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THE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AT
THE PUBLIC HEALTH SCIENCE DEPARTMENT, FACULTY OF PUBLIC
HEALTH SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF SRIWIJAYA,
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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to find out the students' perceptions towards the teaching of English at the Public Health Science Department, Faculty of Public Health Sciences, University of Sriwijaya. This study was carried out by using a descriptive research method and used a set of questionnaires as a research instrument.

This study revealed interesting results due to the students' perceptions towards the teaching of English were beyond the common belief. A majority of the sample claimed that the teaching of English was expected not only to help them learn English for the academic purposes, as many research results in this area claimed, but also beyond their academic purposes, that is for their future career right after completing their studies. In addition, some students expected they could learn English at the university not only for the academic purposes but also for the communicative purposes in general.

Therefore, the results of this study might be a signal, although it was carried out in a very small scale of research, for some, if not all, English teaching experts and practitioners to reconsider the common practice of English teaching at the university. It might be the time for them to see the needs of English teaching from the students' needs in the sense of their real needs of English.

English has widely been recognized as one of international languages by people all over the world. It means that, among others, English has widely been used as a means of communication in various sectors by people all over the world. Consequently, either it is directly or indirectly, English has been taught to many people all over the world.

In Indonesia, English has been taught both in formal and informal sectors. English teaching in the formal sector is carried out from primary schools to universities. English teaching in primary schools is an optional course. It means that one primary school may run the English teaching if the school is capable to do it. However, at the secondary level,

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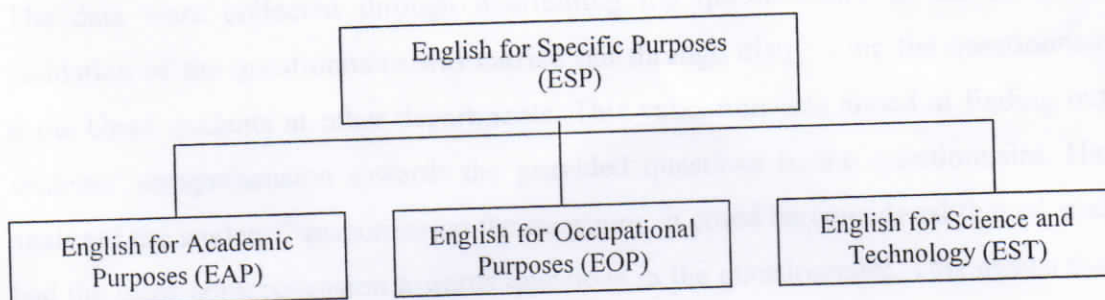
junior and senior high schools, English teaching is compulsory. It means that every junior high school or senior high school has to run the English teaching as one of its courses. The teaching of English at these two levels is different from one held at the university level. The difference is on the status of English teaching itself. At the university level, English teaching is carried out on the basis of the needs of study programmes or departments. It means that one study program or department may or may not run the English teaching as one of its courses. At present, some study programmes or departments run the English teaching, and some do not. Those running the English teaching as their course(s) can be classified into two, that is optional and compulsory one(s).

University of Sriwijaya also holds the same concept about English teaching in its study programmes and departments. Therefore, at this university, some study programmes or departments run the English teaching as one of their courses (either it is an optional or compulsory one), and some do not. Faculty of Public Health Sciences as one of the faculties at the University of Sriwijaya also holds the same concept about the English teaching (Unsri:2009). It means that the Public Health Science Department at this faculty runs the English teaching as one of its compulsory courses.

The teaching of English can be classified into three categories in terms of its purposes. The first category is English Language Teaching (ELT) or English for General Purposes (EGP). The ELT or EGP is aimed at helping the students learn English in order that they can generally communicate in English. The second one is English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It is aimed at helping the students learn English for specific purposes. The last one is English for Young Learners (EYL). This one is aimed at helping the children learn English for the purpose of communication.

The English teaching at the universities, in the views of Munby (1978), and Hutchinson and Waters (1989), can be classified into English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This view is supported by Kennedy and Bolitho (1985) and McDonough (1984). They all claim that the English teaching at the universities is a part of ESP, that is English for Academic

Purposes (EAP) – as shown in the below diagram. The purpose of the English teaching proposed by these experts is also supported by Ahmad (1999 and 2002). He claims that the purposes of English teaching at the non-English departments are to help students understand the lecture held in English, read the textbooks written in English, and the combination of them.



Kennedy and Bolitho, 1985:4; McDonough, 1984:6

ESP as one of English teaching models is provided for the adult learners. This model has some specific characteristics, for example, all students (1) have the same reason/purpose to learn English – relevant to their jobs or professions, (2) use English in the same context, (3) learn English through the same discipline of materials – relevant to their specialization, and (4) use the teaching and learning strategy particularly developed to suit their needs (Schleppegrell, 1994:54).

In line with the English teaching at the universities, therefore, the writer wants, as a case study, to explore the students' perceptions towards the English teaching at their departments, Public Health Science Department. This is because there has been no evaluation and/or research on this area so far at this department.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

The research method used in this research was a descriptive method. It means that the researcher only described or illustrated the existing variables as they were without any intervention. In other words, the researcher only wanted to explore the students' perceptions towards the teaching of English at their department. Respondents of this

research were the students of Public Health Science Department, Faculty of Public Health Sciences, University of Sriwijaya. This research involved 53 students as its sample or all second semester students who had done the English courses. It was carried out in June 2010.

The data were collected through distributing the questionnaire to the sample. The validation of the questionnaire was carried out through distributing the questionnaire to some Unsri students at other departments. This validation was aimed at finding out the students' comprehension towards the provided questions in the questionnaire. Having analysed the students' responses on the questions, it could be considered that all students had the same comprehension towards questions in the questionnaire. This means that the questionnaire could be used as a research instrument because it suited the purpose of the research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following findings are based on the questionnaire administered to 53 students. Table 1 shows the students' expectations on the English teaching in their department.

Table 1: Students' Expectations on the English Teaching

Topics	Yes	No
Need English	45	8
Textbooks written in English	23	30
English as a means of supporting their studies	49	4
English as a means of supporting their future careers	53	0

Having looked at Table 1, it could be understood that most of the students (84.91%) needed English. Their needs of English depended upon their expectations. Some of the students thought that it could support their access to reading the academic textbooks written in English (92.45%) in line with having better understanding of their lectures. Eventhough, not all of their lecturers used textbooks written in English as their course references (43.40%). Interestingly, all of these students also needed English for their

future career after they have completed their studies at this department (100%). It could be understood this positive attitude towards English is because many available textbooks, for example in libraries, written in English and many employers now require their employees master certain levels of English. In short, most of the students had a strong expectation on English both for their studies in general and future careers.

In line with the benefits and purposes of learning English, as the students claimed as follows:

Table 2: Benefits of Learning English

Topic	Knowledge	Others
Benefits	41	12

Table 3: Purposes of Learning English

Topic	Conversation	Others
Learning Purposes	31	22

Tables 2 and 3 show that most of the students considered that learning English was mostly beneficial for enriching their knowledge (77.36%), and for communication purposes – conversation (58.49%).

CONCLUSION

One general conclusion can possibly be drawn from this short paper is the students roughly have the same perceptions on English teaching at their department. Most of them claimed that they needed English not only for their academic purposes, for example, reading the textbooks in particular and supporting their studies in general, but also for their future careers, for example, looking for jobs. These perspectives can basically be classified into one general idea, that is they learned English because they wanted English as a means of communication for supporting their academic and future lives. Therefore, it will be wiser if the common practice of English teaching needs to be reconsidered so that it can really suit the students' real expectations.

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