EXPLORATION DES PERSPECTIVES DES ENSEIGNANTS SUR LES DÉFIS DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT DE L'ANGLAIS À DES FINS SPÉCIFIQUES DANS LES UNIVERSITÉS PUBLIQUES ET PRIVÉES DU BENIN

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Résumé : Cette étude examine les caractéristiques des enseignants d'Anglais comme Langue Etrangère (ALE)- spécialisés en Anglais de Spécialité (AS) au Bénin, ainsi que leurs qualifications et les défis qu'ils rencontrent. À travers un questionnaire distribué à 10 enseignants d'AS, l'étude recueille des données sur leur sexe, leur âge, leur expérience d'enseignement, leurs qualifications académiques et leur formation professionnelle. Les résultats montrent que la majorité des répondants sont des hommes, avec une expérience d'enseignement considérable, 50 % ayant plus de 10 ans d'expérience. Malgré leurs qualifications académiques élevées, 80 % des répondants étant titulaires d'un doctorat, 90 % n'ont pas reçu de formation spécialisée pour enseigner l'AS. L'étude met également en lumière plusieurs défis majeurs, tels que l'absence de programme structuré, des ressources pédagogiques limitées, des effectifs pléthoriques et des heures de cours insuffisantes (15 à 30 heures), ce qui entrave l'enseignement efficace de l'AS. Les répondants s'accordent unanimement sur la nécessité d'une formation spécialisée pour améliorer leur efficacité dans l'enseignement de l'AS. Les résultats suggèrent la nécessité de programmes de développement professionnel ciblés, de la conception de programmes d'études, d'une meilleure allocation des ressources et de réformes politiques pour améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement de l'AS au Bénin.
Mots-clés : formation spécialisée, défis dans l'enseignement de l'AS, développement du programme, développement professionnel, Bénin

EXPLORING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN BENINESE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

Abstract: This study investigates the background characteristics, qualifications, and challenges faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers specializing in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Benin. Through a questionnaire distributed to 10 ESP teachers, the study gathers data on their gender, age, teaching experience, academic qualifications, and professional training. The results indicate that the majority of the respondents are male, with extensive teaching experience—50% having more than 10 years of teaching experience. Despite their high academic qualifications, with 80% holding PhDs, 90% of the respondents have not received specialized training for teaching ESP. The study also highlights several key challenges, including the absence of a structured syllabus, limited teaching resources, large class sizes, and insufficient course hours (15-30 hours), all of which hinder effective ESP instruction. The respondents unanimously agree on the need for specialized training to enhance their ESP teaching effectiveness. The findings suggest a need for targeted professional development programs, curriculum design, better resource allocation, and policy reform to improve the quality of ESP teaching in Benin
Keywords: specialized training, challenges in ESP teaching, curriculum development, professional development, Benin

Introduction

ESP has become a fruitful field over the last three decades. As a learner-centered approach, its main purpose has been that of fulfilling the specific needs of target learners to satisfy either their professional or vocational demands. Since then, ESP could settle itself as an important approach within EFL teaching/learning and has been more required by learners of different levels and categories, yet this approach still faces some challenges that hinder against teachers and learners.

English is playing a vital role in political, social, educational, and economic concerns of the nations. Due to its importance, all universities in Benin offer ESP courses in all disciplines. As a matter of fact, many General English teachers are required to teach ESP courses, despite their qualification.

This paper aims to explore ESP teachers' perspectives on the challenges of teaching English for Specific Purposes in Beninese public and private Universities.

The following two research questions were raised: What are the challenges that teachers face when teaching ESP? How do they overcome these challenges?

Indeed, the study in hand is important in a way that it seeks to explore the challenges faced by Beninese GE-ESP teachers, and provide solutions to them. This process has long been addressed by various scholars without success, and without overcoming these challenges, ESP would never generate reliable outcomes. For this reason, ESP challenges require more study, research and discussion from everyone in the community of higher education.

