

Analyzing the Four State Vocational High School students' perceptions of English, English Training, and Its Future

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Abstract

As part of the annual community service to help improve the school students' English skills, Technocrat Foreign Language School Tangerang conducted a community service in The Four State Vocational High School in Tangerang Regency, Banten. The English training emphasized improving the students' English communicative skills and their interest in practicing the language. The survey research, which succeeded in the training, indicated some important findings, such as the positive perceptions toward the English training, the perceived importance of English for the student's future careers, the importance of English subjects/courses in higher education as well as in employment. Specifically, the role of English in the hospitality, service, retail, and creative industry will be imperative. Of the four skills, speaking was deemed the most important skill to learn for employment. Concerning their future career, the students expected to have a non-English teaching career after graduating from college. The present study attempted to highlight the issue of the English training, potential employability, and the perceived important skill needed by the vocational high school graduates so that they can have more chances to work in the above industries. Further study should identify more skills specifically needed in the above industries so that the amount of unemployment from vocational high school graduates can be reduced.

Keywords:

Analyzing; The Four Vocational High School Students; Perceptions; English Training; Future Use of English.

1. INTRODUCTION

English has long been considered the global language (Pan, & Block, 2011); thus, using English in various contexts has been mandatory (Zein et al., 2020). Precisely, it is necessary to acquire English skill in all formal education contexts (Lauder, 2008). Up to now, the education stakeholders in both high and vocational schools have continuously upgraded the teaching of English in their schools to improve their students' English skills.

Given the increasing popularity of being competitive and capable of finding employment, vocational high school students are required to continuously improve their English skills to compete with other job seekers (Roy et al., 2021). Despite being important, teaching English at the high school level has not been satisfactory (Songbatumis, 2017). One of the findings indicated that many students can not speak English effectively after graduation (Lie, 2007).

Due to the necessity of the quality English teaching process, the school management or administrators usually cooperate with other external parties to help improve their English learning/teaching activities. The teaching process conducted by external institutions can provide a much different atmosphere, allowing the students to learn differently and be more motivated. The learning/teaching process conducted by external institutions will usually be relevant to the policy set by the institution, allowing the students to acquire higher national examination grades.

In line with the above context, Technocrat Foreign Language School Tangerang has continuously attempted to offer English language training to numerous high schools/vocational high schools in Tangerang Regency, Banten. It attempts to improve the English teaching program and provide a more interesting learning experience in the schools. In line with the community service activity in 2024, Technocrat Foreign Language School Tangerang (henceforth abbreviated as STBA Technocrat Tangerang) offered an English training to The Four State Vocational High School in Tangerang Regency, Banten.

Based on the preliminary interview and observation of the site, the English teaching conducted at school tends to focus on some topics required in the national curriculum. Despite being supported by several sound learning media, the students seemed less interested in participating in the English lesson. Despite the fact that the school has also established an English club to cater to the student's interest in practicing more naturally, most students do not seem interested in joining the club.

More specifically, there are some overarching problems encountered by the school in teaching English to the students, such as the mediocre capacities of the teachers, the limited learning media, less interesting or less natural topics allowing the students to practice their English, and the rigid and monotonous learning/teaching activities. It is reasonable as the teachers who teach in formal schools will usually be required to fully comply with the national curriculum, requiring the teachers to rely on relatively similar books when learning English. In order to improve the student's English skills, particularly those joining the English club, STBA Technocrat Tangerang conducted the English training program from 15 October 2024 to 3 December 2024.

The proposed training in the 2024 community service emphasized the communicative teaching method. Communicative language teaching has been widely used and applied worldwide as one of the sound language teaching methods, allowing students to communicate more naturally and effectively (Qasserras, 2023; Sitoy, & Sonsona, 2024). Besides, this method can also improve the student's interest in learning English as it provides the students with more chances to practice rather than the complexity of grammar or complicated vocabulary.

In its application, the institution recruited some qualified lecturers as English trainers. The lecturers are assigned different topics to deliver to the students. Besides, the lecturers were also required to prepare the learning sources/ media to support the learning process, such as engaging audiovisual learning media, interactive teaching media, and possibly simple handouts, allowing the students to read promptly and easily. At the end of the training, the students were also given a questionnaire to allow them to express and indicate their perceptions regarding the English training program conducted by the institution and other relevant aspects pertaining to the English language.

The present study illuminated the English training program conducted by the team of the Community Service Department of STBA Technocrat Tangerang at the Four State Vocational High School Tangerang Regency, Banten, as indicated in the research questions below.

