



## Teaching Basic English in Higher Education: Effective EFL teaching through students' lens.

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### Abstract

This study is a quantitative descriptive that applying a questionnaire to explore undergraduate students' expectations and preferences in EFL teaching-learning activities. A convenience sample of 120 first-year university undergraduates at the start of their university life was used. They were enrolled in an Economic student's degree course at an Indonesian university. The questionnaire focused on students' experiences and perceptions concerning teaching and learning strategies, students' growth skills, the quality of English lecturers, and the students' suggestions toward the Teaching-Learning Process. The data collected were calculated as percentages and discussed. The majority of the students preferred projects as effective teaching-learning strategies. Grammar was considered the most growth skill. Furthermore, good teaching skills and knowledgeable were reckoned as the most favorable qualities of an English teacher. They recommended more fun activities, fewer assignments, seek for other fun activities, and using online applications.

**Keywords:** Basic English; Economics Students; Students' Perception.

## **Introduction**

The rate of change in education has changed dramatically by today's changing needs and information. The shift towards results-based education goes hand in hand with increasing awareness that the learning process is as important as the outcome (Anderson J.A, 2005; Saroyan, A., & Trigwell, K. 2015). EFL classrooms are no exception, curriculum changes towards new learning approaches, to ensure that students acquire the right knowledge accompanied by practical, procedural and communicative skills (Canale, 2014). It attempts to give students a foundation in general language abilities that will give them simple access to a world where English is seen as a key to success.

Higher education institutions in non-English countries frequently provide instruction in English for Specific Purposes to meet the expected language needs of their students, whether in academic, professional, or vocational for example, a career in the economy, international banking, tourism, or hospitality (Charles 2013; Thompson 2013). EFL classes in higher education are now designed in two learning steps (Çelik et al.2018). English which is used to be taught only one semester during lectures, has divided into two steps. The first semester teaches general English and continues to the next semester for English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Basic Learning is taught for one semester because it is expected that students' basic English skills have been completed before continuing in English for Specific Purposes. If basic English is inadequate, it is certain that students will have difficulty participating in learning in advanced ESP classes (Petraki & Khat,2022). There are some important distinctions to take into account, although teaching ESP and teaching General English is practically identical (Hartina, S., & Syahrir, S. (2021).

Several factors affect students' engagement in educational activities including 1) lesson plan and learning activities (teachers may discuss the goals of the activity with their students if alternative activities are unfamiliar to them); 2) the materials and content of the lessons; 3) the teaching strategies and techniques; 4) the organization and control of the classroom; and 4) affective factors, such as observing the atmosphere in the classroom, the level of anxiety, and the teacher empathy to students ( Zhou, 2010; Almarghani, E. M. & Mijatovic, 2017). To evaluate all of these factors, student perceptions are needed as a reflection and evaluation tool for the effectiveness of the teaching system that has been implemented so far.

In the past, L2 teachers were often seen as implementers of various language policies in education and teaching methodology. More recently, teachers have been portrayed as educational experts who are not only expected to be able to make informed decisions about effective classroom practice (Clarke, 1994; Richards & Nunan, 1990), but also have the ability to make decisions from the learning outcomes in class (Biesta et al. (2015). Furthermore, to handle language classes effectively, they must be able to consider not only pedagogical but also social and individual complexities that affect the learning process (Wang, 2020). Thus,

students' perceptions of their experiences in classroom settings are very useful as a reflection for teaching improvement.

The importance of students' perceptions of the goals and activities in the classroom has increased with the introduction of learner-centered and outcomes-based teaching approaches. Nunan (1989a) stated that "No curriculum can be described as fully learner-centered unless the learner's subjective needs and perceptions related to the learning processes are taken into consideration (p. 177). Both teachers and students have their own ideas on what language teaching and learning are (Richards, 2008), and all learners have to critically analyze the tasks they accomplish" (p. 205). According to Richards (2008), "the more we understand the learner's personal approaches and personal notions, the better and more productive our intervention would be". It means that teachers will be able to promote desirable learning outcomes in the classroom if they are aware of where our learners are coming from, how they perceive language learning, what they perceive about their language learning experiences, and how they react upon these emotions. It's essential to keep in mind that all students generally examine their work critically (Gardner, 2021). Because of this, it is a must for students to apply their own perspectives to activities and other classroom events.

