



Students' Perception on the English for Economics Course: An ESP-Based Study

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 24 Jan 2026	This study examines students' perceptions of the English for Economics course at the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia, within the framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The study aims to investigate students' perceptions regarding the course's relevance to academic and professional preparation. A quantitative descriptive design was employed using a survey approach. Data were collected from 89 fifth-semester Islamic Economics students through a 41-item closed-ended Likert-scale questionnaire. The instrument was validated using Aiken's V coefficient and demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.875. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to determine frequency distributions and perception categories. The findings indicate that students generally hold positive perceptions of the course. Approximately 85.4% of respondents perceived the course as relevant, with 79.8% confirming academic relevance and 77.5% acknowledging career relevance. In terms of language skill development, speaking showed the highest perceived improvement (67.4%), followed by listening (65.1%), reading (64.0%), and writing (61.1%). Overall, 84.3% of students reported positive perceptions of the English for Economics course. These results suggest that the course effectively operationalizes ESP principles by aligning instructional objectives with students' disciplinary and professional needs. However, the unequal distribution of perceived skill development, particularly the comparatively lower improvement in writing, highlights the necessity for more systematic writing instruction and a more balanced pedagogical integration across language skills. In conclusion, the course is pedagogically effective; however, targeted
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instructional refinement is required to promote comprehensive language competence among economics students.

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1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, proficiency in the English language has become an indispensable academic and professional competency, particularly in the field of economics. The majority of seminal economic journals, international financial reports, market analyses, and cross-border business communications are produced in English, making English literacy a prerequisite for effective participation in the global economic arena (Azarnoosh et al., 2018; Branković, 2019; Jaya & Subiyanto, 2017; Kristianto & Harendita, 2022; Nawir et al., 2023; Rahmi et al., 2020; Rahmiani et al., 2024; Rao, 2019). Universities, therefore, bear a responsibility to equip non-English major students especially those in economics with the targeted language skills necessary for academic success and professional readiness.

In response to this demand, many Indonesian higher education institutions have adopted English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as the pedagogical framework for designing English courses tailored to specific disciplinary contexts. As articulated by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all curricular decisions regarding content and methodology are fundamentally based on learners' reasons for learning English. Unlike General English, which focuses on broad communicative competence, ESP is designed to develop discipline-specific language skills aligned with students' academic and professional trajectories (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998).

At Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, the English for Economics course is a mandatory subject offered to third- and fourth-semester Islamic Economics students. The course is designed to cultivate students' ability to comprehend English economic texts, engage in academic discussions, produce written reports, and communicate ideas in professional contexts. Despite the clear pedagogical rationale behind this course, preliminary investigations conducted prior to this study revealed a persistent gap between the course's intended relevance and students' actual learning experiences. All 39 students surveyed in the preliminary phase reported finding the course challenging, particularly regarding economic terminology, and 57% indicated difficulty applying English in authentic communicative situations.

Although several studies have examined students' perceptions of ESP courses in Indonesian higher education contexts (Putra & Suparni, 2023), empirical research specifically addressing economics students' perceptions of English for Economics within an Islamic university setting remains scarce. Moreover, no prior study has systematically distinguished between academic relevance and career relevance, nor has any study specifically examined the distribution of perceived language skill development across the four macro-skills within this context.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by investigating two central questions: (1) How do economics students perceive the relevance of the English for

Economics course to their academic and professional goals? (2) Which specific language skills do economics students perceive as most improved through the course? The findings are expected to provide actionable insights for course designers, instructors, and curriculum developers engaged in ESP-based instruction in non-English academic faculties.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Perception and Its Role in Language Learning

Perception is a foundational concept in understanding how learners engage with their educational environments. According to Robbins and Judge (2013), perception is a cognitive process by which individuals organize and interpret sensory impressions in order to assign meaning to their environment. This process is inherently subjective; the same stimulus may be interpreted differently depending on the perceiver's personal characteristics, the nature of the target being perceived, and the situational context in which perception occurs.

