



## Original Article

### Challenges in Learning English of Marine Product Processing Students: A TEFL Perspective

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#### Abstract:

This research investigates the challenges faced by students of the Marine Product Processing Study Program *Politeknik Kelautan dan Perikanan Jembrana* in learning English during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. Many students consider English a difficult and uninteresting subject, which leads to low motivation and poor learning outcomes. The aim of this research is to 1) identify the types of learning difficulties students experience, 2) the factors that contribute to these challenges, and 3) the possible solutions to overcome them. This research involved 30 students from the Marine Product Processing Study Program. A descriptive qualitative method was used, with data collected through questionnaires, observations, and documentation. The results show that 1) students have difficulties in understanding vocabulary, speaking, listening to English instructions, and applying English in field-related contexts. 2) Internal factors include low confidence, lack of motivation, and limited exposure to English. 3) External factors involve unvaried teaching methods and the lack of industry-related English learning materials. The study concludes that to improve students' English learning, more engaging and contextualized teaching approaches should be implemented.

**Keywords:** TEFL, English learning difficulties, Marine Product Processing students, learning motivation

#### Introduction

English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world and is considered an international language. In many countries, including Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language. This is known as TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) (Korkmaz, 2021; SaThierbach et al., 2015; Susanto et al., 2020). According to (Kahrs, 1967), TEFL focuses on helping students develop skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. In vocational schools and universities, English is often taught not only for general communication but also to support students in their specific fields of study. In non-English-speaking countries like Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language, a practice commonly referred to as TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign



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Language) . TEFL refers to the teaching of English in contexts where English is not used as a medium of daily communication but is taught in schools or institutions as an additional subject. It differs from TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language), which typically applies in countries where English is widely used in everyday life alongside the native language. According to [\(Abdallah, 2024; Hadiyanto, 2024\)](#), the primary aim of TEFL is to develop learners' competence in the four fundamental language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are interrelated and essential for effective communication. In practice, TEFL emphasizes the integration of these skills to build communicative competence—enabling learners to use English in both spoken and written forms across a range of social and academic situations [\(Li et al., 2021; Marcellino, 2015; Simarmata & Hum, 2024\)](#).

In the Marine Product Processing Study Program *Politeknik Kelautan dan Perikanan Jemberana*, English holds a vital role in preparing students for the demands of the global seafood industry. Students are expected to master essential communication skills that allow them to understand technical terminology, follow workplace instructions accurately, interpret standard procedures, and interact with international partners or clients. These competencies are particularly important in areas such as quality control, packaging, labeling, handling export documentation, and complying with international safety and hygiene standards. Despite its importance, many students in this program perceive English as a difficult and unengaging subject. Observations in the classroom reveal that the students frequently struggle with listening comprehension, especially when exposed to spoken English involving technical or seafood-related vocabulary. Their limited exposure to English outside the classroom, combined with unfamiliarity with specific industry terms, contributes to low confidence and hesitation in using the language. As a result, students often become passive, easily distracted, and disengaged during lessons, which negatively affects their motivation and overall learning outcomes. This disconnect between the perceived relevance of English and the way it is taught highlights the need for a more contextual and field-specific approach to English language instruction in vocational education.

Based on a simple needs analysis, most students say they want to learn English that is relevant to their field. They are more interested in practical English, such as listening to job instructions, reading labels, or communicating in seafood export activities. However, the main barriers include lack of motivation, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and teaching methods that are not connected to their future work environment. The main problem is that students do not see the direct benefit of learning English because the materials feel too general and unrelated to their study program, there was not also available of learning book. As a result, their learning outcomes remain low. There is also a gap between what they need and what is taught in class.

This research is different from previous ones because it focuses on English learning challenges from the perspective of vocational students in the Marine Product Processing Program *Politeknik Kelautan dan Perikanan Jemberana*, with special attention to listening skills and field-specific content. This research is urgent because students in vocational programs must be prepared to enter industries that often require basic English communication. By understanding their difficulties, teachers can develop better strategies to support their learning and improve their readiness for the workplace.

