

---

**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Mapping the Needs of Foreign Language Skills for Vocational Students Based on Industrial Demands

Lenggahing Saputri<sup>1</sup> ✉ Maharani Ratna<sup>2</sup> and Chisbiya Latifa<sup>3</sup>

<sup>123</sup>*Vocational Collage, Diponegoro University, Indonesia*

**Corresponding Author:** Lenggahing Saputri, **E-mail:** [lenggahingasri@live.undip.ac.id](mailto:lenggahingasri@live.undip.ac.id)

---

**| ABSTRACT**

A current imperative for vocational education is to be highly responsive to industrial demand. The Indonesian government requires a link and match between vocational curriculum with industrial demands. The vocational college should collect and classify the industrial demands and implement them in its curriculum designs. This study aims at mapping the need for foreign language skills for vocational students based on industrial demand. The data were collected through a survey conducted on eight multinational companies in Indonesia. The result of the study showed that the industries in Indonesia, especially multinational companies, require their applicants to have English certifications such as TOEFL and TOEIC. They also expect their applicants to have good English-speaking skills and good English business correspondence skills. The minimum scores that should be had by the applicants are 450 for TOEFL and 550 for TOEIC. Furthermore, multinational companies usually do an English interview to measure the ability of the applicant's English-speaking skills. Moreover, multinational companies also ask their applicants to write or reply to an English email to measure the ability of the applicant's English business correspondence skills. Therefore, vocational students should have good scores on TOEFL and TOEIC, good English-speaking skills, and good English business correspondence skills in order to become prospective applicants for industries in Indonesia, especially multinational companies.

**| KEYWORDS**

Vocational, Foreign Language, TOEFL, TOEIC, Skill, Industry

**| ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 11 May 2023

**PUBLISHED:** 15 May 2023

**DOI:** 10.32996/jeltal.2023.5.2.15

---

### 1. Introduction

A current imperative for vocational education is to be highly responsive to industrial demand. The Indonesian government requires a link and match between vocational curriculum with industrial demands (Billett, 2000). The vocational college should collect and classify the industrial demands and implement them in their curriculum designs (Kashipar et al. I, 2009). There are so many big industries in Indonesia that consist of national and multinational companies such as HM Sampoerna, Djarum, Astra, Unilever, Maybank, Marriot International, etc. Vocational graduates are expected to work in national and multinational companies in Indonesia.

Multinational companies require their workers to have good foreign language skills, especially English as an international language. They ask the applicants to have English proficiency test certificates such as TOEFL or TOEIC. TOEFL, which stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language, is a standardized test to measure the English language ability of non-native speakers (Phillips, 2001). There are three parts of TOEFL, namely listening comprehension, structure and written expression and reading comprehension (Phillips, 2001). On the other hand, TOEIC, which stands for Test of English for International Communication, is an international standardized test of English language proficiency for non-native speakers. It is intentionally designed to measure the everyday English skills of people working in an international environment (Talcott & Tullis, 2007). There are two parts of TOEIC, namely, listening comprehension and reading comprehension (Talcott & Tullis, 2007). Because TOEFL or TOEIC test does not cover speaking and

writing skills tests, it is not able to measure the ability of someone's speaking and writing skill. Therefore, multinational companies usually do an English interview to measure the applicants' speaking skills. They also ask the applicants to reply to an English email to measure the applicants' writing skills.

Some related investigations about the link and match between vocational curriculum and industrial demand have been conducted by other researchers. Billet (2000) conducted research which focused on defining the demand side of vocational education and training. His findings described that the need for vocational education to respond to demand-side factors had become a key policy goal for vocational education in Australia (Billett, 2000). The other research conducted by Dayuan is focused on an industrial structure that determines the education structure. His findings showed that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) structural change should reflect industrial structural changes (Asian Development Bank, 2014). Different from the previous study, which focused on the technical skills that should be mastered by vocational graduates based on industrial demands, this study aims at mapping the needs of foreign language skills for vocational students based on industrial demand.

## 2. Methods

It is essential to apply a proper research method in order to attain research objectives. Since the present study was focused on describing the need for foreign language skills for vocational students based on industrial demand, a descriptive research method was appropriate to be employed in this study (Gall & Borg, 2007) (Nassaji, 2015). The goal of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics (Nassaji, 2015). This research is more concerned with what rather than how or why something has happened. Therefore, observation and survey tools are often used to gather data (Brayan, 2018). In such research, the data may be collected qualitatively, but it is often analyzed quantitatively, using frequencies, percentages, averages, or other statistical analyses to determine relationships (Brayan, 2018).

