

EFL Students' Perception of Outcome-Based Education Classroom Practices in the English Education Study Program

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ABSTRACT

This study describes English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' perceptions of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum implementation in the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University, focusing on four dimensions: student-centered learning, classroom activities, lecturer-student interaction, and alignment with intended course learning outcomes (CPMK). Examining students' perceptions is important because their experiences provide direct evidence of how OBE principles are enacted in classroom practices and can reveal aspects of implementation that require improvement. A qualitative descriptive design was employed using in-depth semi-structured interviews with four students from the 2024 cohort who had completed four semesters of OBE-based instruction. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Findings revealed three main themes and one subtheme: clarity of learning objectives provided a structured direction; active participation was structurally facilitated yet constrained by individual factors; and lecturer-student interaction was positive in class but less consistent outside class hours, alongside workload concerns. Overall, participants held favorable perceptions of OBE implementation, although variations in classroom participation, interaction, and workload warrant attention from lecturers and curriculum developers.

Keywords: *Outcome-Based Education, Student Perception, EFL, Higher Education, Thematic Analysis*

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, higher education has increasingly shifted from content-oriented instruction toward Outcome-Based Education (OBE), a framework that places intended learning outcomes at the center of curriculum planning and instructional practice. Spady (1994) conceptualizes OBE as an approach that organizes educational processes around what learners are expected to achieve rather than what teachers are expected to deliver. Similarly, Harden (2007) emphasizes that OBE requires educational programs to define clear and measurable outcomes that guide curriculum content, teaching strategies, learning activities, and assessment. Thus, OBE represents more than a change in curriculum terminology; it requires coherence between what students are expected to achieve and the learning experiences provided to help them achieve those outcomes. This orientation is particularly relevant to higher education because it emphasizes demonstrable competencies and encourages institutions to evaluate educational quality based on students' achievement of intended outcomes.

A central principle of OBE is the formulation of explicit learning outcomes. Learning outcomes describe the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies that students are expected to demonstrate after completing a course or learning process. These outcomes provide a reference for determining appropriate learning activities and assessment procedures. At the course level, intended outcomes should be sufficiently specific to guide both lecturers and students in understanding the expected learning achievements. In this context, OBE also emphasizes student-centered learning, in which students are positioned as

active participants rather than passive recipients of information. Student-centered learning encourages students to engage in discussion, problem solving, collaboration, independent learning, and performance-based activities that enable them to demonstrate the intended outcomes. Consequently, the effectiveness of OBE depends not only on the formulation of learning outcomes but also on whether classroom practices provide students with meaningful opportunities to achieve them.

The principle of constructive alignment further strengthens the relationship among learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment. Biggs & Tang (2009) explain that constructive alignment requires intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks to support one another. In an aligned learning environment, classroom activities should provide opportunities for students to develop the competencies specified in the learning outcomes, while assessment should provide evidence of whether those outcomes have been achieved. Assessment is therefore not merely a final measurement of student performance but an integral component of OBE that informs learning and provides evidence of outcome attainment. Previous research has emphasized the importance of systematic course outcome assessment and the alignment between course outcomes and broader program outcomes in ensuring that OBE functions effectively (Premalatha, 2019). From this perspective, OBE implementation can be understood as a connected process in which learning outcomes, student-centered activities, lecturer support, and assessment work together rather than as separate curricular components.

In Indonesia, the implementation of OBE has been reinforced through national and institutional policies. Permendiktisaintek Nomor 39 Tahun 2025 tentang Penjaminan Mutu Pendidikan Tinggi positions graduate learning outcomes (CPL) as an important reference for curriculum development and quality assurance (Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2025). At the institutional level, Universitas Tadulako (UNTAD) has mandated OBE implementation through Peraturan Rektor UNTAD Nomor 3 Tahun 2024, which incorporates graduate learning outcomes (CPL), course learning outcomes (CPMK), and sub-course learning outcomes (Sub-CPMK) into curriculum implementation (Universitas Tadulako, 2024). These policies require OBE principles to be translated from curriculum documents into actual classroom practices. However, the existence of formal OBE structures does not necessarily guarantee effective implementation. Research in Indonesian higher education has identified challenges related to lecturers' understanding of OBE, formulation of learning outcomes, selection of teaching strategies and materials, assessment practices, workload, and the persistence of teacher-centered approaches (Mufanti et al., 2024). This indicates that the implementation of OBE needs to be examined not only at the policy and curriculum levels but also through the experiences of those directly involved in the learning process.

Within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, OBE is particularly relevant because language learning requires students to demonstrate practical and communicative competencies rather than merely acquire knowledge about language. OBE-oriented EFL instruction therefore requires learning outcomes to be translated into opportunities for students to use English through interaction, discussion, problem solving, presentations, and other communicative activities. Student-centered learning is important in this context because language development depends substantially on students' active participation and opportunities for meaningful language use. Empirical studies have indicated that OBE-based English instruction can support the development of language competencies when learning activities and outcomes are appropriately aligned. For example, Sriyanto et al. (2024) reported that OBE implementation supported the development of English reading, writing, and speaking competencies through structured learning activities and digital learning support. Jaya et al. (2025) also highlighted the importance of aligning OBE implementation with program-level learning outcomes in Indonesian English language education. These findings suggest that OBE can provide a relevant framework for EFL instruction, although its effectiveness depends on how its principles are enacted in students' actual learning experiences.

