

THE CURRENT PRACTICES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ESP AT A SPORT UNIVERSITY IN VIETNAM

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Abstract: *In recent years, the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become one of the primary topics in English language teaching and research. In the educational setting, ESP forms an essential component in the university course as it is designed to provide students with the language and communication skills required for particular fields and occupational or academic purposes. The purpose of this paper was to identify the current practices of teaching and learning ESP for sport students. Lecturers of English and the first-year students undertaking undergraduate courses in Physical Education, Sport Coaching and Sport Management were involved in this research. The data were collected in semester 2 of the academic year 2023-2024 while ESP classes were being conducted. The qualitative method was utilized in this study through the analysis of documentation, classroom observations, one-on-one interviews with lecturers of English and students. The findings revealed a number of problems lecturers and students encountered, including the use of text_book, teaching methods, lack of vocabulary, and dependence on Google Translate. Based on the evidence drawn from this research, recommendations were proposed with an emphasis on the use of technology and ChatGPT to enhance the quality of teaching and learning ESP.*

Keywords: *ESP, problems, technology, chatGPT, ESP teaching and learning*

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and internationalization have a significant impact on higher education. This results in the more increasingly important role of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This article aims to identify the current practices of teaching and learning ESP at a sport university in Vietnam, exploring the difficulties and strategies utilized in the sporting context. The fact that ESP is integrated within the curriculum is crucial

to prepare students for the professional demands of the international sports industry in which students' technical knowledge and English proficiency in communication skills are required (Belcher, 2009; Paltridge & Starfield, 2011).

Although the importance of ESP is increasingly recognized, there remains a lack of research studies in the area of sports education in Vietnam. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the materials and techniques employed in ESP courses at a sport university in Vietnam. Hence, it provides an insight into the efficiency of the current practices and identifies areas for improvement (Basturkmen, 2010).

This study seeks to address the central research question: *How is ESP currently instructed and learned at a sport university in Vietnam, and what challenges and strategies shed light on how it is conducted in this context?* Through examining this question, the study seeks to gain practical understanding of the teaching methods, choice of instructional materials, and challenges encountered by both lecturers and students, with the goal of enhancing the effectiveness and contextual relevance of ESP instruction within the field of sports education. The research findings will contribute to the ESP in sports education and provide practical recommendations for instructors in an effort to improve the quality of ESP instruction in the sporting context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has aroused notable interest over the past few decades. It has been designed to satisfy the varied and specific needs of students in a variety of professional areas. Unlike general English language teaching, ESP concentrates on providing students with language skills intended for particular fields of study such as medicine, economics and sports (Belcher, 2009). This literature review investigates the current practices of teaching and learning ESP, with an emphasis on its application in the area of sports education, and reviews these practices within the broader context of

ESP research.

ESP in higher education

There has been an increasing demand for the proficiency of English communication skills in global professional working environments. This has led to the reproduction and inclusion of ESP courses in the training programs of higher education institutions. According to Hyland (2023), ESP courses are designed and conducted to meet the particular language needs of students, combining subject-specific vocabulary, grammar, and communicative practices. This approach is fundamental for students to effectively get involved in their professional fields. Paltridge and Starfield (2011) placed an emphasis on the significance of needs analysis in the development of ESP curriculum so that the courses are accommodated to meet the future professional requirements of students.

ESP in sports and physical education

In comparison with other fields, there has not been much exploration regarding the application of ESP in sports education. Those working in the area of sporting including sports professionals, athletes, coaches, and managers need to master specialized English language skills to take part in world sport events, communicate in international contexts, and understand technical documents. Fakourian and Ghalibafan (2024) indicated that both the general language skills and the specific terms associated with sport science, sport management, and sport coaching must be included in ESP courses in sports education. While this perspective offers a comprehensive instructional model, it lacks empirical support regarding how instructors balance these dual tasks in real classrooms. Moreover, the recommendation to teach both general and specialized English may be overly ambitious for contexts with limited instructional time or resources, particularly in non-English speaking countries.

