
The foundation of English learning to equip vocational students in higher education to face industrial era 4.0

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ABSTRACT

Industry 4.0, originally centered on manufacturing, has significantly evolved, influencing production and how individuals learn and develop skills. As vocational education is pivotal for skill development, it must swiftly adapt to the changing landscape of Industry 4.0, wherein English proficiency holds a crucial position. To enhance English learning effectively in preparation for the Industry 4.0 era, it is essential to understand the beliefs of vocational students, especially in higher education. This research utilized a survey method, employing a novel questionnaire to gauge these beliefs that can be useful information to shape the foundation of English learning. The study involved 258 students of the vocational program in higher education. The research findings demonstrated that the participants held positive beliefs concerning English learning. These favorable beliefs encompassed various aspects, including language learning methods, language skills with a focus on strategy awareness, the perception of English as integral to their careers, the utilization of authentic materials and technology as learning resources, the willingness to be self-directed learners, and the recognition of the life values acquired through English learning. Furthermore, the students held a functional view of language, underlining its practicality.

Keywords: *English, belief, vocational education, higher institution*

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INTRODUCTION

Vocational education must swiftly adapt to the changing landscape of Industry 4.0 as a cornerstone for skill development since real-world learning experiences and teaching are supposed to correlate positively (Phuong, et al, 2023). Proficiency in the English language is increasingly vital, given its status as the primary global language. To ensure effective English language learning, it is essential to establish a clear foundation for the learning process. It is consistent with the finding from (Bui & Huong, 2023) that recommends educators and learners of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) be aware of the elements of successful EOP instruction. This involves understanding the language learning beliefs held by vocational students, as such insights are valuable for shaping education in the Industry 4.0 era. Language learning beliefs have been a prominent subject of study in language research. It has been observed that beliefs about language learning are correlated with English proficiency. In Indonesia, English is

a prominent language of global significance. It is widely viewed as a necessity driven by the forces of globalization (Zacharias, 2005). This transformation has led to English being a core subject in the educational curriculum, from elementary to university levels. Given English's status as an international lingua franca, universities in Indonesia recognize the need to equip their students with a high level of English proficiency to prepare them for their future careers. It supported by (Olabiya, 2022) that to receive high-quality preparation for the workforce, school administrators and cooperating teachers should improve the teachers' acceptability and guidance for English learning. Foreign language teachers at these institutions play a crucial role in assisting students in becoming effective and strategic readers and speakers. However, English education in universities often involves comparing and reflecting on the language in relation to the student's mother tongue. Instead, many universities prioritize reading comprehension and grammar instruction. Universities recognize the importance of critical reading skills as a key factor for success in society, as the ability to read critically is increasingly seen as essential for students' personal and professional development.

The situation in Indonesia closely resembles the one described earlier, where the primary goal of English teaching is to equip students to read English texts. However, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) reading instruction in Indonesian universities is especially challenging. Students must be self-reliant and capable of reading English texts from diverse sources effectively and independently. Indonesian students, often influenced by their cultural backgrounds and grappling with motivation issues when reading English texts, find it difficult to meet the demands of EFL reading instruction (Lamb & Coleman, 2008b). Nevertheless, recent developments in some Indonesian universities are prioritizing English education. These efforts include establishing English clubs, and self-access centers, and promoting academic presentations in English (Masduqi, 2014). Notably, these constructive efforts have been more successful in well-established state and private universities where students already possess a good level of language proficiency from their secondary education and have access to better English Language Teaching (ELT) facilities (Sukono, 2002). In this context, (Lamb & Coleman, 2008a) highlight that successful English programs can contribute to achieving more equitable educational opportunities among students from various socio-economic backgrounds.

In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), it has been observed that students hold diverse beliefs about language learning. For instance, as noted by Wu (2010), many students tend to believe that certain individuals have an innate talent for learning foreign languages, while only a minority believe that English, in particular, is easy to learn. Exploring and comprehending these beliefs is paramount since students' attitudes and beliefs substantially impact their language learning experiences. Similarly, (Tsunemoto et al., 2020) find potential connections between the students' beliefs as a learning foundation and their professional experiences and viewpoints about

L2 pronunciation training. This understanding is especially crucial in vocational education in Indonesia, where English is a fundamental subject spanning from elementary school to college. Despite the Indonesian government's emphasis on the importance of English education, many students lack the motivation to develop English proficiency for their future careers. This lack of enthusiasm is not limited to students majoring in non-English fields but extends to general college students. As a result, many students, even those in non-English majors, do not actively engage in classroom interactions during their English classes. Given this situation, it is essential to clarify the beliefs and attitudes of these students because these beliefs significantly influence their language learning experiences. Understanding their beliefs can provide valuable insights for designing effective English learning strategies for vocational students in Indonesia, enabling them to better compete in the era of globalization.