The data in this research were gathered from a survey using a questionnaire in the form of Google Forms starting from 4<sup>th</sup> April to 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022. The survey was conducted at eight national and multinational companies in Indonesia. The industry is engaged in various fields, including heavy equipment, energy, electronics, etc. The subjects of this survey are the human resources department staff that are responsible for the recruitment process in their companies.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Foreign Language Skills

Vocational graduates are expected to work in national and multinational companies in Indonesia. Multinational companies require their workers to have good foreign language skills, especially English as an international language. English consists of four languages skill, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and reading are also known as receptive skills because when students listen and read, they receive the language and decode the meaning to understand the message; while speaking and writing are also known as productive skills because the students use the language that they have acquired and produce a message through speech or written text that they want others to understand (David, 2003).

Multinational companies usually ask applicants to have English proficiency test certificates such as TOEFL or TOEIC. TOEFL, which stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language, is a standardized test to measure the English language ability of non-native speakers. There are three parts to TOEFL (Phillips, 2001). The first part is listening comprehension. This section is intended to "measure the ability to understand spoken English." Test-takers are given 30-40 minutes to answer 50 questions. The questions in this section are all multiple choice, and they are based on audio recordings of conversations and lectures. Correct answers are converted to a scaled listening comprehension section score of 31 to 68 (Phillips, 2001).

The second part is structure and written expression. This section measures the ability to recognize language appropriate for standard written English," and it covers 40 questions in 25 minutes. Structure and written expression questions are also multiple choice. Two types of exercises are included: questions in which test-takers must complete sentences with the best word choice and questions that require test-takers to choose which underlined word or phrase must be changed in order to correct the given sentence. Scaled structure and written expression scores are reported from 31 to 68 (Phillips, 2001).

The last part is reading comprehension. This section is designed to measure "the ability to understand non-technical reading material." Students are allowed 55 minutes to answer 50 multiple-choice questions on reading passages intended for non-specialists. Questions ask about information stated or implied in reading passages and the meaning of specific words or phrases. The scoring scale for PBT reading comprehension ranges from 31 to 67 (Phillips, 2001).

On the other hand, TOEIC, which stands for Test of English for International Communication, is an international standardized test of English language proficiency for non-native speakers. It is intentionally designed to measure the everyday English skills of people working in an international environment. There are two parts of TOEIC (Talcott & Tullis, 2007). The first one is listening

comprehension. This section tests how well test takers understand spoken English. Test takers are going to listen to short passages in English and answer 100 questions in 45 minutes. The Audio features 4 accents: American, Canadian, British and Australian. The second part is reading comprehension. This section tests how well test takers understand written English. Test takers are going to read passages and answer 100 questions in 75 minutes. The passages represent real-world workplace communications (Talcott & Tullis, 2007).

TOEFL or TOEIC test does not cover speaking and writing skill tests; it is not able to measure the ability of someone's speaking and writing skill. Therefore, multinational companies usually do an English interview to measure the applicants' speaking skills. They also ask the applicants to reply to an English email to measure the applicants' writing skills.

### **3.2 The Survey Results**

The following are the results of a survey that was conducted at eight national and multinational companies in Indonesia through the questionnaire in the form of Google Forms:

1. Do You know about the types of English Language Proficiency Tests?  
In this question, 100% of respondents answered that they knew about the types of tests to measure English language skills.
2. If "yes", what types of tests do you know?  
Through these questions, 100% of respondents answered that they knew TOEFL. Meanwhile, 77.5% of respondents know about TOEIC.
3. Do You know the purpose of each type of test above?  
Based on the answers given to the questionnaire, it can be concluded that 34% of respondents answered they did not know, while the remaining 66% answered they knew.
4. Do you require applicants to attach a certificate of English language proficiency test when applying for a job at your company?  
In the question above, 89% of respondents answered "yes," while 11% answered "no."
5. If "Yes," what type of certificate should be attached?  
51% of respondents answered that the certificate that must be attached when applying for a job at their company is TOEFL, 22% answered TOEIC, and 6% answered TOEFL and TOEIC. The rest answered that the certificate does not need to be attached.
6. How much is the minimum score that applicants must have? (Example: TOEFL 450)  
In this question, 62% of respondents answered that applicants must have a minimum score of 450 on their TOEFL certificate, and 16% of respondents answered that applicants must have a minimum score of 400 on their TOEFL certificate. At the same time, the remaining 22% answered that applicants must have a minimum score of 550 on their TOEIC certificate.
7. Based on your experience, is there any appropriateness between the certificate and the employee's English language skills?  
Based on these questions, 75% of employees who attach a certificate of English language proficiency have equivalent English language skills at work. At the same time, 25% feel that the English language proficiency certificate owned by the applicant is not by his ability at work.
8. How long do you think an employee needs to renew a certificate?  
In this question, 25% of respondents answered that they did not know when an employee should renew their Japanese language proficiency certificate. Meanwhile, the remaining 75% answered that the certificate should be renewed every 2-3 years.
9. What foreign language skills do You think employees should improve, even though they already have an English proficiency certificate?  
67.5% of respondents answered that every employee should have good English-speaking skills, while 23.5% of respondents answered that every employee should have good English business correspondence.
10. Do You require your employees to be fluent in a foreign language other than English?  
In this question, 32.5% of respondents answered "yes," while the remaining 67.5% answered "no."
11. If "yes," what foreign languages should they be proficient in?  
Continuing the previous question, 25% answered that Japanese is the second foreign language that should be mastered by the employees. In comparison, 75% answered that mastering other foreign languages besides English is not mandatory but highly recommended.
12. What soft skills would you like your employees to have besides foreign language mastery?  
In addition, the questionnaire also asked questions about the soft skills the industry wants for its employees. In this question, respondents answered that being able to work in a team and having high integrity are the most important things; this is evidenced by the high number of respondents' answers, each of which is 100%. On the other hand, being able to work under pressure, having problem-solving skills, and being able to innovate each has 87.5%. In addition, the ability to lead has a high percentage of 75%.