In the domain of education, students' perceptions of a course are shaped by three interacting components identified by Robbins and Judge: the perceiver (the student), the target (the course and its materials), and the situation (the learning environment). Perceiver-related factors include attitudes, motivation, prior experience, personal interests, and expectations. These internal dispositions influence how readily students accept, internalize, and evaluate instructional input (Ajzen, 2005; Harackiewicz et al., 2016). Target-related factors encompass the novelty, relevance, and background of course content, while situational factors include classroom atmosphere, timing, and social interaction (Santrock, 2011).

Understanding students' perceptions is particularly critical in ESP contexts because perception directly influences learners' motivation, participation, and ultimately, their language development outcomes. As Tanjung et al. (2021) note, students' perceptions reflect their evaluations of the teaching and learning process and often manifest as constructive input for pedagogical improvement.

2.2 English for Specific Purposes (ESP): Framework and Principles

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) constitutes a learner-centered, needs-driven approach to language pedagogy in which instructional objectives, content, and methodologies are calibrated to the specific academic or professional requirements of a defined learner group (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) further characterize ESP by its use of discipline-specific discourse, authentic materials, and context-relevant task design. ESP programs are typically classified into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), though in practice these categories often overlap, particularly in university settings where students prepare simultaneously for academic achievement and professional entry (Anthony, 2018a).

Within the context of economics education, ESP instruction aims to develop four integrated language skills: listening (to comprehend economic lectures, discussions, and presentations), reading (to interpret academic texts, financial reports, and economic data), speaking (to articulate economic analyses, participate in discussions, and deliver presentations), and writing (to produce reports, summaries, and academic essays). ESP theory emphasizes that these skills should not be treated as isolated competencies but developed in tandem with discipline-specific vocabulary and genre conventions (Basturkmen, 2010; Hyland, 2016).

2.3 Previous Research on Students' Perceptions of ESP Courses

A growing body of literature documents students' perceptions of ESP courses in Indonesian non-English departments. Putra and Suparni (2023), in a mixed-methods study involving 45 students across two private universities, found that non-English major students generally held positive perceptions of English learning and perceived it as important for their academic and professional futures. Notably, the study identified a significant positive correlation between students' perceptions and their English achievement, reinforcing the motivational relevance of perception in learning outcomes.

Rahmi et al. (2020) employed qualitative methods to examine students' perceptions of ESP Business English instruction at a polytechnic institution in Makassar. While students expressed overall positive perceptions particularly regarding the professional relevance of course materials, they also recommended greater contextualization of content and more innovative instructional strategies. Similarly, (Syafitri, 2018; Syafitri et al., 2025; Syafitri et al., 2019) found that ESP-based learning effectively developed discipline-specific communication skills when materials were aligned with students' professional contexts.

The present study builds upon and extends this prior work by focusing specifically on Islamic Economics students, by distinguishing between academic and career relevance as separate dimensions, and by analyzing perceived skill development across all four macro-skills within a single institutional context. This specificity allows for more nuanced conclusions regarding the effectiveness of ESP instruction in this particular academic environment.

3. Method

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design using a survey method. This approach was selected because it enables the systematic collection, quantification, and description of students' perceptions without attempting to establish causal relationships among variables (Creswell, 2012; L. R. Gay, Geoffrey E. Mills, 2012). The research focused on two main dimensions: the perceived relevance of the course and the perceived development of language skills.

The study population comprised all students enrolled in the Islamic Economics Department at Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi during the 2025/2026 academic year who had completed both the General English course (Semester

2) and the English for Economics course (Semester 4). These criteria ensured that respondents possessed direct experiential knowledge of both courses. A total sampling technique was applied, resulting in a sample of 89 fifth-semester students drawn from three classes: Class A ($n = 33$), Class B ($n = 27$), and Class C ($n = 29$). Total sampling was deemed appropriate given the relatively small and accessible population size (Creswell, 2012).

Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 41 Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), organized into two main dimensions: (1) course relevance (Items 1–29), encompassing academic relevance and career relevance; and (2) language skill development (Items 30–41), covering listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The questionnaire was administered in Bahasa Indonesia to minimize linguistic barriers for non-English major participants. The instrument was validated by three expert lecturers in English Education using Aiken's V coefficient (Aiken, 1985). Items achieving $V \geq 0.70$ were retained, those scoring 0.60–0.69 were revised, and those below 0.60 were eliminated. The final instrument's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.875$), indicating good internal consistency (Jugessur, 2022).

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Frequencies and percentages were computed for each response category using the formula $P = (f/n) \times 100\%$, where P denotes the percentage, f denotes the frequency of a given response, and n denotes the total number of respondents. Students' overall perception levels were further categorized as High/Very Positive ($X > M + SD$), Moderate/Positive ($M - SD \leq X \leq M + SD$), or Low/Negative ($X < M - SD$), following the categorization framework proposed by Jaya (2019), using the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of students' total scores.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Students' Perception of Course Relevance

The relevance dimension of the questionnaire assessed students' perceptions across two sub-dimensions: academic relevance and career relevance. With regard to academic relevance, the aggregated findings indicate that 79.8% of respondents selected Agree or Strongly Agree across the academic relevance items, confirming a strong positive perception of the course's alignment with students' academic learning needs. Items reflecting high academic relevance included students' expectations that the course would improve their English proficiency (86.5% Agree/Strongly Agree), the perception that materials supported understanding of international economic content (77.5%), and the recognition that learning activities enhanced engagement with the academic learning process.

Career relevance received similarly strong endorsement, with 77.5% of respondents selecting Agree or Strongly Agree across professional relevance items. Notably, 91.0% of students agreed that studying English for Economics is important for their future career the highest-rated individual item across the entire questionnaire while 85.4% expressed

motivation to take the course for professional development purposes. These findings indicate a heightened awareness among students of the significance of English proficiency within the global economic workforce.

The mean-based categorization of relevance perception scores ($M = 116.3$, $SD = 16.3$) yielded the following distribution: 16 students (18.0%) were categorized as High/Very Positive, 60 students (67.4%) as Moderate/Positive, and 13 students (14.6%) as Low/Negative. Combining the high and moderate categories, 85.4% of students demonstrated a positive overall perception of course relevance.

Table 1. Students' Perception of Course Relevance

Category	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
High/Very Positive	16	18.0
Moderate/Positive	60	67.4
Low/Negative	13	14.6
Total	89	100

Note: $M = 116.3$, $SD = 16.3$. Score ranges: High ($X > 132.6$), Moderate ($100.0 \leq X \leq 132.6$), Low ($X < 100.0$).

Table 1 indicates that the majority of students demonstrate a positive perception of the course relevance. A total of 67.4% of students fall into the Moderate/Positive category, while 18.0% are categorized as High/Very Positive. Only 14.6% of students show a Low/Negative perception. These findings suggest that most students perceive the English for Economics course as relevant to their academic learning and future professional needs.

The strong positive perception of course relevance particularly the high endorsement of academic and career relevance aligns with the core tenets of ESP theory. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize, effective ESP instruction must be fundamentally needs-based, with materials and objectives anchored to learners' disciplinary and professional contexts. The findings suggest that the English for Economics course at UIN Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi has successfully operationalized these principles, as students perceive the course content as directly pertinent to their academic requirements and future occupational demands.

The slightly higher rating for academic relevance (79.8%) compared to career relevance (77.5%) may reflect the immediacy of students' academic context; as currently enrolled learners, they experience the academic benefits of the course more tangibly than the professional benefits, which remain anticipatory. This finding is consistent with Putra and Suparni (2023), who found that non-English major students recognized the academic utility of English learning before its professional utility became directly apparent.

