

# ESP Teachers: Insights, Challenges and Needs in the EFL Context

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**Abstract**—This research investigated ESP teachers' perceptions of the underlying concepts, challenges, and needs of ESP teaching in Thailand. A six-Likert questionnaire and checklist were given to 63 ESP teachers at a Thai government university. An interview was also used to further explore 12 teacher participants' issues, challenges, and needs in ESP practices. The results indicated that Thai university teachers had a piecemeal understanding of ESP concepts, and they also agreed that ESP practice is a complex and challenging task. Moreover, the current findings indicate that language teachers must work in tandem with the content teachers. Indeed, the results strongly suggest that teachers require professional training in ESP teaching. Overall, ESP teachers must embody the five essential elements of ESP, including a language teacher, a content teacher, a researcher, a course planner and material provider, and a course evaluator.

**Index Terms**—ESP, ESP teachers, ESP elements, task, ESP in the EFL context

## I. INTRODUCTION

Recent progress in science and technology in the digital era has highlighted that traditional language teaching models with a teacher-centred approach might not be sufficient to prepare English language learners to meet current language demands. Indeed, the demand for English communication is growing in many occupational contexts, including business, engineering, medicine, hospitality, and education (Hyland, 2007). As such, extensive attention has been focused on English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP involves teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language where the learners' primary purpose is to use English in a particular domain (e.g., Ahmed, 2014; Otilia, 2015). Therefore, ESP can be described as an approach to language teaching where all decisions about content and methods are based on the learners' reasons for learning (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The awareness of teachers' perceptions of ESP principles and practices may shed some light on the roles of ESP in contexts and didactic implications among researchers and pedagogues.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Overview of English for Specific Purpose (ESP)

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emerged in the 1960s as a rudimentary principle in the disciplines of Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching (ELT). It is concerned with teaching and learning the English language to serve communicative needs in either academic or occupational domains. The contents developed for ESP courses, including English language knowledge and subject content in a specific field of studies, need to be aligned with learners' authentic needs in using a language in their academic studies and career (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). The core focus of ESP courses provided at a tertiary level of education is on English language skills, including linguistic structures and genres that learners are likely to encounter in their future employment. ESP education is thus developed to equip learners to effectively use the English language for their specific employment-related communicative purposes (Basturkmen, 2010; Bruce, 2011). ESP has been divided into two main branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Basturkmen, 2010). EAP is associated with the use of the English language to serve academic purposes in learners' fields of study (Hyland & Shaw, 2016). That is, EAP principles lie in the use of English "for the purposes of academic study and scholarly exchange" (p. 1). By contrast, EOP relates to the use of the English language to effectively serve professional purposes, including the development of interpersonal skills that allow learners to communicate with colleagues in daily life (Cummins, 2008).

Given the focus on serving specific learners' needs, a needs analysis needs to be conducted prior to developing an ESP course. ESP course design typically includes a stage during which the course developers identify the specific language skills the learners will need. Identifying these language skills is used to shape and refine the content for the

ESP course (Warters, 1987; Hyland, 2006). Needs analysis can also be used to assess learners at the end of the course (Warters, 1987). Indeed, needs analysis is an umbrella term that holds many aspects; that is, the term *needs* incorporates the learners' goals and backgrounds, language proficiencies, reasons for taking the course, teaching and learning preferences, and the situations in which learners will need to communicate. Overall, a needs analysis is a well-organised and ongoing process that requires teachers to adjust their teaching as they come to learn more about their students.

### B. Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is the first stage in ESP course development, followed by curriculum design, selection of materials, methodology, assessment, and evaluation. Importantly, these steps are not linear but, rather, the phases of ESP course development are interdependent, overlapping phases in a cyclical process (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Figure 1 shows the ongoing processes involved in needs analysis and the feedback that occurs throughout the various stages (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 121). At present, the application of needs analysis in ESP curriculum development is common. Indeed, the development stages of ESP courses usually involve a need analysis related to course design, selection of materials, pedagogical approaches, assessment, and evaluation. When determining the overall needs for a course, practitioners can decide on the learning objectives, selection or production of materials, teaching guidelines and evaluations (Jin et al., 2014). Many ESP practitioners agree that needs analysis is fundamental to any language course (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Kavaliauskienė & Užpalienė, 2003).

