

Theory and Practice of English for Specific Purposes

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Abstract: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a dynamic discipline within applied linguistics that customizes English language education to meet the distinct requirements of learners in diverse professional and academic fields. This article examines the theoretical underpinnings and practical implementations of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), emphasizing its significance in improving communication competencies in disciplines such as business, medicine, engineering, and law. The research analyzes essential pedagogical approaches, curriculum development, and obstacles encountered by instructors in executing ESP programs. This article elucidates effective tactics for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction and its influence on learners' language proficiency and professional growth by integrating theory and practice.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, ESP, language education, professional discourse, curriculum development, ESP techniques, applied linguistics, specialized language instruction.



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Introduction. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become increasingly significant in contemporary education owing to the rising necessity for specialized communication competencies across diverse professional and academic settings. In contrast to General English, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is customized to address the particular linguistic and communicative requirements of learners in disciplines such as commerce, medicine, engineering, and law. The rise of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is grounded in the globalization of industries and the increasing demand for professionals to attain competency in specialized English. This article seeks to examine the theoretical foundations and practical implementations of ESP, emphasizing its significance in language education, curriculum design, and pedagogical strategies. This study examines the interplay between theory and practice, elucidating the obstacles encountered by educators and offering solutions for effective English for Specific Purposes training. The discourse will also examine the equilibrium between linguistic abilities and subject-specific knowledge, ensuring that learners attain both language competency and effective communication skills within their particular fields. The scientific advancements and technological developments of the "Information Age" have rendered bilingual and multilingual communication a significant facet of contemporary culture. The advent of the Internet has obscured boundaries and fostered a more interconnected society, subsequently generating novel communicative contexts, cultural paradigms, and linguistic variations and discourses. As a result, there has been

an increasing demand for foreign language courses and innovative teaching and learning methodologies.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a significant and unique subset of English Language Teaching (ELT) that emphasizes practical elements based on needs analysis, genre, and effective communication. The implementation in Cuba, within the framework of an evolving education system aimed at achieving quality, represents a viable solution to the pressing necessity of discovering innovative approaches for individualized, contextualized, adaptable, and development-focused instruction. This method of English instruction has gained prominence in recent decades and is currently regarded as fully operational. Such courses are prevalent among professionals in engineering, tourism, healthcare, aviation, informatics, and business sectors. It is employed in both general and polytechnic education, particularly in vocational, trade, and service institutions. Numerous scholars have conducted research on this subject in the global context: Strevens, P. (1988), Hutchinson, T. and Waters, A. (1987), Dudley-Evans, T. and St. John, M. J. (1998), Johns, A. M. and PriceMachado, D. (2001), Hyland, K. (2007), Katalin, I. (2014), Minodora, S. (2015), Lamri, C. E. (2016), and Bojovic, M. (2017). In the context of Cuba: Castillo, M., Corona, D., Macola, C., and Peña, J. (1997); Díaz, G. (2000); Fonseca, A. B. (2002); Ramírez, I. (2004); Pupo, S. (2006); Castro, P., González, G., and Casar, L. A. (2015); and Teruel, O. (2016). Their theoretical and methodological contributions address the characteristics and fundamental concerns of ESP instruction, including the delineation of its categories, competency models, and pedagogical approaches, as well as exercises, tasks, strategies, methods, and procedures, among others. These technologies are highly beneficial for the ESP teaching-learning process. Nevertheless, we must persist in seeking new alternatives that address specific topics requiring a uniqueness absent in other publications on this subject. In this regard, it is essential to further explore the nuances of this technique to identify alternatives that cater to the desire in learning English within various circumstances. The preceding insights necessitate more investigation into the substance of ESP, its historical and theoretical background, and the pursuit of viable methods for its curricular implementation. These are the leitmotifs that have prompted the writers to explore this specific methodology for English instruction and represent the definitive objective of this essay.

