

**The Comparative Analysis of Students' Needs of SMA, SMK & MA Al-Ittihad DDI Soni (Students' and Teachers' Perspectives)**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to analyze and compare the English learning needs from the perspectives of students and teachers at SMKN 1 Dampal Selatan, MA Al-Ittihad DDI Soni, and SMA Negeri 1 Dampal Selatan. The research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using data collected through questionnaires distributed to students and interviews conducted with English teachers. The focus of this study includes academic needs such as mastery of the four main English skills, and non-academic needs like motivation, environmental support, and self-confidence, as well as perceptions regarding the use of technology in learning. The results indicate a significant gap between students' and teachers' expectations. Students tend to prefer practical, technology-based, and work-oriented materials, while teachers emphasize grammar mastery, basic language skills, and the need for adequate learning media. Additionally, students expressed difficulties in vocabulary acquisition and low confidence in speaking, whereas teachers stressed the importance of enhancing motivation and learning facilities. These findings highlight the necessity to adjust curricula and teaching methods to better align with students' real-world needs and support more effective English learning.

**Keywords:** Students' Needs; Comparative Education; Teacher and Student Perspectives

**INTRODUCTION**

English, as an international language, plays a strategic role in various fields including education, technology, global communication, and the professional world. Proficiency in English is not only essential for academic purposes but has

also become a key requirement for competing in the global workforce, especially in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Richards, 2015; Schwab, 2016). Therefore, English language teaching at the secondary education level must be designed to equip students with relevant and practical skills. However, the reality in many schools, particularly in remote areas such as Dampal Selatan, shows that English learning still faces multiple challenges. These include limited facilities, poor internet access, lack of innovative learning media, and teaching methods that are not fully adapted to current developments (Hamid & Honan, 2020; Yusuf et al., 2019). In addition, a gap often exists between students' expectations and the instructional focus of teachers, which contributes to a mismatch between the teaching process and learning outcomes (Richards, 2015).

Students generally prefer a learning process that is enjoyable, contextual, and directly related to real-life situations or future careers, particularly for vocational high school (SMK) students who are oriented toward practical competencies. They tend to favor technology-based learning tools such as apps, videos, and interactive platforms (Kukulska-Hulme, 2020; Nugroho & Mutiara ningrum, 2020). On the other hand, many teachers continue to focus on traditional approaches that emphasize grammar, structure, and the four basic language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening), which may not fully engage or motivate learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This difference in perspectives can become a major obstacle if not identified and addressed through appropriate instructional strategies. Therefore, it is important to conduct a comparative analysis of students' and teachers' needs in English learning to develop more relevant, responsive, and effective teaching approaches (Graves, 2000; Nation & Macalister, 2010).

This research was conducted in three schools with different characteristics SMKN 1 Dampal Selatan, SMA Negeri 1 Dampal Selatan, and MA Al-Ittihad DDI Soni to gain broader and deeper insights into the similarities and differences in English learning needs from both perspectives. The findings are expected to serve as valuable input for curriculum development, instructional innovation, and education policy reform that truly meet students' needs (Brown, 2016; Richards, 2017). In addition to pedagogical challenges and infrastructural limitations, social and cultural factors also influence students' English learning experiences. Students in rural areas often suffer from low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and limited exposure to authentic English usage (Tiono & Yuwono, 2008; Suprpto, 2020). These psychological and environmental barriers can hinder students from actively participating in class and discourage them from using English outside the school environment. Teachers, in turn, face difficulties in developing students' communicative competence when learners experience anxiety, peer pressure, or a lack of motivation (Horwitz et al., 1986). As a result, many students complete their secondary education without having acquired adequate English proficiency, despite years of formal instruction.

