

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TEN ESP RELATED REVIEW ARTICLES

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ABSTRACT

With ESP establishing itself as an independent subarea of applied linguistics, more researchers directed their attention to its specificity in language teaching and learning. After continuous development since the 1960s, the research focus of ESP teaching and learning has evolved accordingly. This paper aims to address future trends of ESP by doing a content analysis of ten articles on ESP reviews. Those selected review articles range from 2011 to 2020 (the past decade) and review ESP in terms of its origination, development process, research fields, crucial current topics, future trends, and the pitfalls researcher should be warned of. Implications deduced by comparing the ten ESP reviews are proposed: the common themes and contrasting views in future trends of ESP research, noticeable cautions in applying technology in ESP, and research gaps in terms of ESP applications in specialized contexts. The findings from this study may provide some insights for ESP-related researchers and practitioners.

Keywords: content analysis, ESP reviews, implications

1.0 INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes(ESP) has been a distinct field in the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT) since the 1960s. There are over 2000 articles closely related to ESP research that can be found on just one database (web of science) during 1992-2020, as put by Salmani-Nodoushan (2020 pp.247-268), ESP will continue to be a focus of future English language research and practice. To grasp the current status and future trends of ESP research, reviews on ESP research development are very necessary for researchers and practitioners in the field. However, as a limitation of most reviews, only a limited database(s) can be selected as the source of review, some choose databases that are globally available, like a web of science, and some preferred to use qualitative data within one country, still, others who did not specify the specific database they turn to do literature review. Though understandable, some confusion on the whole picture of ESP does exist. Questions like “ are these reviews consistent in their conclusions on ESP future trends despite their different databases and analysis methods?” may be raised. This paper aims to find out the similarities and differences

among the ten selected ESP reviews in terms of their findings to present a more clear picture of ESP future trends.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Emergence of ESP

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) began around fifty years ago, its emergence was a result of increased worldwide demand for occupational and professional language training, critical involvement in theoretical linguistics, and attention directed to language learners' needs for specific purposes in accordance with their professions or job description. It was originated from the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) but has gradually established itself as an independent subfield of Applied Linguistics (AL) (Robinson, 1991; Rahman, M. 2015 pp.24-31; Salmani-Nodoushan M. A.2020 pp.247-268) and a vital and innovative activity within the Teaching of English as a Foreign or Second Language movement (TEFL/TESL)(Howatt, 1984).

2.2 Definitions of ESP

There are many definitions referring to ESP by ELT experts, ESP specialists, and connoisseurs. The most quoted definitions include those proposed by Mackay and Mountford (1978), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Strevens (1988), Robinson (1991), Dudley Evans and St. John (1998), and Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) and Nunan (1994).

Mackay & Mountford, (1978) defined ESP as language instruction that focuses on detailed preparation for the specific domain).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.19) defined ESP as "an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method were based on the learners' reason for learning".

Strevens (1988) defined ESP via making a distinction between four absolute characteristics and two-variable characteristics.

Robinson's (1991) definition of ESP was 'normally goal-directed', which constantly enlarged as a result of the needs and situational analysis of the learners.

Dudley-Evans and St-John (1998, pp.4-5) pointed out that ESP was an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method were based on the learners' reason for learning.

John's (1998) definition emphasized that ESP was not necessarily related to a specific discipline.

Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) included more factors to the variables proposed by Strevens (1988) and Evans and St John (1998): a) Authentic texts, b) Communicative task-based approach, c)Adult learners, and d)Purposeful course.

Nunan (1994) considered ESP as an important subcomponent of language teaching, with specificity in its approaches to curriculum development, material design, pedagogy, assessment, and research.

There are also new but similar definitions, for instance, Saber (2016, pp. 2) defined ESP as “a ‘variety of English’ that can be observed in a given perimeter of society, delineated by professional or disciplinary boundaries”.

Though in different forms of definition, the common key elements of ESP definitions have been summarized by Salmani-Nodoushan, M. A. (2020 pp.248), stating that ESP comprises (a) purpose, (b) specificity, (c) learners’ needs, (d) target situation, and (e) authenticity and genuineness, which makes the understanding of ESP definitions much clearer.

