ESP in Practice: A Literature Review of Challenges Faced by Teachers and Learners

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Abstract	
	ESP means teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes. ESP concentrates on giving students the language skills required for efficient communication in specialized fields. This literature review investigates the major instructional challenges faced by educators and learners in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly those related to content knowledge gaps, lack of authentic materials, curriculum alignment, and technological limitations in specialized academic and vocational settings. This review identifies five major challenges: (1) a gap in subject-matter knowledge among ESP instructors, (2) a lack of authentic, field-specific learning materials, (3) learners' struggles with technical language and genre-specific discourse, (4) inadequate needs analysis and curriculum alignment, and (5) technological limitations that hinder digital integration. The findings suggest that many ESP programs fall short due to a lack of institutional support, insufficient teacher training, and weak collaboration between language educators and content experts. To address these challenges, the review recommends interdisciplinary cooperation, the development of contextually relevant resources, continuous needs assessment, and strategic use of educational technology. These steps are essential for improving the relevance and effectiveness of ESP instruction in diverse educational and professional settings.
	Abstrak ESP berarti pengajaran bahasa Inggris untuk tujuan kejuruan atau profesional. ESP berfokus pada pemberian keterampilan bahasa yang dibutuhkan siswa untuk komunikasi yang efisien dalam bidang-bidang khusus. Tinjauan pustaka ini menyelidiki tantangan pengajaran utama yang dihadapi oleh para pendidik dan peserta didik dalam Bahasa Inggris untuk Tujuan

Tertentu (ESP), khususnya yang terkait dengan kesenjangan pengetahuan konten, kurangnya materi autentik, keselarasan kurikulum, dan keterbatasan teknologi dalam lingkungan akademik dan kejuruan khusus. Tinjauan ini mengidentifikasi lima tantangan utama: (1) kesenjangan pengetahuan subjek di antara instruktur ESP, (2) kurangnya materi pembelajaran yang autentik dan khusus bidang, (3) kesulitan peserta didik dengan bahasa teknis dan wacana khusus genre, (4) analisis kebutuhan dan penyelarasan kurikulum yang tidak memadai, dan (5) keterbatasan teknologi yang menghambat integrasi digital. Temuan tersebut menunjukkan bahwa banyak program ESP gagal karena kurangnya dukungan kelembagaan, pelatihan guru yang tidak memadai, dan kolaborasi yang lemah antara pendidik bahasa dan pakar konten. Untuk mengatasi tantangan ini, tinjauan tersebut merekomendasikan kerja sama interdisipliner, pengembangan sumber daya yang relevan secara kontekstual, penilaian kebutuhan berkelanjutan, dan penggunaan teknologi pendidikan yang strategis. Langkah-langkah ini penting untuk meningkatkan relevansi dan efektivitas pengajaran ESP dalam berbagai lingkungan pendidikan dan profesional.

INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has emerged as a crucial element of English language instruction, especially in situations where students want to develop language proficiency relevant to particular academic or professional domains. Daulay, (2021) defined ESP as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes. This definition highlights the goal-oriented nature of ESP, where language instruction is tailored to meet the specific communicative needs of learners in particular disciplines or occupations. In contrast to general English learning, ESP concentrates on giving students the language skills required for efficient communication in specialized fields including commerce, engineering, medical, and agriculture. Therefore, the development of an ESP course is predicated on an evaluation of the goals, requirements, and activities for which English is required (Rahman, 2015).

This distinctiveness creates special difficulties for teachers and children alike, requiring a nuanced approach to language instruction.

The first step in ESP training is usually a needs analysis, which determines the precise language and communication requirements of the target situations for the learners. This process is fundamental in ESP curriculum planning because it ensures that the course content is directly aligned with the learners' real-world tasks and communicative demands. Moreover, it allows for the customization of instructional methods to suit the learners' proficiency levels, professional backgrounds, and learning goals. Without a thorough needs analysis, ESP instruction risks becoming too generic and disconnected from the practical contexts where learners must apply their language skills. According to Basturkmen (2021), this procedure assists teachers in adapting the course material, including vocabulary, grammar, functions, and genres to the practical applications of English in fields like as commerce, law, medical, engineering, tourism, and more. ESP is therefore context-driven and extremely pertinent to learners' present and future objectives. Then, ESP's goal-orientedness is one of its main characteristics. Students in ESP classes frequently study English to be able to communicate successfully in settings where it is a tool for academic or professional interaction, rather than for general purposes. For example, a course in English for Business might focus on presentations, negotiations, and formal correspondence, while a course for Engineering students may emphasize technical documentation, schematics interpretation, or collaborative project reporting. In other settings, like law or advocacy, ESP instruction may help students develop rhetorical skills and critical thinking necessary for debate, policy writing, or community engagement. The other example, according to Barnhardt et al. (2015), students who participate in advocacy activities eventually become more actively involved in all societal processes, enhancing their "civic skills and social responsibilities" and helping them justify their own opinions.