At the Muhammadiyah University of Palopo, the Economics department studied English for two semesters. Initially, students only studied English for one semester. However, based on the results of need analysis and curriculum review, it was found that students needed in-depth and specific English teaching as a future job demand. So now, the first semester is equipped with Basic English. Student responses to Basic English Learning deserve special attention. Do they enjoy the activity of real learning and the use of language? Do they accept the teaching techniques applied? Do they agree that the activity is useful for them as language learners?. This information is very useful for evaluating and improving English Language Teaching in the Economics major.

The description above underlies this research to explore student perceptions as a result of learning basic English in the Economics major. The focus of this article is to explore teaching methods, growth skills and qualified lecturers which will be the findings of this research. Thus the objectives of this research are:

1. To assess students' experiences and expectations regarding current EFL teaching-learning practices.
2. To elicit suggestions from students in order to enhance the effective teaching-learning process.

## **Method**

### ***Research Design***

This study is an exploratory study to investigate undergraduate students' perceptions and preferences in learning Basic English at the Economics Faculty. The study was carried out after a 12-session Basic English class at the end of the second semester of the academic year 2022.

**Participants**

A convenience participant of 120 first-year university undergraduates at the start of their university life was used. They were enrolled in an Economic students degree course at Indonesian universities.

**Data collection and Analysis**

This study used a specially designed questionnaire to explore undergraduate students' perceptions of and preferences in learning Basic English. The questionnaire explores students' preference for learning, growth Skills after the teaching-learning process, qualities of the lecturer, and suggestions to optimize the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Each item's percentage from the questionnaire is calculated, and the data is then sorted according to the tendency of the score for each item.

**Results**

The majority of the participants recognized the following elements for students' preferences for learning activities including quizzes, projects, lectures, presentations, and group tasks, according to a qualitative analysis of the open-ended and closed-ended questions. The majority of respondents said that the quiz, project, and individual task were the most favorable options of students in learning activities. In addition to this, grammar and vocabulary were the most significant of students' growth skills after the learning process (see Table 1 and 2).

*Table 1: Students' Preference of learning Activities (N=120)*

Method	Very Helpful N (%)	Helpful N (%)	Less Helpful N (%)
Quiz	86 (71,7)	24 (20)	10 (8,3)
Project	72 (60)	42 (35)	6 (5)
Lecture	59 (49,2)	21 (17,5)	40 (33,3)
Presentation	64 (53,3)	23 (19,2)	33 (27,5)
Group Task	57 (47,5)	44 (36,7)	19 (15,8)
Individual Task	75 (62,5)	32 (26,7)	13 (10,8)

Table 1  
students'

displays

preference of learning method. The majority of respondents preferred a Project (95 %) as an effective learning activity. It was followed by Quiz, 91,7% of the respondents agreed that it helped them in learning. Moreover, individual tasks (89.2%) and group tasks (84.2%) showed a very large proportion. When using presentation, more than half 64 (53,3%) respondents chose it even though more than a quarter (27,5%) students opined that it just gave little effect.

Following that data, the lecture was significantly chosen by more than half of the respondents (66.7%). Overall, of the six learning activities, the top position is

project-based learning which was chosen by 95% of the respondents who agreed that it is beneficial in helping students. The lowest was lecture (66.7) even though it was chosen by more than half of the respondents. There were one-third per cent (40 students) who assumed that it was less helpful.

Table 2. Students' Growth Skills after the Teaching-Learning Process.

Skills	Very good N (%)	Good N (%)	Fair N (%)	Poor N (%)	Very poor N (%)
Grammar	49 (40,8)	39 (32,5)	12 (10)	14 (11,7)	6 (5)
Vocabulary	41 (33,3)	45 (37,5)	10 (8,3)	16 (13,3)	8 (6,6)
Reading	19 (15,83)	20 (16,6)	21 (17,5)	41 (34,2)	19 (15,3)
Speaking	21 (17,5)	14 (11,7)	23 (19,6)	34 (28,3)	28 (23,3)
Listening	18 (15)	24 (20)	24 (20)	40 (33,3)	20 (16,6)
Writing	21 (17,5)	22 (18,3)	18 (15)	28 (23,3)	31 (25,8)

The increase in learning outcomes for each skill is clearly illustrated in table 2. The grammar aspect has developed quite rapidly as seen by 73.3% of respondents experiencing a significant proportion. However, the four main skills are less developed. Half of the respondents considered that reading (49.5%), speaking (51.6%), listening (49.9) and writing (48.9) were still underdeveloped. The reason behind the response from 50% of respondents who are less developed will be the next study to find out the constraints and factors that cause it.