2.3 Classification of ESP

The most quoted ESP classifications including but not limited to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St. John, (1998)

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) positioned English for Specific Purposes in a holistic picture of a ‘Tree of ELT’, EFT was divided into different branches and sub-branches, and ESP was one of the sub-branches. Those branches include: a) English for Medical Studies, b) English for Technicians, c) English for Economics, d) English for Secretaries, e) English for Psychology, and f) English for Teaching

ESP has been divided into two major branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998).

Basturkmen (2010) also presented a categorization of ESP and stressed that ESP can be divided into different sub-types according to the general and specific nature of the course.

Despite the various ways to classify ESP, as Salmani-Nodoushan, and Mohammad Ali (2020 pp.260) predicted that the main types of ESP are likely to exist in the years to come.

3.0 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The method of content analysis (comparative analysis) was applied to identify the common themes in the ten reviews on ESP. These ten reviews are selected from CNKI (mainly Chinese literature), ERIC (mainly English literature), JSTOR (mainly English literature), Elsevier (mainly English literature), and Google Scholar (both English and Chinese literature), with the keywords of “ESP”, “review”, the literature type is journal articles, the time limit is literature written between 2011 to 2020.

This research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the main features of the ten ESP reviews?
2. Are these reviews consistent in their conclusions and findings on ESP future trends despite their different databases and analysis methods?
3. What implications can be deduced by comparing the conclusions of the ten ESP reviews in terms of future trends?

It should be noted that this research has its own limitation on literature resources - literature that appeared in the first few pages(6-7 pages) of the database webpage was carefully detected, but when no related articles can be found, the author did not go on to finish the rest webpages, in simple words, it is not exhaustive, but with the latest ESP reviews worldwide and nationwide (in the context of China) included in the analysis, it still bears important significance for ESP researchers and practitioners.

4.0 RESULTS

The features of the ten reviews are compared in terms of publishing year, the country of the written article, main focus, methodology, and their main conclusions/ESP future trends.

(1) **The ten literature reviews were written between 2011 and 2020**, with 3 Chinese authors and 7 authors from other countries. Some reviews focus on the domestic status quo or needs in ESP teaching and learning (NO. 2.3.5.6.7.9), others are more general and review literature for no specific purpose of presenting implications for a particular country or a particular aspect of ESP research, especially reviews NO.1.4.8.10.

Table 1 Article No., author(s)' name and written time and place of the reviews

Article No./Author (year)	Country
1. Cui Xiaoling LI Chao (2019)	China
2. Cao Ying (2017)	China
3. Momtazur Rahman (2015)	Bangladesh
4. NADEŽDA M.STOJKOVIĆ (2019)	Serbia
5. Adeel Khalid (2016)	Pakistan
6. Reza Dashtestani ; Nadežd-a Stojković (2015)	Serbia
7. HU Bingyao (2016)	China
8. Shona Whyte, Cédric Sarré (2017)	France
9. Samad Mirza Suzani; Lotfollah Yarmohammadi; MortazaYamini (2011)	Iran
10.Salmani-Nodoushan, Mohammad Ali (2020)	Iran

(2) **In terms of research methods**, most of (8 out of 10) the reviews are qualitative studies (NO.3-10), some are in the form of grounded theory, more in the form of content analysis. Qualitative reviews offer more information on the research literature collected, whereas, the

two quantitative analysis (shaded) of ESP(NO1-2) literature presents a more straightforward and easy-to-see picture of the research hotspots in the field of ESP.

(3) **In terms of literature review type** (Snyder, 2019 pp. 333-339), most of (8 out of 10) the review are not systematic review and the database the authors drew literature sources are often unclear (NO.1.2.3.9). Those semi-systematic or integrated reviews tend to do content analysis and categorize the literature from different perspectives, but with the same aims of those reviews that are done systematically (NO.1.2.6) to show the trends of ESP development.

Table 2 Article No. and their methodologies applied

Article No.	Methodology (review type)
1.	A quantitative analysis based on an analytical software called CiteSpace 4. 0. R5 SE and lit ranging from 1959 to 2016 on a database (web of science). (A Systematic review and meta-analysis of ESP related lit)
2.	A quantitative analysis based on an analytical software called CiteSpace 4. 0. R5 SE and lit ranging from 2005 to 2016 on a database (web of science) with only quality literature included in the analysis. (A Systematic review and meta-analysis)
3.	Content analysis of related articles from different perspectives to deduce the themes in ESP needs analysis -- instrument, components and pragmatic models. (Semi-systematic)
4.	Qualitative meta-analysis Integrative review
5.	A qualitative Content analysis (Narrative review)
6.	A qualitative review of 55 empirical research studies according to the technology typology developed by Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson, and Freynik (2014) (Systematic review)

