



BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN GENERAL ENGLISH AND ESP: STRATEGIES FOR SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

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Abstract : The transition from General English (GE) to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) poses significant challenges for many students in tertiary education, particularly when English is a second language and when the second language is used by either specialists or not. Globalization and internationalization of language education had inspired a shift from the learning of traditional College English to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Dou, Chan and Win, 2023). Today English is the channel for technical progress as it enables the rapid exchange of information and research of the common global problems. Any specialist of any science field should properly use both ESP and GE to communicate in any specialized and non-specialized subject for professionally oriented activities. What approaches to use in teaching English characterized the use of these two approaches which include structural or rhetorical, text-based, task-based or process-based constituting register either formal or personal (Galvez, 2016). This study investigated effective strategies to bridge the gap in transitioning from GE and ESP teaching on students from various colleges at Bulacan State University. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, the research involved quantitative data gathered from surveys of 200 students, alongside qualitative data from instructor interviews. Findings indicate that insufficient contextualization of GE content, lack of discipline-specific vocabulary integration, and minimal exposure to authentic materials hindered effective transition to ESP. Based on these insights, the study proposed pedagogical strategies including scaffolded ESP instruction, early needs analysis, and collaborative content design involving subject matter experts. The study highlighted the need for a more seamless alignment between GE and ESP curricula to better prepare students for academic and professional communication within their fields.

Index Terms – General English, English for Specific Purposes(ESP), Transition

INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become an essential component of tertiary education, responding to the growing demand for language instruction relevant to students' academic disciplines and professional fields. In many institutions, students had begun their academic journey with General English (GE) emphasizing broad-based language skills such as grammar, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. However, when students transition to ESP, they often had encountered a sharp shift in expectations, discourse styles, and vocabulary demands that GE may not have had adequately prepared them for.

At Bulacan State University, students from various colleges such as engineering, business, education, and health sciences demonstrated differing degrees of readiness for ESP courses. This divergence suggested a misalignment between GE instruction and the linguistic demands of ESP.

This study sought at examining the nature of this changeover and identified strategies to facilitate smoother transitions but not neglecting enhancement of student performance and engagement in ESP courses. By applying a mixed-method design involving 200 students across several colleges, this research explored student perceptions, instructional challenges, and effective pedagogical practices. This paper's goal was to develop contextually appropriate strategies that would help curriculum developers and language educators to create more coherent and supportive transitions from GE to ESP.

Research Questions

1. What challenges do students face when transitioning from General English to English for Specific Purposes at Bulacan State University?
2. How do students perceive the relevance and effectiveness of their General English preparation for ESP courses?
3. What teaching strategies are currently being used to bridge GE and ESP, and how effective are they perceived to be?
4. What pedagogical interventions can be proposed to facilitate a smoother transition from GE to ESP?

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the linguistic and instructional challenges students encounter when moving from GE to ESP.
2. To examine student perceptions regarding the adequacy of their GE background in preparing them for ESP learning.

3. To evaluate existing teaching strategies and practices used to connect GE and ESP instruction.
4. To propose a set of practical, evidence-based strategies for educators to implement smoother transitions between GE and ESP courses.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the following key theories. The first was the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Theory which emphasized interaction as both the means and the goal of learning a language. It underpins both GE and ESP in that students need real-life, communicative tasks that could simulate the professional contexts in which they would eventually use English. It was relevant to include this theory in support to designing both GE and ESP programs by focusing on fluency, appropriateness, and real-life use of English. The use of both Approaches could inform strategies like task-based learning, role-playing, and simulations used in ESP courses. To Hutchinson and Waters in 1987, ESP was viewed as a language teaching considered for learner needs, particularly in professional and academic contexts. It posits that language is not learned for its own sake but for performing specific tasks in specific fields. The use of this theory was relevant since the foundation of the ESP curriculum stressed the cater of such instruction to the learners' academic and professional requirements.

Another theory relevant to the study was the Schema Theory of Anderson (1984). This theory suggests that new information could be understood by relating it to pre-existing knowledge frameworks or "schemas." Students transitioning from GE to ESP could benefit from having a foundational "schema" in GE. However, students would find it difficult to bridge the gap between GE and ESP when their schema are inadequate. They would struggle in transitioning from one approach to the next specifically with comprehension. Finally, applying Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) was significant because ZPD explains the gap between what a learner could do independently and what they could do with support. This justifies the role of scaffolding in helping students move from GE to ESP. The study supported the use of instructional scaffolding strategies like field-specific vocabulary lists and collaboration with content teachers to aid in the transition.

