



Teaching English For Specific Purposes (Esp): Methods And Challenges

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ABSTRACT: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is crucial in preparing learners for professional communication across various fields, such as business and engineering. However, selecting and implementing effective teaching methodologies remains a persistent challenge. This study investigates the effectiveness of three widely used ESP teaching methods: the Communicative Approach (CA), Task-Based Learning (TBL), and Content-Based Instruction (CBI), while also identifying key challenges faced by educators and learners. A mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating surveys, interviews, and test result analysis to assess the impact of these methodologies. Findings indicate that TBL significantly enhances practical language application, whereas CBI fosters a deeper understanding of subject-specific content. However, educators face challenges such as a lack of specialized teaching materials, student motivation issues, and varying proficiency levels among learners. Additionally, limited institutional support further exacerbates these difficulties. The study offers insights into overcoming these barriers and provides recommendations for enhancing ESP instruction in higher education.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), language teaching methods, Task-Based Learning, Communicative Approach, Content-Based Instruction, ESP challenges, vocabulary retention, teaching methods.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively in professional settings has become a crucial skill. English for Specific Purposes



plays a vital role in equipping learners with the language proficiency necessary for success in specialized fields such as business, engineering, medicine, and law. As industries become increasingly interconnected and reliant on international collaboration, the demand for ESP courses has grown significantly. Recent studies indicate a rising need for industry-specific language skills, as employers seek professionals who can navigate complex workplace communication effectively. Despite its importance, teaching ESP presents several challenges. Educators often struggle with limited access to specialized teaching materials, a lack of clear methodological frameworks, and varying levels of student proficiency. Additionally, many teachers lack training in ESP-specific pedagogy, which can hinder their ability to design and implement effective lesson plans. From the learners' perspective, difficulties such as limited vocabulary, reliance on dictionaries, and differences between their native language and English further complicate the learning process. Moreover, institutional constraints, including large class sizes and an overemphasis on standardized examinations, pose additional obstacles to effective ESP instruction. To address these challenges, researchers have explored various teaching methodologies for ESP. Among the most widely used approaches are Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Learning, and Content-Based Instruction. CLT focuses on real-life communication and interaction, making it particularly effective in professional contexts. TBL enhances learners' practical language application through structured tasks, while CBI integrates subject-specific content with language instruction, fostering deeper engagement and understanding. However, the effectiveness of these methods depends on factors such as curriculum design, teacher expertise, and student motivation.

This study aims to examine the methods and challenges in ESP instruction, providing insights into best practices for educators and policymakers. A mixed-methods research approach is employed, combining surveys, interviews, and test result analysis to assess the effectiveness of ESP teaching strategies and identify key obstacles in the learning process. By analyzing different pedagogical approaches and their impact on learners' performance, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing development of ESP education and offer practical recommendations for its improvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes has been widely studied, with researchers identifying various methods and challenges faced by both educators



and students. Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of different teaching approaches, as well as the difficulties encountered in ESP instruction across diverse academic and professional fields. Susandi and Krishnawati found that many students perceive their vocabulary, speaking, listening, and writing skills as inadequate, which negatively impacts their ability to communicate in professional settings [13].

Alsamadani highlighted that most ESP classes tend to focus on receptive skills such as reading and listening, while productive skills, particularly writing and speaking, receive less attention [1]. However, Ridwan argued that reading and writing are among the most critical skills required by students, yet current ESP courses often do not sufficiently address them. This issue points to a gap between student needs and the existing curriculum [10]. Cahyadin suggested that ESP curricula should integrate both skills-based and content-based approaches to ensure that students acquire the necessary linguistic competencies while also developing their subject-specific knowledge. Similarly, Pranoto and Suprayogi examined ESP needs in Physical Education, concluding that students require targeted instruction in speaking and writing to succeed in careers such as sports journalism, coaching, and professional athletics [2]. Likewise, Nasution explored ESP in Informatics Engineering, revealing that while students need proficiency in technical English, they also struggle with grammar and general communication skills, requiring a more balanced instructional approach [7]. Overall, these studies underscore the need for effective ESP teaching methodologies that align with students' academic and professional demands while addressing common instructional challenges. Based on these findings, this study aims to further explore the effectiveness of different ESP teaching methods and identify the key difficulties encountered by both teachers and students in this field.

Methods of ESP Instruction

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes relies on various methods tailored to learners' professional and academic needs. Effective ESP instruction requires an approach that aligns language acquisition with real-world applications relevant to students' fields of study. Below are three widely recognized methods in ESP instruction, supported by academic research.

