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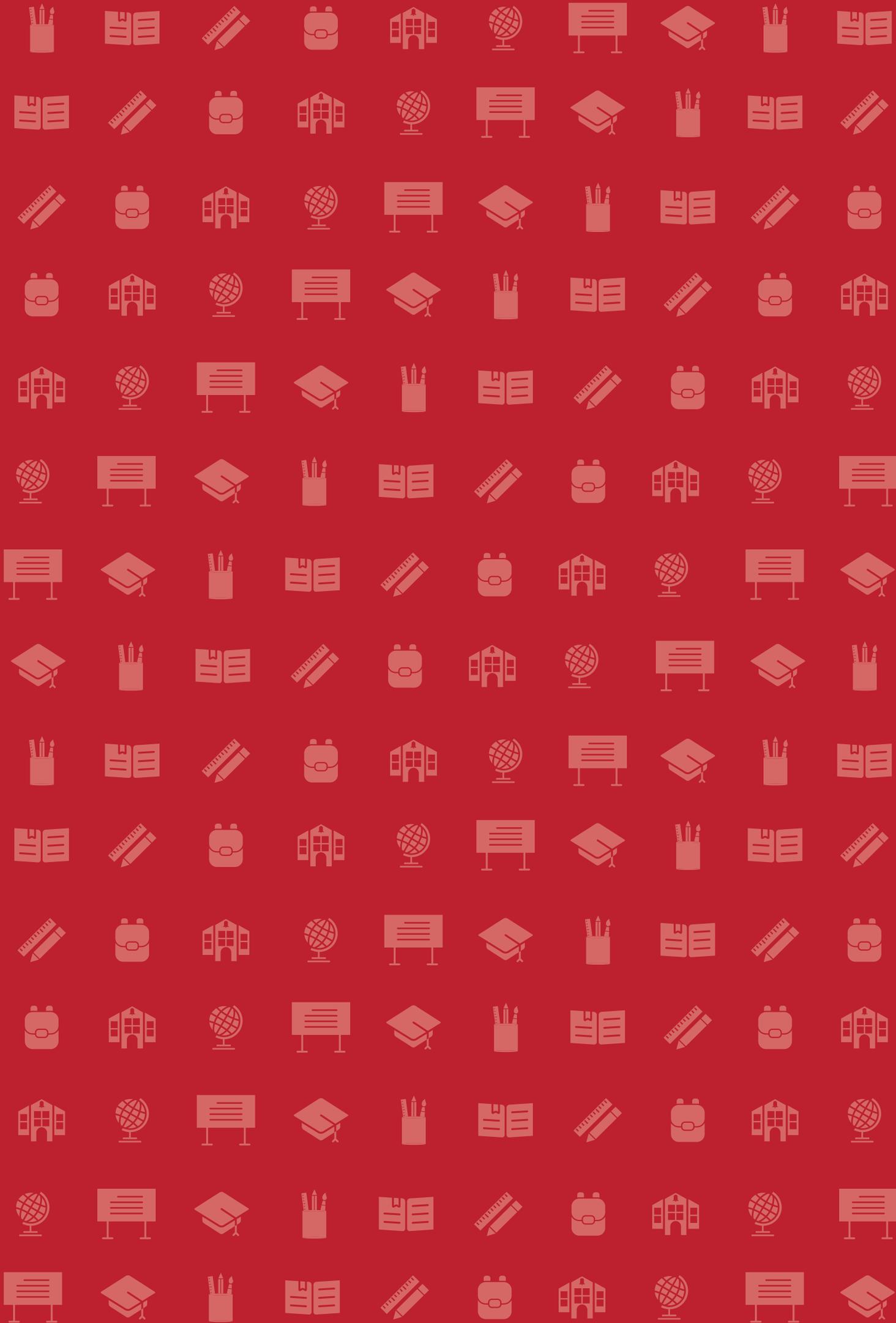


Policy Paper No. 53

Addressing the Employability of SMK Graduates through Improved English Curriculum

by Latasha Safira & Nadia Fairuza Azzahra

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Addressing the Employability of SMK Graduates
through Improved English Curriculum

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Center for Indonesian Policy Studies (CIPS)

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FOREWORD

The wide-ranging effects of globalization, rapid advances in technology, evolving labor market and increased action in response to environmental challenges are changing the nature of not only our social and cultural systems, but also our educational institutions and workplaces.

These changes raise key questions for all those working in the education sector, from policy makers to university lecturers and school leaders. How can we ensure young people are equipped with the skills and resilience they need to succeed in this rapidly changing world? How can we strengthen education systems to help students gain the experience & competencies that meet the new labor market demands and expectations? What are the core skills young people need to develop now for the jobs of tomorrow? And to what extent are English language skills essential? These are some of key questions we had in mind as we carried out our research in this regard. Indonesia has entered a period which many experts have termed 'demographic bonus', in which the population of the productive age (15-64 years old) is greater than the non-productive population. However, this demographic bonus will only become an opportunity if the younger generation, the productive age group, are equipped with education and skills necessary to realize their potential, both as employees and entrepreneurs.

Regular and Islamic vocational senior secondary schools, Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK) / Madrasah Aliyah Kekuruan (MAK), make up over half of the secondary education population in Indonesia with more than 14,000 schools across the country, educating students aged 16-18. Equipping these students with the skills needed in the modern economy is crucial for Indonesia to realize its ambitions, lift aspiring Indonesians into the middle class, and spur growth.

Despite the recent pandemic, the impact of globalization and internationalization continues to grow in Indonesia. With Indonesia hosting G20 this year and taking up the ASEAN chairmanship next year, the country continues to attract greater foreign investment. More multinational companies are establishing a presence in Indonesia and the tourism sector recovers and expands. At the same time, more Indonesians than ever are seeking opportunities to work and study overseas, with many returning to Indonesia equipped with new qualifications, skills, and experience. English language skills are key for individuals to secure study and employment opportunities, both at home and abroad. In the Indonesian labor market, minimum English language proficiency levels are increasingly required by a greater variety of employers and sectors across all industry.

Within this context, the British Council Indonesia has been running the 'Work Ready' program across the country. Work Ready is a partnership initiative between the British Council and PT Bank HSBC Indonesia. The program aims to support the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in improving the employability skills of vocational school graduates. Launched in 2018, Work Ready has reached over 3,000 SMK teachers/leaders and 3,500 students across Indonesia through a variety of capacity building activities including online and face-to-face teacher training, virtual conferences as well as resources for the teachers and direct training for SMK students.

To support all those engaged in improving the quality of education in vocational senior secondary high schools in Indonesia; from policy makers to school leaders and teachers, the British Council supported the Center for Indonesian Policy Studies (CIPS) to conduct a study on “English for SMK”. This study examines the current attitudes, perceptions, and challenges towards English language competencies among employers, SMK teachers and SMK students, particularly with respect to the SMK graduates’ readiness for the labor market.

The report provides detailed data, insight and analysis which we hope will serve as the basis for further informed debate and discussion. Through consideration of its recommendations, this report aims to inform evidenced based policy reform, help to further strengthen and improve the quality of vocational high school education, especially regarding the provision of English language teaching in SMK schools.

Improving the English language proficiency skills of vocational high school graduates is essential for Indonesia to upskill and increase the competitiveness of its human capital for a modern economy, and by doing so, ensuring the potential advantages of its current ‘demographic bonus’ are fully realized.



Summer Xia

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British Council

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GLOSSARY

DUDI:

Dunia Usaha dan Dunia Industri

ESP:

English for Specific Purposes

EAL:

English additional language

FGD:

Focus Group Discussion

ILO:

International Labor Organization

MOECRT:

Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology

SMK:

Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan

SMK-PK:

SMK-Pusat Keunggulan

TOEIC:

Test of English in International Communication

UNICEF:

United Nations Children's Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

English proficiencies have been increasingly demanded by employers, especially given the increase in globalization and foreign investments and relations in Indonesia. Employers have reported that English fluency is an important skill across industries, whether as a necessity to secure a job or as a value-added, particularly for career progression and promotions. Hence, developing English competencies is important, particularly in vocational schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan* or SMK) that aim to prepare students directly for the job market. The effectiveness of English teaching and learning in SMK depends on the attitudes and perceptions of teachers, students, and parents.

In general, teachers and students agree that English is important to improve employability, although to varying degrees. SMK students need to meet the expected proficiency of their industry upon graduation, as 70% of graduates seek employment, rather than continue their studies in universities. Unfortunately, there remains a skill gap as both employers and teachers have revealed that SMK graduates tend to have lower English competencies than their industry requirements. As a result, this may reflect negatively on their competitiveness in the job market and thereby limit their job prospects.

The availability of qualified English teachers for SMK students is one contributing factor. Employers have also argued that English teachers themselves do not have a good understanding of the industry requirements. Studies have also demonstrated that SMK English teachers tend to struggle with their pedagogical and professionalism competencies, consequently affecting their ability to support and facilitate the students' development of English proficiencies in a way that matches their industry's demands.

Meanwhile, teachers have attributed weaknesses in the 2013 curriculum, time constraints, as well as students' lack of motivation as the main challenges in improving students' English competencies. Currently, English studies in SMKs are still too general and do not follow a ESP (English for Specific Purpose) approach, which would be adjusted appropriately to the demands of their respective majors and industries. In fact, there is no difference between the required competencies that students must attain in their English studies at the SMK level and the SMA level. Consequently, SMK students tend to develop only basic proficiencies in English, which is still below the required capacity by employers across industries. This leaves SMK students unprepared for the job market, and there is urgency to address this especially as SMKs are currently reported to be the highest contributors to unemployment in Indonesia compared to other education levels.

In order to facilitate improvements in student's English proficiencies and ensure that the skills developed in school matches the demands of the industry, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology should pay attention to how the curriculum impacts the learning experiences and attitudes of English at the SMK level. The ESP approach needs to be adopted, and therefore better prepare SMK students for the job market. This can be done through revising the basic competencies of English studies at the SMK level (especially to ensure that it is distinct

from the SMA level), fostering collaborations with industry players to develop ESP for each major, ensuring availability and access to more learning resources that support the ESP approach, provide training opportunities for English SMK teachers to increase industry-knowledge and improve the infrastructure needed to support students' development of English proficiencies outside of school.

INTRODUCTION

Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK), Indonesia's formal vocational school at the secondary-level, is intended to prepare students to enter the job market. According to MOECRT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology) Regulation No. 56/M/2022, SMKs offer ten umbrella majors: construction technology and property; manufacturing technology and engineering; energy and mining; information and communication technology; health and social work, agribusiness and agrotechnology; maritime studies; business and management; tourism; and arts and creative industry. According to MOECRT (2018), the majority of SMK students major in technology and engineering¹ (33%), information and communication technology (24%), and business and management (22%).

As of the 2020/2021 school year, there are a total of 14,078 registered SMKs in Indonesia², in which 74% are private SMKs and 26% are public SMKs (Statistics Indonesia, 2021a). Currently, the availability of SMKs throughout the archipelago remains uneven as 57% are located in Java, followed by Sumatra, comprising 20% of the total SMKs in Indonesia. Approximately 70% of SMK graduates seek employment, while 30% continue their studies in university.

The employability landscape has undergone significant developments. Alongside a trend in upgrading business operations through digitalization and automation, there is also a growing demand in labor for health industry, construction, manufacturing and retail, which are majors offered in SMKs across Indonesia (Das et al., 2019). According to Suharno, Pambudi and Hajanto (2020) the local job market has an 85% absorption rate for SMK graduates. Given both the high degree of absorption and students looking for jobs upon graduation, SMKs should prepare students for the workforce by facilitating the development of the necessary skills before they graduate, particularly those that are demanded by hiring managers.

One skill that employers have paid special attention to is English proficiency. While it may be valued to varying degrees, the use of English is present in state-owned, multinational, foreign, and private companies alike (Setiawan, 2014). Within the workplace setting, English may be required to pass the job interview, communicate with managers and colleagues; interact with foreign investors and customers; and produce and comprehend instruction manuals, official documents and even information online (ibid). This suggests that in some cases, English proficiencies may be linked to job performance, which indicates its value when obtaining promotions. As employers have expressed the growing need for staff with the necessary English competencies, acquiring English proficiencies is becoming more critical in order to thrive in the current competitive workforce.

Given both the high degree of absorption and students looking for jobs upon graduation, SMKs should prepare students for the workforce by facilitating the development of the necessary skills before they graduate, particularly those that are demanded by hiring managers.

¹ As of 2022, technology and engineering has been split into two majors: construction technology and property, and manufacturing technology and engineering.