The Conceptual Framework

The study utilized the Input Process Output (IPO) approach. For the Input, it included skills and knowledge students acquired from GE courses, such as grammar, vocabulary, and general academic reading and writing. These were assumed to provide the linguistic foundation for ESP.

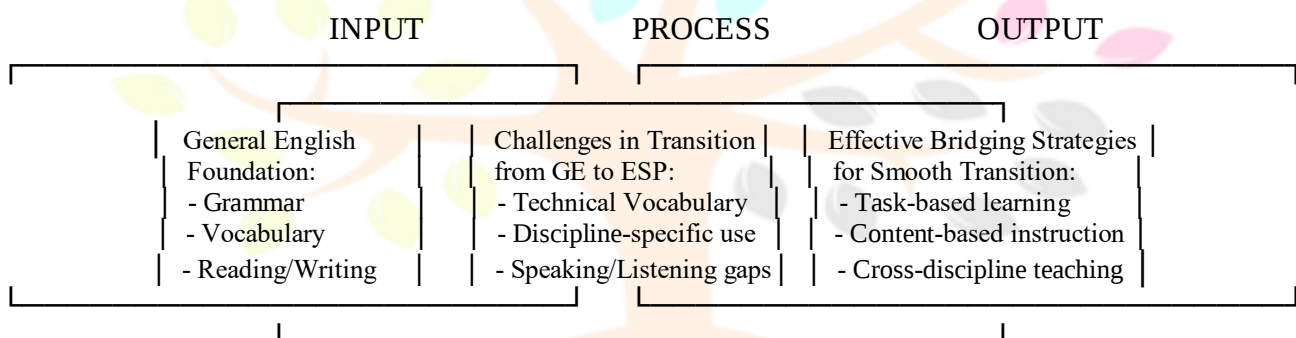


Figure: Conceptual Paradigm (Input-Process-Output Model)

For the Process, this included identifying of challenges in transitioning. Students may have had faced difficulty adapting to ESP due to unfamiliarity with technical terms, different writing conventions, or the lack of specific communicative skills needed in their field. And for the Output, this focused on effective strategies that could help students bridge the gap including: Task-based learning that could simulate real-world tasks, Content-based instruction that would integrate language and subject matter, and Collaboration between GE and content-area instructors to align language with field-specific contexts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a mixed method designed to combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively provide understanding of the transition strategies between General English (GE) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The quantitative component involved a structured survey, while the qualitative component from the key informant interviews. The approach allowed triangulation of data for more robust findings.

Participants

The study involved 200 college students from five different colleges within Bulacan State University consisting of the following:

Colleges	No. of Participants
College of Engineering (COE)	40
College of Business Administration (CBA)	40
College of Education (COED)	40
College of Nursing (CON)	40
College of Information, Communication and Technology (CICT)	40
Total	200

The study had a sample size of 200 respondents, students who experienced in both GE and ESP courses, ideally from various disciplines to reflect diverse ESP needs. Using stratified random sampling technique, to ensure representation across different majors and proficiency levels, considering the heterogeneity in English proficiency noted in similar studies. Additionally, five (5) English language experts from the Department of English (DOE) of the College of Arts and Letters (CAL) were purposively selected for qualitative interviews.

Instrument

The study utilized a survey questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale developed to assess student perceptions on: Preparedness for ESP, Relevance of GE content to their field, Teaching strategies used, and Language challenges encountered. As to the interview, the researcher designed for instructors to share strategies and observations regarding the GE-ESP transition.

Data Collection Methods

For the Quantitative Data, a structured questionnaire was developed to measure students' perceptions of the transition from GE to ESP, their English proficiency levels, and the effectiveness of different bridging strategies. For the assessment of scores, there was a need to collect data students' English proficiency scores from both GE and ESP courses to analyze improvement and gaps in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and specific ESP-related skills such as job jargon and cross-cultural communication. As for the Qualitative Data, the researcher prepared interview using semi-structured questionnaire with selected language experts from the College of Arts and Letters (CAL) specifically the Department of English (DOE) to explore deeper insights into challenges faced during the transition and the strategies they found most helpful. With the hope to get accurate data of the two approaches, questionnaire and interview guides were developed based on literature reviews on GE and ESP transition challenges and strategies. Validity and reliability were ensured from expert reviews. The study used Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions to capture quantitative and qualitative data.