Furthermore, national education policies such as the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum (K13) and the more recent Merdeka Curriculum are designed to

promote student-centered learning and 21st-century skills (Kemendikbud, 2017; Kemendikbudristek, 2022). However, the success of these curricula heavily depends on the ability of schools and teachers to adapt them to local contexts. In many cases, the absence of systematic needs analysis has created a gap between the intended goals of the curriculum and classroom practices (Graves, 2000; Nation & Macalister, 2010). By identifying the real needs and preferences of both students and teachers, this study aims to offer valuable insights to help align curriculum implementation with actual learning conditions and improve the quality of English language education, particularly in regions that are still limited in resources.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

English language learning at the secondary school level plays a strategic role in preparing students to face global challenges, especially in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. As Richards (2015) and Schwab (2016) argue, English proficiency is no longer solely for academic purposes but has become a crucial skill for competing in the workforce. Therefore, English language curricula must balance the mastery of the four basic skills with practical contexts relevant to students' diverse educational pathways, including general high schools (SMA), vocational schools (SMK), and Islamic high schools (MA).

One of the main focuses in needs analysis is differentiating between students' academic and non-academic needs. Brown (2001) and Nation & Macalister (2010) emphasize the importance of comprehensive needs analysis to design appropriate teaching materials, learning strategies, and assessments. Without systematic needs analysis, there is a risk of a disconnect between curricular goals and classroom implementation, as highlighted by Graves (2000). Previous studies have shown persistent differences in perceptions between teachers and students regarding learning priorities. Richards & Rodgers (2014) note that teachers tend to prioritize grammatical mastery and structural aspects of language, whereas students often prefer contextual, technology-enhanced learning. Kukulska-Hulme (2020) also found that mobile learning tools can increase students' motivation by providing flexible and accessible resources aligned with their daily habits.

In the Indonesian context, especially in rural areas, infrastructural and socio-cultural factors still pose significant challenges to effective English language learning. Studies by Yusuf et al. (2019) and Hamid & Honan (2020) reveal that limited facilities, poor internet access, and lack of innovative teaching media hinder optimal learning outcomes. Moreover, low self-confidence and limited exposure to authentic English usage further reduce students' willingness to practice the language (Tiono & Yuwono, 2008; Suprpto, 2020). Motivation and environmental support are critical non-academic factors influencing students' language learning success. Dörnyei (2001) and Horwitz et al. (1986) highlight that language anxiety can prevent students from participating actively in class activities. Graham et al. (2011) also stress the need for strong parental and school support systems to reinforce students' confidence and interest in English.

National education policies such as the 2013 Curriculum (K13) and the more recent Merdeka Curriculum were designed to foster student-centered learning and 21st-century skills (Kemendikbud, 2017; Kemendikbudristek, 2022). However, the effective implementation of these policies depends on how well schools and teachers can adapt them to local contexts and actual learner needs (Graves, 2000; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Innovative strategies have been proposed to bridge the gap between students' expectations and teachers' approaches. Project-Based Learning (PBL), for instance, has been shown to enhance student engagement through collaborative, real-world tasks (Beckett & Slater, 2005; Bell, 2010). Similarly, digital storytelling (Robin, 2008) is suggested as an engaging method to improve students' speaking skills and boost their confidence. The literature highlights the urgent need for an adaptive, contextual, and technology-integrated English language learning model. Effective collaboration among teachers, students, schools, and families is key to creating a supportive and motivating learning environment. These insights reinforce the importance of aligning curriculum and instructional strategies with the real needs of students to better prepare them for the demands of the 21st century (Richards, 2015; Harmer, 2015; OECD, 2018).

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Sample**

This study employs a quantitative approach with a descriptive design to provide an objective overview of English learning needs based on numerical data collected from respondents. This design allows the researcher to measure and analyze patterns in students' and teachers' perceptions using statistical methods (Creswell, 2012; Sugiyono, 2019). The research sample consists of 48 students and 3 English teachers selected from three different schools: 11 students and 1 teacher from SMKN 1 Dampal Selatan, 20 students and 1 teacher from SMA Negeri 1 Dampal Selatan, and 17 students and 1 teacher from MA Al-Ittihad DDI Soni. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, which involves selecting participants based on specific criteria in this case, their active participation in English learning and their ability to provide accurate responses to the research instruments (Etikan et al., 2016; Sugiyono, 2019).

