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Contemporary Trends in ESP Research within the MENA Region: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

As English is today's lingua franca, ESP is a flourishing domain of English language teaching and learning for learners seeking to enhance their professional or academic performance in a specific target situation. This review aims to classify research tendencies in the MENA region through topical themes explored in two major journals of ESP, *English for Specific Purposes* and *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. The study's significance lies in shedding light on the evolving landscape of ESP research in the region, a crucial endeavor given the growing importance of English as a lingua franca in professional and academic contexts. To reach this objective, 26 papers published between 2019 and 2024 were selected based on the authors' institutional affiliation. Scholars from Algeria, Iran, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and the UAE authored the selected research papers. The results of this review revealed a major interest in researching target-situation linguistic analysis and pedagogical implications.

Keywords: *ESP, Research Trend, MENA, EAP, English for Specific Purposes, English for Academic Purposes, Scoping Review*

Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region stands at the crossroads of diverse cultures, histories, and socio-political landscapes, making it a fascinating study area for scholars. As a region of strategic significance due to its rich natural resources, burgeoning economies, and geopolitical complexities, understanding the linguistic dynamics within MENA is imperative for grasping its evolving role in the global arena (Elyas et al., 2023). As a lingua franca, English occupies a central position in this linguistic mosaic, serving as a vital tool for communication across borders, sectors, and disciplines (Assassi & Ghodbane, 2023).

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Figure 1

Map of the Middle East and North Africa Region (Roloff et al., 2018)



Even though the Asian part of the MENA region, particularly the Gulf region, is relatively more economically advanced than the rest of the countries in MENA, African countries such as Algeria and Egypt are opening more to the internationalization of education, commerce, and trade. The prominence of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in higher education and research has surged, reflecting the region's aspirations for internationalization and academic excellence. Elyas et al. (2023) elaborated on the idea in their work investigating EMI in the MENA region. For example, in Algeria, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research encouraged the government to elevate the status of higher education by increasing financial support and offering academic staff opportunities for professional development through the 'Study in Algeria' label. Among these opportunities are encouraging training for using EMI and assisting professionals in developing their digital literacy to enhance universities' visibility and attract more international mobility and cooperation. In Egypt, the American Embassy in Cairo provided targeted online English programs for young professionals in business and tourism. The program aims to boost English skills in specialized fields. (US Embassy in Egypt, 2023)

Moreover, the emergence of ESP in this context highlights how professionals in diverse fields like business, medicine, and diplomacy recognize English as a specialized tool that meets their communicative needs. Professionals from different disciplines in North Africa still plan to immigrate to Europe, North America, and the Gulf region for better job opportunities, which locals label 'brain drain'. Furthermore, several countries in the MENA region, particularly less developed countries, worked effortlessly to attract more foreign investments given the availability of resources, energy, manpower, and tax reductions (Akgüç et al., 2020). These reasons also assisted in anchoring job seekers to learn the lingua franca, making ESP a flourishing field of educational practice.

Comprehending the position of English as a lingua franca, especially in the context of ESP and its influence on international professional communication, is crucial for understanding the developing educational, economic, and socio-cultural environments of the MENA region. This will help ESP practitioners spot present and future research directions, current challenges in ESP teaching, and best practices in ESP course design and instruction. Conventionally,

Basturkmen (2022, p. 519) states that “two foci of interest have dominated ESP research in general – studies of target situation discourse and case reports of teaching initiatives in local settings.” However, not all recent ESP research in the Asia-Pacific region is concerned with these foci, and researchers have pursued other topics of interest, as shown in the review.

Education policymakers' emphasis on ESP has prompted researchers to delve into this rapidly expanding field of study. ESP research was not the only indicator of the domain's development in the MENA region. Various projects related to needs analysis, target situation analysis, teacher professional development, EMI, and educational initiatives were among the main indicators of ESP development in the African and Asian countries of the MENA region. Among the encouraging projects is the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research's attempt to implement EMI, of which author one was a part, relying on a yearly training of subject specialists and language teachers in EMI in collaboration with Columbia University's Teachers College. Additionally, authors from Algeria (Assassi and Ghodbane, 2023), Saudi Arabia (Alsubaie, 2016), and Tunisia (Labassi, 2010) shared calls for the establishment of ESP centers with efficient training and locally designed materials to meet job market needs.

There is an increasing visibility and a growing presence of the MENA region in ESP research literature. We could not find journals dedicated to special issues or publishers focusing on publishing books and collected works in ESP in the MENA region. Nonetheless, several collected works, books, and special issues included interesting papers discussing ESP in one or several countries in the MENA region. In a special issue in ‘*World Englishes*’ entitled ‘*World Englishes and English for Specific Purposes*’, Nickerson (2022) explored how English is used for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP) in the UAE. The author presented a comprehensive overview of the language's use in business, highlighting its co-construction in various interactions and identifying the models referenced in common business genres. This paper showed how authors in the region pay attention to ESP course design and instruction by sharing the role of the language in economic prosperity with the international academic community. The increasing number of published papers researching academic writing in the region, particularly North Africa, indicates a growing interest in EMI. In applied linguistics articles, Assassi (2023) examined metadiscourse markers in abstracts from Algerian, Saudi, and native researchers. Using Hyland's classification, 60 abstracts were analyzed for frequency and function. The researcher found that Saudi authors, in terms of frequency, were closer to natives in using transitions; however, they remained far from native and Algerian authors in using other interactional and interactive markers.

