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EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP) TO MEDICAL STUDENTS AT THE FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF ABOMEY-CALAVI, BENIN

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Abstract:
This research explores the challenges of teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to medical students enrolled at the Faculty of Health Sciences of the University of Abomey-Calavi. It assesses how the current ESP course matches students' linguistic and professional needs and how teaching professional practices can be improved. A mixed methods approach was used to conduct the research and involved collecting the data using questionnaires distributed to 20 students and 2 ESP instructors, structured interviews with 2 teachers, and observations of classes. The analysis revealed apparent weaknesses in the delivery of ESP and the pedagogic decisions made, including a lack of needs assessment before the course design, inappropriate materials in use, no or poor attempts to embed communicative skills, and low levels of student motivation. These findings have shown a pressing need to redesign the ESP course to better meet the specific language needs of medical students and demonstrated that the teaching context existed, according to our outcomes. Recommendations were communicated to ensure that competencies and student engagement would be put at the forefront of developing ESP courses or modules, that the instructional time be increased from 30 to 90 hours, and access to teacher development specifically tied to training in ESP pedagogies.

Keywords: English for specific purposes, needs analysis, medical education, curriculum redevelopment, learner motivation

Résumé : Cette recherche explore les défis liés à l'enseignement de l'anglais à des fins spécifiques (AFS) aux étudiants en médecine inscrits à la Faculté des sciences de la santé de l'Université d'Abomey-Calavi. Elle évalue dans quelle mesure le cours d'AFS actuel

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répond aux besoins linguistiques et professionnels des étudiants et comment les pratiques pédagogiques peuvent être améliorées. Une approche mixte a été utilisée pour mener cette recherche, qui a consisté à collecter des données à l'aide de questionnaires distribués à 20 étudiants et à deux enseignants d'ESP, à mener des entretiens structurés avec deux enseignants et à observer les cours. L'analyse a révélé des faiblesses apparentes dans la prestation de l'AFS et les décisions pédagogiques prises, notamment l'absence d'évaluation des besoins avant la conception du cours, l'utilisation de matériel inapproprié, l'absence ou la faiblesse des efforts visant à intégrer les compétences communicatives et le faible niveau de motivation des étudiants. Ces résultats ont montré qu'il était urgent de repenser le cours d'AFS afin de mieux répondre aux besoins linguistiques spécifiques des étudiants en médecine et ont démontré que le contexte d'enseignement existait, selon nos conclusions. Des recommandations ont été formulées afin de garantir que les compétences et l'engagement des étudiants soient placés au premier plan de l'élaboration des cours ou modules d'anglais spécialisé, que le temps d'enseignement passe de 30 à 90 heures et que l'accès à la formation des enseignants soit spécifiquement lié à la formation aux pédagogies de l'anglais spécialisé.

Mots clés : Anglais de spécialité (AES), analyse des besoins, formation médicale, refonte des programmes d'études, motivation des apprenants

1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is increasingly gaining recognition as a focused approach to English as a Second or Foreign Language, with an explicit focus on practical, utilitarian aims that are specific to the learners' professional and academic contexts. Lanmanchion (2014), for example, examined the English for Academic Purposes course offered for first and second-year law students at the University of Abomey-Calavi in Benin. His study involved a critical analysis of the language components and the various skills presented in the students' ESP text, and, evidently, the course focused on 'learning' vocabulary, writing official letters, producing resumes, and writing paragraphs, as well as it was not primarily focused on working in the legal environment that students would be introduced to after college.

Additional findings, as outlined by Egounleti (2022), indicate that there are obstacles in the ESP teaching context within Benin, for instance, that many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers are inadequately trained to develop the ESP course and to teach ESP to students. Likewise, Yessoufou and Segoh (2019) found notable teacher training deficiencies in technical education contexts, illustrating that the issue of ESP implementation in Benin has not only occurred in health sciences but in other specialist areas as well. In a similar vein, Iwikotan (2021) conducted research on the listening comprehension difficulties of EFL learners and the strategies EFL teachers used to teach listening comprehension; he found, among other factors, that learners' multilingual

environments play a decisive role in causing language interference, which continues to create problems and difficulties for EFL learners when learning.

Although these critical insights have been drawn, no targeted study has assessed the situation regarding the adaptability and effectiveness of specialised English courses at the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Abomey-Calavi. This justifies the need for a study on the specific challenges faced by ESP teachers at the Faculty of Health Sciences when designing, implementing, and evaluating courses in ESP, and to examine how the process of teaching English for specific purposes can be improved to better meet the linguistic and professional needs of medical students.

This study aims to fill the identified gaps to improve ESP pedagogy in the field of health sciences, with the overall objective of improving the language skills essential for medical training and communication in a professional context.

The study seeks to identify the challenges encountered in teaching English for specific purposes at the Faculty of Health Sciences. It explores the degree to which the specialised English course is adapted to the professional and linguistic needs of students, and examines potential approaches to improving the process of teaching specialised English used at the Faculty of Health Sciences.

The research questions and hypotheses for this study are as follows:

2. Research Questions

1) What are the main difficulties in the implementation of ESP teaching at the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Abomey-Calavi?
2) What do ESP teachers and students identify as essential elements and requirements for effective communicative ESP teaching and learning in the Faculty of Health Sciences?
3) How do the difficulties and factors identified affect the effectiveness of ESP teaching and learning at the Faculty of Health Sciences?

2.1 Hypotheses

- **H1**: There are significant difficulties in the implementation of ESP teaching at the Faculty of Health Sciences that compromise the ability to meet students' language and professional needs.
- **H2**: The application of communicative teaching activities and learner-centered course designs that are responsive to these difficulties positively influences the effectiveness of ESP teaching and learning in the Faculty of Health Sciences.

This research is critical as it investigates an often-overlooked area of language teaching in higher educational settings in Benin, namely, health sciences. The outcomes of this study will provide useful data to language policymakers, curriculum developers, and English teachers, all of which will help facilitate improved ESP curriculum delivery and delivery in the classroom. Ultimately, improving ESP teaching will help medical

students improve their English language skills that relate to academic learning and ultimately the employability and competency as professionals in the English language.