- a. What are The Four State Vocational High School Students' Perceptions of the English language?
- b. What are The Four State Vocational High School Students Perceptions of English Training?
- c. What are The Four State Vocational High School Students' perceptions of the use of English in the workplace and higher education?

1.1. Vocational high school and employability

Based on National Education Sytem No. 20, 2003, Vocational High School is a formal education that government forms to prepare its learners to work in a particular field (Hidayati et al., 2021). Despite preparing the students to be employable, Safira and Nadhira (2021) suggest that vocational high school commonly called in Indonesian language as 'Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan' graduates belong to the highest contributors of the unemployment rate in Indonesia (11.45 %).

In terms of English language mastery, although SMK teachers and students generally perceive that English competence belongs to an important skill, most SMK graduates still do not meet the levels demanded by the industries. One of the persistent problems identified as the cause of the mediocre skill of the Indonesian vocational high school graduates is the existing curriculum (Safira, & Nadhira, 2021).

1.2. English and employability

Numerous scholars worldwide have postulated the necessity of English mastery in securing employments (Kamlun et al., 2020; Nghia et al., 2024). Regarding the Indonesian vocational high school education, scholars confirmed the necessity for acquiring adequate English mastery to enable the graduates to be more competitive in securing employment (Natsir et al., 2022). More specifically the English teaching at the Indonesian vocational high school should also specifically prepare the students to enter particular professions in the future (Natsir et al., 2022).

Even though some foreign languages are increasingly gaining their importance in employment context (e.g., Mandarin, Japanese, or Korean) the role of English language in securing employment in Indonesian has been confirmed incomparable (Rini, 2014). The reason for adopting English as the first foreign language is because English is the language to keep up with the development of science and technology in Indonesia (Rini, 2014).

2. METHOD

2.1. Survey Research

Survey research can be applied as part of the quantitative method due to the perceived several benefits (Barella et al., 2024). For instance, the researcher can acquire more participants' views on specific topics. Furthermore, the data can also be generalizable due to the conveniently provided options in the survey, even though the researcher has already provided the option, which could limit the participants' views on describing their opinions. The Likert-like scale, which is commonly used, can help the participants choose what seems similar to their views. It is certainly much easier than describing their views themselves. In sum, the items in the presented options help the participant to figure out and choose what seems relevant to their views in some instances. Despite being a quantative method, the present study did not fully adopt the quantative application due to several considerations, such as the program was mainly conducted as part of Communitive Service Program held by Technocrat Foreign Language School Tangerang, the number of the students could not be predicted as the program was conducted voluntarily after the English club, thus the students might have been home or partially staying after completing their task in the club, lastly the emphasis of the Community Service was to introduce English training which could improve the students' interest and motivation to learn and practice English more naturally.

2.2. Participants

The participants in the English language training were selected conveniently. The students interested in joining the program were first given priority regardless of their English background. The emphasis on recruiting interested students was because the students with higher motivation could learn more seriously than those who do not. Students who reported being interested in joining the training were first accepted. The number of students identified to be interested in joining the training was 21. Most of the students who participated in the training are currently joining the English club.

2.3. Instruments

The instrument is the tool used to elicit the data from participants of the research. The present research used only one instrument to elicit the data. The instrument employed in the present research was Likert-scale instrument. The instrument consisted of five options: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Doubted, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

2.4. Data analysis

The sources of data to be analyzed in the present study were the students' perceptions indicated in the questionnaire. The questionnaires distributed directly to the participants after the last teaching process in the classroom.



Figure 1. The process of filling in the qusetionnaire conducted by the students

2.5. Data Collection Procedure

The research consisted of a team of community outreach members reporting the proposed training to the school. After the approval, the teachers taught based on the approved schedule. The English training was conducted from 15 October until 3 Desember 2024. The duration of each session is determined to be one hour, starting from 13.00 to 14.00 at noon. The training venue was taken at one of the training rooms at the Four State Vocational High School Tangerang Regency. Seven training sessions plus one session for assessment and survey research to identify the training's results were held. The following table indicates the training program held in the community services in 2024.