As our study focuses on the latest published papers in these journals, Liu and Hu (2021) quantitatively reviewed publications in *English for Specific Purposes* and the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. The authors examined the development of ESP and EAP globally through published research papers in the two journals, without considering specific regions. A co-citation analysis of 1,092 articles and their 25,147 unique references identified 11 main groups of co-cited references representing ESP's major areas of study. These 11 clusters marked three evolutionary periods in ESP research. Liu and Hu label the three periods as follows: the initial conceptualization (1970s–1990s), which focused on needs analysis and identification; the maturing stage (1990s–2000s), which centered on the development of leading methodological approaches such as genre-based and corpus-based approaches; and the

flourishing stage (2000s–to date), which guided research into different interests such as move analysis (Deng et al., 2024; Van Herck, 2022), cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic variations (Xu et al., 2024; Rørvik, 2021), metadiscourse, and lexical bundles (Assassi & Merghmi, 2023). Liu and Hu (2021) identified five thriving ESP research areas in the ‘flourishing stage’ era, particularly from 2000 onwards. These areas cover disciplinary discourse in academia, formulaic language and academic lexis, ethnolinguistic variation, metadiscourse in English academic writing, and global academic English. For example, within academic discourse's disciplinary framework, research has predominantly used genre analysis to examine and contrast rhetorical structures and linguistic attributes across various academic disciplines. Certain inquiries, however, have focused on scrutinizing these patterns and features within a genre or genres prevalent in a specific disciplinary context. For example, ethnolinguistic variation studies have mostly compared academic genres written in English as a first or second language or next to works written in languages like Chinese and Arabic. Additionally, investigations within this area explored the linguistic and non-linguistic challenges encountered by multilingual scholars striving to disseminate their work in English as an L2. Most studies on academic vocabulary, meta-discourse, and formulaic language have been frequency-focused and descriptive studies based on corpus-based methods. These studies typically explore the characteristics of academic English usage in general or its manifestation within specific disciplinary contexts.

Basturkmen (2022) explored current trends in ESP research in the Asia-Pacific region. Similar to our study, it focuses on a specific region, highlighting different research directions. Her work inspired our current study in terms of data classification methods. Her review identified contemporary themes in recent ESP studies in the region through evidence from research papers reporting experimental studies published in *English for Specific Purposes* between 2018 and 2020. The author relied on identifying the region via the information on all authors' institutional affiliations. A total of 23 research articles were selected randomly for review. This set of papers included articles from different countries in the region, such as China, Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Vietnam, Australia, Taiwan, and Thailand. The review highlighted the vibrant and diverse ESP research in the Asia-Pacific region. Basturkmen (2022) identified four main topical themes for ESP research areas in the region: identity, teaching and learning, under-researched settings, and linguistic inquiry. The review revealed interesting subthemes in papers discussing identity. These difficulties were summarized as the ones individuals face in meeting the demanding social expectations of their roles. The theme also included studies of ESP teachers' professional identity and behavior. In teaching and learning as the second theme, the studies focused on needs analysis by evaluating syllabi and seeking stakeholders' perspectives on teaching methods.

Furthermore, studies investigating material evaluation, literacy development, and case reports of novel teaching initiatives took a fair share of the total number of ESP papers published in the region. As for under-researched settings, Basturkmen found that authors investigated embedded ESP, in which they discussed a range of alternative settings for teaching ESP courses and team teaching by language teachers and subject specialists. Linguistic inquiries took considerable attention from scholars in the Asia-Pacific region, as the author found. Using built corpora, researchers developed linguistic descriptions through target-situation linguistic analysis. Several corpus-based studies in Basturkmen's review covered the

functions and occurrences of lexical bundles in recorded lectures. Furthermore, the studies compared high-frequency lexis in hard and soft sciences academic discourse.

This study addresses a research gap that concerns the limited understanding of current trends and research themes within ESP in the MENA region. Despite the growing relevance of ESP in improving professional and academic performance, comprehensive reviews are scarce. The existing literature focuses mainly on individual studies or specialized elements of ESP (Havery, 2024; Koester, 2024), leaving a knowledge deficit in broader research trends and theme areas. This gap underscores the need for a comprehensive review that identifies key research themes and trends, providing valuable insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Therefore, this study aims to close this gap by thoroughly analyzing research from two prominent journals, *English for Specific Purposes* and the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, focusing on studies from the MENA region. By identifying and synthesizing research themes, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of ESP research in the MENA region and guide future research directions and pedagogical practices.

