

# Investigating ESP Courses at Salahaddin University-Erbil from the Instructors' Perceptions: A Qualitative Study

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## Abstract

The current study aims to investigate the ESP courses at Salahaddin University-Erbil to identify the current situation of ESP programs and highlight the main challenges encountered by ESP instructors. The study hypothesizes that when the methodology and the principles of ESP are implemented appropriately in the courses at Salahaddin University, the teaching/learning process is likely to be more efficient. Moreover, when the ESP instructors understand the nature of ESP teaching, the quality of ESP courses can

be improved. To achieve the aim of the study, the researchers employed a 20-question semi-structured interview for data collection; the study instrument was divided into several parts including instructors' knowledge and expertise, conceptualizing the concept and the objectives of ESP, the nature of implementing the stages of ESP course design, the nature of collaboration, and instructors' perceptions about the main issues. The sample of the study consisted of (7) instructors of ESP courses in non-English majors departments at Salahaddin University- Erbil. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively focusing on specific certain themes. Moreover, the results indicated that the ESP courses taught at Salahaddin University-Erbil did not meet the requirements of ESP courses. Besides, the instructors highlighted some main problems that led to the failure to achieve the objectives of the course; the reasons are the students' poor linguistic level, time constraints, lack of background knowledge and linguistic literacy, large classes, and students' low motivation.

**Keywords:** ESP, EAP, Course Design, Instructors Perceptions.

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## Introduction

English became the most common spoken language around the globe. The significance of English makes it mandatory for speakers of different countries to learn English for communicative purposes. Crystal (2000 cited in Poggensee, 2016) states that nearly one in four of the world's population can speak and/or understand English. This is due to the fact that the English language has been used in different fields such as science, technology, tourism, aviation and so on. In a similar vein, university students in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (henceforth IKR) are required to embrace the English language to keep updated with global developments whether in the academic or professional context. Besides, the majority of IKR universities use English as a medium of instruction in their teaching programs. These demands yielded an increase in interest in developing specific English language teaching courses such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

It is important to understand that ESP is not similar to General English courses. Basturkmen (2010) and DeMarco (1986) point out that the goals of General English courses are to develop oral competence, learn a wide range of grammatical structures and so on, while in ESP, learners are required to learn specific competencies or skills. For instance, adults who study General English in schools need to demonstrate on-the-job proficiency whether in a specific skill domain such as reading or a specialized topic area such as technical English. According to Gollin-Kies, et al. (2015), another distinction can be made between ESP and LSP (i.e., Language for Specific Purposes); the latter is a broad field that includes similar realms in languages other than English such as Arabic for poetry purposes. Whereas, ESP is only concerned with teaching English that can be divided into English for Academic or Occupational purposes.

ESP aims to prepare learners to become proficient language users and enable them to fulfil the ample needs of their presumably diverse professional communities. It is no longer required to teach anything simply because it was 'there' in the language. As a result of this realization, ESP

emerged as an essential subcomponent of language education, with its own methods for curriculum design, materials development, pedagogy, assessment, and research (Nunan, 2004). Moreover, designing an ESP course encompasses systematic stages which need analysis, determining course objectives, deciding the content and teaching materials and course evaluation. These stages contain specific parameters to determine the success of the course (Anthony, 2018). ESP courses require studying closely to address their objectives effectively. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, these courses have never been investigated before at Salahaddin University-Erbil (Henceforth SUE). Therefore, the present study aims to reveal how current ESP courses are taught at the university. The instructors' perception of their academic experience and conceptualizations of the courses can acquaint a better understanding of the situation. The significance of the study is to provide the course designer with a framework of how well ESP courses are running in the university and to overcome the identified challenges by providing practical solutions to improve the quality of English language teaching courses at the university. Therefore, the research is concerned to answer the following questions:

- 1- To what extent do ESP courses at SUE fulfil the current requirements of ESP methodology and principles defined by modern theory and practical studies in this field?
- 2- Are the parameters of ESP course design taken into account at SUE?
- 3- What are the challenges that instructors face at non-English major departments at SUE?

## 1. The Concept of ESP

ESP is a branch of English for Language Teaching (ELT); it emerged as a response to the tremendous development in science and technology (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Although ESP has been established for decades, there is still much controversy concerning its actual meaning. Belcher (cited in Paltridge & Starfield, 2013, p.2) describes the target context when he tried to define ESP which “refers to the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language where the goal of the learners is to use English in the particular domain”. This definition explains that learners are learning the language in order to be able to either read or write in the target language relevant to their specialization- academia and/or professional context. To Day & Krzanowski (2011, p. 5): “ESP involves teaching and learning the specific skills and language needed by particular learners for a particular purpose”. In other words, ESP courses are not only teaching the target language but also the required skills. Robinson (1991) and Buserkmen (2006) claim that people learn English, not for their own sake or because they are interested in language or its culture but to gain ‘linguistic efficiency’ for communication purposes.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that ESP generally is a learner-centered approach where all decisions related to the selection of content and methods should be based on learners' reasons to learn in order to achieve the course aims. Hence, it is considered as an approach to language teaching rather than a product (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Furthermore, Munby (1978) associates the selection of syllabi and materials with the analysis of the communicative needs of learners. Therefore, the selection of methods and materials depends on specific reasons set by learners to use the language appropriately in the target situation. Thus, all ESP definitions generally deal

with three main aspects that encompass the theory of language teaching and learning, the learners' needs, and the target situation.

