B-1-b
		a. Placement test	B-2-a
	2. Students' English language skill	b. Training	B-2-b
		a. Training	B-3-a
	3. Institution support	b. Teacher discussion	B-3-b

As for the coding system (see table 3 above), this study applied an inductive coding approach (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). It means that the codes were generated from the participants' answers both in the survey and the interview. The procedure comprised of several stages. For example, first, the participants' answers that appeared to relate to the issues within the participants were put into the category "internal factor (A)". Then, the answers that appeared to relate to teachers' competency were put into the sub-category "subject knowledge (1)". Last, the answers that appeared to relate to working in groups were put into the theme "teacher collaboration" (a). These three elements (categories, sub-categories and themes) generated final codes (A-1-a).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What Challenges Do ESP Teachers Perceive in Post-Pandemic Era?

Based on the data gained from the online survey, it was found that the ESP teachers were dealing with a variety of challenges (see table 4 below).

Table 4. Challenges for the ESP Teachers

Challenges	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>Part 1: Teaching Materials</i>		
ESP textbooks are not provided by my institution.	3.16	0.88
I develop ESP materials by myself.	3.14	0.86
There has been little financial aid from my institution for ESP textbook purchases.	2.94	0.84
<i>Part 2: Subject Knowledge</i>		
I have no academic qualification for teaching ESP courses.	2.76	0.82
I participate in relevant trainings outside of my institution to help me with my ESP teaching career.	2.52	0.72
Specific-subject knowledge teachers provide inadequate suggestions or advices to ESP teachers.	2.64	0.76
<i>Part 3: Technology Literacy</i>		
I have no relevant skills in using electronic tools when teaching ESP courses.	2.63	0.75
IT staffs provide teachers with limited help in using digital tools.	2.41	0.66
There are few relevant trainings held by my institutions to help teachers with the use of technology things.	2.58	0.74
<i>Part 4: Students' Level of English Language Proficiency</i>		
There are no placement tests administered for new students at the beginning of ESP programs.	2.52	0.70
It is difficult to manage ESP classes containing students with different level of English skills.	2.75	0.69
There are few relevant trainings held by my institutions to help teachers with heterogenous ESP classes.	2.64	0.77
<i>Part 5: Institution Support</i>		
My institution provides teachers with limited supports to develop their ESP teaching career.	2.67	0.78
Very few teaching media have been provided by my institution to support the learning process.	2.56	0.73
I have a very limited access to participate in teacher professional development programs since my institution provides no support.	2.34	0.62

As shown in the table 3 above, the highest mean value in the part of teaching materials is that the participants agreed that their institution provided no relevant textbooks for ESP courses ($M=3.16$, $SD=0.88$). It can be assumed that the most challenging factor for the ESP teachers in the current study is inadequate teaching materials. This issue relates to limited financial support

from their institution for textbook purchases, which then leads the teachers to develop ESP materials by themselves. Meanwhile, in the part of subject knowledge, the highest mean value is that the participants have no academic qualification for teaching ESP courses ($M=2.76$, $SD=0.82$). This challenge can be associated with inadequate support from their specific-subject teachers, resulting in them participating in relevant trainings outside of their institution. As for the technology literacy, the most challenging thing is that the participants agreed that they have no relevant skills in using electronic devices in their ESP teaching practices ($M=2.63$, $SD=0.75$). This constraint is related to limited opportunities for the teachers to participate in relevant trainings in their institution, which leads them to ask for help from IT experts. With regards to students' level of English skills, the highest mean value is that the participants agreed that they received difficulty in managing ESP students with different level of English skills ($M=2.75$, $SD=0.69$). This issue relates to no placement tests and limited relevant trainings conducted in their institution. Consequently, the teachers are dealing with some struggles in heterogenous ESP classes. The least challenging issue, institution support, the participants agreed that their institution provided them with limited supports to develop their ESP teaching profession ($M=2.67$, $SD=0.78$). This unsupported system varied from inadequate teaching media to limited teachers-training programs.