² See Appendix 1 for breakdown of number of SMKs by province

English studies are mandatory in vocational studies at the SMK level. When it comes to developing English competencies, the MOECRT has formulated a national curriculum to guide teachers in the instruction of English studies. In addition, the Directorate of Technical Vocational Education introduced the Test of English in International Communication (TOEIC) for SMK students as a way to measure their English proficiencies. TOEIC is often used as a standardized test that in some cases, may be a requirement used to gain employment.

Several SMKs have also attempted to adopt an English for Specific Purpose (ESP) approach. This principle encourages teachers to design and develop their best practices, pedagogies and materials to teach English in a way that is adjusted to their students' respective majors. The goal of ESP is to ensure that students are learning and developing their English competencies in a way that matches the needs of industry, thereby preparing students to secure employment upon graduation.

In February 2021, recent data from Statistics Indonesia (2021b) demonstrated that among all education levels, SMK graduates are the highest contributors (approximately 11%) to the unemployment rate in Indonesia, even compared to those who have never gone to school or only attained elementary education (almost 4%). Rahman and Fatah (2021) found that the youth unemployment rate (25%) in Indonesia is higher than the average global youth unemployment rate (14%). While the issue of unemployment was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, this is also largely due to the talent shortage, as employers struggle to find graduates that meet the requirements and qualification for employment (Damanik, 2021).

Despite previous efforts to close the gap, the MOECRT has reported that there are still many reports of mismatches between the competences of SMK graduates and the needs of the job market, which contributes to the number of people who are educated yet unemployed (Putra, 2021). According to a report by ILO, on average it takes about eight months for SMK students to secure their first job, but 15 months to secure stable employment (Kent, 2021). Therefore, there remains a weak transition from school to occupation (ibid).

English proficiencies are among the skills that require further development, as SMK graduates generally still attain a level that is below the expected capacity by employers across industries. The current course for English studies may prepare SMK students to graduate, but it does not necessarily facilitate them to obtain their first job afterwards. Given that the majority of SMK students seek work once they finish their studies, their English studies are not meeting their learning goals.

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This study aims to explore the attitudes and experiences of English within the SMK context, especially in its relation to the students' future employability. This report is based on both primary and secondary research. Primary data was gathered through surveys³, interviews and a focus group discussion (FGD) with teachers, students and industry representatives (employers).

This paper is separated into three sections, focusing on the Industry's, Teachers' and Students' attitudes and experiences of English, respectively. The paper concludes with a summary of the key takeaways and practical policy recommendations for government stakeholders, the private sector and teachers on how English studies can be improved, by way of increasing the employability of students to ultimately improve the quality of human capital in Indonesia.

³See Appendix 2 for the methodology and sampling for the study

THE INDUSTRY'S ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES

As an international language, English competencies are widely recognized as a value-added, and oftentimes, a prerequisite for employment in the Indonesian job market. A report by the Ministry of National Development and Planning (Bappenas, 2015) found that English proficiency is understood as a core skill in which Indonesian students have not yet adequately developed. Two different studies with both multinational and local representative companies from energy, mining, manufacturing, industrial estate sectors as well as industry skills training in Indonesia conducted by Sari Baso (2014) and Wigati, Sari and Santosa (2020) show that the majority of companies perceive English language as important skills to have in the workplace setting and would prioritize hiring employees who have proficient English skills. ILO reports that in the Indonesian maritime industry, employers in their sample expect graduates to acquire English proficiencies that will allow them to liaise with International Port Authorities, listen and contribute in business meetings, resolve complaints from angry customers and more (Kent, 2021).

Employers have identified English skills as one of the top two essential skills required for future employment, alongside technology competencies (Nambiar et al., 2019). Indonesia is continually developing their international links, as foreign enterprises are increasingly investing in Indonesia, and local companies seek to expand their business globally. In addition, local companies plan to expand and open branches, factories and franchises in South Asia and Southeast Asia over the next 5-10 years (ibid). Consequently, employers and managers perceive a professional proficiency level in English as an essential skill to acquire and develop especially when their workers begin to communicate and interact with foreign clients and customers. In addition, English competencies may be factored into an employee's prospects for promotion and benefits. As much as 55% of Indonesian employers indicated that they offer better packages to applicants with good English skills, which includes salary increases and faster job progression (Cambridge English, 2016).

In the context of English skills for SMKs graduates, an interview with the Djarum Foundation (2021), a non-profit organization committed to improving quality of SMKs through industry-oriented development, revealed that English skills would be an added value to SMKs students as it will increase their employability and competitiveness in the job market. In the past, their students who have fluent English skills tend to have wider opportunities to advance their career or pivot to another career trajectory, compared to those who only have lower proficiencies in English. This holds true even when students have the same level of technical, industry-specific skills.

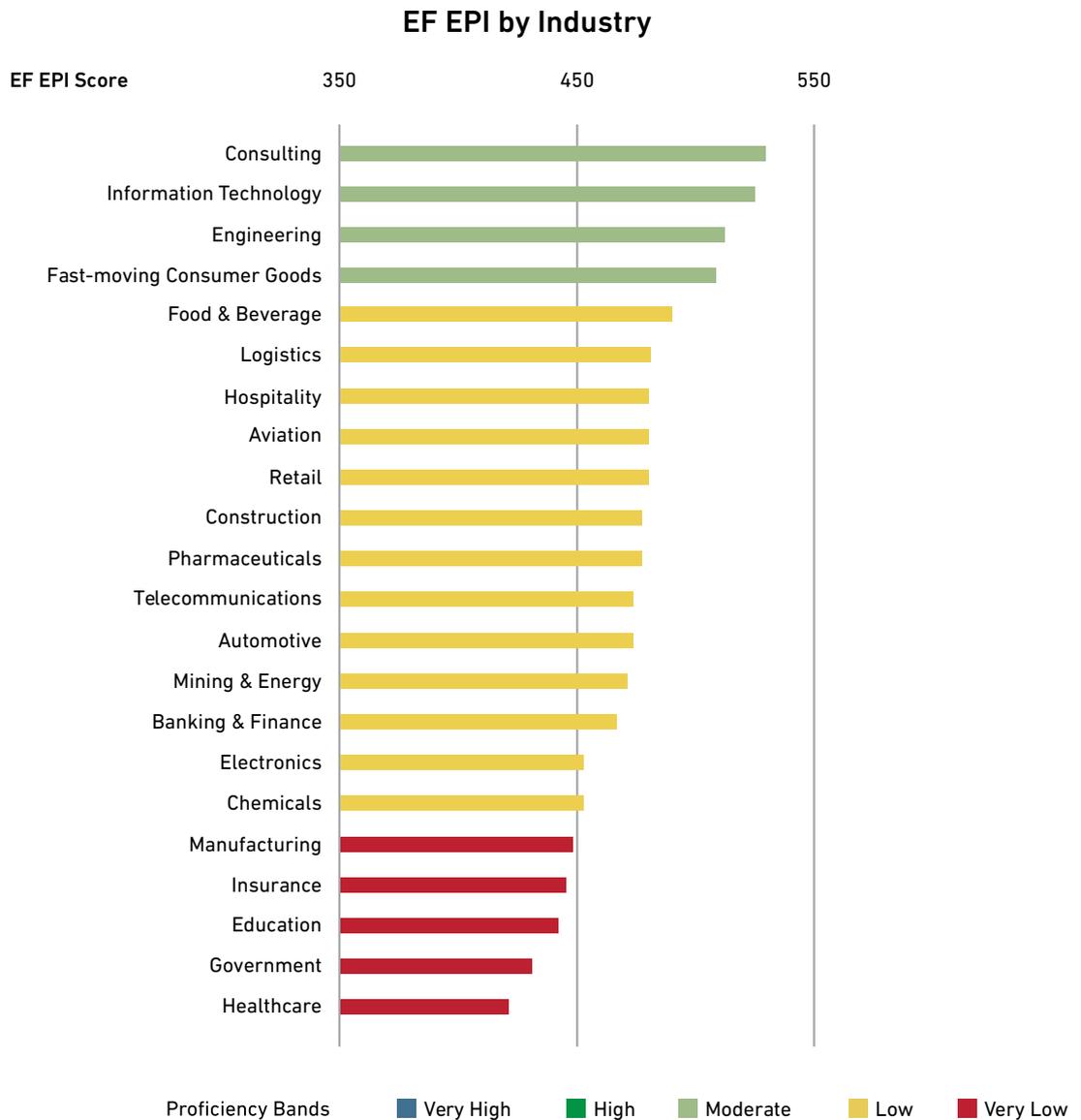
“In the past, their students who have fluent English skills tend to have wider opportunities to advance their career or pivot to another career trajectory, compared to those who only have lower proficiencies in English.”

Furthermore, English skills are just as important to secure internship and apprenticeship opportunities as well. According to Manpower Law No. 13/2003, students are allowed to seek employment if it remains within the framework of their education and training curriculum. Within the SMK context, students can participate in a program called Industrial Work Practice (*Praktek Kerja Industri*) or Field Work Practices (*Pelatihan Kerja Lapangan*), where students receive on the ground training from companies to provide them with practical experience. Ministry of Finance Regulation No. 128/2019 also stipulates a super tax deduction for private sector and industries that provide internship and capacity building programs for SMK students to improve their competitiveness. However, acceptance into these programs also depends on the individual competencies of the students in their fields and the requirements specified by the respective companies. This means employers may require students to attain specific levels of English proficiency.

The English skills areas (speaking, writing, reading, and listening) that are regarded as the most important vary by different industries. Findings from a Cambridge English study (2016) from 5,373 employees in 38 countries (including Indonesia) shows that while different English skills are required for different industries, in general, 11 industries mentioned that reading skills are the most important, followed by speaking skills in nine industries. English reading skills come in handy when the employee deals with contracts and other administrative tasks while English speaking skills are very important to interact with colleagues or clients. A study conducted by Prima (2022) on the perception of English proficiency among Indonesian hotel employees shows that speaking and listening skills are deemed the most important.

It is also important to note that the minimum English skills required by the employers vary across jobs and sectors. Business sectors, such as banking, and finance require advanced English skills while lower English requirements are still acceptable for service sectors where interaction with customers and guests can be conducted in a relatively casual manner, such as tourism and hospitality (ibid). An English Proficiency Index published by English First (2021) shows that the employees from different industry sectors have overall different levels of English skills (Figure 1).

Figure 1.
English Proficiency Index by Industry



Source: Education First (2021)

The English Proficiency Index⁴ portrays the general English proficiency of people working in different sectors, which broadly reflects the extent to which English is utilized in their workplace. This provides the minimum expected English proficiency for SMKs graduates in Indonesia based on their specific industry. For instance, SMKs graduates who want to work in the engineering and information technology sectors may need to achieve at least a moderate level of English proficiency (which indicates the ability to participate in meetings and write professional emails) to match the proficiency level of employees in the same sector.

⁴ The English Proficiency Index shows data on English proficiency levels from 2 million people around the world who took the English First's placement test.

Unfortunately, many job-seekers fail to fulfill the demands of English skills set by the employers (World Bank, 2019). Only 32% of employers in Indonesia believe that SMK graduates in general are adequately prepared for entry level-positions, with 39% perceiving graduates having the appropriate “general skills” (Thompson and Lim, 2021). While the misalignment of skills being taught in school and industry needs is a common discourse to explain the low absorption rate of SMK graduates, several reports indicate that employers have specifically attributed Indonesia’s youth unemployability with the significant gaps between the Industry required English proficiency, and the level attained by graduates (Nambiar et al., 2019; Bappenas, 2015; World Bank, 2012).

Employers have expressed dissatisfaction with the current competencies of SMK English teachers, as it has been linked to the low English competencies of the graduates. According to the representative from Djarum Foundation (2021), the ideal TOEIC threshold for English teachers to attain is approximately 700 (equivalent to limited working proficiency⁵), yet many teachers, especially those in rural areas, still score below. Furthermore, while MOECRT Regulation 16/2007 stipulates that teachers must have pedagogical, personal, social and professional competencies, studies have shown that English teachers in SMKs still struggle to develop these skills, particularly those related to their pedagogy and professionalism. These teachers face problems in mastering the material and curriculum, effectively communicating the lessons to their students, appropriately targeting their students’ potential, classroom management and developing their teacher professionalism (Hariadi, Kuswandi and Wedi, 2021; Jabri, 2017; Syamsinar and Jabu, 2016).