7.	Personal experience as a practitioner (Integrated review)
8.	A qualitative Content analysis (Integrative review)
9.	a qualitative study based on "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to categorize interviews and paper materials of 115 college student. (not a review in strict definition)
10.	A qualitative study to categorize the related ESP lit from theory, methodology and analysis perspectives

(4) **In terms of research focus**, though most of (7 out 10, except NO. 1.4.10) the reviews are carried out with an emphasis on a specific area (underlined), for example, NO.2 analyzed the future trends of international ESP development aiming to show directions/implications for China's college English ESP-oriented reform; NO. 6 focuses on reviewing the literature that are concerned with technological application in ESP, NO.7 and NO.9 focuses on situations of ESP application within one specific country in a higher education context.

Table 3 Article No. and their main focus of research

Article No.	Main focus
1.	Focusing on ESP research topic shift, aiming to point out the major trends and research hot-spots in ESP research
2.	Focusing on ESP research hot-spots, aiming to offer <u>implications for college English ESP-oriented reform in China.</u>
3.	A review on ESP <u>need analysis.</u>
4.	A review on ESP lit according to the degree of importance of the research topics.
5.	Focusing on the importance of ESP need analysis and its research in medical field, aiming to draw <u>implications for ESP need analysis research in medical area in Pakistan.</u>
6.	Focusing on research of <u>information technology application in ESP teaching.</u>

7.	Focusing on status quo of ESP teaching in <u>vocational colleges in China</u>
8.	<u>Responding to criticism</u> on esp lack of theoretical foundation and applicability in ESP teaching.
9.	Focusing on status quo of ESP teaching in <u>colleges in Iran</u> aiming to show directions for future ESP teaching improvement.
10.	Focusing ESP development from theoretical, analytical and methodological perspectives, aiming to point out ESP research Future trends.

(5) In terms of conclusions and future trends of ESP research, some common themes can be detected by content analysis.

1) Themes that are mentioned in at least half of the 10 reviews, using underline or shade to highlight them.

- ① genre analysis - 5 out of 10 reviews (NO.1.2.4.8.10)
- ② need analysis - 6 out of 10 reviews (NO. 3.5.7.8.9.10)
- ③ discipline/vocation/profession content - 7 out of 10 reviews (NO. 2.4.6.7.8.9.10)
- ④ and technology application in ESP - 8 out of 10 reviews (NO. 1.2.4.5.7.8.9.10)

2) Themes that mentioned in at least two of the 10 reviews, considering these articles are literature review, they are forms of summary in nature, themes that have been selected and discussed in two review article are worth marking.

- ① Academic writing (NO.1.4)
- ② Translation (NO.2.4)
- ③ Context (NO.4.10)
- ④ Intercultural competence (NO.4.8)
- ⑤ Textbook (NO.4.7.9)
- ⑥ Motivation (NO.4.8.9)
- ⑦ Institution (4.7.9)
- ⑧ EMI (NO.4.8.10)

⑨ Problem-based/content-based/task-based ESP teaching methods(NO.4.7.9)

⑩ Corpus analysis/based ESP teaching (NO.1.4.8.10)

11 Authentic teaching materials (NO.7.8.9.10)

3) ESP emergence, definitions, classification and future trends are frequently introduced in those reviews too.

(6) Other noticeable points in reviews on conclusions and ESP future trends

1) Almost all the other reviews asserted that genre analysis is and will continue to be main part of ESP research, Stojković, N. (2019 pp.81-89) opposed this view and asserted that “critical approaches to ESP discourse analysis” have been over-researched.

2) Most of the reviews(nine out ten) mentioned or stressed the importance of application in ESP teaching and learning, Dashtestani, R., & Stojkovic, N. (2016 pp. 435-456) are the few ones to remind researchers and practitioners be cautious about the features of the technologies applied.

3) Vocational colleges is a big part in the education system worldwide, it is no exception in China, but rare reviews(only review NO.7) mentioned research in this context. Given the nature of vocational colleges and the learner-centered ESP teaching and learning, it is of special importance to fill this research gap with more quantitative and qualitative studies.