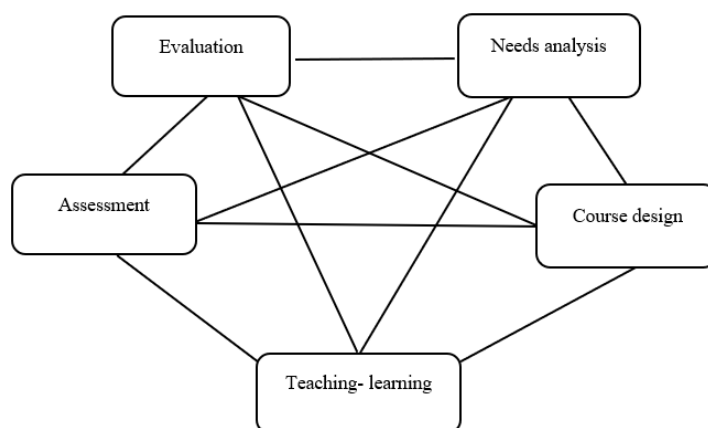


Figure 1 Stages in the ESP Process (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p. 121)

Several studies have been conducted on ESP. Indeed, Liu and Hu (2021) recently conducted a co-citation analysis of ESP studies from 1980 to 2018 and categorised the studies into eleven clusters. All clusters involved “ESP issues and directions, academic genres and scholarly publishing, learning to write academically, academic vocabulary and formulaic language, English as an academic lingua franca, disciplinary academic discourse, needs analysis, L1-L2 differences and English as an L2, voice and stance in academic discourse, metadiscourse in English academic writing, and citation and illegitimate source use” (Liu & Hu, 2021, p. 102). The authors also recommended areas that require more empirical literature vis-à-vis ESP education. Those so-called “less well trodden and new ESP territories” (p. 113) include (1) local grammar (e.g., Parkinson & Musgrave, 2014), (2) intradisciplinary variation (e.g., Hu & Gao, 2015), (3) multimodal discourse, academic speech and under-researched genres (e.g., Hu & Liu, 2018; O’Halloran et al., 2016; Zou & Hyland, 2020), (4) ESP teacher development (e.g., Margic & Vodopija-Krstanovic, 2018), (5) improvement on research methodologies (e.g., Simpson-Vlach & Ellis, 2010), (6) contextualised research methodologies (e.g., Paltridge et al., 2016), (7) reception studies of ESP research (e.g., Swale & Leeder, 2012). As such, the current study aimed to provide an in-depth investigation into EFL teachers’ understanding of ESP teaching.

### C. ESP Teaching Situations

To date, ESP has grown widely popular in Southeast Asia due to the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) setting. Moreover, with the increase in skilled labour mobility from different countries, investors, business people and tourists in the region, ESP becomes necessary for their people to be equipped with real-life language skills to compete in regional and global markets. Consequently, many governments have reformed English teaching and established educational standards proposing that higher educational institutes are required to teach general English and EAP or EOP. It is believed that this proposal would improve their citizens’ English proficiency. Thailand has no exclusion.

In the Thai context, ESP courses at a tertiary level remain unsatisfactory and do not provide significant English language learning benefits. This is due to multiple reasons. First, language teachers still focus on traditional, teacher-centred approaches (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Kulsiri, 2006; Nonthisong, 2015; Thongsri, 2005). A grammar-translation method relying on in-class instruction of English is also often used. The grammar-translation method aims to enhance learners’ ability to remember linguistic traits and provide a target language system. By contrast, ESP instruction methods, such as the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, have not been widely adopted by ESP

teachers. ESP courses run by educational institutes provide short English courses or training courses for workplace contexts (e.g., nursing, business, engineering, or medicine). These short training courses are often aligned with the core concepts of ESP to capture the needs of learners in different disciplines. Several empirical studies have evaluated the needs of learners for their future professional careers (Chamnankit, 2015; Chankasikub, 2014; Chatsungnoen, 2015; Chetsadanuwat, 2018; Chumtong, 2014; Sompuing, 2014; Hiranburana, 2017; Jamshidnejad, 2010; Theeartsana, 2018; Tongvivat, 2008; Waidarp, 2011; Wong, 2004) and designed appropriate courses and materials for these occupations (Chetsadanuwat, 2018, Nor Puteh & Nor Mohammad, 2017; Onkao, 2019; Pandey & Sinhaneti, 2013). However, despite many empirical studies supporting ESP short courses, effective ESP instruction seems to be an ongoing issue. Indeed, English language teaching remains unsuitable for students' needs and disconnected from their specific disciplines. For example, Anuyato (2015) surveyed diploma students' perceptions in one vocational college in Bangkok. Overall, the students' perceptions were favourable to the extent that ESP provides some benefits for future occupations after graduation and develops English language competence and creativity in language use. However, some students found ESP instruction difficult and demanding and, thus, felt demotivated.