Students' perceptions are therefore important for evaluating OBE implementation because they provide evidence of how curricular principles are experienced at the classroom level. Although institutional documents may specify learning outcomes, student-centered strategies, classroom activities, and assessment procedures, students' experiences can reveal whether these elements are actually visible and meaningful in everyday learning. Previous studies of OBE in Indonesian higher education have largely focused on curriculum development, institutional implementation, or lecturers' practices, while students' classroom-level experiences remain comparatively underexplored (Chotimah et al., 2025; Gusti et al., 2025; Sabbardi et al., 2025; Susanti et al., 2024). This gap is particularly relevant in EFL programs, where successful OBE implementation requires sustained student participation, meaningful interaction, and opportunities to demonstrate language competencies. Examining students' perceptions can therefore help identify whether OBE principles are reflected in classroom practices and reveal areas that may require further improvement.

Against this background, this study examines EFL students' perceptions of OBE curriculum implementation in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Tadulako. The study focuses on four dimensions that reflect key principles of OBE implementation: student-centered learning, classroom activities, lecturer-student interaction, and the alignment between classroom activities and intended course learning outcomes (CPMK). Specifically, this study aims to (1) describe EFL students' overall perceptions of OBE implementation, (2) explore their perceptions of student-centered learning and classroom activities, and (3) examine their perceptions of lecturer-student interaction and the alignment between classroom activities and CPMK. By centering students' experiences, the study seeks to provide a classroom-level perspective on how OBE is enacted in an Indonesian EFL higher education context and to identify aspects of implementation that may inform lecturers and curriculum developers.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design Creswell & Creswell (2018) to describe and interpret EFL students' perceptions of OBE curriculum implementation as they naturally occur, without manipulation of variables or numerical measurement. Data were analysed using a hybrid deductive-inductive thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2006) six-phase procedure, in which the four OBE dimensions served as a priori deductive categories while specific themes and subthemes were allowed to emerge inductively from participants' accounts.

Participants

The study involved four EFL students (P1-P4) from the 2024 cohort of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Tadulako, selected through purposive sampling Creswell & Creswell (2018) because they had completed four semesters of OBE-based instruction and were therefore well-positioned to provide in-depth perceptions of its implementation. This sample size reflects a deliberate focus on the depth and richness of data rather than breadth, consistent with the principle of information-rich cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Table 1 summarizes participant information.

Table 1. Research Participant Information

Code	Cohort	Semesters Under OBE	Status
P1	2024	4 Semesters	Active
P2	2024	4 Semesters	Active
P3	2024	4 Semesters	Active
P4	2024	4 Semesters	Active

Instrument

Data were collected using an in-depth semi-structured interview guide comprising 14 open-ended questions organized around the four OBE dimensions. The guide was piloted with two EFL students who were not included in the main study, and minor wording adjustments were made based on the pilot results to improve the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted individually, lasted approximately 16–19 minutes per participant, and were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent. All four participants opted to respond in Bahasa Indonesia; the interview transcripts were subsequently translated into English for analysis and reporting. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym code (P1–P4) to protect their anonymity throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Interview data were analyzed following [Braun & Clarke \(2006\)](#) six-phase thematic analysis: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Transcripts were transcribed using a denaturalized approach that preserved the substantive meaning of participants' responses while removing non-substantive fillers. Trustworthiness was addressed through thick description, an audit trail, within-method triangulation across the four participants' accounts, and a reflexivity journal to support confirmability ([Lincoln & Guba, 1985](#)).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of the interview data yielded three main themes and one subtheme, summarized in Table 2 and elaborated below with supporting excerpts translated from Bahasa Indonesia into English.

Table 2. Emerging Themes

Theme	Description	Evidence Across Participants
Clarity of Learning Objectives	Clear CPMK and learning objectives give learning a structured direction.	P1–P3 reported clear explanation from the outset; P4 noted a concept–practice gap.
Active Participation, Structurally Facilitated but Constrained	OBE opens space for participation, yet confidence and uneven opportunity remain barriers.	P1–P3 positive; P2 low confidence; P4 reported uneven, dominated discussions.
Positive Lecturer–Student Interaction, Limited Outside Class	Interaction is good in class but less consistent outside class hours.	P1–P3 positive both settings; P4 positive in class, slow response outside.
Workload and Time Constraints (subtheme)	High assignment volume and limited time reduce depth of understanding.	Raised specifically by P4; not raised by P1–P3.

Theme 1: Clarity of Learning Objectives Supports a Structured Learning Direction

All four participants reported that the clarity of learning objectives communicated by lecturers at the beginning of a course gave their learning process a clear direction. P1 explained that the OBE curriculum was beneficial because lecturers usually explained the learning objectives before starting a lesson, which made learning “more directed.” P4, however, drew a distinction between concept and practice:

“In my opinion, the concept of OBE is actually quite good, but its implementation still needs improvement. I sometimes feel that the learning still feels like the old method, even though it uses OBE terminology.”