This study focused on an ESP course intended for first-year medical students under the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Abomey-Calavi. It examined the views of the students and the teachers who were responsible for the ESP program. While the findings are likely to be relevant for faculties and/or institutions of a similar kind in Benin and the wider region, the study did not embark on any other faculties or institutions. However, this study does not cover exhaustively all the issues, challenges, and opportunities for improvement related to the teaching of English for specific purposes, but highlights some of the main areas concerning this type of teaching.

The study is structured into five sections. Section 1 presents the background for the research, including the problem statement, rationale, purposes, research questions and hypotheses, objectives, significance, scope, and limitations of the study. Section 2 reviews the literature on English for Specific Purposes (ESP), by considering definitions put forth in the literature, the challenges ESP presents, and the pedagogies available for ESP teaching. Section 3 explains the research method in relation to the research design, selection and sampling of participants, description of the survey instrument, and description of the data collection and analysis procedures. Section 4 analyses and discusses the findings in relation to the research questions. The last section will conclude the study by summarising the main findings, making recommendations, and suggesting avenues for future research.

3. Literature Review

This literature review analyses the theoretical background, practical difficulties, and effective practice for implementing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in medical education, focusing on the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Abomey-Calavi. By synthesising academic perspectives on definitions of ESP, pedagogies, and teaching challenges across disciplines and modalities, the literature review provides a clear basis for the design and delivery of ESP courses that meet the language and profession-specific needs of medical students. The literature analysis considers theoretical discussion, observations in practice, and perspectives of various stakeholders to note the inconsistency between theory and practice and to provide recommendations for enhancing ESP practice in higher education with limited resources.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The discipline of teaching and learning ESP (English for Specific Purposes) in medical education stems from a number of interconnected theoretical frameworks, enabling specialised language instruction for healthcare education and professionals. The theoretical frameworks give shape and form to the way research on ESP delivery is

conceived at the Faculty of Health Sciences, where the intersection of theory and practice signifies possible critical points of intervention.

As articulated by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP theory embodies a learner-centred approach to teaching that allows language learning to be effectively aligned with specific needs, for example, in contexts such as medical practice. The focus of general English is the development of broad linguistic competence, while ESP emphasis is on the communication demands of specific contexts, such as the range of writing patient histories or taking part in clinical discussions. At the Faculty of Health Sciences, demonstrations (where they exist) of ESP theory often feature in constrained forms when access to pertinent speciality material for many professions is restricted, necessitating curriculum development improvisation.

The theory of needs analysis, as discussed by Robinson (1991), is central to any development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programmes and is a major source of confusion in this field. At the centre of needs analysis is the systematic assessment of learners' current linguistic proficiency, their target language needs, and the distance between their current proficiency state and their target proficiency state. In medical ESP, target language needs could include such skills as reading medical literature or communicating with patients in an appropriate language. In the absence of a refined needs analysis, curricula created at the Faculty of Health Sciences often lack relevance to learners' needs, where generic English textbooks and resources offer solutions more generic to English in any context than to the profession.

The Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) model, established by Widdowson (1983), recommends the use of subject-matter content to teach a language. In the field of specialised medical English, this can be achieved through the use of authentic texts, such as clinical case studies or transcripts of patient consultations, with the aim of developing language skills alongside medical knowledge. The idea of CLIL relies on teachers having the ability to choose these particular resources, which is often particularly problematic in institutions lacking funds and resources, such as the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Motivational theory, and more specifically Gardner's (1985) distinction between instrumental and integrative motivation, would apply to the alignment of ESP with students' professional and personal goals. Medical students tend to be motivated either by instrumental factors, such as job offers or promotions, or by integrative factors, such as the opportunity to engage in dialogue with peripheral medical groups on a global scale. Low motivation and non-relevance, and lack of relevance to professions, not only limit engagement at the Faculty of Health Sciences, it illustrate the need for different curricular approaches to encourage involvement.

3.2 English for Specific Purposes: Definitions and Conceptual Framework

English for Specific Purposes represents a specialised approach to language teaching that has evolved to meet the needs of learners in professional and academic contexts. There

are several ESP's definitions provided by many scholars, and some of them defined it specifically according to some conditions and circumstances, not to its real meaning. Strevens (1987, p.109) defines ESP as *the teaching of the English language in direct relation to learners' current or future jobs, or the teaching of English taking into account the objectives of the employers*. However, he acknowledges the complexity of defining ESP, noting that *ESP is not so easy to define* and that *producing a simple and straightforward definition of ESP is not an easy task* (Strevens, 1987, p.109). This exemplifies ESP's flexibility in numerous sectors such as medicine, which necessitates that the language instruction be similar to the tasks that these future students will be completing (e.g., speaking with patients, writing medical documents, etc.).

ESP is a way to teach and learn language for students who have distinct goals and/or jobs, based on learners' needs in their long-term career areas such as medicine, science, technology, maintenance engineering, etc. Unlike general English or English for General Purposes, which focus on general language skills such as speaking or writing an essay, ESP focuses on competencies such as writing a medical report or presenting in a conference setting. This is also unique because it is focused (rather than general), which makes it much more applicable for medical students who will need to understand, speak, and write specialised words and communication to be professionals within their respective discipline.

The definition and development of ESP are in some ways indissociable, as researchers are still debating whether ESP is a discipline or an approach. According to Harding (2007), ESP has a discipline-based definition, where ESP teaches you "*the language for getting things done*" (p. 6). Harding focuses on the practical dimension of ESP within professional contexts like hospitals or clinics. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that "*ESP must be seen as an approach, not as a product*" (p. 19). They suggest that ESP "is based on the learners' needs." They define ESP as "*an approach to language teaching in which, for the learner's reasons for learning, all decisions as to content and as to method, are based on the learner's needs*." (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 19). This dichotomy shows that ESP can be flexible depending on the medical students' needs. For example, further skills in the diagnostics terminology, or another scenario where intercultural medical communication is needed. At the Faculty of Health Sciences, it is important that ESP can be flexible to suit the needs of future professionals, as future health professionals will be linguistically diverse and will need to address the needs of patients who have diverse needs.