### 3.3 Mapping the Needs of Foreign Language Skills for Vocational Students

Based on the survey results, it can be described that the multinational companies in Indonesia know about English language proficiency tests such as TOEFL and TOEIC, which can measure the English language ability of non-native speakers. Most of them require their applicants to have TOEFL or TOEIC certificate. The standard scores required are 450 for TOEFL and 550 for TOEIC.

Furthermore, multinational companies also highly recommend their applicants and their employees to have good English-speaking skills, especially communication skills. The ability to effectively communicate with other people is an important skill. Through communication, people reach some understanding of each other, learn to like each other, influence one another, build trust, and learn more about themselves and how people perceive them (Sweeney, 2003). People who communicate effectively know how to interact with others flexibly, skillfully, and responsibly, but without sacrificing their own needs and integrity (Sweeney, 2003). Therefore, employees with good English communication skills are expected to have effective communication with the company's foreign partners, such as attending English meetings, doing English negotiations and giving English presentations.

Moreover, multinational companies also require their applicants and their employees to have good English business correspondence skills. If they have good English business correspondence skills, they will become successful members of an office team because they will know how to write clear and effective letters, faxes, memos, and e-mails in English (Lougheed, 2003).

In addition, it can be concluded that the industry's needs for prospective employees are that the industry wants employees to have English language certification with a good standard score; the industry wants prospective employees to have a good English-speaking skill and good English business correspondence skills, and the industry wants employees to master English as a companion language, as well as to have other soft skills, especially those related to the ability to work in a team and have integrity.

### 4. Conclusion

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the industries in Indonesia, especially multinational companies, require their applicants to have English certifications such as TOEFL and TOEIC. They also expect their applicants to have good English-speaking skills and good English business correspondence skills. The minimum scores that should be had by the applicants are 450 for TOEFL and 550 for TOEIC. Furthermore, multinational companies usually do an English interview to measure the ability of the applicant's English-speaking skills. Moreover, multinational companies also ask their applicants to write or reply to an English email to measure the ability of the applicant's English business correspondence skills. Therefore, vocational students should have good scores on TOEFL and TOEIC, good English-speaking skills, and good English business correspondence skills in order to become prospective applicants for industries in Indonesia, especially multinational companies.

**Funding:** This research was funded by Vocational School Diponegoro University, grant number XXX and The APC was funded by Vocational School Diponegoro University.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Publisher's Note:** All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

### References

- [1] Asian Development Bank. (2014). *Sustainable Vocational Training Toward Industrial Upgrading and Economic Transformation: A Knowledge Sharing Experience*. Asian Development Bank.
- [2] Brayan, V. S., Neale, S., & Craig, M. (2018). Perspective: The Qualitative Descriptive Approach in International Comparative Studies: Using Online Qualitative Surveys.
- [3] Gall, M.D., Gall, J.P., & Borg, W.R. (2007). *Educational research: An introduction* (8th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- [4] Kasipar, C., Van Tien, M., Lim, S., Phuong, P., Huy, P., Schnarr, A., & Bünning, F. (2009). Linking Vocational Training with the Enterprises-Asian Perspectives. *Bonn (InWEnt)*.
- [5] Lougheed, L. (2003). *Business Correspondence: A Guide to Everyday Writing: Intermediate*. PEARSON EDUCATION KOREA.
- [6] Nassaji, H. (2015). Qualitative and descriptive research: Data type versus data analysis. *Language teaching research*, 19(2), 129-132.
- [7] Nunan, D. (2003). *Practical English Language Teaching*. New York: The McGraw Hill.
- [8] Phillips, D. (2001). *Longman introductory course for the TOEFL test*. Longman.
- [9] Stephen Billett (2000) Defining the demand side of vocational education and training: industry, enterprises, individuals and regions, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 52:1, 5-31, DOI: 10.1080/13636820000200104
- [10] Sweeney, S. (2003). *English for Business Communication Teacher's Book*. Cambridge University Press.
- [11] Talcott, C., & Tullis, G. (2007). *Target Score Teacher's Book: A Communicative Course for TOEIC® Test Preparation* (Vol. 3). Cambridge University Press.