



Exploring the multifaceted roles of English for specific purposes practitioners within the transformative paradigm in higher education

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Abstract

This academic article, utilizing an analytical literature review, aimed to explore the multifaceted roles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) practitioners. It was found that there were five key roles responsible by the practitioners: (1) teaching; (2) course designing and material providing; (3) researching; (4) collaborating; and (5) evaluating. Performing the teaching role, practitioners facilitate learning, integrate subject-specific content, and foster authentic communication. As course designers and material providers, ESP practitioners adopt language-centered, skills-centered, and learning-centered approaches, as well as the cyclical process of needs analysis, ensuring relevance and authenticity in their courses. ESP practitioners, in their role as researchers, actively participate in action research to develop their professional identities within the ESP context. Collaboration with subject teachers and colleagues also emerges as a crucial aspect, ranging from cooperation to team-teaching, with associated challenges. Lastly, ESP practitioners serve as evaluators, assessing teaching methods, materials, and student learning outcomes, emphasizing fair and constructive evaluation aligned with academic and professional achievements. The discussion highlights the dynamic and comprehensive nature of ESP practitioners' responsibilities, requiring ongoing adaptation and improvement in response to the evolving demands of ESP instruction. Moreover, clear national educational and language policies of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) countries should be emphasized to succeed in their ESP education.

Keywords: Challenges of ESP practitioners, ESP course design, ESP education, ESP professional development, ESP, Roles of ESP practitioners.

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Contents

1. Introduction	132
2. Key Roles of ESP Practitioners.....	132
3. Discussion.....	138
4. Conclusion	139
References.....	139

Contribution of this paper to the literature

The article emphasizes the five concurrent key roles of ESP practitioners and discusses the challenges associated with each role and its relevance to the current educational and language policies of EFL countries, contributing to recognition of the professionalism of ESP practitioners and their field among policymakers, educational institutions, and ELT fellows.

1. Introduction

Originating in the 1960s due to the increasing global demand for international personnel in science, business, and engineering fields, English for specific purposes (ESP) is a specialized approach to language teaching tailored to meet the communicative needs of learners in specific professional or academic domains. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize more practical application of language skills within a targeted context than teaching grammar and language structures (Fiorito, 2024) focusing on the learners' specific needs and tasks. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) extend this concept, highlighting the integration of language and subject matter and promoting effective communication in real-world situations. ESP now goes beyond general language proficiency, contributing to the development of students' skills required for specific fields (Fitria, 2023) and fostering language competence that directly aligns with the demands of a particular discipline, occupation, or academic pursuit.

Within this process, ESP practitioners are expected to fulfill five significant roles (Khemri & Kadri, 2017) as shown in Figure 1: a teacher, a course designer and a materials provider, a researcher, a collaborator, and an evaluator (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). However, the demands of these interconnected roles often present challenges for ESP practitioners, potentially hindering the success of ESP courses. Iswati and Triastuti (2021) report that ESP practitioners encounter challenges such as inadequate knowledge in students' disciplines, inadequate ESP training and comprehensive needs analysis, and a wide range of students' English competencies. According to Bottaro (2023) ESP practitioners instructing ESP courses need to undergo specialized training to ensure they are equipped and capable of aiding their students in achieving proficiency in the English language, thereby enhancing their professional opportunities. This article aims to outline the five key roles of ESP practitioners and discuss the challenges they may face. Additionally, it provides guidelines for both ESP practitioners and educational institutions offering ESP courses.