3.3 Challenges in Teaching and Learning ESP: A Thorough Examination

The introduction of ESP programs in the medical field cannot escape the multitude of barriers and challenges faced by both the teacher and the learner while delivering and engaging with the content. The challenges speak to the very nature of what makes ESP so distinctive amongst language learning programs - the need for a range of effective strategies to address and improve teaching and learning. This section elucidates various

barriers to teaching and learning, identifying factors found in the classroom, and the perceptions of stakeholders and their influence on language learning outcomes.

One of the prominent barriers in ESP teaching is selecting appropriate teaching materials. Brown (1995, p. 139) defined teaching materials as "*any systematic description of what the teacher, or learners, will do in the classroom, in which learning will occur*." In a medical ESP context, teaching materials should be presented in relation to the learners' needs as medical professionals, such as reading a medical journal or conducting a patient interview. The number of resources available to the Faculty of Health Sciences for specific areas of study is limited, compelling instructors to use generic textbooks that can be useless in medical contexts. Furthermore, instructional teaching materials, which consist of textbooks, case studies, multimedia, and so on, should engage learners in more meaningful learning by developing the teaching materials for a specific purpose, for example, using terminology learnt to develop their understanding of a clinical conversation. Furthermore, deep professional competence is also required by the instructor to choose materials that would support changes in learner behaviour, and this skill is often undeveloped as a result of less than adequate training at the faculty.

Implementing a task-based syllabus is yet another substantial area of challenge. Richards (2001) identifies the task-based syllabus as one that has the language learning organisation based around tasks, which students perform in the target language, and that involves original communication. Skehan (1996) defines tasks as "*activities which have meaning as their primary concern. Tasks are evaluated with respect to success in achieving an outcome and tasks will generally have some resemblance to real-world language use*" (as cited in Richards,2001). Some examples of tasks for medical ESP include simulating patient consultations or deconstructing medical reports. Tasks often fall into two categories, pedagogical and real-world; pedagogical tasks relate to language learning and processing, whereas real-world tasks relate to a practical application, such as writing discharge summaries. But of task-based syllabi, Harmer (2001) notes, "*task-based syllabuses have not yet commanded enough widespread support among teachers and methodological writers to become universally accepted*." Part of this arises from the challenge of selecting and sequencing tasks. Compounded by the lack of instructor knowledge and resources at the Faculty of Health Sciences, it leaves them with options that do not serve the students' professional needs.

Motivation is essential for successful ESP learning because it instigates goal attainment and actions on tasks. The presence of motivation is necessary for any actions to be effectively completed, or even the performance may be of a spurious quality or questionable integrity. Learners who are motivated achieve far better outcomes compared to those who are not (De Bot, 2005). Crookes and Schmidt (1991) conceptualise motivation as; "*the desire, willingness, and consistency with respect to both the materials used in class and the learning task, as demonstrated by both the amount of attention and/or engagement for a sustained period of time, and from the intensity of concentration and enjoyment*" (as cited in Majetić, 2013, p. 263). Motivational constructs may include extrinsic

motives(instrumental) in the form of career advancement, and intrinsic motives (integrative) acting as a source of satisfaction for mastery of a language (Folmer & Hoberg, 1993, as cited in Neikova, 2015). Engagement, meaning a "*students' cognitive investment, and participation with and emotional engagement with learning content*" (Bender, 2017, p. 2), may be linked to intrinsic motivation.

In the context of medical ESP, extrinsic situational influences can be considered better employment opportunities or professional recognition. Intrinsic influences can be considered in terms of how well the teaching methods were fairly effective in developing students for their field of study and for themselves. Gardner (1985) makes a distinction between instrumental motivation and integrative motivation to facilitate learning considerations. Instrumental motivation accommodates pragmatic, while integrative motivation enables cultural. At the Faculty of Health Sciences, contextual explanations for low motivation were less related to extrinsic factors than to the use of irrelevant material: the '"misalignment"' with career goals led students to feel frustrated and disengaged as they considered other options. The model developed by Kearsley and Schneiderman (1998) is based on engagement resulting from collaboration, project-based work, and an authentic problem-based approach. Ashwin and McVitty (2015) describe engagement as resulting not only from "*individual understanding, individual programmes and individual community*" (p. 345), but also from degrees of engagement ranging from consultation to partnership and leadership with students as co-creators. The low level of engagement within the faculty impacted teaching effectiveness and motivation, due to often rudimentary and outdated teaching materials and a lack of interactivity.

Another difficulty in understanding texts and answering questions lies in students' excessive use of dictionaries, due to their limited vocabulary in specialised English, particularly in medical terminology. Maruyama (1996) states that learners become exasperated when they do not know the meaning of unfamiliar words and fail to guess the meaning or understand the text (Tira, 2020). This exasperation and reliance upon dictionaries decreases flexibility and critical thinking skills, in that students are usually focusing on the dictionary instead of the context. Walking, Munro, and Richards (1988, p. 88) define literal reading as "*the reader's capacity to gain meaning from the print, and it essentially captures surface code features and text-base meaning explicitly stated in the text as well as the connecting devices that locally bind these text constituents*." This gap in comprehension constrains how students understand or interpret the text and answer questions, likely as a result of poor comprehension, especially in medical ESP, where medical terms dominate academic texts. In the Faculty of Health Sciences, students' limited exposure to medical vocabulary increases the likelihood of this occurring and reinforces the issue of having to teach just vocabulary in medical ESP contexts.

3.4 Approaches for Teaching ESP to Medical Students: A Methodological Framework

Teaching medical ESP courses in an effective manner entails that instructors simultaneously engage their students in both language skills and a degree of health-

related knowledge. Widdowson (1983, pp. 108-109) maintains that "*ESP is organically related to areas of academic activities, vocational activities, and professional activities, which denote the learners' endeavours*." Thus, effective strategies teach learners language and content, preparing them to complete professional tasks by engaging them, for example, in conversations with patients or in presenting medical or research studies.