ESP teachers often assume that they must teach subject areas by using English rather than teaching the English language. Patiyasevee and Kijjabancha (2010) evaluated the use of English for General Purposes (EGP) method and ESP in first-year undergraduate students at a public university in Thailand. Overall, the findings suggest that the students lacked communication skills in English, and a majority of students reported that the EGP curriculum needed to be revised. Moreover, an emphasis was also needed on using a language to communicate, which should be an essential foundation in ESP courses.

Previously, transfer-and test-oriented assessments of factual knowledge were emphasised (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Kulsiri, 2006; Nonthisong, 2015; Thongsri, 2005) rather than an assessment of critical thinking and analytical skills. Using traditional teaching methods, Thai English teachers conduct their instruction to prepare students to pass required tests or high-stakes examinations (e.g., Ordinal National Examination Test and General Aptitude Test). This results in the inability to answer questions critically and apply the linguistic features and systems of the target language in various social situations, which is heightened by limited exposure to the target language. Within a Thai EFL context, the opportunities to use English outside the classroom are somewhat limited (Frederickson, 2002; Sanpatchayapong, 2017). English learners typically remember linguistic rules in class but have few opportunities to use them for communicative purposes outside of class. This results in a lack of oral practice for Thai learners in authentic settings. Therefore, the failure of ESP in Thai contexts may have resulted from insufficient exposure to the target language.

In addition, ESP teachers may find they have far less knowledge or experience in the subject areas than their students (Ruang & Chuenchaichon, 2016). Ruankam and Chuenchaichon (2016) conducted a survey of ESP and general English perceptions of ESP instructors and students at a university in Thailand. The findings showed that both ESP teachers and students had positive attitudes towards ESP instruction. The students agreed that ESP instruction could enhance their preparedness for work-related competitiveness among ASEAN countries. The study further noted that ESP instructors found the lack of opportunities to use English in daily life and the workplace problematic. Moreover, students require the ESP instructors to equip themselves with ESP content. As such, the instructors should focus on practising language skills integrated with the ESP content addressed in the curriculum.

With the growing demand for ESP in professional workplaces, many educational institutes in Thailand are offering ESP courses to meet the learners' future occupational needs and market trends. Universities and colleges also believe that learners will be motivated by, and benefit from, a programme that is geared to their needs and directly relevant to their fields of study. Such a programme would, therefore, result in better learning. However, given the issues outlined above, before implementing ESP instruction, some preparation is required. Specifically, a needs analysis should be conducted to identify learners' needs and expectations. In addition, many factors, including teachers' qualifications, teaching materials, course designs, teaching hours, class sizes, and teaching methodology, should be considered. Moreover, teachers' insights into ESP require closer examination as they are directly involved in the course and can determine the course outcome. As such, the teacher's understanding of ESP can provide valuable information for curriculum planners, course designs and evaluators, and other stakeholders. The current study attempted to explore Thai university teachers' ESP principles and their pedagogical challenges and needs in the context of a government university in the northeast of Thailand. Specifically, this study investigates how prepared ESP teachers are for meeting the specific challenges of this teaching method. Two research questions were formulated to guide the study: To what extent do Thai university teachers understand the principles of ESP teaching? What challenges and needs are related to ESP teaching among Thai university teachers?