The relatively lower ratings for items pertaining to classroom facilities, available practice time, and classroom atmosphere suggest that while the course content is perceived as relevant, certain contextual and infrastructural factors modestly limit students' overall positive perception. These situational dimensions, as theorized by Robbins and Judge (2013), represent external influences that interact with course content to shape the holistic perception of learning relevance.

4.2 Students' Perceived Development of Language Skills

The language skills dimension of the questionnaire examined students' perceptions of improvement in listening, speaking, reading, and writing following completion of the English for Economics course. The aggregated percentage of Agree and Strongly Agree responses for each skill is summarized as follows: speaking (67.4%), listening (65.1%), reading (64.0%), and writing (61.1%). The pattern reveals a clear hierarchy of perceived improvement, with speaking emerging as the most positively perceived skill and writing as the least.

Speaking improvement was most prominently reflected in items assessing students' confidence in speaking English during classroom activities (67.4%), the course's contribution to articulating economic concepts orally (67.4%), and the ability to express ideas about economic topics in English (67.4%). These results suggest that participatory classroom activities such as group discussions, presentations, and oral explanations of economic concepts significantly fostered students' communicative development and confidence.

Listening improvement was reflected in items related to understanding spoken English about economic topics (65.2%) and following explanations delivered in English during class (65.1%). Reading improvement was evidenced by students' perceived ability to comprehend economic vocabulary in English texts (64.1%) and to identify main ideas in economic texts (64.0%). Writing, while still showing positive perceived improvement, recorded the lowest aggregate scores, particularly in items addressing the organization of ideas in written form (60.7%) and the production of written explanations of economic concepts (61.1%).

Table 2. Perceived Language Skill Improvement

Language Skill	Agree + Strongly Agree (%)	Rank
Speaking	67.4	1
Listening	65.1	2
Reading	64.0	3
Writing	61.1	4

Note: Percentages represent the combined Agree and Strongly Agree responses for each skill dimension.

Table 1 shows that the majority of students demonstrate a positive perception of the course relevance. A total of 67.4% of students fall into the Moderate/Positive category, while 18.0% are categorized as High/Very Positive. Only 14.6% of students show a Low/Negative perception. These findings suggest that most students perceive the English for Economics course as relevant to their academic learning and future professional needs.

Using the mean-based categorization ($M = 45.8$, $SD = 7.5$), the language skills perception scores were distributed as follows: 17 students (19.1%) fell into the High/Very Positive category, 55 students (61.8%) into the Moderate/Positive category, and 17 students (19.1%) into the Low/Negative category. Aggregating the positive categories, 80.9% of students demonstrated a positive perception of language skill development.

The pattern of perceived language skill development speaking, listening, reading and writing reflects the instructional orientation of the course and merits nuanced interpretation. The predominance of speaking improvement corroborates the participatory nature of ESP instruction, which frequently employs discussion-based and presentation-oriented activities that provide repeated opportunities for oral language production. When learners are consistently engaged in expressing economic concepts through authentic communicative tasks, fluency and confidence naturally develop as corollary outcomes (Basturkmen, 2010; Hyland, 2016).

Listening, ranked second, benefited from students' exposure to instructor explanations and peer discourse conducted in English, though its position below speaking suggests that listening activities may not have been as systematically structured or as varied in terms of audio input types. Consistent exposure to diverse accents, authentic economic broadcasts, and varied speech rates would likely further develop listening comprehension (Flowerdew, 2016).

Reading's third-place ranking may be partially attributed to a floor effect: students entering the course likely possessed pre-existing foundational reading skills, making proportional improvement less dramatic. Nonetheless, improvement in comprehending economic vocabulary and identifying key arguments in discipline-specific texts reflects meaningful academic literacy development (Hyland, 2016).