Table 1. Indicates the training program

No	Date	Teaching/ Learning material	Expected result
1.	15 October 2024	Introduction	The students are expected to be able to introduce themselves for either formal or normal purposes.
2.	22 October 2024	Applying for a job	The students are expected to be able to provide sufficient information in job application interviews.
3.	29 October 2024	Selling a product	The students are expected to be able to use oral English skills for business purposes (e.g., selling a product, promoting a product, etc.).
4.	5 November 2024	Answering an email	The students are expected to be able to use English writing skills for a variety of formal purposes.
5.	12 November 2024	Telling previous accomplishment and future plan	The students are expected to be able to explain their previous accomplishments and their plans for the future.
6.	19 November 2024	Writing for formal purposes	The students are expected to be able to use English grammar in various written communication and scientific reports.
7.	26 November 2024	Talking to public	The students are expected to be able to use their oral English skills along with grammatically correct expressions and well-received pronunciation.
8.	3 December 2024	Evaluation	The students are expected to accomplish the necessary English skills, which were previously underlined in the previous meetings. The students will also be given a survey indicating their perceptions regarding their English training.

After the commencement of the training (7 sessions), the team conducted the evaluation. As the training was chiefly aimed at invigorating the students to learn and motivating them to practice their English, the evaluation conducted was not aimed at identifying the students' scores or differences in their learning results. In fact, the evaluation was aimed at identifying the students' perception of English, the training conducted by the team community service, and the future use of English. The absence of scoring in the evaluation was important as the training was principally aimed at introducing them to the use of English so that the students could develop their interest in learning and applying their English skills for the sake of securing employment in the future.



Figure 2. One the lecturers is delivering a training material

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Students' Perceptions of the English Language

The findings indicated the students' positive perceptions of English. The facts indicated that the students agreed that English is important for them, with four students (19.4%) agreeing and seventeen students (80.95%) strongly agreeing, thus indicating the whole participants' agreement. Likewise, they also indicated their agreement and strong agreement with the statement postulating that English is as important as their core subjects, such as computer and accounting Table 2, (nine students, or approximately 42.85 %, and twelve students, or approximately 57.14 %).

Table 2. 3.1. Students' perceptions of the English language

1	Students' perceptions on English	Options (N=21)				
		SD	D	D	A	SA
A	I think english is important for my future career.				4 (19.4 %)	17 (80, 95 %)
B	I think English is one of the important skills along with computer and accounting.				9 (42, 85%)	12 (57.14%)
C	I always learn English, whenever I have time to study.			4 (19. 04 %)	9 (42.85%)	8 (38.09 %)
D	I listen to English songs.			2 (9.52 %)	5 (23.80 %)	14 (66. 66%)
E	I watch English movies.		3 (14.28 %)	3 (14.28 %)	7 (33.33%)	8 (38. 09%)
F	I join an English club in my school.				5 (23.80 %)	16 (76.19%)
G	I am interested in learning English in the college/ university.			7 (33.33 %)	7 (33.33%)	7 (33.33%)
H	I think English skill is still needed in the future.				2 (9.52%)	19 (90.47%)
I	I am interested in becoming an English teacher.		7 (33.33%)	9 (42.85%)	4 (19. 04 %)	1 (4.76%)
J	I am interested in becoming a translator.	2 (9.52%)		7 (33.33%)	7 (33.33%)	5 (23.80 %)

3.1.2. Students' Perceptions of the Training

The findings also indicated that the students tend to have positive perceptions of the training given to them, with six students agreeing (28.57%) and fifteen students strongly agreeing (71.42%). The above statement was strengthened by their strong disagreement (33.33%) and disagreement (23. 80 %) regarding the statement that the training given was boring and complicated (Table 3).

Table 3. Students' perceptions of the training

2	Students' perceptions on the English training conducted by the trainers					
		SD	D	D	A	SA
A	I think the English training given to us is very useful.				6 (28.57%)	15 (71.42%)

B	I think the English training given to us is complicated and boring.	7 (33.33%)	5 (23.80 %)	8 (38.09%)	1 (4.76%)
C	I think the way the lecturers/instructors teach us is easy to understand.		2 (9.52%)	13 (61.90 %)	6 (28.57%)
D	I think the learning materials/learning sources given to us are easy to understand.		3 (14.28 %)	15 (71.42%)	3 (14.28 %)
E	I think speaking practice conducted during the training is very important.			5 (23.80 %)	16 (76.19 %)
F	I think writing practice conducted during the training is very important.		3 (14.28 %)	9 (42.85%)	9 (42.85%)
G	I think reading practice conducted during the training is very important.		1 (4.76%)	8 (38.09%)	12 (57.14%)
H	I think listening practice conducted during the training is very important.				13 (61.90 %)
				8 (38.09%)	

3.1.3. Students' Perceptions of the Use of English in Employment and Higher Education Context

The last finding indicated that the whole students perceived that the role of English in higher education or employment remains important. More specifically, the participants perceived that English would be important in certain industries, such as the service, retail, hospitality, and creative industries.