⁵ The TOEIC test scores are divided into six proficiency categories. The lowest category is basic proficiency (10 - 250), the second lowest is elementary proficiency (255 - 400), the third one is elementary proficiency plus (405 - 600), the second highest is limited working proficiency (605 - 780), the second highest is working proficiency plus (785 - 900), the highest one is international professional proficiency (905 - 990). A limited working proficiency indicates the ability to satisfy most social demands and limited work requirements.

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES

Attitude of English for Employability

Data from both the survey and the FGD demonstrated that most English teachers in SMK perceive English competencies to be an important skill to acquire to increase students' employability, especially upon graduation. On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being not important to 5 being very important, 55% of the teachers surveyed rated a "5" for the importance of English for employability (Figure 2). Meanwhile, 100% of the teachers interviewed in the FGD agreed that English is especially important for SMK students to compete in the job market. Figure 3 breaks down the importance of the different competencies in everyday life. Of the four, speaking is regarded as the most important competency.

Figure 2.
The importance of English competencies for employability
From a scale of 1-5, how important is English competencies to increase employability?

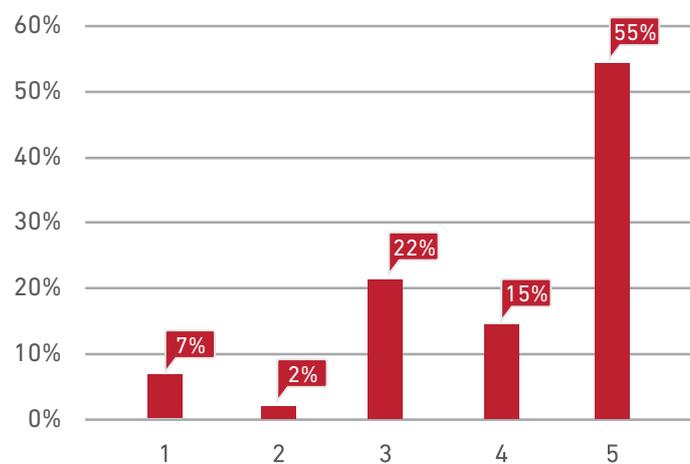
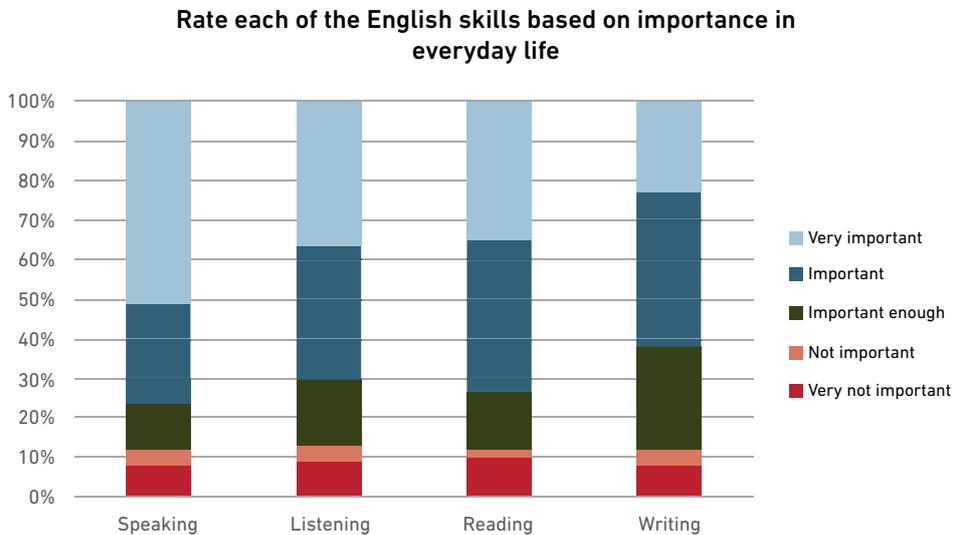


Figure 3.
The importance of writing, speaking, listening, and reading in English



In the FGD, teachers agreed that the majority of their alumni with better English competencies had better employment outcomes. For example, Teacher T from Cianjur mentioned that regardless of major, it was much easier for students with better English competencies to secure employment because they also had better opportunities to undergo training abroad. Teacher E from Central Kalimantan attributed participation in the English debate club as one opportunity in which students were able to apply the skills they have learned in class, and therefore improve their competencies. She revealed that one of the previous members became a teacher, while another alumni member was recruited into the local agriculture agency. These success stories suggest that English competency is one factor that can contribute to the students' future career prospects.

Figure 4 illustrates the common rationales cited as to why English is understood to be important in the SMK graduates' efforts to secure employment – however these reasons are ultimately interconnected. English is overwhelmingly considered as a current "industry demand", heavily impacted by globalization. According to the Ministry of Investments (previously known as *Badan Koordinasi Penanaman Modal*), there were a total of 25,919 foreign companies (approximately 3.8% of total registered companies) in Indonesia by the end of 2019 (BKPM, 2020). This number is expected to grow as the government has continuously put in efforts to make it easier for foreign companies to do business in Indonesia (Ministry of Investment, 2021). Teacher F from a private SMK in Jakarta, explained that high proficiencies in English can bring in more opportunities for their students, especially when seeking employment from foreign companies.

Figure 4.
Teacher respondents' description of why English is important

What are the reasons that make you think it is important/not important for employability?



Three teachers in the FGD expressed concerns that while compared to local talent in general, SMK graduates may not be perceived as employable enough partly due to their low English competencies, they may become even more disadvantaged if they are competing against foreign workers in Indonesia. According to Teacher KA from a national SMK in Samarinda, “as foreign companies are increasingly entering Indonesia, there is a tendency for them to bring employees from their respective countries, rather than hiring local workers.” This corresponds to the recent Government Regulation No.34/2021 which eases the process of hiring foreign workers (including foreign graduates).

English competencies are also perceived as a valuable skill within local companies. According to the survey, teachers believe that in both local and foreign companies alike, employees will most likely interact with foreigners at some point, whether they are managers, trainers, clients, customers or investors. Therefore, in order for students to compete in a job market that is more international than ever, they must equip themselves with a certain level of English competencies.

Urban vs Rural SMK Teachers' Attitudes

Several teachers have also expressed that while English competencies are generally important for employment prospects, the extent to which they are important varies. Data collected from the survey were disaggregated based on gender, age, geographic area (urban vs. rural), type of school (private vs. public) and major. Among the five comparisons, a greater difference was found in the attitudes and perceptions of English between urban and rural SMKs. For example, 66% of the teacher respondents who taught Technology and Engineering in urban areas rated the importance of English competencies as a 5 (on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not important to 5 being very important), compared to the 47% that taught in rural areas. This suggests that the domicile in which students are situated plays a role in the attitudes of English among SMK teachers, more so than if they taught at a private or public SMK.

One interesting finding is that teachers from SMKs for Automotive Engineering, particularly those in rural areas, revealed that compared to other majors, they believe English may not be as necessary for their students' career prospects. For example, Teacher EC, who teaches in Kabupaten Bekasi, noted that the majority of automotive factories in the area are Japanese owned. Therefore, while the instruction manual provided in these factories is written in English, Japanese competencies are required, if not more valued, to facilitate the SMK graduates in the actual application of utilizing the equipment. Meanwhile, a teacher who teaches English at SMKs for the same major in the city of Pekanbaru states that English is very important not only for work, but for their student's daily lives as well. This demonstrates the importance of the local contexts and demands.

However, similarly, the attitudes of teachers from urban SMKs can also be impacted by local conditions. A teacher from the city of Samarinda, who teaches for students majoring in Tourism, notes that because international guests seldom visit the area, SMK graduates do not necessarily need a professional proficiency level in English to excel at their jobs. Furthermore, Figure 5 demonstrates that there is only a small difference between the number of teachers from Urban and Rural SMKs who rated the importance of English competencies as a 3 or lower. Teachers from both domiciles state that the reason for their indication is because these competencies are not required and/or used in the future jobs where their students are employed at (Table 1).

Figure 5. Breakdown of the importance of English competencies for employability (Urban vs. Rural SMK)

From a scale of 1-5, how is English competencies to increase employability?

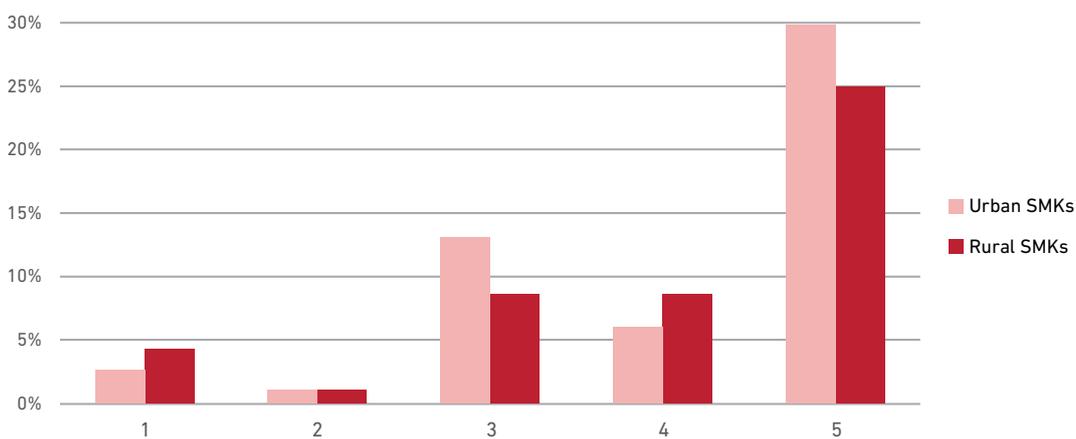


Table 1.
Breakdown of teachers who reported that English is not important for employability

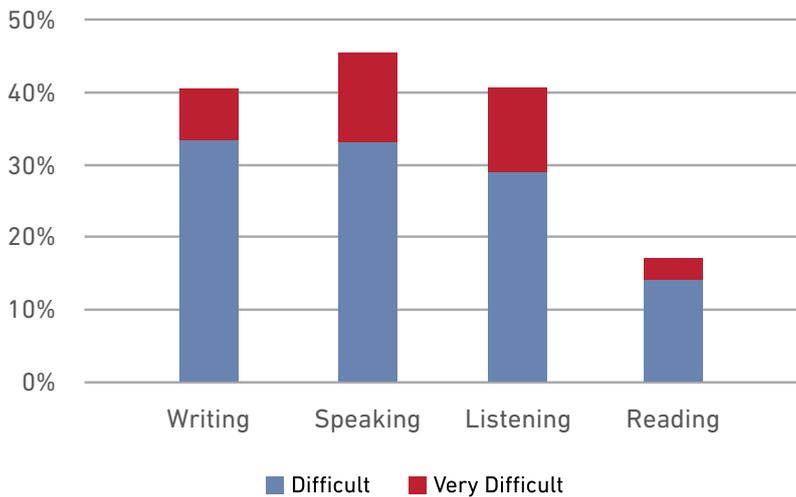
| Rating | Region | School type | Description |
|--------|--------|-------------|--|
| 1 | Rural | Private | "English is not really used in [the graduates'] day-to-day lives [anyways]" |
| 2 | Urban | Private | "SMK graduates who end up working in production [and] operation do not need English competencies" |
| 3 | Urban | Public | "In my area, the hotels rarely has guests from other countries that only speak full English" |
| 3 | Rural | Private | "Most of our graduates work in companies and institutions that do not require English competencies" |
| 3 | Urban | Private | "Only big companies as well as entrepreneurs who work with foreigners need English" |
| 3 | Urban | Private | "Oftentimes, English is not used in [the graduates'] workplace" |
| 3 | Urban | Private | "From our school, most graduates work in a factory [that does not require english] or at households" |

Experiences in Teaching English

On average, teachers perceive that it is more difficult for SMK students to master the four language competencies in English, with the exception of speaking (Figure 6). Teacher respondents in the survey reported that in comparison of the four competencies, reading is the easiest competency to master, while speaking is the most difficult. This is quite concerning given that speaking was identified as the most important competency to develop for day-to-day communication. During the FGD, three teachers explained that students are particularly unmotivated to develop their speaking skills. According to teacher S from Samarinda, students believe that "communication [with their peers] in Bahasa Indonesia is enough".

