

## EXPLORING THE TEACHER'S ROLE AND OBSTACLES IN ESP EDUCATION

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**Abstract.** English for Specific Purposes (ESP) focuses on meeting learners' academic and professional language needs. This article examines the roles of ESP teachers and the challenges they face. Drawing on key theoretical perspectives, it highlights teacher responsibilities such as needs analysis, course design, and material development, alongside obstacles like limited subject knowledge, lack of resources, and institutional constraints. The study emphasizes the importance of adaptability and professional development in effective ESP teaching.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes (ESP), teacher roles, pedagogical challenges, needs analysis, material development, ESP instruction.

**Introduction.** English for Specific Purposes (ESP) represents a learner-centered approach to language teaching that prioritizes the specific communicative needs of learners in professional or academic contexts. Unlike general English instruction, ESP is tailored to meet particular disciplinary or occupational requirements.

A foundational definition of ESP is provided by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who state that "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning." This definition highlights the centrality of learner needs, positioning them as the primary determinant of course design and teaching strategies.

Similarly, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) expand on this concept by emphasizing the complexity of ESP teaching. They argue that "the ESP practitioner has to perform a variety of roles, including teacher, course designer, materials provider, collaborator, and evaluator." This perspective underscores the multifunctional nature of ESP teaching and the additional responsibilities placed on educators.

Despite its growing importance, ESP education presents several challenges. As Basturkmen (2010) notes, "ESP teaching often requires instructors to operate beyond their linguistic expertise, particularly when dealing with specialized subject content." This observation highlights the tension between language teaching and subject-specific knowledge.

According to A. Erkinova (2025), this is not to say that teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has its challenges. As with other content areas, the expert teaching the ESP course needs to know both the target language and the specific discipline very well. Also, they need to develop or modify teaching resources for different student categories.

The purpose of this article is to explore the diverse roles of ESP teachers and to analyze the major obstacles they face in practice. By synthesizing insights from key scholars, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of ESP teaching dynamics.

**Materials and Methods.** This study adopts a qualitative research design based on an extensive review of existing literature in the field of ESP. The method involves analyzing theoretical frameworks and empirical findings from key academic sources.

The primary materials used in this study include seminal works by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), Robinson (1991), Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991), and Basturkmen (2010). These sources were selected due to their significant contributions to



ESP theory and practice.

Robinson (1991) emphasizes the importance of specificity in ESP, stating that “ESP courses are generally constrained by a limited time period and are focused on clearly defined objectives.” This viewpoint informs the analysis of course design and teaching limitations.

The research process involved:

- Identifying key themes related to teacher roles
- Examining documented challenges in ESP contexts
- Comparing perspectives across different scholars
- Synthesizing findings into coherent categories

This qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the complexities involved in ESP teaching.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The Role of the ESP Teacher**

The analysis reveals that ESP teachers perform multiple interconnected roles that go beyond traditional language instruction.

#### **1. Needs Analyst**

One of the primary roles of the ESP teacher is conducting needs analysis to determine learners’ goals and requirements. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize this by stating that “the analysis of target needs is the starting point of ESP course design.” This highlights that effective ESP teaching begins with a thorough understanding of learners’ professional or academic contexts.

#### **2. Course Designer and Material Developer**

ESP teachers are often responsible for designing courses and developing materials tailored to specific contexts. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) note that “ESP practitioners frequently have to design and adapt materials to suit specific learner needs.” This responsibility arises due to the limited availability of ready-made ESP resources.

#### **3. Facilitator of Learning**

In ESP classrooms, teachers act as facilitators rather than authoritative knowledge providers. They guide learners in developing practical language skills relevant to their fields.

#### **4. Collaborator**

Collaboration with subject specialists is another important role. Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) argue that “cooperation between language teachers and subject experts enhances the effectiveness of ESP instruction.” This collaboration ensures that course content remains relevant and accurate.

## **Challenges in ESP Teaching**

### **1. Lack of Subject-Matter Knowledge**

A significant challenge for ESP teachers is limited expertise in specialized fields. Basturkmen (2010) observes that “ESP teachers often experience difficulties due to their lack of subject-specific knowledge.” This can affect their confidence and teaching effectiveness.

### **2. Limited Teaching Materials**



Another major obstacle is the scarcity of appropriate teaching resources. As Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) point out, “the need to produce tailored materials places a heavy burden on ESP practitioners.”

### 3. Institutional Constraints

Institutional factors such as limited time, large class sizes, and inflexible curricula can hinder ESP instruction. Robinson (1991) highlights that “ESP courses are often time-bound and goal-oriented, which can restrict teaching flexibility.”

### 4. Diverse Learner Needs

ESP classes often include learners with varying levels of proficiency and different professional goals. This diversity complicates course planning and delivery.

### 5. Role Overload

The requirement to perform multiple roles can lead to teacher burnout. Balancing responsibilities such as teaching, designing materials, and evaluating performance can be demanding.

**Conclusion.** This study demonstrates that ESP teachers occupy a complex and demanding position within language education. Their roles extend beyond traditional teaching to include needs analysis, course design, material development, collaboration, and evaluation.

At the same time, they face numerous challenges, including insufficient subject knowledge, lack of teaching materials, institutional limitations, and diverse learner needs. These challenges highlight the need for continuous professional development and institutional support.

To improve ESP education, it is essential to provide teachers with access to training, resources, and opportunities for collaboration with subject specialists. Addressing these issues will enhance the effectiveness of ESP instruction and better prepare learners for real-world communication.

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