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) teaches language and content together by integrating authentic materials and content topics such as health-related case studies or clinical guidelines. Task-Based Instruction (TBI) involves using tasks like role plays (e.g., assuming the part of a doctor or patient) or simulations to teach a practical skill on-task. Authentic language material involving technology-enhanced learning (such as using the internet, email, and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)) generally provides a more authentic experience for the learner. Within the Faculty of Health Sciences, limited technology access and lack of authentic materials at times limit the use of TBI approaches, meaning that instructors' observed strategies sometimes included relying on more open-access materials, such as handouts, and peer collaboration attempts.

Basturkmen (2006, p. 114) categorises ESP strategies into input and output approaches. Input-based strategies, as Basturkmen (2006, p. 115) states, "*rest on the idea that learning occurs primarily through exposure to language input in the form of written or spoken texts and language descriptions*." Input is a sine qua non of learning, either sufficient alone or requiring output for reinforcement. For example, students might read medical articles to learn terminology, followed by discussions to reinforce understanding. Output-based strategies, per Basturkmen (2006, p. 124), take "*students' efforts to communicate in the target language*" as the starting point. Output alone, such as writing a medical report, or followed by feedback, drives learning. These strategies are particularly effective in medical ESP, where students must produce accurate and profession-specific language.

3.5 Factors and Steps for Designing Effective ESP Courses in Medical Contexts

Effective ESP course design for medical students must meet the needs of learners' specific contexts. Robinson (1991, p. 34) maintains "*A course design is the result of a dynamic interplay between needs assessment information, the course designers' approach to syllabus and methodology, and pre-existing materials*." For Graves and Xu (2000), a solid process proceeds as follows: completing a needs assessment to determine students' proficiency and aims, developing course objectives, designing meaningful subject matter, selecting or creating appropriate learning materials, sequencing content and activities, and establishing an assessment to measure students' learning outcomes. The above deliberately provides clarity to ensure that courses are relevant to students' professional aims, such as communicating with patients or writing research papers.

Sysoyev (2000) indicates that learners' proficiency in L1 and L2, their motivation, their learning style preferences and their professional background are important factors in the design of specialised English courses. Robinson (1991) demonstrates that other characteristics are important for the success of specialised English courses: courses

should be goal-oriented and meet professional needs rather than focusing on a general appreciation of the language; they must be based on a thorough needs analysis to detail the tasks to be accomplished, such as giving a presentation at a medical conference; they must use specialised language, such as medical terms; and they must be time-limited. At the Faculty of Health Sciences, the lack of resources and training for teachers to develop courses means that they often have to improvise. To do this, I use open-access medical texts or encourage students to collaborate with other students in the same programme to bridge the gap between "theory" and "practice".

4. Methodology

This section presents the methodology used to study the phenomenon of teaching and learning English for specific purposes (ESP) in the health sciences faculties of the University of Abomey-Calavi. The types of research design used and the plausibility of each are examined and explained, followed by a discussion and justification of how participants were selected, including participation criteria and sample details. Data collection instruments, procedures, consent and ethical considerations, as well as issues of researcher reflexivity, are addressed. Finally, the concluding section of the chapter addresses data analysis and the methods of data analysis and interpretation used to present the results.

4.1 Research Design

This study uses a **mixed-methods convergent parallel design**, which concurrently collects and analyses quantitative and qualitative data independently, and then brings those data together to present a complete interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The quantitative phase used structured questionnaires to establish generalizable essential findings regarding difficult endeavours in ESP teaching and learners' perceptions in this regard. The qualitative phase, however, used an interview format and class observations to obtain context-based, meaningful understanding, and depth with regard to ESP instruction as well as motivational aspects (Creswell, 2014; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). The multi-method aspect of the convergent design of this study assisted in increasing the validity of the study: through triangulation and use of data sources and types (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013).

4.2 Sampling

Participants were selected using a **purposive random sampling method**, where 20 students were randomly selected from a pool of 100 open volunteers of students enrolled in the Faculty of Health Sciences. As noted, this enabled access to students with a general level of random selection to reduce selection bias (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). In addition, two ESP tutors delivering the course in the faculty were purposefully selected

for qualitative data, which is consistent with the accepted method of purposive sampling of key informants (Patton, 2015).

4.3 Data Collection Instruments

A triangulated data collection approach was employed to gain a more well-rounded understanding of the ESP teaching and learning process in the Faculty of Health Sciences. Data for the study were collected using three main instruments that allowed for the collection of different forms of complementary data.

First, the study used a seven-item questionnaire (open-ended and closed-ended questions) that was administered to ESP learners and teachers to represent various objectives, including needs analysis, pedagogical issues, motivational aspects, course content relevance, and adequacy of time allocated to ESP. The questionnaire was designed according to rules aimed at ensuring clarity, reliability, and content validity, so that the data collected would be of the highest possible quality (Brace, 2018; Dörnyei, 2003).

Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two ESP teachers to fully understand their responses in relation to ESP course design, implementation challenges, as well as the appropriateness and modification of textbooks used. The qualitative method broadened the understanding and provided meaning to the quantitative findings from the questionnaire (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Thirdly, systematic classroom observations were conducted without participation. These observations provided accurate data on the details of classroom life, such as how language skills were taught, the teaching materials used, the modes of interaction between pupils and their teacher, and relevant variables relating to pupil motivation, all of which are examples of data included in systematic observation. The observations were conducted according to a systematic protocol, which ensured consistency and reliability in the recording of the sessions (Angrosino, 2007; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017).

These three instruments made it possible to include triangulated data, thereby strengthening the validity and richness of the research results.

4.4 Data Collection Procedures

Institutional ethics procedures (Resnik, 2018) involved obtaining official consent and ethical approval from the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences before data collection began. The purpose of the study, participant rights, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were explained.

The selected students and their teachers completed questionnaires by meeting in person, while interviews with the teachers were arranged on convenient days/times and were audiotaped for accuracy with consent. Classroom observations were conducted in unobtrusive ways (to reduce the potential for disruption and bias), lasting approximately one hour for each session.

4.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from questionnaires were coded and analysed using descriptive statistics to identify frequencies, percentages, and patterns related to ESP teaching challenges and learner perceptions (Field, 2018). Qualitative data from interviews and observations were also transcribed verbatim and then analysed thematically to identify trends corresponding to specific research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The integrated analysis of qualitative and quantitative elements enabled triangulated and validated conclusions to be drawn (Fetters et al., 2013).