1. **Literature Review**

   1.1. A General Overview of ESP:

   English for Specific English has steadily grown since 1960 and it has eventually become a significant aspect of English language instruction. It is regarded as an approach to language teaching which has widely spread after World War II. At the same time, the English language has emerged as the major means of many domains such as: technology, business, trading education and medical field.

   1.2. Definition of ESP

   Many definitions are given to ESP. T. Hutchinson and A. Waters (1987, p19) define ESP as

   an approach to language learning which is based on learner need. The foundation of all ESP is the simple question: Why does the learner need to learn a foreign language? ... ESP, then, 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 means that ESP is a goal-directed approach which is based on learners' goals and reasons to learn a language and meets their needs. Dudley Evans and St John (1998, p5) illustrate ESP in terms of "*absolute*" and "*variable*" characteristics. These absolutes are:

   - ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners;
   - ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves;
   - ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

   While the variable features of ESP include the following:

   - ESP may be related to, or designed for, specific disciplines;

- ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English;
- ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level;
- ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students;
- Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language system

The above definition is a modified version of Strevens' (1988) definition, which deleted the absolute characteristic that ESP "*is in contrast to General English*" and included some new variable characteristics. ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, it could, however, be taught to beginners if great attention is paid to the needs analysis and the development of relevant materials that address the level of the targeted learners' aims and future usage of English in their field of specialism.

According to the definitions provided, ESP is about educating students to utilize English in academic, professional, or workplace settings where the language would be employed. English is learned in ESP not for its own purpose or to achieve a comprehensive education, but to facilitate admittance or increase linguistic efficiency in specific situations H. Basturkmen (2006).

1.3. GE Definition

Broadly speaking, General English refers to the study of English in a non-specialized context. It focusses on developing core language skills such as listening, speaking, reading writing, and grammar and vocabulary. The goal is to help learners use English in everyday situation such as travel, casual conversation, or general communication at work or in social settings.

1.4. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Versus General English (GE)

T. Hutchinson and A. Waters (1987, p. 3) believe that there is no difference between ESP and General English in theory but there is a significant difference in practice. "*In theory nothing, in practice a great deal".* Widdowson (1981, p. 89), however, assumed that General English does not refer to the "*existence*" of a need, rather, it refers to the "*awareness*" of a need. In this respect, Hutchinson and Waters (1992) state that if teachers and learners are aware of why they need English, it will influence what is considered as effective content in the language course and what is accomplished. According to H. Basturkmen (2006, p. 9), general English language teaching tends to move from a definite point to an intermediate one, whereas ESP seeks to accelerate learners and guide them to a specific destination in order to achieve specific goals. "*The emphasis in ESP on going from A to B in the most time- and energy efficient manner can lead to the view that ESP is an essentially practical endeavor".* Moreover, Robinson (1980) claims that the approach to teaching ESP is known to be learner-centered, where the focus is on the learners' needs and goals, whereas the approach to teaching GE is known to be language-centered with the focus on language skills and the cultural aspects of English community.

1.5. Needs Analysis (NA) in ESP:

Researchers define needs analysis (NA) in a variety of ways, but most of them agree on the fact that NA represents the necessities, wants and needs of learners in their subject area. According to T. Dudley- Evans and St John (1998, p. 125), NA refers to "professional information about the learners: the tasks and activities, learners will be using English for target situation analysis and ESP objective needs". They carry on stating that NA is the process of determining a learner's English language proficiency, gathering information on linguistics, genre and discourse, determining what is expected of the course and how it would be administered.