## 2. The Characteristics of ESP Courses

To design an effective ESP course, course designers should reflect on the characteristics of the ESP course. The characteristics of ESP courses are interpreted differently by different linguists. Strevens (1988), for example, classifies the features of ESP into two categories: absolute and variable characteristics. The former can include (a) ESP is tailored according to learners' needs, (b) the ESP course content is specified to a specific discipline or profession, (c) it focuses on the appropriateness of the language structure and usage and genres in discourse community and discourse analysis, and (d) ESP differs from general English (Anthony, 2018). Whereas the latter necessarily has a number of characteristics that ESP (a) is limited to teaching/learning one language skill such as reading only and (b) is not taught through any pre-ordained methodology (Anthony, 2018; Alkandari, 2020).

On the other hand, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) provided an illustrative version of ESP characteristics that are based on Strevens' (1988) studies. Similarly, they divided the characteristics into absolute and variable. The absolute features identify ESP as a response to learners' specific needs, it uses the underlying methodology and discourse community of a specific discipline that it serves, and it focuses on the language appropriateness to meet the activities of a specific discipline that includes grammatical structures or features, discourse and genres. While the variable focuses on the following:

- a) Perhaps it is designed for specific disciplines or occupations,
- b) In specific teaching situations, ESP may employ various methods used in teaching General English,
- c) It is likely to be created or generated for adult learners in academic or professional settings. Yet, it can be designed for learners at the secondary school level,
- d) In general, the course is created for intermediate or advanced students, and
- e) The majority of ESP courses propose some basic knowledge of the language systems.

## 3. The Branches of ESP

ESP has been classified mainly into two branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (Woodrow, 2018). Hutchinson and Waters (1987), further, divide ESP into English for Academic Purposes and English for Occupational Purposes, and then they sub-categorize the branches based on learners' specialized areas such as English for Business and Economics (EBE) and English for the Social Sciences (ESS), and English for Science and Technology (EST).

Furthermore, Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Anthony (2018), and Day & Krzanowski (2011) believe that is hard to make a distinction between EOP and EAP since learners can study and work simultaneously. For instance, a lawyer and a marketing executive may both benefit from the same Business English course, which focuses on the learning outcomes they both need at work (such as sending an email or taking part in a meeting), but they may benefit more from joining an ESP course in legal or marketing English, which focuses on their specific needs. Anthony (2018) claims that ESP is regarded as a broad field which focuses on meeting the particular needs of learners in different academic and occupational settings. Moreover, EAP receives a huge attention than EOP because many pioneers in ESP are based in academic settings and many EFL learners need EAP skills to go along with their studies in their institutions. ESP instructors regard their subject as unique from standard Business English.

Finally, EAP can be classified into English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) (Woodrow, 2018; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Kenny, et al., 2020). The difference between these two categories is that EGAP addresses the language and practices shared by all EAP students whereas ESAP is devoted to specialized requirements of students in specific disciplines (Blue, 1988). It is clear that the vast range of ESP classification considers a number of seemingly infinite acronyms designed by the various categories of ESP. These acronyms reflect the content area of the curriculum; it is the language instructor's responsibility to describe the contents in the syllabus (DeMarco, 1986). In addition, there will be as many branches of ESP determined by learners' specific needs and target communities in which learners wish to thrive (Viana, et al., 2019).

#### **4. The Process of Designing ESP Course**

Course design or syllabus design is constructed on careful planning that comes before, during, and after instruction. To begin, the instructor organizes the course content around fundamental concepts and creates a series of steps, distributes all lessons, readings, and assignments throughout a manageable time frame. Learning objectives are increasingly being developed and clarified in terms of what students will do rather than instructor behaviours (Brown, 2010). Furthermore, Anthony (2018) suggests four pillars to the ESP courses, namely needs analysis, learning objectives, materials and methods, and evaluation.

##### **4.1 Needs Analysis**

Needs analysis is the backbone (Woodrow, 2018) and a cornerstone (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) of ESP course design. Needs analysis is defined as a technique or a dynamic to collect and assess information that is relevant to the target communicative situation i.e. it is considered as a means to determine the teaching and learning activities of a course (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Hyland, 2006; Woodrow, 2018). According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), needs can be divided into two kinds: target needs and learning needs. The target needs (what learners need to achieve in the target situation) include necessities, lacks and wants. "Want" is (What the learners want to achieve), "lacks" is (What the learners need to learn), and "necessities" is (What the stakeholders decide what learners need to learn). The learning needs (what learners need to achieve in order to learn) are considered as a way to meet the target needs.

Identifying the needs of students can be obtained in many ways. Various scholars and researchers provide a list of many different methods, including interviews (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991; Brown, 1995; Dudley-Evans, 1998; Jordan, 1997), questionnaires (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991; Jordan 1997; Dudley-Evans, 1998;), tests (Robinson, 1991), case studies (Robinson, 1991), authentic data collection (i.e., analyzing the existed manuals and written assignment) (Robinson, 1991; Brown,1995), discussions (Dudley-Evans, 1998), observations (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Jordan, 1997;Dudley-Evans, 1998), assessments (Brown,1995; Dudley-Evans, 1998), meetings (Brown, 1995), forms or checklists (Jordan,1997), documentation (Jordan, 1997); tests (Jordan, 1997) and so on.