In line with this, the importance of ESP extends far beyond language learning. It plays a vital role in supporting national and global development frameworks. For

instance, ESP contributes directly to several targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, particularly:

1. SDG 4 (Quality Education): by promoting equitable access to relevant, high-quality, and work-relevant education.
2. SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): by preparing learners with communication skills required in globalized labor markets.
3. SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure): by equipping technical professionals with the English skills needed to participate in international research and innovation.

From a national policy perspective, ESP aligns with ASTACITA 2030 which emphasizes human development, science and technology, and economic competitiveness. It also supports the vision of the Rencana Induk Riset Nasional (RIRN) 2017–2045, particularly in domains such as industrial technology, health, agriculture, and marine sciences, where English proficiency is critical for research dissemination, cross-border collaboration, and accessing global knowledge.

However, primary challenges in ESP instruction are the requirement for teachers to possess not only proficiency in English language teaching but also a deep understanding of the subject matter pertinent to their students' fields of study. Wulandari & Waloyo (2018), stated the selection of teaching-learning materials is very crucial aspect to teach and learn foreign language. Due to a lack of resources and proper training in the particular subjects they are supposed to teach, many ESP's educators report having trouble creating and presenting curriculum that meets the unique requirements of their students. This gap may result in a dependence on general instructional resources that might not adequately meet the contextual requirements of the learners' intended careers. One of the biggest challenges for the students is learning the specific terminology and conversation norms of their subjects. Students frequently have trouble learning and using technical words, which can make it difficult for them to understand course materials and communicate professionally. Furthermore, these issues are made worse by the absence of exposure to real-world language use in their particular fields, which creates a gap between classroom instruction and practical application.

Some studies conducted related to ESP in teaching-learning. Nădrag & Buzarna-Tihenea (2017), conducted "*The Benefits of Using Authentic Materials in The Esp Classroom*". Then, Gu et al. (2019) conducted a research entitled "*Developing ESP Teaching Materials Based on the Analysis of Information Engineering Majors' Needs*". These two researchs found that teaching using ESP material give a positive impact to students' knowledge related to their fields. However, this article throgh literature review aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted challenges encountered by both teachers and learners within the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). As ESP continues to gain prominence in global and local educational settings particularly in vocational training, higher education, and professional development programs. It is crucial to examine the specific barriers that hinder the effective delivery and acquisition of language instruction tailored to specialized fields.

METHOD

To find, evaluate, and compile academic works pertaining to the difficulties in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP), this study used a library-based literature review methodology. According to Mensah et al. (2020), this approach is especially useful for formulating research questions, spotting knowledge gaps, and creating fresh theoretical viewpoints. On the other word, the objective is to give a thorough summary of the recurrent themes, trends, and suggestions found in recent research, with an emphasis on the viewpoints of educators and learners in ESP environments. To ensure currency and relevance, the review drew from scholarly books, conference proceedings, theses, and peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2024. Academic databases are use to find the resources. Keywords used in the search included: "ESP challenges," "English for Specific Purposes," "ESP teacher competence," "authentic materials in ESP," "ESP curriculum design," "ESP learners' difficulties," and "technological integration in ESP."

To ensure a focused and rigorous selection of sources, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

1. Publications from 2015 to 2025.

2. Studies conducted in the context of ESP at secondary, tertiary, or vocational levels.

3. Articles that specifically discuss challenges faced by teachers or learners in ESP settings.

4. Peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books available in full text and in English.

Meanwhile, exclusion criteria were:

1. Articles focused solely on General English or EAP without a specific domain.

2. Opinion pieces, blog posts, or non-academic publications.

3. Studies not accessible in full text or written in non-English languages.

These sources provided diverse insights into pedagogical, linguistic, technological, and institutional challenges in ESP instruction, which form the basis of the discussion in this research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the literature reviewed, the practice of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction presents a complex array of challenges that affect both Teacher and learners. These The following are the key findings synthesized from recent scholarly sources.

1. Content Knowledge Gap Among ESP Instructors

One of the most prominent challenges identified in ESP instruction is the gap between language teaching competence and subject matter expertise. Since many ESP teachers have experience teaching general English, it is possible that they lack official training or real-world experience in the specific fields (such as engineering, medicine, or law) that their students are preparing to enter.