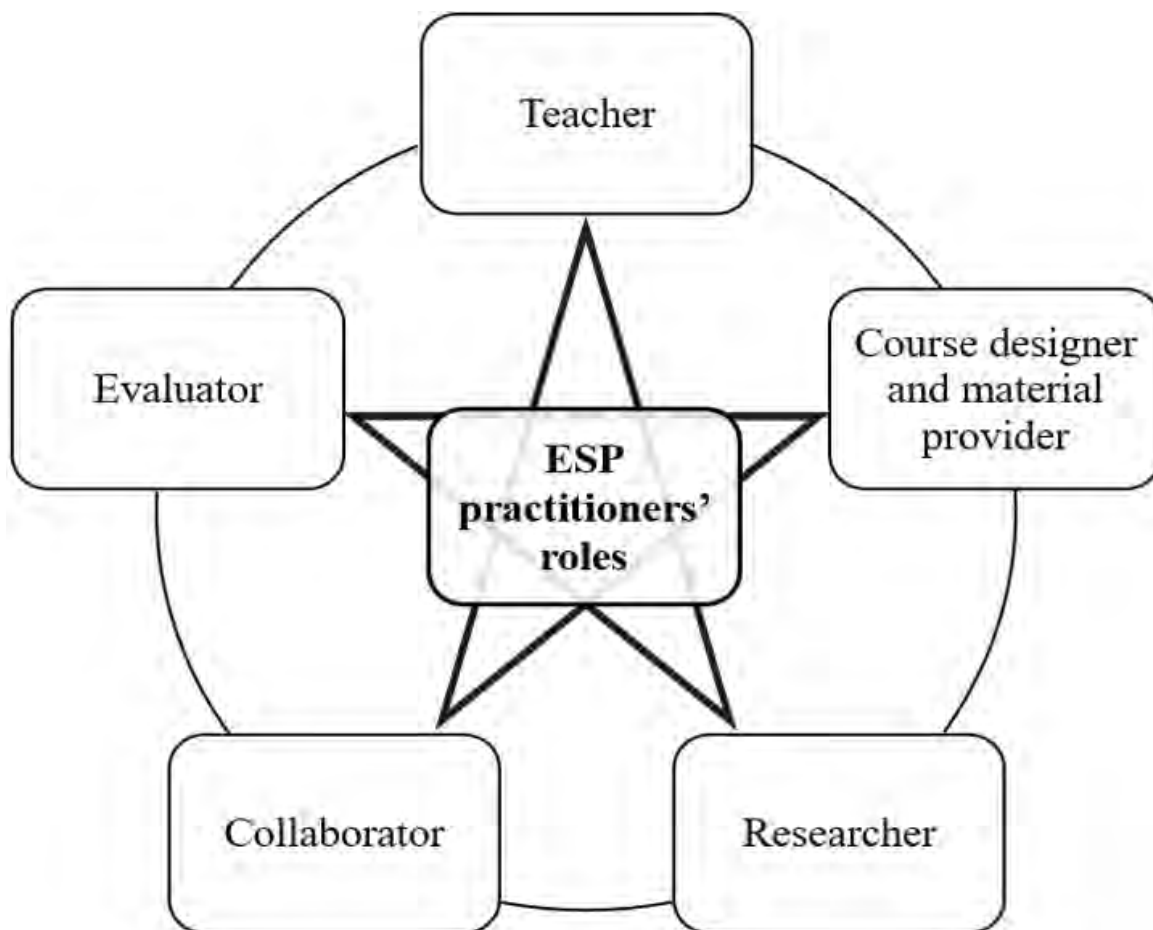


Figure 1. ESP practitioners' roles and their interconnection.

Source: Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998).

2. Key Roles of ESP Practitioners

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) initially highlighted a range of distinct challenges encountered by ESP teachers in the past, such as the shift in English's status from a stand-alone subject to one that serves students in other fields. As a result, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) strongly emphasize the importance of acknowledging the diverse nature of ESP teaching. They advocate for using the term "practitioner" instead of "teacher" to encompass a wider spectrum of roles and responsibilities central to ESP education beyond traditional English language teaching (ELT). Consequently, they delineate five concurrent key roles performed by ESP practitioners as follows:

2.1. A Teacher

Performing a teaching role, ESP practitioners are responsible for facilitating learning opportunities, fostering authentic communication, and selecting suitable teaching methods to deliver specialized ESP courses tailored to the specific needs of their students. To facilitate effective communication in specific domains, they must incorporate

subject-specific content and language skills into their instruction. They also play a vital role in providing feedback, assessing students' progress, and guiding them towards improvement. By fostering linguistic proficiency, practical application, and professional development, ESP practitioners create a dynamic learning environment for their students (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). As indicated in the teaching evaluation forms completed by undergraduates (Maejo University, 2022; Prince of Songkla University, 2016) higher education ESP practitioners are expected to fulfill several responsibilities. These include establishing positive relationships with students, employing relevant and effective instructional materials, demonstrating good personal qualities and punctuality, and implementing teaching and learning approaches that encourage active student engagement and application of acquired knowledge and skills to their future professions. These expectations effectively highlight the teaching role of higher education ESP practitioners. However, ESP practitioners may encounter a situation where they are not considered the primary source of knowledge, as their students may possess a deeper understanding of the subject matter. This is because many ESP courses cater to students in specific disciplines, leading to the perception of English teachers as advisors or counselors (Antić, 2016). In fulfilling their role, ESP practitioners should exhibit flexibility, actively listen to their students, show a genuine interest in the assigned disciplines, and be prepared to take calculated risks.

To illustrate, Promnath and Tayjasanant (2016) highlight that numerous higher education institutions in Thailand encourage English teachers to employ English-medium instruction, creating an English-speaking environment to support internationalization and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) policies. However, some ESP practitioners, particularly in ESP courses for health science and liberal arts undergraduates who are Thai natives, adopt an English-Thai code-switching approach to facilitate better understanding. In contrast, according to Hoa and Mai (2016) the majority of Vietnamese undergraduates emphasize that their difficulty in learning ESP courses is caused by the quality of lecturers in terms of their selection of teaching methods, English listening skills, and specialized knowledge. The researchers believe that teaching ESP is ineffective due to a lack of teacher training in specialized knowledge, and ESP practitioners admit that they do not understand specialized terminology.

Based on their research with Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at Dong Hua University in China, Bao and Ding (2009) develop a business English teaching model (see Figure 2) for ESP. They argue that the traditional grammar-translation approach is ineffective for teaching English in a professional context, and instead, they propose integrating metacognitive strategies into business English instruction. In this model, the ESP practitioner takes on a guiding role, allowing students to actively participate and take responsibility for their own learning. The model consists of three steps: setting goals with students, creating meaningful scenarios for learning, and developing students' metacognitive strategies.