The Review

The significance of reviewing articles in the region and elucidating prevalent themes lies in the imperative to identify current research trajectories, thereby pinpointing emerging gaps and under-researched areas within the field. The main objective of the review was to identify common themes in recent ESP studies conducted in the MENA region. Relying on a scoping review framework, we attempted to draw on the nature and scope of recent ESP studies in the MENA region. Sutton, et al. (2019) assert that scoping reviews help to identify the scope of existing literature in a limited time frame through tabulated narrative commentary. Articles published in the journals mentioned above between 2019 and 2024 were inspected to achieve this aim. We focused on empirical research conducted within the MENA region. To accomplish this task, authors' institutional affiliations were analyzed using the advanced search feature available on the websites of both journals. To ensure the consistency of the collected information, only original research articles were selected for the study. We eliminated review articles, short communication papers, case reports, researchers' commentaries, book reviews, and data articles to ensure the validity and reliability of the research outcomes. The current review selected 26 research articles based on the criteria stated above. In this set of selected research articles, at least one of the authors provided an institutional affiliation in the MENA region. Among the 26 papers, five were single-authored, and 21 were co-authored by researchers from different institutional affiliations in and out of the MENA region. Following the selection criteria of the review sample, only eight out of 23 countries were represented in the study. The eight countries are Algeria, Iran, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and the UAE.

The process of selecting research papers for review resulted in their classification based on broad topics. The review aimed to classify the broad topical nature of selected papers through repetitive reading and categorization. Topics of the papers were divided into five main groups based on their main ideas: how to teach and learn, linguistic questions or target language use, reports of under-represented contexts, social and identity challenges of stakeholders (teachers and learners), and sociocultural differences in specific-drive language use. Accordingly, both authors organically identified the five categories from the data through an iterative process of

reading and re-reading articles, aiming to distill a concise set of thematic elements. Both authors participated actively, yet separately, in the iterative reading practice to ensure a more valid categorization of themes. Next, the authors joined forces to negotiate reading outcomes and frame a specific set of themes. The authors ensured agreement on the final emerging themes to validate the analysis outcomes relying on this inter-rater reliability procedure. Several sub-themes emerged inductively during reading, such as *needs analysis and identification, material evaluation, literacy development, innovative teaching initiatives, and ESP teachers' marginalization and professional development*. We must acknowledge that the work of Liu and Hu (2021) and Basturkmen (2022), who reviewed papers on a global non-specific region and the Asia Pacific region, respectively, inspired the reviewers' work on this paper. Nevertheless, the authors of the current review attempted to explore ESP research interests in MENA without drawing preconceived conclusions and expectations. The study sheds light on emerging ESP research themes published in flagship journals in a less familiar region.

Table 1*Institutional Affiliation of Authors by Country in the MENA Region*

Country	Institutional Affiliation
Algeria	2
Australia *	2
Iran	39
Lebanon **	1
New Zealand *	1
Oman	1
Qatar	6
Saudi Arabia	2
Tunisia	1
UK *	3
UAE	2
USA *	6

* Researchers from affiliations outside the MENA region co-authored articles with at least one author from the MENA region.

** The Researcher from Lebanon has two affiliations, Lebanon (Primary) and Australia.

Classifying research articles into their specific categories was more challenging than limiting the categories or themes. The classification process began with the study's title and the abstract section. However, for both authors, the classification process necessitated a thorough reading of the manuscripts to ensure accurate sorting. Therefore, the authors opted for a recursive classification process to clarify the appropriate theme of each paper, which resulted in slight modifications in sub-theme sections. An example of reclassified papers after further reading is a paper classified as a study focusing on educational implementation based on the title and the abstract. After further reading, we discovered that it was an investigation into an under-researched context or setting. The reclassification was due to the paper's real focus, which is an investigation of a teaching situation in an underrepresented context rather than an actual teaching practice. Another interesting example concerns studies focusing on language, with further suggestions for teaching initiatives based on the research outcomes. However, we classified this type of paper as linguistic inquiries or target language use because their primary goal was to define language usage for specific purposes, not as a teaching intervention per se. The theme of 'teaching and learning implementation or intervention' consists of papers that

discuss, in essence, subjects such as needs analysis and identification, material evaluation, or innovative teaching initiatives.

Main Themes

Teaching and Learning Implementations

As an ever-evolving area of study and practice, ESP has always focused on teaching methods and evaluating teaching approaches. Traditionally, ESP has been depicted as a movement driven by teaching and instructional materials (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). There has been a notable emphasis on methodologies for teaching and assessing teaching methods within this discipline as a whole. (Basturkmen, 2022)

Needs Analysis and Identification

Al Hilali and McKinley (2021) discussed how to effectively prepare English language learners for workplace technical writing in fields like engineering and business. They contributed to the current discussion about this topic, building on social learning theories and existing research on the university-to-workplace transition for newly hired employees. Their research offered a novel approach by conducting a detailed needs analysis in professional settings, highlighting the ever-evolving complications of writing needs for L2 learners of English. The authors investigated the multifaceted character of workplace writing encountered by graduates in Oman. They used in-depth qualitative approaches such as interviews with 12 vocational college graduates and four-line managers in addition to text analysis of 29 workplace writings. The findings highlighted the significant impact of socio-contextual components on writing practices, emphasizing the necessity for ESP course designers to incorporate these contextual factors into their curriculum to prepare learners for the demands of workplace writing.