1.6. ESP Teacher Role

According to Widdowson (1990), the term" role" is used in a variety of ways since people have diverse social roles in their daily lives; nonetheless, the general definition of the word "role" is a component of performance in a certain social action such as being a teacher. In ELT, the role determines the status of both teachers and learners and their relationship. Furthermore, it is likely to change because the teacher may alter the roles by assigning and evaluating activities to his students. As a result, the instructor may be both a teacher and an evaluator (Nunan and Lamb, 1996). Aside from teaching, the ESP teacher has a variety of responsibilities both within and outside the classroom. According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), an ESP teacher can take on five different roles namely a teacher, a course designer, material provider as well as collaborator and evaluator.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Choice of the Method

The study under investigation looks forward to Exploring Teachers' Perspectives on the Challenges of Teaching English for Specific Purposes in Beninese Public and Private Universities. To investigate the aforementioned' we opt for a descriptive method. The latter is made up of two key terms. Initially, the descriptive method to direct the research. The aim of this method as M. W.R. Travers (1978, p76) stated is "*to depict the nature of a stance as it occurs at a current time of the study and to figure out the reason of a peculiar phenomenon*".

According to J.W. Creswell (1998; p.15), it is: "*An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct and methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or a human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses word, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting*". Moreover, it induced participants as Markham et al., (2009, p. 749) claimed to "*Use the richness of their own words to explore and describe their experiences in relation to the research question*".

2.2. Population /Sample/Sampling Technique

The population is defined by D. Polit (2001, p. 233) as "*The entire aggregation of cases that meet a specified set of criteria*". It means all members that meet a set of specifications or a specified criterion. The number of ESP teachers is estimated at fifty (50). Since the study cannot be carried out on the whole population, the researchers

singled out a subset, representative, a randomly selected sample which would ensure the generalization of results as far as possible.

The sample by definition is "*the process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population*" D. Polit, (2001, p. 233). It can be seen as a group of a relatively smaller number of people selected from a population for investigation purposes. The members of the sample are teacher participants from the Beninese public and private universities. It is selected following the technique of the one-fifth (1/5). In this sense, the overall population of fifty (50) teachers is divided by five (5) which ultimately resulted in ten (10). The motive behind our choice is, mainly, the teaching experiences of the participants and their degrees. On the whole, this reason provided a significant quality of the data that will be gathered.

2.3. Data Collection Tools and Data Analysis

The data collection method is a process that refers to obtaining standardized information from the whole participants in the sample of the study by administering the same instrument to all of them Tichaponda (2013). This process is described by Best and Khan (1993, p.25) as "*the process of disciplined inquiry through gathering and analysis of empirical data*". The ultimate tools for gathering data used in a research process, namely; questionnaires, interview guides, and observation schedules are the most used implements to achieve reliable results. It is defined by Tichaponda (2013) as a document of different questions, frequently asked for acts, opinions or perceptions, attitudes or preferences of the respondents, designed to obtain information from the participants in the sample. The questionnaire is usually composed of structured or close-ended and unstructured or open-ended questions (p.26). According to Brown (2001, p. 6) "a questionnaire is *any written instrument that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing their answers or selecting among existing answers*".

The questionnaire is widely used as a method of data collection because it requires little time to administer. According to Cohen et al. (2007, p. 317) "*The questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher and often being comparatively straightforward to analyze*".

Hence, we opted for the questionnaire as the instrument undertaken to collect the research data. It consists of a range of questions devised and administered to the sample units (10) for the sake of obtaining data to ensure an accurate relevance and management of the research. The data is analyzed qualitatively using the content analysis of the open-ended questions, and quantitatively of the close-ended ones in the same questionnaire. First, it is piloted, this process is defined by the same authors as "a pilot has several functions, principally to increase the reliability, validity, and practicability of the questionnaire". Then, it is administered to (10) teachers who are chosen randomly, via the "1/5 random sampling technique.

3. Results and Discussion of the Results
3.1. Results

The main purpose of the first section in the questionnaire was to collect general data about ESP teachers Therefore, a clear profile of those teachers was drawn to get

information about their qualifications, teaching experience as General English and ESP teachers, and specific training for teaching ESP.

