Evaluating Teaching Effectiveness through Student Reflections: An Inquiry into English Language Instruction

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP); Language Skill Development; Reflective Teaching; Student Evaluation of Teaching **Received:** 10 Mar 2025 **Revised:** 25 Apr 2025 **Accepted:** 07 May 2025	This study investigated student perceptions of teaching effectiveness in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course using a mixed methods approach. The research involved 65 first-semester undergraduate students from seven academic disciplines at a private University in Indonesia. Data were collected through an end-of-semester evaluation form consisting of Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. Quantitative findings indicated that students perceived the course as most effective in enhancing their reading and vocabulary skills. Other language areas—speaking, writing, listening, and grammar—also received favorable ratings, although with more variability. Thematic analysis of qualitative responses revealed that students attributed their progress to specific instructional strategies such as text-based reading tasks, vocabulary drills, and interactive speaking activities. They also highlighted grammar instruction as helpful for improving sentence construction and clarity. Suggestions for improvement included increased integration of technology, hybrid learning modes, and more personalized support. Overall, the study demonstrated that student evaluations can serve as assessment tools and reflective instruments to inform and enhance teaching practice. The study offered a nuanced perspective on how ESP instructional strategies influenced student learning by combining numerical and narrative data. These findings support using student feedback as a dynamic resource for pedagogical development.

1. INTRODUCTION

In English for Specific Purposes (ESP), enhancing teaching effectiveness through reflective practice has become increasingly critical (Misnawati, 2023). One valuable yet often underutilized source for reflection is student evaluation (Misnawati, 2022). While student evaluations are a standard component of higher education quality assurance systems, their impact on teaching practice remains debatable (Misnawati et al., 2022). Some scholars argue that student evaluations may not always correlate with learning outcomes and thus, should be used with caution when judging instructional effectiveness (Uttl et al., 2017). However, when combined with reflective inquiry, student evaluations can become powerful instruments for pedagogical improvement (Pennington, 2015). Students' feedback offers insights into their satisfaction and the cognitive and affective dimensions of their learning experiences (Carless & Boud, 2018). In language learning contexts, where the interplay between input, interaction,

and output is central, understanding students' perspectives on what helped them develop specific language skills is essential for refining instructional strategies (Golding & Adam, 2016).

This study focused on how student evaluations in an ESP course could be interpreted not merely as administrative assessments but as reflective instruments that inform teaching practices. It emphasized how numerical and narrative feedback could uncover students' perceptions of instructional strategies and skill development across speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. The study aimed to illuminate how learners experience instructional effectiveness and how those insights can drive pedagogical development by grounding the inquiry in students' voices.

1.1 Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET)

Student evaluations of teaching (SET) have long been employed in higher education to assess instructional effectiveness, improve course quality, and hold instructors accountable (Heywood, 2000; Spooren et al., 2013). Most institutions rely on student feedback as part of quality assurance systems, often using Likert-scale surveys and end-of-semester reflections (Alhassan, 2018; Asassfeh et al., 2014). However, the validity of SETs has been widely debated (Langbein, 1994). According to Uttl et al. (2017), SET scores are not consistently correlated with student learning outcomes and, as such, should not be treated as direct indicators of teaching competence. Other critiques suggest that SETs may be influenced by external variables such as course difficulty, instructor personality, or grading leniency, thus limiting their diagnostic value (Marsh, 2007; Pounder, 2007).

Despite these concerns, SETs offer essential insights when used thoughtfully and with reflective teaching practices (Hubball et al., 2005; Parsons & Stephenson, 2005). Rather than viewing student ratings as final judgments, educators are encouraged to approach them as formative tools that provide perspective on students' learning experiences, expectations, and challenges.

1.2 Reflective Teaching and Feedback Literacy

Reflective teaching is a pedagogical approach grounded in the idea that instructors continuously analyze their teaching to improve effectiveness (Mutlu, 2020; Pennington, 2015; Warmoes et al., 2025). Scholars outline reflective practice as a structured cycle of inquiry where teachers evaluate their methods, respond to student needs, and adapt instructional strategies accordingly (Day, 2002; Sellars, 2017). Student feedback—especially qualitative, open-ended comments—can be critical.