The relatively low perceived improvement in writing constitutes the most pedagogically significant finding of this study. Writing is a cognitively demanding productive skill that requires not only linguistic accuracy but also conceptual organization, coherence, and adherence to discipline-specific genre conventions. As Hyland (2019) argues, ESP writing instruction must be structured, sustained, and accompanied by systematic feedback and revision cycles to yield tangible improvement. The present findings suggest that current writing instruction may be insufficient in duration or intensity, limiting students' perceived development. This finding echoes Rahmi et al. (2020) recommendation for more contextually grounded and pedagogically innovative instructional strategies.

4.3. Overall Perception of the English for Economics Course

Taking both dimensions into account course relevance and language skill development the overall perception scores ($M = 162.1$, $SD = 23.0$) yielded the following distribution: 15 students (16.9%) in the High/Very Positive category, 60 students (67.4%) in the Moderate/Positive category, and 14 students (15.7%) in the Low/Negative category. The combined positive categories accounted for 84.3% of respondents, indicating that the vast majority of students hold a favorable overall perception of the English for Economics course.

Collectively, the findings carry important implications for ESP curriculum design and pedagogical practice. The positive perception of course relevance validates the current material design and confirms the appropriateness of an ESP-based approach for economics students. However, the imbalanced distribution of perceived skill

improvement particularly the underperformance of writing indicates a need for more deliberate pedagogical intervention to ensure equitable development across all four language skills.

Specifically, integrating structured writing tasks, such as economic summaries, short analytical reports, and literature annotations, alongside regular peer and instructor feedback, could significantly improve students' writing competence. Similarly, systematically incorporating authentic listening materials such as economic podcasts, TED talks on financial topics, and documentary clips would provide more diverse and rigorous listening input. These adjustments would bring the course into closer alignment with the holistic language development goals articulated within ESP theory (Anthony, 2018b; Evan & John, 1998).

5. Conclusion

This study investigated economics students' perceptions of the English for Economics course at UIN Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi from two analytical dimensions: course relevance and language skill development. The findings demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of students (84.3%) hold a positive overall perception of the course, confirming the effectiveness of the ESP-based instructional approach in meeting students' academic and professional language needs.

More specifically, 85.4% of students perceived the course as relevant, with academic relevance (79.8%) and career relevance (77.5%) both receiving strong endorsement. This indicates that the course has successfully aligned its instructional design with the disciplinary and professional contexts of economics students. Regarding language skill development, students perceived improvement across all four skills; however, the distribution was unequal. Speaking demonstrated the highest perceived improvement (67.4%), followed by listening (65.1%), reading (64.0%), and writing (61.1%). This hierarchy reflects the current instructional emphasis on participatory and oral activities and highlights a critical gap in writing development.

These findings have direct practical implications for curriculum designers and instructors. While the overall course design is affirmed by students' positive perceptions, targeted enhancements are needed in the domain of writing instruction through structured writing tasks, process-oriented feedback, and genre-based instruction to achieve a more equitable and comprehensive language development profile. Future research might employ mixed methods or longitudinal designs to examine the relationship between students' perceptions and actual language proficiency gains, as well as to explore how individual variables such as prior English proficiency and learning engagement moderate perceived skill development.

The findings suggest that the English for Economics course has successfully implemented ESP principles by aligning English instruction with students' academic and professional needs. The positive perception of course relevance indicates that discipline-specific materials and contextualized learning activities should be maintained in ESP classrooms. The strong improvement in speaking skills also shows the effectiveness of

interactive and communicative teaching strategies. However, the lower perceived improvement in writing highlights the need for greater pedagogical attention to writing instruction. Lecturers are encouraged to integrate structured writing tasks, provide regular feedback, and balance instructional focus across all four language skills. Additionally, students' perceptions can serve as valuable feedback for continuous curriculum evaluation and improvement.

This study has several limitations. First, the data were collected using a self-reported questionnaire, which reflects students' perceptions rather than actual language proficiency. Second, the study involved students from only one university, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Third, the research used a cross-sectional design and did not examine changes in students' perceptions over time. Future studies are recommended to employ mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches to obtain more comprehensive insights into ESP learning outcomes.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' contribution

The authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. The authors took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation and discussion of results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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