Material Evaluation

Karimpour and Mazlum (2024) addressed the critical gap in our understanding of the assessment behavior of EAP teachers, a topic that has been notably underexplored in the language testing community, according to Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons (2015). The study investigated the perceptions and practices of EAP assessment among two distinct Iranian practitioners: subject-specialty teachers and English language specialists. Through interviews with 30 teachers and an examination of 40 test samples, the researchers provided insights into the assessment practices within the Iranian EAP context. Drawing from interview and built-corpus data and considering the integrally syllabi-dependent nature of achievement tests, the study relied on a content analysis of undergraduate program syllabi to clarify any differences in test tasks, the nature of knowledge assessed, and the characteristics of efficient EAP tests between content specialists and English teachers. The findings suggested that Iranian EAP teachers' assessment behavior is shaped by their interpretations of the goals and objectives of EAP courses as outlined in the syllabus contents.

Literacy Development

Gaffas (2019) examined Saudi undergraduate students' perceptions of the effectiveness of EGP and ESP courses in improving their academic language proficiency and usage in degree programs conducted in English. Through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, students' perspectives on their challenges with academic speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills were gathered. The study, which adapted a questionnaire from Evans and Green (2007) and supplemented it with qualitative data, reveals that students' primary challenge is comprehending unfamiliar terms, which results in subpar performance across all four language skills. The study highlighted shortcomings in course implementation and offered suggestions for future course planning. The article concludes by discussing the implications of these findings within the Saudi educational context.

Innovative Teaching Initiatives

Saadatara et al. (2023) addressed the dearth of research on lexical bundles (LBs) in ESL/EFL examinees' writings, particularly in international high-stakes examinations such as the IELTS. The study aimed to fill these gaps through a two-phased investigation. In the exploratory phase, the researchers analyzed approximately 1000 mock academic IELTS writing tasks across three levels of writing competence to examine the form, function, and distribution of LBs. In the second phase, the researchers implemented a pedagogical intervention and assessed its impact on enhancing the performance of IELTS candidates. The findings revealed that higher proficiency levels correspond to increased frequency, range, and varied structures and functions of LBs deployed by examinees. Moreover, examinees distributed LBs equally across different sections of the texts, observing some variations in the introduction, body, or conclusion sub-sections. The study concluded that an explicit functional pedagogical approach is effective particularly in enhancing cohesion and coherence, as well as lexical resource scores.

On a slightly different note, Atai et al. (2022) investigated the transformative impact of virtual conferences and webinars on academic communication, highlighting the growing need for researchers to adapt to digital platforms with guided mentorship, practical experience, and ongoing feedback. The study, which focused on the efficacy of an online EAP course in improving researchers' virtual presentation skills, involved 20 participants from various science departments at a state university in Iran. The researchers conducted a needs analysis through narrative interviews, revealing the participants' requirements for academic language competence, pragmatic communication skills, and engaging remote audience interaction in virtual presentations. The researchers then designed and implemented an online EAP course to address these needs, incorporating participatory observations and peer feedback to evaluate its effectiveness. The findings underscored the positive impact of the course, as evidenced by participants' enhanced self-confidence, proficiency in multimedia-enhanced presentation skills, and heightened awareness of audience engagement. Focus-group interviews further illuminated the participants' experiences, highlighting the course's role in fostering digital academic competence and collaborative, community-based learning.

Linguistic Inquiries or Target Language Use

It is noteworthy that this thematic area encompasses all studies exploring linguistic inquiries and target language use. Nevertheless, the authors categorized papers examining sociocultural and contextual dimensions of language usage as a principal theme (Theme Five). This

classification stemmed from the shared objectives evident in the articles within the present theme, which predominantly employed corpus-based analyses and linguistic delineations within target situations, particularly within academic genres such as articles and theses.

Traditional needs analysis methods often lack depth in identifying precise language functions, genres, linguistic devices, or skills required by the target context. Effective ESP instruction necessitates insights from linguistic analyses of target situational language use in academic and professional settings. Mancil et al. (1980) emphasize the importance of a detailed analysis of English language usage within learners' specific domains. This approach enhances traditional ESP needs analysis by providing meticulous descriptions of linguistic features and functions in target situations, thereby improving the validity and relevance of ESP teaching practices.

This section reviews a study by Golparvar et al. (2024) that addressed the research gap in cohesion within academic writing, focusing on research articles (RAs). The study examined cohesion at sentence, paragraph, and overall textual levels across different sections using a corpus of 100 RAs in applied linguistics. Mixed-effects modeling showed that there are noticeable differences in cohesion measures between rhetorical sections. Global cohesion indices showed how well some sections can predict what will happen next. The findings offered theoretical and pedagogical insights into the importance of cohesion in academic writing.

In 2023, Ash'ari et al. carefully looked at how rhetorical organization and the placement of meta-discourse markers are organized in a corpus of 20 applied linguistics qualitative research articles. The study's findings illuminated the structural composition of these articles, demonstrating that the seven-move structure previously proposed in quantitative dataset research also applies to the qualitative dataset under investigation. However, contrasted to prior quantitative data, notable differences emerged in the steps within certain moves, particularly in the '*Comment on the Results*' and '*Deduction from the Research*' moves. By drawing attention to these distinctions, the study promoted enhancing academic writers' awareness of rhetorical and linguistic intricacies integral to qualitative research within applied linguistics. Such insights have useful implications for teaching, especially for helping new writers to get better at following academic writing conventions and using meta-discourse markers correctly in qualitative research settings.