The integration of ESP into physical education and sports-related

programs is based on the principles of needs-based curriculum design and discipline-specific language acquisition. Despite being relatively scarce, a growing body of research has emerged focusing on the implementation of ESP in physical education contexts. Conducting needs analysis of ESP for physical education students is of great importance. Pranoto and Suprayogi (2020) conducted a survey with a sample of 50 physical education students and 10 lecturers, identifying priority ESP topics, including sport journalism, athlete/referee/coach communication. The research revealed a strong institutional and student demand for ESP instruction focused on productive skills, particularly speaking and writing for professional roles in sports and suggested further research to assess the effectiveness of ESP materials developed in alignment with real-world occupational demands. The findings identified key content areas such as sport journalism and athlete communication as key focus, which reflects a clear demand for productive skills (speaking and writing) tailored to real-world roles in the sports sector. However, while their study responds to institutional and student needs, it does not sufficiently evaluate the effectiveness of current teaching materials or link language training to actual performance outcomes. This limitation weakens its potential to inform evidence-based curriculum change.

Regarding the resources of vocabulary in ESP classrooms, Kongcharoen (2023) identified the specific vocabulary needed for ESP courses in physical education and sports science by analyzing academic journals in the field. It highlighted the importance of sport-specific word lists for improved reading comprehension. It also offered a strong foundation for syllabus designers and instructors aiming to integrate subject-specific terminology into ESP courses for physical education and sports science students. In contrast to the above-mentioned studies, Kongcharoen (2023) emphasizes the value of discipline-specific vocabulary for improved reading comprehension. This instructional focus complements the communicative emphasis of Pranoto and Suprayogi (2020), yet the two studies implicitly present a conflicting instructional priority: one focuses on the teaching of

productive communicative skills, while the other emphasizes receptive vocabulary acquisition. This raises an important pedagogical approach, whether ESP instruction in sports prioritizes speaking and writing for professional communication, or reading comprehension and vocabulary development for academic success. This reflects a broader issue in ESP literature - the lack of agreement on instructional priorities in highly specialized, practice-based disciplines like sports education. While communicative competence is essential for professional integration, vocabulary comprehension is foundational for engaging with academic materials and technical documents. A balanced or integrative approach may be necessary, but research has yet to empirically determine how this balance can be achieved effectively within the constraints of existing curricula. In short, the current body of research on ESP in sports and physical education reflects a growing recognition of its importance but reveals conflicting instructional emphases and insufficient contextual analysis. This study addresses these gaps by examining not only what is being taught in ESP courses at a sport university in Vietnam, but also how it is taught, with what perceived challenges, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of ESP in the sport setting.

Teaching strategies in ESP

Effectiveness in ESP instruction depends on the employment of teaching strategies that address the specific linguistic and contextual needs of students. There are two approaches in ESP, including task-based learning and content-based instruction. Basturkmen (2010) demonstrated that task-based learning involves engaging students in real-world tasks relating to their field, enhances practical language skills and contextual understanding. Content-based instruction combines language with subject instruction, enabling students to learn language skills and acquire knowledge in their field of study (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

Tsou and Chen (2014) explored how task-based ESP instruction

improved sports students' ability to understand and apply sports science concepts in English. Similarly, Papaja (2023) investigated the use of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in sports departments, emphasizing the dual benefit of language acquisition and subject matter comprehension. These studies suggest that ESP in physical education must be both communicative and content-oriented, with emphasis on sport-specific terminology, oral communication, and reading comprehension of sport-related documents.

Use of Technology

Technology, particularly AI-powered tools like ChatGPT, is increasingly developing to assist with ESP instruction in sports. While research specifically focusing on ChatGPT in this context is still emerging, studies exploring technology-enhanced language learning in ESP provide valuable insights. Huang et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of pedagogical chatbots for language learning, highlighting their ability to offer personalized feedback and support. Furthermore, Hu et al. (2025) discussed the broader implications of AI in language education, including personalized learning pathways and automated feedback, aspects directly relevant to ESP in sports.

