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Crafting Language for Culinary Excellence: Customizing ESP Content to Align with Student and Industry Needs

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Abstract

The alignment of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) materials with the needs of students and the culinary industry is crucial for preparing graduates to excel in the competitive fields of tourism and hospitality. In particular, essential English language skills such as culinary terminology, effective communication in professional kitchen environments, and writing recipes or menus in English should be addressed more in existing curricula. This study aimed to assess the relevance and practicality of current ESP materials within the context of culinary education at an Indonesian university. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research involved 40 second-semester students who had completed a course in Professional English, along with 11 waitstaff from hotels and restaurants in West and North Sumatra. The findings revealed significant gaps in the current materials, particularly in areas critical for international customer service and multicultural teamwork, such as food presentation, customer interaction, and sanitation practices. The study concludes that English learning materials must be tailored to meet the general needs of English learners and the specialized demands of the culinary industry. Incorporating relevant terminology, practical communication skills and industry-specific content is essential for better preparing students for professional roles in catering and hospitality. The research suggests that focused classroom techniques on communication and specialized vocabulary can guide educators in developing more effective ESP materials for the culinary field.

Keywords: ESP, students' needs, target needs, ELT materials for culinary, English for Hotel and Tourism

INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a branch of language education that focuses on the specific needs of a particular group of learners. Unlike general English courses, ESP programs tailor their content and objectives to align with the practical and professional requirements of the learners (Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015). It encompasses various fields, including business, science, technology, medicine, and more, each with its unique vocabulary and contextual usage. ESP aims to equip learners with the tools they need to

effectively communicate and perform in their chosen fields by concentrating on the specific language skills and knowledge necessary for a particular domain (Robinson, 1991; Rahman, 2015).

In the context of the culinary industry, ESP plays a crucial role in preparing students for successful careers in food service and hospitality. Culinary Arts Programs incorporating ESP are designed to provide students with essential culinary skills and the language proficiency required to thrive in an international workplace (Degirmencioğlu et al., 2023). These programs follow structured curricula that outline specific learning objectives, content, and materials tailored to the culinary field. This specialized language education is critical to understanding culinary terminology, keeping up with evolving trends, and mastering technical and managerial competencies (Kim & Joo, 2018). Additionally, practical training in real-world environments ensures that students can effectively apply their language skills. Combining theoretical knowledge with hands-on experience, this dual approach equips students to meet industry demands and enhances their readiness for the culinary profession (Askren & James, 2020; Seyitoğlu, 2019).

In ESP research, identifying learners' needs is a cornerstone of ESP research and practice. Flowerdew (2012), Widodo (2017), and Hui (2017) emphasizes the critical role of needs assessment as the foundation for ESP curriculum development. Similarly, Khalid (2016) underscores the importance of accurately determining learner needs as the initial step in ESP course design. Needs are defined as the gap between learners' current and target competencies, which serve as the basis for language program development. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identify three primary target needs in ESP: wants (learners' desires), necessities (essential knowledge), and lacks (knowledge gaps). Understanding the discrepancy between learners' abilities and desired outcomes is crucial for effective ESP curriculum design. This gap represents the starting point (lacks) and the goals (wants or necessities) of language learning. Additionally, target language proficiency is a significant factor in L2 studies and a crucial consideration when designing language courses. It has been argued that the target proficiency should be matched against the existing proficiency of the learners (Richards, 2017), highlighting the importance of identifying the gap between current proficiency levels and the desired levels needed for workplace success.

Some related literature includes Boers and Lindstromberg (2008), Blasco (2015), and Nghi et al. (2022) which highlights the importance of using Cognitive Linguistics (CL) to enhance vocabulary teaching in EFL classrooms, particularly culinary contexts. The study suggests that organizing vocabulary around cognitive domains, such as culinary actions and food-related categories, can lead to more effective language learning and a richer linguistic repertoire. Another study by Kim et al. (2018) examines the English language needs of culinary students in Korea, finding that these needs vary based on students' career aspirations. Those aiming for international careers, particularly in restaurants or hotels abroad, demonstrate a higher need for English proficiency than those planning to work or study in Korea. Poláková (2022) also explored the effectiveness of using a mobile learning application, *Angličtina Today*, to enhance the English vocabulary of gastronomy students in Slovakia. The study, conducted at a secondary vocational school for gastronomy and tourism, found that culinary students who used the mobile app performed better in English vocabulary development than those who relied on traditional methods.

However, research focusing on the needs analysis of EFL students learning ESP in the culinary vocational context remains relatively limited, particularly in aligning English language learning with the specific skills culinary arts students need to master. Therefore, to address this gap, this research aims to explore the extent to which current English learning materials align with the needs of culinary students. By evaluating the appropriateness of these materials and how well they meet the students' practical needs, this study seeks to provide insights into how the curriculum can be improved. Ultimately, this research aims to ensure that English learning materials are relevant and effective in equipping students for successful careers in the increasingly global and dynamic culinary industry.