Moreover, feedback literacy is increasingly recognized as a student skill and a competency that educators must develop. Carless & Boud (2018) emphasize that effective feedback processes involve more than transmitting information; they require educators to interpret, act on, and respond meaningfully to student voices. When instructors engage reflectively with feedback, they can better understand the learning environment from the student's perspective and make evidence-informed improvements to their pedagogy (Schaub-de Jong et al., 2011; Yılmaz, 2020).

1.3 Student-Centered Instruction in ESP

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a branch of English language teaching that equips learners with language skills tailored to engineering, health sciences, business, or information technology (Misnawati et al., 2023, 2024). In ESP contexts, teaching effectiveness is strongly linked to how well instruction addresses learners' academic and professional needs (Astri et al., 2022). According to Dudley-Evans and St John Dudley-Evans & St John (1998), ESP instruction must be flexible, needs-based, and contextually relevant. It typically integrates skill development (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening) with genre-specific or discipline-specific language input.

In recent years, ESP has shifted toward more student-centered, reflective approaches (Iswati & Triastuti, 2021; Kırkgöz & Dikilitaş, 2018). Hyland (2007) argues that effective ESP teaching involves linguistic input and engagement with students' perspectives on the most relevant skills. Students were more motivated and participative in ESP courses when they perceived content as aligned with their

future professional goals (M. Al Zahrani & Chaudhary, 2022; Nekrasova-Beker et al., 2019; Pardayevna et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of using tools such as student evaluations to adapt ESP instruction to meet dynamic learner needs continuously.

1.4 Research Gap and Novelty of the Study

Despite the ubiquity of evaluation instruments, there remains a gap in the literature concerning how qualitative insights from student feedback are systematically analyzed and translated into actionable changes by instructors (Mutlu, 2020; Warmoes et al., 2025). This gap is especially relevant in ESP classrooms, where teaching must be aligned with diverse student backgrounds and future professional needs (Astri et al., 2022; Misnawati et al., 2024). Instructors are often left to interpret numerical ratings without the context that open-ended student responses can provide. This study seeks to address that gap by presenting a reflective, data-driven inquiry into how students perceive classroom activities across four skill domains—speaking, writing, listening, and reading—as well as grammar and vocabulary instruction. Rather than treating student evaluations as one-dimensional metrics, this research explores how students articulate their learning processes, challenges, and progress through both quantitative ratings and qualitative narratives.

The novelty of this study lies in its methodological design: a mixed methods approach that not only summarizes quantitative scores but also conducts thematic analysis of student comments to generate actionable insights. While many studies focus solely on Likert-scale responses, this study elevates the student voice through close reading and coding of qualitative feedback, capturing the nuanced and personal nature of student learning reflections (Pennington, 2015; Schaub-de Jong et al., 2011; Yılmaz, 2020). The research responds to recent calls in higher education to move beyond surface-level evaluation and engage in deeper, more contextualized analyses of teaching effectiveness (Berk & McKeachie, 2023; Tomlinson, 2017). The study illustrates how feedback can serve as a springboard for pedagogical transformation by situating the findings within a reflective teaching framework.

To guide this inquiry, the study posed the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive the effectiveness of an ESP course in developing key language skills, and what instructional strategies do they identify as most impactful?
2. In what ways can student evaluations serve as reflective tools for enhancing teaching effectiveness in ESP contexts?

The implications are far-reaching. For educators, the study provides an empirical foundation for reflective teaching and encourages the integration of student voices in curriculum refinement. For curriculum developers, it offers insight into the alignment between instructional design and student-perceived effectiveness, particularly in skill-specific language instruction. For institutional stakeholders, the study demonstrates the value of mixed-method evaluation models that go beyond accountability to foster genuine teaching development. As higher education emphasizes quality, responsiveness, and learner-centeredness, such an approach provides a roadmap for transforming routine evaluation into meaningful professional growth.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to comprehensively understand student evaluations in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom. The quantitative component aimed to identify overall trends in student perceptions using Likert-scale items, while the qualitative component explored deeper insights through open-ended responses. The study's objective is to justify using mixed methods: to measure general satisfaction and

perceived learning outcomes and to understand how and why students experienced the course in particular ways (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

2.2 Participants and Context

The participants were 65 first-semester undergraduate students enrolled in an ESP course titled *English for Professional Purposes* at a private University in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. These students came from seven academic programs: Information Technology Education, Civil Engineering, Retail Management, Health Administration, Library and Information Science, Sports Science, and Fisheries Science. The course, conducted over 16 weeks, aimed to enhance students' English proficiency in four language domains (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), grammar, and vocabulary, focusing on professional and workplace contexts.