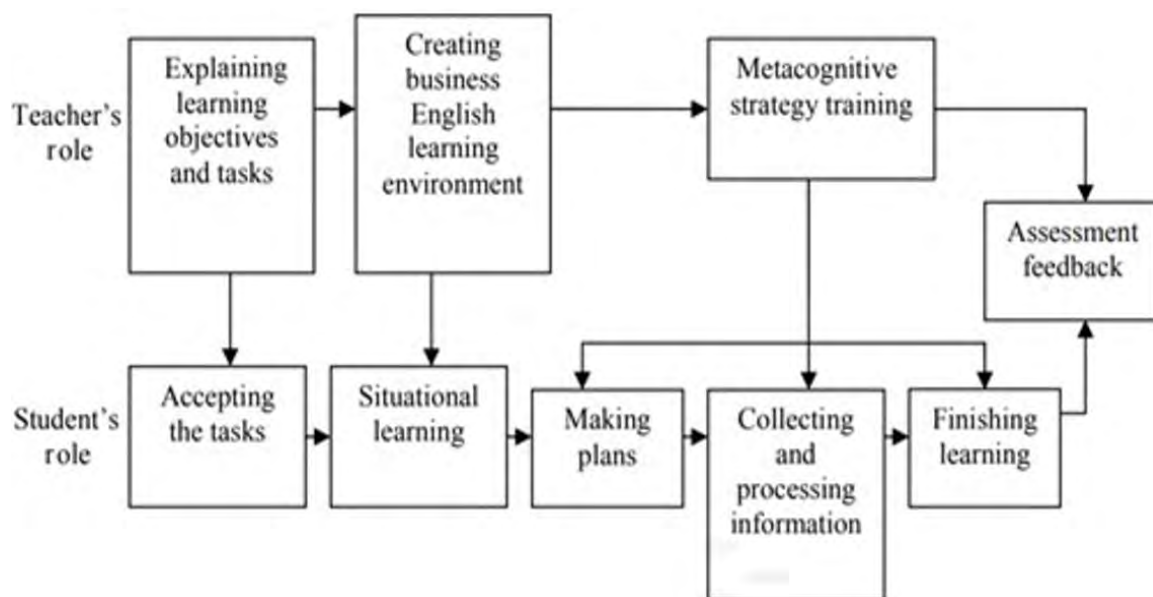


Figure 2. ESP-based business English teaching model.

Source: Bao and Ding (2009).

During the goal-setting step, the ESP practitioner and students collaborate to establish class objectives and individual targets based on the students' language skills and business knowledge. The second step is for the ESP practitioner to create engaging business English contexts that motivate students and encourage their active involvement in problem-solving. In this stage, the ESP practitioner acts as a consultant, while students become the primary participants in the class. The final step empowers students to practice and apply metacognitive strategies beyond the classroom. They plan their activities outside of class, monitor their progress, gather relevant information, and assess their own achievements.

The model demonstrates several strengths related to the cyclical process of needs analysis (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998) which is prominent in an ESP course design. Firstly, it involves selecting target situations that students are likely to encounter in workplace contexts, ensuring relevance and student engagement. Additionally, the model emphasizes current English language communication, allowing the ESP practitioner to identify students' areas for improvement and address their needs. This enables students to set their own short-term learning goals, aligning them with the overall class objectives. Finally, the model emphasizes the importance of effectively addressing learning needs, and by equipping students with metacognitive strategies, they develop a sense of responsibility and actively participate in all ESP classes.

However, the model exhibits some weaknesses in both its structure and the researchers' explanations. While the ESP practitioner plays a consulting role in this teaching model, students often lack support during metacognitive training. In the initial stages of implementing this model, it would be beneficial for the ESP practitioner to be more involved during metacognitive training by offering guidance and consultations to ensure students' self-independence.

Additionally, the researchers' explanation of the metacognitive training appears to be inadequate, potentially making it unclear for other researchers attempting to apply it in practice. Moreover, there are doubts about the model's suitability for different age groups and majors. For instance, while MBA students in this study can quickly grasp and utilize the strategies, undergraduate students majoring in English may face challenges in finding relevant and sufficient subject-related information, necessitating more assistance from the ESP practitioner.

2.2. A Course Designer and a Material Provider

For ESP practitioners who are involved in course design and material development, [Hutchinson and Waters \(1987\)](#) suggest three primary approaches to ESP course design: the language-centered approach, the skills-centered approach, and the learning-centered approach. These approaches offer different perspectives on how to structure and organize ESP courses based on different priorities and emphases.

The first approach is the language-centered approach, as shown in [Figure 3](#), which focuses on the language and skills of the discipline used in the real world. The target situation refers to the specific context or environment in which the students will use the language skills they are acquiring. It entails actively identifying the language requirements and tasks that students will encounter in their future professional or academic settings. The target situation provides a clear understanding of the students' language needs and goals, allowing ESP practitioners to tailor language instruction to meet those specific needs. By analyzing the target situation, ESP practitioners can determine the linguistic and communicative skills that are essential for students to effectively participate and succeed in their desired professional or academic domains.

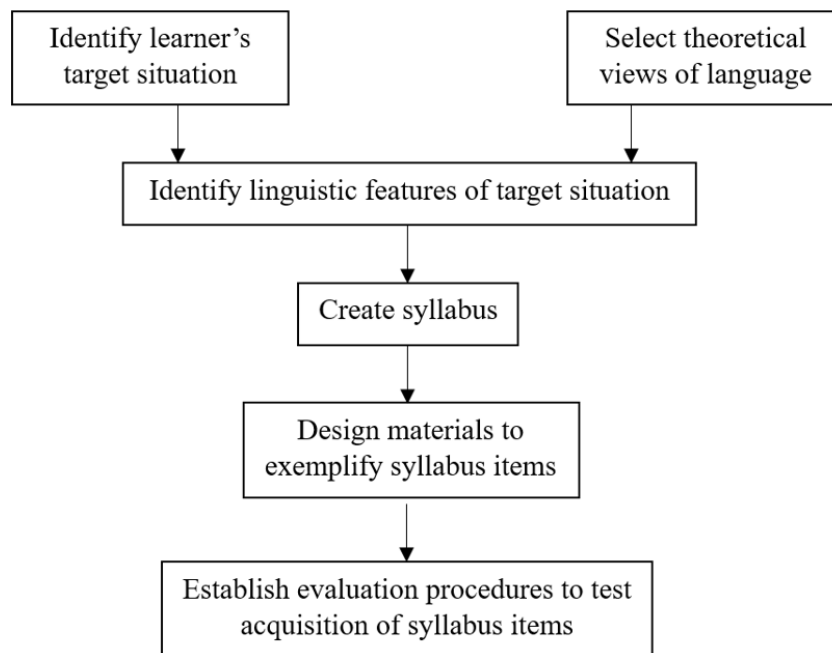


Figure 3. The language-centered approach to course design.
Source: [Hutchinson and Waters \(1987\)](#).