Table 3. The Quality of English Lecturers.

Aspect	Very good N (%)	Good N (%)	Fair N (%)	Poor N (%)	Very poor N (%)
Knowledgeable	90(75)	21 (17.5)	7 (5.8)	2 (1.67)	0
Teaching Skill	92 (76.7)	20 (16.6)	8 (6.6)	0	0
Approachable	72(60)	31 (25.8)	14 (11.6)	3 (2.5)	0
Enthusiasm	45 (37.5)	33 (27.5)	37 (30.8)	5 (4.16)	0

Table 3 illustrates the data of English Lecturer Quality based on students' perception. Obviously, the two largest proportions of lecturers' quality in positive feedback are the Teaching Skill (93.3 %) and Knowledgeable (92.5%). Only a small number of students perceived that teaching skill is fair (5.8 %) and Poor (1.67 %), while Knowledgeable is recognized as fair (6.6 %). Subsequently, Approachable is the second rank of this percentage assumed as Very good and good (85.8 %). Besides, A small minority of students realized it as fair (11.6 %) and poor (2.5 %). Lastly, the Enthusiasm of lecturers in teaching is presumed as the lowest percentage of all (65 %), even though it is more than half percent. Along with this, some students believed it as fair (30.8) and poor (4.16).

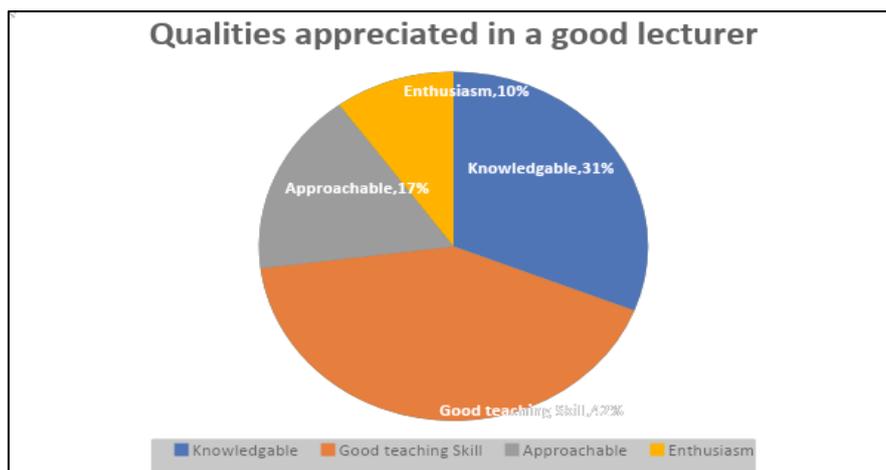


Figure 1: Qualities appreciated in a good lecturer.

Student expectations of good lecturers are clearly illustrated in chart 1. Almost half of the students (42%) assume that having good teaching skills is the highest indicator that determines the quality of lecturers. Further, supported by knowledgeable at just under a third portion (31%) as the second priority. Apart from this, approachability is a small priority (17%). The smallest portion of good teachers' quality is teachers' enthusiasm when teaching (10%).