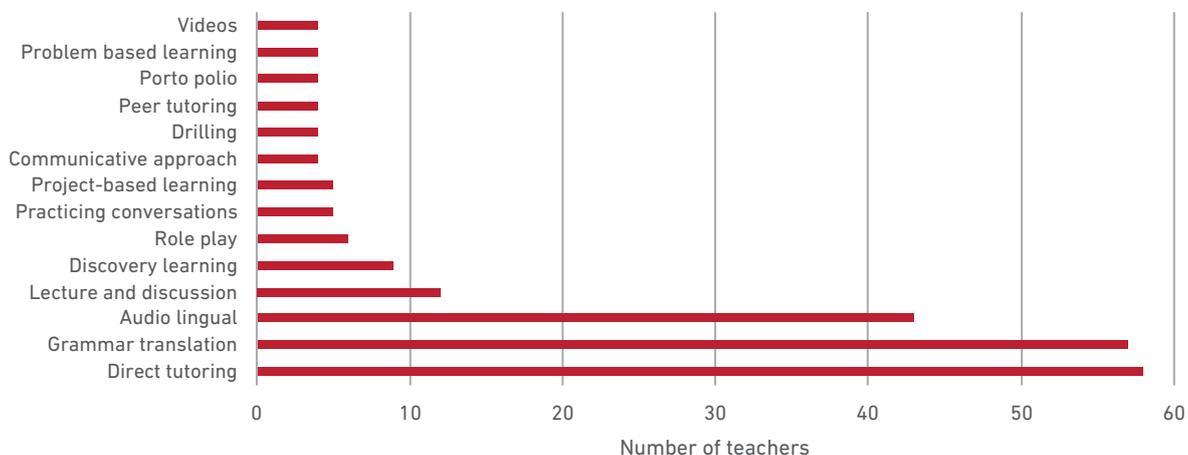
Figure 6.
The difficulty for students to master writing, speaking, listening and reading in English (Difficult vs. Very difficult)

The difficulty of students mastering English competencies



The most frequently used methodologies and pedagogies to teach English are direct tutoring, grammar translation and audio visuals (Figure 7). However, teachers mostly use a combination of these methodologies, depending on the topic, material and resources available, and lesson plan. For example, a teacher from Makassar constructs his pedagogy based on the skills targeted: he uses grammar translation to teach reading and grammar, while audio lingual and direct tutoring are used to practice speaking competencies. In addition, he also adjusts based on the abilities, strengths, and weaknesses of his students.

Figure 7.
The most frequently used methodology to teach English
What methods do you use to teach English?



The methodologies used by public and private school teachers are generally similar, however private school teachers have reported to use a wider variety of ways to teach English. For example, private school teachers were more likely to incorporate videos and voice notes into their online teaching methodologies during the pandemic.

This finding is consistent with the tools used to teach English. While the most frequently used tools by public SMK and private SMK teachers are similar, private SMK teachers tend to use a combination of more different tools⁶. This difference was also found when disaggregating based on the location of schools, as urban SMKs used more tools compared to rural SMKs. While this could be attributed to the level of resources SMKs had access to, this could also be explained by a difference in teacher training, infrastructure and internet connectivity or even, the average household incomes of the students.

Challenges in Teaching English

Students' low motivation to learn English was the most frequently reported challenge faced by the teachers (Figure 8). Several teachers have linked the lack of motivation to the students' perception that English is not valuable, even in regard to their employment prospects. This is especially attributed to students from rural communities. According to teacher MR from Cirebon, "Because we are from [a rural area]...most graduates continue to work in factories. [Students] feel that there is no opportunity and possibility to communicate with foreign workers or even work abroad. Therefore, there is such little desire to master the English competencies." Interestingly, students' low motivation was the most common challenge faced by teachers regardless of whether they taught state or private SMKs, as well as in rural and urban areas. What this reveals is that the reasons as to why motivation is difficult to attain in the first place may differ.

In some cases, motivation may also vary depending on the major of the students. For example, teacher G states that students who major in the Arts, Multimedia and Visual Communication Design are eager to develop their proficiencies as they perceive English to be important for communication and stakeholder management within their fields. However, students who major in Craftsmanship do not understand how English is valued in the job market, and therefore have very low motivation to improve their proficiency.

⁶ See Appendix 3 for breakdown of tools reported to be used to teach English

Figure 8.
Teacher respondents' description of the challenges in teaching English



Teachers, particularly those in public schools, have also mentioned that one main challenge they face is that students are unprepared to study English at the SMK level. According to Teacher A from North Sulawesi, students who arrive in their first year of SMK may not have mastered even basic English vocabulary. She must reteach basic English to ensure students acquire at least elementary proficiency, which affects her capacity to teach through the ESP approach. Consequently, by the time students graduate, their English capabilities may remain lower than the industry's required level, negatively impacting their employability. This implies that at the middle school level (and perhaps at the elementary school level as well), English studies have not yet been successful in developing the necessary proficiencies for their students. Similarly, a study by Fadlia et al. (2020) found that across two SMKs with different focuses (Maritime Fishing Vessel Engineering and Hospitality Management) in the city of Langsa, almost 70% of the students do not meet the standard of required English competencies at their level of education.

“ She must reteach basic English to ensure students acquire at least elementary proficiency, which affects her capacity to teach through the ESP approach. Consequently, by the time students graduate, their English capabilities may remain lower than the industry's required level, negatively impacting their employability. ”

Curriculum

Only 5% of the respondents rated the curriculum for English studies as “very effective” in equipping and improving the students’ skills for future employment. Teachers have argued that the curriculum provided for students is too general and even outdated. For example, teacher G argues that an exercise called, “telephone conversation” that still exists within the current syllabus is no longer useful because it cannot be applied in the students’ daily lives. Meanwhile, teacher Y expressed concerns as students tend to disregard the materials provided, especially those that are text-based narratives, because they believe that it is not utilized in their future careers.

According to MOECRT Regulation No.37/2018, the students in Indonesia are only required to achieve basic proficiency in English, as reflected in the core competencies (*Kompetensi Inti*) and the basic competencies (*Kompetensi Dasar*)⁷. These competencies do not specify any differences in the requirement to fulfill specific levels of English competencies at the SMA/MA/SMK/MAK level. Consequently, this has affected the way in which students are able to develop their English competencies in a way that improves their employability.

“As much as 38% of the teachers at the FGD have expressed frustrations that the SMK 2013 curriculum is very similar to that of high schools’ for English, and therefore do not prepare them well for the demands in the job market.”

As much as 38% of the teachers at the FGD have expressed frustrations that the SMK 2013 curriculum is very similar to that of high schools’ for English, and therefore do not prepare them well for the demands in the job market. Furthermore, there is no difference in the English textbooks for SMAs and SMKs prepared by the MOECRT. SMK students and teachers use the same English textbooks across majors, which indicates that the resources available do not fit the learning needs of SMK students (Yuana, 2013; Sudartini, Karmadi & Diyanti, 2016).

MOECRT Regulations No.464/D.D5/KR/2018 states that English lessons should be adjusted to their respective majors, which reflects the ministry’s stance on ESP. However, in practice, this is not translated to the English curriculum for SMK, as the regulation does not differentiate the competencies required across SMK majors. Several studies on multiple SMKs have found that the teaching materials and syllabus does not follow the ESP approach (Ronaldo, 2016; Mulyah & Aminatun, 2020; Fadlia et al, 2020). Only three teachers in the FGD revealed that they have taken on the responsibility to prepare English lessons that are more suitable for the respective SMK majors. However, the process of seeking materials that align with the learners’ needs and industry requirements is a time-consuming process. Teachers have expressed the need for more support in terms of the availability and variety of relevant English learning materials.

Teachers believe that the English curriculum for SMKs should be much more focused on ESP. According to Teacher E, “the first year can emphasize a continuation of basic English studies, but the next 1.5 years should be focused on ESP.” Teachers believe that the study should be more specialized and correspond with the specific industry needs and requirements. Certain majors such as Agribusiness Technology and Tourism require specific vocabularies that may not be applicable in other majors.

⁷ See Appendix 4 for the listed core and basic competencies for English studies per MOECRT Regulation No.37/2018

In addition, there is a gap between the allotted teaching time for English mandated by MOECRT and the actual time needed for English lessons needed at the SMK level. According to the Regulation of the Director General of Primary and Secondary Education on the Curriculum Structure for SMK (Perdirjen Dikdasmen No.07/D.D5/KK/2018), English is to be studied for 3 hours for Grades 10-11 and 2 hours for Grades 12-13 (if applicable). While the government still allows schools to provide additional hours of English subjects if needed, the survey reflects that the majority of the schools are still studying below the time allotted by the MOECRT. The teachers from the FGD consistently reported that they teach English for a maximum of two hours per week. Meanwhile, schools in other ASEAN countries study English at the secondary level for a minimum of six hours per week (MOECRT, 2017). This means that with the current allocated time, in one year of English studies, SMK students are still behind their ASEAN peers by one semester (ibid).

Although schools may have the autonomy to add additional time, they are still limited to do so because they must also consider the minimum required teaching time for other subjects. This impacts the extent to which students are able to develop their competencies, especially in a way that would positively affect their employability. Teachers have reported that within the short time available, English studies are therefore mainly utilized to meet the curriculum targets, rather than tailoring the studies to accurately reflect the students', as well as their respective industry's needs and requirements.

Three teachers reported that prior to the pandemic, English debate clubs were offered to provide extra support for the students' development of their English skills. Based on the student survey, 44% of the respondents reported that their schools offer an English club. This extracurricular activity was cited by teachers as a best practice to address the challenges of teaching English in SMKs, specifically motivation, as the introduction of competition increases students' enthusiasm to improve, and limited practice, as this provides students with a unique opportunity to apply their skills (such as speaking and writing) in a real-life setting. Unfortunately, only 11% of the surveyed students actually participate in their school's English extracurricular activities.

Box 1.

New programs on Improving SMK Students Employability and Curriculum

The MOECRT is currently focused on transforming the quality of SMKs by improving the link-and-match program, to increase the absorption of SMK graduates into the job market. This is evident in the development of SMK-PK, a new priority initiative under the MOECRT's Directorate General Vocational Education that aims to develop programs to generate skillful and employable future workers and entrepreneurs. This program is currently carried out in selected SMKs in Indonesia.

Selected SMKs are required to establish partnerships with relevant business and industry players (DUDI), local government, and polytechnics to support these schools (Vocational Education MOECRT, 2021). Furthermore, teachers at SMK-PK will undergo an upskilling and reskilling program to ensure that their competence and knowledge matches with the industry's standards.

Furthermore, SMK-PK is part of the Merdeka *Belajar* initiative, indicating that they are among the qualified schools to test the MOECRT's new Merdeka Curriculum

(*Kurikulum Merdeka*) since last year. The Merdeka Curriculum was formally introduced in February 2022 as part of the recovery plans in the education sector. It is designed to address and mitigate the effects of learning loss that occurred during distance learning, as schools were forced to close its physical campus to curb the spread of COVID-19.

The Merdeka Curriculum focuses on simplifying learning contents, prioritizes the development of students' essential skills (numeracy and literacy) and soft skills, encourages teachers' flexibility in using various pedagogies and reduces curriculum burdens. Specifically for SMK, the curriculum requires students to undergo a one semester field work and allows SMKs to flexibly set the allocated learning time per subject.

The following table breaks down the new curriculum requirements for English lessons within SMK-PK, which shifts studies in Grade 11-12 to utilize an ESP approach:

| | Grade 10 | Grade 11 | Grade 12 |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------|--|
| Focus | General English | ESP | ESP |
| Allocated time | 2 hours/week | 3 hours/week | 3 hours/week, however only over one semester |

The implementation of SMK-PK and Merdeka Curriculum and its impact on English lessons in SMKs remains to be reviewed. However, the premise of the new initiative and curriculum suggests that the English learning experience in SMK will indeed transform, which in the long run will impact the employability of SMK graduates in terms of their English competencies.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES

Attitude of Learning English for Students' Future Career

Across gender, regions, grade levels and SMKs majors, the data shows that a majority of students believe that English skills are important to learn (Figure 9). In addition, similarly to teachers (although contrasting industry findings), students believe that English speaking competencies are the most important skill to develop (Figure 10).

The majority of student respondents who rated English as "Important" and "Very important" tend to refer to English as an 'international language' (262 respondents) that will be useful for any career choices. Others have also mentioned the importance of English for 'communication' and 'interaction' with foreigners in both professional and casual settings.