Communicative Approach (CA): The Communicative Approach emphasizes interaction and real-life communication rather than traditional grammar-focused instruction. According to Canale and Swain, communicative



competence is essential in ESP as it allows learners to effectively function in professional settings [3]. Richards and Rodgers further argue that CA enhances students' ability to use language contextually, making it particularly useful in ESP classrooms [9]. For instance, in Business English courses, students engage in simulated negotiations, email writing, and formal presentations to develop relevant communicative skills. Research by Hutchinson and Waters highlights the effectiveness of CA in ESP, as it fosters a learner-centered approach where students actively engage in meaningful communication related to their field [6]. *Task-Based Learning (TBL)*: Task-Based Learning (TBL) is another widely applied method in ESP instruction. According to Willis, TBL is particularly beneficial in ESP as it allows learners to practice language skills in real-world professional contexts. For instance, medical students may engage in patient interviews or practice writing medical reports, while law students may analyze case studies and draft legal documents [6].

Content-Based Instruction (CBI): Content-Based Instruction (CBI) integrates subject-specific content with language learning, enabling students to develop both linguistic and professional competencies simultaneously. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche describe CBI as an approach where students engage with authentic materials related to their discipline, rather than learning general English [11]. Stoller and Grabe highlight that CBI is particularly effective in ESP courses, as it immerses learners in industry-specific language and discourse. For example, engineering students may analyze technical reports, while tourism students may study customer service dialogues and travel itineraries in English.

The Communicative Approach, Task-Based Learning, and Content-Based Instruction are among the most effective methodologies in ESP instruction. Each method provides unique advantages depending on the specific needs of learners and their professional requirements. Incorporating these approaches in ESP courses enhances students' ability to communicate effectively in their respective fields, ensuring that they acquire not only linguistic proficiency but also the practical skills necessary for their future careers.

Challenges in Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

The implementation of English for Specific Purposes instruction presents various challenges for both educators and learners. According to Fitria, teachers often face difficulties due to inadequate teaching materials, insufficient qualifications, and a lack of a structured theoretical framework for ESP instruction [4]. Additionally, students encounter obstacles such as limited English proficiency,



language differences, a lack of specialized vocabulary, and over-reliance on dictionaries without the necessary skills to use them effectively. Environmental factors, including overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching resources, and an excessive focus on examinations, further complicate the learning process. Fitria highlights that students across different fields such as Accounting, Taxation, Engineering, Information Systems, and Islamic Economics express a strong need for comprehensive vocabulary instruction, particularly specialized English terms relevant to their disciplines [4]. Similarly, Sofyan identifies curriculum-related challenges in ESP instruction for engineering students. Teachers are required to develop and implement structured lesson plans, but classroom conditions often disrupt their execution. Furthermore, varying levels of English proficiency among students, along with low motivation, make it difficult for educators to foster an engaging learning environment [12]. Another key challenge is the insufficient pedagogical preparation of ESP teachers. Iswati and Triastuti further note that the primary difficulties faced by ESP teachers include limited knowledge of their students' fields of study, a lack of ESP-specific training, inadequate needs analysis, large class sizes, and diverse proficiency levels among learners. To address these issues, policymakers should consider reforming educational policies to better support ESP instruction in non-English departments. Zuraidah also stresses the importance of developing students' listening skills and specialized vocabulary, as these are crucial across various disciplines [14]. However, existing ESP curricula often fail to fully meet students' needs due to issues arising from both learners and the curriculum itself. As a result, improvements in ESP teacher training and better course structuring are necessary to enhance the overall effectiveness of ESP instruction.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs an experimental research design with a mixed-methods approach to examine the effectiveness of various ESP teaching strategies and identify key challenges faced by both students and instructors. The research was conducted over eight weeks and involved 50 university students from two different academic disciplines: business (25 students) and engineering (25 students). To assess the impact of different ESP teaching methods, participants were divided into three experimental groups. Group A (15 students) received instruction through the Communicative Approach (CA), which emphasized real-life communication and interaction. Group B (15 students) was taught using Task-Based Learning (TBL), focusing on completing practical tasks related to