Perceived challenges in ESP for sports and physical education

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of ESP in sports education, several challenges continue to hinder its effective implementation in both theoretical and practical aspects. These challenges, as reported in existing literature, extend across curriculum design, instructional capacity, learner engagement, and institutional support.

One of the foremost challenges lies in the lack of qualified instructors with dual expertise in both English language teaching and sport-specific content. As Fakourian and Ghalibafan (2024) observed, although instructors are often skilled in either general English or sport science, it is uncommon to find individuals who possess strong competencies in both domains. This gap frequently results in instruction that only

addresses the integration of content knowledge and language goals, ultimately compromising the effectiveness of ESP implementation in sports-related contexts.

Another key challenge relates to the absence of standardized, field-specific instructional materials. While Kongcharoen (2023) made progress in identifying sport-specific vocabulary through academic analysis, there remains a lack of validated ESP textbooks or resources tailored to the diverse subfields of sport (e.g., sport management, coaching, exercise science). Consequently, many instructors are to collect improvised content, which frequently lacks consistency and fails to reflect the real-life communicative contexts of the sports field.

Furthermore, students often struggle with motivation and relevance. Pranoto and Suprayogi (2020) emphasized the importance of productive skills like speaking and writing, yet many students perceive ESP as disconnected from their practical sports training. Without a clear understanding of how English proficiency translates into career advantages — such as participation in international tournaments, internships abroad, or communication with foreign coaches — students may disengage from ESP courses or undervalue their long-term significance.

In addition, institutional support for ESP remains limited, especially in developing contexts such as Vietnam. Investment in teacher training, access to modern educational technology, and cross-departmental collaboration between language and sports faculties are often insufficient. This institutional gap is further widened by a lack of policy guidance or national frameworks specifically targeting ESP integration into professional programs like physical education.

Finally, instructional challenges arise from balancing language use with subject matter learning. While studies such as those by Basturkmen (2010) and Papaja (2023) highlight the value of task-based and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approaches, due to the

limited time in many courses, instructors often struggle to find the right balance between teaching language skills and technical knowledge. This lack of agreement can lead to instructional goals that are unclear or applied inconsistently across different institutions.

In summary, while the field of ESP in sports education is growing, its development is impeded by several challenges related to human resources, materials, motivation, and institutional facilities. These issues point to the urgent need for a more coordinated and empirically informed approach to ESP curriculum design, delivery, and evaluation within sports and physical education settings. The literature reviewed demonstrates that while ESP has gained significant progress in various professional fields, its application within sports and physical education remains limited and contextually underdeveloped. Existing research emphasizes the need for tailored instruction that integrates both general and discipline-specific language skills (Fakourian & Ghalibafan, 2024), yet studies often lack agreement on instructional priorities and fail to address the unique challenges faced in non-Western educational contexts. Although a few empirical investigations — such as those by Pranoto and Suprayogi (2020) and Kongcharoen (2023) — have begun to explore needs analysis and vocabulary development in physical education, critical gaps persist regarding curriculum effectiveness, pedagogical strategies, and contextual adaptation in Vietnamese sport universities. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how institutional, technological, and motivational factors shape ESP delivery in this field. These gaps highlight the need for an in-depth, context-specific investigation that not only maps current practices but also identifies challenges and strategies to enhance ESP instruction in sports education. Therefore, this study aims to explore how ESP is currently taught and learned at a sport university in Vietnam, focusing on the instructional methods, materials, and perceived challenges.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study employed a qualitative case study design, appropriate for in-depth exploration of contextualized educational practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study approach allows for an investigation into how English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is currently taught and learned at a sport university in Vietnam through multiple sources of evidence—classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. This triangulated design enhances the depth and credibility of the findings by allowing consistency and validation across different data sources (Yin, 2018).

Research site and Participants

The study was conducted at a sport university in Vietnam offering undergraduate programs in physical education, sport coaching, and sport management. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling to reflect a range of teaching experiences and student perspectives across faculties (Patton, 2015).