##### **4.2 Learning Objectives**

The ESP course attempts to bridge the gap between learners' requirements and their present language abilities; this leads to the development of course objectives (Woodrow, 2018). It might be claimed that ESP courses are more likely to yield high levels of motivation since they suit students' interests and needs. It may also be claimed that ESP classes are more efficient than typical ESL courses since they have more specific goals (Basturkmen,



2010). In addition, objectives are essential in informing both instructors and students about what will be done. They contribute to a cohesive teaching program for instructors and play a significant planning role in determining and sequencing materials and activities within units of work and lectures, ensuring that learning is related to the specific teaching environment. They provide learners with precise information to what extent the course is relevant to their requirements and a platform for direct negotiation about what it may include and how it may be performed (Hyland, 2006). Learning objectives (or learning outcomes) are considered the initial phase of developing any course where the intent and goals of the course are defined. The majority of course developers can choose the skills, knowledge, and attitudes of learners informally. Contrastingly, it is preferable to establish these elements in a more particular and quantitative manner so that learners have a clear understanding of what they will master, how they will do, and how they will be tested (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

### 4.3 Material Selection

After analyzing learner needs and establishing course objectives, the ESP practitioner must select some resources to help students to achieve the course objectives (Ellis & Johnson, 1994). These resources are called materials which are referred to as any resources used by instructors or students to enhance the learning process. This broad definition includes a diverse variety of learning sources, including ‘technological contributions’ and ‘computer-mediated instruction’ (Woodrow, 2018). Moreover, these materials should be specific to the learners’ individual skills and content demands (Anthony, 2018). The course designers may face challenges in deciding on the teaching materials for the ESP course such as time constraints and unavailable resources. Therefore, course designers are subjected to adapt or create the teaching material (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nunan, 1991; Hyland, 2006; Bocanegra-Valle, 2010; Day & Krzanowski, 2011; Belcher, 2012; Anthony, 2018; Woodrow, 2018).

The adoption of teaching materials includes published content from textbooks and/or online sources. Menkabu and Harwood (2014) and Woodrow (2018) point out that the published materials rarely address the particular needs of students. ESP course designers, therefore, tend to adapt the existing materials. Anthony (2018) believes that no matter how effective these resources are, they should allow for some flexibility and allow the instructor to adapt to the requirements of individual students. As Basturkmen (2006; 2010) claims, the adaptation of teaching materials refers to modifying the published textbooks to meet learners’ needs. It can involve reducing, adding, omitting and modifying.

In order to implement an effective course, the intended communication scenario must be accurately reflected in ESP materials. To achieve this aim, typically ESP courses must contain authentic materials or texts written for ESP professionals rather than language learners (Woodrow, 2018). Finally, material development is an ongoing cycle; individuals involved in generating or adapting resources will need a pilot test or conduct evaluative evaluations in order to alter materials over changes in relation to implementation outcomes, current practices in the area, or research findings. Material development is a process of trial and error, so it is useful to remember that materials that are good for one ESP course/area may not be as effective for another (Bocanegra-Valle, 2010).

### 4.4 Methods of Teaching

As a branch of ELT, ESP is based on students’ interests. In other words, it is more concerned with a learner-centred approach (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Therefore, it focuses on developing learners’ communicative competence rather than developing relevant knowledge such as dealing with the structure of the language (Kenny, 2016). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) confirm that there is no specific methods or approaches designed for ESP courses. Anthony (2018) believes that it is debatable whether or not there is a particular teaching methodology for

ESP. It is discovered that learning the General English approach does not imply that the success of an instructor is in techniques used in the classroom.

## 4.5 Evaluation

Course evaluation is the systematic collection of empirical data and environmental information concerning program intervention including answers to the what, who, how, if, and why inquiries that help analyzing the development, implementation, and/or efficacy of the program (Chen, 2015). Whereas, Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the assessment or the evaluation process is a reflection to not only the learners' performance but also to indicate the existence of flaws of the course, i.e., employing the diagnostic evaluation to trace the flaws or the drawbacks.

## 5. Methodology

### 6.1 Population and Sampling

The population of this study is all SUE instructors who can teach ESP courses (i.e., almost all MA and PhD holders of English language and literature). The study sample consists of (7) ESP instructors from different non-English major departments at College of Arts and College of Administration and Economics. The participants are currently teaching ESP courses during the academic year (2021-2022) at SUE. Furthermore, the researchers depended on Dörnyei's (2007) and Creswell & Creswell's (2018) studies in sample selections. Hence, the size of the sample is suitable to get accurate and in-depth results. It is worth mentioning that convenience sampling is implemented in the study; the selection is based on ESP instructors' availability and willingness to participate in this study (Flick, 2014).

### 6.2 Research Tool

The interview is the most used method in qualitative research. A semi-structured interview is a suitable tool to develop questions about a specific topic which can provide in-depth and breadth responses (Dörnyei, 2007). The current study tool is designed to identify the issues and challenges related to the ESP courses from the instructors' point of view. It consists of 20 questions which are designed to investigate the instructors' knowledge and perspective about the nature of ESP courses at Salahaddin University-Erbil in terms of needs analysis, learning objectives, teaching methods, content selection, and the evaluation process as well as to examine instructors' background knowledge and competence and to give a glance into the actual context of the courses at the university. The interview questions are ended by highlighting the main challenges encountered by ESP instructors. The questions are written in such a manner that encourages participants to communicate their attitudes and behaviours to address the questions of the study.

#### 6.2.1. Description of Semi-Structured Interview Questions

The data collected from the interview are analyzed, organized, and presented as the following:

Questions 1 to 5 are informative and aim to reveal instructors' personal information. They are related to instructors' qualifications, experience in teaching ESP courses, background knowledge, and ESP training course participation.

