

## NEEDS ANALYSIS AS A FUNDAMENTAL ASPECT OF ESP: EXPLORING ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND EVOLUTION IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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### Abstract

The advancement of globalization and international development in language education has led to a shift from traditional College English to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The article focuses on the significance of needs analysis in ESP, providing an updated understanding of its role. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of understanding past and future ESP developments and prioritizing effective teaching through the use of well-designed materials that cater to the specific needs and preferences of students.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes (ESP), needs analysis, English for General Purposes (EGP), English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

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### Introduction

Traditionally, discussions around English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching focused on general English. However, in recent decades, there has been a shift towards teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly in non-native English-speaking countries. This change in perspective has necessitated a shift in teaching methods to optimize learning outcomes in ESP. This includes designing educational objectives that cater to the specific needs of learners, aligning with the overall goals of the course or program, and addressing the specific training requirements desired by learners upon program completion.

### Methodology of the literature review

A key characteristic of ESP courses is their tailored approach, wherein materials and goals are customized to meet the specific needs of learners. These courses emphasize language, skills, and genres that are directly relevant to the specific activities learners need to perform in order to effectively use English. As Johns (2012) puts it, teaching ESP involves focusing on the following key concerns.

Needs analysis or needs assessment is a fundamental aspect of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) practice and is expected to continue playing a significant role in future ESP works. Since its emergence in the 1970s, needs analysis has evolved as a framework that has garnered considerable attention from ESP and ESL researchers and practitioners. Needs assessment is a crucial process for establishing a close connection between learners and curricula. By determining learners' needs, needs analysis aids in prioritizing learning targets and facilitating effective language teaching. The concepts of "needs" and "analysis" are intertwined and encompass necessities, wants, or deficiencies. These needs can be objective or subjective, perceived or felt by the learners. Meeting both objective and subjective needs relies heavily on target situation analysis, which involves recognizing learners' real-world communicative needs and establishing foundational principles for course design. While the fundamental principles of needs analysis have remained relatively consistent, the concept itself has undergone changes over time, as noted by Otilia and Brancusi (2015). In the early stages of ESP development (in

the 1960s and early 1970s), needs analysis primarily focused on assessing learners' communicative needs and determining the necessary techniques to achieve appropriate teaching objectives. However, in the present day, the objectives of needs analysis have become more complex, aiming to gather information from various dimensions of students' experiences within both the objective context and the ESP learning environment. Abuklaish (2014) further explains that data for needs analysis can be collected through questionnaires, tests, interviews, and observations to gather information about several aspects, including:

- The specific situations in which the language will be used, including the individuals with whom it will be used.
- The objectives and purposes for which the language is required.
- The specific type of communication that will be employed (e.g., written, spoken, formal, informal).
- The level of proficiency that will be necessary to achieve the desired outcomes.

### **Overview of ESP development**

In Asian countries, College English is a compulsory course for students entering tertiary education. The exit language performance indicator is determined by a specific score obtained through the College English Test (CET), which serves as a graduation language assessment goal. However, this requirement is often seen as an unsatisfactory and inflexible language policy implementation. The relationship between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approaches and College English, which focuses on general English learning, has been a subject of extensive debate among scholars.

It has been suggested that once students have reached the general English proficiency level, they can gradually transition to ESP as the next step in their English learning. An integrated approach to English learning has been recommended as a way forward. ESP teaching is seen as an extension and continuation of basic English teaching. The idea of a symbiotic coexistence of English for General Purposes (EGP) and ESP within the university English teaching system has also been supported.

The difference between English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and EGP lies primarily in goal identification. Some scholars have proposed replacing the integrated EGP course with academic English as a starter course for freshmen, which would be a more realistic learning goal in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This recommendation aligns with the provision of ESP as an academic English course, offering students from any discipline a more meaningful English language learning experience. The premise is that after completing an ESP course focused on academic English, students may be motivated to further study ESP to acquire more marketable skills within their respective disciplines upon leaving the university.

Indeed, ESP development is influenced by evolving needs and contextual challenges. Looking ahead, there are exciting prospects for the future of ESP and language learning, driven in part by technological advancements. Technology has made a noticeable impact on foreign language learning, particularly with the proliferation of Internet-based applications. However, she also cautioned that further research is needed to address existing gaps in understanding. One concern is the sustainability of certain technologies, as they may become obsolete and be replaced by new innovations. This poses challenges for ESP teachers, particularly those who are considered "digital immigrants" and may face difficulties in adapting to new technologies as they strive to become "digital natives."

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that technology is here to stay and continues to play an increasingly significant role, particularly in the context of global interactions. As the world undergoes rapid technological advancements, it inevitably influences current and future language use. Technology has become pervasive, especially in the workforce, and countries striving for economic growth must embrace technological advances to remain competitive. These national needs and priorities naturally extend to the realm of language teaching and ESP, as educators seek to equip learners with the language skills necessary to navigate a technologically-driven world.

## Conclusion

This article initially provides an introduction to the fundamental principles and trends of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), offering a historical overview of its development and discussing the simultaneous evolution of ESP teaching and learning. By acknowledging the historical context, it sets the stage for potential future trends in ESP development and teaching, emphasizing the importance of revisiting needs analysis, embracing technological advancements, and fostering intercultural communication. In summary, further investigations into needs analysis, technological advancements, and intercultural awareness will play a significant role in creating an improved learning environment for English language acquisition in specific contexts. This, in turn, justifies the establishment of future ESP courses that aim to effectively prepare students and professionals for the demands of the workplace. To ensure the efficacy of ESP frameworks, it is crucial to recognize that changes in ESP development will necessitate corresponding changes in learning approaches. These changes must be thoughtfully considered to ensure successful language learning outcomes.

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