

An Analysis of Soft Skills Integration in ESP Materials Created By Pre-Service Teachers

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Abstract. This qualitative content analysis analyzed soft skills integration in ESP learning materials created by pre-service teachers at Universitas Esa Unggul from June to August 2025. Grounded in the theories of Robles, Dean, and Poghosyan, the study evaluated tasks for industry-relevant soft skills. The results showed that all materials integrated soft skills, with teamwork and critical thinking being the most prominent, while communication, problem-solving, and creativity were more limited. Specifically, communication was fostered through role-plays, teamwork via group assignments, critical thinking through analytical questions, problem-solving via complaint-handling tasks, and creativity through idea development. Despite sample size limitations affecting generalizability, these findings highlight how pre-service teachers embed essential soft skills into ESP materials. Future research should examine larger material samples for broader insights.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes; Learning Material; Soft Skills.

1. Introduction

Soft skills have become essential competencies in the 21st-century workplace (Dean, 2017; Sreehari, 2021). Key soft skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and creativity enable individuals to address challenges, work effectively in teams, and foster innovation (Bora, 2015; Musa et al., 2012; Schulz, 2008). Given their critical role in workplace success, developing soft skills among vocational students requires closer attention before they enter the workforce.

Despite their importance, vocational school students often lack adequate soft skills, largely due to learning processes that predominantly emphasize hard skills (Anastasya et al., 2021; Bunyamin et al., 2022; Jaedun et al., 2024; Sobari et al., 2023). Key workplace competencies include communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and work ethic (Dean, 2017; Masterson, 2023; The Times of India, 2025). To bridge this gap, institutional support through aligned learning systems, teacher readiness, and teaching materials adhering to national competency standards (SKKNI) is necessary (Sahdu, 2024). However, several empirical studies indicate that soft skill implementation in vocational schools remains insufficient (Ariwibowo et al., 2020; Bunyamin et al., 2022; Cahyono, 2021; Hartanto et al., 2017).

Mastery of soft skills, such as presentation skills, is vital for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners to achieve employability (Mousawa & Elyas, 2015; Poghosyan, 2020). Nevertheless, existing ESP learning materials frequently focus solely on language proficiency or curriculum alignment with industry demands while neglecting soft skill integration (Komang et al., 2021; Simanjuntak, 2024; Zaman, 2024). Although prior studies have explored soft skills in higher education ESP curricula (Drozdovych, 2016; Poghosyan, 2020), limited attention has been given to material

development by prospective teachers. While in-service teachers have successfully integrated task-based language teaching and soft skills into ESP materials (Mulyadi & Prasetyanti, 2016), involving practitioners and pre-service teachers is equally critical to meeting student needs (Gu, 2019).

To address this gap, this study analyzes how the content of ESP learning materials developed by pre-service teachers integrates soft skills relevant to industry needs. By examining pre-service teachers as emerging practitioners, the findings are expected to offer theoretical and practical insights for curriculum designers and vocational institutions in developing industry-relevant ESP materials.

2. Method

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis aimed at exploring the extent to which ESP learning materials developed by pre-service teachers integrate soft skills that accommodate industry needs. A qualitative approach allows for understanding the meaning associated with social problems, conducting inductive data analysis, and establishing patterns (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative content analysis was chosen to examine the content of ESP learning material systematically and to identify implicit meanings, recurring themes, and patterns related to the development of soft skills in vocational or professional contexts through three phases: preparation, organizing, and reporting (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

The research was conducted from June 2025 to August 2025 at Esa Unggul University. The subject of this study was a collection of ESP learning materials for vocational school developed by pre-service teachers as a final project of English education students at Esa Unggul University in the ESP Class. The materials were selected using purposive sampling with criteria: developed by pre-service teachers majoring in English education, specifically designed for an ESP context, and containing a complete instructional unit (learning objectives, activities, and assessment tasks). Four ESP learning materials analyzed included English for office administration, English for hotel professionals, English for marketing, and English for design & communication.

In this qualitative content analysis, the researcher acted as the main instrument in collecting and analyzing data through selecting data, coding, categorizing, and interpreting text content. Data collection and categorization were executed through three phases (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008):

- 1) Preparation: Collecting 4 ESP learning materials covering Phase E (grade 10) and Phase F (grades 11–12) based on the Merdeka Curriculum, and identifying activities relevant to soft skills (communication, teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity).
- 2) Organizing: Coding and organizing collected data into a document analysis checklist incorporating code, soft skills, indicators/criteria, checklist mark, page, and activity (e.g., Code C1 for Communication with roleplay/dialogue indicators, C2 for Critical Thinking, C4 for Creativity, P2 for Problem Solving, and T1 for Teamwork).
- 3) Reporting: Presenting analysis results in narrative form to explain the extent of soft skills integration.

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis method by identifying, analyzing, and interpreting meaning patterns according to Braun and Clarke (2006). The steps comprised:

- 1) Familiarization with the data by reading all collected ESP materials and taking initial notes;
- 2) Generating initial codes by marking relevant keywords reflecting themes such as “communication” or “problem solving”;
- 3) Searching for themes by grouping similar codes;
- 4) Reviewing themes to ensure relevance to research objectives;
- 5) Defining and naming themes; and

- 6) Producing the report detailing descriptions of each identified theme and its pedagogical implications.