Materials and Methods. This research employed many methodologies. The analytical-synthetic and inductive-deductive methodologies enabled the identification of the study object and the discovery of a viable solution. The historical-logical analysis facilitated the establishment of a timeline and the identification of the most significant characteristics of the subject of research in relation to the pertinent evolutionary phases. Empirical observation and critical analysis of sources were employed to gather information and ascertain the theoretical framework of the subject under investigation. All of these strategies facilitated the systematization of the theoretical and methodological framework behind the proposal, as well as the adoption of the most relevant criteria to address the issue at hand.

Results and Discussion. The quest for a universally accepted definition of English for Specific Purposes within the scientific community presents a degree of complication, as writers vary in their conceptualizations and consensus appears lacking on the subject. T. Hutchinson and A. Waters assert, “ESP is an approach to language instruction wherein all decisions regarding content and methodology are predicated on the learner’s purpose for studying” (1987, p.19). Simultaneously, as articulated by David Crystal, it is “a course whose context is determined by the student’s professional needs” (1995, p. 108). In alignment with this perspective, L. Anthony elaborates on its objective by defining it as “the teaching of English utilized in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes” (quoted by Lamri, 2016, p. 1). Authors Hutchinson and Waters (1987) delineate what English for Specific Purposes is not and concur in defining it as a pedagogical strategy. Candlin (1975) perceives it as a subset of foreign language instruction, although Robinson (1991) firmly asserts that a universal definition is

unattainable. Strevens (1988) describes it using absolute and variable features, a concept that Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) subsequently elaborate on. All definitions, in various manners, encapsulate the essence of English for Specific Purposes and are suitable for settings and requirements particular to specific social groupings. The absolute and variable features of Strevens' initial definition (1988), along with the variable characteristics introduced by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) in their re-conceptualization, serve as the guiding principles for practitioners of this technique. These features are crucial for defining a teaching approach based on English for Specific Purposes and serve as the reference framework for its identification. English for Specific Purposes pertains to the instruction of the language with distinctly pragmatic objectives, aimed at developing specific linguistic competencies through real-world contexts, enabling students to apply it in their future careers or comprehend matters pertinent to their field of expertise. Consequently, its function include assisting students in cultivating the necessary skills for a particular professional setting and offering opportunities to enhance specialized language and discourse pertinent to a subject field, among other responsibilities. The emergence of English for Specific Purposes was initially shaped by socio-economic and political factors, notably the United States' leadership following World War II, which established English as the lingua franca of commerce, medicine, technology, and business (Minodora, 2015). The oil crisis of the 1970s also contributed to the increased need for this type of education. The crisis led to a substantial influx of finance and Western professionals into the oil-rich nations. The emergence of English as a business necessitated that the pedagogical profession address the requirements and desires of English teachers and other social groups concurrently (Minodora, 2015). A second influential aspect was what Hutchinson and Waters termed a revolution in linguistics (1987, p. 6). At that moment, linguistic studies were poised to investigate the utilization of language in authentic communication. A major result was the identification of distinctions between spoken and written language, including what is appropriate in specific contexts and communicative situations. All those studies enabled the identification of the characteristics and linguistic elements that differentiate one context, situation, and specialty from another, serving as the foundation for designing a course that distinguishes English for various specialties. Thus, the enduring maxim remains: "Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English you need" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 8). The final factor contributing to the emergence of English for Specific Purposes was the evolution of contemporary trends in educational psychology and communicative language theories, which emphasized the student's central role, thereby becoming the core of the teaching-learning process (Minodora, 2015). Students' needs and interests became significant. This facilitated the development of courses centered on the student's needs, with the premise that this approach would enhance both motivation and performance. English for Specific Purposes pertains to applied linguistics, discourse analysis, pragmatics, socio-cognitive theory, communicative language education, student-centered pedagogy, rhetoric, and critical literacy. It is unequivocally a direct consequence of the evolution of the world in those domains of knowledge.