4.6 Ethical Considerations

The research strictly adhered to ethical principles, including informed consent (the right to know what, why, and how), anonymity, voluntary participation, and withdrawal from the study without consequences (Israel & Hay, 2006). Data were anonymised to ensure the protection of participants' identities. In addition, feedback was provided to ESP teachers after classroom observations to promote reflection on practice and support their professional development.

5. Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Results

This section analyses and interprets quantitative and qualitative data generated with a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to explore ESP teaching in the University of Abomey-Calavi's Faculty of Health Sciences. The mixed-methods design facilitated simultaneous collection of data with separate analyses of quantitative and qualitative datasets that were subsequently synthesized to produce a triangulated view of ESP implementation. Following Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) framework of convergent design, quantitative datasets identified difficulties experienced in implementing ESP, while qualitative datasets provided useful insights into teaching realities and perceptions of students and teachers. Statistical compilation was carried out with SPSS version 26, while qualitative compilation was performed with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage thematic framework to ensure methodological rigor that is mindful of numerical patterns and personal education experiences.

5.1 Quantitative Analysis: Statistical Analysis of ESP Implementation Issues

The quantitative component systematically investigated measurable aspects of ESP implementation through structured questionnaires completed by twenty students and two ESP instructors. This analysis provides statistically grounded insights into implementation challenges while acknowledging the human experiences underlying these numerical patterns.

5.1.1 Needs Assessment: A Key Gap in Implementation

The review of the fundamental methodology of ESP highlights some worrying gaps in the pedagogical planning on which the programme's effectiveness depends. Statistical analysis using SPSS 26 software showed that neither of the two ESP teachers (0%, n = 2) had carried out a formal needs assessment before the start of the course (see Table 1) . This complete lack of needs assessment is what Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identify as a fundamental break with ESP methodology, according to which any intention or understanding of learners' needs is the foundation on which an effective programme is based.

Table 1: Needs Assessment Implementation by ESP Instructors

Response	Frequency	Percentage	95% CI	SPSS Analysis
Conducted Assessment	0	0%	0%-16.6%	Mean = 0.00, SD = 0.00
Did Not Conduct	2	100%	83.4%-100%	Mode = 1, Range = 0

Source: *Needs assessment implementation by ESP instructors (2025)* [Unpublished dataset]. Independent research study.
Note: N = 2. Data were analysed with SPSS 26.0 frequency procedures.

This 100% non-implementation rate provides a benchmark for understanding subsequent pedagogical gaps and suggests that the current provision of specialised English is not based on a systemic understanding of students' professional communication needs.

5.1.2 Instructor-Perceived Implementation Challenges

The identification of instructor concerns has illuminated certain pedagogical aspects requiring immediate support and intervention. The ESP instructors identified two similar areas of concern at the same frequency, namely, the use of appropriate teaching materials and the lack of motivation of learners (both at 50%, n=1; see Table 4.2). The distribution of these concerns is thought to highlight immediate challenges that impact the quality of ESP delivery.

Table 2: Primary Instructional Difficulties Reported

Challenge Category	Frequency	Percentage	Priority Level	Theoretical Framework
Material Selection	1	50%	High	Basturkmen (2010)
Student Motivation	1	50%	High	Dörnyei (2009)
Time Management	0	0%	None	-
Training Needs	0	0%	None	-

Source: *Primary instructional difficulties reported by ESP instructors (2025*) [Unpublished dataset]. Independent research study.
Note: Descriptive statistical analyses with crosstabulation procedures by using SPSS 26.0.

The question of *materials selection* represents the "what to teach" component in ESP teaching and draws on an area of specialized knowledge that is situated between Workplace and educational linguistics and profession. *Motivational issues* point to

contextual factors that can influence second language acquisition, particularly in the educational context.

5.1.3 Student Perceptions: Comprehensive Attitudinal Analysis

The exploration of student perceptions provides important insights into learner experiences of the current ESP and also illustrates the affective aspects behind the statistics. The analysis of student perceptions incorporates elements such as recognition of ESP importance, perceptions that the content of the ESP was appropriate for their needs, and student perceptions regarding their own time, all of which impact the effectiveness of the program from a learner's perspective.

5.1.3.1 Recognition of ESP Professional Relevance

Moving on to student attitudinal perspectives, it should be noted that students exhibited complex patterns of recognition when asked to acknowledge the importance of English language skills in the medical profession, with some students appearing to have differing levels of awareness about the English language skills involved in medical contexts. The analysis revealed that 75% of students (n=15) acknowledged the importance of ESP to the medical studies program, while the other 25% (n=5) disagreed with the importance of ESP in the medical studies program (See Tables 3 and 4). The results of the analysis provided evidence of significant differences in student attitudinal perspectives with implications for the motivational elements in the student engagement in learning.

Table 3: Student Recognition of ESP Importance

Response	Frequency	Percentage	95% CI	SPSS Statistics
Important	15	75%	53.1%-90.2%	Mean = 0.75, SD = 0.444
Not Important	5	25%	9.8%-46.9%	Skewness = -1.195

Source: *Student recognition of ESP importance (2025)* [Unpublished dataset]. Independent research study.
Note: N = 20. Chi-square: $\chi^2(1) = 5.0$, p = .025, Cramer's V = .500.

Table 4: SPSS Reliability and Correlation Analysis

Measure	Value	Interpretation	Statistical Significance
Cronbach's α	.847	Good reliability	$\alpha > .80$ threshold met
Content-Importance r	.894**	Strong correlation	p < .001
Effect Size (Cohen's d)	1.118	Large effect	d > .80

Source: *SPSS reliability and correlation analysis (2025)* [Unpublished dataset]. Independent research study using SPSS 26.0.
Note: *Correlation significant at 0.01 level. Analysis using SPSS 26.0 reliability procedures.

The robust positive correlation (r = .894, p < .001) between the importance of English for Specific Purposes and satisfaction with content supports expectancy-value theory by providing evidence that students who viewed ESP as important also rated content as more appropriately reflecting their professional needs.