The challenges that ESP teachers perceived, as revealed by the online survey above, is in line with what Alsharif and Shukri (2018) have reported. Conducted in the context of Saudi Arabia higher education, their study revealed several pedagogical challenges faced by ESP teachers. Although these teachers possessed good qualifications, they were not inadequately prepared to teach ESP programs due to limited ESP teaching capabilities. On the contrary, the teachers in the current study reported that they had no ESP qualification, yet attempted to develop their self-potential by participating in relevant teacher-training programs. As reported by Basturkmen (2019) that teacher professional development trainings provide teachers with not only the latest trend in certain field of study, but also the network. It is therefore, the participants in the current study made use of the networks they had gained from training-participations to help them with their ESP teaching career. Another study by Nezakatgoo and Behzadpoor (2017) also revealed some challenges perceived by not only ESP teachers but also other stakeholders such as ESP students, subject teachers, and graduate employee. Their finding revealed a variety of challenges faced by each group of stakeholders and some solutions they had to offer. While their study provides us with general challenges by a group of ESP stakeholders,

the current study mainly focused on discovering challenges by ESP teachers. Focusing on one particular area, as Marcu (2020) highlighted, help researchers to generate a more comprehensive study. As such, the finding in the current study may help enlighten those working in the field of ESP although the number of participants in the current study are relatively small.

How Do the Teachers Resolve the Challenges in Their ESP Teaching Practices?

The data gained from both online survey and interviews revealed some techniques which the participants had deployed to cope with the challenges in their ESP teaching practices. In regards to the most challenging factor, teaching materials, the participants wrote in the online survey:

“I mostly look for ready-made materials from internet. Then I adapt them with my teaching context. Sometimes, I received some suggestions regarding my adapted ESP materials from other ESP teachers.” (Code: B-1-a)

“Internet is the main source of ESP materials for me. I have no enough money to buy printed textbooks. I also often borrow some ESP books from my colleagues, listen to their ESP teaching experiences, and learn from them.” (Code: B-1-b)

When asked in the interview sections, T2 and T4 recalled how they utilized ready-made ESP materials from internet:

“Adopting ready-used materials from internet is totally unacceptable. Therefore, I need to adapt them with my teaching situations such as my students’ learning goals, my school teaching policies, and my socio-cultural backgrounds.” (Code: B-1-a)

“Because of my heavy-workload, I think I have no enough time to develop ESP materials from zero. Thus, I often download ready-used materials from internet and ask for some advices from other ESP teachers for material adaptations.” (Code: B-1-a)

This finding is in contrast with what Petraki and Khat (2022) have revealed that only 17% participants in their study mentioned that they preferred ready-made ESP materials. Nevertheless, the majority of their study participants agreed that ready-made ESP materials should be compiled based on the instructors’ teaching contexts, which aligns with the finding of the current study. Furthermore, the ESP teachers in the current study valued some feedbacks from their colleagues as they can help improve their skills in developing ESP materials, and experience how ESP materials work in different teaching contexts (Diachkova et al., 2021). In regards to the second

challenge, subject knowledge, the participants wrote in the online survey how working together with specific subject teachers benefitted them:

“Since I teach ESP courses in the Computer Engineering study program, I need to ask Computer Engineering teachers about some technical words. Working together with those teachers is considerably beneficial as I have no qualification in that particular subject.” (Code: A-1-a)

“Because I have no any academic background in Tourism, it is often frustrating that I need to spend much time to study some terminology in the field of Tourism. I would say collaborating with Tourism teachers can help me with my ESP teaching practices.” (Code: A-1-a)

In addition to this, the participants perceived relevant teacher trainings and workshops are beneficial. T5 and T8, for example, reflected during interview sessions:

“I often work together with my colleagues who are teaching the specific subject. It helps me a lot with my ESP teachings. However, I also participate in teacher trainings outside of the school. It helps broaden my horizon in regards to teaching English in non-English major classes.” (Code: A-1-a)

“Attending relevant workshops are very helpful for ESP teachers who have no any knowledge in specific subject, like me. It also helps me to expand my network and support my ESP teaching career.” (Code: A-1-b)