Procedure

The study process with the administration of the questionnaire to all 200 respondents to collect broad quantitative data on perceptions and proficiency. This was followed with the interview with English language experts to gain qualitative insights. Then collection and analyzing students' academic records related to GE and ESP cases. Finally, analysis of the teaching strategies was done to identify alignment and gaps.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative data, they were interpreted using descriptive statistics in getting the mean, frequency and percentage and in doing the cross-tabulation using SPSS software. And for the qualitative data, they were analyzed through thematic analysis, then identifying common themes and patterns with interview transcripts. For the quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistics was applied in getting means, frequencies and percentages to summarize questionnaire responses and proficiency scores. Inferential statistics was also applied using t-tests and ANOVA to examine differences in perceptions and proficiency across groups. The next step was to analyze correlation to explore relationships between GE and ESP performances. To gather qualitative data, thematic analysis of interviews took place to identify common themes related to transition challenges and effective strategies. Finally, analysis of the strategies experts used to assess the integration of ESP elements into GE courses.

Ethical Considerations

To apply ethics in the study, the researcher obtained informed consent from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity was maintained since the respondents were not forced to participate meaning they had option whether to participate or not and that they could withdraw at any time without having a second thought.

Limitations

The researcher considered the following that limited the outcome of the study. These were: potential variability in respondents' prior exposure to ESP could affect perceptions; self-reported data could incur biases; and triangulation with academic records and qualitative data helped mitigate results and findings. However, the methodology aligned with best practices in bridging GE and ESP by combining quantitative data on proficiency and perceptions with qualitative insights into English language teachers who had experiences in analyzing the curricula as supported by recent studies on ESP integration and teaching strategies, needs analysis in ESP courses, and theoretical frameworks on ESP learner-centeredness.

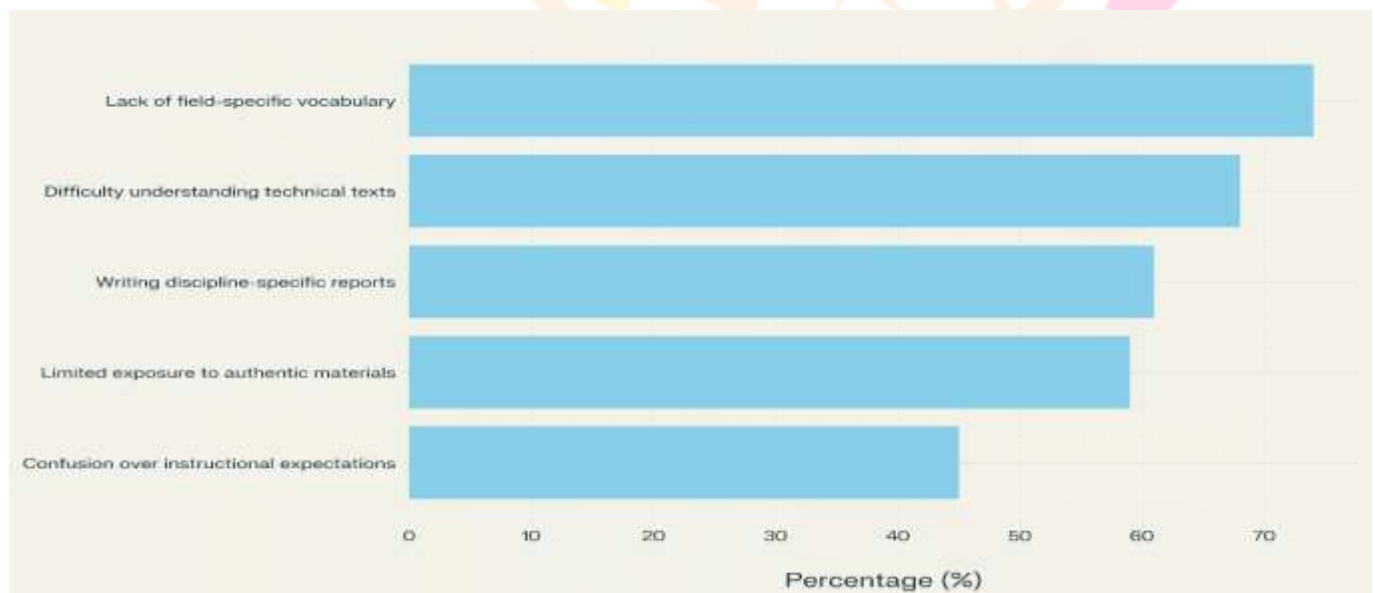
Results and Findings

Table 1. The Students' Perceptions of Preparedness for ESP Courses

Preparedness Indicator	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strong Disagree	Mean
GE improved my academic vocabulary	22%	36%	20%	15%	7%	3.5
GE helped me write discipline-specific content	12%	28%	25%	24%	11%	3.0
GE equipped me for technical reading materials	10%	30%	30%	20%	10%	3.1
GE covered content relevant to my major	8%	18%	30%	28%	16%	2.7