Lecturers: Three ESP instructors, each with teaching responsibilities in the selected classes, participated in both interviews and class observations.

Students: The observed classes included first-year students enrolled in Physical Education, Sport Coaching, and Sport Management programs during the second semester of the 2023–2024 academic year.

Data collection methods and procedure

Observations

In the first stage of the research, the observations of lecturers and students on the three ESP classes were conducted to provide a deeper understanding of the practices of teaching and learning. “Observation is the process of gathering open-ended, firsthand information by observing

people and places at a research site” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 214). Observations provide a better understanding of the research context, to see things that have become routine to those being observed themselves, to record behaviours as they are occurring (Creswell, 2012), and to explore things that might not be obtained by questionnaires or interviews (Cohen et al., 2013). In this study, the researcher played the role of a non-participant observer and took notes during the observation process. The observation protocol includes some information such as the time, day, subject, class, observed lecturer, observer. It also includes observation criteria such as lecturers’ teaching methods and use of instructional materials, student engagement, interactions between the lecturer and students, how students respond to tasks. Field notes taken by the observer were both descriptive and reflective. Descriptive field notes described what was happening during the observation time. Reflective field notes were written during and after the observation.

Each class observation was conducted for approximately 50 minutes. The researcher sat at a table at the back of the classroom and sometimes moved around to have a better view of the students. This assisted the observer to take more detailed and comprehensive field notes on the teaching and learning activities.

Semi-structured interviews

In the second stage of the study, one-on-one interviews with the three lecturers of English were conducted. These lecturers were also instructors who delivered ESP lectures and were observed by the researcher. Open-ended questions were employed in semi-structured interviews (Gillham, 2005), with a focus on specific topics and to promote flexible interaction between the researcher and participants. They also allowed the researcher and participants to explore more deeply into issues based on the list of questions (Bergin, 2018). Focal points for the interviews with lecturers were on gaining a better understanding about the students’ English proficiency skills, how students respond to the tasks and the textbook being used from lecturer

perspectives. In addition, through the interviews, the researcher could have the lecturers clarify a number of issues regarding what happened during class observations. Each interview lasted 30–45 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed. Interviews allowed participants to expand on classroom events and provided deeper context for interpreting observational data. Field notes made by the researcher during the classroom observations were compared to the qualitative data from the lecturers' interviews for triangulation. "Triangulation is the application of different data analysis methods, different datasets, or different researchers' perspectives to examine the same research question or theme" (Bergin, 2018, p.29).

Data analysis

Interview and observation data were analysed qualitatively, using thematic content analysis described as "a foundational method for qualitative analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 4), including the following steps: familiarization with data; generation of initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes. Through this process, the emerging themes including the textbook, teaching methodology, lack of vocabulary, dependence on google translate were identified. Regarding the theme 'textbook', structural and content observations, outdated and potentially unreliable content and limited focus on language skills were identified as subthemes. After identifying key themes across interview transcripts and observation notes, the researcher presented key findings under each main theme. The qualitative findings from the lecturers involved in the interviews and observations were compared and contrasted to ensure a thorough interpretation of the findings.

Trustworthiness and Reliability

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were employed:

Triangulation: Data were collected from three sources (observations, interviews, documents) to validate emerging themes (Bergin, 2018).

Member checking: After data transcription and preliminary analysis, summaries were shared with lecturers to confirm interpretations.

Reliability was enhanced through consistent data collection procedures and clear coding rules applied across all transcripts and observation notes.

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted with informed consent obtained from all participants. Also, all identifying information from those involved in the study was omitted to ensure participant anonymity and confidentiality in the report. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research site, like many institutions globally, recognizes the importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in equipping students for success in their chosen fields. The study investigates the current practices of ESP in Sport at the university, focusing specifically on various aspects of the ESP program. This section aims at presenting a number of problems relating to the textbook being utilized and the teaching methods employed by the lecturers. Additionally, the challenges faced by students, such as limited sport-specific vocabulary and an over-reliance on tools like Google Translate are highlighted.