Questions 6 and 7 are questions related to the objectives and benefits of the ESP course.

Questions 8 to 10 are related to the student's needs analysis.

Questions 11 and 15 are related to the skills that the instructors focus on, the instructor's teaching methodology, and the content selection, i.e., the relevance of course content to the objectives of the course.

Question 16 is about the collaboration with the subject specialist.

Questions 17 to 19 are for the evaluation process

Question 20 is to highlight the main challenges that ESP instructors face.

## 6. Data Analysis and Discussion

After obtaining the data from the instructors, the data categorized building on different related issues to ESP. Furthermore, the instructors' responses have been analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis.

### 6.1 Instructors Background Knowledge and Expertise

The participants are inevitably varied in terms of academic degrees and experience. This is due to the fact that all ESP instructors are not expected to teach ESP courses at SUE. One noteworthy argument to make is that years of experience, whether present or earlier, are not addressed in instructional skills (Johnson, 2005). Nonetheless, it continues to have an influence on shaping instructors' experiences in a distinct and unconventional way (Borg, 2015 cited in Alkandari, 2020).

Table (1) shows that instructors have an MA that are irrelevant to ESP field or Applied Linguistics. Moreover, none of the instructors has ever participated in an ESP training course. The results can go along with Djaileb's (2018) key findings that instructors should be trained in order to be able to teach the content of a specific domain and Zhang's (2017) conclusions that the training programs are effective methods to improve the actual performance of ESP instructors. Building on this, one may easily state that ESP instructors at SUE may lack instructional experience and professional expertise.

Table (1) The Instructors' Academic Background

Participants	Academic Degree	Years of Teaching Experience at SUE	Participation in ESP Training
P1	MA in Archeology	2	No
P2	MA in Business Administration	3	No
P3	MA in Modern History	4	No
P4	MA in English Language and Linguistics	2	No
P5	MA in Human Resource Management	5	No
P6	MA in Psychology	4	No
P7	Master's in Translation	2	No

### 7.2 Instructors' Perceptions about Objectives of ESP

The concept of teaching ESP courses is to enable students develop the target language to use it effectively in a specific context. Yet, some of instructors (especially P3 and P4) consider teaching ESP not beneficial for the students and having such courses in their specialized department wastes time and effort. Instructors believe that teaching ESP in their context is insufficient because they predict learners' incapacity and low proficiency level to achieve the course objectives and goals. This indicates that there is a probable lack of awareness of the undisputed global ESP problems, which, in turn, influences the instructors' views, practices, and instruction in



ESP courses. The influence of instructors' cognitions on their conceptualizations of course objectives, as well as the roles these goals play in shaping the classroom orientation, either to prepare learners for examinations or to supply them with accumulated 'deep knowledge', as Alkandari (2020) claims.

Whereas, P1 and P5 connected the benefits of teaching ESP courses to familiarize the students with the basic terms and definition of their specialized area. P1 states that "ESP course is good for students to be familiar with the terms and definitions to have some background about their specialized field in the English language in order to help them to cope with the existing information in their second level" and "ESP benefits students in their studies. They will be more familiar with the terms used in their specialty. Hence, they will be able to apply what they learn to their main field of study. Also, enable them to use the English they know to learn even more English". Furthermore, P2 generalizes the idea of the usefulness of teaching ESP courses in the specified department:

"The course benefits students, in the field of work, how to find the right work, job interview skills, and many other areas, at a time when language ability, especially English, is a requirement of the labour market"

P6 particularizes the merit of instructing ESP courses to enhance communicative competence, especially listening and speaking skills. As P6 points out "The ESP course was designed to meet learners' needs in terms of developing communicative skills especially the main focus was on listening and speaking". Meanwhile, P7 prescribes the prerequisite of ESP courses to teach students up-to-date idioms and phrases. P7 claims that "I have given myself a considerable latitude to bring extra business-related idioms and phrasal verbs to my students. I feel I have considerable freedom to teach the materials that I thought are best to enhance my student's skills and abilities"

The instructors' responses indicate that ESP instructors at SUE focus on some elements of the course that they think their students require in the target context while ignoring others. This contradicts Woodrow's (2018) idea that ESP courses should not be limited to grammar and vocabulary but to teach genre corpora since this helps students to contextualize the language in the target situation.

Moreover, the majority of instructors assert that they explain the ESP course objectives inside their classes except one P6 who states that "I don't tell them about the objective of the course because most students that I teach don't like to learn English. They are obliged to take this course only to pass the exam."

The interview results relevant to course objectives reveal that the study participants are not fully aware of the concept of ESP courses in their context. According to Nezakatgoo and Behzadpoor, (2017), the objectives of the course should be formulated on actual and realistic aims at the beginning of the course. Finally, Akhiroh (2017) points out that ESP instructors of non-English majors are required to understand the nature of ESP courses.

## 6.2 Instructors' Perceptions of Needs Analysis

As a matter of fact, implementing a needs-based process for ESP is challenging. The needs analysis is recognized as an essential part of any ESP course and is used to guide course technical requirements (Bosher & Smalkoski, 2002 cited in Chostelidou, 2010). Generally speaking, the instructors' responses are completely contradictory. Almost none of the instructors could identify the real meaning behind conducting needs analysis in the class. One of the instructors, i.e., P4, refers to needs analysis as means of teaching stating that "the only analysis means I use is a projector". While, P1 claims that "the students don't have special needs all they need is to deal with texts in their field". Additionally, P2 states that "I did not conduct a needs analysis, so far, but I may consider that in a near future". Further, P3 asserts that s/he has not conducted any needs analysis. Similarly, P6 stated that "unfortunately, no because we don't have a clear idea how needs analysis should be conducted".