The publication "The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching" by Halliday, Mackintosh, and Strevens (1964) signifies the formal inception of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in English language instruction. These authors assert that the term "specific" denotes the types of language employed in a professional context. M. Gotti (1991) elaborates on the subject and delineates the criteria for language specificity: focus on the user (didactic domain), the context of reference (pragmatic-functional domain), and the specialized application of language (linguistic-professional domain), (cited by Gratton, Francesco, 2009, p. 14). In 1975, the British Council, under the aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Great Britain, initiated the inaugural categorization of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is categorized into two branches: English for Science and Technology (EST) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Subsequently, Hutchinson and Waters developed a more intricate classification, dividing English for Specific Purposes into three categories: English for Science

and Technology (EST), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (1987, p. 17). Researcher Imola Katalin Nagy delineates the history and evolution of the "ESP Movement" into four periods (2014, pp. 262-272): the initial phase, spanning the 1960s and 1970s, during which ESP instruction concentrated on the phrase level. A further phase, occurring from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, began to incorporate rhetorical purposes and emphasized grammatical structures. The third phase, occurring in the mid-1980s, amalgamated the linguistic and rhetorical components of the preceding phases, emphasizing the goal situation and the oral communication skills required by students in various professional contexts. This phase resulted in the adoption of the notional-functional curriculum. The final phase, commencing in the late 1980s, redirected focus towards learning strategies, influenced by psycholinguistics. Johns, Ann M. & Price-Machado, Donna, 2001, pp. 43-54 Strevens (1988) posits that a definition of English for Specific Purposes requires distinguishing between four definitive traits and two changeable ones. He enumerates the subsequent definitive attributes: It is tailored to address the particular requirements of the learners. It pertains to specific disciplines, professions, and activities. It focuses on the language pertinent to activities in syntax, text, discourse, semantics, and discourse analysis. It is designed in opposition to General English. Moreover, he discloses the presence of two changeable attributes: 1. ESP may be confined to the linguistic competencies to be acquired. For instance, reading. ESP is not instructed based on any predetermined approach (pp. 1-2). Both the absolute and variable qualities have guided the construction of ESP courses and its instruction over the years. They are particular to this methodology as demands are of utmost significance during the design of language-centered activities. Consequently, English for Specific Purposes should be regarded as a pedagogical method or what Dudley-Evans & St. John refer to as "a mental attitude" (1998, p.11).

Hutchinson & Waters asserted that ESP is an approach to language instruction wherein all decisions about content and methodology are determined by the learner's purpose for studying. (...) ESP should be regarded not as a special language product but as a methodology for language instruction guided by distinct and evident motivations for learning (1987, p. 19). Dudley-Evans and St. John modified Streven's definition and concurred with the majority of his assertions. They expanded the concept by incorporating additional variable characteristics, considering factors such as (a) the approach in which teaching shares terminology and competencies across academic disciplines and business activities, and (b) the necessity for teaching to consistently reflect the foundational concepts and activities of the discipline under examination. Their further changeable traits are: ESP may pertain to or be tailored for particular fields of study. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) may employ a distinct methodology in particular instructional contexts compared to General English. ESP is primarily intended for adult learners, whether in postsecondary education or professional environments, while it may also be applicable to secondary school students. ESP is often intended for intermediate or advanced learners. Most English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses presuppose a fundamental understanding of the language system; nevertheless, they can also be utilized with novices (1998, p. 4). The distinction between General English (EGP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), as articulated by Hutchinson & Waters (1987), is little in principle; however, it is significantly pronounced in practice. Strevens (1988) elucidates that this distinction lies in the fact that ESP is grounded in a comprehensive assessment of learners' communicative requirements for a profession or specialized task, alongside a meticulous examination of the language pertinent to that profession or task. Donesh (2012) underscores the significance of needs, stating, "Nowadays teachers are aware of the importance of needs analysis and perhaps it is this that has been the greatest influence that the ESP approach has had on the teaching of General English" (cited by Minodora, 2015, p. 2). Consequently, doing a requirements analysis is a crucial stage in the creation of an ESP syllabus. Basturkmen (2010) notes in relation to this specific perspective: Needs analysis in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) pertains to a course creation procedure. This process identifies and considers the language

and skills that learners will utilize in their target professional or academic environments, in relation to their current knowledge, perceived needs, and the practical limitations of the teaching context. The data acquired from this procedure is utilized in assessing and enhancing the content and methodology of the ESP course (Minodora, 2015, p. 3). Based on these concepts, it can be asserted that requirements analysis is fundamental to English for Specific Purposes. Munby (1978) asserts that precisely identifying and specifying a set of learners' English language needs can inform the development of a language program tailored to those needs (quoted by Minodora, 2015, p. 3). Upon identifying needs, the objectives, subjects, and texts are defined. Various authors advocate for the utilization of diverse coursebooks and online resources, provided they address the individual needs of learners. Nonetheless, they acknowledge that when integrating them into specific situations, the act of extracting them from their native settings compromises their authenticity. Consequently, it is underscored that the subject of authenticity should focus more on the transferability of methods or actions rather than on the oral or written texts removed from their original contexts (Johns & Price-Machado, 2001, p. 47).