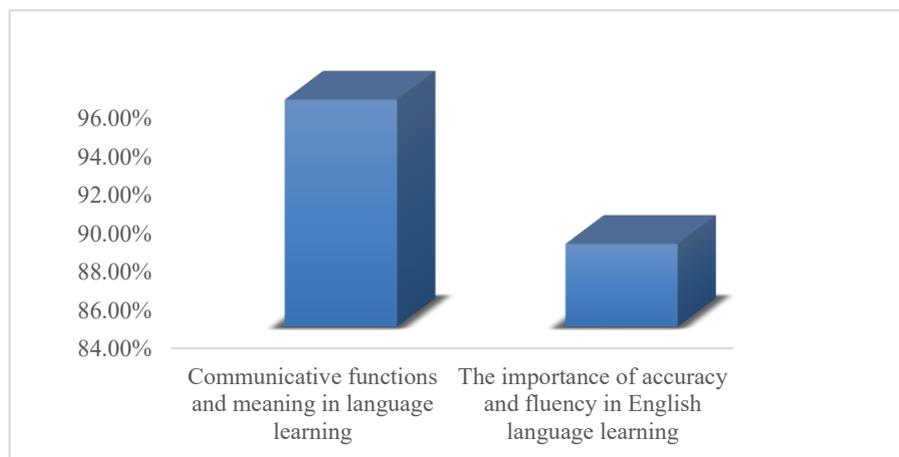
METHOD

This research employed a survey method to investigate students' beliefs regarding English language learning. The survey used a newly developed questionnaire specifically designed to assess these beliefs. To ensure the questionnaire's quality, it underwent three rounds of piloting. The internal consistency or reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The quantitative descriptive analysis was utilized for this analysis, which also helped establish the internal validity of the questionnaire. It involved 258 students of the vocational program in higher education. We collected their thoughts about English learning. Their responses were turned into numbers using Microsoft Excel. We used a scale from 1 to 4 (1 being strong disagreement and 4 being strong agreement) to categorize their level of agreement. Then, we used a software called The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21.0 to analyze this data, and tables were created to show the frequency, percentage, and average scores of their responses. These tables helped us group their beliefs about learning English. Ultimately, we looked at all this data to understand the common beliefs of students who do not major in English regarding how they perceive learning the English language.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the beliefs held by students of the vocational program in higher education regarding English language learning. The study focuses on their beliefs concerning various aspects, including language theory, language skills, language learning, self-esteem, learning resources, and their identity as English learners.

Beliefs about language



Picture 1. Beliefs about language

This study delves into students' beliefs about language, examining three primary perspectives: the structural, functional, and interactional views. The findings shed light on the fact that most participants lean towards a functional view of language. In this perspective, language is primarily seen as a means of communication and expression. A striking 95.8% of respondents place strong emphasis on the importance of communicative functions and meaning in language learning. Their perspective is that mastering a language revolves around understanding how to effectively apply the rules and vocabulary to convey ideas and intentions. Moreover, the research indicates that most students (88.3%) value both accuracy and fluency in English language learning. This dual emphasis suggests a positive concern for effective communication: fluency and appropriateness are essential. This preference for fluency might be attributed to their learning experiences, particularly in the context of the current curriculum of 'Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka'. This curriculum introduced a shift in language learning, moving away from traditional syllabi organized around grammatical rules and vocabulary. Instead, it emphasized what learners need to do with language and the meanings they need to convey. Functions, such as making requests, denials, arguments, and descriptions, took center stage. In sum, most vocational students in this study adopt a functionalist view of language, perceiving it primarily as a tool for expression and communication. They also acknowledge the significance of interaction in language learning and maintain that a balance between accuracy and fluency is crucial in their language-learning journey.