### **Instruments and Procedures**

The primary data collection tool used in this research is a closed-ended questionnaire with a Likert scale format. The questionnaire was developed based on theoretical indicators that include both academic needs such as speaking, listening, reading, writing skills, and vocabulary mastery and non-academic needs, such as motivation, self-confidence, and environmental support (Brown, 2001; Sugiyono, 2019). In addition, the instrument contains several items designed to gather students' perceptions of learning media and teaching methods used in their classrooms. A similar, adapted version of the questionnaire was also administered

to the teachers to capture their perspectives on the same indicators, ensuring a comparative understanding between student and teacher views.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including the calculation of percentages, frequencies, and mean scores for each questionnaire item. This method was chosen to identify patterns and provide a comprehensive description of the students' and teachers' responses (Creswell, 2012; Arikunto, 2013). The analysis was conducted to determine the degree of alignment or discrepancy between students' learning needs and the instructional focus perceived by teachers. The findings from this analysis are expected to contribute valuable insights for curriculum development, the selection of effective teaching strategies, and the overall enhancement of English language education quality in the participating schools (Richards, 2017; Brown, 2016).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this study provide a detailed overview of the English learning needs and perceptions of students and teachers across three schools: SMKN 1 Dampal Selatan, SMA Negeri 1 Dampal Selatan, and MA Al-Ittihad DDI Soni. The data were collected through questionnaires and focused on both academic and non-academic aspects of English learning.

At MA Al-Ittihad DDI Soni, a significant portion of students approximately 52.9% reported challenges in vocabulary acquisition. Many students expressed difficulty in recalling and using appropriate vocabulary during speaking and writing tasks. This limited vocabulary was often linked to problems in expressing their thoughts clearly and confidently. Additionally, many students admitted feeling nervous or insecure when asked to speak in English during classroom activities. They often hesitated to participate in discussions or answer questions orally, fearing they would make mistakes or be embarrassed in front of their peers.

At SMA Negeri 1 Dampal Selatan, students demonstrated a strong preference for technology-based learning tools. According to the responses, many students found it easier and more enjoyable to study English using digital media such as YouTube videos, mobile learning applications, and online quizzes. These platforms were considered more engaging and accessible than traditional printed textbooks. Despite their interest in learning, some students reported a reluctance to speak English in class due to concerns about being laughed at or corrected harshly by peers. This concern created a barrier that limited their willingness to take part in speaking activities or group tasks.

Students at SMKN 1 Dampal Selatan emphasized the importance of making English learning relevant to their vocational and professional interests. They expressed a

clear desire for learning materials that included job-related scenarios, such as handling customer interactions, reading manuals, writing reports, and understanding technical vocabulary related to their fields. The students felt that English should not be treated as a general academic subject but rather as a practical tool that supports their future employment opportunities. Furthermore, students from this school expressed a need for more flexible and adaptive learning approaches that cater to different learning speeds and preferences. Some students mentioned that they found it difficult to keep up with fast-paced lessons and needed more personalized guidance.

Across all three schools, the English teachers tended to prioritize grammatical accuracy, sentence construction, and formal writing. Their instruction generally focused on structured exercises, such as completing grammar drills and writing short texts. Teachers explained that their approach was aimed at helping students master the fundamentals of English, which they viewed as essential for further language development. However, there was limited use of interactive or communicative methods in their classrooms. Although teachers were aware of students' interest in digital learning tools, many admitted facing challenges such as lack of training, limited access to resources, and difficulties in integrating technology into existing lesson plans.

In addition to academic factors, the study also revealed several non-academic challenges. Students from all schools pointed to low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and lack of motivation as major obstacles in learning English. In some cases, students said they avoided speaking or writing in English altogether because they lacked confidence in their abilities. These feelings were particularly strong among students who had limited exposure to English outside of school. Teachers also noted that external support for English learning was often lacking. Many reported that parental involvement in students' learning was minimal, and some families were not aware of the importance of supporting English education at home. In addition, schools were limited in their ability to provide extracurricular English programs, clubs, or additional practice sessions due to time constraints and resource limitations.

Despite these challenges, there was one area of common ground between students and teachers: both groups agreed on the potential benefits of using technology to support English learning. However, their expectations differed. Students looked for interactive, fun, and engaging ways to learn English using technology, while teachers primarily saw technology as a tool to reinforce traditional instruction, such as using PowerPoint presentations or showing videos occasionally. This difference in expectations highlighted a gap in how technology is implemented and experienced in the classroom.