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### A. Participants

A total of 63 (25 males and 38 females) university teachers who teach ESP courses at a government university in the northeast of Thailand agreed to participate in the current study. The convenient sampling technique was employed. Eighteen participants were English language teachers, while 45 participants were content teachers. All participants were Thai nationals with an average of four years of overseas experience. Only eight of the participants had never lived overseas. Most participants had advanced or effective operational proficiency with the CEFR (C1). Half of the teacher

participants had received ESP training, while the remaining half had not. Thirty-three out of 63 participants were holders of master's degrees, and the rest had doctorate degrees. The surveyed teachers included five associate professors, 15 assistant professors, and 43 lecturers aged between 25 and 49. Regarding teaching experience in their subject domain, including ESP courses, approximately one-third of participants had more than ten years of teaching experience, and around 36% had five or fewer years of teaching practice. However, all content teachers had less than five years of ESP teaching experience since the ESP Programme at the university had run for only five years. The remaining teachers had between six to ten years of teaching experience. Table 1 presents additional demographic information for the participants.

TABLE 1  
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Categories		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	25	39.7%
	Female	38	60.3%
Age	25-30	7	11.1%
	31-35	17	27.0%
	36-40	19	28.6%
	41-45	19	30.2%
	Above	2	3.2%
Teaching experience	1-5 years	23	36.4%
	6-10 years	19	30.2%
	11-15 years	19	30.2%
	More than 15 years	2	3.2%
Overseas experience	Never	8	12.7%
	1-5	37	58.8%
	6-10	16	25.4%
Education	More than ten years	2	3.2%
	Master's degree	33	52.4%
	Doctoral degree	30	47.6%
Proficiency Test	B1	4	6.3%
	B2	16	25.4%
	C1	39	61.9%
	C2	4	6.3%
ESP Training	Yes	31	49.2%
	No	32	50.8%
Total (N)		63	100%

### B. Research Instruments

The current study employed two main research instruments – a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. A questionnaire and checklist entitled “English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Questionnaire” was developed to address the research questions. The questionnaire and checklist were written in English, as all participants were proficient in English. The development of the questionnaire was based on Tsao (2011) and Dudley-Evans and St. John (2013), who investigated the perceptions of all stakeholders involved in ESP instruction. The questionnaire consisted of two sections – 12 general information questions and 17 six-point Likert scale ESP-related questions. The survey had been piloted with ten university English teachers in the Department of English and Linguistics at a university in the northeast of Thailand before it was finalised into its current form. None of the participants in the pilot study was involved in the main study. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to examine the accuracy of the scales used, and the statistical analysis (via SPSS) revealed that the alpha coefficient of the piloted survey was 0.78. Another research instrument, a semi-structured interview, was used as it allows participants to “answer the question in any way they want and encourages them to do so in a relatively extended manner” (Borg, 2015, p. 496). Moreover, semi-structured interviews have been predominantly employed in educational research and are regarded as an effective instrument for scrutinising the in-depth phenomenon being studied (Miles et al., 2014).

### C. Procedures

The six-point Likert questionnaire and survey checklists were administered to all participants in person or via email during the semester. A total of 69 were distributed, and 63 were returned. All teachers agreed to participate in the study prior to data collection. After completing the questionnaire, the participants were invited to attend the interview, which was conducted in English. The interview for qualitative data collection was semi-structured to assess the teachers' understanding of the principles, challenges, and needs of ESP.

### D. Data Analysis

For the quantitative data analysis, IBM SPSS Statistics 23 was used to analyse the piloted survey's results to examine the validity of the scales. SPSS was also used to perform descriptive statistics, including frequency, mean, and standard deviation. To analyse the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis and syntactic coding patterns were adopted. Specifically, according to Creswell's (2014) suggestions, qualitative data analysis was conducted. The interviews were first transcribed into English by the Centre for Translation at the university. Then, the

transcribed data were reread to generate codes based on their values and importance. The coded data were then grouped into different themes. The participants' statements were added to accompany and illustrate the emerging themes. A member-checking technique was administered by returning the transcripts to all research participants to check their accuracy before data analysis (Creswell, 2014). An inter-rater analysis was also performed by comparing the interpretations of the three researchers (Rose et al., 2020). That is, three rounds of data analysis were completed due to the number of interviews, and data triangulation was conducted at the end to assess all emerging themes. For ethical considerations, participants were also given pseudonyms before the data analysis.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### A. Thai University Teachers' Insights of ESP