Data analysis was processed using Microsoft Excel. To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of data interpretation, the expert judgment method was applied by involving a supervisor as an expert in ESP material development and English language teaching. The supervisor evaluated research instruments, analysis categories, and data interpretations to confirm analysis categories, validate correspondence between texts/tasks and interpretations, and provide critical feedback for accurate, scientifically sound findings.

3. Result

This study analyzed 4 ESP learning materials developed by pre-service teachers, categorized into Phase E (grade 10) and Phase F (grades 11–12) based on the Merdeka Curriculum. The overview of the materials analyzed is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Learning Material Description

Criteria				
Phase	E1	E2	F1	F2
Page	13	8	20	34
Authors	Marsha, Haliza, and Dimas	Isma, Asyakra, and Farah	Meidita, Zafira, and Afie Fajri	Agnes, Rendy, and Milen
Title	English for Marketing	English for Office Administration	English for Hotel Professionals	English for Design & Communication

The analysis identified the integration of five soft skills across the materials: communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, in compliance with the theories of Robles (2012), Dean (2017), and Poghosyan (2020). Table 2 summarizes the distribution of soft skills integrated within the analyzed materials.

Table 2. Soft Skill Integration in ESP Material Created by Pre-service Teacher

Soft Skill	Phase				Total
	E1	E2	F1	F2	
Communication	2	1	4	2	9
Teamwork	4	2	4	6	16
Critical thinking	3	2	2	4	11
Problem solving	0	0	1	0	1
Creativity	0	1	2	5	8
Non-Soft Skills	2	1	4	1	8

Overall, teamwork (16 activities) and critical thinking (11 activities) were the most prominently featured soft skills. In contrast, communication (9 activities), creativity (8 activities), and problem-solving (1 activity) were more limited.

Communication

Nine activities incorporated communication skills, primarily implemented through role-playing tasks and group discussions. In E2 (English for Office Administration, p. 5), students practice professional conversations between secretaries and callers. In E1 (English for Marketing, p. 4, 7), tasks include seller-buyer negotiations and group discussions on international negotiation styles. In F1 (English for Hotel Professionals, p. 5, 6, 10), activities involve waiter-customer role-plays and dialogue practice using expressions like "Would you like to...". Lastly, F2 (English for Design & Communication, p. 8, 14) promotes pair discussions and dialogue practice to foster a two-way process of exchanging information.

Teamwork

Teamwork emerged as the most dominant soft skill with 16 integrated activities. In E1 (p. 2, 4, 7, 9), tasks instruct students to discuss in groups of four, practice conversations, and write dialogues with partners. In E2 (p. 5), students create dialogues and role-play in pairs. In F1 (p. 5, 6, 10), collaborative tasks require group discussions and pair conversations. In F2, teamwork is highly integrated (p. 5, 14, 15, 16, 21, 25), featuring partner analyses, museum observation reports by groups of three, and paired presentations.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking was integrated 11 times. In F1 (p. 4, 5), tasks involve brainstorming questions such as "Why is welcoming guests important in hotel and restaurant services?" and handling complaint scenarios. In E1 (p. 2, 3, 7), activities require analyzing visual evidence, answering listening questions like "Why do buyers ask to reduce prices?", and evaluating country-specific negotiation styles. In E2 (p. 3, 6), tasks prompt students to justify recording messages accurately and synthesize conversations into summaries. In F2 (p. 8, 11, 16, 18), critical thinking is honed through evaluating design guidelines, analyzing video content regarding unity and variation, synthesizing design analyses, and predicting future career impacts.

Problem Solving

Problem-solving showed very limited integration, appearing only once in F1 (English for Hotel Professionals, p. 6). Students are presented with a customer complaint scenario regarding cold or improper food service and must develop effective solutions by identifying the issue, exploring options, and selecting the best outcome.

Creativity

Creativity appeared across 8 activities, predominantly in F2 (English for Design & Communication). In F2 (p. 14, 25, 27, 28), tasks include designing posters for Independence Day based on design principles, creating original dialogues, constructing PowerPoint presentations, and editing/uploading video presentations to YouTube. In F1 (p. 6, 11), activities require developing original restaurant dialogues and writing engaging menu descriptions. In E2 (p. 7), students generate original ideas for secretary-caller conversations adapted to new contexts.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that all ESP learning materials developed by pre-service teachers integrated soft skills relevant to industry needs, including communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. This outcome aligns with Mulyadi and Prasetyanti (2016), who also found that soft skills are integrated into ESP learning materials in higher education. The alignment is particularly evident in the integration of critical thinking and problem-solving, suggesting that both skills are universally recognized as essential for preparing students to enter the workforce.