their field of study. Group C (20 students) followed a Content-Based Instruction (CBI) model, integrating subject-specific content with language learning. This division allowed for a comparative analysis of how each method influenced student engagement, vocabulary retention, and overall language proficiency. To gather comprehensive data, a triangulation approach was employed, utilizing pre-tests and post-tests, student surveys, and teacher interviews. The pre-test and post-test measured students' vocabulary retention and communication skills before and after the ESP course. Student surveys were conducted to evaluate their engagement and perception of the effectiveness of each teaching method. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with ESP instructors provided qualitative insights into the challenges of ESP instruction, including difficulties in curriculum design, student motivation, and the availability of specialized teaching materials. The collected data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Pre-test and post-test scores, along with survey responses, were statistically examined using descriptive and inferential analysis to identify significant differences among the three groups. Thematic analysis was applied to teacher interviews to extract key insights into instructional challenges and best practices. To ensure ethical research practices, all participants provided informed consent, and strict confidentiality measures were followed. Students and instructors participated voluntarily, with the option to withdraw at any time without consequences. This methodology provides a structured approach to evaluating ESP instruction, offering valuable insights into the effectiveness of different teaching methods while addressing common challenges faced by educators in the field.

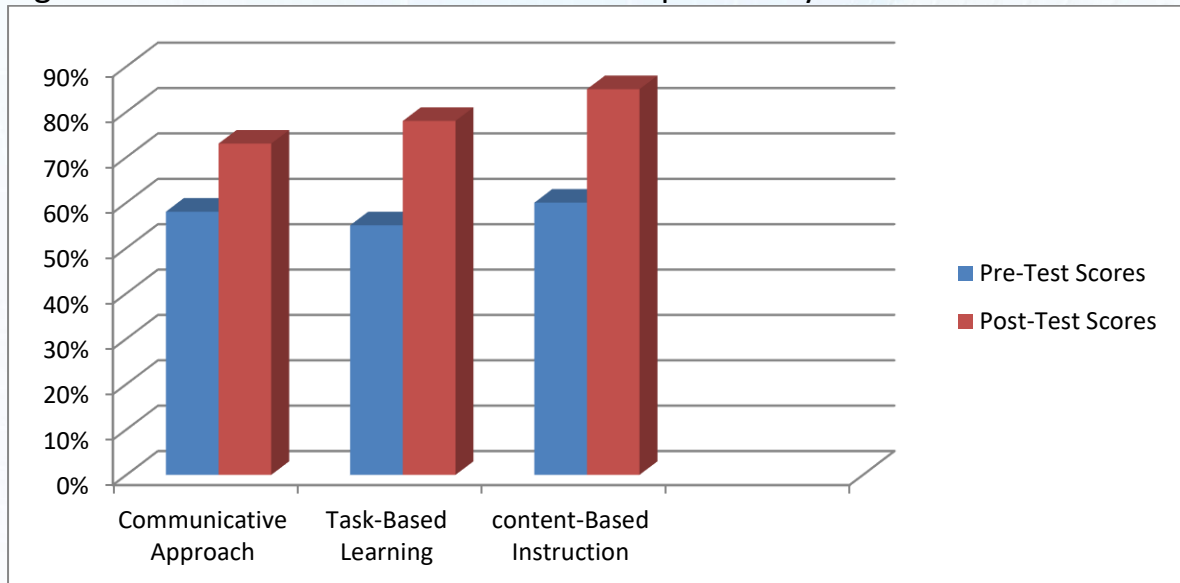
RESULTS

This study investigated the effectiveness of three ESP teaching methods Communicative Approach, Task-Based Learning, and Content-Based Instruction among business and engineering students. The results were analyzed based on pre-test and post-test performance, as well as students' perceptions of these teaching methods.

Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores: The analysis of pre-test and post-test scores indicates a significant improvement across all groups, with varying degrees of effectiveness depending on the instructional method and students' academic background. As illustrated in Figure 1, students exposed to the CBI method exhibited the highest improvement, with an average post-test score of 85%, followed by TBL (78%) and CA (73%).