The second approach, as shown in [Figure 4](#), is the skills-centered approach, which focuses on analyzing the specific skills and strategies required to effectively navigate particular situations. This approach integrates selected skills and strategies, along with theoretical views of language and learning, into ESP lessons and utilizes them in the selection of texts and exercises. However, it is important to note that the lessons and sequences of activities are typically planned for the entire group of students rather than catering to individual differences in learning styles, paces, and preferences for customized materials and activities. Consequently, this approach may potentially diminish the authenticity of the learning experience ([Cañado & Esteban, 2015](#)) and the characteristic of particularity in addressing students' specific needs ([Kumaravadivelu, 2001](#)) in teaching.

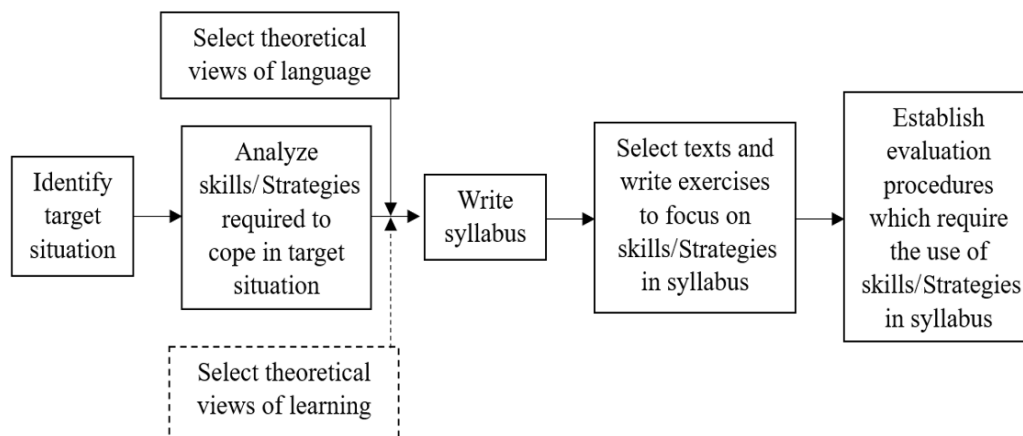


Figure 4. The skills-centered approach to course design.
Source: [Hutchinson and Waters \(1987\)](#).

[Hutchinson and Waters \(1987\)](#) argue that when ESP practitioners bring texts from professional contexts into ESP classes, they may lose their authenticity. This occurs because the readers' or students' knowledge and the classroom context differ from the original contexts in which the texts were written and used. However, as part of their role in course design and material provision, ESP practitioners must either create their own materials or adapt

authentic materials from real workplace settings (Ahmed, 2014). Additionally, they should leverage the wide range of educational resources and teaching materials available to enhance their instructional approach.

The final approach is the learning-centered approach, as illustrated in Figure 5, which emphasizes the prior identification of students and their needs, as well as the analysis of the language and skills required in the target situation and the students' competences and preferences for learning styles. In this approach, ESP practitioners prioritize understanding their students' specific requirements and tailoring the lessons accordingly. Flexible lesson plans allow ESP practitioners to accommodate any necessary adjustments and continuously monitor their students' progress and reactions. This allows them to make real-time modifications to the lessons to ensure optimal learning outcomes and student engagement.

However, the learning-centered approach to course design in ESP also has its weaknesses. One weakness is the potential difficulty in addressing the diverse needs and preferences of individual students within a larger group setting. As Cañado and Esteban (2015) note, designing lessons for the entire group may not effectively cater to the different learning styles, paces, and perceptions of customized materials and activities among students. This can lead to a decrease in authenticity and the personalized nature of instruction (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

Another weakness is the challenge of effectively monitoring and assessing individual student progress and learning outcomes. Due to the focus on student-centeredness, ESP practitioners may face difficulties in assessing the effectiveness of their instructional methods and determining if students are achieving the desired language and skill development. This aspect is highlighted by Kumaravadivelu (2002) who emphasizes the need for clear assessment measures in learning-centered approaches.

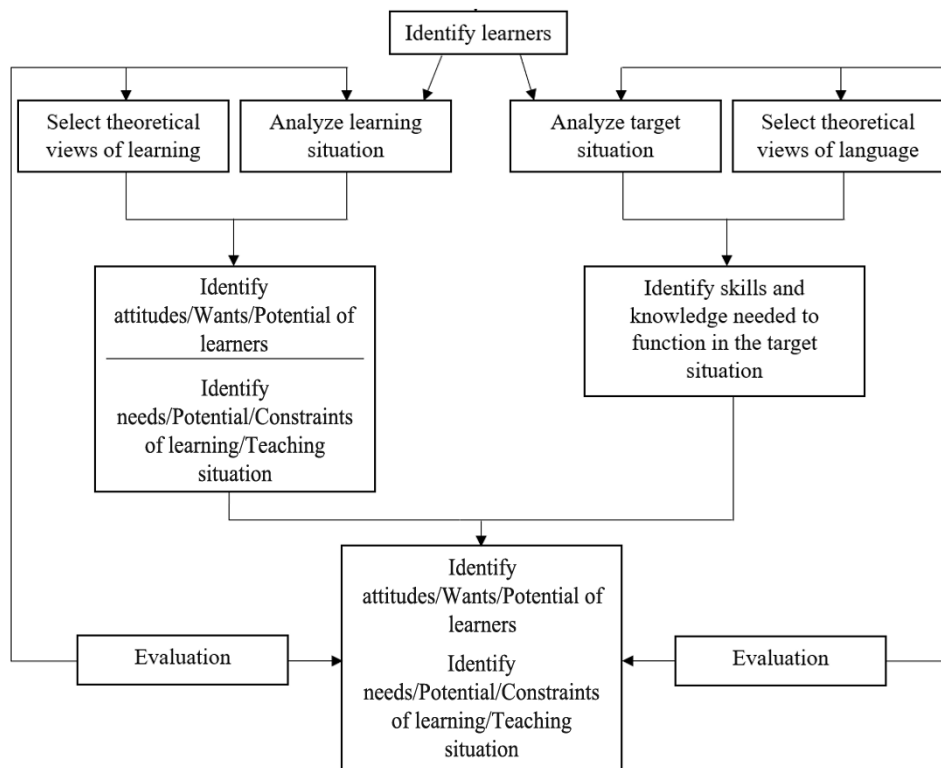


Figure 5. The learning-centered approach to course design.