## Methods

This research used a descriptive qualitative method. It wanted to know about students' needs, problems, and opinions about learning English. The study took place in the Marine Product Processing program at *Politeknik Kelautan dan Perikanan Jembrana* during the even semester of 2024/2025. The focus was on how students learn listening skills and how English is related to their study program. There were 30 students from the program in this research. They were chosen because they study English and are related to this research. The researcher used four tools to get data: questionnaires, interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis. The questionnaire asked students about their needs, interests, and problems in learning English. The interviews were done with some students to get more details. The observation looked at how students and teachers acted in class. The researcher also studied English materials like syllabus. After collecting data, the researcher grouped the answers into themes using content analysis. Some questionnaire answers were counted with simple numbers or percentages. To make sure the data is correct, the researcher compared information from students, observations, and documents.

| No. | Instrument            | Purposes                                                                 | Participants                          | Data Type                     |
|-----|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1   | Questionnaire         | To find out students' needs, interests, and problems in learning English | 30 Marine Product Processing students | Likert scale & open answers   |
| 2   | Classroom Observation | To observe students' participation                                       | Students in class                     | Observation notes & checklist |
| 3   | Document Analysis     | To check if English materials match the students' vocational needs       | Syllabus, lesson plans                | Written documents             |

1.1 Table of Research Instruments

This research used four tools to collect data. First, a questionnaire was given to 30 students to learn about their needs, interests, and problems in learning English. Second, the researcher observed the classroom to see how students joined the lesson. Lastly, the researcher looked at the syllabus and lesson plans to check if the materials fit the students' study program.

## Results

This research found that most students in the Marine Product Processing Study Program *Politeknik Kelautan dan Perikanan Jembrana* have a positive attitude toward learning English, especially when the materials are related to their field. Many students said they could understand English better when it includes seafood processing vocabulary. They also feel confident speaking English in class, and most of them are motivated to learn every day. Students enjoy the lessons more when teachers use fun methods like games, speaking practice, and technology. The students feel they get enough opportunities to practice English through group work and role-plays.

However, some challenges still exist. Many students said that they have trouble understanding spoken instructions, showing that listening is still a weak skill. They also

struggle with vocabulary, pronunciation, and building sentences. Some students said the English materials are still too general and should focus more on seafood industry topics. Most students believe that speaking and listening are the most important skills for their future jobs. To improve learning, students suggested more speaking and listening practice, and more game-based and interactive lessons.

| <b>Skill</b> | <b>Students' Needs<br/>(Based on responses)</b>                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Main Challenges<br/>(from students)</b>                                                                                                                                    | <b>Suggestions (from<br/>students)</b>                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Listening    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understand job instructions in English</li> <li>- Listen to information about seafood exports</li> <li>- Follow verbal instructions during processing tasks</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hard to understand fast speech</li> <li>- Lack of vocabulary</li> <li>- Difficulty recognizing technical terms</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More listening practice using real-life audio</li> <li>- Use videos or recordings related to seafood industry</li> <li>- Practice listening in every lesson</li> </ul> |
| Speaking     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Speak confidently in class</li> <li>- Communicate at work with supervisors or customers</li> <li>- Practice speaking about seafood products</li> </ul>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of confidence</li> <li>- Limited vocabulary</li> <li>- Hard to pronounce English words</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase speaking practice in class</li> <li>- Use role-plays and group discussions</li> <li>- Focus more on pronunciation drills and vocabulary building</li> </ul>   |
| Reading      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read seafood product labels</li> <li>- Understand manuals or job procedures</li> <li>- Interpret export-related documents</li> </ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficult vocabulary</li> <li>- Trouble remembering meanings</li> <li>- Long or complex sentences are confusing</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide reading materials from seafood industry</li> <li>- Pre-teach difficult vocabulary</li> <li>- Use short, practical reading texts</li> </ul>                     |
| Writing      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fill out export or shipping forms</li> <li>- Write simple reports documentation</li> <li>- Label seafood products properly</li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficulty forming English sentences</li> <li>- Weak grammar and structure</li> <li>- Forgetting vocabulary while writing</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Give writing practice with real job tasks</li> <li>- Use writing models (sample forms, reports)</li> <li>- Focus on useful phrases, not just grammar rules</li> </ul>  |

