


Concept Paper

Perspectivization on the Relevance of Vocational English: Prospect for Career Advancement¹

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Abstract: Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) programs are designed for learners who seek career advancement by integrating language education with the development of essential soft skills. This paper proposes that a learner-centered approach recognizes the unique knowledge and experiences of each individual, which promotes engagement and effective learning. VESL emphasizes the importance of language acquisition, the use of authentic materials, and active language practice, all of which enable learners to succeed in the changing job market and enhance global connections. By combining vocational skills with language proficiency, VESL equips individuals to navigate workplace environments confidently and excel in diverse career paths. Effective adult vocational ESL programs take into account cognitive knowledge, content knowledge, English language proficiency, and personality traits, all of which contribute to learners' success. The implementation of VESL empowers individuals to thrive professionally while embracing linguistic diversity and fostering social change. Ultimately, VESL represents a specialized approach that equips learners with both language skills and essential soft skills necessary for career advancement. By addressing cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills, VESL programs prepare individuals for success across various professional and personal contexts. The learner-centered approach of VESL emphasizes that students must incorporate individual experiences and knowledge, thereby enhancing engagement and facilitating effective learning.

Keywords: adult education; education competencies; second language programs; staff development; vocational education

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1. Introduction

Language is a system of signals that can be sent through voice sounds, gestures, or written symbols that communicate information (Fannoush, 2023). In the context of career advancement, language serves as a vital tool for effective communication, allowing individuals to express their ideas, skills, and qualifications to potential employers or colleagues. Mastering language proficiency enhances one's ability to convey meaning clearly, fostering better networking, collaboration, and overall professional growth opportunities (Mingoy & Estremera, 2025).

In effect, in today's globalized market, vocational English is still very important and helps workers all around the world advance their careers (Kholifah et al., 2024). Likewise, learning vocational English gives people the useful communication skills they need to be competitive in the business, since industries increasingly demand expertise in language abilities particular to the industry, such as drafting technical reports, negotiating with clients, and working in cross-cultural teams.

Due to improved employability and remote work options, studies show that fluent English speakers in non-native contexts make up to 30-80% more money, especially in global industries like technology, commerce, and healthcare. This skill, in the long run, promotes

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worldwide networking, access to cutting-edge training materials, and flexibility in fast-paced employment markets where English is essential for smooth cross-border communication in remote and hybrid professions. Additionally, vocational English develops soft skills like problem-solving and cultural sensitivity, preparing students for advancement and business endeavors (Leichsenring et al., 2015; Estremera & Sevilla, 2025). It is essential for long-term professional advancement in areas like the Philippines, where BPO growth and tourism recovery are intimately correlated with upward mobility.

In the twenty-first century, the English language is widely used as a global lingua franca (Leichsenring et al., 2015; Estremera & Sevilla, 2025). Based on Kachru's (1986) model of world English, he segregated English speakers into three groups: inner, outer, and expanding circle. The author also mentioned that this phenomenon is rooted in the historical, cultural, and economic influence of English-speaking countries. This prominence has established that English has been accepted as a second language among the speakers of thousands of different languages, playing a significant role in diplomacy, trade, education, and technology (Lauta & Estremera, 2025; Rao, 2019). Its adoption as a second language in numerous countries further strengthens global connections and economic opportunities, hence being recognized as an official language in 67 different countries (Assi, 2022; Jalmasco & Estremera, 2025). As a result, countries incorporate English into their curriculum, enabling students to develop into globally competitive citizens and workers. Correspondingly, English has migrated around the professional world, particularly in multinational settings. Simply, good communication skills in the language are undeniably essential for the country's economy.

2. Vocational English as a Second Language

Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) is a specialized approach to English language education tailored to teaching communicative skills to prepare learning individuals, predominantly persons of limited English proficiency, for a particular vocation, including hotels, hospitals, construction, and manufacturing (Gersalia & Estremera, 2025; Guamos & Estremera, 2025). It aims to equip them with the necessary language skills to effectively interact with English-speaking customers and colleagues, complete job applications, and comprehend manuals and catalogues (Estremera, 2017a; Estremera, 2017b). VESL serves as a powerful tool for career advancement rather than a pursuit for leisure, as emphasized by Crandall (1985). In the evolving job market, employers prioritize not only occupation-specific expertise but also the ability to communicate proficiently in specialized forms of English (Estremera, 2023).