Source: Hutchinson and Waters (1987).

Furthermore, the learning-centered approach may require a significant investment of time and resources to develop individualized lesson plans and continuously adapt them to meet students' changing needs. This can be demanding, particularly in contexts with limited resources or large class sizes.

The three approaches mentioned above may have certain weaknesses that require careful adaptation by ESP practitioners. However, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) have proposed a more comprehensive and efficient cyclical model of needs analysis (see Figure 6) for ESP course developers. This model comprises five interconnected stages: needs analysis, course design, teaching learning, assessment, and evaluation.

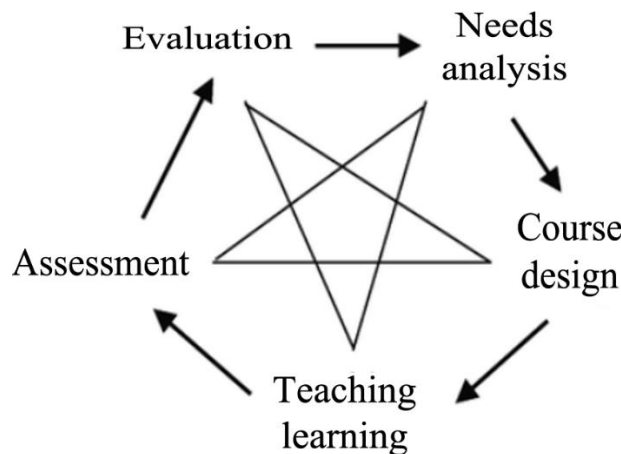


Figure 6. The cyclical process of needs analysis.

Source: Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998).

In the first stage of the cyclical model proposed by [Dudley-Evans and St. John \(1998\)](#) needs analysis plays a crucial role in gathering relevant data that serves as a foundation for course design. Several components are analyzed during this stage and retrieved from various stakeholders, including students, employers, policy makers, institutions, and ESP practitioners. The target situation is examined to understand the specific language and skills required in the given context. Students' personal information, such as their backgrounds, motivations, and goals, is taken into account to tailor the course to their specific needs. The analysis also includes an assessment of students' language proficiency and identifying areas where they may be lacking. Additionally, effective learning strategies and approaches are considered to enhance the learning process. Moreover, effective course design necessitates an understanding of the target situation's usage of language and skills. Lastly, any constraints or limitations that may impact the course implementation are identified and addressed. According to [Thepseenu \(2020\)](#) needs analysis is emphasized as a key step to the success of ESP course development for Thai civil engineering students. The researcher finds that the students require ESP courses prioritizing collaborative assignments, in-class and out-of-class activities, code-switching approaches, and listening-speaking profession-related activities. Moreover, [Chaovanapricha and Champakaew \(2023\)](#) highlight that a lack of a comprehensive needs analysis could lead to a number of challenges ESP practitioners and educational institutions housing ESP courses may face.

In the second stage of course design, ESP practitioners use the data gathered during needs analysis to design courses that cater to the identified needs of the students. According to [Sorastaporn \(2018\)](#) the development of an ESP course should follow a systematic and scientific approach, drawing upon the findings of a needs analysis to establish the goals and objectives of language learners. Consequently, ESP practitioners should carefully choose and arrange ESP materials, activities, and tasks that are well-suited to their needs, ensuring their relevance and appropriateness. ESP practitioners should then incorporate these selected resources into classroom instruction, utilizing a variety of suitable language teaching methods and techniques. Regular evaluation of ongoing ESP courses is essential, allowing for continuous improvement and providing assurance to all stakeholders that the courses are effective. It is important to recognize that these four elements—needs analysis, syllabus development, material selection and sequencing, and ongoing evaluation—are interconnected and mutually dependent. By adhering to this comprehensive approach, ESP practitioners can create and improve courses that meet their students' specific language learning needs.

Subsequently, the teaching and learning phase takes place in the classroom, where ESP practitioners implement the designed courses and engage students in various activities and tasks aimed at developing their language and skills in the target situation. Additionally, [Asmali \(2018\)](#) suggests that ESP practitioners can leverage technology in teaching and learning activities, making use of free, accessible on-market applications and students' devices. This integration of technology can enhance students' positive attitude, learning motivation and foster the development of generic competences such as team-work, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. By incorporating technology into the classroom, ESP practitioners can create interactive and engaging learning experiences, promoting active participation and facilitating the acquisition of language and skills in ESP contexts.

After the teaching and learning phase, students undergo assessments to measure their progress and achievement. It is crucial for these assessments to be authentic and specific, aligning with the language and skill requirements of the real-world target situation. Simulations are recognized as an effective and commonly utilized assessment method ([Castillejos & Cervero, 2004](#)) among ESP practitioners. The simulations provide students with the opportunity to autonomously engage in tasks within their field of expertise and enhance their language proficiency.

Finally, both the students and the course undergo evaluation to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. This feedback loop enables continuous course review and refinement, ensuring that the course remains responsive to the evolving needs of the students. [Sorastaporn \(2018\)](#) emphasizes the importance of implementing appropriate tests and evaluations to enhance the ongoing courses. These assessments provide valuable insights into the students' progress and the course's effectiveness, enabling educators to make informed adjustments and enhancements.