The data obtained from six-point Likert questionnaires were analysed to reveal Thai university teachers' knowledge of ESP practice. The scoring for all adverse questions was reversed before the analysis of the data. Table 2 shows the teachers' agreement ratings towards ESP practice, indicating a moderate understanding of ESP teaching. Thai university teachers' overall awareness of ESP teaching scored an average of 3.74 (62.33%). That is, Thai university participants have partial knowledge of ESP practice. More specifically, the top five statements of ESP are items 14, 2, 12, 4, and 15, respectively, suggesting these concepts of ESP are coherent and comprehensible among Thai university teachers. In contrast, the degree of agreement on items 16, 13, 17, 5, and 7 appears to be low, indicating these ESP conceptual principles remain problematic among Thai university participants. These findings provide empirical evidence to support previous studies that ESP teaching is a complex and challenging task (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Fitzpatrick, 2011; Javid, 2015; Jones, 1990; Nonthisong, 2015; Patiyasevee & Kijjabancha, 2010; Ruangkam & Chuenchaichon, 2016).

TABLE 2  
TEACHERS' SELF-RATING AGREEMENT OF ESP TEACHING

Item	Statement	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
1	ESP is to teach English skills beneficial for students from all academic disciplines.	4.05	1.51
2	ESP is different from EAP (English for Academic Purposes).	4.86	1.24
3	ESP instruction is considered a learner-centred approach.	4.33	1.27
4	ESP and General English instructions are not similar.	4.48	1.38
5	Listening, speaking, reading, and writing needs to be taught in an ESP course.	3.51	1.37
6	ESP instructions involve the combination of English language teaching and content-specific knowledge.	3.79	1.22
7	It is necessary to collaborate between a language teacher and a content-specific teacher.	3.65	1.38
8	ESP teachers need to analyse future situations in which students might encounter and use the target language in an ESP course.	3.81	1.28
9	Before actual instruction, a needs analysis should be conducted to assess learners' needs in terms of language in a particular field of study.	3.81	1.23
10	ESP tends to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation.	4.11	0.86
11	The learning and teaching objectives, materials, and approaches used in ESP instructions need to be different from EGP (English for General Purposes) courses.	4.24	1.13
12	The primary focus of ESP instruction is to strive for effective communication in one discipline.	4.51	0.69
13	English grammar needs to be taught in ESP classes.	3.17	1.13
14	Vocabulary in an ESP course or teaching material is derived from a specific field of study	5.02	1.04
15	Text structures and language are of focus in an ESP course.	4.40	1.20
16	Assessments in an ESP course often respond to students' needs and course objectives.	2.77	1.36
17	Conversational activities are planned and designed in response to the course syllabus.	3.48	1.22
	Average	3.74	0.48

The analysis suggests that ESP is a multifaceted and challenging task for Thai university teachers. This can be accounted for by the ESP principle *per se*. That is, ESP pedagogy combines language teaching with vocational skills. It has been argued that ESP teachers are language teachers teaching English for specific careers but not specialists or experts in the subject areas related to those careers (e.g., business, medicine, hospitality, and engineering). In this regard, ESP teachers carry additional workloads in the content area of the learners. ESP teachers may, therefore, feel that they are not in the position of being the primary knowledge resource of the carrier content. Indeed, it may be the case that learners know more about the subject content than the teachers. ESP teachers are also faced with the formidable and challenging task of designing specific courses and providing relevant materials. Teachers must survey what resources are readily available, select some units from a number of course books, adapt materials if necessary, and write their own teaching materials to suit the students' learning objectives. These tasks can be challenging because ESP teachers find themselves in situations where they are assumed to produce a course that exactly matches the needs of a specific cluster of learners. However, ESP teachers have limited time to prepare and create targeted course materials. Overall, the current results provide evidence to support previous findings showing that ESP teaching is demanding and challenging (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Javid, 2015; Jones, 1990).

Selecting the appropriate methodology and evaluation materials is another essential element that makes ESP teaching more arduous and challenging. The current findings showed that ESP teachers placed more emphasis on teaching grammar and vocabulary than preparing students for chosen communicative environments. Many ESP teachers focus more on forms or accuracy than meaning or fluency in communication or speaking activities. These results remind

practitioners, including teachers and educators, that ESP places emphasis on language use in authentic contexts than on teaching grammar and language structures. It has been argued that ESP teaching requires diverse teaching methods and tasks to address the various yet particular needs of specific learners. As such, ESP teachers' teaching techniques should match their students' learning styles since the learners' characteristics and the learning contexts will affect their teaching performance (Hutchison, 1988; Rao, 2001; Javid, 2010, 2015). This study illustrates that ESP requires efficiently planned activities and tasks and the selection of matching pedagogical methodologies. Indeed, the current findings strongly suggest a demand for thorough, all-inclusive training for the ESP teachers' professionalisms and teaching careers, at least for Thai university settings.