METHOD

In this study, the researcher employed a descriptive qualitative approach to identify patterns and concepts that emerged from the data, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of the issues at hand. A descriptive qualitative approach seeks to understand the intrinsic value of concepts both individually and in groups without comparing them to other concepts (Bernard et al., 2016). This study was conducted within the culinary department of the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism at a university in Indonesia. The participants in this research included 40 second-semester culinary students, 11 professional servers and chefs working in restaurants and hotels, and lecturers from the culinary department.

Data collection involved a combination of questionnaires and document analysis. Questionnaires were administered to students and professional servers. The documents analyzed included syllabi and learning modules used in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. These sources provided a comprehensive overview of the current state of English language instruction within the culinary program. The questionnaire, designed based on the theory and indicators developed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), utilized a Likert scale. ESP course lecturers verified its validity and reliability. Responses were categorized into three levels: very high, high, medium, and low. The data from the questionnaires were scored to assess their impact, aiming to measure constructs effectively (Taherdoost, 2022).

Besides, document analysis focused on the learning modules, with the content analyzed based on criteria established by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). These criteria included language description, language points, macro skills, micro-skills, text types, and subject areas. Additionally, the suitability of the English learning materials to the student's needs was assessed using Hutchinson and Waters' framework of subject analysis and objective analysis. The alignment between the student's needs and the learning materials was categorized as (0) not matching, (1) partly matching, or (2) closely matching.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION
Learners' Need of English for Culinary Purposes

The needs of students in learning English, particularly within a culinary context, encompass a broad range of skills essential for their success in the field. English language proficiency is vital for effective communication in the culinary industry, which often operates internationally. Regarding speaking skills, students must master the 5W1H questioning technique to interact with customers, take food orders, recommend menus, handle requests

over the phone, and manage complaints effectively. In reading, students need to comprehend basic cooking techniques, understand the use of kitchen appliances, follow standard procedure manuals for food storage, and read nutritional information on food ingredients. Listening skills are equally important, as students must be able to follow explanations about kitchen appliance usage, cooking techniques, and instructions or advice given by culinary instructors.

Meanwhile, writing skills are crucial for describing dishes, recording customer orders, and maintaining inventory notes for foodstuffs and kitchen appliances. Additionally, students must become familiar with specific culinary terms, including those related to main ingredients, food nutrition, cooking techniques, kitchen appliances, beverages, food temperature measuring gadgets, dish names, and food doneness (for meat, vegetables, and pasta). Mastery of these language skills and specific terminologies will enable students to navigate the culinary industry more effectively and confidently.
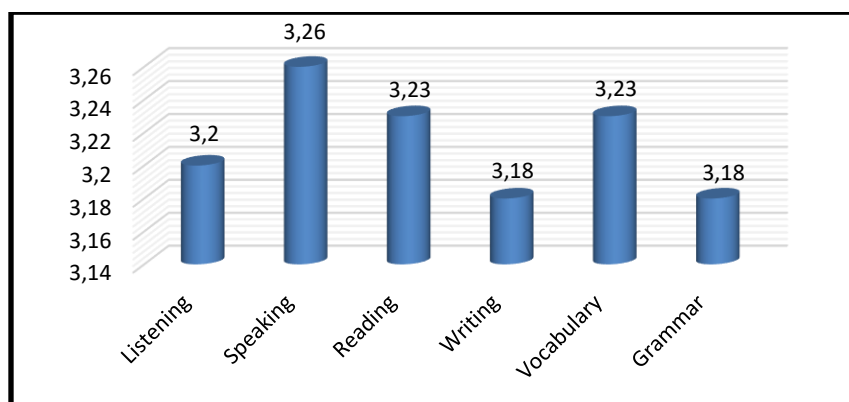

Figure 1. Learners' need for English for culinary

The bar graph in Figure 1, titled "Learners' Need of English for Culinary," illustrates the varying levels of importance that learners place on different English language skills within the context of culinary education. Speaking is the most critical skill, with an average score of 3.26, emphasizing the importance of effective verbal communication in the culinary industry, such as interacting with customers, taking orders, and providing recommendations. Reading follows closely with a score of 3.23, indicating its significance in understanding written materials like recipes, cooking instructions, and food safety guidelines. Vocabulary also scores 3.23, reflecting learners' need to acquire a specialized culinary lexicon, including terms related to ingredients, cooking techniques, and kitchen equipment. Listening is another critical skill, receiving a score of 3.20, which suggests the need for learners to understand verbal instructions, whether from customers, colleagues, or culinary instructors. Writing and Grammar, while slightly less emphasized, with scores of 3.18 each, are still crucial for tasks such as documenting orders, writing descriptions of dishes, and maintaining clear written communication.