Azizi et al. (2022) examined the growing emphasis on promotion in academic writing, particularly in research articles in Applied Linguistics (AL). The study investigated using value arguments as a form of promotion, focusing on the introduction sections. Analyzing 30 RAs from various AL journals, the researchers found that writers often employ implicit value arguments to underscore the importance of their research. They also identified the different functions of these arguments, which tend to appear in specific locations within the introduction sections. The study underlined the strategic use of value arguments for promotion in scholarly writing and contributes to understanding promotion mechanisms in academic discourse in applied linguistics.

Alinasab et al. (2021) shed light on the increasing recognition of genre literacy's significance in academic writing classes, principally in research article composition. Their study recorded the revisions, informed by genre literacy, that English as an Additional Language (EAL) graduate students made to improve their term-paper assignments, transforming them into Research Articles (RAs). The researchers developed a six-category

taxonomy of genre-based revision strategies, encompassing addition, deletion, reformulation, substitution, translocation, and expansion. Through the lens of these frameworks, they analyzed the initial and revised drafts of twelve RAs authored by Iranian graduate students, focusing on move-step realization within each paper section. The study revealed that expansion, reformulation, and addition emerged as the most common genre-based revision strategies. Furthermore, it shows that the introduction and discussion sections undergo the highest percentage of genre-based revisions. Shirazizadeh and Amirfazlian (2021) investigated the role of lexical bundles in academic texts, emphasizing their importance in EAP instruction. They addressed the lack of research on intradisciplinary variations of 4-word bundles within the same discipline. Analyzing a 5.7-million-word corpus comprising textbooks, research articles, and theses in applied linguistics, the study reveals variability across genres and commonalities within disciplinary genres. The findings challenged the dichotomy of generality and specificity in EAP and have pedagogical implications for teaching lexical bundles. Loghmani et al. (2020) explored the dynamics of academic writing, emphasizing its role in representing external realities and facilitating social interaction. The study, which focuses on native English-speaking Ph.D. students in TEFL, examines how they position their texts intertextually within dissertation discussion sections. Using the Appraisal Framework's Engagement subsystem, the researchers examined ten discussion sections to identify and explain the use of dialogic engagement resources. The findings revealed a diverse range of dialogic resources writers employ to engage with potential interlocutors. Additionally, they observed a preference for dialogically contractive resources, suggesting a tendency to mitigate potential rejection or challenge.

Alangari et al. (2020) explored the aspect of phrasal verbs (PVs) used in expert academic writing in linguistics. A previously overlooked area according to them. They used a new method that combines grammatical collocation, Quirkian clause structure analysis, and frame semantics to look at how common PVs are in academic writing compared to other types of verbs. Using a curated corpus of L1 English academic experts writing in linguistics, they meticulously investigated PV frequency (types and tokens) and semantic differences. Contrary to prior findings, the results revealed a significant presence of PVs in expert writing, often used in constrained and occasionally metaphorical senses. Triki (2019) conducted a detailed analysis of the discourse function of definitions in scholarly writing, challenging the traditional view that definitions serve only metadiscursive purposes. The study argued that definitions have a dual role, serving metadiscursive and ideational functions. While definitions are often seen as non-propositional elements that clarify the meaning of utterances, this paper explored how they contribute to constructing meaning and building argumentation. Analyzing research articles from Linguistics and Computer Sciences, the study categorized definitions based on their structure and function. Results revealed diverse forms and functions of definitions across disciplines, highlighting their role in academic discourse. The study emphasized that definitions' function depends on disciplinary practices, providing insights into their complex usage in academic writing.

Zolfaghari's (2023) research explored the often-neglected complexities of negation within academic genres and disciplines. The study examined the appraisal subsystems in 360 research articles across various fields, focusing on how negation interacts with interpersonal and evaluative resources. Comparative analysis revealed significant disciplinary differences in the

use of appraisal resources, with the soft sciences employing certain engagement and evaluation devices more than the hard sciences. Soft disciplines prefer misalignment, cautious detachment, and unfulfilled expectations in denial, while hard sciences use appreciation, neutral attitude polarity, and sharpening resources more densely. The study also highlighted the diverse negation patterns within and across sub-corpora, emphasizing the use of denial markers either alone or in combination with other appraisal options.

Pessoa et al. (2023) explored the intricacies of case analysis writing, a common task in business courses where students must leverage their domain knowledge to identify corporation problems and recommend viable solutions. Despite the recommendations section's pivotal role in case examination studies, there was a lack of investigation into how to effectively guide students in composing it. The study used Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based genre analysis to look at how students at an American university (Middle Eastern campus) chose which alternatives to include in a case proposal assignment for an Organizational Behavior (OB) course. The findings have implications for various genres that require students to maintain a consistent stance while advocating for a preferred solution among alternatives, thus contributing to pedagogical practices to improve students' argumentative writing skills. Mitchell et al. (2021) analyzed case analysis, a challenging genre in business and information systems (IS) programs, posing academic and professional role-play dilemmas for students. The study, which investigated student writing in an IS course at an English-medium American branch campus in the Middle East, dissected linguistic features using systemic functional linguistics (SFL). Using contrasting examples, the study revealed how students balance academic and occupational parts in numerous cases. The findings informed the creation of a mentor text showcasing linguistic features that alleviate role-play tension, fostering a seamless blend of learner and professional identities.