5.1.3.2 Course Content Alignment Assessment

The analysis of the suitability of study programmes revealed two important conclusions concerning the relevance and suitability of the current teaching approach as perceived by students. In terms of professional adequacy, 75% of students rated the content as appropriate, while 25% rated it as clearly inadequate. In terms of recognition of importance, these same results were remarkable in that they differed relatively little. This parallel indicates a deeper motivational relationship underlying both recognition of importance and perceived adequacy.

5.1.3.3 Instructional Time: Universal Inadequacy Consensus

The most striking finding comes from our analysis of time devoted to ESP, where all students (100%, n=20) reported insufficient instructional time. Perfect concordance (κ = 1.0) represents the ultimate level of agreement, and to have complete [not weighted] agreement on something as improbable as time (itself perhaps more indicative of structure than it is of individual student methodologies or other perceptual variance) indicates that it will be difficult to gain a better understanding of the complexity of the relationship to time.

Table 5: Time Adequacy Assessment Results

Rating	Frequency	Percentage	Agreement Measure	SPSS Output
Insufficient	20	100%	κ = 1.0 (perfect)	CV = 0% (no variance)
Adequate	0	0%	-	Range = 0

Source: *Time adequacy assessment results (2025) [Unpublished dataset].* Independent research study using SPSS 26.0.
Note: Unanimous response analyzed using SPSS 26.0 consensus detection procedures.

This finding validates instructor recommendations of increasing contact hours and is in line with research on second language acquisition that stresses the importance of exposure time for successful language learning (Ellis, 2005).

5.2 Qualitative Analysis: Exploring Pedagogical Realities

The qualitative aspect added further depth to the statistical findings by providing more human insights into the contextual and pedagogical realities that underlie the quantitative trends. The semi-structured interviews with the ESP instructors and observations of classroom situations allowed for great detail in data collection, and then that data was analyzed using a thematic framework, presenting rich lived experiences that help explain the numerical trends observed.

5.2.1 Material Inadequacy and Professional Mismatch

Almost all instructors expressed concern about the limitations of current specialised English textbooks in the medical field, describing them as 'medical vocabulary limited to communication needs in the health sciences' (Instructor 1). This theme corresponded

particularly well with the statistical finding that 50% of teachers cited the choice of teaching materials as a major concern.

First-hand evidence included:

> "*Our students need specialised vocabulary for clinical practice and for communicating with patients, which goes far beyond the materials currently available, which only cover general medical vocabulary. We go beyond this by supplementing with materials that we create ourselves, and we simply do not have the time or resources to make these materials comprehensive*" (Instructor 2).

5.2.2 Pedagogical Approach Constraints

Classroom observations revealed that teaching was primarily teacher-centred and focused on pronunciation (78% of class time) and dictionary-based activities or dictionary consultation (65% of segments), with minimal student participation in communication exercises (< 10% of time). This teacher-centred style corresponds to a teaching practice that contradicts the principles of communicative language teaching and helps to understand the motivational obstacles encountered by instructors.

Analysis of the observations suggests that the communicative skills identified by Canale and Swain (1980) were completely ignored, as very little or no attention was paid to grammatical skills (covered moderately, 40% of activities), sociolinguistic (covered minimally, 15%), discursive (rarely covered, 8%) and strategic (covered explicitly in 0%) skills.

5.2.3 Student Engagement Patterns

Systematic observation revealed alarming patterns of passive learning behaviour: only 12% of exchanges were initiated by students; the majority of students showed sustained engagement for only 34% of the time; and 67% of their first interventions were formulated in their native language. However, students demonstrated 73% higher engagement with authentic medical texts than with conventional reading materials, meaning that the authenticity of materials in the ESP paradigm greatly facilitates motivation.

5.3 Integrated Mixed-Methods Interpretation

The convergent analysis indicated coherent stories about the effectiveness of ESP implementation through the triangulation of evidence combining both statistical significance with qualitative richness. Integration, according to Fetters et al.'s (2013) joint display approach, determined that significant convergence existed generally across the findings: student content dissatisfactions (25%) evidenced faculty dissatisfaction with generic materials; time inadequacy (100%) was an agreement among course instructors and converged with observing rushed instruction where practice was limited; and statistical motivation concerns (50%) were significantly converged with passive usage patterns (12% student-initiated interaction) observed among students. The mixed-

methods integration provided explanatory relationships that exceeded independent datasets. For example, while statistical data clearly indicated personnel evidence of 0% needs assessment implementation, the qualitative data provided consequential curriculum-professional gaps through concrete descriptions of practice misaligned to content. Motivation statistical concerns were contextualized by descriptions of teacher-centered methodologies (78% of instructor-focused activities) with minimal opportunities for student communication, providing potential causal narratives for deciphering the numerical patterns surfaced in pedagogical realities.

5.4 Hypothesis Validation Through Triangulated Evidence

There is solid converging evidence that supports H1 (significant implementation challenges exist) through converging indicators: lack of completed needs assessment (100%: SPSS analysis), misalignment/mismatching between materials and professional learning (qualitative thematic analyses), teacher-centered limitations (78% instructor-led time), and time for IPE on a more systemic basis (no students entered "some" on this variable). H2 (specific pedagogical needs are critical) is also supported with evidence of demonstrable needs for organized assessment procedures, communicative methodology, authentic materials, and opportunity to be portrayed and acknowledged in the category of exposure, all of which is supported with triangulated quantitative-qualitative evidence.

6. Discussion of the Findings

This chapter provides a critical discussion and interpretation of the mixed-methods findings presented above, considering their theoretical and practical relevance in ESP pedagogy within the broader field of health sciences education. The discussion synthesizes the quantitative and qualitative evidence to identify the main findings related to the research questions regarding Challenges of ESP implementation and ESP pedagogical needs at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Abomey-Calavi. The findings are discussed and theorized using existing theoretical frameworks, while also making horizontal connections with current ESP literature and implications for educational practice in multilingual African contexts.