#### *B. Challenges of ESP Practice Identified by Thai University Teachers*

Table 3 reveals Thai university teachers' concerns about the issues or challenges of ESP practice. These challenges include teaching materials, course design, course evaluation, needs analysis, subject content, and even English. Indeed, a large number of ESP teachers are concerned about teaching materials and course design, followed by course evaluation (see Table 3).

As illustrated in Table 3, among the various factors that pose a challenge to ESP practice in the Thai tertiary context, the teachers underscored ESP pedagogy itself, placing teaching materials (74.6%) and course design (74.6%) as the top concern, followed by course evaluation (54%), needs analysis (47.6%), subject content (46%) and the English language (14.3%). These findings may provide several stakeholders with valuable information about ESP practice and assist practitioners in designing ESP courses.

TABLE 3  
CHALLENGES IN ESP PERCEIVED BY THAI UNIVERSITY TEACHERS (*N* = 63)

Teachers' challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
English language	9	14.30%
Subject content	29	46.00%
Needs analysis	30	47.60%
Course evaluation	34	54.00%
Teaching materials	47	74.60%
Course design	47	74.60%

The analysis of the current findings indicates that Thai ESP teachers are facing several practical challenges. Many of these challenges are directly associated with the characteristic attributes of ESP. For instance, ESP teachers are often instructors teaching English and, as such, they are not in the position of being the primary knowledge source of the material. Indeed, the students may know more about the content than the teachers, especially when the course is primarily oriented toward the subject studied by the students. In this case, the teachers may draw on the learners' subject knowledge to facilitate communication in a language classroom. In some situations, ESP teachers need to have substantial flexibility; that is, teachers must be willing to become learners who take an interest in the professional activities in which the learners are engaged. The following excerpts provide support for this finding.

"I have to bear the extra burdens or workloads of the subject content of the students because I'm not familiar with the vocabulary used in the area." (Kan)

"I have learned some new words of business conducts from my business English class." (Meow)

As shown in the excerpts below, the analysis also revealed that some content teachers are still struggling with the English language. These teachers may not be able to facilitate communication in their language classes.

"I am not confident to teach. This is mainly because I am not an English teacher. In terms of English teaching, I don't really know what to teach. So, I end up teaching vocabulary and grammar to my students in ESP class." (Jenny)

"I think I know the subject content quite well. It's my major, and I've got a degree in it. However, I barely use English in class. Even worse, I am not quite sure about the methodology of teaching English because I have never learned how to teach English. Say, I considered myself a subject teacher teaching English to Engineering students." (Pee)

In addition:

"I don't really focus on speaking activities or tasks because I am not a real English teacher. So, it's better to have a language teacher co-teach my ESP class." (Joe)

Consistent with previous studies (Basturkmen, 2006; Todd, 2003), the analysis of the current study suggests that team teaching or cooperation between language teachers and content teachers may be necessary for ESP classes. This is partly due to the characteristic features of the ESP methodology. That is, tasks and activities used in ESP reflect the learners' specialist domains (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). In this regard, these language teachers need to work in collaboration with the content teachers to integrate specialist activities and English language learning. These findings indicate that a complete collaboration is required for successful ESP teaching in which a language teacher and a subject expert co-teach ESP classes.

The most daunting concern regarding ESP practice among Thai university teachers lies in designing and teaching course materials. The current findings suggest that it is difficult, even impossible, to find textbooks that suit the learners' target needs. Therefore, ESP teachers are expected to plan and design their own courses and provide their

students with goal-oriented materials. ESP teachers may also have to adapt available materials, given that commercial textbooks may be unsuitable. One university teacher participant remarked:

“We are using a commercial book for business students. However, I don’t think the book suits the students’ level of language competence. Indeed, some parts are rather difficult and irrelevant to the course objectives, but some do.” (Yu)

Another interviewee stated:

“We chose the published book for the disciplinary field of science, technology, and engineering. Later, we found out that some chapters of the book are suitable and good for our engineering students, but some chapters are not really relevant to engineering disciplines. This seems to bore our students.” (Pee)

One teacher from the faculty of Humanities and Social Science said:

“We developed our teaching materials for social science students. However, the materials lacked authenticity and did not include all language skills. Basically, the materials included linguistic features, vocabulary, and reading passages. They did not include speaking tasks or activities, though.” (Nan)

With regard to these extracts, given the lack of suitable materials for ESP courses, teachers often have to provide the course materials, which increases their teaching burden. Previous studies have also indicated that much of the work done by ESP teachers rests in designing appropriate courses for various cohorts of learners (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Tsao, 2011). The current study reveals that ESP course designing and planning are fundamental mechanisms for syllabus design, material writing, classroom teaching methodology, and evaluation.