Table 4. Students' perceptions of the use of English in employment and higher education context

3	Students' perceptions on the use of English in the employment context and the colleges/universities	SD	D	D	A	SA
A	I think English will continuously be used in future employment.					21 (100%)
B	I think English will not be used much in future employment.	10 (47.61%)	7 (33.33%)	2 (9.52%)		2 (9.52%)
C	I think English will be very useful in industries/manufacturing companies.			5 (23.80 %)	7 (33.33%)	9 (42.85%)
D	English will be very useful in service industries, such as banks.				6 (28.57%)	15 (71.42%)
E	I think English will be very useful in retail companies/shopping centers.			1 (4.76%)	9 (42.85%)	11 (52.38 %)
F	I think English will be very useful in hospitality industries.				3 (14.28%)	18 (85.71%)

G	I think English will be very useful in creative industries.	2 (9.52%)	5 (23.80 %)	14 (66.66%)
H	I think English will continuously become important subject/course in private/state colleges.	1 (4.76%)	7 (33.33%)	13 (61.90 %)
I	I think English will still become a prerequisite/requirement to enter colleges, either in state or privately funded ones.	1 (4.76%)	1 (4.76%)	6 (28.57%)
			8 (38.09%)	5 (23.80 %)

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. The Popularity of English Leading to Positive Perceptions

The findings indicated that all students tended to have positive perceptions of English, with four agreeing and seventeen strongly agreeing with the statements. The findings were also strengthened by the students' activities indicating their positive perception toward English, such as attending an English club (five agreed and sixteen strongly agreed), watching English movies (seven agreed and eight strongly agreed), listening to English songs (five agreed and fourteen strongly agreed), and learning English vehemently (nine agreed and eight strongly agreed).

This finding corresponds to the other studies that indicated positive perceptions toward and learning English (Anjani et al., 2024; Fauziah, & Sutrisno, 2024; Fitria et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2023). Regardless of the variety of learning activities, most learners' psychological or sociopsychological aspects in learning English are positive. Scholars perceived that the popularity of English could influence the students' perceptions or attitudes of English so far (Anjani et al., 2024; Fauziah, & Sutrisno, 2024).

Besides, they confirm that English has been a global language due to its role in some global entertainment or science (Englander, 2014; Kapica-Curzytek et al., 2019). Some researchers have also surveyed the popularity of English among other foreign languages. This fact shows that English is still the most popular foreign language compared to other languages. English is frequently used in songs or entertainment programs and is viewed or appreciated by millions of viewers worldwide (Park University, 2025; Werner, 2022).

Getie (2020) further elaborates that English is the common language in all parts of the world. It may be a foreign language, but it is international in its significance. English is spoken, read, and understood in most parts of the world. Because of this language, people of the world communicate and belong to the whole share of the world. Furthermore, the participants also thought English was as important as the other courses they had studied, such as computer and accounting. Even though the job as an English speaker is not the participants' future career objective, indicated with seven students who disagreed with this job and nine students who doubted this option, they still thought that being a translator would be pretty rewarding for them, as indicated by twelve students who stated agree and strongly agree.

3.2.2. The Emphasis on Speaking Skill

Apart from appreciating the English training given to them, as indicated by the whole students' agreement and strong agreement, the participants also confirmed that English speaking skills are more important than other skills, such as reading, writing, and listening. The present research confirms the previously conducted research in that most students who learn English are identified to emphasize the necessity of learning English speaking skills (Sinaga, 2018; Zannah, & Hidayanti, 2024). Regarding these findings, scholars assure us that speaking is a more important skill, allowing speakers to simultaneously exchange ideas, views, opinions, and other information (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020; Widiawati et al., 2020).

Furthermore, most scholars reiterate that one of the possible proofs of being successful in language learning process is indicated by the student's ability to enunciate the language (Nunan, 1999). Shen and Chiu (as cited in Jaya et al., 2022) identified that students who learn to speak, will generally face many challenges when coping with linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. Regarding oral communication improvement, for instance, three significant factors can generally be considered: linguistic-related, affective-related, and socially related. Linguistic factors encompass the learners' vocabulary sufficiency, fluency, grammar, and pronunciation. Effectively related factors cover attitude, self-confidence, motivation, anxiety, exposure, classroom condition, environment, family background, and student-teacher competencies. Lastly, socially related factors include internal and external environments where students practice and communicate their oral skills (Jaya et al., 2022).