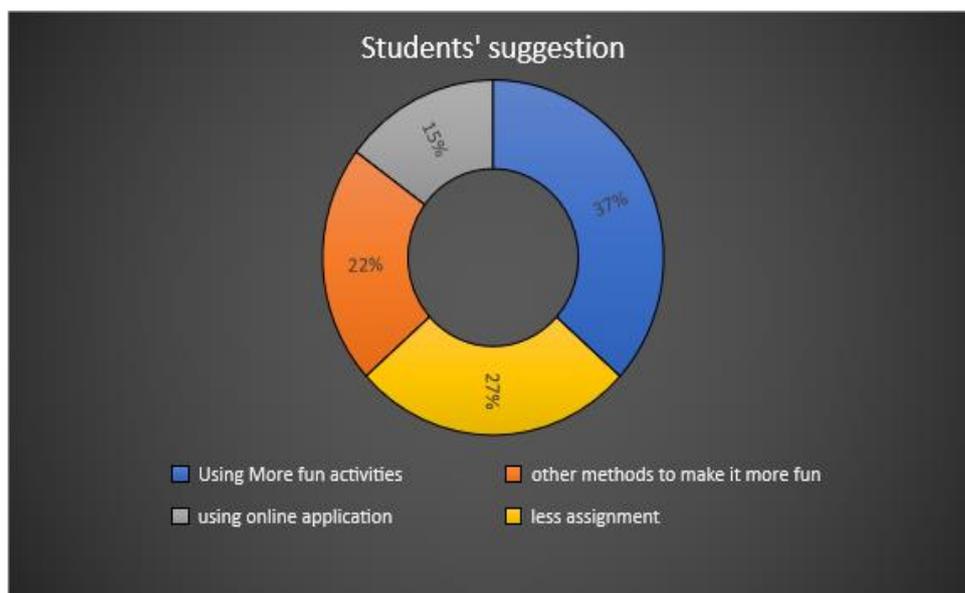


Figure 2: Suggestions from students to optimize the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

The pie chart reveals the data regarding the students' suggestions to develop effective ways of teaching and learning in the four classes of first-semester students of the management study program of Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo, Indonesia in the academic year 2022-2023.

Most of The students tend to suggest more fun activities applied in the classroom by choosing more than a third portion (37 %). Less assignment has the second-highest choice level, at 27.9 per cent. However, some students still need other methods to make the learning process more fun, representing 22 per cent of the total. The smallest group in terms of students' recommendations is using online applications, at 2.4 per cent.

### **Discussion**

These results offer some unique observations in this area of research. The findings indicate that Project Based Learning (PBL) is method that is in great demand by students. The project provides its own challenges because it requires the synergy of all the knowledge that has been studied to complete it. Thus, the Project Based Learning (PBL) method entails a whole learning process with systematic learning management to achieve meaningful and applicable results, inspire learning, and reinforce required living skills (Buck Institute for Harris and Katz, 2001; Moursund, 1999; Education, 2010)

Furthermore, quiz is a learning activity that as the second option helps students' development the most. It is usually used by lecturers after completing one material to measure student understanding levels. Students are challenged to learn because they want to win the quiz. So far, quizzes have been implemented using the question-and-answer method interspersed with educational games. Through the quizzes, students enjoyed and accepted the usage of the educational game format as a more enjoyable and rewarding teaching strategy. (K. Devi, 2014; Aljezawi and Albashtawy, 2015).

Regarding the presentation, it is one of the most helpful methods because it makes students more active in learning. In addition, this method will also stimulate active discussion between lecturers and students, and other participants. So that the learning activities will become more lively. These reactions support Hillman's (1999) argument that eye contact, gestures, and body movement are essential components of an effective presentation. A presentation's chance to be successful is mostly determined by the presenter's excitement, delivery style, and knowledge of the subject matter. (Conlan, C & Ahmed, S. 2011).

The next finding is related to the task. Individual tasks are more helpful than group tasks. So far, the composition of groups is usually in large numbers of students so there are some students who are less active in contributing to the group. Compared to individual tasks, they are fully responsible for completing their respective tasks. From these findings, it is hoped that giving group tasks, is better in small groups. Small groups foster greater connection and encourage more active participation from all students. (Springer L, Stanne ME, Donovan SS, 1999).

Lecture is the smallest portion chosen by students. It is one of the most widely used methods by teachers because it is easy to do. However, in language learning, the lecture method is considered less influential because communication only occurs in one direction, the interaction between students is lacking, tends to make students less creative, and the material presented only relies on the teacher's memory (Covill, 2011). Students are only relied on in terms of remembering. While the brain is not stimulated to create something. The key factor of this successful study was the implementation of placed poll questions throughout lectures. Congruent with these findings, lecturers should be observant in choosing language teaching methods according to the learning objectives and characteristics of students.