Table 1 shows that while students generally felt somewhat prepared, many indicated that GE lacked discipline-specific content, suggesting the need for better integration. The table emphasized that students to prepare for a shift from GE to ESP, teachers should motivate students to study English be it GE or ESP. Most of them claimed that General English was not important because it was beyond their field and thus seemed useless, ignoring the fact that English was crucial for them to support their competence in the future. Learners would even add that to change their perception, teachers need to make them aware of its importance by developing authentic materials and using the techniques or strategies to encourage them to like learning English. To add, teachers need to accommodate students' need for more specialized English teaching relevant to their field, the ESP which goal is to meet the needs of particular learners and communicative competence.

Table 2. The Major Challenges Students Faced in Transitioning from GE to ESP



The above bar graph displays the major challenges students faced when transitioning from General English (GE) to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) with the most significant challenge reported as; Lack of Specific Vocabulary with 74%; Difficulty Understanding Technical Texts which affected students of 68%, Writing Discipline Specific Reports with 61%, Limited Exposure to authentic Materials impacting 59%, and Confusion over Expectational Expectations with 45%. The researcher used a horizontal bar graph with challenges listed on the y-axis and the corresponding percentages on the x-axis. The bars were color-coded in sky blue, and the y-axis was inverted so that the most significant challenge to appear on top. This confirmed that Vocabulary and Technical Comprehension were the most cited challenges, highlighting gaps in GE instruction related to ESP preparation.

Table 3. The Effectiveness of Teaching Strategies (Based on Student Feedback)

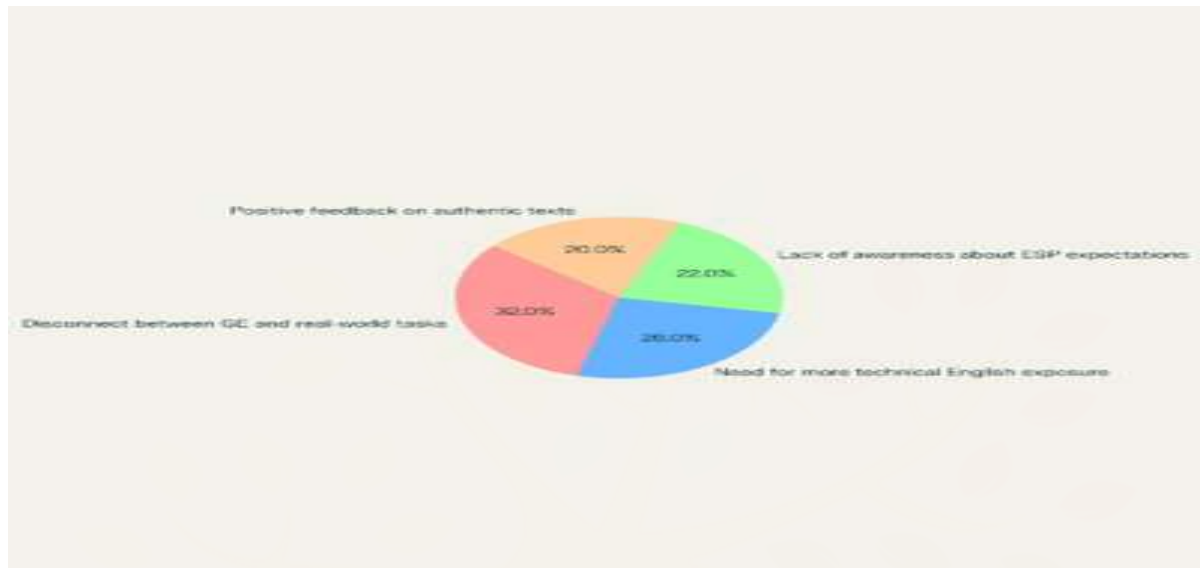
Teaching Strategy	Very Effective	Effective	Neutral	Ineffective	Mean
Use of authentic materials (e.g., manuals, emails)	30%	42%	18%	10%	3.9
Collaboration with subject teachers	25%	35%	25%	15%	3.7
Use of case-based discussions	20%	36%	24%	20%	3.5
Vocabulary lists without context	10%	20%	30%	40%	2.6