P5 states “Yes, the better I know my students the better I am able to teach them. Getting to know them as a people as well as, as learners” However, P7 claims that: “I think I have done similar thing when I have asked my students what they want to learn and whether they are interested in the topic or not and because I have a heterogeneous class, I find some difficulties in deciding on which area should I focus on. Sometimes I have to bring some difficult terms for high-level students”

Based on the instructors’ responses, the majority of instructors do not have sufficient knowledge to define the concept of needs analysis and how it is to be conducted. Moreover, the needs analysis at SUE is based on instructors’ intuitions. Similar points are found by Akhiroh (2017) and Iswati and Triastuti (2021). This raises additional concerns about the effectiveness of ESP courses at SUE in filling such needs analysis-related deficits. On the other hand, only three instructors agreed that the ESP courses address students’ needs. They have affirmed that “since the ESP course is intended to provide students with four main English language skills, and real language topics to make students have a better background in English and develop their communication capacity using English and expression or specialization” P2 and “the objectives are put according to the students’ needs because they are going to need the English language in any workplace here in IKR” P4.

Moreover, two of instructors do not agree with the idea that the learning meets the learning objectives of the course. One of the instructors declared disagreement: “no, our expectations doesn’t match the context, at the end the learning objectives are not achieved” P1. Only two of the instructors, e.g., P6 and P7, are neutral in this regard. P6 believes that “the learning objectives partially address learners’ needs, especially for high-level students” and according to P7, “when you decide on course objective, you figure out some extra matters throughout your teaching process to address learners’ needs in this regard. Partially it addresses learners’ needs”

Lack of needs analysis implies that learners’ fundamental needs are not being identified effectively either by the ESP instructors or the university. As a result, the proposed learning objectives can meet the needs of learners is a debatable issue, as Iswati and Triastuti (2021) claim.

### 6.3 Instructors’ Perceptions Towards Their Teaching Approaches

Table (2) demonstrates the methods and strategies used by instructors in the ESP context. P1, P6 and P7 insist that ESP teaching is textbook-driven and focuses on teaching grammar using external activities and textbooks. In their classes, vocabulary is taught using wordlists translated and the students are required to memorize them. In this way, they remove words from their context focusing entirely on their meaning. More precisely, P6 claims that the Grammar-Translation method is a good way to meet the authenticity needs of the ESP program. Whereas, P2 and P3 eliminate teaching methods to cooperative activities, providing feedback and memorizing words. On the other hand, P4 confirms his tendency to use mixed methods that teetered between instructor-centeredness and group working activities.

Table (2) The Main Features of Participants’ Teaching Style

Participants	Teaching Style
P1, P6, P7	Memorization, Translation
P2, P3	Cooperative learning, Response of peers and editing, Vocabulary
P4	Teacher-centered, Group activities

Employing systematic teaching methods that is concentrated on studying grammar and carrying out translation exercises is considered a challenge in ESP courses. The results show that lecturers have used a variety of

instructional tactics to help continuing program students to accomplish their learning objectives. Furthermore, some instructors claim that they do not have enough background knowledge about methods of teaching since they have not taken any teaching courses during their study. Thus, they depend on memorization technique and provide positive feedback to the students.

Concerning the skills, the instructors mostly focus on in their teaching activities, they give divergent responses. The majority of them focus on the four language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and the English grammatical structure. Only one of the instructors, i.e., P7, asserts his focus on developing the students' communicative skills, stating that "I have emphasized the enhancing the learners' abilities to be proficient in communication situations and express their ideas clearly. I always try to develop their critical thinking skills and be autonomous". According to P7, it is a prerequisite for ESP instructors to foster learner autonomy and communication skills in order to enable them to seek information rather than spoon-feeding them. As Alkandari (2020) points out, applying this makes the students more acquainted with the textual and contextual components of their professional genres and it also assists their independent study after graduation.

P1, on the other hand, believes that developing critical skills is a must but the level of students is not helpful to adopt or enhance these skills in the class. She states "I mostly concentrate on the comprehension, writing and reading skills. The critical skill is difficult to adopt because the students are not interested", P3 claims that "teamwork is the most important skill. After that comes communication skills and organization"

To sum up, the instructors' unfamiliarity with adopting appropriate teaching methods in the ESP context leads to many serious problems for the student's future careers and current university life as well. As Ho (2011 cited in Hoa & Mai, 2016) points out, students must engage in group activities, seminars, writing essays, etc. and, instructors may face challenges with tasks and instructional methods.

#### **6.4 Instructors' Perceptions about Materials Development**

Based on lecturers' response, all the ESP instructors at USE select their teaching materials by themselves to achieve the objectives of the course. P1 depends on a content-based syllabus in selecting the materials for her class, stating that "the content is selected by me and I discuss the content with the students and see whether they find the content interesting for them or not. Some topics are mandatory for students to study them even if they don't like them" " P2 misconceptualized the materials of ESP since she thinks what she is teaching is a General English rather than an ESP course. As she has reported, "The textbook, I mean General English for a university student is good teaching material since this theme is on work and business. Materials that student need after graduate, for example, job, interview, meeting". This indicated that the content is selected by the institution's preferences. In addition, P3 depends on the structural syllabus during the ESP course design, emphasizing that "for me, it makes students familiarize with the most commonly used terms, proverbs, idioms and different types of phrases. They also get familiarized with the notion of language and linguistics; its roles and significance, etc." According to Dudley-Evans and St. John, (1998), this kind of content cannot be practical and accomplishable for ESP courses. It is not reasonable why students need to be familiarized with the notion of language and linguistics in ESP courses.