Students' Growth Skills after the Teaching-Learning Process as a starting point for measuring the achievement of learning outcomes. After studying for one semester, according to the students, they developed a lot in terms of grammar and vocabulary mastery. This is in line with the learning objective of basic English which emphasizes mastery of language structures and vocabulary as the main foundation for building the four main English skills (Biloon J, 2018). Of the four main skills; reading, listening, speaking, and writing only 50% of students feel improvement. This is also evident from the results of the student's final exam with a mean score (75). These results become the main basis for developing ESP at the next level which will emphasize integrated skills. All four language skill techniques should be used throughout a teaching hour, however, they differ in difficulty from level to level based on the objectives (Sadiku, 2015).

The next important finding is the good quality of EFL lecturers from a student point of view. Identifying the qualities of a good English teacher will help teachers to have an idea of what their students think of them and, as a result, reflect on their teaching method and behavior. The gap between teachers' expectations and their students' expectations can be reduced by understanding the students' opinions about their teachers (Mahmoud & Thabet, 2013). The results of the questionnaire reveal that high percentages of students like the teacher's good teaching skills. Teacher with the proper abilities inspires and positively impacts all of their students' lives (Alhija, 2017). Because teaching skills impact student learning outcomes, teachers must develop these skills to attain learning outcomes in the form of improved practice-related concepts or, better yet, changed behavior.

The second is knowledgeable about the subject matter. Expert teachers can organize and utilize content knowledge more efficiently for their students' understanding by relying on their subject knowledge (Hettie, 2012). Expert teachers are also able to adapt to the demands of each given classroom (Mahmoud & Thabet, 2013), identifying students' problems and modifying how the material is delivered to make it more understandable. The third is being approachable. It does not mean that the lecturer is always available but lets the students know the availability and how to reach the lecturer. It increases the students' desire to participate in class and their

comfort level when interacting with the lecturer (Lynch,2018). The last is enthusiasm. Students are more interested to participate in class discussions, and more willing to discuss any issues or complaints when their lecturer is "enthusiastic." Thus, Knowing the quality of lecturers expected by students is of course very useful for improving the quality of good EFL lecturers and teaching techniques.

Lastly, the students suggest developing effective teaching and learning methods. It reveals the importance of employing enjoyable activities to learn vocabulary and how these techniques are more effective at teaching vocabulary at the primary levels than conventional ones. The results also showed that the trial assembly participants gave important mobility and activities rather than retaining design. This highlights how vocabulary learning may be improved by including fun activities, and the children can learn the language in a crucial situation. In this approach, the study lends credibility to the idea that having fun influences how well students learn vocabulary. As a result, teachers should consider these exercises as a viable option for teaching vocabulary (Bavi, Farideh. 2018).

The next is using more games. Many studies have shown that using games and enjoyable activities to teach vocabulary has a wash-back effect that allows many students to overcome their discomfort and engage more fully in the process of meaning construction (Honarmand & Rostampour 2014). Then, giving fewer assignments. Simple assignment length or item reductions can lower the amount of work necessary to complete them, which increases the likelihood that students will choose to complete their work instead of engaging in other activities (Winterling, Dunlap, & O'Neill, 1987).

Furthermore, the students recommended employing other methods, as well as using applications. They tend to seek new teaching strategies in order to experience enjoyable learning activities. The students refuse to undergo rigid and unpleasant classes. Besides, the use of technology in learning has no doubt of its usefulness. An innovative factor that has a good effect on students' performance is the implementation of the right gaming components in academic environments like the study of a foreign language (Bustillo, J., Rivera, C., Guzmán, J. G., & Acosta, L. R. (2017). Application in learning will make the learning experience more enjoyable. It is congruent with the findings from Syahrir, Fahmi, A., & Yusuf, A. (2022) that digital reading which required some applications can enhance students in learning. Moreover, The use of technology for example in the flipped learning method enables students to acquire and utilize digital literacy skills in order to fully comprehend the subject, solve issues, do assignments, make comments, and be knowledgeable about digital technologies (Hartina, S., Ermawati, E., & Syahrir, S. (2022).

## **Conclusion**

Based on the results of data analysis gained from filling out student questionnaires, it can be concluded that the majority of the students preferred projects as effective teaching-learning strategies. Grammar was considered the most growth skill. Furthermore, teaching skills and knowledgeable were reckoned as the most favorable qualities of an English teacher. They recommended more fun activities, fewer assignments, seek for other fun activities, and using online applications. In order to more fully understand how teaching and learning Basic English in the setting of ESP students, future studies should look into the impact of various pedagogical scenarios.

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