However, a distinct finding of this study is that the most dominantly integrated soft skills were teamwork (16 activities), critical thinking (11 activities), communication (9 activities), and creativity (8 activities), while problem-solving appeared only once. This distribution differs from Mulyadi and Prasetyanti's (2016) findings, which reported that critical thinking and problem-solving were significantly integrated into the material. Differences in context and instructional focus can explain the variation. The ESP materials analyzed in this study were designed for specific vocational purposes: Marketing, Office Administration, Hotel Professionals, and Design & Communication, which emphasize interaction, collaboration, and creative production. Consequently,

communication, teamwork, and creativity emerged more prominently. At the same time, problem-solving received limited attention due to the nature of the tasks, which tended to focus on dialogue practice, group discussions, and creative projects rather than complex problem-solving scenarios.

The limited integration of problem-solving (only one activity in F1) represents a notable gap in the materials. Given that problem-solving is widely regarded as a critical soft skill in professional settings (Robles, 2012; Dean, 2017; Poghosyan, 2020), this finding suggests that pre-service teachers may need further guidance in designing tasks that explicitly require students to identify problems, explore alternative solutions, and select the best outcomes. The single problem-solving activity identified in F1, which involved handling a customer complaint scenario, demonstrates that such tasks are feasible and relevant within ESP contexts. However, they remain underexplored across the other materials.

The dominance of teamwork (16 activities) across all four materials reflects a strong emphasis on collaborative learning. This is consistent with the pedagogical orientation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which encourages *gotong royong* (cooperation) and student-centered learning. However, the finding that teamwork was most prevalent in F2 (English for Design & Communication, with 6 activities) suggests that the nature of the subject matter influences the types of soft skills integrated. Design and communication tasks naturally lend themselves to collaborative work, such as group analyses, paired presentations, and museum observation reports. In contrast, E2 (English for Office Administration) and F1 (English for Hotel Professionals) integrated teamwork through role-plays and dialogue practice, which, while valuable, may not fully develop the deeper collaborative skills required in more complex professional settings.

Communication was integrated through role-playing tasks and group discussions, primarily in E1, F1, and F2. The tasks identified, such as seller-buyer negotiations, waiter-customer role-plays, and pair discussions, are appropriate for developing oral communication skills in vocational contexts. However, the relatively lower frequency of communication activities (9) compared to teamwork (16) suggests that the materials may prioritize collaborative work over explicit communication skill development. Since communication is consistently ranked as one of the most important soft skills by employers (Robles, 2012), this imbalance warrants attention. Pre-service teachers could benefit from designing more tasks that explicitly focus on communication strategies, such as active listening, negotiation, and professional correspondence, rather than embedding communication implicitly within teamwork activities.

Creativity appeared in 8 activities, predominantly in F2 (English for Design & Communication). The tasks identified designing posters, creating original dialogues, constructing PowerPoint presentations, and editing video presentations demonstrate that creativity can be effectively integrated into ESP materials when the subject matter allows for open-ended, production-oriented tasks. In contrast, E1 (English for Marketing) and E2 (English for Office Administration) showed limited creativity integration (0 and 1 activity, respectively), suggesting that these materials may be more focused on functional language use rather than creative expression. This finding highlights the importance of balancing functional and creative tasks across all ESP materials, regardless of the vocational focus.

The finding that 8 activities were categorized as "Non-Soft Skills" indicates that not all tasks in the materials were explicitly designed to develop soft skills. These activities may have focused on language knowledge (e.g., grammar exercises, vocabulary drills) or technical skills specific to the vocational field. While such activities are necessary for language acquisition, the presence of 8 non-soft-skill activities suggests that there is room for greater integration of soft skills across all tasks, including those traditionally viewed as purely linguistic.

Overall, the materials created by pre-service teachers demonstrate a commendable effort to integrate soft skills relevant to industry needs. The findings confirm that the materials not only teach English but also bridge the gap between the school curriculum and the non-technical skills required in professional environments. This is consistent with the theoretical frameworks of Robles (2012), Dean (2017), and Poghosyan (2020), who all emphasize the importance of soft skills in professional settings. However, the uneven distribution of soft skills, with teamwork and critical thinking dominating while problem-solving and communication remain limited, suggests that pre-service teachers may require further professional development in designing tasks that holistically develop all five soft skills. Future research should explore the effectiveness of these materials in actual classroom settings and investigate whether the integration of soft skills leads to improved student outcomes in vocational English contexts.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that ESP learning materials developed by pre-service teachers successfully integrate industry-relevant soft skills, prominently featuring teamwork and critical thinking, alongside communication, creativity, and problem-solving. These skills are practically embedded through targeted instructional activities: communication is fostered through role-plays and discussions; teamwork is developed via collaborative group or pair assignments; critical thinking is stimulated through higher-order questioning; problem-solving is practiced via complaint-handling scenarios; and creativity is facilitated by tasks requiring original dialogues and innovative ideas. Despite these findings, this study is limited to the content analysis of four ESP learning materials specifically designed for Phase E and Phase F. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the sample size across a wider variety of vocational contexts and educational phases. Furthermore, further studies should investigate the actual implementation of these materials in real classroom settings to evaluate their practical effectiveness in enhancing students' soft skills.

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