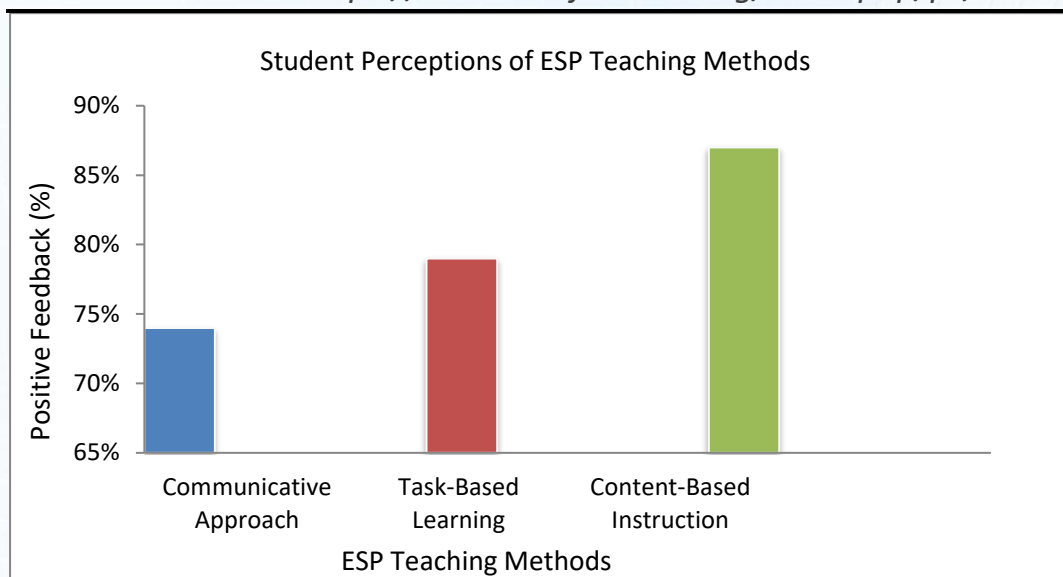
Figure 1: Pre-Test and Post-Test Score Comparison by Method



(Bar chart visualizing the increase in scores across different teaching methods)

A discipline-specific analysis revealed that business students demonstrated superior performance in CA and TBL methodologies, while engineering students experienced the most substantial improvement in the CBI approach. These findings suggest that business students benefit more from interactive and task-driven learning environments, whereas engineering students perform better when content based instruction is employed, allowing for the integration of technical vocabulary and domain-specific knowledge.

Student Perceptions of ESP Teaching Methods: In addition to performance-based results, a survey was conducted to evaluate students' perceptions of the three instructional methods. As presented in Figure 2, CBI received the highest positive feedback (87%), followed by TBL (79%) and CA (74%), indicating a general preference for content-integrated learning among the participants.



(Bar chart illustrating student satisfaction with each teaching method)

The responses further demonstrated discipline-specific preferences. Business students expressed a strong preference for TBL, as it facilitated engagement in simulated real-world tasks, such as email correspondence, negotiations, and business presentations. Conversely, engineering students found CBI more effective, as it allowed them to develop technical language proficiency while simultaneously acquiring knowledge relevant to their academic discipline. These findings underscore the importance of aligning ESP instructional methods with students' professional and academic needs, ensuring that the teaching approach adopted enhances both language acquisition and field-specific competency development.

DISCUSSION

The study highlights the varying effectiveness of ESP teaching methods across disciplines. Business students benefited more from Task-Based Learning and the Communicative Approach, which enhanced their practical communication skills. In contrast, engineering students showed the highest improvement with Content-Based Instruction, as it provided technical vocabulary and subject-specific knowledge. Student perceptions aligned with these findings, with CBI rated as the most effective method, followed by TBL and CA. Business students appreciated the interactive nature of TBL, while engineering students found CBI more relevant to their field. These results emphasize the need for ESP instruction to be tailored to different academic disciplines rather than using a uniform approach. However, challenges such as a lack of specialized materials,



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limited teacher training, and varying student proficiency levels remain obstacles to effective ESP implementation. Addressing these issues through improved curriculum design and teacher development programs can enhance ESP learning outcomes.

This study underscores the importance of combining task-based and content-based methods to optimize ESP instruction. Future research should explore additional strategies, including digital tools and individualized learning approaches, to further improve ESP teaching practices.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effectiveness of three key ESP teaching methods Communicative Approach (CA), Task-Based Learning (TBL), and Content-Based Instruction (CBI) as well as the challenges faced in ESP instruction. The findings reveal that while all three methods contribute to improving students' English proficiency, their effectiveness varies depending on students' academic backgrounds. Business students benefited more from interactive and task-driven approaches such as CA and TBL, whereas engineering students showed the highest improvement through CBI, which integrated technical vocabulary and subject-specific content. Despite these positive outcomes, ESP instruction faces several challenges, including insufficient teacher training, a lack of specialized materials, and students' diverse English proficiency levels. Many teachers struggle with aligning their instruction with students' specific professional needs, highlighting the need for more targeted ESP training and curriculum development. To enhance ESP teaching effectiveness, institutions should consider adopting a blended approach that incorporates elements of CA, TBL, and CBI based on students' fields of study. Additionally, professional development programs for ESP instructors, improved course materials, and smaller class sizes could help address the existing challenges. Future research could further explore the long-term impact of these teaching methods and develop innovative strategies for overcoming the difficulties in ESP instruction.

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