Teachers find it challenging to contextualize classes and create engaging activities that mimic real-world communication tasks due to their unfamiliarity with domain-specific knowledge (Basturkmen, 2021). Teachers sometimes express

feeling underqualified or unprepared to teach material that calls for a thorough comprehension of situational discourse, genre-specific writing, and professional jargon. The overall relevance and authenticity of the teaching may be diminished as a result of their use of excessively generic materials that fall short of the target profession's communication requirements (Daulay, 2021).

2. *Scarcity of Authentic, Field-Specific Learning Materials*

According to Sari et al. (2020), the integration of authentic materials helps students develop a deeper connection to the language because it reflects real communicative purposes and current issues. Then, scarcity of suitable teaching and learning materials for ESP is another important problem. In contrast to General English, which has a large selection of textbooks and online resources, ESP materials need to be carefully related to particular academic fields or sectors. Such materials take a lot of effort to create and involve working with subject-matter experts, a procedure that is frequently overlooked in practice.

Learners may struggle to see how what they are studying relates to the actual world if the materials are not adapted to their professional demands. The lack of authentic input not only undermines motivation but also restricts the ability to acquire pragmatic competence and language proficiency relevant to the profession (Widodo, 2021). Additionally, a lot of teachers say that their institutions don't give them enough money or support to create or acquire specialist materials, so they have to modify the General English curriculum in ways that might not entirely suit the needs of their students (Suherman & Kertawijaya, 2023).

3. *Learners' Struggle with Technical Language and Discourse*

ESP students are supposed to interact with real resources such technical manuals, research papers, clinical case notes, engineering specifications, legal documents, and commercial communication, in contrast to General English learners who usually utilize the language in conversation or in daily situations. According to Tymbay (2022), learners must be given a comprehensive "toolkit" of vocabulary and terms unique to their field of study in a thematic ESP course. High levels of lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic competence are also necessary for them to carry

out duties including evaluating domain-specific data, producing formal reports, presenting technical presentations, and attending professional meetings.

This challenge is especially acute for learners whose general English proficiency is still developing. Without a strong linguistic foundation, students may find it difficult to comprehend complex sentence structures, interpret implicit meanings, or grasp cultural and disciplinary conventions embedded in professional communication. Moreover, limited exposure to authentic field-specific texts and insufficient opportunities to practice technical communication further hinder learners' ability to internalize and apply the language effectively. Many ESP learners also struggle with genre-specific writing and speaking. This awareness stems from the fact that they have difficultyin understanding the lessons in their faculty courses (Hikamah et al., 2021). For instance, a nursing student might know basic English but feel unprepared to write patient care reports using the appropriate tone, structure, and terminology. Similarly, engineering students might find it challenging to describe processes or technical diagrams in English, especially under time constraints or in high-stakes professional settings.

4.   *Inadequate Needs Analysis and Curriculum Alignment*

The lack of a comprehensive requirements analysis to guide curriculum development is one of the most serious problems in many ESP programs. The basis for creating ESP courses that mirror the practical communication requirements of particular fields or occupations is needs analysis. In actuality, though, this procedure is frequently lacking, out-of-date, or completely ignored. According to Drajati et al., (2021), instead of carrying out systematic assessments of students' academic and professional settings, instructors and institutions occasionally rely on generic curricula or assume about learners' demands based on institutional norms. This mismatch between education and students' real needs can lead to curricula that prioritize language proficiency unrelated to students' future employment, which lowers student engagement and instructional efficacy.

According to Wahyudi & Jufrizal (2023), the student also needs to learn material related to their major and almost them know their strength and weaknesses. ESP instruction runs the risk of losing focus on its goal of promoting functional language competency for particular objectives if it does not have a clear knowledge of what learners must do with English in their target situations. Furthermore, inflexible or outdated curricula frequently do not adjust to shifting industry standards, demands of the labor market, or advancements in technology. Furthermore, the problem is made worse by the absence of cooperation between language teachers and subject-matter specialists, which makes it more difficult to create resources that appropriately represent the language used in certain professional contexts. Without feedback from professionals in the field, ESP courses could miss important terms, discourse patterns, and communication techniques that are necessary for students' future employment.

5. *Technological Limitations and Digital Integration Challenges*

These challenges include teachers' limited experience with using technology for ESP, a shortage of digital materials, and insufficient internet connection (Suherman & Kertawijaya, 2023). There are several obstacles to overcome when integrating digital technologies into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training, especially in areas with inadequate technology infrastructure. ESP teachers frequently deal with a lack of institutional support for technology-enhanced learning, a shortage of digital resources, and insufficient access to dependable internet connections. These limitations make it more difficult to provide ESP courses effectively, which call for real-world, industry-specific content and interactive platforms that imitate professional communication in the workplace.