It is clear from the quotes above that the teachers valued collaborative work with specific-subject teachers. As Er and Kirkgoz (2018) highlighted that working together with specific-subject instructors is arguably benefitting ESP instructors in terms of technical vocabulary and terminology. Other than this, the teachers in the current study argued that taking part in trainings or workshops positively affected their ESP teaching practices. As Gollin-Kies et al. (2015) mentioned that ESP teachers need to keep themselves notified with the developments or updates in the specialized fields. It can be assumed that the ESP teachers in the current study took part in trainings or workshops with the purpose to help themselves keep up with the latest trends in the ESP field. In relation to the third challenge, digital literacy, the participants took a variety of methods in developing their IT skills. Such methods were mentioned both in the online survey and interview process:

“I attended some teacher trainings few months ago. Most of them were regarding how to make use

of electronic devices in English language teaching classes. These trainings can somehow develop my confidence in using such devices in my ESP teachings.” (Code: A-2-a)

“Honestly speaking, I am not used to using digital tools in my teaching practices. But I believe that it is beneficial for language teaching. Therefore, I sometimes watch some tutorial videos in YouTube and see how to use such modern technology.” (Code: A-2-b)

“When I find the need to use an application or software in my ESP teachings, I try to find some guidelines on google, or simply I ask the IT staffs in my institution.” (Code: A-2-c)

The notion of technological use in language teaching has been a problematic for some teachers as many of them have a relatively low-level of digital literacy (Dudeney et al., 2014; Rokenes & Krumsvik, 2016; Windsor & Park, 2014). In the current study, the ESP teachers were aware of the benefits of using electronic devices in language teaching, but were not confident of their ability to use them. This finding is in line with what Marcelo and Yot-Dominguez (2019) have reported that teachers’ self-confidence and relevant teacher trainings are two crucial determinants which can help language teachers develop their digital literacy. Although they rated their digital literacy as low-level, the ESP teachers in the current study were willing to develop their IT skill by attending teacher trainings, communicating with IT experts, and learning through internet. With regards to the fourth challenge, students’ level of English skills, some participants wrote in the online survey about the need of placement tests:

“It is not easy to teach ESP courses in a class where students have different level of English language proficiency. Therefore, I think it needs to carry out placement tests in advance.” (Code: B-2-a)

“I believe that all students need to take placement tests before enrolling in the ESP class. Those whose score are lower than average should be provided with English bridging course.” (Code: B-2-a)

Other than placement tests, the interview participants mentioned the benefits of teacher trainings for dealing with the challenge. T9, for instance, reflected:

“It is very important that placement tests be carried out. With thousands of the test takers, however, the placements tests are not easy to conduct. I think, trainings should be provided with the purpose to get new teachers used to heterogeneous classes.” (Code: B-2-b)

It is clear from the excerpts above that the teachers in the current study argued that the need of placement tests is considerably crucial to conduct in ESP teachings. As recommended by scholars (Lenard & Lenard, 2018; Marcu, 2020), the use of placement tests in ESP classes can help teachers to distribute students based on their English language proficiency and design appropriate syllabus and lesson materials. The ESP teachers in the current study also valued trainings which can help novice teachers be familiar with classes with diverse students, and able to adapt with new learning environment (Chmelikova & Hurajova, 2019). As for the last challenge, institution support, the participants mentioned how they made use of relevant trainings outside of their institution. This solution was mentioned both in the survey and interviews:

“Since there are no any trainings for new teachers provided in my university, I usually participated in trainings or seminars organized by other institutions. It helps me to improve my ESP teaching knowledge.” (Code: B-3-a)

“I attended a workshop held by my institution few years back. There has no anymore training after that. So, I decided to take part in workshops outside of my institution. I also often discuss with other ESP teachers in the forums we initiated together.” (Code: B-3-b)

“Because of no financial support for participating in relevant trainings from my university, I and other ESP teachers usually create a regular discussion just before the new teaching period begins. We often share our best-practices to each other.” (Code: B-3-b)

This finding is in line with what Petraki and Khat (2022) have revealed that the ESP teachers showed limited teaching motivation due to lack of financial support for them to develop their teaching capacity. The ESP teachers in the current study solved this challenge by taking part in trainings outside of their university. They also initiated discussion forums which, as mentioned by Al-Jarf (2021), are arguably beneficial for teachers who have limited access to teachers’ professional development programs.