It is undeniable that there are many different challenges with preparing ESP lectures and materials at the university level. One of the most common challenges is the instructors' emphasis on theory rather than practice (Hoa & Mai, 2016). P4 and P5 develop in-house materials and transform them into slides to be presented inside the class. P5 claims that "I try to include whatever aspects that are related to language. I go and search through many sources.

Then design and make my PowerPoint slides accordingly”. Presenting the content through slides presentation does not imply practical or scientific content.

However, P7 tends to use materials that address students’ needs in the job market, as he declares, “one of the main goals is to enhance my learners to develop their abilities and skills in their specialized area. Education in our country should be market-oriented to provide work opportunities for students on a discipline level. That is why I concentrate mainly on teaching my students the common expressions and words and the required skills that exist in their specialized fields. I see a huge gap between education and occupation. I am trying to do my best to help my students to find job opportunities after their graduation”. Moreover, P7 claims to use specific and authentic materials that contain up-to-date phrases and terms. This is in line with the goal of ESP materials which is to familiarize students with authentic language as it is used in a variety of professional or academic situations, and they should be directly tied to students’ target needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Basturkmen, 2006; Hyland, 2006; Anthony, 2018).

Overall, the results indicate that most of the instructors use relevant content to students’ specialized fields. Yet, they fail to demonstrate the language in authentic or pseudo-authentic situations. The majority of them lack authenticity which is the most important criterion in ESP courses. On the other hand, the majority of instructors claim that the materials do not address the objectives of the course due to lack of time. This is confirmed by P1, P3, and P5. Whereas P6 and P7 agree that the materials partially meet the objectives of the course. In contrast, P2 and P4 agree that the materials address the needs of the students. All of these indicate one main challenge materials selection in ESP courses at SUE do not follow systematic procedures for most of the cases. Ignoring the students’ needs and selecting the materials randomly leads to a gap between occupation and education. In addition, the materials do not seem to address learners’ needs adequately.

### **6.5 Instructors’ Perception about the Assessment Process**

ESP instructors use assessment to diagnose their students’ performance, identify their requirements, support their learning, and give them chances to improve their learning quality. According to Douglas (2000), ESP evaluation refers to exams that seek to measure language competence for specific occupational, professional, and academic reasons. At SUE, P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 heavily depend on conventional methods in assessing students’ performance. P1 claims that the reason behind adopting such methods is due to students’ low level. Meanwhile, P7 states that “sometimes I give them a subject and write about it or to discuss it in the class. I also use exams as well to assess their performance”. This means that the efficiency of these assessments is poor since ESP students frequently forget what they have learnt after the exams. Thus, the adoption of summative assessment can be related to obstacles that the instructors have throughout the evaluation process since they must improvise due to a lack of proper training (Abbasi & Djebbari, 2021).

### **6.6 Instructors’ Perception about the ESP Course Systematic Evaluation**

Instructors’ perceptions of the course evaluation component show that there is a consensus among instructors about the absence of any kind of procedures concerning ESP evaluation. Briefly, instructors believe that a formative evaluation is necessary with the intention of improving the program and identifying any weaknesses. A number of scholars such as Hutchinson & Waters (1987), Nation & Macalister (2010), Woodrow (2018) and many others, highlighted the importance of evaluation process as an essential part in ESP course development.

The ESP instructors of SUE responses indicate lack of evaluation and this is a challenge for them and their students as well.

### **6.7 Instructors' Perception about the Collaboration among Instructors**

The majority of instructors deny the importance of working with subject specialists. Thus, two of them claim that they work collaboratively with the content specialist instructors to design exam questions. In fact, during the interview process, it seems that they do not have a clear idea about the concept of collaboration in the ESP context. Depending on interview question responses on the nature of ESP courses at SUE, ESP practitioners should collaborate with subject experts from other fields to design and teach relevant content to learners (Alsolami, 2014; Anthony, 2018; Ghezali, 2021).

Lack of sufficient knowledge regarding the English language in general and ESP courses, in particular, is one of the problems that exist at SUE. So, in this case, it is preferred for ESP practitioners to work collaboratively with the subject specialist since they do not have background knowledge or when they want to evaluate the project. The reason behind this collaboration could be attributed to the fact that collaboration integrates instructors' and experts' responsibilities and fosters problem-solving strategies through sharing knowledge and required information to provide solutions to a variety of learning and literacy difficulties. Many studies have found that collaboration has favourable effects on instructors, such as increased efficacy and the degree of confidence (Goddard, et al., 2007; Nalan, 2016; Ghezali, 2021).

### **6.8 Some other Challenges of ESP Courses at SUE**

Based on the qualitative data obtained from the interview questions, the main challenges of ESP courses at College of Arts and College of Administration and Economics of SUE can be classified as the following:

#### **7.9.1 Students' level**

Based on instructors' response, the students' level is considered as one of the main issues that many ESP instructors encounter. The students' low level of proficiency negatively affects the whole program; P1 explains that "some of the students cannot spell their names and some of them don't have the basic knowledge of English language some of the students' can't provide appropriate answers to some basic information such as what is your name and where are you from for this reason it difficult for me to teach them ESP. This problem existed in all non-English major departments at college of Arts. This problem has put a workload on instructors and sometime I feel demotivated.