2.3. A Researcher

As ESP researchers, their primary focus should revolve around the students' specific needs, objectives, and interests. They should continuously enhance their understanding of the subject they are teaching and actively seek out authentic materials to support their instruction. [Kumaravadivelu \(2001\)](#) views that in the post method era, ESP practitioners are encouraged to be concerned with their context-sensitive local knowledge (particularity) and teacher-generated personal theories (practicality). Consequently, the specific research findings could enhance precision and contextualization; furthermore, they could elevate the significance of local ESP practitioners, previously marginalized by the method era, and inspire them to embrace methods that were once widely accepted.

According to the research conducted by [Meihami and Werbińska \(2022\)](#) it was found that action research plays a constructive role in the professional identity development of ESP practitioners. The study showed that ESP practitioners began to identify themselves more as ESP teacher-researchers, fostering a stronger inclination towards conducting action research and exhibiting increased self-reliance in carrying out future research projects. The findings also highlighted the importance of considering the specific nature of the ESP context when implementing action research programs for ESP practitioners. Furthermore, [İlter and Yeşilyurt \(2021\)](#) adopted action research as a tool for teaching ESP in a flipped learning environment. The researchers argue that conducting action research not only enhanced the teacher-researcher's rapport with students but also played a role in shaping the professional identity as an ESP practitioner.

In addition, [Chen \(2000\)](#) addresses two challenges in the field of ESP: a lack of teacher training programs in many regions and dissatisfaction with traditional theory-based training methods. To tackle these issues, the author proposes an ESP self-training model employing action research techniques to demonstrate how a general English teacher can develop ESP expertise independently by reflecting on and enhancing their teaching practices in the ESP classroom. The research shows that through systematic action research involving ongoing participation in real teaching situations and engagement with the disciplinary culture of the learners, ESP practitioners can formulate effective teaching approaches. In essence, this self-training model offers a potential solution to the challenges faced by ESP professionals in terms of training and teaching methodology.

2.4. A Collaborator

To enhance their collaboration skills, ESP practitioners, as collaborators, should actively engage with other ESP practitioners and subject specialists, particularly when they may lack content knowledge. Collaborative activities, such as working together with colleagues, play a crucial role in all educational endeavors (Nunan & Lamb, 1996) as cited in Fitria (2023). Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) suggest three levels of relationships between ESP practitioners and subject teachers (see Figure 7): cooperation, collaboration, and team-teaching. Firstly, cooperation is the lower-level consultation from a subject teacher. ESP practitioners gather information about students' subject courses, encompassing topics such as reference points or carrier content, with the aim of introducing the linguistic side or actual content. Also, as Pei and Milner (2016) report, ESP practitioners ask a subject teacher for help when they face some specialty problems.

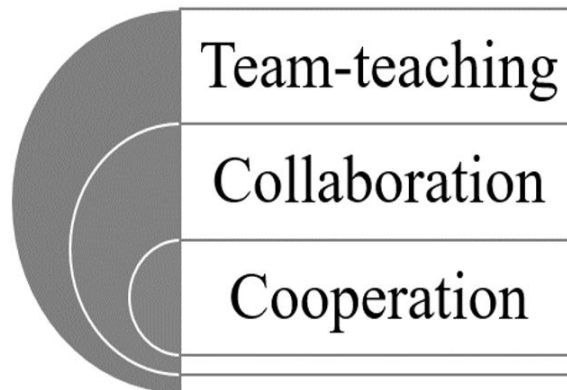


Figure 7. Three levels of relationships between ESP practitioners and subject teachers.

The second level of relationships is collaboration which involves ESP teachers consulting subject teachers about various elements of the particular disciplines and working collaboratively to design aligning objectives and syllabi. At this level, Ghanbari and Rasekh (2012) indicate that the supportive cycle of collaboration between ESP practitioners and mainstream teachers in Iran facilitates curriculum design, selection of teaching materials and textbooks, and a good amount of the ESP practitioners' knowledge. In addition, Lockwood (2012) also finds the high significance of collaboration when the ESP curriculum is directly required by a particular organization. It is inevitable that the ESP practitioners collaboratively work with the organization's representatives to design the curriculum containing required contents and language.

Moreover, Chaovanapricha and Chaturongakul (2020) investigate the collaborative teaching approach between ESP practitioners and subject teachers in ESP courses at a Thai university, examining both the advantages and drawbacks of this method. The study outlines the various roles undertaken by ESP practitioners, encompassing tasks such as lesson planning, teaching, organizing learning activities, and designing class exercises. In contrast, subject teachers are identified as serving roles, including consultants or informants, supporters, monitors, and facilitators. The research findings indicate that ESP practitioners gain confidence in teaching ESP courses and receive constructive feedback from the subject teachers. Furthermore, the students express positive attitudes towards this collaborative teaching approach. However, the students highlight some challenges, particularly in managing schedules and the time-consuming nature of lesson planning for the ESP practitioners and the subject teachers in their specific context.

Finally, team teaching, which integrates the first two levels, involves high-level cooperation, with both ESP practitioners and subject teachers playing key roles in the class and performing agreed-upon roles in teaching their own relevant materials simultaneously. However, Esteban and Marios (2002) view the role of ESP practitioners in this relationship as "supportive and subordinate," and students consider the ESP practitioners' task as a side issue. While Antić (2016) argues that team teaching is vital to ESP teaching since it involves highly relevant contents recommended and transferred by subject teachers and enhances the academic relationship among three parties: ESP practitioners, subject teachers, and students, engaged in a three-way dialogue. Luo and Garner (2017) also support team teaching, as ESP practitioners are likely to be able to identify the language needs of their students when they become more familiar with the specific teaching contexts and establish good relationships with subject teachers. In addition, Spasić, Janković, and Spasić-Stojković (2015) have found that the combination of Business English course materials and the materials from other specific fields, such as Computing and Informatics, Finance and Accounting, and Taxes and Customs, is proven to be an effective practice, resulting in more investments in learning made by the students. At the same time, the collaboration between the ESP practitioners and the subject specialists could encourage deeper learning and knowledge exchange among them.