Section I: Background Characteristics about English Teachers
Table: EFL Teachers' Background (Frequency: **N** Percentage: **%)**

	Response	N	%
1. Gender			
	Male	7	75
	Female	3	25
	Other	0	0
2. Age Group	20 – 30 years	0	0
	31 – 40 years	1	10
	41 – 50 years	7	70
	Above 50 years	2	20
3. Years of Teaching Experience	Less than 3 years	2	20
	3 – 5 years	1	10
	6 – 10 years	2	20
	More than 10 years	5	50
4. Highest Academic Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	0	0
	Master's Degree	2	20
	PhD	8	80
5. Highest Professional Qualification	BAPET	0	0
	CAPES	10	100
	CAPET	0	0

Source: Field work, 2025

The results in table 1 show that 10 lecturers respond to the questionnaire. 75% are male and 25% are female. So, the majority of the teacher respondents are male. (n=1/ 10%) is between 30 – 40 years, (n=7/ 70%) from 41 – 50 years. Only (n=2/ 20%) is above 50. From the above, one can say that the majority of the teachers are young.

As far as years of teaching experience of the respondents is concerned, 2 teachers, that is to say 20% have less than 3 years of teaching experience. 10% have 3-5 years; 20% have about 6-10 years of practical teaching experience. The data shows that 50% of the respondents have over 10 years of teaching experience. This aligns with the observation that ESP teaching might require a certain level of experience and maturity, as it deals with specialized content. Furthermore, teachers with extensive experience might have developed their own strategies and approaches to teaching ESP, even in the absence of formal training.

The fact that 80% of the respondents hold a PhD indicates a high level of academic achievement, suggesting that these teachers have the theoretical background to tackle complex ESP topics. However, the absence of participants with a Bachelor's degree highlights the professional expectations within this educational context, in Benin, where advanced degrees are the norm.

All the respondents possess the CAPES qualification, which is necessary for teaching in secondary schools in Benin, yet none hold the CAPET qualification, which is specific to technical and vocational schools. This suggests that the ESP teachers in this study are primarily engaged in general education settings rather than specialized technical or vocational education.
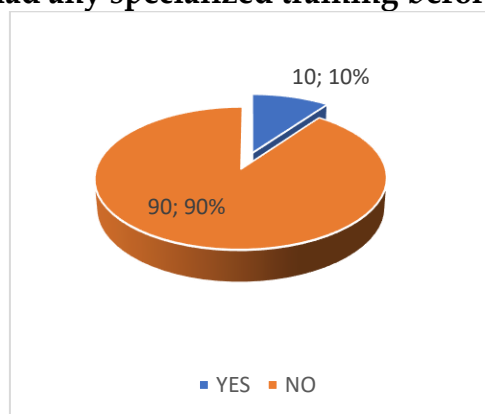
Question 06: Have you had any specialized training before teaching ESP?

Figure1: Specialized Training before Teaching ESP
Source: Field work, 2025

Nine (09) teachers answered that they have not received specialized training before being recruited for this job. One (01) teacher declared that he has received a theoretical training about teaching methods and the use of ICT to teach ESP. However, it remains a theoretical training since nothing in practice has been done.
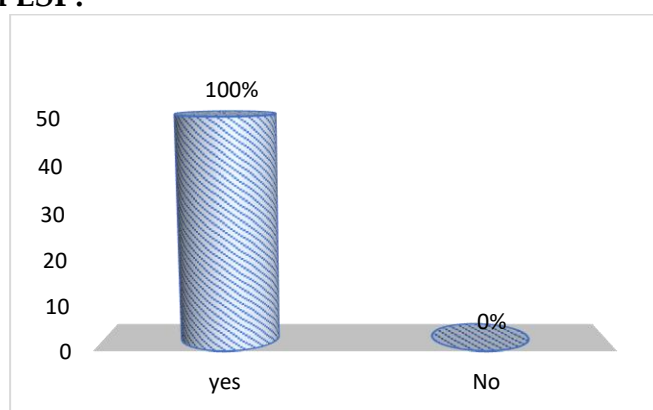
Question 07: Do you think that EFL teachers of ESP should be trained so as to have a specialized knowledge in ESP?