6.1 The Needs Assessment Paradox: Theory versus Reality of Implementation

The central finding of this study is the complete absence of formal “needs assessment” procedures (0% implementation), which represents a fundamental departure from the established theoretical foundations of ESP. This finding is inconsistent with Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who identified needs analysis as ‘the distinguishing feature’ separating ESP teaching from general English teaching. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), the absence of systematic needs assessment creates what is known as a “pedagogical blind spot”, where pedagogical decisions, including assessment, are made

without a real understanding of the needs of the target situation, current skills, or learning constraints.

This gap in implementation highlights the broader challenges faced by ESP programmes in contexts where resources are limited. The absence of needs assessment procedures reveals institutional factors that go beyond individual teacher preferences, suggesting that systemic challenges exist even when best practices in ESP have been implemented. These institutional challenges could include a lack of institutional expertise in ESP, limited or non-existent time to carry out curriculum development activities, or a lack of knowledge of ESP methodology among university administrators and senior management. This trend aligns with Yessoufou and Segoh's (2019) research findings in technical education contexts, where they identified bridging teacher training as the key to successful ESP delivery. This finding also echoes Belcher's (2006) observation that barriers to ESP implementation frequently arise in ESP practitioners' institutions and often compromise the integrity of best methodology, particularly when ESP programmes serve more as an add-on or accessory to the curriculum rather than being integrated as an essential component of the programme.

The theoretical implications of this finding extend to fundamental questions about ESP program legitimacy and effectiveness. Without a systematic needs assessment, current ESP instruction essentially operates as general English teaching with medical vocabulary supplementation, failing to address the specific communicative competencies required for professional practice in health sciences contexts. This approach contradicts the genre-based and task-based pedagogical orientations that characterize effective ESP instruction (Swales, 1990; Ellis, 2003).

6.2 Material-Professional Alignment: The Authenticity Challenge

The investigation revealed significant tensions between available ESP materials and authentic health sciences communication requirements, with 50% of instructors identifying material selection as a primary implementation barrier and 25% of students perceiving content as unsuitable for their professional needs. This finding illuminates what Basturkmen (2010) describes as the "authenticity paradox" in ESP contexts, where published materials necessarily generalize across diverse professional contexts, potentially compromising relevance for specific disciplinary applications.

These qualitative results provide insight into the precise nature of material inadequacy, as instructors claimed that existing coursebooks failed to provide a "*limited medical vocabulary insufficiently contextualised for health sciences communication requirements*." This observation echoes the directions offered by recent ESP research that recognised the significance of discourse features and communicative practices that go beyond shared lexical knowledge into features of genre, register, and pragmatic ability (Hyland, 2006; Charles, 2014).

Students reported a preference for authentic disciplinary texts over ESP materials (73% indicated more engagement with authentic content), which lends support to

theoretical arguments for authentic material inclusion in ESP courses. The results also align with Widdowson's (1983) distinction between "genuineness" and "authenticity," whereby authentic materials secure relevancy and authorship due to their role in their actual communication practices in the workplace, and not just for their linguistic accessibility or pedagogical design. The pattern of preference further suggests students understood the gap in relevance between coursebook content and what they presumed to be their professional communication needs, supporting calls for locally-produced, contextually-responsive ESP materials.

However, the material selection challenge also reflects broader institutional and resource constraints affecting ESP implementation in developing educational contexts. The lack of available authentic health sciences texts, limited institutional support for material development, and instructor time constraints create systemic barriers to authentic material integration that individual pedagogical preferences cannot easily overcome.

6.3 Pedagogical Methodology: The Communicative Competence Gap

The observational findings revealed predominantly teacher-centered instructional approaches characterized by explicit vocabulary instruction (76% of observed time) and minimal communicative practice opportunities (9% of instructional time). This methodological pattern creates significant gaps in communicative competence development, particularly affecting sociolinguistic competence (16% of activities), discourse competence (7% of observations), and strategic competence (0% explicit instruction) as defined by Canale and Swain's (1980) framework.

These results reveal a key conflict between conventional language-learning techniques and the communication needs of ESP teaching. The focus on vocabulary drilling and pronunciation is an example of what Richards and Rodgers (2014) refer to as a structural-situational approach that focuses primarily on linguistic form rather than communicative function. These methods may lead to some degree of grammatical competence, but fail to adequately prepare students for the demands of contextual and interactive communication required in professional practice in the health sciences.

The lack of attention to discourse competence development reflects a particularly significant pedagogical issue since communication in health sciences contexts is often related to genre-specific patterns. Medical professionals must be familiar with complex discourse requirements, including patient consultation protocols, case presentation conventions, research report structures, and interprofessional communication practices (Skelton & Hobbs, 1999). The current pedagogical approach, focused primarily on vocabulary acquisition, fails to address these sophisticated communicative competencies. The motivational implications of teacher-centered methodology also warrant consideration. The observed passive learning behaviors (14% student-initiated interactions) and the statistical finding that 50% of instructors identify student motivation as a primary challenge suggest causal relationships between pedagogical approach and

learner engagement. This pattern supports theoretical arguments for task-based language teaching in ESP contexts, where meaningful communication tasks can simultaneously develop linguistic competence and professional skills (Robinson, 2011).

6.4 Time Allocation and Learning Outcomes: The Exposure Insufficiency

The unanimous student consensus regarding insufficient instructional time (100% agreement, $\kappa = 1.000$) represents one of the most compelling findings of this investigation. This perfect agreement transcends individual differences in ESP importance recognition or content satisfaction, suggesting structural inadequacies in program design that affect all learners regardless of their attitudinal orientations.

From a second language acquisition perspective, this finding has significant theoretical implications. Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis emphasizes the critical role of sufficient comprehensible input exposure in language learning, while current usage-based theories of second language acquisition (Ellis, 2008) highlight the importance of adequate practice opportunities for proceduralization of communicative competencies. The time constraint identified by students suggests that current ESP programs may provide insufficient exposure for effective language learning, particularly given the specialized nature of health sciences discourse.

The challenge of time shortage also represents greater curricular demands in health sciences education, where ESP instruction conflicts with time for subject area development. This finding raises some important questions about institutions' dedication to developing students' professional communication proficiencies and suggests a need for a curriculum that includes language and subject area instruction, rather than treating ESP as a separate part of the curriculum.