Contextual and interdisciplinary strategies were perceived as more effective, while isolated vocabulary teaching was seen as less helpful. To Bao and Ding (2024), English skills have become a necessity for the academic success. English seemed one

of compulsory subject included in the school curriculum, English was also taught in every discipline either in teacher training, vocational, science, engineering or technology. The teaching English in every discipline was supposed to be different dependent on the specific needs of the language learning. This was often referred to as English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Through ESP the students were not only taught the language but were also learning the subject matter relevant to their fields. Therefore, they acquire both the language skills and relevant knowledge in their field at the same time. English for specific purposes (ESP) is different from General English Purposes (EGP), in terms of both teaching methodologies and teaching materials. However, many English lecturers who teach English for ESP students teach general English, not suitable for the learning purposes. Those were the fact that often would occur in the ESP field and it perhaps happened because of the lack of experiences, information, and miss understanding about ESP on the teachers' part.

Table 4. Themes from the Experts' Perspective on the Transitioning from GE to ESP



The pie chart featured themes derived from the Language Experts' Perspective on their use of strategies in teaching Viewing skill to bring out empathy in students. Findings revealed failure of transitioning from GE to ESP was due to mentors', "Disconnection or Cessation between GE and ESP real-world tasks" with 32%, "Need for more Technical English Exposure" with 26%, "Lack of Awareness about ESP Expectations" with 22%, and "Positive feedback on authentic texts" with 20%. This means that students expressed a strong desire for more practical, real-world language experiences and better orientation toward ESP expectations.

Table 5 below shows most instructors recognized the importance of preparing ESP students necessary in their individual field. However, specifically In Bulacan State University, there was only one (1) GE subject in teaching English, the Purposive Communication. With the implementation of the K-12 Program, all the other subjects (e.g. Oral Communication and Technical Writing) were taught in Senior High School. What was left was only Purposive Communication (PCM) where with 56 hours in a semester was not enough to capture lessons for the macro skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing). There was insufficient time to enhance micro skills necessary for the transition. Collaborating with content-area, using ESP-oriented textbooks, conducting student needs analysis and Embedding GE skills in discipline context, were neglected if not were only part of the curriculum and orientation, not consistently done, taken only during the first few classroom meetings, and when using materials, there was no prescribed but only as references.

Table 5. Reported Negative Strategies Hindering Smooth Transition from GE to ESP

Strategy	Frequency (Five)
Introducing field-specific tasks early	5 (in the orientation only)
Collaborating with content-area faculty	4 (not consistently done)
Using ESP-oriented textbooks	4 (but as reference only)
Conducting student needs analysis	0
Embedding GE skills in discipline context	4 (as part of the curriculum)

Table 6: Effectiveness of Different Strategies for Smooth Transition (Mean Scores)

Theme Descriptions	Description	Frequency of Mention (n=30)
Need for authentic, discipline-specific materials	Students emphasized real-world texts and case studies to better understand ESP contexts.	28
Importance of teacher collaboration	Collaboration between language and subject teachers improves course relevance and delivery.	24
Technology as a facilitator	Digital tools and apps enhance engagement and access to ESP resources.	22
Metacognitive awareness	Training in self-regulation and strategy use aids in smoother transition.	18
Curriculum alignment	Better coordination between GE and ESP syllabi is necessary for continuity.	20

The above table confirmed English for Specific Purpose (ESP) as a market driven, need oriented and purpose driven course which was taught on the line of teaching General English focusing on language teaching methods (Ngo, 2023). ESP teachers in the study would often forget that ESP had some distinguishing features unlike General English. ESP seemed a separate activity within English Language Teaching (ELT) with its own approach, material and methodology by adapting and integrating with other disciplines and it encouraged learner investment and participation. Since ESP used distinctive approaches, materials and methods based on learners' specific needs, ESP practitioners should assess learners' needs, design course, develop materials, choose appropriate instruction and would implement it to satisfy the identified needs of the learners. Therefore, just knowledge of language system and ability to deliver this was not enough for an ESP teacher (Recalde-García et al., 2023).