CONCLUSION

This study explored challenges in teaching ESP programs in the context of Indonesian higher education. The findings revealed five main challenges perceived by the participants including inadequate teaching materials, limited subject knowledge, digital illiteracy, students’ mixed level of English skills, and unsupportive institution system. Along with these, the findings also reported a variety of solutions performed by the participants to

resolve the challenges such as attending relevant trainings, making use of internet, collaborating with their colleges, and consulting with IT experts.

As the findings revealed, some pedagogical implications can be drawn. First, ESP teachers need to be equipped with relevant trainings to help them improve their ESP teaching skills and knowledge. Second, authorities should facilitate ESP teachers with textbooks and other lesson materials for the betterment of teaching and learning process. Third, placement tests should be carried out for students before enrolling to ESP classes with the purpose to help teachers distribute them based on their English language skills and design an appropriate syllabus.

Despite this, the current study appears to have some limitations. First, this study recruited a small number of participants. Therefore, future studies should call for more participants to obtain a more generalized finding. Second, this study mainly focused on examining teachers' perceptions. To produce a more comprehensive framework, future research should explore perceptions from other stakeholders such as students, graduate alumni, school officials, syllabus designers, and material developers.

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APPENDICE

Appendix 1

Online Survey:

Section 1: Rank the statements below based on your ESP teaching experiences!

Note : 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=somewhat agree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

1. ESP textbooks are not provided by my institution.
1 2 3 4 5
2. I develop ESP materials by myself.
1 2 3 4 5
3. There has been little financial aid from my institution for ESP textbook purchases.
1 2 3 4 5
4. I have no academic qualification for teaching ESP courses.
1 2 3 4 5
5. I participate in relevant trainings outside of my institution to help me with my ESP teaching career.
1 2 3 4 5
6. Specific-subject knowledge teachers provide inadequate suggestions or advices to ESP teachers.
1 2 3 4 5
7. I have no relevant skills in using electronic tools when teaching ESP courses.
1 2 3 4 5
8. IT staffs provide teachers with limited help in using digital tools.
1 2 3 4 5
9. There are few relevant trainings held by my institutions to help teachers with the use of technology things.
1 2 3 4 5
10. There are no placement tests administered for new students at the beginning of ESP programs.
1 2 3 4 5
11. It is difficult to manage ESP classes containing students with different level of English skills.
1 2 3 4 5
12. There are few relevant trainings held by my institutions to help teachers with heterogenous ESP classes.
1 2 3 4 5
13. My institution provides teachers with limited supports to develop their ESP teaching career.
1 2 3 4 5
14. Very few teaching media have been provided by my institution to support the learning process.

1 2 3 4 5

15. I have a very limited access to participate in teacher professional development programs since my institution provides no support.

1 2 3 4 5

Section 2: Answer the following questions based on your own opinion?

1. What challenges have you experienced in relation to ESP teaching materials?
2. How do you resolve the challenges?
3. What challenges have you experienced in relation to your specific-subject knowledge?
4. How do you resolve the challenges?
5. What challenges have you experienced in relation to the use of digital tools in your ESP teaching?
6. How do you resolve the challenges?
7. What challenges have you experienced in relation to students' English language skills?
8. How do you resolve the challenges?
9. What challenges have you experienced in relation to support provided by your institution?
10. How do you resolve the challenges?

Appendix 2

Interview Checklist:

1. How long have you been teaching ESP course?
2. Do you have any challenges in regard to ESP teaching materials? If yes, what are they?
3. How do you deal with the challenges?
4. Is there any financial aid from your institution for ESP textbooks purchases?
5. Do you have any challenges in regard to your knowledge of specific subject? If yes, what are they?
6. How do you deal with the challenges?
7. Have your worked together with specific-subject teachers in your institution?
8. Do you have any challenges in regard to the use of electronic devices? If yes, what are they?
9. How do you deal with the challenges?
10. Have you participated in relevant trainings?
11. Do you have any challenges in regard to students' English competences? If yes, what are they?
12. How do you deal with the challenges?
13. Do you think administering placement tests for new students is important? How?
14. Do you have any challenges in regard to support from your own university? If yes, what are they?
15. How do you deal with the challenges?