Furthermore, a lot of ESP teachers lack the skills and self-assurance needed to use digital tools efficiently. Teachers' digital literacy inadequacies were revealed by the abrupt switch to online teaching modalities, which was sped up by the COVID-19 epidemic. This resulted in a sense of unpreparedness and a decline in instructional efficacy (Ginusti, 2023). Reduced student enthusiasm and participation were frequently the outcome of teachers' challenges transferring

traditional teaching materials to digital formats and interacting with students via virtual platforms. On the other side, students face difficulties with access to technology and digital literacy. Their capacity to use online resources, engage in virtual collaborations, and acquire the technical language skills required for their particular areas may be hindered by a lack of exposure to digital learning settings. These difficulties are made worse by the absence of customized

Discussion

According to the literature, a number of interconnected problems make it difficult to offer effective ESP teaching. While learners encounter considerable linguistic and pragmatic difficulties in mastering specialized language, teachers frequently lack the domain-specific skills and resources necessary to give meaningful instruction. Further undermining the quality of ESP education include the lack of thorough needs studies, the restricted use of real materials, technology limitations, and a lack of institutional support.

Despite these systemic challenges, recent studies provide promising examples of ESP innovations that mitigate these issues through integrated approaches:

1. Gao (2021) describe an ESP course for information engineering students in China that successfully addressed the content knowledge gap by team-teaching pairing English instructors with field experts during course development and delivery. This interdisciplinary collaboration ensured both language and content accuracy while modeling authentic discourse for learners.

2. For instance, Nekrasova et.al (2019) highlights the use of corpus analysis tools (e.g., AntConc) that allow ESP teachers to extract real-world vocabulary, structures, and genres from discipline-specific texts. This enables instructors with limited domain expertise to develop data-driven, field-relevant tasks that mirror workplace communication without needing deep technical knowledge.

3. In Indonesia, Widodo (2015) reports a vocational ESP program that incorporated locally adapted authentic materials in hotel and tourism contexts. These were developed in collaboration with industry partners and included

role-plays based on actual guest interactions, digital booking forms, and tourism brochures. This context-specific material significantly improved students' motivation and job-readiness.

These findings underscore the need for sustainable interdisciplinary cooperation as a foundational principle of effective ESP instruction. Creating successful ESP environments demands collaborative frameworks, where language educators, content specialists, curriculum designers, and technologists work in tandem. Educational institutions must take a more integrated and cooperative approach to ESP curriculum design in order to overcome these problems. This entails undertaking thorough needs evaluations, creating specific materials, offering focused teacher training, and encouraging collaborations between content specialists and language educators. By doing this, ESP instruction can become more relevant, successful, and in line with the academic and career goals of its students. Among the potential fixes are:

1. Collaborating across disciplines and team teaching
2. In partnership with SMEs, schools should provide teachers with time and resources to create or modify materials.
3. Use glossaries, visual aids, and repeated exposure in a variety of contexts to progressively introduce technical vocabulary.
4. Before requesting that students create their own, provide real-world examples and serve as an example of professional texts and discourses.
5. Get feedback from professionals, employers, and students through surveys, interviews, and workplace observations.
6. When internet connectivity is limited, combine classroom instruction with low-tech digital resources (such as PDFs and taped interviews).

CONCLUSION

In summary, the creation of strategic, context-sensitive solutions and a comprehensive grasp of the particular difficulties associated with ESP training are essential to its successful implementation. The studied literature emphasizes how ESP education is frequently hindered by teachers' lack of subject-specific

knowledge, a lack of authentic materials, learners' difficulties with technical discourse, a poorly aligned curriculum, and technological constraints. These issues are not separate but rather connected, frequently enhancing one another and making things more difficult for both teachers and learners.

Addressing these challenges demands a shift from one-size-fits-all pedagogical models toward more responsive, interdisciplinary approaches. Collaboration between language instructors and subject-matter experts enhances instructional relevance, while institutional support through professional development, curriculum realignment, and context-appropriate technological integration is essential for sustainability. Even modest digital tools, when carefully implemented, can significantly increase learner access and engagement.

Importantly, resolving these challenges holds long-term significance for the development of the ESP field. By tackling foundational issues, educators and institutions can foster a more resilient and adaptable ESP framework one capable of evolving alongside professional and academic needs. A strengthened ESP foundation not only improves current learning outcomes but also ensures that future programs can more readily respond to emerging linguistic and occupational demands. Equally crucial is the commitment to continuous adaptation and innovation in teaching methods. In an era of rapid technological and industry transformation, ESP instruction must remain agile and forward-thinking. Regular updates to instructional strategies, informed by ongoing research and feedback from real-world practice, are vital to maintaining relevance and effectiveness. This mindset of iterative improvement will empower ESP to remain a vital tool for preparing learners to succeed in increasingly specialized and dynamic global contexts.

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