Table 7. Reported Challenges Hindering Smooth Transition from GE to ESP

Challenge Statement	Mean Score	Interpretation
Lack of specialized vocabulary hinders transition	4.35	Strongly Agree
Insufficient integration between GE and ESP courses	4.10	Agree
Difficulty adapting to technical discourse	4.10	Agree
Limited exposure to authentic ESP materials	4.10	Agree
Difficulty adapting to technical discourse	4.22	Agree

The findings revealed the challenges hindering shift from GE to ESP to include lack of specialized vocabulary to integrate both courses and incorporate digital tools in ESP materials, highlighting the growing emphasis on creating immersive and interactive learning experiences (Zaman, 2024). Additionally, the review underscored the importance of developing materials tailored to the learners' specific needs and cultural contexts, facilitating more meaningful engagement and language acquisition.

Despite the observed benefits, challenges such as the necessity for ongoing teacher training and the absence of standardized evaluation frameworks for ESP materials were identified (Petraki and Khat, 2020). The study in 2020 recommended enhancing digital integration, prioritizing learner-centered and culturally inclusive materials, investing in teacher training, developing evaluation frameworks, fostering collaborative material development, ensuring accessibility, and conducting longitudinal impact studies. This SLR set a foundation for future research and development in ESP material design and implementation, aiming to support learners' language learning goals and professional aspirations effectively.

Table 8. Effectiveness of Different Strategies for Smooth Transition (Mean Scores)

Strategy	Mean	Rank
Incorporation of authentic materials	4.40	1
Needs analysis-based curriculum design	4.25	2
Collaborative teaching involving subject experts	4.10	3
Use of technology and digital tools	3.95	4
Metacognitive strategy training	3.80	5

To Gvelesiani (2023). globalization brought education to deal with the innovative approaches to teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) via translation, heteroglossia, translanguaging as well as code-switching. The change in teaching English brought the use of modern approaches to teaching the vocabulary, grammar and translation to adapt to different settings and acquiring of the specialized terminology via labelling, plying between terminological units as well as corpus-based analysis. Similarly, Monakhova and Yurieva (2023) examined from students in universities who learned English language with

terminology, vocabulary and grammar belonging to different fields or ESP (English for Specific Purposes). Teacher should understand their needs and work on weak point of themes and studied background and methodology of ESP.

Conclusion

The study "Bridging the Gap Between General English and ESP: Strategies for Smooth Transitions" highlights the significant divide between general English (GE) instruction and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education. It confirmed that while GE could provide essential foundational language skills, it would be insufficient on its own to meet the specialized linguistic demands of professional and academic contexts. The research underscored the necessity of a well-structured transition from GE to ESP, emphasizing that ESP courses were more effective in enhancing language skills directly relevant to students' future careers and professional communication needs. Moreover, the study revealed that students and educators recognized the motivational benefits of ESP, as it aligned closely with learners' professional interests and goals. However, a solid grounding in GE had remained crucial as a prerequisite for successful ESP learning. The findings also pointed out the importance of integrating cultural and practical language skills within the curriculum to prepare students comprehensively for real-world communication challenges.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, recommendations were drawn:

1. To develop a curriculum that progressively integrates ESP content into GE courses to ensure that students build a strong general English foundation while gradually acquiring specialized vocabulary and skills necessary for their professional fields.
2. To implement blended learning models such as SPOC (Small Private Online Course) to facilitate the integration of ESP into GE. This method would enhance student engagement, fosters autonomous learning, and allow real-time monitoring and adjustment of teaching strategies by instructors.
3. To establish comprehensive professional development initiatives to equip English language teachers with expertise required for effective ESP instruction. Training should focus on the linguistic and pedagogical demands of specific disciplines, enabling instructors to deliver targeted and contextually relevant language education.
4. To encourage cooperation between language educators, subject-matter experts, and industry professionals to create teaching materials that are both linguistically appropriate and professionally relevant, ensuring that students acquired practical language skills would align with their career needs.
5. To design ESP curricula that would balance competence across practical language abilities, reflecting the diverse communicative demands for students' global professional environments.

Implications

The findings of the study imply that English language education programs should move beyond traditional general English instruction to incorporate specialized ESP training tailored to students' academic and professional trajectories. This shift requires systemic changes in curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and resource development. By bridging the gap between GE and ESP, educational institutions can better prepare students for the linguistic complexities of their future careers, thereby enhancing their international competitiveness and professional effectiveness. Furthermore, the adoption of technology-enhanced teaching modes like SPOC can transform language learning into a more interactive and personalized experience to support continuous improvement in student outcomes. Lastly, the emphasis on teacher readiness and collaborative material development highlights the need for ongoing investment in educator training and cross-disciplinary partnerships to sustain high-quality ESP education.

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