Beliefs about language skills

The findings regarding language skills reveal important insights into the beliefs and strategies of vocational students. Regarding listening skills, the survey showed that 81% of participants use a visualization strategy during their listening process. This strategy reflects their cognitive approach

to comprehension and indicates their awareness that visualizing words can aid in understanding new information. Furthermore, a significant 82.9% of participants found local speakers more understandable. This aligns with the notion that familiarity with a local accent can enhance comprehensibility, an idea (BROWN, 2009) supports. For speaking skills, the results indicate that 70.9% of participants do not feel shy about speaking in English, while 29.1% lack confidence in using the language. This mirrors the finding of (Yang, 1999), which revealed that a significant portion of participants felt timid when speaking English. Additionally, 82.9% of respondents believe speaking English with excellent pronunciation is crucial, emphasizing the significance of pronunciation correctness. This aligns with the view that proper pronunciation is integral to mastering English, and many participants agree that learners' errors should not be ignored to prevent fossilization (Vibulphol, 2004). Most participants see Reading and writing skills as important for vocabulary enrichment, with 94.9% believing that reading can enhance their vocabulary and 92.3% indicating that writing contributes to their vocabulary enrichment. These findings corroborate (Kao & Craigie, 2013) assertion that English skills like reading and writing can compensate for vocabulary deficits. Furthermore, participants generally find spoken language easier to use and understand than written language, a sentiment consistent with the view that written text is more syntactically and lexically complex. Participants also commonly agree on the necessity of guessing words in a foreign language, implying their willingness to deduce the meaning of unfamiliar English words. This aligns with Lie's (2007) observation that participants often employ guessing to understand unknown English words. In summary, the survey results regarding language skills highlight the participants' strategies and beliefs. They often visualize words during listening, consider local speakers more understandable, emphasize pronunciation's importance, and recognize the value of reading and writing for vocabulary enrichment. Furthermore, they find spoken language easier to use and understand than written language and are open to guessing unfamiliar words. These beliefs and strategies are essential insights into their language-learning approaches.

Beliefs about language learning

Responses to the questionnaire items related to beliefs about language learning reveal several interesting findings. Most participants (64.3%) agree that the language learning involves repetition and continuous imitation of similar structures. This indicates their belief in the importance of practice and repetition in language learning, aligning with behaviorist learning theories. These participants emphasize the value of repeated practice, which resonates with findings from (Tezcan & Deneme, 2015). The participants' views on the ease of learning a foreign language at an early age are mixed. Approximately 51.6% agree with this statement, while 48.4% disagree. This finding contrasts with (Kao & Craigie, 2013), where a significant majority

(77.8%) believed that children possess better foreign language aptitude than adults, with only 6.4% disagreeing. In essence, the current vocational students are uncertain whether early childhood is the most suitable time to learn English. This contradicts the widely held belief that children are more adept language learners than adults. The perception that children are inherently better language learners may not align with the reality, potentially discouraging adult language learners. The findings suggest that participants hold mixed beliefs about language learning. They emphasize the importance of practice and repetition but are divided regarding the notion that children are better language learners than adults. This diversity in beliefs reflects the complex nature of language acquisition and learning theories. Additionally, they indicate that learning grammar is not solely for building fluency, suggesting a more nuanced understanding of language learning.

Beliefs about self-esteem

The study unveils several noteworthy beliefs among the participants regarding self-esteem and motivation for learning English. A significant majority (82.2%) of participants disagreed with the notion that excelling in math or science would make it easier to learn foreign languages. This belief corresponds with findings from Yang's study in 1999, where nearly three-quarters of participants shared a similar perspective (Yang, 1999). In essence, most participants do not see a strong connection between proficiency in mathematics or science and the ability to learn foreign languages. Instrumental motivation remains a dominant driving force for students learning English. About 79.9% of participants agreed that learning English connects them to the global community, recognizing English as an essential tool for navigating the demands of globalization. Most participants (91.9%) believe that language skills open doors to better job opportunities. They understand that English proficiency and linguistic abilities play a crucial role in shaping their future careers and social status on a global scale. A significant portion (94.2%) of the participants strongly desired to learn and master English. This enthusiasm underscores their commitment to acquiring the English language effectively. Most participants (82.6%) believe they can effectively master English. This indicates that they hold positive self-evaluations about their language learning capabilities and place significant importance on English proficiency. They aim to excel in English for integrative (feeling part of the global community) and instrumental (access to better job opportunities) reasons. In summary, vocational students strongly desire to learn and excel in English. Their motivations are multifaceted, with instrumental motivation being prominent. They recognize the importance of English proficiency in a globalized world and display high self-confidence in their language learning abilities. However, they do not perceive a strong correlation between aptitude in mathematics or science and the ability to learn foreign languages. These

beliefs offer insights into the students' complex motivations and attitudes towards learning English (Widiastuty et al., 2019).