Each subsection (Textbook, Teaching Methodology, Vocabulary, Google Translate) includes clearer evidence of how insights from document analysis (e.g., textbook content and structure), classroom observations (e.g., teaching practices and student engagement), and interviews with lecturers (e.g., perceptions and challenges) were synthesized to produce a holistic understanding of the current practices of teaching and learning ESP at the research site.

Textbook

Structural and content observations

Published in 2013, *English in Sports* has served as the primary ESP learning resource at the research site. The book is divided into two sections: different kinds of sports and fields of sport studies. The first section includes types of sports with a ball such as soccer, volleyball, basketball, tennis, table-tennis, handball and golf and types of sports without a ball like gymnastics, athletics, badminton, swimming, chess, recreational sport, and martial arts. In the second section, a variety of study fields in the area of sports are covered, including history of sports, sport management, sport coaching, sport medicine, sport culture, sport economy, sport psychology.

There is a total of 21 units, each covering a specific sport or field of study within sports. Each unit is consistently designed with 10 parts across its 21 units: pre-reading task, reading text, new words and expressions, reading comprehension, vocabulary, word study, grammar focus, further exercises, further reading and post-reading task.

This study was conducted in the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024 on the first-year students majoring in Physical Education, Sport Management and Sport Coaching. In this term they were studying ESP 1 (3 credit hours) and they are going to continue to study ESP 2 (3 credit hours) in the coming semester.

The four units were selected for teaching and learning in each semester. They were Gymnastics, Athletics, Badminton and Swimming for ESP 1 and Soccer, Basketball, Volleyball and Martial Arts for ESP 2. The selection of these units was primarily based on different popular kinds of sports and on discussion among lecturers of English participating in instructing ESP. Due to a limited credit hours given, students had to self-study the remaining units to gain better understanding of other sports as well as sport studies.

Outdated and potentially unreliable content

The lecturers highlighted the presence of outdated information within the textbook, particularly regarding sport rules. As stated by lecturers:

“The textbook was compiled a long time ago, so the information provided in the reading texts is not up-to-date, especially rules in sports.” (ESPL3)

“There are many texts that contain a lot of outdated information in the area of sport rules.” (ESPL1).

This suggested a need for content revision to reflect current standards and practices. Additionally, the lecturers expressed concern over the use of reading texts extracted from unidentified sources, indicating potential reliability issues as demonstrated by a lecturer:

“The textbook includes many texts which are collected from different sources and some of them are not reliable.” (ESPL2).

Limited focus on language skills

The textbook predominantly focused on reading and writing skills, neglecting crucial aspects of listening and speaking. Lecturers stated:

“Students do not have an opportunity to practice listening and speaking skills because the textbook focuses on only writing and reading.” (ESPL1)

“The textbook provides students with sport vocabulary as well as grammatical points in addition to reading and writing.” (ESPL3)

This lack of balance deprived students of opportunities to develop comprehensive English language proficiency relevant to the field of sports.

The use of *English in Sports* (2013) as the primary textbook at the research site reveals a core structural limitation in the ESP program. The outdated nature of the content, particularly in rapidly changing areas like sport rules, not only reflects a failure to keep pace with the

discipline but also raises questions about the authenticity and credibility of the learning material. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argued, ESP content must be both relevant and up-to-date to maintain learners' motivation and engagement. Moreover, the textbook's focus on reading and writing skills, while neglecting speaking and listening, undermines the holistic development of communicative competence — a concern widely acknowledged in ESP scholarship (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

This imbalance significantly restricts students' ability to perform real-life communicative tasks in sporting environments, where spoken interaction is often essential. In contrast, integrated-skill approaches, such as those supported by Basturkmen (2010), would better assist students in developing the communication skills needed in professional sport contexts.