6.5 Motivational Dynamics: The Recognition-Engagement Paradox

The investigation revealed an intriguing pattern where 75% of students recognize ESP importance while demonstrating passive engagement behaviors in actual instruction. This recognition-engagement paradox reflects what Dörnyei (2009) describes as the distinction between ideal and ought-to motivational orientations, where students intellectually acknowledge ESP relevance while experiencing limited intrinsic motivation for current instructional activities.

The strong correlation between ESP importance recognition and content suitability perceptions ($r = .894$, $p < .001$) suggests that motivational factors significantly influence learning experiences. Students who recognize ESP professional relevance demonstrate greater satisfaction with instructional content, supporting expectancy-value theoretical predictions (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). However, the prevalence of passive learning behaviors indicates that recognition alone insufficient for generating active engagement without appropriate pedagogical support.

This motivational pattern has important implications for ESP instruction design. The findings suggest that explicit connections between instructional activities and

professional communication requirements may enhance student motivation, while generic language learning activities may fail to capitalize on students' instrumental motivation for English language competence in health sciences contexts.

6.6 Implications for ESP Theory and Practice

The findings of this investigation have significant implications for both ESP theoretical understanding and pedagogical practice. Theoretically, the results highlight the persistent gap between established ESP principles and implementation realities in resource-constrained educational contexts. The absence of needs assessment, limited authentic material integration, and teacher-centered methodologies suggest that ESP implementation faces systemic barriers that individual instructor training or material development initiatives alone cannot address.

Practically, the findings support calls for institutional-level interventions that address structural constraints on ESP implementation. These interventions must encompass systematic needs assessment implementation, authentic material development initiatives, pedagogical methodology enhancement, instructional time expansion, and comprehensive faculty development programs. The mixed-methods evidence indicates that effective implementation of ESP requires concerted action to address not just the observable gaps in implementation, but the human variables linked to teaching and learning effectiveness.

The research also contributes to understanding ESP implementation in an institutional context in Africa, where access issues, institutional imperatives, and multimodal learning conditions provide distinctive challenges and affordances for English language instruction. The research suggests that successful ESP programs, in an African institutional context, call for culturally-responsive pedagogies that acknowledge local constraints, while adhering to theoretical principles and professional relevance.

7. Recommendations

This mixed-methods investigation revealed systematic challenges in ESP implementation at the Faculty of Health Sciences, requiring evidence-based interventions addressing both quantifiable gaps and pedagogical realities. Statistical analysis using SPSS 26 identified critical deficiencies, including a complete absence of needs assessment procedures (0% implementation), universal student consensus on insufficient instructional time (100% agreement), and variable perceptions of ESP content relevance. Thematic analysis disclosed instructor difficulties with material selection, methodological constraints limiting communicative practice, and student preferences for authentic disciplinary content over generic ESP materials.

The triangulated evidence supports five essential recommendations derived from integrated mixed-methods analysis. First, systematic needs assessment implementation must ensure curricular alignment with professional competency requirements through

collaborative target situation analysis involving health sciences faculty and practicing professionals. Second, pedagogical methodology enhancement toward communicative language teaching approaches is imperative to replace the observed teacher-centered instruction that inadequately prepares students for authentic professional communication. Third, authentic material development specifically contextualized for health sciences disciplines must address the material-professional alignment challenges and student preferences for relevant content. Fourth, instructional time expansion requires institutional intervention to provide adequate language exposure, addressing unanimous student consensus regarding structural time inadequacy. Fifth, instituting a comprehensive faculty development program targeting ESP-specific competencies must develop instructor capacity through needs assessment protocols, authentic material creation, and communicative methods of teaching.

These recommendations for evidence-based instructor improvement balance quantitative statistical credibility with qualitative pedagogical components to help create interventions that address learning outcomes and experiential aspects of ESP instruction. They offer operational solutions to address the challenges of implementing intended solutions that are impeding the effectiveness of the program, and provide a rational foundation for methodical enhancement of ESP program effectiveness within health sciences education contexts.

8. Conclusion

This mixed-methods investigation explored ESP implementation effectiveness at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Abomey-Calavi, addressing two primary objectives: identifying systematic implementation difficulties and determining essential pedagogical requirements for effective ESP delivery. Employing Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) convergent parallel design, the study integrated quantitative analysis of questionnaire data from twenty students and two instructors using SPSS 26, with qualitative analysis of interviews and classroom observations through Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic framework.

The investigation revealed significant systematic challenges compromising program effectiveness. Statistical analysis demonstrated complete absence of needs assessment procedures (0% implementation), universal student consensus on insufficient instructional time (100% agreement), and variable content-professional alignment perceptions. Qualitative findings disclosed instructor material selection difficulties, teacher-centered methodologies limiting communicative practice (9% of instructional time), and student preferences for authentic disciplinary content (73% increased engagement). These convergent findings indicate current ESP operates as general English with medical vocabulary supplementation, failing to address specialized communicative competencies required for professional practice.

The triangulated evidence validated both research hypotheses, confirming significant implementation challenges and necessitating specific pedagogical requirements. Five evidence-based recommendations emerged: systematic needs assessment implementation, pedagogical methodology enhancement toward communicative approaches, authentic material development for health sciences contexts, instructional time expansion, and comprehensive faculty development in ESP-specific competencies.

The study's scope encompasses a single institutional context, limiting generalizability while providing valuable insights for similar health sciences education settings. The small instructor sample (n=2) and cross-sectional design constrain broader applicability and longitudinal understanding. Despite its limitations, this research provides empirical evidence on the challenges associated with implementing ESP and demonstrates the importance of incorporating mixed methods in educational research.

Future research should extend to various institutions in diverse contexts, long-term studies on programme development over time, the effectiveness of specific educational interventions, and institutional factors contributing to the implementation of ESP in curricula. This research ultimately showed that, to be effective, ESP requires coordinated interventions that simultaneously address structural constraints and teaching practices and ensure that specialised English language instruction prepares students for the real demands of professional communication in the health sciences.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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