Figure 9.
Students' perception on the importance of English competencies in general

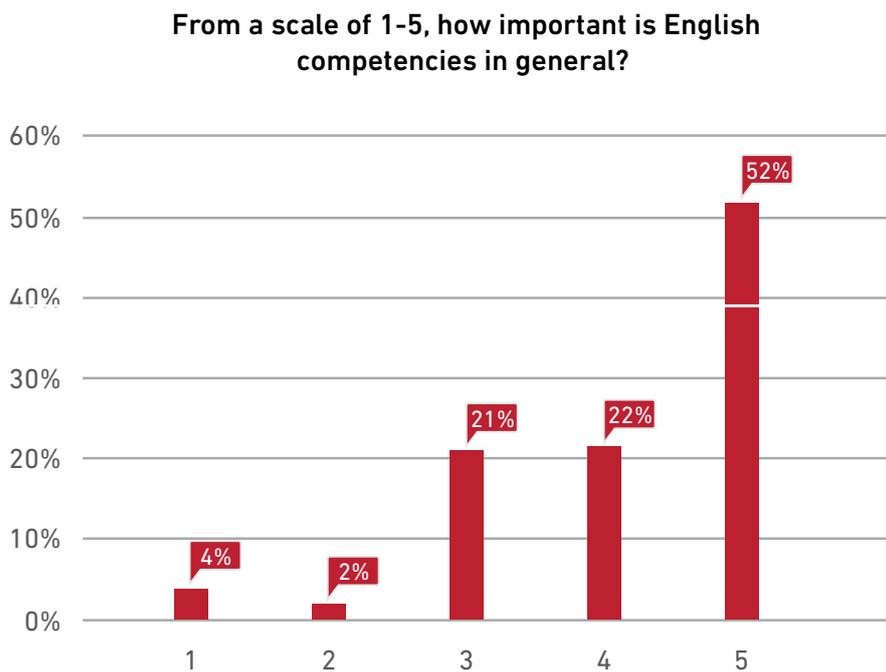
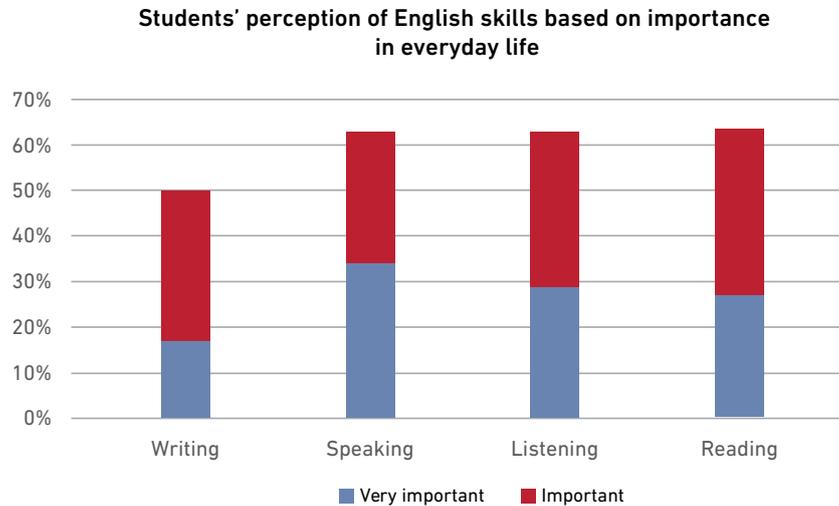
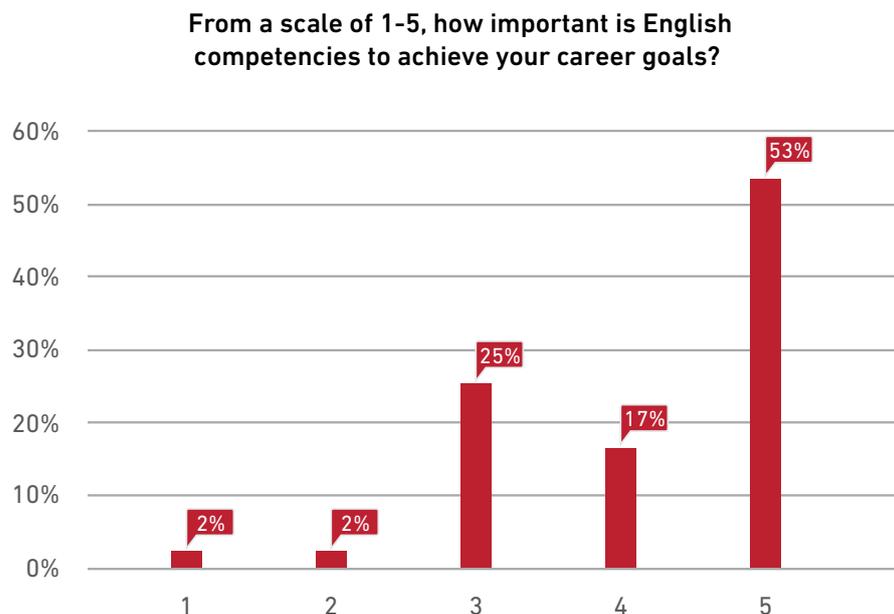


Figure 10.
Students' perception of importance of English competencies for everyday life



As shown in Figure 11, as much as 53% of students have also linked the importance of English competence with their career goals. For example, a culinary major mentioned that “It is important for chefs to have good English skills as they are required to be familiar with food ingredients from other countries, or be able to communicate with foreign guests, while a technology and engineering major stated that in order to achieve his goals of becoming a UI/UX designer, he “must acquire good English skills”. This differs from findings in both the FGD and surveys, as several teachers reported that students’ awareness of the value of English in their careers remains low.

Figure 11.
The importance of English competencies to achieve career goals



Interestingly, when asked about their career goals, many students mention wanting to have a career outside the major they are currently studying at their SMKs. For example, one male student majoring in mechanical engineering stated that he wants to enroll in Indonesia's military academy (*akademi militer*) to be a soldier, while one female student majoring in broadcasting wants to be a stewardess. These two examples suggest that although SMKs help them to learn practical skills for work after graduation, many students also want to keep their options open when it comes to career choices.

UNICEF has reported four types of important skills for children and adolescents to be successful in their school, career and life: foundational, digital, transferable and job-specific (Nambiar et al., 2019). In a report on the skills required in the future in Indonesia, Nambiar et al. (2019) found that English language skills are regarded as an important transferable skill because these skills can be applied across domains. Ultimately, students who develop good English competencies have the advantage of being flexible in their career choices, as these skills will be utilized even if they experience career pivots.

In addition, transferable skills complement foundational skills, which refers to core skills such as literacy and numeracy, and can serve as the basis for which new skills can be acquired. Through the development of English skills, students are also building up on their literacy skills. In turn, these English competencies allow students to develop other skills. For example, Yuana (2013) who found that Accounting majors wanted to develop their English in order to improve their understanding of the key vocabularies in finance, which they will use to produce financial reports and communicate with clients.

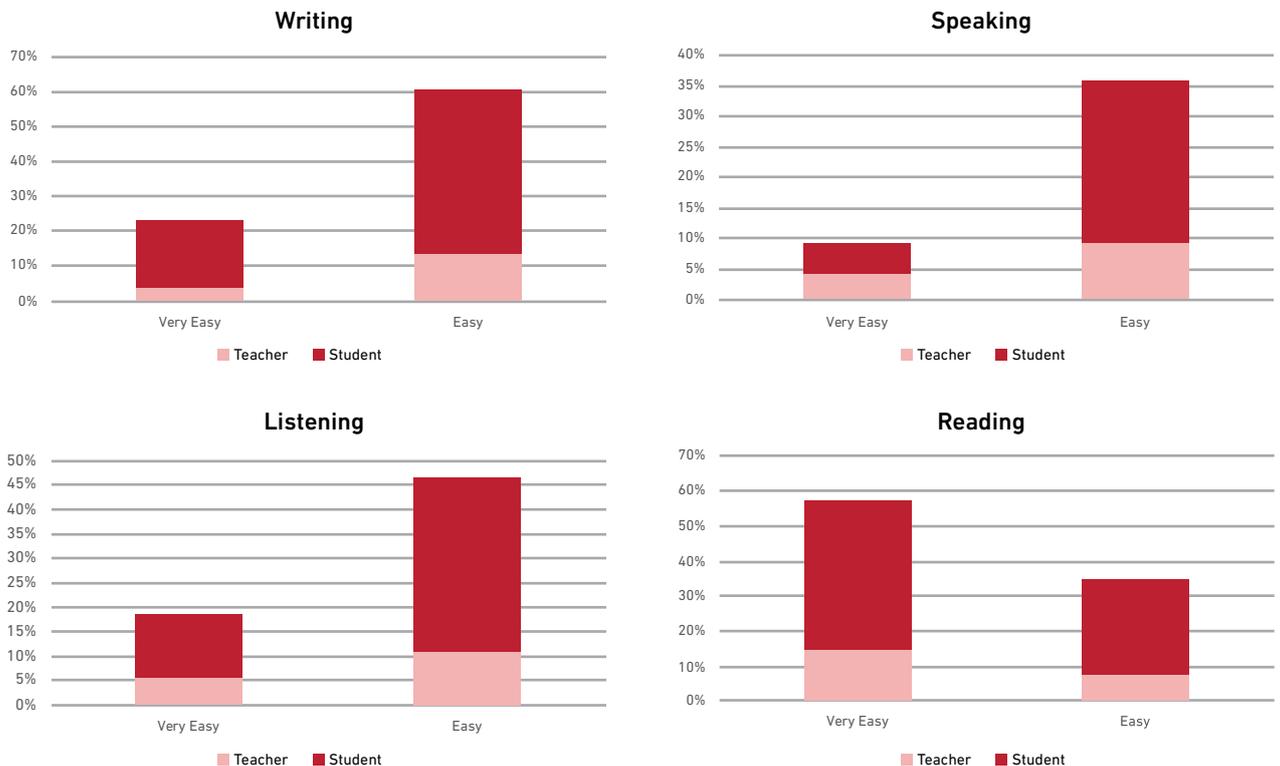
Experiences in Learning English

Based on the student survey, English writing and reading competencies are rated as the easiest to learn, while English speaking competencies are the most difficult, compared to the four skills. However, in general, student respondents rated the four competencies as easier to master compared to the findings reflected in the teachers' survey. There is an inconsistency between students and teachers' perception of the students' performance, which suggests that students may believe that they have a higher English proficiency than they actually possess (Figure 12).

“ There is an inconsistency between students and teachers' perception of the students' performance, which suggests that students may believe that they have a higher English proficiency than they actually possess. ”

Figure 12.
Perception of students versus teachers for students to master writing, speaking, listening and reading in English

Rate each of the English skills based on difficulty to master versus teach (Very easy and Easy)



Fadlia et al. (2020) found that in an attempt to meet the curriculum targets during their classes, teachers are consequently much more focused on preparing students for the National Examination⁸, which tests for basic English skills, rather than reflecting their industry requirements. Teachers may be predisposed to focus on lessons and exercises that are easier to master. In turn, this may provide students with a much more positive perception towards the development of their four English skills. However, in 2019, the national average score for the English portion of the National Examination (*Ujian Nasional*) at the SMK level was only 41.78 (out of 100), as reported by MOECRT's Education Assessment Center (*Pusat Penilaian Pendidikan*) (n.d). Therefore, not only are the current curriculum and teaching approaches disconnected from the industry needs, it is also ineffective in the development of even basic English competencies.

⁸ As of 2020, the national examination has been discontinued. The National Exam used to be the determinant of students graduation. For SMK level, it tested for four subjects: Math, Bahasa Indonesia, English, and subjects according to students' major. to be the determinant of students graduation. For SMK level, it tested for four subjects: Math, Bahasa Indonesia, English, and subjects according to students' major. to map the competencies of students across Indonesia, testing for four subjects: Math, Science, Bahasa Indonesia and English.