All classes were taught by the same instructor (the author), using a blended learning format combining synchronous online sessions and asynchronous materials. Instructional strategies included interactive speaking tasks, vocabulary-focused readings, grammar drills, writing exercises, and video-based listening comprehension. The course emphasized student-centred and communicative approaches to learning.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

The main instrument was an end-of-semester evaluation form designed and piloted by the instructor. It consisted of:

1. Six Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) measured students' perceived improvement in speaking, writing, listening, reading, grammar, and vocabulary.

2. Four open-ended questions asked students to reflect on (a) the skill they felt most improved in, (b) the skill they had mastered most, (c) how grammar and vocabulary instruction contributed to their learning, and (d) suggestions for improving future ESP instruction.

Two language teaching experts reviewed the instrument for content validity, ensuring alignment with course learning objectives and clarity of items. A small pilot with 10 students (not included in the final study) was also conducted to assess item clarity. The internal consistency of the Likert-scale items was measured using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.84, indicating acceptable reliability.

The final instrument was administered online through a secure institutional survey platform. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and no personal identifying information was collected.

2.4 Data Analysis

2.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Likert-scale responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. To summarise student perceptions, the mean, standard deviation, and range (minimum-maximum scores) were calculated for each language skill domain. These analyses used Microsoft Excel and Python to identify patterns and central tendencies.

2.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Open-ended responses were subjected to thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework:

1. Familiarization with the data through repeated reading of all student responses.

2. Initial coding, where meaningful units were extracted manually.

3. Searching for themes by grouping codes into categories such as *"Speaking Confidence," "Reading Comprehension," "Vocabulary Growth," "Interactive Learning,"* and *"Technology Use."*

4. Reviewing themes to ensure they accurately capture the data.

5. Defining and naming themes, with representative codes assigned to each.

6. Reporting, in which themes were supported by direct student quotations (with identifiers such as S1, S2, etc.) to preserve voice and authenticity.

Longer and more elaborate responses were prioritized to enhance the depth and richness of the analysis. Manual coding allowed contextual interpretation and attention to linguistic nuances.

2.5 Trustworthiness and Rigor

The study employed methodological triangulation to ensure validity and reliability by integrating quantitative scores and qualitative feedback. Student anonymity further enhanced the credibility of responses. Thick description was used to contextualize findings, and direct quotations were included to maintain transparency and allow readers to trace interpretations back to the original data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Additionally, peer debriefing was conducted with a fellow language instructor to cross-verify the coding scheme.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This classroom-based research was conducted as part of routine reflective teaching. Students were informed about the purpose of the evaluation, the voluntary nature of participation, and the anonymity of their responses at the beginning of the final session. Written informed consent was obtained electronically before survey completion.

Although the study did not involve experimental manipulation and used anonymous data, ethical protocols were followed by institutional guidelines. As such, formal ethics approval was not required under the University's current research policy.

AI Declaration:

The author drafted and revised this manuscript. Language editing assistance was supported by using AI-based tools, ChatGPT and Grammarly, for paraphrasing and polishing. The author conducted all conceptual design, data analysis, interpretation, and critical synthesis. The use of AI tools was limited to surface-level editing and did not influence the study's originality, integrity, or academic responsibility.

3. FINDINGS

This section presents the integrated results of the quantitative and qualitative data collected through a student evaluation survey at the end of an ESP course. The goal was to explore how students perceived the effectiveness of classroom instruction across six language skill areas and what instructional strategies they found most impactful. A convergent mixed methods design guided the integration of descriptive statistics and thematic student reflections to understand teaching effectiveness comprehensively.

3.1 Perceived Effectiveness of Language Skills Instruction

The first research question explored students' perceptions of how the ESP course supported their language development. Quantitative results (Table 1) indicated that reading (mean = 4.12) and vocabulary (mean = 4.06) were the most positively evaluated areas. Speaking, writing, listening, and grammar followed with mean scores ranging from 3.83 to 3.88. The variation in standard deviations, especially for listening (SD = 1.13), suggested diverse student experiences across skills.