As a result, there is a growing demand for VESL courses, where language education is combined with instruction in job-specific skills. For individuals enrolling in VESL programs, mastering a second language becomes a means of securing better employment opportunities and achieving professional growth. According to Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991), the primary goal of VESL is to enable learners to successfully participate in training programs and excel in job performance within their chosen fields. This is achieved by focusing on the language demands prevalent in various occupations. For example, VESL courses may train clerical workers to efficiently order supplies or handle phone messages, providing them with the language tools crucial for seamless job execution (Mrowicki, 1983). Opportunity to improve VESL skills prepares individuals to confidently navigate real-life scenarios in the work setting. Whether it be in the hospitality industry, medical settings, construction sites, or manufacturing plants, VESL equips learners with the language competence needed to thrive in their chosen vocations. Ultimately, VESL plays a significant role in bridging language gaps, empowering limited English proficient individuals to fully participate in different career fields (Estremera, 2024a).

3. Program Models of VESL

Depending on the specific needs and goals of the learners and the industries they are targeting, VEST programs can accommodate the different skills, educational levels, English proficiency levels, and vocational goals of students. As cited by Buchanan (1990), there are four approaches to teaching English to second language learners. In addition, Ramirez (2023) and Jasemi et al. (2025) considered a scientific problem and identified the following:

The first one, the ESL approach, focuses on teaching English in a general context, with some emphasis on employment-related concepts. Classes typically include grammar, vocabulary, and reading and writing skills. However, some classes may also focus on specific

job skills, such as those listed in the CASAS life skills competencies list (Bico & Estremera, 2023).

The vocational approach includes programs that take place in a vocational setting. Students in these programs receive training in specific occupations, as well as language skills related to a certain occupation. Specialized ESL and cross-cultural training may also be provided.

The work experience approach combines workplace experience with classwork in VESL and sometimes with vocational skills training. Work experience programs typically demand extensive time commitments, but they provide support during the transition from training to employment. Students gain local job experience and a reference, which can help them break the cycle of no experience/no job. Prospective employers can also benefit from knowing trainees' work abilities and learning about the cultural backgrounds of their future employees before hiring them.

And the fourth approach, that is titled the workplace approach, focuses on programs that take place at a particular job site, stressing language skills related to specific job areas. Emphasis is placed on job functions, occupational knowledge, career development, and organizational culture. Classes may be offered by companies, community colleges, adult education programs, and trade unions.

The author, therefore, contends that the most effective method for teaching English to second language learners in an employment and vocational context is contingent upon the individual needs of the learners and the specific objectives of the program. Nonetheless, he proposes that the work experience approach is generally the most beneficial for the majority of learners. In the United States, the adult education sector is experiencing the development of models that integrate fundamental skills with occupation-specific training to meet evolving demands. These programs now work in partnership with employers, workforce board members, and colleges to establish integrated services that promote a seamless transition from training to career pathways (Biney, 2023; Estremera, 2023).

4. Program Overview

In VESL classes, participants are taught appropriate strategies for interacting with employers, co-workers, and customers, including how to initiate, interrupt, respond, and end conversations. Emphasizing the importance of asking for clarification early in the course enables them to acquire the effective skills for seeking more information, clarifying misunderstandings, and requesting repetition without losing critical details (Estremera, 2024b; Mena-Guacas et al., 2025). For example, it was found that the onsite learning format assigns a VESL specialist to identify specific outcomes that need to be accomplished for each group of trainees (Bico & Estremera, 2023). As presented in Figure 1, a VESL approach is created that incorporates certain items.

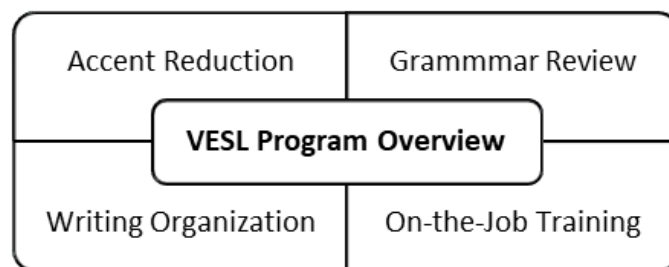


Figure 1. Concepts involved in the VESL program of the employer group.

Accent reduction can be a beneficial method for individuals aiming to enhance their pronunciation and improve communication with native English speakers. Many diverse accent reduction programs are accessible, allowing learners to select one that suits their specific needs and budget.

Engaging in grammar review can help individuals refine their language skills, ensuring they use accurate word forms. Numerous grammar review resources are available online and in libraries, making it convenient for learners to brush up on their grammar knowledge (Estremera & Gonzales, 2025).

Mastering writing organization is crucial for writers as it ensures clarity and coherence in their work. With various organizational patterns to explore, individuals can experiment and

discover the most suitable approach for their writing style (Estremera & Gonzales, 2021).