Beliefs about learning resources

Regarding learning sources, the participants' beliefs underscore a preference for actual, active, and interactive media for language learning. Most participants (94.2%) believe authentic materials, such as films, are the most effective resources for improving their English. This preference for authentic materials highlights their recognition of real-world content as a valuable tool for language development. Participants also hold positive beliefs (80.5%) regarding the efficacy of learning software, particularly video or Flash applications, as a language teacher. This finding suggests that they consider technology-based resources as valuable aids in their language-learning journey. It is consistent with the findings from (Qaddumi et al., 2023) who understand and believe that ICT is vital for collaborative learning. Most (77.1%) express enthusiasm for using English in the classroom. They are happy to have opportunities to communicate in English during classroom activities, indicating a desire for active engagement with the language. Many participants (66.7%) use websites like YouTube to enhance their English language competence. Online platforms offer diverse content and opportunities for interactive learning. In contrast, textbooks rank the lowest regarding preferred learning resources, with only 38% of participants indicating their use. This result is consistent with Kao's study (2003), suggesting that non-English majors often lack English textbooks and rely on computer technology resources for language learning. In summary, the participants' beliefs about learning sources emphasize a strong preference for authentic materials, digital learning software, and interactive classroom language activities. The internet, particularly platforms like YouTube, is a valuable resource for language improvement. Conversely, traditional textbooks have a lower perceived utility, possibly due to limited access to English textbooks among vocational students. These beliefs reflect a modern and technology-oriented approach to language learning.

Beliefs about being a learner

Regarding their beliefs about being language learners, participants in the study hold the following views. A significant proportion (68.2%) of respondents believe that learning English offers knowledge and instills positive values in their lives. This perspective indicates that language learning extends beyond acquiring language skills; it contributes to broader personal and cultural development. The value of learning new languages extends beyond just acquiring knowledge; it has been seen as a tool to promote understanding and respect for others. This aligns with the "intercultural dimension" concept in language teaching, which emphasizes the broader cultural and societal aspects of language learning (Byram & Sheils, 2023). This indicates their eagerness to control their learning processes and make choices regarding what and how they learn.

Autonomy in learning allows students to set their goals, select methods, and engage in self-assessment. Non-English major students' beliefs about being language learners highlight their recognition of the broader values associated with language learning (Ebadi et al., 2023). They perceive English learning as an opportunity for personal growth and intercultural understanding. Additionally, they emphasize the importance of autonomy in their language learning journey, indicating a desire for more active and self-directed approaches to learning, which extend beyond traditional classroom settings.

CONCLUSION

In the realm of language and its diverse facets, a recent study delved into the beliefs and attitudes held by a group of vocational students, shedding light on their perspectives towards language, language skills, learning, self-esteem, resources, and the nature of being a language learner. The research uncovered that these students primarily subscribed to a functional view of language. For them, language was not just a set of rules and structures but a tool for communication and expression. Practicality and functionality were at the core of their language perception. As the study continued, it became evident that these students exhibited a keen awareness of language skills, revealing intriguing beliefs. They had specific strategies for listening - a cognitive process of visualizing words to enhance comprehension. They also held a preference for local accents, finding them more comprehensible. Confidence was a prevalent theme, especially in speaking, and they emphasized the importance of speaking with correct pronunciation. Their understanding of reading was that it could enrich their vocabulary, and writing was an avenue for improving their grammatical skills. For these students, language learning was a process of practice and repetition. They believed that mastering a language required consistent effort. However, there was uncertainty about whether early age was the ideal time for language acquisition. The students were primarily motivated by instrumental factors. They saw English as a gateway to better job opportunities. A strong desire to learn and master English was a unanimous sentiment. They held a positive self-assessment of their language learning capabilities. For them, pursuing English went beyond proficiency; it was an essential skill for their career aspirations and their role in the global landscape. The students had a strong preference for authentic learning materials, particularly films. They believed films were entertaining and potent tools for language improvement. Learning software, especially video and Flash, also played a significant role. The traditional textbook was the least favored, possibly due to the limited availability of English textbooks in their context. Their perception of English learning as a journey beyond language acquisition was an interesting revelation. They believed it imparted values and life lessons, fostering personal growth and intercultural understanding. They also desired autonomous learning, indicating they wanted to take charge of their language-

learning journey and not limit it to classroom settings. These findings underscored the importance of understanding and incorporating student beliefs into the teaching and learning process. Educators can create a more effective language learning environment by recognizing their practical view of language, promoting strategies for language skills, addressing their instrumental motivation, and embracing the value of authentic resources. Moreover, by nurturing values of life and autonomy, educators can help students become proficient language users and more culturally aware and independent learners.

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