Teaching methodology

The research findings revealed that the lecturers of English utilized traditional teaching methods while delivering ESP instructions to students. Most lecturers employed direct instruction, rote learning, and a focus on technical terminology. While rote memorization of vocabulary might provide a grasp of technical terms, it failed to equip students with the communicative competence required to navigate real-world situations, such as interacting with teammates, understanding coaching instructions, or engaging in sports-related discussions. This disconnection between classroom learning and practical application can be demotivating for students and limit their ability to fully participate in the globalized world of sports. This was consistent with a study by Lee (2023) on ESP practices in Korean universities. According to the lecturers, the use of traditional methods provided both lecturers and students with the comfort and familiarity.

The results also showed that the lecturers did not integrate authentic

materials, task-based activities, and technology-enhanced learning into their ESP classrooms. This was due to the fact that the lecturers were not provided with specialized training for ESP instructions and there was a lack of resources. The dynamic and engaging nature of sports provides ground for incorporating innovative teaching methods, such as project-based learning, simulations, and case studies. These approaches, as advocated by Brown and Lee (2015) in their work on task-based language teaching, offer a more interactive and learner-centered experience, fostering critical thinking, collaboration, and authentic language use. By using traditional methods, lecturers provided no opportunity for students to engage in communicative activities within context of ESP for sport.

In order to provide students with the language skills necessary to thrive in the dynamic world of sports, a shift towards more engaging, communicative, and context-driven teaching practices is fundamental. This requires a joint effort from institutions to provide sufficient training and resources for ESP lecturers. Using innovative pedagogies reflect the dynamism of the field itself.

The reliance on traditional, teacher-centered methodologies such as rote memorization and translation exercises mirrors what Anthony (2018) described as a traditional method of ESP instruction that emphasizes correct language use rather than practical communication skills. While such methods may offer structure and familiarity, they do not adequately prepare students for authentic, situational use of English in sport-related contexts.

This is especially problematic when viewed through the lens of task-based language teaching (TBLT), a method supported by Brown and Lee (2015) for its capacity to foster communicative competence through authentic language use. The lack of TBLT or project-based activities at the research site suggests a mismatch between current teaching practices and best practices in ESP pedagogy. Without opportunities to engage in simulations, debates, or scenario-based tasks, students

miss the chance to develop critical thinking and collaborative skills—capabilities increasingly emphasized in the literature as essential to ESP success (Hyland, 2006).

Lack of vocabulary

The findings demonstrated that students lacked vocabulary in the field of sport. The lack of vocabulary was considered to be a barrier to effective learning. Students found it hard to understand lectures, academic texts, and even informal discussions due to unfamiliarity with sport-specific terminology. This not only had a negative impact on students' language skills and their academic performance but also on their feelings of demotivation and reduced confidence. Therefore, their engagement in classroom activities might be significantly hindered, which affects their overall learning experience.

There are a number of factors that contribute to this pervasive vocabulary gap. Firstly, sport students at a sport university in Vietnam entered ESP course without any foundation in general English. In practice, general English courses were not included in the training program of the research site. This vocabulary gap made the acquisition of specialized terms even more challenging (Chang, 2019). Secondly, traditional teaching methods that depend primarily on textbooks further worsen the issue, providing limited exposure to authentic materials such as sports journals, articles, or commentaries (Lee & Kim, 2016). In fact, through observations, the lecturers of English utilized the existing textbook and did not give students any opportunities to any new materials related to sports to motivate them. In other words, the students lacked the opportunity to encounter specialized vocabulary in context, which is essential for enriching and understanding new words and terms specific to sports.

In order to address this vocabulary gap lecturers need to move away from traditional, textbook-centric methods and use a more dynamic and needs-based approach. Conducting thorough needs analyses through

pre-assessments allows for the identification of specific vocabulary needs within different sport-related fields (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). This targeted approach ensures that instruction and materials are tailored to address the specific language demands students will face in their chosen specializations. Active learning strategies should be encouraged such as concept mapping, vocabulary notebooks, and peer teaching to promote deeper understanding and retention (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020).