Given the multiplicities of speaking skills, all education stakeholders, particularly school management/administrators, should start overhauling the factors that can improve students' speaking skills, leading to improved employability. These include a more industrially or business-relevant curriculum, a more

practical teaching method allowing the students to have an apprenticeship or work-related learning, continuous improvement of the teacher's performance, and many more.

Zalzulifa et al. (2023) propose project-based learning, namely publipreneur-based language learning, emphasizing the development of students' entrepreneurial skills and creativity. It is specifically designed to provide the students with sufficient opportunity to apply their English in the real world. In sum, Scholars confirm that equipping vocational high school graduates to be more employable is the most imperative thing to do. The grim fact indicating that vocational high school graduates belong to the most contributors to the unemployment rate in Indonesia necessitates a major overhaul to overcome the situation (Safira, & Nadhira, 2021).

3.2.3. The Employment Contexts Requiring English Skill

Besides confirming the importance of English in the employment and higher education contexts indicated in the questionnaire, the students also hinted that several industries require English the most at the moment, such as service hospitality, service, retail, and creative industries. These findings are relevant to the fact that hospitality industries, until now, are the users of those having international language mastery.

The research conducted by Putri et al. (2018) indicated that the need for English in hospitality industries and travel is very high. Due to the rapid movement in the global era, the ability to use English is a prerequisite for hotel management students to compete in a competitive job market. Rahmani and Laratnase (2024) argue that using English is necessary as the hospitality industry constitutes a multicultural environment. Thus, anyone learning in the hotel department must master English.

Furthermore, the use of English in the service industry is also prevalent. Holmqvist et al. (2017) identified a link between the need for international languages (i.e., English language) and the services given by the companies. The term service industry refers to the concept coined by Guseman (2003), which refers to businesses that provide intangible products. The industries include small, local firms like restaurants, laundries, airlines, banks and insurance companies. Despite the scarcity of studies in these industries, most scholars confirm that the use of international languages, particularly in English, can boost the trades, business, or even companies that serve clients worldwide (Ahmad et al., 2024; Englander, 2014). Specifically, Lee (2012) identified that OECD member countries trade more services with countries with higher English proficiency. The fact is powerful in specific sectors, such as communication, finance, insurance, and commerce, which are considerably associated with face-to-face activities.

While not specifically researched, the world of retail has been confirmed as a melting pot where people of diverse origins come and communicate. The use of English as an international language is strictly imperative. Agustina et al. (2024) identified that investing in sufficient international language training (i.e., English) can magnify business outcomes, boost competitiveness, and mitigate communication challenges in global operations.

In terms of creative industry, defined as an economic concept based on creativity and technological progress to take advantage of existing potential (Aziz et al., 2024), the role of English is not widely identified. However, specific studies on the fields belonging to creative industries have been long affirmed. For instance, improving English proficiency could significantly enhance the quality of life for Thai music professionals. Proficiency in English enables them to effectively communicate with a global audience, refine their musical skills, and explore a broader range of job opportunities (Un-udom et al., 2024).

The role of English in social media, which belongs to a creative industry, has also been identified in that scholars perceive that the use of English allows the significant use of communication among social media users, thus resulting in a more effective and much wider audience or receptions (Tagg, 2020). Previously, scholars (Graddol, 1997) have long identified that the role of English in the cultural world and global entertainment, which belong to the creative industry, has been inseparable.

4. CONCLUSION

It should be admitted that the English training given to state school students only provide a direct figure of the students' English capacities but also indicate the students' appreciation of English. This appreciation can also show that English is perceived as one of the most popular foreign languages in the world. The interest in learning English, which is not only instrumentally motivated (e.g., seeking employment or preparing for a future career), indicates that the participants tend to learn English to fill their leisure time (e.g., listening to English songs or watching English movies).

Given English's relatively stable popularity, the teacher should start incorporating English into a more relevant and contextual activity so that the students can enjoy their learning and improve their capacity at the same time. Given the necessity of the student's employability after graduation, the teachers should further improve the potential link and match the English they are learning with the potential needs in the future employment context.

Despite being generalizable, the present study only elicited data from the few students who happened to be members of the English club. Their participation in the English club might have influenced their positive

perceptions of English. Admittedly, the school management could only approve the survey to those involved or participating in the English training program, which constitutes a voluntary extra-curricular program; this has resulted in relatively few participants as school management could not force them to attend the English training. Further study should be conducted on all students in the school, regardless of their English backgrounds/activities, to identify the more varied data. Besides, the more significant number of students will also mean more generalizable data for further study.

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