Another ongoing concern is the course evaluation. The current study showed a majority of participants found assessment challenging in an ESP course. This is mainly because ESP teachers must consider various principles of assessment, including test reliability, validity, and washback. ESP teachers must consider the purpose of the test, examinee characteristics, and context of language use. Assessment tests are instruments frequently used to gauge whether students have the necessary language and skills to undertake a particular academic course or occupation. ESP teachers also need to assess their students’ achievement (i.e., what students have gained from the course). For example, it is generally known that university students in engineering use language differently from students in business, engineers use language differently from chefs, and football players use language differently on the pitch than boxing fighters in the ring. In addition, doctors use English differently when talking with medical practitioners than when conversing with patients, although these two contextual environments would be categorised under the heading of medical English. Therefore, various principles of assessment are needed in an ESP context (Douglas, 2013). The below excerpts from the qualitative data provide clear evidence for this contextual variation:

“We, ESP teachers, made tests for university students in the cluster of Health Science. I think the in-house tests lacked test validity because the test comprised only a multiple-choice format. Moreover, the test only measured students’ reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary.” (Yu)

“I don’t really know how to design speaking tasks for my ESP class even though I know subject content very well. Apart from that, I have no idea how to assess my students’ speaking abilities because I am not an English teacher myself. Moreover, I have never been trained on how to write a test.” (Nhong)

The final issue identified in the qualitative data was a needs analysis. Although needs analyses were regarded as a fundamental component in designing an ESP course for specific learners and the demands of specific situations, the current study indicated that conducting a needs analysis was a time-consuming and tedious process. This is because the needs analysis incorporated different tasks, which included collecting information about the learners and defining the target situations and contexts of learning ESP. This is in line with previous studies suggesting that needs analysis consists of multiple tasks, including “necessities”, “lacks and “wants” (Duddley-Evans & St. John, 2011). “Necessities” is defined as understanding the knowledge required by learners to be able to communicate effectively in a target situation. “Lacks” refers to the gap between learners’ existing knowledge and the language competence required to meet the students’ specific needs. “Wants” involves the learners’ subjective perspectives, which may vary from one student to another in the same target situation. These tasks pose an extra burden to ESP teachers in Thailand. This issue was highlighted in the following excerpts:

“In needs analysis, I have to do a lot of things. These include my students’ language proficiency levels, background, and motivation. Moreover, ESP is a learning-centred approach; therefore, I have to learn more about the facilities, the teaching methodology, etc. I also spend lots of time preparing course syllabus and materials for my students’ needs.” (Kung)

“I realised that my students want English for their future workplace. As a result, I have to prepare speaking activities and tasks that suit their interests and needs. In practice, I don’t have time to prepare for speaking activities.” (Som)

“In my ESP class, my students’ English language proficiency levels are widely different. Some students’ language levels may be at C1, according to CEFR. But many of them are at A2, and some are at B1, I think. This made it more difficult for me to prepare my lessons for my class.” (Yu)

The current results highlight the challenges of ESP practice among university teachers. Each of the ESP tasks poses a different challenge to ESP teachers. Moreover, the findings suggest ESP teachers’ growing need for targeted professional development in ESP-related tasks.

### *C. University Teachers’ Needs for ESP*

The quantitative and qualitative data analysis revealed that Thai university teachers require extensive training for ESP practice. Table 4 illustrates the participants' perceptions of the training needed for teaching using the ESP method. The results indicated that a large number of teachers believed that training was required in various fields, including teaching materials (60.3%), course design (58.7%), needs analysis (58.7%), teaching methodology (57.1%), course evaluation (47.6%) and subject content (42.9%). Training for the English language (20.6%) was reported to be the least required, suggesting that most university teachers do not seem to have difficulty with the English language. These findings are consistent with previous studies that ESP teachers are English teachers but not specialists in the discipline (Ahmed, 2014; Bojovic, 2006).