It seems that the students' proficiency level is a universal issue since similar results are found by Hoa and Mai (2016) and Nezakatgoo and Behzadpoor (2017). To overcome this challenge, SUE instructors can establish an EGP basis, and then concentrate on skills. Moreover, ESP courses should be introduced at intermediate or advanced levels.

#### **7.9.2 Time Constraints**

The amount of time allocated to ESP classes is insufficient for ESP students to develop language abilities. Almost all the instructors agree that time constraint is considered one of the main challenges that ESP instructors face. For P4, "time is not that much enough to do what we want because, in the first semester, we had less than 2



months, in the second semester also the same because of holidays”. It is vital to highlight that when the planned objectives are not achievable due to time constraints the intensity of instructions should be explicitly acknowledged and communicated to the authorities (Hyland, 2006).

### **7.9.3 Large Classes**

Generally speaking, in IKR, almost all public universities suffer from large classes. In addition, teaching ESP to a big group of students in one lesson would be tedious and ineffective. According to instructors’ perspectives, having large classes is one of the most prominent challenges ESP instructors at SUE face and can negatively impact the teaching/learning process. Almost all ESP instructors have problems with large classes. According to the response of P7, “We can say one of the impairments to reach my goals in motivating the students is the class size. Because I wanted to create a positive environment to engage my students in the activities and exchange ideas and so on. So, the class size is my main constraint let’s say to fulfill the plan of the course”. Moreover, having large classes in ESP courses is unsuitable and presents serious problems since the activities cannot enhance communicative skills and professional abilities.

### **7.9.4 Insufficient Background Knowledge and Lack of Expertise**

For teaching English and ESP courses, linguistic literacy is required which can involve linguistic, cultural discourse and genre knowledge to understand the nature of English language teaching (Akhiroh, 2017). Lack of instructor’s qualifications and knowledge is another main challenge that influences the nature of teaching ESP courses at SUE. To support this claim, P1 states that “my English language is not good enough to handle ESP courses and I don’t have enough information about the ESP courses”. He further adds that “this is a common issue faced by many ESP instructors at the university”. In highly specific circumstances, the question of how much field expertise is required for ESP educators remains open (Belcher, 2006). Although, there is consensus in the literature on instructor education that an English instructor must be proficient in both general English and/or English classes (Richards, 2017).

Similarly, five out of seven instructors claim that they do not have any background knowledge or expertise in the ESP field and only two of them to some extent are familiar with ESP courses. The qualification of instructors should be determined as a primary concern and high importance (cf. Al-Tameemy, 2019).

### **7.9.5 Students’ Lack of Motivation**

Motivation is essential to achieve a goal or perform an activity effectively. Without motivation, no task can be carried out, or if it is carried out, the quality and sustainability will be questionable. Concerning the ESP courses at SUE, lack of students’ motivation is reported by all the participants. P1 explains the context as he points out that “another problem is that students don’t like to learn the English language. Most of the time, I am obliged to use the mother tongue language to make them understand the content of the materials which is time-consuming and puts a workload on me as an instructor. None of the students use the English language in the class, the language that is used by them is only Kurdish i.e. their mother tongue language”. The use of the first language should be at the bare minimum to enhance students’ independence. Thornbury (2002 cited in Tuyen & Van, 2019) states that students must wean themselves off of relying on direct translation of their first language. Furthermore, Stefanova and Zabunov (2020) point out that some undergraduate students may not appreciate the value of ESP courses. They are in the course only to fulfil their graduation requirements. So, the students should be motivated

for learning since when the students are demotivated no objective in the field of learning can be attained because the students would not make attempts to learn topics successfully. Finally, one may state that ESP instructors should address the students' needs; ignoring this may lead to poor motivation and devoting little time for students to meet their goals (Anthony, 2018).

## 7. Conclusions

Building on the analyzed data collected from the instructors through an interview, the study has come up with a number of conclusions. The majority of ESP instructors at SUE believe that due to a number of challenges, the courses do not fulfill the current requirements of ESP theories and practices. The reason behind this failure could be attributed to some factors. Firstly, ESP instructors at SUE lack instructional experience and professional expertise. Moreover, the instructors have never participated in any training course relevant to ESP. Secondly, although the ESP course objectives are explained by the instructors inside the classroom, yet they cannot be accomplished. Besides, the instructors themselves do not fully understand the nature of ESP courses. Thirdly, the students' needs analysis which is a fundamental part of the course is somehow ignored by ESP instructors. Fourthly, almost all ESP instructors are not aware of modern teaching methods, approaches, and techniques and this negatively affects the process of learning. Fifthly, the instructors to a large extent are not aware of material developments and they themselves choose the materials without referring to needs analysis or course objective achievement. Sixthly, regarding the assessment process, almost all SUE ESP instructors follow the old-fashioned way of assessment. Next, there is no program evaluation and this has its own negative impact on the whole process and makes the materials and programs appear poor. Finally, factors such as the students' low level of proficiency, time shortage, large classes, the students' demotivation, and lack of instructors' knowledge and expertise are some other challenges that affect ESP courses in general.