Target's Needs of English for Culinary Purposes

As the culinary field demands a blend of technical expertise, operational knowledge, and effective communication, these target needs emphasize the areas where students must focus their learning to be well-prepared for their future careers.

Table 1. Culinary student's target needs

No.	Target Need	Description	Score
1	Work in restaurants and hotels	We are preparing students for employment in the culinary industry, particularly in restaurant and hotel settings.	3.55
2	Work abroad	We are equipping students with the skills necessary for working in international culinary environments.	3.27
3	Attend culinary workshops	We are enabling students to participate in specialized culinary training sessions.	3.18
4	Understand food preparation and beverage serving areas	Ensuring students can effectively manage and operate food preparation and serving stations.	3.18
5	Able to listen to instructions on cooking techniques	Developing the ability to follow verbal instructions on various cooking methods.	3.36
6	Able to listen to the rules of food hygiene and kitchen sanitation	Understanding and adhering to health and safety regulations in the kitchen.	3.18
7	Able to understand the nutritional information of food ingredients	Comprehending the nutritional content of various food items.	3.27
8	Able to Write structured recipes for cooking dishes	Creating straightforward, organized recipes for culinary use.	3.27

The table outlines the critical target needs of culinary students, emphasizing the specific skills necessary for success in the culinary industry. The highest-rated need, with a score of 3.55, is preparing students for employment in restaurants and hotels. This underscores the importance of equipping students with the practical skills and knowledge required to thrive in these settings, which are central to the culinary field. Another significant need, scoring 3.27, is the ability to work abroad. This reflects the importance of training students to adapt to diverse culinary cultures and practices, preparing them for global career opportunities. In addition to international adaptability, attending specialized culinary workshops, with a score of 3.18, is vital for students to refine their practical skills through hands-on experience in specific areas of culinary arts.

Furthermore, understanding food preparation and beverage serving areas, also scoring 3.18, is crucial for ensuring students can effectively manage and operate these stations, maintaining efficiency and quality in culinary operations. Moreover, the ability to listen to instructions on cooking techniques, with a score of 3.36, is essential for executing culinary techniques accurately in professional settings. The need to listen to the rules of food hygiene and kitchen sanitation, scoring 3.18, highlights the importance of adhering to health and safety regulations in the kitchen, which is fundamental to maintaining high standards in culinary environments. Additionally, understanding the nutritional information of food ingredients, with a score of 3.27, is increasingly essential for creating health-conscious and nutritionally balanced dishes. Finally, the ability to write structured recipes for cooking dishes, also scoring 3.27, is vital for ensuring consistency and quality in culinary production.

This skill allows students to effectively communicate their culinary creations in written form, whether for personal use or in professional settings.

Relevance between Learners Needs and Learning Materials for Culinary Students

A match score calculation approach was employed to identify the relevance between the learning materials and the needs analysis, categorizing scores into three levels: 0 for no match, 1 for partial match, and 2 for close match. This assessment technique was grounded in a framework based on Hutchinson and Waters' (1986) theory. The process began with a subjective analysis, where the researcher counted the number of statements in the questionnaire that students rated as very high. This step was crucial in gauging students' perceptions of the relevance and necessity of each learning concept. Following this, an objective analysis was conducted to verify whether the aspects that students deemed essential were covered in the learning materials provided by the lecturer. The objective was to ensure consistency between students' perceptions of the importance of the material and the content delivered in the course.

The final score for each statement was determined by comparing the results of the subjective and objective analyses. If the students' perceptions (subjective) closely matched the material taught (objective), a score of 2 was assigned, indicating a close match. If there was a minor discrepancy between perceptions and teaching content, a score of 1 was given, indicating a partial match. However, if there was no alignment between students' perceptions and the teaching content, a score of 0 was assigned, indicating no match.

Table 2. The relevance between target need and learning materials

Criteria	Frequency		Score	Category
	Subjective analysis	Objective analysis		
Language descriptions	6	3	1	Partly match
Language points	4	4	2	Closely match
Macro-skill for culinary	18	11	1	Partly match
Micro skills for culinary	1	1	2	Closely match
Text type	6	3	1	Partly match
Subject-matter areas	7	5	1	Partly match
Conclusion			**1**	**Partly match**

Based on the table above, there are evident variations in the level of alignment between the student's needs and the materials delivered by lecturers. The language description criterion scored a 1, indicating a partial match. This suggests that while some aspects of the material align with the student's needs, notable areas still need to meet these needs fully. In contrast, the language points covered and the micro-skills scored a 2, placing them in the close match category, meaning the materials closely align with the specified needs. However, the macro skills, text types, and subject matter areas also scored a 1, indicating partial alignment. This means there is some correlation between the materials and the student's needs, but discrepancies still exist. Overall, the findings reveal that the relationship between students' needs and the English learning materials specific to culinary studies is partly matched, with an overall score of 1. This indicates that while the materials address some aspects of the student's needs, there is significant room for improvement and

adjustment to align the content with the student's learning requirements. The study underscores the importance of continuously refining the English curriculum within the context of culinary education to make it more responsive to students' needs.