Reports of Under-represented Contexts

This section presents research endeavors within specific ESP contexts, looking into areas that have received little attention or remain underexplored in ESP. Furthermore, there is a notable lack of literature on these topics in esteemed ESP journals and among specialist communities. Outemzabet and Sarnou (2023) conducted a thorough analysis of English language use among university hospital professors in a teaching hospital in Algeria. Through qualitative methods including focus group interviews, in-depth interviews, and field observations, the study revealed a complex linguistic environment characterized by multilingualism, diglossia, code-switching, and code-mixing. English was traditionally limited to research and has expanded into medical domains, driven by aspirations to integrate into the global medical community. This shift is evident in professional, vocational, educational, and social communication. Increased use of information technologies and participation in international conferences further emphasize the importance of English proficiency. These findings have significant implications for ESP research in medicine, guiding the development of tailored curricula, materials, assessment methods, and data collection tools. Bahrami et al. (2019) explored the research practices of Iranian EAP teachers. Through a mixed-methods approach involving narrative frames administered to 97 teachers and in-depth narrative interviews with 6 participants, the study explored the landscape of research engagement among EAP educators and examined the trajectories of their research endeavors throughout their teaching careers. The findings revealed

a variety of research profiles and highlighted personal and institutional barriers to active participation in research activities. Notably, personal impediments include a prevailing perception among teachers that EAP research lacks priority, coupled with constraints on time availability for research pursuits and limited access to EAP research materials. Institutional barriers, such as micro-political dynamics within academic institutions, further compound these challenges. Moreover, the study unveiled the intricate interplay between institutional politics and teachers' disciplinary backgrounds, delineating distinct research trajectories characterized by responses of commitment, compliance, or disengagement. These findings have implications for institutional policy formulation and teacher education program design.

Social and Identity Challenges of Stakeholders (Teachers and Learners)

ESP teachers are commonly denoted as practitioners due to the multifaceted roles and responsibilities they undertake. These roles encompass various tasks integral to the instructional process. These responsibilities span from conducting needs analyses and course design to material selection, development, and post-instruction evaluation. Consequently, we expect ESP practitioners to assume diverse roles such as collaborators, researchers, curriculum designers, instructors, managers, and artists. The expanding array of tasks and the escalating demands of specialized language courses exert pressure on ESP practitioners. Moreover, as ESP teachers strive to keep pace with advancements in other domains, ESP learners encounter analogous challenges, whether navigating role expectations as newly employed professionals or, as elucidated by Lei and Hu (2019), grappling with the heightened global expectations for scholarly publication. Consequently, research endeavors that explore social and identity dynamics aim to delineate the challenges stakeholders confront in meeting socially imposed role expectations. (Basturkmen, 2022)

Atai et al. (2022) studied the identity construction of a novice Iranian EAP teacher. The study employed a multi-method approach, which includes semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, classroom observations, and stimulated recall sessions, to explore Alborz's journey of identity formation. Analysis of the data revealed three main themes: (1) tensions arising from discrepancies between claimed and constructed EAP identities; (2) emotional conflicts stemming from content-related challenges; and (3) perceptions of EAP teaching as undervalued professionally. In the Iranian EAP teaching context, Alborz encountered conceptual, emotional, and agency-related conflicts influenced by sociocultural and disciplinary variances. The study provided valuable insights into the complexity of novice EAP teachers' identity development, emphasizing the importance of contextual factors and professional support mechanisms in EAP teacher education programs. Kaivanpanah et al. (2021) investigated Iranian EAP teachers' competencies, Professional Development (PD) activities, and perceptions of teaching roles and challenges. According to data from 105 teachers, there were strengths in reading, speaking, and pedagogy, as well as areas for improvement in listening, writing, feedback, and needs analysis. Interviews identified nine roles (teaching, PD, collaboration, etc.) and seven challenges (students, materials, etc.). This study provided insights into teachers' pathways, perspectives on content knowledge, essential qualifications, and EAP teacher education, concluding with practical implications and research recommendations.

The investigation by Tardy et al. (2022) presented a comprehensive qualitative investigation spanning a year, focusing on the experiences of six writing instructors with genre-based pedagogy (GBP). The study shed light on these instructors' perspectives regarding the challenges and successes encountered while implementing GBP in an English for general academic purposes writing classroom. The findings stressed challenges concerning course aims, content, and structure in addition to successes in leveraging genre content knowledge to address issues and enhance GBP implementation in the classroom. The study suggested that teachers' pedagogical content knowledge of genres evolves through their interaction with teaching practices, and advocates for continuous and robust teacher training and support.