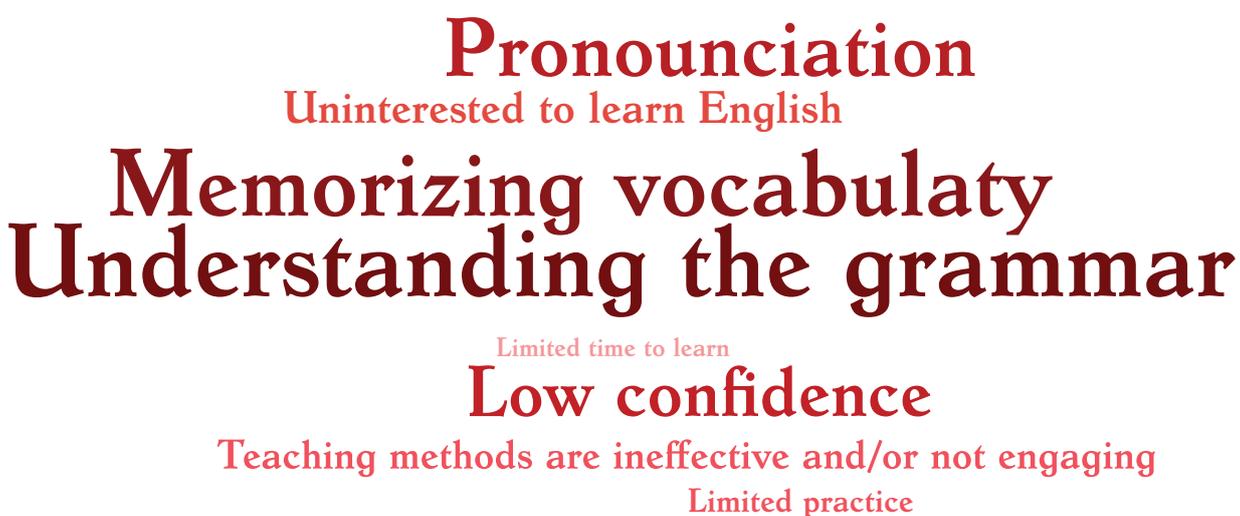
Experiences in Learning English

Figure 14 illustrates the main challenges in learning English reported by the SMKs students. The three most reported by student respondents are understanding English grammar (1,945 responses), followed by memorizing English vocabulary (1,568 responses) and difficulty pronouncing English words (1,367 responses). It is important to note that the lack of interest was not even among the top challenges reported by students, which contrasts the findings from the teachers' survey and FGD. Meanwhile, six students reported that all options reflected their difficulties in developing English competencies.

These findings are consistent across gender and type of school, however when disaggregating based on the schools' location, the third most mentioned challenge among students from rural SMKs is the low confidence in using English. This may be attributed to the limited practice for students to develop their speaking competencies. According to Shahnaz and Gandana (2021), in general, students in rural areas experience more challenges than urban areas partly because of the lack of support from their parents. Four student respondents reported that they particularly face difficulties in "finding family members or friends willing to practice English".

When it comes to low confidence, one student explained that he "finds English to be very difficult and becomes insecure when [he] encounters those that are fluent". This is similar to the findings of a 2017 study on attitudes towards English studies in a private SMK in Palembang. Maharani and Sri Harti (2017) observed that students tend to laugh at their peers when they make incorrect answers, lowering their confidence and making them unwilling to contribute to the class discussion, even when they know the correct answer. Students also reported anxiety when asked to read in front of the class, as they become hyper-alert over their pronunciation of English vocabulary.

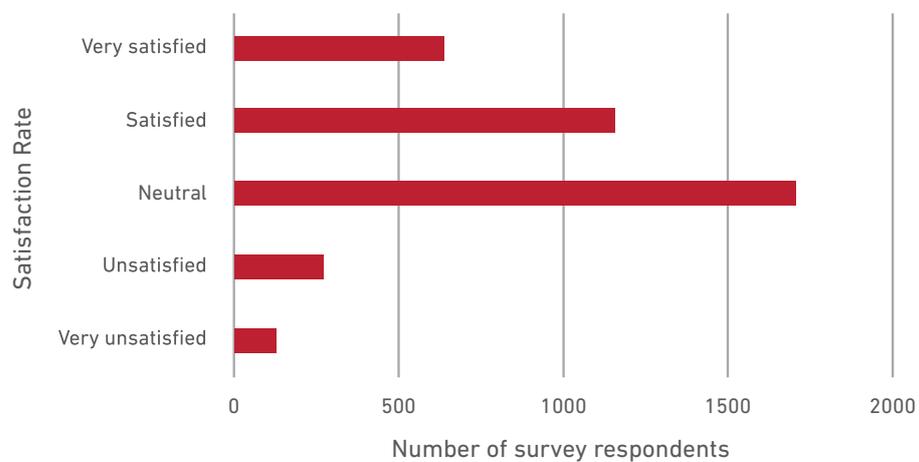
Figure 13.
Main Challenges in Learning English among SMKs Students



Curriculum

When asked about students' satisfaction rate on English lessons at their school, the results demonstrate that the students are generally satisfied with the English lessons they receive at school (Figure 15). Unlike teachers, students are more likely to perceive their current curriculum for English at the SMK level to be aligned with their learning goals and needs for the future.

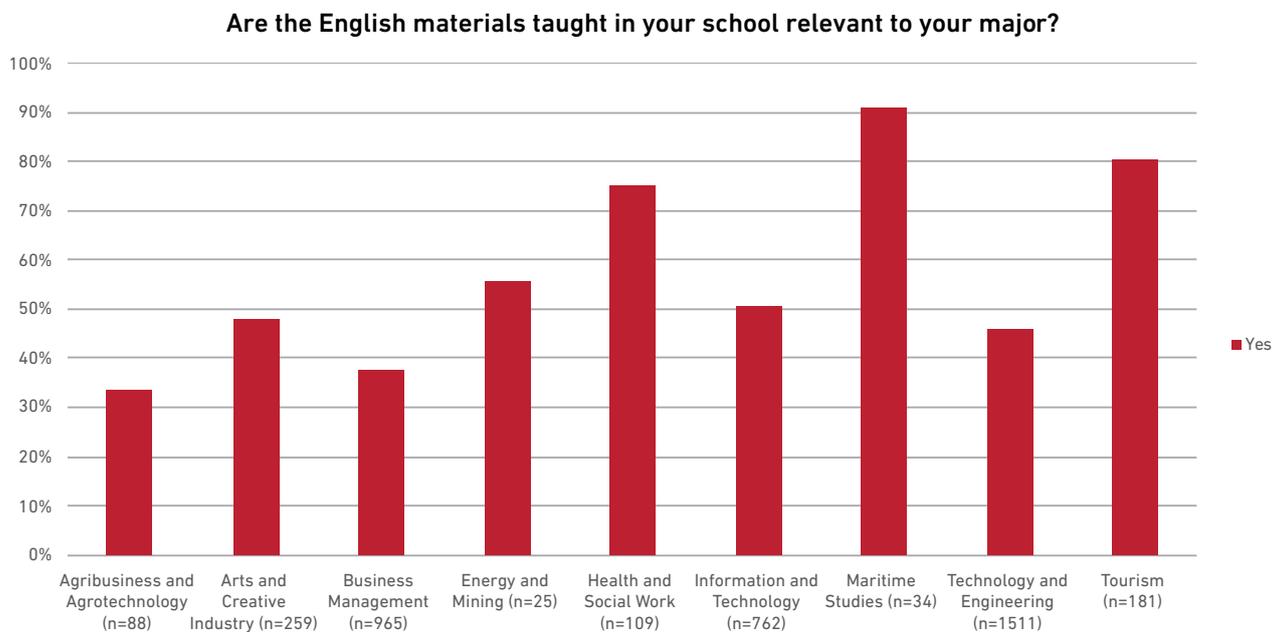
Figure 14.
Students' Satisfaction on English Lesson at School



The majority of students do not find the materials provided for their English studies at school as relevant to their respective majors. Out of the ten umbrella majors in SMKs, only students coming from Health and Social Work, Tourism, and Maritime Studies majors opined that their school's English lessons are adjusted to their major.

However, as depicted in Figure 16, the majority of students do not find the materials provided for their English studies at school as relevant to their respective majors. Out of the ten umbrella majors in SMKs, only students coming from Health and Social Work, Tourism, and Maritime Studies majors opined that their school's English lessons are adjusted to their major. This finding is consistent with the existing literature, as well as survey and FGD results, that found that many SMKs in Indonesia do not teach ESP to their students. For example, the results from Yuana (2013)'s study show that students believe that the problem lies in the material provided, as it is not relevant to their majors and industry needs.

Figure 15.
Percentage of students who perceive the English materials in their schools are relevant for their studies (per major)



Ultimately, as students are overall more satisfied with the curriculum of their English studies, but do not find that their studies reflect the needs of their respective majors, this suggests that students may merely desire to attain a basic level of proficiency in English. While the majority of the students believe that English is important for daily use as well as for their career aspirations, they may not believe that a professional level of proficiency is absolutely necessary.

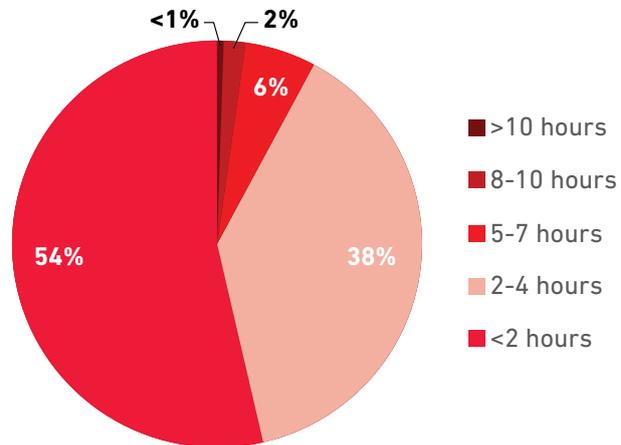
This is consistent with the teachers' reports, as for example, Teacher ES from a public SMK in Samarinda mentioned that students only realize the true value of English competencies within their careers once they have entered the job market.

“Students only realize the true value of English competencies within their careers once they have entered the job market.”

In regards to time spent learning English in classes, the result of the student survey also echoed the teachers' survey and FGD findings. The majority of the respondents (54%) mentioned that they receive less than two hours of English lessons per week at school, while only 38% of the students study English within the allotted time mandated in the MOECRT Curriculum Structure for SMK (Figure 17). This result is consistent across school types. SMK students do not get much exposure to the English language at schools, thus impeding meaningful development of their English language skills.

Figure 16.
Number of hours per week students spend learning English in school

How many hours per week do you spend learning English in school



Demie and Hau (2012) collected data on test scores and ethnic background to summarize the average time it takes to acquire English fluency among EAL (English additional language) students, who found that for one student whose native language is Indonesian, it took approximately 5.1 years for them to become a confident English speaker. This is further broken down based on the phases of learning English (Table 6).

Table 2.
Number of years at each stage of fluency in English for Indonesian speaker

| Stage | Proficiency | Years |
|-------|---|-------|
| 1 | Beginner to New to English | 1.2 |
| 2 | Becoming familiar with English | 1.8 |
| 3 | Becoming confident as a user of English | 2.1 |

Source: Demie (2012)

Data from a research report by Schellekens (2001) projects that for EAL students, it takes approximately 1,765 hours for pure beginners (i.e. those who speak no English) to reach a proficient level that is required to undertake study of another subject in higher education or take a job that requires routine English communication (ibid). Table 6 demonstrates how the projection can be applied to different types of beginner students learning English over a 30 week period.

Table 3.
**Projected number of years to achieve required English proficiency for
 higher education and/or to secure a job**

| Type of learner | Hours learning English per week | Years to develop the required proficiency for further education or employment |
|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Full time 16-19 year old further education students | 15 | 4 |
| Adult learners | 10 | 5.5 |
| Adult learners | 4 | 14 |

Source: Schellekens (2001)

It is important to note that the two aforementioned studies provide insights for students in the UK, where English is the national language. Therefore, the environment in which the observed students were placed may further support the development of their proficiencies, as there may be more necessity to master English in order to accomplish their daily tasks, routines and responsibilities. Furthermore, the English proficiency requirements for employment may be higher in the UK than in Indonesia. Cambridge English (2016) found that 98% of employers in their UK sample reported that English is significant, compared to 87% of employers in their Indonesian sample.

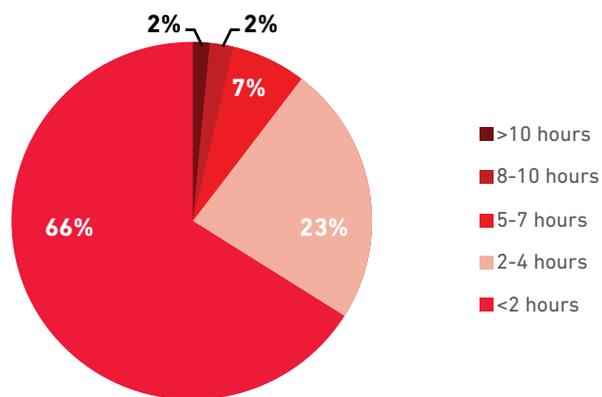
Ultimately, the survey results show that less than 1% of the SMK students are spending adequate time to develop their proficiency in school. As one school year has 26 effective weeks, they only attain, at most, 156 hours of learning English in-class by graduation. Although the total additional hours required for students to improve their English competencies ultimately vary depending on their level of literacy and background in English prior to SMK, 2 hours of study per week is ultimately not enough to help students improve their English fluency. For pure beginners, they would need approximately 1,609 extra hours to attain the necessary English competencies, and thereby increase their employability. This cannot be covered by their school studies alone. Therefore, it is vital that students, especially in these cases, also spend time outside of school developing their English skills.

