

# THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## VOLUME-5, ISSUE-7 NEEDS OF ESP LEARNERS

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### Abstract

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has emerged as a response to the increasing global demand for professionally or academically tailored language instruction. ESP is built upon the premise that language learning is most effective when it is relevant to learners' specific goals and contexts. This paper explores the nature of ESP learners' needs, how they are identified, and their implications for curriculum design and pedagogy. Drawing on theoretical models and practical case studies, the discussion highlights the importance of conducting thorough needs analysis and continuously aligning instruction with learners' real-world communication tasks.

### Introduction

In the contemporary world, English is no longer a foreign language reserved for elite academic circles—it is a fundamental requirement in nearly every field of study and profession. As a result, the demand for English instruction that goes beyond general conversational competence has grown. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) caters to learners who need English to function effectively in their academic studies or professional careers.

Unlike General English (GE) courses, which often aim to improve all-around proficiency for a broad audience, ESP courses are designed with a sharp focus on specific contexts. This specificity requires teachers and curriculum developers to understand the unique goals, challenges, and preferences of each group of learners. At the heart of ESP is the idea that a "one-size-fits-all" approach does not work; rather, instruction must be adapted to the learners' real communicative needs. For this reason, understanding and addressing the needs of ESP learners is a foundational aspect of successful language education.

#### Understanding the Concept of Needs in ESP

In ESP, the term "needs" is multi-dimensional. It encompasses what learners are required to do with English in their target environments (e.g., in university, at work), what they already know, and how they prefer to learn. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) famously distinguished between three categories of needs: Necessities refer to the linguistic skills and knowledge learners must have to succeed in their specific domain. For example, a nurse may need to understand medical terminology and communicate with patients in English. Lacks are the gaps between what learners already know and what they need to know. Identifying these gaps is critical for avoiding redundancy and targeting instruction efficiently. Wants represent the learners' personal goals and perceptions of what is useful or interesting. While these may not always align with institutional expectations, acknowledging learners' wants boosts motivation and engagement. Furthermore, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) emphasized the importance of distinguishing between target situation analysis (TSA)—analyzing what learners will need to do in real-life contexts—and present situation analysis (PSA)—

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understanding learners' current language level and experiences. Only by considering both can educators plan instruction that bridges the gap effectively.

#### Academic Needs vs. Occupational Needs

ESP learners generally fall into two broad categories based on their purpose: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Understanding the distinction between these groups is key to understanding their varying needs. EAP learners are usually students preparing for or currently enrolled in academic programs where English is the medium of instruction. Their needs revolve around reading academic texts, writing essays or reports, understanding lectures, taking part in academic discussions, and often, preparing for standardized exams like IELTS or TOEFL. EAP courses are often characterized by their emphasis on academic discourse, critical thinking, and genre-specific writing (e.g., research articles, literature reviews). In contrast, EOP learners are professionals or vocational students who require English for their job-related tasks. These tasks can vary widely—from writing emails and attending meetings in business contexts, to reading manuals and giving instructions in technical fields. A factory technician may need English to understand safety instructions, while a hotel receptionist must master polite conversation with foreign guests. Importantly, learners' time availability, learning urgency, and preferred modes of study often differ between these groups. Academic learners may have more time for formal study, while occupational learners often seek fast, practical results due to job demands. These contextual factors influence not only the course content but also the method of delivery (e.g., intensive short courses, blended learning, evening classes).

#### Identifying Learners' Needs: Tools and Approaches

Accurate and meaningful needs analysis is the cornerstone of any effective ESP program. Without understanding the learners' actual requirements, course designers risk creating irrelevant or unmotivating syllabi. Several methods are used to identify these needs, often in combination for triangulation and depth.

Questionnaires and Surveys are commonly used to collect broad information about learners' backgrounds, goals, language proficiency, and learning preferences. These are useful in larger classes or institutions and can be adapted for specific sectors (e.g., healthcare, aviation). Interviews and Focus Groups allow deeper exploration of learners' personal experiences and challenges with English. Involving not only students but also their employers, supervisors, or subject teachers can reveal insights into what is required in the field. Observation of real-life tasks in the learners' workplace or academic environment is another effective approach. For instance, watching how nurses interact with patients in English, or how engineers interpret manuals, can help tailor teaching materials. Target Situation Analysis (TSA) is used to understand the specific language tasks the learner will need to perform in the future, such as answering customer emails, delivering presentations, or writing lab reports. Present Situation Analysis (PSA) helps determine the learner's current proficiency and experience, and compare it with the target. Diagnostic testing is often used at this stage. These tools help in constructing a "needs profile" for each group of learners, which forms the basis for curriculum planning, material selection, and assessment design.

#### Implications for Course Design and Teaching Practice

Once learner needs have been accurately identified, course designers can create learning experiences that are directly relevant, purposeful, and motivating. This has several implications: 1. Authentic

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Materials: Materials must reflect the learners' field. For example, aviation English learners benefit from listening to air traffic control dialogues; hospitality learners should practice handling booking inquiries and complaints.

2. Skills Integration: Courses should integrate the skills learners use together in real life. For instance, in a medical ESP course, reading patient records, listening to symptoms, and writing prescriptions might be taught together.

3. Relevant Grammar and Vocabulary: Rather than teaching grammar in isolation, it should be embedded in meaningful contexts. A legal English course might focus on modal verbs for obligation (must, shall) and conditional clauses used in contracts.

4. Task-based Learning: ESP teaching often emphasizes performance of realistic tasks. Role-plays, simulations, case studies, and projects increase learner engagement and reflect real communication.

5. Assessment Alignment: Tests should evaluate not just language proficiency, but the ability to perform specific tasks. A business English course may assess writing a formal email rather than completing multiple-choice grammar tests.

6. Learner Autonomy: As many ESP learners are adults with experience and goals, promoting autonomy through project work, online learning tools, and self-assessment strategies enhances their involvement and progress. For example, in a vocational college in Uzbekistan, students training for jobs in construction may benefit from a course that includes interpreting blueprint instructions, understanding safety signs in English, and communicating with foreign site managers. Such focused training improves job readiness and boosts confidence.

#### Conclusion

The effectiveness of an ESP course is determined not by how much content it covers, but by how closely it aligns with the learners' real-world communication needs. A thorough and dynamic needs analysis process ensures that instruction is relevant, learner-centered, and practical. Moreover, responding to learners' specific academic or occupational needs boosts their motivation, retention, and success in applying English in their target environments. As learners' goals, professions, and technologies evolve, so too must the ESP curriculum. Continuous feedback, observation, and adaptation are essential to maintain the relevance and impact of ESP instruction. Teachers must play the dual role of facilitator and researcher, consistently reflecting on what their learners need—and how best to meet those needs.

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