Critical areas for improvement include integrating more culinary-specific content, developing more targeted speaking skills, adjusting the curriculum to better align with future career requirements, and innovating teaching methods. The findings reveal a complex relationship between students' needs and the current English learning materials, indicating significant potential for improvement. Maican(2014), Luka (2015), and Kardijan (2017) identified a gap between the English communicative competence required by hospitality students and the actual teaching-learning process. This gap is particularly critical where integrating industry-specific content is essential for students' future careers (Borah et al., 2021). Standard English curricula often fail to prepare students for the specialized language skills needed Lee (2018), such as following precise instructions and effectively communicating in a globalized industry, such as understanding culinary terminology.

As the culinary industry continues to evolve, the need for English learning materials that closely align with industry demands becomes increasingly important. Integrating culinary-specific content into the curriculum is essential to bridge the gap between academic preparation and the practical language skills required in the workplace. Seedhouse et al. (2020) noted that incorporating cooking into the ELT curriculum as an occasional, complementary activity offers numerous opportunities. It enables students to use language in real-world, practical, and engaging tasks that result in a tangible end product, thereby enhancing both language learning and practical application. By addressing these gaps and focusing on the practical application of language skills in culinary contexts, educational programs can better equip students for successful careers in this competitive and dynamic field.

Additionally, Vogt et al. (2020) argue that to prepare students for the demands of their future careers truly, EFL classes must adopt more innovative assessment methods that reflect the practical use of language. This could include performance-based assessments, such as role-plays, presentations, collaborative projects, and audio-video learning, which provide a more accurate measure of students' communicative abilities. Andres and Holguín (2022) found that using culinary videos as comprehensible input in the EFL classroom can improve the learning environment and increase student motivation. Moreover, Rojas and Villafuerte (2018) argued that roleplay is an educational technique that exposes learners to genuine situations, helping them strengthen their ability to communicate naturally and meaningfully with peers about everyday routines and future professional environments. These adjustments are expected to make culinary arts-specific English learning materials more effective in meeting students' needs and supporting their career development in a competitive industry. A customized approach would allow learning materials to focus on terminology, phrases, and situations (Tomlinson, 2012; Walkington & Bernacki, 2020) that, in this case, should be relevant to the culinary world, such as communication in the kitchen, menu preparation, interaction with customers, and understanding international recipes. This would give students a competitive edge when entering the workforce, as they would have strong culinary skills and sufficient English language ability to communicate professionally and effectively in diverse work environments.

Finally, this research demonstrates that continuously improving the alignment between the curriculum and student needs significantly enhances the quality of global education and training in the culinary industry. This increased alignment fosters collaboration between educational institutions and the culinary industry, leading to more relevant and sustainable internships, workshops, and training programs. A workforce trained in culinary skills and English language proficiency will be better equipped to contribute to daily operations, improve service quality, and bridge the international communication required in the modern culinary business.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis, the conclusions drawn from this study are as follows. Students recognize that English language skills are a valuable asset in their careers in hospitality and tourism, where effective communication with customers often requires proficiency in English. The learning modules currently used by culinary students are designed to address the specific English language needs within the culinary field. However, the alignment between the needs of culinary students and the learning materials is only partially achieved, particularly in the areas of language points and micro skills. These findings indicate significant room for further development in the culinary arts-specific English curriculum, focusing on better aligning the curriculum with student needs and the demands of the target industry. Although the current curriculum addresses some of these needs, there is a clear opportunity to enhance its relevance and effectiveness.

A limitation of this study is its reliance on qualitative methods, which, while providing valuable insights, may only partially capture the extent of changes in students' English proficiency over time. Additionally, the partial fulfilment of student needs identified in this study suggests that further research is necessary to explore how well the curriculum meets these needs across different aspects of language learning. For future research, it is recommended to use quantitative research methods, particularly employing pre-experiment and post-experiment designs, to measure students' English proficiency before and after targeted learning interventions. This approach would provide a more detailed understanding of the impact of culinary-specific English language learning on students' proficiency levels. Research could offer deeper insights into the effectiveness of curriculum adjustments and help guide the development of more tailored and impactful learning experiences in the culinary arts.

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