Table 4 Article No. and the major conclusions of those ESP reviews

Article No.	Major conclusions of those ESP reviews (especially in terms of future trends)
1.	<p>1 ESP research started in English-speaking countries like UK and US, it slowly became an important part in countries where English is foreign/second language, in China, ESP research has a noticeable increase in 2010.</p> <p>2 ESP research is multi-field, multi-perspective, interdiscipline that can borrow theories from different field and can be done by different types of researchers.</p> <p>3 ESP research focus has shifted from research on lexicon, grammar, rhetoric to <u>Genre analysis</u>, pragmatic analysis. The research hotpots mainly focus on academic writing, corpus-based ESP, science-demand-based pedagogy, multilingualism, language policy and institutional language.</p>

2.	<p>1 Genre analysis,</p> <p>2 blended learning,</p> <p>3 and ESP lexicon (industry-related words) teaching are main focus of quality ESP research during 2005-2016.</p>
3.	<p>1 The teaching environment, methods and contents used in ESP are not the same as in General English.</p> <p>2 The main components of language <u>needs analysis</u> such as TSA (Target Situation Analysis), LSA (Learning Situation Analysis), PSA(Present Situation Analysis), MA (Means Analysis) should be prioritized and applied in any ESP needs assessment.</p>
4.	<p>1 the prevailing topic: ESP research based on discipline -- most frequently center upon pillars- syllabus and material design, methodology, goals of instruction, <u>discourse and corpus analysis</u>, translation, textbooks writing, enhancing students' motivation, cultural and policy issues within a institution or a country, CLIL, EMI,etc.</p> <p>2 crucial topics: integration of translation into the teaching context of ESP. (Inter)cultural competencies; English as a medium of instruction (EMI); Academic writing; Problem based learning; <u>Use of technologies</u>; social issues related ESP research.</p> <p>3 unwanted research: heavy reliance on statistical tools, absence of personal teaching experience;</p> <p>4 Over researched topics: critical approaches to ESP <u>discourse analysis</u></p> <p>5 rarely investigated topics: fundamental defining criterion of ESP for their societal and possible ideological underpinnings.</p>
5.	<p>1 ESP <u>need analysis</u> is important</p> <p>2 ESP need analysis in <u>medical field</u> need further research in Pakistan</p>
6.	<p>1 there is clear empirical evidence for the efficacy of the use of course/learning management systems, corpora, and wikis in ESP instruction.</p> <p>2 research findings on the use of technology in ESP instruction are different from the ones identified in the literature of using technology in</p>

	<p>EFL instruction.</p> <p>3 There is a dearth of research and empirical evidence on the use of a wide range of technologies in ESP instruction.</p> <p>4 ESP teachers should make attempts to use a wide range of technologies in their ESP courses in order to maximize student participation and engagement in language learning .</p> <p>5 ESP researchers are advised to explore the possible benefits and drawbacks of various types of technology in different contexts and cultures(451)</p>
7.	<p>1 Vocational college students are in need of authentic ESP courses to meet student’s need in future work, rather than EG courses in the name of ESP.</p> <p>2 ESP status quo and difficulties in higher vocational colleges in China - weak in course development and teaching training, lack institutional support etc, ineffective teaching methods...</p> <p>3 Measures to be taken - change of attitude towards ESP teaching, support its application in vocational colleges with fund and management; work with industry experts to develop ESP courses/teaching materials to meet student’s professional needs, offer on-service training for ESP teachers, making use of new technology to reform teaching methods.</p>
8.	<p>1 Four trends in ESP research: <u>discourse analytic</u>; notional-functional and communicative approaches to language teaching; English Medium Instruction (EMI) / English as a Lingua Franca (ELF); Increase use of technology in ESP teaching (mainly Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL))</p> <p>2 ESP didactics are in need of theoretical framework, interaction between theory and practice.</p> <p>3 Conclusions from reviewing 9 ESP didactics related articles</p> <p>1) Various and sometimes conflicting needs are found in ESP <u>need analysis</u>, and it is hard to cater to each student’s need.</p> <p>2) Some research addressed the particular difficulties in ESP</p>