Notwithstanding all stated strengths, all kinds of relationships can have some difficulties due to contested authorities, identities, and schedules. The first problem can occur when cooperation, especially at the second and third levels of cooperation, requires permission from involved authorities such as the dean and the head of the department. Moreover, it's likely that ESP practitioners grapple with their identities, as students, particularly those not majoring in English, tend to prioritize the subject teachers and view the ESP practitioners as less significant. Also, it seems that ESP practitioners have to compete for a sufficient proportion of linguistic content in class. Finally, in relation to the previous issues, both ESP practitioners and subject teachers must agree upon a shared schedule in order to conduct team-teaching classes. However, it is very probable that they have conflicting schedules and have to negotiate for a satisfying one that also depends on authorities and identities.

Therefore, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject's skills, tasks, and syllabus, ESP practitioners must collaborate with subject specialists. This collaboration enables them to effectively integrate the subject matter with language, select appropriate materials, and design suitable courses for their students (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

According to handbooks on English curricula and course verification (Khon Kaen University, 2022; Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, 2017), ESP practitioners are required to collaborate with various stakeholders involved in the course, including students, co-teachers, coordinators, administrators, curriculum committees, and course verification committees. This collaborative effort guarantees the achievement of all desired course and curriculum outcomes. Thus, we underscore the significance of strong collaboration among ESP practitioners and others.

2.5. An Evaluator

In their role as evaluators, ESP practitioners should consider various stages in the evaluation process. Prior to the course, they should assess the effectiveness of teaching methods and materials by evaluating students' responses. At the end of the course, they should evaluate the learning outcomes achieved by the students. According to teaching evaluation forms completed by undergraduates (Maejo University, 2022; Prince of Songkla University, 2016), ESP practitioners have several responsibilities to fulfill. These include establishing positive relationships with students, utilizing relevant and effective instructional materials, demonstrating personal qualities such as punctuality, and implementing teaching and learning approaches that encourage active student engagement and application of acquired knowledge and skills in their future professions. In addition, according to Chaovanapricha and Champakaew (2023), ESP practitioners view that the evaluation of ESP students' performance should embrace norm-referenced grading systems, which involve standardized assessment to enable fair comparisons among students, discourage grade inflation, and ensure an equitable evaluation of their performance (Hall, 2016) as well as avoid hypercompetitive environments in ESP classes.

Khon Kaen University (2022) and Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (2017) strongly recommend conducting course verification involving committee members from the English curriculum committee, faculty, and off-campus experts to ensure a fair and constructive evaluation of students' academic and professional achievements. In addition, Chaovanapricha and Champakaew (2023) suggest that the course verification committee should include one with ESP backgrounds and experience; as a result, this verification process could help provide assurance regarding the evaluation of students' performance and adherence to the curriculum requirements.

3. Discussion

In this section, the authors emphasize the challenges ESP practitioners may face and the existing gaps in national educational and language policies in English as a foreign language (EFL) context.

3.1. Challenges Faced by ESP Practitioners

The diverse nature of their roles presents ESP practitioners with a variety of challenges. These challenges can significantly impact the success of ESP courses. Firstly, as highlighted by Iswati and Triastuti (2021) ESP practitioners often struggle with a lack of knowledge in their students' disciplines. The specialized nature of ESP courses necessitates a nuanced understanding of the subject matter, and the absence of such knowledge can hinder effective communication and integration of language and content. Moreover, the challenges extend to ESP training and comprehensive needs analysis. ESP practitioners need to possess not only language proficiency but also a profound comprehension of the unique needs and objectives of their students. This requires thorough needs analysis, as emphasized by Chaovanapricha and Champakaew (2023) to tailor courses that address the diverse learning requirements within the ESP context. Furthermore, ESP practitioners face the obstacle of addressing a wide range of students' English competencies. The heterogeneous nature of student proficiency levels within ESP courses demands adaptable teaching strategies. Bottaro (2023) emphasizes the need for specialized training to enhance practitioners' capability in aiding students to achieve proficiency in the English language. Furthermore, Luo and Garner (2017) believe that effective training is necessary for ESP practitioners to acquire linguistic and pedagogical skills, gain socio-cultural understandings, and tackle the aforementioned challenges to effectively carry out various roles.

Because ESP practitioner training is often neglected, Pham and Ta (2016) develop a theoretical framework for pre-service ESP teacher (practitioner) training (PETT), as shown in Figure 8, in an EFL country like Vietnam. The framework, which combines ESP teacher competence (ETC) and language learning competence (LLC), includes a training series on ESP methodology and ESP acquisition. The former episode aims to equip pre-service ESP practitioners with knowledge in applied linguistics, theories, and practices of ESP, as well as skill sets in ESP material design, evaluation of commercial ESP materials, and needs analysis. It also reinforces ESP practitioners' roles as teachers, material providers, and evaluators. The latter, known as ESP acquisition training, aims to address the knowledge gaps of ESP practitioners in areas such as multi-disciplinary knowledge, a content-based instruction approach and application to ESP courses, team teaching and integration of four language skills, ESP teaching materials, a code-switching approach, and the significance of linguistic elements.