Abusalim's (2023) empirical investigation examined the impact of coloniality on social sciences research writing and publishing in the Arab World. This study studied the ERPP practices of Arabic-speaking academics, as well as EAL and Native English-speaking (NES) academics. It addressed Arab World issues from within the region. The study used qualitative interviews to look into how 11 EAL and 11 NES scholars in the social sciences (SS) and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) felt about their ERPP practices. The study addressed critical questions about the challenges faced by EAL and NES academics in ERPP when discussing local issues. Findings revealed significant challenges faced by SS academics in terms of epistemological dependency, the inhibition of border thinking, and navigating the demands of disciplinary writing conventions. Accounts from the Arab World advocated for the approval of border thinkers who integrate local and/or Western epistemic agendas to advance academic research and knowledge construction. By recognizing the experiences of EAL and NES scholars with decolonization, these results showed how important it is to engage critically with the discussion on decolonization in ESP and ERPP scholarship.

Socio-cultural Differences in Specific Purpose Language Use

A newer area of study in ESP linguistics now examines how different sociocultural and linguistic factors influence language use in specific situations, rather than describing language practice in a target situation. As a result, this area of research investigates whether language patterns change based on specific aspects such as culture, linguistic background, or interlocutors' roles. Basturkmen (2022) clarified that to fully understand the language requirements of ESP learners in their target environments. It was essential to create detailed descriptions of language use that consider the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of those involved.

Sultani and Kuhl (2022) investigated differences in the use of directional determinants (DDs) in English RAs between English and Iranian researchers. 600 RAs from six soft science disciplines were analyzed. They found similarities in DD recycling between the two groups, particularly in the discussion section and in economics. While both cited editorial policy and RA length as reasons for DD recycling, novice Iranian researchers focused solely on academic writing conventions and redundancy in particular. Ziaei and Gulparvar (2022) investigated syntactic complexity in the discussion sections of RAs across applied linguistics, chemistry, and economics. They argued that existing research primarily focuses on large-grained indices, overlooking finer syntactic variances. Their study used both phrasal and clausal complexity indices to capture these intricacies. Comparative analysis revealed disciplinary variations in complexity, with applied linguistics and economics RAs showing higher clausal complexity,

whereas chemistry texts exhibit greater phrasal complexity. However, differences between L1 and L2 writers' contributions were less pronounced. Sadeghi and Alinasab (2020) explored how writers establish their knowledge in negotiating new research outcomes and resolving tensions within the discussion section of research articles. Departing from traditional analyses, they employed Hunston's (1993) framework of academic conflict to examine the discourse of native and non-native writers in both their L1 and L2. The corpus comprised Applied Linguistics articles: 20 by native English speakers, 20 by non-native English speakers, and 20 in Persian by native speakers. Results show that English papers, regardless of the author's native language, exhibited more academic conflict structures than Persian articles. However, specific components of academic conflict were similarly frequent in English and Persian articles. The distinction was pointed out in inconsistent indicators and conflict resolution strategies between papers written in English and Persian.

Abouzeid (2021) examined the challenges encountered by Lebanese students in academic writing within the context of the EMI. While previous studies focused on instructors' views, this research considered students' writing proficiency by analyzing their discipline coursework and comparing that with teachers' perceptions. The study revealed consistency between teachers' perceptions and learners' practice on two out of three identified challenges. These findings provided valuable insights for EMI policy and curriculum design, ensuring instructors' perceptions align with learners' linguistic proficiency and learning requirements.

Discussion

The main aim of the current study is to delineate current research directions in the domain of ESP within the Middle East and North Africa region. Even though the findings from the review, quantitatively, revealed discrepancies between different research interests, it still provided evidence of dynamic and varied research interests in the region. ESP researchers in the MENA region seem to draw new and innovative directions of study. Unexpectedly, linguistic inquiries and target language use through corpus-based analyses dominated the current research interests in the region even though several areas of the region are considered underrepresented in ESP. Accordingly, a few studies inquired about underrepresented contexts.

In the world of ESP course design and instruction, needs analysis stands out as a crucial aspect, garnering significant interest among researchers. However, the exploration of needs analysis as a comprehensive process within workplace contexts to enhance Omani learners' L2 writing skills was primarily undertaken by Al Hilali and McKinley (2021), showcasing a notable exception given the scarcity of studies investigating and employing needs analysis in the MENA region as far as our sample is concerned. The primary objective of dedicating research papers to needs analysis appears to have evolved, reflecting a diminished emphasis on standalone investigations of this nature, which have been extensively covered in the preceding decade (Liu & Hu, 2021). Presently, needs analysis reports are typically integrated as components or phases within broader research endeavors that concentrate on material development and teaching initiatives in ESP. This observation suggests a shifting landscape within ESP, particularly in the MENA region, notably the Gulf, where scholars appear increasingly inclined towards applying pedagogical implications via innovative teaching initiatives without standard needs analysis. Similarly, investigations into material evaluation and literacy development within ESP teaching and learning contexts have been relatively

scarce. Karimpour and Mazlum (2024) explored the former, examining how Iranian EAP teachers' assessment practices are influenced by their interpretations of ESP course objectives outlined in syllabi. Meanwhile, Gaffas (2019) explored the latter, highlighting Saudi undergraduate students' criticisms of both ESP and EGP courses for perceived shortcomings in enhancing overall English proficiency. While the evaluation of teaching materials, tests, and instructional methods holds paramount importance for fostering effective instructional practices within ESP, scholars within the region appear to allocate comparatively less attention to these facets. This trend suggests a prevailing inclination towards innovative and creative pursuits, potentially overshadowing the allure of qualitative assessments and evaluative inquiries, which have experienced diminished scholarly appeal in contemporary academia. As an example, evaluating aviation English tests' validity and reliability has not been under scrutiny for a long time even though several issues with testing practices have been noticed. In one of our studies, we provided several shortcomings with the English for Aviation Language Testing System and how these issues may jeopardize the validity of the test. This kind of study would not attract as much attention as required as it was not offering innovative initiatives but evaluating what was supposed to be innovative. Alderson (2008) was the last to stand and investigate these testing issues in aviation English and no studies have been conducted ever since.