Emphasizing the value of on-the-job training, this method offers a practical and real-world environment for individuals to acquire new skills and enhance their English language proficiency. Securing a job that provides on-the-job training can be a significant step towards English language improvement and skill development.

5. Primary Competencies Developed in VESL

Holmes et al. (2021) say that competency is the ability to learn well, which can be shown through different traits like knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and behaviors. In the context of VESL, a learner acquires language proficiency and develops essential soft skills vital for success in various areas of life. These soft skills include social, personal, and emotional abilities that are necessary for excelling in the labor market, academic environments, and beyond. As VESL learners improve their communication, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities, they also develop qualities such as adaptability, resilience, and teamwork, which are highly sought after by employers across different industries. As shown in Table 1, the frameworks and standards for soft skills in English are categorized into three groups: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills (Bico & Estremera, 2023).

Table 1. Three categories of “soft skills” based on several frameworks.

Cognitive	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal
Thinking skills	Individual skills	Group skills
Foundation skills (basic reading, writing, and math) for metacognition	Executive functions and social-emotional skills	Communication and customer service
Questioning, creativity, critical thinking, problem, and information use	Professionalism	Sociability and teamwork
Digital literacies		Presentation Skills

6. Characteristic of Successful VESL Programs

The VESL approach is learner-centered, recognizing that learners bring their own knowledge, experiences, and ideas, which influence how they absorb new information and learn. By actively engaging learners in the learning process, VESL enhances retention and serves as a powerful tool for social change and the pursuit of social justice (Dio & Estremera, 2023). As a result, the list of contributing variables to successful adult vocational ESL was generated (figure 2).

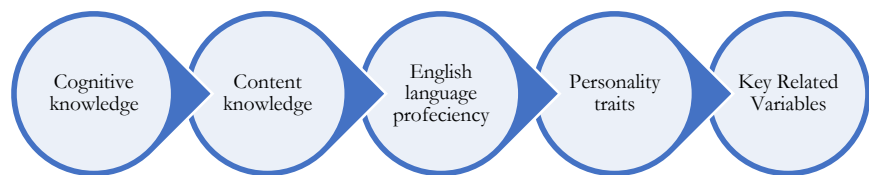


Figure 2. Contributing variables to successful adult vocational ESL.

Its emphasis on language acquisition, authentic materials, and active language use effectively addresses the needs of learners seeking to acquire vocational skills alongside language proficiency. Successful adult vocational ESL programs take into account cognitive knowledge, content knowledge, English language proficiency, and personality traits as key factors contributing to learners’ achievements (Bagasala & Estremera, 2025; Baliwas & Estremera, 2025). By recognizing both intrinsic and instrumental motivation in learners, VESL programs align language learning with specific functions and domains, ensuring relevance and effectiveness for their vocational goals (Bico & Estremera, 2023).

To promote optimal outcomes, the VESL approach provides job counseling, on-the-job training, and continued English classes even after employment. However, it also

acknowledges the necessity for a more efficient ESL-prevocational approach for learners facing urgent financial challenges and seeking immediate employment (Alimova, 2025; Asne & Estremera, 2025). Thus, this paper underscores that vocational English must have been a requirement for students who are about to undertake their on- the- job- trainings to be able to adapt to the new speech community with marked efficiency. It is necessary to equip them with the basics of vocational English communication techniques and structures.

7. Conclusions

This paper aligns mainly its argument with VESL and its contribution to career advancement. These approaches emphasize tailoring English language instruction to meet the specific needs of learners in a particular profession or industry. These fields primarily require identifying the language skills and competencies required for a specific career or profession. It also calls for focusing on the specific language skills, vocabulary, and communication strategies needed for success in a particular field. There is correspondingly a need for the leveraging of real-world materials and scenarios to simulate workplace communication.

In conclusion, VESL is a targeted methodology that equips learners with language proficiency and vital soft skills necessary for career progression. VESL programs equip individuals for success in diverse professional and personal contexts by integrating cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills. The learner-centered VESL approach acknowledges the significance of personal experiences and knowledge, promoting engagement and efficient learning. This program emphasizes job-specific tasks and language pertinent to the learners' professions, including sorting, cleaning, and assembly for factory workers, as well as welding techniques and equipment for welders. The objective of an effective occupation-specific VESL course is to deconstruct the job's language and present it in a manner that facilitates comprehension and execution for students. Thus, this language instruction improves workplace communication skills and fosters critical thinking that advances learners' careers.

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