Students' limited vocabulary in sport-specific English emerged as a significant barrier to learning. This is not merely an individual-level issue but a systemic one rooted in the research site's curriculum design, which does not include general English preparation. The absence of such foundational training at the research site further increases the challenges students encounter in understanding domain-specific terminology.

Moreover, relying solely on textbook materials without incorporating authentic supplementary content restricts students' exposure to vocabulary in real-life contexts. This contradicts what scholars such as Schmitt and Schmitt (2020) have found that repeated, contextual exposure is critical to effective vocabulary acquisition. The lack of digital tools, authentic language resources, and media integration highlights a missed opportunity to utilize modern educational technologies for enhancing vocabulary acquisition.

Dependence on Google Translate

Through interviews with lecturers of English teaching ESP and class observations with respect to how students dealt with reading texts and responded to different kinds of tasks, the findings revealed that most students used Google Translate. In today's digital age, instant translation tools like Google Translate seem like an advantage, especially for students learning foreign languages in specialized fields like sports. Sport students increasingly relied heavily on this technology to assist them in doing tasks assigned by the lecturers. This was done by taking

pictures of texts and having them translated into Vietnamese by using this tool.

Employing Google Translate demonstrates benefits and drawbacks. A key benefit highlighted by researchers like García and Pena (2011) is the role of Google Translate in facilitating access to specialized sport-related vocabulary. In their study on the use of translation tools, they found that students felt empowered to engage with authentic materials like sports articles and interviews, fostering comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

However, an overdependence on Google Translate can hinder deeper language acquisition. As pointed out by Chang et al. (2022) in his study on the impact of machine translation on EFL learners' writing, while students may grasp the general meaning, they often miss out cultural contexts, and the intricacies of sport-specific terminology. This superficial understanding can impede their ability to effectively communicate in authentic sporting situations. Moreover, concerns arise regarding the accuracy and reliability of machine translation, particularly in a field like sports, replete with idioms, metaphors, and colloquialisms. As highlighted by Al-Khresheh (2024) in his study on the use of Google Translate in translating sports news articles, the software often struggles with such language features, leading to inaccurate or misleading translations. This can have detrimental effects on students' understanding of coaching instructions, game strategies, and communication within a sporting context.

While Google Translate offers undeniable advantages in ESP by facilitating access to information and promoting learner autonomy, it is crucial to recognize its limitations. Overdependence can lead to a superficial understanding of the language, hinder the development of essential language skills, and potentially expose students to inaccurate translations. Lecturers must therefore guide students towards a balanced and critical approach, leveraging the benefits of machine translation while emphasizing the importance of active learning, language

exploration, and authentic engagement with the dynamic world of English for sport.

The frequent use of Google Translate reflects an educational conflict between student autonomy and meaningful learning. On one hand, as García and Pena (2011) noted, digital translation tools can enable students to access authentic texts and foster independent learning. On the other hand, excessive dependence on such tools can result in surface-level understanding and loss of the richness of real-world language, particularly in culturally and contextually rich environments like sport.

This contrast reflects Chang et al.'s (2022) warning that machine translation may hinder long-term language acquisition and communicative accuracy. While the tool may offer short-term functional benefits, its overuse can impede students' ability to understand idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and sport-specific terminology — issues also observed by Al-Khresheh (2024) in the context of sports news translation.

The findings suggest that the current ESP practices of the research site reflect essential challenges within the institution: lack of lecturer training, inadequate materials, and a mismatch between curriculum design and real-world communicative demands in sport. These issues raise the pressing need for ESP reform in higher education.

Therefore, systematic curriculum reform is essential, guided by ongoing needs analysis (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998), the inclusion of general English courses, and the integration of innovative teaching methods and materials. A shift towards learner-centered, communicative, and technology-enhanced approaches would not only improve language acquisition but also align with the dynamic and global nature of the sports industry. Institutions must take an active role in equipping lecturers with both pedagogical training and access to up-to-date resources to ensure that ESP instruction continues to adapt to students' needs while maintaining its effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For lecturers

Teaching ESP in sport can leverage technology and ChatGPT to create dynamic learning experiences. They should go beyond traditional textbooks by utilizing authentic materials like sports websites and podcasts, and leverage Learning Management Systems (LMS) platforms for interactive exercises. ChatGPT can be a valuable tool for teachers teaching ESP in sport, offering support in various areas.