TABLE 4  
ESP TRAINING REQUIREMENTS AS PERCEIVED BY THAI UNIVERSITY TEACHERS (N = 63)

ESP Training required	Frequency	Percentage (%)
English language	13	20.60%
Subject content	27	42.90%
Course evaluation	30	47.60%
Teaching methodology	36	57.10%
Course design	37	58.70%
Needs analysis	37	58.70%
Teaching materials	38	60.30%

ESP teachers clearly need to be provided with the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with their students' knowledge in a specific domain. Note that ESP teachers are not experts in the field but in teaching English. That is, their subject is English for the occupation, but not the occupation in English. ESP teachers are faced with students who know the subject content better than them, yet they must help advance the students' skills in understanding, using, and/or bestowing authentic information in their career. The inherent attributes of ESP may also explain why specific training in this practice is required. To illustrate, ESP is a learner-centred approach where all teaching practices are administered according to the specific needs of specific learners. As such, the process of ESP incorporates a variety of components, which include conducting a needs analysis, course planning and material design, course implementation, and related evaluation procedures. ESP courses, which are academic and occupational, are specially designed for learners who wish to use English in their future careers after graduation. Therefore, through substantive training, ESP teachers are equipped with the necessary knowledge and geared to deal with their own learners' knowledge and specialisations.

The analysis of qualitative findings reveals that teachers' knowledge of the underlying principles of ESP is piecemeal. Content teachers are concerned about being unable to teach ESP classes effectively, and they perceive an ESP course as similar to a General English (GE) course. As such, some teach subject content by using English rather than teaching English *per se*. Similarly, language teachers in ESP classes often simply teach GE, although the class materials used in class may be relevant to learners' area subjects. The following excerpts highlight these concerns:

"I assume ESP is similar to general English language courses taught at a university. I ended up with the grammar-translation approach in my ESP class." (Fon)

"We chose the published textbook for our ESP class. Still, we taught general English using our mother tongue. Given this is the case, we do need training."

"I think I have to teach subject content in English rather than teaching English, or something similar to English program." (Dow)

The qualitative data analysis underlined the importance of professional training for ESP teachers. Such training is regarded as the necessary starting point in preparing ESP teachers for the growing demand and trends for authentic language use in workplaces. Indeed, the qualitative findings are consistent with the quantitative results showing the strong need for comprehensive and thorough professional training for ESP teachers and their career advancement.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The current study results provide practitioners and educators with valuable information regarding ESP teaching. First, the findings showed that Thai university teachers had a moderate understanding of ESP. The results also indicated that ESP pedagogy is not simply teaching but involves a number of essential elements, including a language teacher, a content teacher or expert, a researcher, a course planner and material provider, and a course evaluator. Together, these elements pose a challenge for ESP teachers since they must bear the extra load of teaching both language and specific subjects, and they are not adequately trained for it. Hence, ESP teachers, especially those working in Thai tertiary education, require a high level of professional training in both language and content teaching. Above all, the findings of the current study show that language teachers need to work in conjunction with content teachers to solve this daunting obstacle. This is critical for the successful use of the ESP approach, given that this method relies not only on the language but also on subject knowledge.



The findings of the current study also provide some pedagogical implications. First, ESP language teachers do not have to be specialists or experts in the area but must remain flexible and undergo professional development for ESP teaching. Second, the current study provides educators and researchers with five essential ESP elements: a language teacher, a content teacher or expert, a researcher, a course planner and material provider, and a course evaluator. However, ESP teachers need to be sufficiently equipped with each of these elements to deal with teaching obstacles. Finally, ESP courses ought, to begin with, an analysis of learners' specific needs. The learners' needs and their future language use determine which language skills are required, influencing the course planning and design. It should be noted that participants in the current study were drawn from one government university in the northeast of Thailand. Therefore, the current findings may not be generalised to other educational contexts or other populations with different demographic backgrounds. Future studies involving a larger sample across more countries could help validate the findings of the current study. Another limitation lies in the methodological design of this study. Specifically, the list of questionnaire items in the study is by no means all-inclusive and, as such, it is subject to further confirmation and possible amelioration in future studies.

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