Figure2: Training Teachers for ESP
Source: Field work, 2025

The ten (100 %) respondents agreed on the necessity to develop and enrich a specific knowledge related to the field they are teaching. This does not mean that teachers of ESP should be experts in the subject they are teaching, but at least have an overview of the field they are involved in; for the sake of a better communication with their students.

Question 07: What are the challenges you face as a General English teacher of ESP?
The challenges faced by the respondents, as stated by themselves, were summed up as follows: the absence of prior training in ESP teaching; the absence of a syllabus which may guide the teachers and facilitate their tasks; the absence of tools and documentation; large classes especially in public universities, and the time allotted to the ESP courses 15 to 30 hours maximum, which is not enough for the course.

3.2. Discussion of the Results

The collected data tends to answer the two research questions: What are the challenges that teachers face when teaching ESP? How do teachers overcome the difficulties of teaching ESP? The results obtained in this research are very important.

One crucial issue that teachers consider as a primary challenge is the lack of knowledge of specific disciplines like economics, medicine, law, English for renewable energy, English for water, business, etc. Some researchers have emphasized the importance of detailed knowledge to be a professional ESP teacher because the teaching competencies and general English proficiency are not enough (Bracaj, 2014; Maleki, 2008; Pradhan, 2013).

The lack of knowledge in specific subjects can drive teachers to look stressed, uncomfortable, and insecure while teaching and subsequently affect the general class atmosphere. This fact can make teachers look unconfident in front of their students, creating negative energy in the classroom that can and will affect both the teaching and learning processes. One of the researchers in the field of ESP highlighted one crucial issue that novice ESP teachers face, which is the lack of preparation on the subject matter before the beginning of the academic year, he said:

> In order to deal with this problem, cooperation should be held between English teachers and specialty teachers (Ahmed, 2014; Bojović, 2006; Luo & Garner, 2017; Zhang, 2017) to complement each other and to minimize the gap in the lack of teachers' content knowledge of the subject matter. In addition, being aware of having limited knowledge on the subject matter can turn to be positive as it will stimulate and motivate ESP teachers to learn new things outside their field. (L. Iswati, A. Triastuti, (2021, p. 9).

From the above citation, it is clear that collaboration between the two kinds of teachers could appease the novice ESP teachers. On the bases of the data collected from teachers' questionnaire, we have come to the conclusion that those teachers have not undergone a special training in the field of ESP. The data outcomes highlight very important results about teachers' challenges in ESP teaching in Beninese public and private universities, and how these challenges are overcome by the teachers.

In addition, the absence of a syllabus which may guide the teachers and facilitate their tasks, and the lack of necessary materials rather complicate the situation for them to conduct an effective and successful ESP course. Teachers are trying to develop an appropriate needs analysis approach because neither the ministry of higher education nor the concerned Departments informed the ESP teachers about what to teach, prepare, and teach. For that reason, teachers find themselves confused about what to teach since they do not know the students' needs and capacities in the English language. Moreover, since one of the fundamental characteristics of ESP is to fulfil the students' different needs (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998), the absence of a proper needs analysis may hinder the process of identifying the actual learners' needs. Large classes management is another challenge.

The respondents confess that large classes. (60, 200 students, even 500 students or more) are challenging to handle. Researchers believe that large classes produce more obstacles and challenges than smaller ones (Harmer, 2001). For teachers to provide effective eaching and lead a good classroom, the universities, along with the ministry,

have to work on recruiting more teachers to be in line with (Brown, 2007): multiple classes need multiple teachers. This same researcher (Brown, 2007) claims that:" *an ideal language class should not consist of more than a dozen students; ESP classes usually consist of many students (40 students or more), making it not ideal for the teaching of ESP*" (cited in (L. Iswati, A. Triastuti, 2021, p.13).

Accordingly, the results confirm our hypothesis that when teachers use the suitable course content based on students' needs inside the class, learners will adopt new positive attitudes because they are more comfortable and encouraged, and that will ensure a wide improvement on all levels.