## 8. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the researchers recommend the following points:

1. The course designer should make sure that ESP courses match the parameters defined by the current theories and practices such as the objectives of the course, the specificity and the authenticity of materials, teachers' knowledge and competence, students' knowledge and competence and so on.
2. The ESP course designers should follow a systematic process in terms of needs analysis, course objectives, the selection of materials, etc.
3. The course designer should make sure to match the ESP course with the ESP characteristics that are defined by linguists to avoid any misconception in the future.
4. The students' language proficiency level should be increased by enrolling in General English courses for at least two courses then ESP courses can be carried out. In other words, the courses should be taught to students with good knowledge of the English language.
5. The ESP instructors should have enough background knowledge and good language skills to be able to teach the course and to bridge the gap between education and occupation.
6. Classroom size should be minimized to carry out the ESP activities effectively and the teaching hours of ESP should be increased.
7. SUE should provide training for ESP instructors, especially those who are specialized in non-English fields or different from ESP courses.
8. SUE should coordinate with specialists in the ESP area to consult them about the appropriateness of the course elements.

## لیکۆئینه وه له کۆرسی ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP) له زانکۆی سه لاهه دین-هه ولیر له تیروانینی مامۆستایانه وه: لیکۆئینه وه یه کی چۆنایه تیه

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### پوخته:

ئامانجی توێژینه وه که لیکۆئینه وه یه له کۆرسی ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP) له زانکۆی سه لاهه دین-هه ولیر بۆ ده ستینیشانکردنی دۆخی ئیستای کۆرسه کانی ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP) و تیشکخستنه سه ر ئه و ئالنگارییه سه ره کیانه ی که مامۆستایانی پرۆگرامی ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP) رۆبه رۆوی ده بنه وه. توێژینه وه که گریمانه ی ئه وه ده کات که کاتیک رێگا کانی وانه وتنه وه و بنه ماکانی کۆرسی ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP) له زانکۆی سه لاهه دین جیه جیه ده کړین، ئه و ئه گه ری زۆره پرۆسه ی وانه وتنه وه و فیربوون کاریگه ر و سه رکه وتووتر بیته و ئه گه ر مامۆستایانی کۆرسی ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP) له سروشتی وانه وتنه وه که تیگه ن، هه روه ها کۆرسی ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP) به ره و باشی ده چی. بۆ لیکۆئینه وه له م پرسانه، توێژه ران چاوپیکه وتتیکی نیمچه پیکهاته بیان به کارهینا، که له ۲۰ پرسیار پیکهاته بوو. بۆ کۆکردنه وه ی زانیاریه کانی، که ره سه ته ی توێژینه وه که به سه ر چه ند به شی کدا دابه شکراوه، له وانه: زانیاری و شاره زایی مامۆستایان، چه مکسازی و ئامانجه کانی ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP)، سروشتی جیه جیه کردنی قوناغه کانی دیزاینی کۆرسی ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP)، سروشتی هاوکاری و بۆچوونی مامۆستایان سه باره ت به پرسه سه ره کیه کانی. نمونه ی توێژینه وه که پیکهاته بوو له ۷ مامۆستای کۆرسی ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP) له و به شانیه که پسپۆریان زمانی ئینگلیزی نییه له زانکۆی سه لاهه دین-هه ولیر. زانیاریه کۆکراوه کانی به شیوه یه کی چۆنایه تی شیکراونه ته وه به جه ختکردنه وه له سه ر هه ندیک بابه تی دیاریکراو. جگه له مه ش، ئه نجامه کانی ئه وه ده رده خه ن که ئه و کۆرسانه ی ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP) که له زانکۆی سه لاهه دین-هه ولیر وتراونه ته وه، مه رجه کانی کۆرسی ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP) تیدا نه بووه. سه ره رای ئه مه ش، مامۆستایان تیشکیانخسته سه ر هه ندیک گرفتی سه ره کی که هۆکاری نه گه یشتن به ئامانجه کانی خوله که، له وانه ش: خراپی ئاستی زمانه وانی خویندکاران، که میی کات، که میی زانیاری پێشینه و نه زانیی زمان، ژماره ی زۆری خویندکار له پۆلیکدا، و لاوازیی پالنه ر لای خویندکاران.

**کیله وشه کانی:** ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی تایبتهت (ESP)، ئینگلیزی بۆ مه بهستی ئه کادیمی (EAP)، کۆرسه کانی، دیزاینی کۆرسه کانی، مامۆستایان.

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## Appendix

### The Instructors' Interview Questions

1. What is your specialization?
2. In which department do you teach ESP courses?
3. How many years have you been teaching ESP at Salahaddin University-Erbil?
4. Do you have any background knowledge about the ESP course?
5. Have you participated in any ESP training?
6. What are the benefits of teaching ESP courses in this department?
7. Are the learners aware of the objectives of the ESP course? If yes, is it clear enough for them?
8. Do you carry out needs analysis before starting the course? If yes, how?
9. Do you face any challenges in conducting needs analysis? If yes, please mention them.
10. Do you think the learning objectives address learners' needs? Please explain why or why not.
11. What are the methods and strategies that you adopt in your class?
12. What are the skills you mostly concentrate on in your class? Please select all that apply
13. How do you select the teaching materials for the ESP course?
14. What are the criteria you depend on when selecting the teaching materials?
15. To what extent do you think that the materials cover the needs of the course?
16. Do you work collaboratively with the subject specialist?
17. How is the assessment carried out?
18. Is there any systematic evaluation of the teachers' performance in teaching the ESP courses?
19. Is the course assessed timely to suit learners' needs? If yes, how?
20. What are the main challenges you face in the ESP course?