The function of the ESP practitioner is delineated into five categories as per Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998): instructor, collaborator, course designer and material provider, researcher, and evaluator (quoted by Minodora, 2015, p. 3). As an educator, he must devise learning opportunities to foster genuine communication and choose suitable instructional approaches to address the educational needs of the students. As a collaborator, he must engage collaboratively with other ESP practitioners and subject matter experts. As a course designer and material supplier, he must develop his own materials and/or modify the actual materials employed in his professional domain while leveraging educational resources and teaching materials. The objective of any ESP syllabus is to identify the individual linguistic and pragmatic demands of students as they prepare for particular scenarios in the language. As a researcher, he must prioritize the requirements, objectives, and interests of the students, enhance his understanding of the subject matter, and seek authentic materials. Ultimately, as an evaluator, the ESP practitioner must consider the phases of the evaluation process. He must evaluate students' needs prior to course creation. He must evaluate the efficacy of the students' responses to the instructional approaches during the course delivery. He must evaluate the outcomes of the students' learning once the course concludes; nonetheless, it is vital that he assesses the extent to which the learners' requirements were addressed. English for certain Purposes can be broadly characterized by the notion that language is utilized in a certain way inside the social groupings to which individuals belong. It addresses communication rather than language, emphasizing the creation and utilization of texts; it rejects the autonomous teaching approach to concentrate on the communicative practices of individuals in authentic circumstances (Hyland, 2007). The primary aim of teaching and learning from this perspective is to enable learners to acquire information and cultivate cognitive and strategic competencies, grounded in the development of a critical mindset. The steps of the learning process with this technique are defined to achieve this. Dudley-Evans and St. John assert that these steps comprise "the need analysis, the course (and syllabus) design, materials selection (and production), teaching and learning, and evaluation" (1998, p. 121). Course design in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is, thus, a product of the dynamic interplay of these parts, which simultaneously reflect stages and exhibit interdependence. Hutchinson and Waters characterize the syllabus as a document that delineates what is to be studied, or at the very least, what ought to be learned (1987, p. 80). It is regarded as a tool by which the educator can align the needs and objectives of the learners with the classroom activities (Yalden, 1987, p. 86). It is an instructional tool designed to enhance learning (Nunan, 1988, p. 6). Robinson indicates that it functions as a framework and setting for class material (1991, p. 34). Basturkmen (2006, p. 21) illustrates the term through the conventional viewpoint of a curriculum put up by Penny Ur in 2002. She endorses the notion that it comprises a comprehensive inventory of content elements (words, structures, themes) and procedural components (tasks, techniques). She also identifies that a

syllabus is an organized document, prioritizing simpler and more vital elements initially. She states that it is explicit, public, may provide a timeline, may identify a preferred methodology or approach, and may recommend resources.