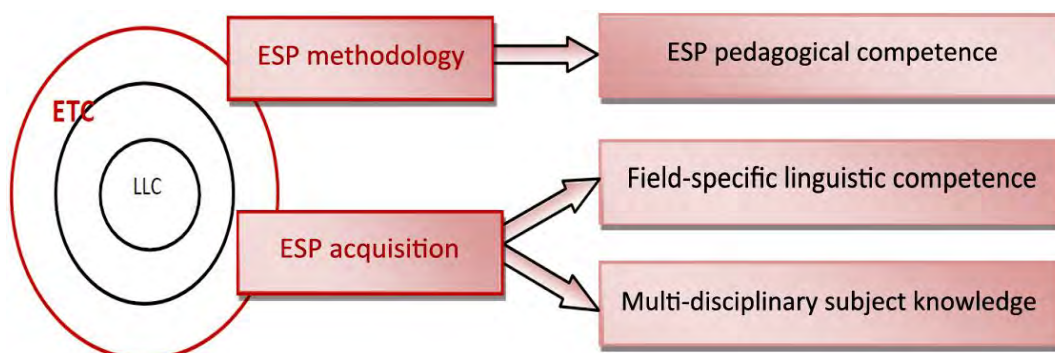


Figure 8. A theoretical framework of ESP teacher (Practitioner) training.

Note: Pham and Ta (2016).

Furthermore, we, as authors, argue that intercultural competence should be strengthened in ESP practitioners and subsequently conveyed to their students. Lane (2023) emphasizes that graduates with intercultural competence are better positioned for success in international workplace environments, the modern business world, and, much more importantly, when applying for top graduate employers. Consequently, numerous institutions are actively incorporating intercultural competence into their undergraduate programs. This implies the additional responsibility of ESP practitioners to enhance the intercultural competence of their students.

In addition to the training framework previously proposed, An and Yang (2021) develop a technological pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK) framework for ESP practitioners in the Digital Age, in which Tucci (2023) underscores that "companies whose businesses are built on digitalized information have become valuable and powerful in a relatively short period of time," to enhance their professional knowledge, English communication competence, and teaching performance. The framework facilitates the design, provision, and evaluation of effective ESP practitioner training as well as allowing the practitioners to self-monitor and self-assess in terms of their knowledge and skills in technology, pedagogy, and English and subject-related content knowledge. The researchers report that even though the ESP practitioners appear to be familiar with the language teaching technologies, they seem to lack the technological knowledge in finance, accounting, management, and economy (FAME) courses. The appointment of ESP practitioners to design and teach FAME-related ESP courses may require them to undergo well-designed training.

3.2. National Educational and Language Policy Gaps Hindering Optimal Performance of ESP Practitioners' Roles

Despite various proposals for ESP practitioner training, the implementation of such programs and the performance of ESP practitioners may encounter limitations due to national educational and language policies in EFL countries. For example, in Thailand, certain challenges may arise due to the vagueness of the current policies of the Royal Thai Government (2019) and Ministry of Higher Education Science Research and Innovation (MHESI) (2019). Firstly, the vague guidance on committee composition in the policies may pose challenges to the establishment of an English curriculum committee, despite aligning with the government's collaborative spirit. A lack of explicit directives on involving ESP experts and practitioners in such committees may hinder the comprehensive needs analysis and understanding that are pivotal, as suggested by the study of Chaovanapricha and Champakaew (2023). Also, the study stresses how important it is to set aside money for activities that allow students to learn by doing and training for ESP practitioners. However, the policy's general language about money issues might make it harder for institutions to actually give money to support the suggested methods. A more detailed budgetary framework in the policy would make it easier to implement these recommendations. Furthermore, in Vietnam, even though the majority of Vietnamese higher education institutions advocate for investment in classroom facilities and resources to enhance English teaching, the typical ESP class size, averaging around 40 students, is too large, and that could obstruct the quality of ESP teaching (Hoa & Mai, 2016). The lack of a clear policy recognizing the impact of class size on language and ESP education may be the cause of this problem.

By contrast, in the light of the Chinese government's policy, the status of ESP education in China is significantly underscored, as college English teaching has shifted from a general purpose-oriented approach to an ESP-oriented one (Yu & Liu, 2018). There are guidelines on improving college English teaching that emphasizes the practical use of English and balance the instrumental and humanistic values of the language in response to the government's policy accelerating modernization and internationalization. In the controversy surrounding the English curriculum reform in China, the researchers argue that the transformation requires higher education institutions to move beyond theoretical language teaching to practical application. This emphasizes the need for needs-analysis, the training of qualified ESP teachers, and an ideological shift among stakeholders for successful implementation. As a result, Chinese undergraduates become competent English users who can effectively communicate with professionals in different parts of the world.

4. Conclusion

This article explores the essential roles and challenges faced by ESP practitioners as they respond to the global demand for specialized English skills in language teaching. Practitioners play interconnected roles as teachers, course designers, material providers, researchers, collaborators, and evaluators, requiring them to integrate subject-specific content, address diverse student needs, and engage in ongoing research and collaboration. However, these practitioners encounter numerous challenges, including perceptions of English teachers, the need for specialized training, and selecting appropriate course design approaches. The cyclical needs analysis process by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) advocates for comprehensive course development. ESP practitioners also serve as researchers, continuously enhancing subject matter understanding through action research and seeking collaboration with subject teachers and specialists. In the evaluator role, the practitioners consider various stages in the evaluation process, focusing on proper grading systems and course verification involving ESP-experienced committee members. The article also provides valuable insights for ESP practitioners and educational institutions, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of their roles and the importance of adaptability in language education. Additionally, the authors highlight challenges related to ESP practitioner training and national educational policies in EFL contexts, underscoring issues such as vague policies hindering ESP initiatives in Thailand and large class sizes impacting teaching quality in Vietnam. Conversely, in China, the government policies align with an ESP-oriented approach, emphasizing practical English use and global communication preparedness for undergraduates.

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