4. Implications and Suggestions

4.1. Implications

4.1.1. Training and Professional Development:

The lack of specialized training for ESP teachers calls for the development of targeted professional development programs. Educational institutions and policymakers should prioritize the creation of ESP-specific training programs that equip teachers with both the theoretical knowledge and practical teaching strategies required for effective ESP instruction. Furthermore, in-service training opportunities should be offered to ensure that current teachers can improve their pedagogical skills and stay updated on ESP teaching methods.

4.1.2. Curriculum Development:

The absence of a structured syllabus is a clear indication that there is a need for the development of comprehensive ESP curricula. Educational authorities should consider creating standardized syllabi and teaching guidelines to provide teachers with clear expectations and direction. This would help ensure that students across different educational institutions receive a consistent and high-quality ESP education.

4.1.3. Resource Allocation:

The lack of teaching resources highlights the need for investment in ESP-specific materials, such as textbooks, online resources, and databases tailored to specific fields (examples: economics, business, law, engineering). Institutions should allocate resources to develop these materials and make them accessible to ESP teachers.

4.1.4. Class Size and Time Management:

Addressing large class sizes and limited course hours is more complex but still crucial. Universities and schools might consider reducing class sizes for ESP courses to enable more focused instruction. Additionally, if feasible, extending the number of hours for ESP courses could provide teachers with more time to cover the material and engage students more effectively.

4.1.5. Educational Policy

The findings of this study could inform educational policymakers at the national level, specifically in countries like Benin. Policymakers should recognize the importance of specialized training in ESP and provide resources for its development.

Furthermore, the results can be used to advocate for changes in teaching standards and qualifications for ESP instructors.

4.2. Suggestions and Recommendations

In the light of the above analysis, it has been realized that urgent strategies ought to be taken into consideration so as to overcome all sorts of challenges Beninese ESP teachers are facing and to embitter the ESP teaching/learning environment in the Beninese universities.

Therefore, the following points are suggested for the benefit of the educational community as a whole.

- Teachers should take the initiative to pursue workshops, online courses, or conferences focused on ESP. These resources may cover both theoretical foundations and practical approaches to ESP teaching.

- Teachers should engage in collaborative learning with colleagues, sharing best practices and resources. Establishing a network of ESP teachers for mutual support can foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Teachers should make use of online resources. There are numerous online platforms and communities where ESP teachers can access training materials, attend webinars, or engage in discussions related to ESP teaching methodologies.

- Incorporating online learning platforms can help manage large classes. By using a blend of face-to-face and online learning, students can access resources, submit assignments, and participate in discussions outside the classroom, making the best use of class time for interactive activities.

Teachers should conduct a needs analysis process and should keep updated with the learners' emerging needs. Designing courses out of their intuition of what learners' need would be misleading.

Teachers should play the role of curious learners to generate knowledge about the subject matter. It is only then that students feel confident and motivated to learn.

- The Ministry of higher education ought to provide ESP teachers with training programs related to their field of expertise

- Encourage collaboration between ESP teachers from four different universities

- Organize workshops and seminars on how to conduct ESP courses

- Encourage ESP teachers to share their experiences with foreign ESP teachers through international conferences,

- To this end, we recommend policy makers at the university level to recruit permanent teachers to improve the situation of ESP teaching and learning.

Conclusion

This research work helps to understand teachers' perspectives on the challenges of teaching English for specific purposes in Beninese public and private universities. After exploring the literature related to the topic, a questionnaire was designed and administered to teachers; interviews were also conducted with them. The data were collected and analyzed. The findings reveal that ESP teachers lack of professional training is a major obstacle to the teaching/learning of ESP in Benin context. It is then urgent not only to make English a compulsory module but also to provide ESP teachers with appropriate training, and materials that would facilitate the daunting task of

course design. It is high time researchers, teachers and experts took needs analysis into account for a better ESP teaching in the future.

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