Syllabuses may be classified as synthetic or analytic (Long & Crookes, 1993, pp. 11-12), grammatical, lexical, grammatical-lexical, situational, topic-based, notional, functional-notional, mixed or "multi-strand," procedural, or process-oriented (Ur, 2002, pp. 178-179), and can be structured around goals and objectives, competencies, standards, tasks, while adhering to a comprehensive approach (Nunan, 1988, pp. 55-65), among other classifications. All three forms of syllabuses reflect the evolutionary progression of English language methodology, and their understanding is crucial in guiding decision-making. The writers concur with Benyelles that "no syllabus can yield positive outcomes independently due to the diverse needs of students" (quoted by Lamri, 2016, p. 16). The author proposes that the syllabus should encompass a blend of grammatical elements, vocabulary, language functions, contexts, subjects, and exercises pertinent to various talents. This viewpoint is designated as an eclectic syllabus, also referred to as a mixed or comprehensive approach according to Nunan (1988) and Ur (2002). In this syllabus, all elements are interconnected and harmonized. Moreover, it enhances the clarity of the teaching-learning process for both students and educators. Therefore, it is advisable to adopt an eclectic syllabus to attain improved outcomes in the implementation of ESP, while acknowledging the significant influence of context on this approach. The aforementioned authors delineate the categories of syllabuses and provide specific examples of their contents. The theoretical and practical expertise necessary for designing an ESP syllabus is scarce in specialized literature, and its contextual distinctiveness further complicates extrapolation to other teaching environments. A potentially beneficial model for implementation, alongside other equally valid alternatives, is presented by Castillo, Corona, Macola, and Peña (Corona & Terroux, 1997, pp. 25-49), who thoroughly argue and exemplify the four stages of an operational model proposed by R. Mackay of Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. They are as follows:

1. Data collection phase
2. Developmental phase
3. Formative evaluation (qualitative) phase
4. Summative evaluation phase

The information collection phase seeks to ascertain the professional or vocational communicative requirements of the students. It delineates the specific aims of the application of English. Structured interviews and questionnaires may be utilized. The developmental stage commences with an assessment of the pupils' academic or vocational requirements. The utilization of language in its intrinsic form. The ESP specialist must delineate the language in terms of particular functions and concepts. Teaching points are identified and organized based on this description. They will serve as the foundation for creating the instructional materials, which consist solely of the specified texts and language samples combined. At this step, specialized approaches are employed, and any suitable methodologies may be utilized. To enhance the efficacy of the syllabus, it is recommended to design it from the standpoint of the communicative, development-oriented approach advocated by the scientific language teaching community. In this context, Corona et al. (1997) assert that the communicative approach to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) does not endorse a specific methodology but rather utilizes several techniques and procedures from prior approaches. After identifying the precise language tasks for the student, the teachers develop their methods based on what is deemed appropriate. Specific objectives and unique content compel the educator to use a distinct methodology. (page 37).

Finally, the assessment of the course encompasses both formative and summative evaluation stages. Formative evaluation pertains to the systematic assessment of the efficacy of the suggested materials and their modification based on feedback from both students and educators. During the summative phase, the entire course is assessed, and the content and methodologies are modified in accordance with the results received. In summary, for the formulation of an ESP syllabus, particular objectives (themes or teaching points) are established based on the identified needs of the students. Subsequently, the texts and reading assignments are established, along with the

evaluation techniques for the curriculum and the students. These final two characteristics are continuously changed during the course.

Conclusion. The theory and practice of English for Specific Purposes are essential in providing learners with the requisite language skills for success in their professional and academic domains. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) distinguishes itself from General English by focusing on specialized terminology, distinct communication styles, and practical language application. Effective ESP instruction necessitates a meticulously organized curriculum, contextually relevant teaching approaches, and an awareness of the learners' requirements. Notwithstanding the difficulty in English for Specific Purposes instruction, including curriculum development and teacher preparation, its advantages surpass the problems. By amalgamating academic knowledge with pragmatic pedagogical methods, ESP guarantees that learners cultivate language competencies pertinent to their professions. As industries increasingly globalize, the demand for specialized English language training will rise, underscoring the importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within the wider context of language education. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a methodology of significant relevance in academic and professional settings. The evolution has been shaped by historical and linguistic transformations, emerging trends in educational psychology, and communicative language theories. It is fundamentally characterized by its absolute and changeable attributes. The process begins with an analysis of students' needs, their attitudes toward learning, and the enhancement of linguistic methods. All of these are critical factors to consider in syllabus design. In the Cuban setting, this pedagogical technique facilitates the fulfillment of pupils' particular needs while addressing societal goals. Effective career guidance, whether implicit or explicit in an ESP course, will consistently consider the harmonious integration of personal and social factors in shaping students' identities to facilitate their conscious self-determination regarding professional interests during career selection or the reinforcement of their chosen motivations.

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