ESP teaching initiatives have attracted considerable research interest within the MENA research community. For instance, Saadatar et al. (2023) and Atai et al. (2022) investigated the implementation of lexical bundles in writing and examination teachings, and the utilization of virtual conferences and webinars to enhance academic communication, respectively. Linguistic inquiries into target language use emerged as a primary focus for authors in this review, with eleven out of twenty-six papers exploring language use in target situations. The majority of these papers directly or indirectly investigated academic writing, with specific emphasis on genres such as research articles and theses, as exemplified by the works of Zolfaghari (2023) and Alinasab et al. (2021). Others approached academic writing indirectly through metadiscourse analysis, exemplified by Triki (2019). Only Mitchell et al. (2021) and Pessoa et al. (2023) ventured beyond academic writing to investigate language use in target situations, exploring case analysis as a prominent genre in business writing. The growing number of research papers on teaching initiatives was marked by a noticeable focus on academic writing development. This indicates a drastic shift towards EMI and CLIL in higher education following demands from students and researchers in the region to develop their competencies in EAP. Accordingly, this will help them to keep up with the globalized world and to share their ideas and production in English.

The preponderance of studies on academic writing within this topical theme may be attributed to the research scope of the primary journal relied upon in this review, namely the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. However, this does not imply a lack of attention to academic English within ESP or other journals specializing in ESP and applied linguistics. EAP remains a rapidly evolving research interest within ESP, given the global status of the English language and EMI, particularly in the MENA region. While the majority of papers in this review originate from the Middle East, only two papers represent the North African region, highlighting the underrepresentation of certain contexts in the literature. Notable among these is the work of Outemzabet and Sernou (2023), which analyzes the significance of English

language usage in Algeria's multilingual setting characterized by diglossia, code-switching, and code-mixing.


Moreover, sociocultural differences in specific purpose language use emerged as a prominent theme, underscoring the importance of linguistic and socio-cultural factors in ESP research within the region. Scholars like Ziaeeian and Gulparvar (2022) and Alinasab (2020) shed light on academic writing complexities and practices between L1 English and L2 English writers, highlighting interdisciplinary differences and techniques for negotiating new research findings. The analyzed papers primarily focused on socio-cultural differences in academic writing, reflecting significant distinctions between native and non-native researchers. This trend, extensively researched over the past decade, often emphasizes metadiscourse and move analysis. The socio-cultural aspect is essential as more non-native researchers publish in English to reach a broader audience. However, despite the multinational nature of many MENA countries, especially in the Gulf region, there was less focus on socio-cultural differences in workplace English (EOP). This lack of attention may indicate fewer communicative issues in the workplace and a well-developed multinational work environment in the region. In conclusion, the reviewed studies not only underscore the dynamic nature of ESP research in the region but also shed light on various socio-cultural and pedagogical dimensions shaping ESP practices in diverse contexts across the Middle East and North Africa.


Conclusion

As a concluding remark on the conducted review, the studies presented in this paper underscore the significance of ESP pedagogy, particularly in the realm of teaching and learning. The current systematic analysis showed that there is a growing interest in ESP pedagogy through studies that look into linguistic corpora, needs analysis, reaching out to underrepresented regions, and teaching initiatives. Consequently, areas of study such as ESP teachers' development, ESP teaching policies, subject-specialty teacher collaboration, and technology integration in ESP classes are all under-researched areas in the domain and need extra attention from researchers in the region. To be more specific, most of the studies looked at in this review either looked at teaching and learning practices as interventions, materials, or needs, or they talked about needs assessments in the workplace or language settings and then gave pedagogical implications. The significance of ESP pedagogy in the MENA region arises from the increasing prevalence of English language usage and its adoption as a medium of instruction. This is not limited to the more developed Gulf region but also North Africa. This review elucidated the demand for global integration and the adoption of English as a lingua franca for both professional and academic purposes, particularly in tertiary education, by emphasizing the paramount importance of academic writing and its specific genres, such as academic articles. This facet of academic writing and the expectations within the academic community, including doctoral candidates, were examined by Chen and Flowerdew (2018) through the concept of "publish or perish" (p. 97). While ESP research primarily focuses on learners or courses, Tardy et al.'s (2022) and others' work indicate a growing emphasis on ESP teachers. However, most studies on ESP teachers in this review and elsewhere explore the additional tasks and requirements assigned to ESP practitioners without addressing the need to alleviate pressure and provide them with the necessary support to ensure a more effective instructional process. Therefore, the authors align with Basturkmen's (2022) sentiment,

emphasizing the importance of understanding the work environment and the needs of ESP practitioners.

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