“For pure beginners, they would need approximately 1,609 extra hours to attain the necessary English competencies, and thereby increase their employability.”

The Exposure of English Learning Outside School

While there are curriculum restrictions regarding English classes, students may be able to further practice and develop their competencies outside of school. However, the survey results revealed that the students spent even less time learning English outside of their classroom. More than half of the student respondents spend less than 2 hours per week developing their English competencies on their own (Figure 18). This could be attributed to various factors including lack of motivation and interests, or difficulties to secure the accessibility and availability of relevant resources (e.g. textbooks, partners to practice). However, the data gathered is likely to reflect the limited time allotted to English courses in SMKs. Given that teachers only spend an average of two hours per week teaching English, they may be bounded in the amount and types of homework they are able to distribute. Consequently, students may not require more than two hours time to complete their assignments each week.

Figure 17.
Number of hours per week students spend learning English outside of school
How many hours per week do you spend learning English outside of school



Meanwhile, as much as 97% of SMK students are not currently enrolled in any English courses or tutoring outside of school. However, many of them indicated that they use online learning platforms to support their English studies (Table 6). It is important to note that many students use more than one platform to learn English. Many of these apps are free or offer free trials for their users, thus attracting students to try the platforms to support their studies. This indicates that while the majority of students only learn English for less than two hours at school, they continue to develop their English competencies outside of school.

“Meanwhile, as much as 97% of SMK students are not currently enrolled in any English courses or tutoring outside of school. However, many of them indicated that they use online learning platforms to support their English studies”

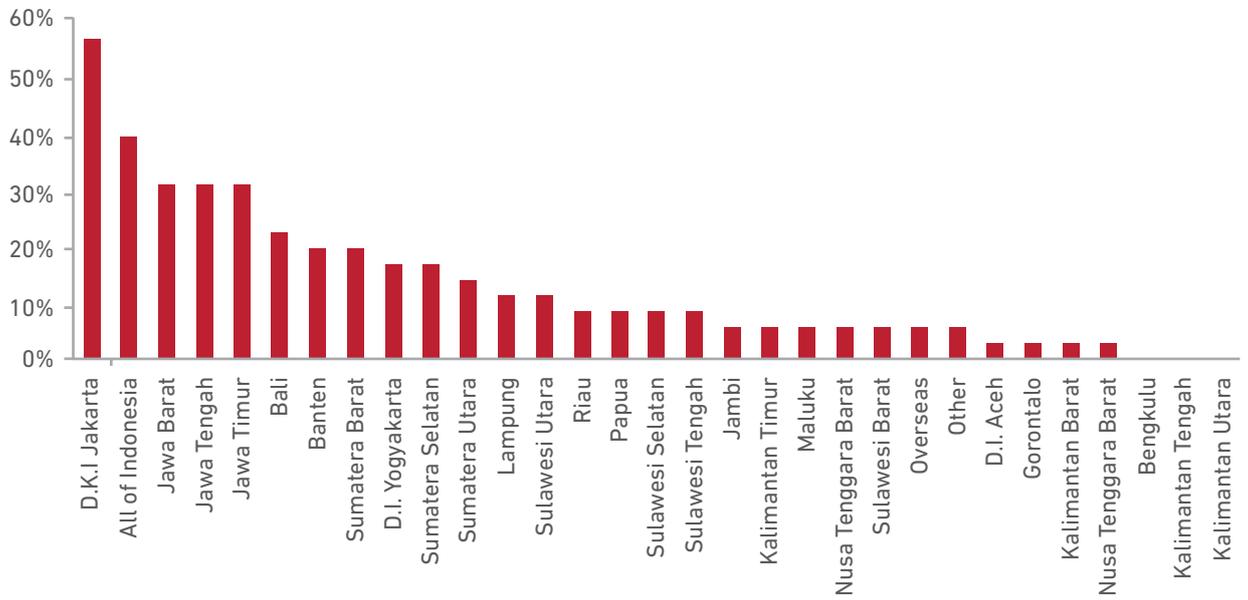
Table 4.
Online learning platforms used by respondents to learn English

| Online learning platform | Student users from urban areas | Student users from rural areas |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Duolingo | 233 | 64 |
| Ruangguru | 43 | 6 |
| Cake | 37 | 9 |
| Moodle | 12 | 2 |
| Elsa | 3 | 1 |
| Zenius | 13 | 1 |
| Quipper | 4 | 0 |
| Pahamify | 1 | 1 |
| Edmodo | 1 | 0 |
| Lingodeer | 2 | 0 |
| Busuu | 1 | 2 |
| Bahaso | 0 | 2 |
| 50 languages | 1 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 351 | 88 |

Furthermore, these platforms also offer students to study English at self-pace. A student from a Public SMK in Samarinda noted that he struggles with his listening skills because he perceives that people who speak in English are speaking too fast for him to catch up and understand. The use of online platforms provide students with more flexibility in improving their English proficiencies, and may even offer personalized features based on the specific competencies they want to develop.

Although students across geographical locations may utilize online learning platforms to supplement their studies, there remains a stark difference between students from urban areas and rural areas. As depicted in Figure 19, the EdTech market coverage remains concentrated in the island of Java (World Bank, 2020). This can also be explained by the uneven infrastructure development across the archipelago. Students living in rural areas may not have strong enough internet connectivity to support their online learning, compared to those living in urban areas. Furthermore, device ownership is also a significant barrier as the majority of Edtech firms in Indonesia deliver their service via browser or web application which would be more convenient to use with a laptop (Bhardwaj, Yarrow & Cali, 2020). However, less than 15% of children living in rural areas have laptops that are required to access these online learning platforms (UNICEF, 2021). That is not to say that urban children do not struggle as well, as the same report indicates that only 25% of children living in urban areas have laptops (ibid).

Figure 18.
Distribution of EdTech firms by geographic penetration of their products



Source: Bhardwaj, Yarrow & Cali (2020)

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In regards to employability and career prospects, English competencies are considered to be important for SMK graduates. Data from the literature, survey and the FGD revealed that employers, teachers and students across regions, types of schools, as well as majors, perceive English as a needed skill for daily communication and task performance. However, despite this general understanding, English competencies, particularly among SMK graduates, remain low as they enter the job market with subpar proficiency compared to the demands of their respective industries.

While the necessary English skills may vary according to industry, the biggest and most common challenge lies in the curriculum for English within the SMKs. The majority of teachers do not use the ESP approach to teaching English. Consequently English studies remain too general and ultimately, there is almost no difference between English taught in SMA and SMKs. This is concerning as the majority of SMK students enter the workforce upon graduation, rather than further their studies at a university level. In addition, currently, SMK students may not even learn English for two hours per week, both in and out of school, which substantially limits the opportunities for students to practice and develop their competencies effectively.

Furthermore, although there is a general agreement that English is important in the SMK context, the attitudes and perceptions towards English slightly vary, particularly between teachers and students. Students have a more positive attitude towards their experiences in learning English than teachers. Teachers have expressed dissatisfaction with the curriculum and cited the challenges of teaching English to their students, especially in efforts to meet the industry-specific requirements for English competencies. These differences may explain why the English outcome of students remains low. Given that students perceive that they are developing their English skill easily and satisfied by the current curriculum, this suggests that students are still unaware of the industry demands, particularly in regards to the value of English, and potentially in general.

Given the insights gathered, the policy recommendations are as follows to improve English teaching, learning and outcomes in the SMK context:

- **Revision of basic competencies of English studies at the SMK level to facilitate a ESP approach and better prepare students for the job market**

As the MOECRT is currently working on revising the basic and core competencies for the graduate skill standardization, Merdeka Curriculum for the SMK level should generally reflect basic competencies that are differentiated from the SMA level. As the majority of students seek employment upon graduation, distinguishing the basic competencies for SMA and SMK will better support the SMK students' learning goals. Therefore, an ESP approach to English studies is more appropriate in the context of SMKs.

In addition, to facilitate ESP, it is important that the basic competencies listed in the MOECRT's regulations also differ across majors. The expected skills of each umbrella major should be included and prioritized. For example, as previously discussed, employers from the maritime industry require employees to be able to negotiate prices and terms,

and resolve complaints from angry customers in English. These skills should be reflected in the basic competencies of English lessons for maritime majors.

- **Encourage more public-private partnerships between MOECRT and industry to develop ESP for each major**

Considering that SMKs students are projected to enter the workforce upon graduation, it is important to equip them with English skills relevant to the industry and business demand. It would be useful for MOECRT collect data on the baseline requirements for English competencies from each major area, as different industries expect different proficiency levels. Insights gathered from the baseline requirements can be used to inform a better English curriculum development, specifically with an ESP approach.

- **Diversifying learning resources available to support the ESP approach**

The MOECRT should ensure the availability of learning resources, such as textbooks, multimedia, education technology, etc that can support the ESP approach. It is important that the MOECRT's recommended books are adjusted to each major, and especially distinguishable from textbooks used in SMA. With greater provision of diverse resources, teachers can be granted more autonomy and flexibility to explore their pedagogies and meet the learning needs of their students, especially in respect to their majors. This availability of ESP resources also facilitates independent learning for students to develop their English competencies in a way that appropriately matches their industry's demands.

- **Prioritize improvements in the quality of English teachers**

Considering that language skills must be developed from an early age, improving the capacity of English teachers from all levels of education (primary to senior secondary) through better training may improve the current low level of English teachers' capacity. However, specifically at the SMK level, it is important to introduce English teachers to the importance of ESP so that they can teach relevant English materials for the students. This can be done through ESP capacity building programs. Furthermore, additional training with up-to-date curriculums that reflects the current needs of the industry should also be accessible and encouraged for teachers to take.

Increased engagements between SMK English teachers and industry representatives may also improve their capacity to teach English in a way that matches the employer's needs. Teachers need a better understanding and awareness of industry needs in general, especially as the demands are continuously evolving. MOECRT can facilitate seminars and discussions hosted by industry players for SMK teachers to ensure that teachers are keeping up with the hiring trends and skill demands. Through these partnerships, teachers may be better able to adjust their lesson plans according to current and future demands of the industry.

- **Improve infrastructures to facilitate students' supplementary learning**

Learning English beyond the classroom setting is important considering language skills must be practiced as often as possible. The survey demonstrates that many students use EdTech to learn English outside the classroom despite the proportion of those utilizing EdTech is far less than those who do not use EdTech at all. Public private partnerships can also be extended to improve infrastructure such as internet connection and provide the necessary technology devices to support and encourage students to learn English from a variety of sources, subsequently helping them to understand and develop their English proficiencies better.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Breakdown of number of SMKs by province

| Province | Number of Schools | Province | Number of Schools |
|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| West Java | 2,898 | West Kalimantan | 221 |
| East Java | 2,103 | East Kalimantan | 216 |
| Central Java | 1,555 | Central Kalimantan | 135 |
| Banten | 727 | South Kalimantan | 126 |
| DKI Jakarta | 581 | North Kalimantan | 29 |
| DI Yogyakarta | 216 | | |
| | | South Sulawesi | 419 |
| North Sumatra | 975 | North Sulawesi | 184 |
| Lampung | 484 | Central Sulawesi | 184 |
| South Sumatra | 294 | Southeast Sulawesi | 157 |
| Riau | 293 | West Sulawesi | 133 |
| Aceh | 217 | Gorontalo | 56 |
| West Sumatra | 211 | | |
| Jambi | 176 | West Nusa Tenggara | 317 |
| Riau Islands | 109 | East Nusa Tenggara | 292 |
| Bengkulu | 105 | North Maluku | 139 |
| Bangka Belitung | 58 | Papua | 136 |
| | | Bali | 165 |
| | | Maluku | 113 |
| | | West Papua | 54 |

Source: Statistics Indonesia (2021)

Appendix 2. Methodology and sampling

A mixed methods approach was adopted to capture a comprehensive perspective of English studies within SMK schools and its impact on the SMK graduates' employability and career prospects. Primary data was gathered from three target groups: employers, teachers, and students. Secondary data was obtained through a literature review. Key findings from the secondary research are included with the intention of complementing, substantiating, or providing alternative ideas and views to the primary data.