Overall, the results indicate a gap between students' expectations for engaging, practical, and supportive English learning experiences, and the more traditional, grammar-focused instruction currently delivered by teachers. Additionally, both

internal factors (like confidence and motivation) and external factors (like family support and school resources) play a significant role in shaping students' English learning outcomes across the three schools.

The findings of this study demonstrate a clear divergence between students' and teachers' perceptions of English learning needs across the three schools—SMKN 1 Dampal Selatan, SMA Negeri 1 Dampal Selatan, and MA Al-Ittihad DDI Soni. While both parties share the common goal of improving English proficiency, their priorities and expectations differ significantly, which reflects a broader challenge in aligning instructional practices with learners' actual needs.

Students across all schools expressed a strong desire for practical and communicative language skills, particularly in vocabulary and speaking. This supports the idea that learners, especially in rural and vocational contexts, value English as a functional tool for real-life situations, rather than as an abstract academic subject. Their preference for technology-based learning, such as YouTube videos, digital quizzes, and mobile applications, is in line with previous research emphasizing the motivational power of multimedia and mobile-assisted language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2011; Kukulska-Hulme, 2020). These platforms provide flexible, accessible, and engaging ways for students to interact with English beyond traditional classroom boundaries.

In contrast, teachers' focus remains rooted in traditional elements, such as grammar mastery, sentence structure, and reading comprehension. While these components are undeniably important for developing a solid linguistic foundation, they do not always address the communicative and contextual needs emphasized by students. This misalignment echoes the concerns raised by Richards & Rodgers (2014) regarding the potential gap between curriculum goals and learner expectations. To close this gap, a more balanced approach is needed—one that integrates both form-focused instruction and real-world language use, as proposed in communicative and task-based language teaching frameworks.

Another significant finding is the influence of non-academic factors on students' learning engagement. Many students reported experiencing low self-confidence, fear of peer judgment, and limited environmental support, all of which can hinder classroom participation and language acquisition. These psychological barriers have long been recognized as critical in second language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; Dörnyei, 2001). As such, teachers and schools must foster a more supportive and inclusive classroom climate, where students feel safe to take risks, make mistakes, and use English without fear of embarrassment. The results also highlight the unique needs of vocational students at SMKN 1 Dampal Selatan, who emphasized the importance of English for workplace communication. This aligns with the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which advocate for context-specific instruction tailored to students' professional goals (Basturkmen, 2010; Long, 2005). Teachers should consider integrating ESP elements, such as

role-plays, simulations, and task-based activities related to industry-specific scenarios, to make learning more relevant and meaningful for these students.

In addition, both teachers and students acknowledged the importance of technology in English learning, but their interpretations varied. Students favored interactive and communicative uses, while teachers tended to view technology as a supplementary tool for delivering conventional content. This difference calls for professional development programs to help teachers effectively integrate digital tools into their pedagogy—not just as a replacement for textbooks, but as a medium to facilitate communication, collaboration, and creativity. Lastly, the lack of external support, including limited parental involvement and extracurricular activities, emerged as a shared concern. Research by Epstein (2001) and Graham et al. (2011) underscores the importance of family and community engagement in promoting student success. To address this, schools should implement outreach programs that involve parents, provide accessible learning resources, and encourage after-school English activities that reinforce classroom learning.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that there is a clear gap between students' and teachers' perceptions of English learning needs across the three schools involved. Students generally expect English learning to be practical, interactive, and relevant to their daily lives and future careers. They show strong interest in digital learning tools and prefer activities that help them build confidence, especially in speaking and vocabulary. In contrast, teachers tend to focus more on grammar, sentence structure, and writing accuracy. Their teaching methods are still largely traditional and less responsive to students' individual preferences and current learning trends. While teachers acknowledge the importance of technology and motivation, they often face challenges in applying these elements effectively in the classroom. The study also highlights several non-academic barriers, such as low self-confidence, fear of peer judgment, and lack of support from the home and school environment. These factors significantly affect students' willingness to participate and engage actively in the learning process. To improve the quality of English learning, it is important to bridge the gap between what students need and what teachers provide. This includes adjusting teaching strategies, incorporating more relevant content, using digital tools more effectively, and creating a more supportive learning environment. By doing so, schools can better prepare students to use English confidently and meaningfully in both academic and real-world contexts.

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