### 1.2 English Challenges and Need Analysis Based on Student Responses

The findings of this research show that most students in the Marine Product Processing Study Program have a positive attitude toward learning English, especially when the materials are related to their future work. This is in line with the main goal of TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), which, according to [\(Pratiwi & Cahyono, 2020\)](#), aims to help students develop the four key language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—through meaningful and contextual

learning. In this recent research, students showed strong motivation and confidence, especially in speaking activities. This suggests that when English is taught in ways that are relevant to students' real-life needs, they become more engaged and active in class.

However, the research also shows that listening remains a major challenge. Students often struggle to understand spoken instructions, especially when the speech is fast or includes unfamiliar vocabulary. This indicates a need for more skill-based instruction in TEFL, where listening tasks are designed based on authentic materials such as videos, job interviews, or factory instructions. According to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach within TEFL, language should be learned through communication in realistic contexts. In this case, listening and speaking tasks that mirror seafood processing situations can help students prepare for the workplace more effectively.

Furthermore, although students are motivated, they feel that some English materials are still too general. This supports the argument made by [\(Robinett et al., 1988\)](#) in their English for Specific Purposes (ESP) theory, which states that learners will be more motivated if they see the direct connection between what they learn and how they will use it. In vocational education, especially in marine product processing, students need English that matches their field—such as vocabulary related to packaging, hygiene standards, or export documentation. Therefore, TEFL teaching in vocational contexts should integrate ESP principles, so the lessons are both communicative and job-specific.

Finally, students prefer interactive and fun methods, such as games, group discussions, and the use of technology. These preferences align with modern TEFL approaches that promote student-centered learning. Teachers play a key role in facilitating language development by using methods that are engaging, varied, and based on real-world use. In conclusion, for TEFL to be effective in a vocational setting, it must be contextualized, communicative, and connected directly to the students' future careers.

## Conclusion

This research concludes that students in the Marine Product Processing Study Program *Politeknik Kelautan dan Perikanan Jember* generally have a positive attitude toward learning English, especially when the content is connected to their future jobs. Most students feel confident speaking English in class and are motivated to learn every day. They find English easier to understand when it includes vocabulary related to seafood processing. However, they still face challenges in listening comprehension, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and sentence construction. Although some English materials are helpful, many students feel that the content is too general and not specific enough to their field. The results show the importance of teaching English with a more specific and practical focus. Based on TEFL and ESP theories, English lessons in vocational education should be job-related and task-based. This will help students become more prepared for real-life communication in the workplace. To improve students' English skills, especially listening and speaking, the teaching methods should be more interactive and relevant to industry needs.

## Suggestion

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are offered to improve English teaching and learning:

1. **Use Field-Specific Content**  
English materials should include vocabulary, dialogues, and tasks related to seafood processing, packaging, safety procedures, and export communication.
2. **Improve Listening Practice**  
Provide students with more listening activities using real-life audio, such as job instructions, interviews, or videos from seafood industries.
3. **Increase Speaking Opportunities**  
Use more role-plays, group discussions, and class presentations to build students' confidence and fluency.
4. **Apply Communicative and Task-Based Approaches**  
Teaching should focus on communication through meaningful tasks and simulations of workplace scenarios.
5. **Update Curriculum to Match Industry Needs**  
The English syllabus should be reviewed regularly to ensure it supports students' future job requirements.
6. **Provide Teacher Training in ESP**  
Teachers should receive support and training to design and deliver English for Specific Purposes (ESP) lessons that match students' vocational backgrounds.
7. **Use Technology and Game-Based Learning**  
Include digital tools and educational games to make learning more engaging, fun, and effective.

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- Page 3659 of 3659