Data collection from industry

Insights on hiring trends and English in the context of the job market was primarily conducted through secondary sources such as peer-reviewed journals and official reports from BAPPENAS, the World Bank, ILO and more. Two expert interviews were conducted with a representative from the Djarum Foundation and the Chairman of SMK Ora et Labora BSD (who is also serving as the director of Don Bosco TVET Center). One of the Djarum Foundation's focuses is to improve the quality of SMKs through partnerships with industry and business-driver interventions. Currently, the Djarum Foundation manages 18 SMKs with 20 majors including creative economy, mechanical engineering and maritime. The Don Bosco TVET Center offers training programs for young people in Sumba, East Nusa Tenggara, covering skills required for careers in electrical engineering, furniture engineering and computer operations.

Data collection from teachers

An online survey was launched to English SMK teachers from both rural and urban areas across majors, on their opinions and experiences in teaching English. A snowball sampling technique was used, as the surveys were disseminated through the British Council and CIPSS' networks and teacher associations such PGRI, TEFLIN and iTELL. This sampling method was used to obtain representation from each major island. The draft of the questionnaire can be seen below.

Questionnaire for SMK English teachers

| No. | Type of Question | Question (English version) |
|-----|------------------|---|
| 1 | Yes/No | Are you an English teacher in a Vocation School? |
| 2 | Drop down | How old are you? <input type="checkbox"/> <25 years old <input type="checkbox"/> 25-34 years old <input type="checkbox"/> 35-44 years old <input type="checkbox"/> 35-44 years old <input type="checkbox"/> 45-54 years old <input type="checkbox"/> 55-64 years old <input type="checkbox"/> >64 years old |
| 3 | Multiple choice | What is your gender? <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer |
| 4 | Multiple choice | How long have you been teaching English? <input type="checkbox"/> <1 year <input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 years <input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 years <input type="checkbox"/> >6 years |
| 5 | Short answer | Where do you teach? |
| 6 | Multiple choice | Is your school a public or private school? <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private |
| 7 | Short answer | Which SMK are you currently teaching at? <input type="checkbox"/> Teknologi dan Rekayasa <input type="checkbox"/> Energy and Mining <input type="checkbox"/> Information and Communication Technology <input type="checkbox"/> Health and Social Work <input type="checkbox"/> Agribusiness and Agrotechnology <input type="checkbox"/> Maritime Studies <input type="checkbox"/> Business and Management <input type="checkbox"/> Tourism <input type="checkbox"/> Arts and Creative Industry <input type="checkbox"/> Others_____ |
| 8 | Short answer | Where did you train to teach English? |
| 9 | Multiple choice | How long was your training program? <input type="checkbox"/> <1 year <input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 years <input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 years <input type="checkbox"/> >6 years |
| 10 | Short answer | After becoming a teacher, do you routinely join English training programs to support your teachings? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |

| | | |
|----|-----------------|---|
| 11 | Short answer | If yes, where? |
| 12 | Multiple choice | At the school that you teach, are the English materials taught relevant to the students' majors (English for Specific Purposes)? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 13 | Long answer | Do you face any challenges in teaching English to your students? If so, please explain |
| 14 | Likert scale | From a scale of 1-5, rate the difficulty of mastering the following English competencies by your students: 1. Writing 2. Speaking 3. Listening 4. Reading |
| 15 | Short answer | What methods do you use to teach English? |
| 16 | Short answer | What tools do you use to teach English? |
| 17 | Yes/No | Do you use online platforms to collect study materials for teaching? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 18 | Short answer | If yes, where? |
| 19 | Multiple choice | From a scale of 1-5, how effective is the current English curriculum for SMK students to improve their skills for future employment? |
| 20 | Multiple choice | From scale of 1-5, rate each of the English skills based on importance in everyday life: 5. Writing 6. Speaking 7. Listening 8. Reading |
| 21 | Multiple choice | From a scale of 1-5, how important is attaining English competencies for future employability of students? 9. Not Important 10. Less important 11. Enough 12. Important 13. Very important |
| 22 | Short answer | Following your answer for question 21, what are the reasons that make you think it is important/not important for employability? |
| 23 | Short Answer | Would you mind joining us in an FGD/interview for this research? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 24 | Short answer | What is your name? |
| 25 | Short answer | What is your phone number? |
| 26 | Short answer | What is your email address? |

Data was collected from 185 teachers from across Indonesia, with 52% and 47% of the teachers reflecting urban and rural areas, respectively. Around 75% of the respondents had been teaching English for more than 6 years. Approximately 52% of the teachers taught in private schools, while 48% taught in public schools. The majority of the teacher respondents taught English at an SMK that specializes in Technology and Engineering (33%), Business and Management (27%), ICT (12%), Tourism (15%) and Arts and Creative Industry (8%).

The last question in the teacher survey invited respondents to a closed FGD to discuss the attitudes, challenges, and ideas to improve English studies in relation to the employability of their students. Teachers from IETA and the English Teacher Forum were also invited to participate in the FGD. 29 SMK English teachers from 17 provinces attended. The FGD was hosted over Zoom for a duration of one and a half hours.

Data collection from students

A student survey was also prepared to collect data on their perspectives of their English studies. In addition to distributing the student survey through network channels, teacher respondents were also asked to pass the survey to their pupils. Given that the research seeks to gather insights from minors, the survey was filled in anonymously. No personal data or contact information was obtained from the student survey. A draft of the survey can be found below.

Questionnaire for SMK students

| No. | Type of Question | Question (English version) |
|-----|------------------|--|
| 1 | Yes/No | Are you a student in Vocational School? |
| 2 | Multiple Choice | What is your gender? <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer |
| 3 | Drop down | Where do you live? |
| 4 | Short answer | Which SMK are you currently attending? |
| 5 | Multiple choice | Is your school a public or private school? <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private |
| 6 | Multiple Choice | What is your major? <input type="checkbox"/> Technology and Engineering <input type="checkbox"/> Energy and Mining <input type="checkbox"/> Information and Communication Technology <input type="checkbox"/> Health and Social Work <input type="checkbox"/> Agribusiness and Agrotechnology <input type="checkbox"/> Maritime Studies <input type="checkbox"/> Business and Management <input type="checkbox"/> Tourism <input type="checkbox"/> Arts and Creative Industry <input type="checkbox"/> Others_____ |

| | | |
|----|---|---|
| 7 | Multiple choice | On average, how many hours per week do you spend learning English in school? <input type="checkbox"/> <2 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 2-4 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 5-7 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 8-10 hours <input type="checkbox"/> >10 hours |
| 8 | Yes/No | Does your school offer English extracurricular or English Club? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 9 | Multiple choice | Do you join your school's English Club? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 10 | Multiple choice | Are the English materials taught in your school relevant to your major? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 11 | Multiple choice | From a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with the English learning materials taught at your school? <input type="checkbox"/> Very unsatisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Unsatisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Very satisfied |
| 12 | Short answer | Do you take English courses outside of school? If so, where? |
| 13 | Yes/No | Do you use online platforms to learn English? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 14 | Short Answer (can be more than one answer) | If yes, where? |
| 15 | Multiple Choice | Which is more effective, learning English at school or in a course? 1. At School 2. In a course 3. Not both |
| 16 | Multiple choice | From scale of 1-5, rate each of the English skills based on difficulty: 1. Writing 2. Speaking 3. Listening 4. Reading |

| | | |
|----|---|---|
| 17 | Multiple choice (choose more than one) | <p>What are your difficulties in learning English?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher's methods are not interesting and/or engaging enough <input type="checkbox"/> Too many vocabulary that are difficult to memorize <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding the grammar <input type="checkbox"/> Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/> No opportunities to practice English outside of class <input type="checkbox"/> No confidence in using English <input type="checkbox"/> Not interested in learning and practicing English <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| 18 | Multiple choice | <p>From a scale of 1-5, how important is learning English in general?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not Important 2. Less important 3. Enough 4. Important 5. Very important |
| 19 | Multiple choice | <p>From scale of 1-5, rate each of the English skills based on importance in everyday life:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Writing 7. Speaking 8. Listening 9. Reading |
| 20 | Short answer | What are your career objectives? |
| 21 | Multiple choice | <p>From a scale of 1-5, how important is attaining English competencies for success in achieving your career objectives?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not Important 2. Less important 3. Enough 4. Important 5. Very important |
| 22 | Short answer | Following your answer for question 19, what are the reasons that make you think it is important/not important in achieving your career objectives? |

A total of 3,938 SMK students responded to the survey, with 65% of the respondents representing urban areas and 35% representing rural areas across Indonesia. Interestingly, as much as 76% of the respondents are studying at public schools, despite the majority of SMKs in Indonesia being privately established. Most of the student respondents study Technology and Engineering (38%), Business and Management (24%), ICT (19%), Arts and Creative Industry (6%) and Tourism (4%). The similarities in distribution of majors with the teachers is presumed to be an effect of the snowball technique, corresponding to the SMKs where the teacher respondents are employed.

Appendix 3. Breakdown of tools reported to be used to teach English

| | By type | | By region | |
|-------------------------|------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Public SMK | Private SMK | Rural SMK | Urban SMK |
| Audio clips | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Book | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Dictionary | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Ebook | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| EduCandy (Online game) | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| Facebook | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Flashcard | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Games | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Google Classroom | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Google Form | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Google Meet | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Interactive application | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Jamboard | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Kahoot | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Laptop/Computer | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| LCD Projectors | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| LMS | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Mentimeter | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Microsoft Team | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Movies | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| Music | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| Phone | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Podcasts | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Pollings | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Posters | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Powerpoint slides | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Quizzes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Reading materials | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Speaker | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Stationary | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Telegram | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

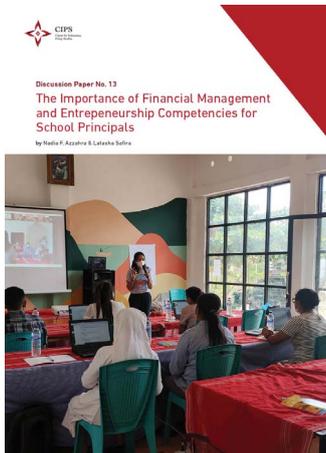
| | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Video | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Vocabulary mapping | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Vocaroo | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| WhatsApp | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Whiteboard | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Worksheet/Handouts | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| YouTube | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Zoom | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Appendix 4. Core and basic competencies for English studies

| | Grade 10 | Grade 11 | Grade 12 |
|--------------------|---|---|--|
| Core competencies | Students are able to process, analyze, and apply the materials taught in the class independently and accordingly. | Students are able to process, analyze, and apply the taught materials independently, effectively, and creatively. | Students are able to process, analyze, and apply the taught materials independently, effectively, and creatively. |
| Basic competencies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to write interaction text (oral or written) to give or to ask information on one's identity • Able to write simple interaction text (oral or written) to greet and give and respond to congratulatory messages • Able to write and comprehend simple descriptive text • Able to write and comprehend simple announcement text • Able write and comprehend recount text • Able to write interaction text (oral or written) to obtain information on past events. • Able to understand song lyrics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to write simple interaction text which involves asking or answering questions related to offer or advice • Able to write simple interaction text which involves asking for and giving opinion • Able to write and comprehend simple official invitation text • Able to write and comprehend analysis exposition text • Able to write, comprehend, and identify information from scientific text • Able to write and comprehend personal letter • Able to write and comprehend text which consist of cause and effects • Able to understand text related to natural disasters or social circumstances. • Able to understand song lyrics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to write a dialog or simple text which involves offering help • Able to write and understand elements of job application letter • Able to write and understand caption for image, graph, table, etc • Able to understand the meaning of news items. • Able to to write and understand text which involves modality and imperatives • Able to write and understand procedure text • Able to understand song lyrics |

Source: MOECRT, 2018

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Food Security & Agriculture: To enable low-income Indonesian consumers to access more affordable and quality staple food items, CIPS advocates for policies that break down the barriers for the private sector to openly operate in the food and agriculture sector.

Education Policy: The future of Indonesia's human capital need to be prepared with skills and knowledge relevant to the 21st century. CIPS advocates for policies that drive a climate of healthy competition amongst education providers. Such competition will drive providers to constantly strive to innovate and improve education quality for the children and parents they serve. In particular, CIPS focuses on the improvement of operational and financial sustainability of low-cost private schools who serve the poor.

Economic Opportunities: CIPS advocates for policies that expand economic involvement and opportunities for Indonesian entrepreneurs and businesses; as well as for policies that open wider opportunities for low-income Indonesians to access decent incomes and create wealth.

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