Table 1. The Quantitative Data of the SET

Skill Area	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Speaking	3.88	1.02	2	5
Writing	3.83	1.01	1	5
Listening	3.83	1.13	1	5
Reading	4.12	1.01	1	5
Grammar	3.83	1.05	1	5
Vocabulary	4.06	1.00	2	5

To elaborate on these trends, students' narrative responses highlighted reading and vocabulary as significant growth areas. For instance:

"Reading: Text-based learning, such as analyzing articles or academic readings, helps improve the ability to understand structure and vocabulary. I find it easier to understand long texts in English and can identify the main ideas and essential details." (S56)

This reflects the alignment between students' self-perceived improvement and quantitative trends. Likewise, vocabulary instruction was frequently mentioned as helpful:

"Vocabulary broadens the ability to express ideas precisely. It helps improve communication skills, both oral and written." (S29)

Interestingly, while speaking and listening had slightly lower means, qualitative data suggested high engagement in interactive tasks:

"Speaking skills improved because I was often involved in face-to-face discussions and presentations. These activities helped build confidence and improve pronunciation." (S29)

"I can understand the Lecturer's explanations well and respond during discussions—so I think listening was my strongest area." (S32)

These insights support the pedagogical use of task-based and communicative learning strategies in ESP settings, where students actively engage with language through authentic tasks.

3.2 Instructional Strategies Students Found Most Impactful

Students reflected on specific instructional practices that contributed to their learning. Their comments emphasized the integration of reading texts, vocabulary activities, speaking opportunities, and writing tasks. These were closely tied to the skills they believed had improved.

"Writing assignments helped me understand grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary better. Now I can write in a more organized way and express my ideas clearly." (S56)

"Speaking activities like discussions and presentations helped improve my confidence and fluency." (S12)

Students also acknowledged that repetition and structure in grammar and vocabulary sessions supported accuracy in language use:

"Focusing on grammar helps construct clear and structured sentences, while vocabulary allows me to express ideas more precisely." (S12)

These reflections confirmed that instructional variety enhances learning outcomes in ESP instruction when aligned with skill-specific goals. They also revealed that students perceived learning not only as the result of content delivery but also as the format and interactivity of classroom activities.

3.3 Student-Identified Challenges and Diverse Experiences

Although many students reported gains, others expressed hesitation in claiming mastery, indicating a mature awareness of language learning as a gradual process:

"I feel I have not mastered any of the four skills perfectly. Each still needs more practice, especially reading and writing." (S27)

Such expressions revealed individual variation in confidence and outcomes, possibly explaining the wider standard deviations in quantitative scores. These differences suggested the need for differentiated instruction, where students with varying proficiency levels receive personalized support to achieve comparable progress.

3.4 Recommendations for Improving ESP Instruction

In response to the final open-ended item, students proposed several improvements. Key themes included greater use of educational technology, more interactive tasks, and personalized instruction:

"I advise using applications that support English language learning in the classroom to make the class more fun and cool. For example, you can use the Quizizz or Duolingo applications to increase students' vocabulary. Because by teaching through applications, I feel it is easier to remember and grasp than just displaying vocabulary on material PowerPoint slides." (Student 17)

"My advice for improving the teaching of English skills in the classroom is to create a supportive environment, increase practical exercises, adapt to the needs of students because students have different levels of ability and needs, provide constructive feedback, focus on context-based learning, and use interactive learning methods." (Student 5)

"I recommend involving students in group discussions, presentations, and speaking exercises. In addition, using interactive media, such as videos or learning applications, can increase students' interest and understanding of the material." (Student 9)

These suggestions aligned with current digital and differentiated language teaching trends and emphasized the importance of maintaining student motivation through adaptive, participatory approaches.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the complex, multidimensional nature of student experiences in an ESP classroom, especially when viewed through both statistical patterns and reflective narratives. Students perceived the ESP course as particularly effective in enhancing their reading and vocabulary skills, as reflected by the highest mean scores and reinforced by descriptive feedback. This indicates that perceived improvement—in this case, stronger engagement with reading tasks and vocabulary development—was a direct outcome of explicit, structured, and contextualized instruction.

The effectiveness of reading instruction aligns with Hyland's (2007) assertion that ESP becomes most impactful when input materials are relevant to students' academic and professional interests. Similarly, Astri et al. (2022) emphasized the value of contextual text engagement in building comprehension and language transfer. The focus on vocabulary development also mirrors the pedagogical emphasis described by Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) and Kırkgöz & Dikilitaş (2018), where mastery of technical and semi-technical terms is essential in ESP settings. These findings support that lexical enrichment and disciplinary reading tasks contribute significantly to student-perceived progress.