P4, translated from Indonesian

This finding directly reflects Spady's (1994) principle of clarity of focus, which holds that curricular and instructional decisions should be based on clearly defined learning outcomes, and is reinforced by [Harden's \(2007\)](#) argument that outcome-based curricula make explicit

"what is to be achieved" before determining how instruction will proceed. It is consistent with Chotimah et al. (2025), who found that clearly articulated learning outcomes helped both lecturers and students align their expectations in an Arabic language and literature program, and with Negara et al. (2024), who linked clearly communicated learning targets to improved perceived quality of higher education. This theme addresses the first research objective, indicating that EFL students' overall perception of OBE implementation at Universitas Tadulako is anchored primarily in how clearly learning objectives and CPMK are communicated.

Theme 2: Active Participation is Structurally Facilitated but Constrained by Individual Factors

P1, P2, and P3 described positive experiences with participation opportunities through discussions, presentations, and question-and-answer sessions, though individual-level barriers also emerged. P2 shared:

"Yes, I once found it difficult, because I lacked confidence when standing in front of the class to speak in public."

P2, translated from Indonesian

P4 raised a more structural concern regarding uneven participation:

"I think the opportunity to be active does exist, and I usually get the chance to participate as well, but in reality, discussions are often dominated by certain students, so participation has not been evenly distributed."

P4, translated from Indonesian

This pattern can be understood through Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, which posits that learning quality depends not merely on the availability of opportunities but on the energy, students actually invest, and through Ajzen's (1991) construct of perceived behavioural control, which suggests that students such as P2 may intend to participate yet be constrained by their perceived capability to do so. P4's account instead points to a classroom-level dynamic rather than a purely individual limitation. These results resonate with Hardiah & Yunita (2025), who found that disparities in student confidence still shaped participation despite increased opportunities under OBE, and with Ningtiyas & Rahmawati (2024), who identified self-confidence and motivation as significant factors in EFL students' classroom engagement. This theme suggests that while OBE-based instruction structurally provides opportunities for student-centered learning, students' actual engagement is also shaped by individual psychological factors and classroom-level dynamics.

Theme 3: Positive Lecturer-Student Interaction within Class, with Limited Accessibility Outside Class

All participants rated interaction with lecturers during class sessions as good and supportive. Even P4, who expressed the most critical views across other themes, confirmed this within the classroom context while noting a limitation outside class hours:

"Regarding my interaction with the lecturer, it is quite good and open when students ask questions during the lesson, but outside of that, the lecturer's response is very slow and sometimes not answered at all."

P4, translated from Indonesian

A related subtheme concerning workload and time constraints emerged specifically from P4's account, who linked assignment volume and limited instructional time to a reduced depth of understanding despite formally meeting the intended learning outcomes:

"I am given the opportunity for independent learning through assignments, but the considerable number of tasks sometimes makes me focus more on completing the tasks rather than truly understanding the material."

P4, translated from Indonesian

These findings can be interpreted through Biggs & Tang (2009) concept of constructive alignment, which holds that meaningful learning requires teaching activities, assessment, and intended outcomes to be coherently aligned and adequately supported by sufficient time and guidance. P4's account of limited accessibility outside class, combined with workload concerns, suggests a partial misalignment between intended outcomes and the practical conditions needed to achieve them. This resonates with Hamid et al. (2025), who observed that

gaps between student perceptions and lecturer rationales often center on workload and sufficiency of guidance, and with Ho & Ha (2025) and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2022), who similarly found that time constraints and workload intensity persisted as concerns even where learning outcomes were generally perceived as achieved. Notably, this critical perspective originated primarily from a single participant, echoing Ma & Jamaludin (2026) mixed-methods finding that a minority of more critical student voices within a generally positive aggregate perception can still provide valuable diagnostic information for curriculum refinement. Taken together, these findings suggest that constructive alignment in the OBE-based EFL classroom at Universitas Tadulako is perceived to be achieved at the level of curriculum design and communication, but its full realization at the level of lived classroom experience remains conditional on adequate instructional time.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that OBE implementation at Universitas Tadulako was generally perceived positively by the participating EFL students, suggesting that its principles were visible in their learning experiences. However, effective OBE implementation extends beyond curriculum design and clearly stated outcomes. Its realization also depends on how consistently students are engaged, supported, and provided with sufficient opportunities and time to achieve intended outcomes. The findings therefore highlight the importance of viewing OBE as an enacted educational process rather than solely as a curricular framework. For lecturers, this implies the need to strengthen inclusive participation, maintain accessible academic support, and balance learning demands with available instructional time. Students can also contribute by engaging actively and seeking support when difficulties arise. These implications should be considered cautiously given the small, purposively selected sample and qualitative design. Future studies could involve more diverse participants and combine student perspectives with classroom observations and lecturers' perspectives to develop a more comprehensive understanding of OBE implementation in EFL higher education.

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