	<p>learner’s motivation, lexicon-grammar learning and reading;</p> <p>3) New practices involving different approaches to materials design and pedagogical to support ESP learning, for example, corpus tools; TV series(related to future profession) as a pedagogical resource; task-based language teaching</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>1 Crucial Factors in ESP Programs : Learners' <u>Needs Analysis</u>; Course Books and Teaching Materials</p> <p>2 ESP is the stepping stone from EGP to professional areas, related lexicon and knowledge should be learned.</p> <p>3 Major Practical Problems: problems with learners and their needs in higher education institutions and problems with course books and teaching materials.</p> <p>4 Conclusion</p> <p>1) The teaching materials should be concise and in depth, should be presented the in a reasonable way and time, teaching materials should be authentic and vocation-related, contented-oriented, and task-oriented teaching are advised, attach great importance to the four basic skills, develop language skills in real situation as far as possible, giving the teacher autonomy, vocabulary teaching should be interesting...</p> <p>1) Student’s engagement, time and allocation of courses should meet student’s physical and psychological needs ... using information technology to enhance students' autonomous learning, self-regulated learning etc.</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>1 ESP will continue to be based on four pillars: <u>need analysis</u>, learning objectives, teaching materials and learning assessment (Anthony, 2018; see also Mobashshernia, 2020) --pp.260-261</p> <p>2 The main types of ESP that are likely to exist in the years to come, à la Détourbe (2017), are: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Specific and Academic Purposes (ESAP), English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP), English as an Academic Lingua Franca (EALF), English for Academic and Occupational Purposes</p>

(EAOP), and English Medium Instruction (EMI).- pp.260

3 Like its past, ESP will develop and proceed in theoretical, analytical, and methodological pathways in the years to come.

1) **From a theoretical perspective**, ESP will opt for an epistemological perspective which requires the ESP researcher to be a surveyor whose job is to map **specialized subject domains** (Détourbe, 2017).

2) **From an analytical perspective**, ESP will continue to be informed by corpus linguistics/analysis, discourse analysis, and **computer and digital technology**; The importance of fieldwork and contextualization will be emphasized in ESP research; ESP research is expected to be responsive to the topics of the post-industrial society; The discourse of the **corporate world** might be another area for ESP research

3)From a methodological perspective, ESP may give more attention to the popularization of specialized knowledge

5.0 DISCUSSION

By summarizing the main features of the ten ESP reviews, we can now answer the first two questions raised in the “3 Methodology and research questions” part and leave the third in Part 6.

1. What are the main features of the ten ESP reviews?

Though being written in different countries, using different research methods, and having different focuses in their ESP-related review, all these review articles are trying to summarize the status quo of ESP research concerning the aspects the authors was interested in and proposed implications for other researchers and practitioners.

2. Are these reviews consistent in their conclusions and findings on ESP future trends despite their different databases and analysis methods?

By content analysis, we can identify the most frequently repeated(four), and less frequently repeated research trends (eleven) in ESP development. The high repeating frequency shows that there is noticeable general consistency in these ten ESP reviews in spite of their differences in research methods, literature resources,s and analysis methods. The minor differences in views about genre analysis should not be ignored though.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The third question in the “3 Methodology and research questions” part concerns the implications that can be proposed at the end of the analysis of this ten review.

Firstly, reviews reviews are of significance in presenting a much clearer picture of a research topic, in a sense, it is a useful meteorological triangulation. In this case, we now have a better understanding of the most wanted research topics -- genre analysis, need analysis, discipline-related ESP research, and research on the application of technology in ESP teaching and learning, and even researching.

Secondly, though ESP research has attracted much attention in the past two to three decades, we need to be warned of research that relies too much on statistical tools without enough teaching experience to screen out research results that are not sensible (NADEŽDA M. S TOJKOV-IC,2019 pp.86).

Thirdly, technology application (nowadays, blended learning) in ESP research and ESP teaching and learning practice have embraced increasing popularity in higher education (Picciano, 2009, p. 8; Claypole, M. 2005 pp.40; Bonk & Graham, 2006 pp.1-2; Jones et al 2014 pp.233;) In this overwhelming trend, some wise researchers warned us of assessing the technological tools before applying them in ESP practice(Dashtestani & Stojkovic,2016 pp. 451).

Lastly, the limited research in the context of higher vocational colleges (especially in China) and the much-stressed profession/vocation nature of ESP entail more research in this perspective.

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APPENDIX

The ten ESP articles that have been reviewed:

- Cui, X. L. & Li C. (2019). Anaysis of Visualization in the Internationa Research Trend of English for Specific Purposes - An Empirical analysis based on visualization software Citespace. *Journal of Yanbian University (Social Science)*,111-120+144-145. doi:10.16154/j.cnki.cn22-1025/c.2019.01.015.
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