However, a distinction must be made between perceived improvement and actual mastery. While many students felt more confident in reading or vocabulary, a number also expressed hesitation in claiming complete competence—suggesting a realistic self-awareness of their learning process. This nuance reflects Carless & Boud's (2018) and Misnawati et al.'s (2022) concept of feedback literacy, wherein students actively self-evaluate, acknowledging strengths and limitations.

Interestingly, though rated moderately high, speaking skills emerged more prominently in the qualitative data. This contrast implies that while statistical ratings captured general satisfaction, students' written reflections revealed a deeper appreciation for interactive, task-based activities such as group discussions and presentations. These insights align with Park (2021) and Iswati & Triastuti (2021), who found that communicative learning in ESP enhances student motivation and fluency—particularly when activities are relevant to real-world communication.

The value of grammar and vocabulary instruction was also reaffirmed. Despite grammar receiving a slightly lower mean score, students described its complementary role in fostering clarity and sentence accuracy. This supports findings from M. Al Zahrani & Chaudhary (2022) and Pardayevna et al. (2021), who noted that learners in ESP contexts benefit most when fluency and form-focused instruction are balanced. The role of grammar may thus be underrecognized in numerical ratings but holds significant influence in shaping learner confidence and output accuracy.

The study also illuminated challenges and instructional gaps related to the need for greater interactivity and differentiation. Student suggestions for using educational apps, group work, and multimedia reflect global trends in technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), where digital platforms increase participation, provide adaptive learning paths, and offer multimodal input. Research by Golding and Adam (2016) and Carless and Boud (2018) also confirm that gamified and mobile-based platforms can increase learner autonomy and retention in language learning, especially when aligned with course goals.

Another key implication is the variation in student experiences, as revealed in statistical dispersion and individual reflections. This reinforces the importance of differentiated instruction in mixed-ability ESP classrooms. The diversity of learners' academic backgrounds, prior exposure to English, and learning preferences demand flexible pedagogy—a principle Tomlinson (2017) emphasised in promoting inclusive language education.

From a broader pedagogical standpoint, integrating student evaluation into reflective teaching practice—as demonstrated in this study—provides a powerful tool for instructional development. Drawing from Hubball et al. (2005), Parsons & Stephenson (2005), and Schaub-de Jong et al. (2011), reflective analysis of student feedback, when supported by data triangulation, can generate insights that inform both micro-level teaching adjustments and macro-level curriculum planning.

In summary, this study confirms that when interpreted systematically, student evaluations offer valuable information not just about satisfaction but about learning processes, perceptions of effectiveness, and instructional relevance. Educators can move beyond performance evaluation toward evidence-informed teaching transformation by integrating perceived outcomes with pedagogical reflection. Future studies may explore how these perceptions align with actual performance data, enabling a deeper understanding of learning impact across various ESP contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

Through a mixed methods approach, this study examined student perceptions of teaching effectiveness in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course. Rather than treating evaluations as summative judgments, the findings supported the role of student feedback as a reflective resource that offers insight into instructional relevance, responsiveness, and impact. The results emphasized the

importance of aligning language instruction with learners' perceived needs—particularly in reading, vocabulary, and speaking—while addressing structural elements like grammar and personalized support. These insights reaffirm that effective ESP teaching requires content alignment and pedagogical responsiveness grounded in the student's voice. For teaching and learning, this study underscores the need for communicative, adaptive, and feedback-informed approaches in language instruction. Encouraging learners to reflect and articulate their experiences provides valuable direction for refining instructional strategies and enhancing learning outcomes. A key limitation of this study lies in its focus on self-reported perceptions, which may not directly reflect measurable gains in language proficiency. Future research could integrate student evaluation data with pre- and post-assessment scores or classroom performance metrics to examine the relationship between perceived and actual learning. Additionally, studies across diverse ESP contexts would help validate the generalizability of these findings and support broader curriculum innovation. In essence, student evaluations—when engaged reflectively—can support pedagogical growth, foster more student-centred instruction, and contribute meaningfully to the continuous improvement of ESP teaching effectiveness.

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