Content creation and lesson planning

Generating sports-specific content: Create authentic reading passages, dialogues, listening exercises, and writing prompts based on various sports, tournaments, and athlete profiles.

Developing engaging activities: Design interactive quizzes, vocabulary games, role-playing scenarios, and debates related to sports topics.

Tailoring materials to different levels: Adapt existing materials or create new ones to cater to specific proficiency levels and learning styles.

Providing authentic resources

Accessing real-world materials: Retrieve and summarize information from sports websites, articles, and interviews, providing authentic language exposure.

Translating and explaining texts: Offer quick translations of sports-related texts and clarify the meaning of complex sentences or idioms.

Generating discussion topics: Spark classroom discussions and debates by proposing thought-provoking questions related to current events in sports.

Saving time and increasing efficiency

Automating repetitive tasks: Generate feedback on student writing, create personalized quizzes, and grade multiple-choice questions automatically.

Providing instant support: Offer on-demand assistance with grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, allowing teachers to focus on individual student needs.

Expanding teaching resources: Provide access to a vast database of information and resources related to sports and language learning.

By integrating ChatGPT strategically and thoughtfully, ESP lecturers can create more engaging and effective learning experiences for their students in the exciting world of sports. While embracing these tools, lecturers should maintain their role as facilitators, guiding discussions and focusing on essential human skills alongside technological proficiency.

For students

Aiming to excel in ESP for sports should adopt a proactive and immersive approach to language learning. Students should go beyond textbooks by engaging with authentic materials like sports news, interviews, and documentaries to enhance vocabulary and comprehension of sports-specific terminology. In addition, they need to utilize technology, including language learning apps and online dictionaries, for personalized practice and vocabulary building. Next, students might explore the potential of AI tools like ChatGPT for targeted practice and feedback on writing assignments, but use them responsibly and ethically. Furthermore, they actively participate in discussions, debates, and role-playing activities to improve fluency and confidence in communicating about sports-related topics. Finally, students should immerse themselves in the world of sports, attend live events, and engage with athletes and enthusiasts to solidify language skills in a real-world context.

For institutions

To effectively teach and learn ESP in sport, classrooms need to be equipped for engaging and interactive learning experiences. Essential

facilities include a reliable and high-speed WIFI connection to access online resources, sports streaming services, and collaborative learning platforms. A high-quality projector or large screen is crucial for displaying authentic materials like match footage, interviews, and online articles. Integrating audio-visual equipment, such as speakers and microphones, enhances listening comprehension activities and allows for interactive discussions and presentations. Comfortable seating arrangements that facilitate group work and collaboration are also essential for creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment. By investing in these technological and physical resources, institutions can create a stimulating space for students to develop their sports-specific English language skills effectively.

CONCLUSION

While the field of ESP in sport identifies the necessity to provide students with effective communication skills for the globalized sports industry, the current practices of teaching and learning at a sport university in Vietnam, to some extent, does not achieve this goal. Outdated textbooks with limited real-world application, coupled with traditional teaching methods that prioritize rote learning over authentic communication, fail to engage students and develop practical language skills. This gap is further widened by students' limited sports-specific vocabulary and over-reliance on Google Translate, hindering their ability to express themselves accurately and fluently. This situation necessitates a shift towards embracing technology, incorporating authentic materials, and promoting interactive learning experiences that equip students with the necessary language tools to thrive in the dynamic world of sports.

Limitations of the study

Although this study provides meaningful insights into the current practices and challenges of ESP instruction at the research site, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample was limited to a single institution and focused on first-year students from the three faculties

of Physical Education, Sport Management, and Sport Coaching—which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts or more advanced students. Future research should involve larger sample of lecturer and student participants and expand to other sport institutions in Vietnam. Secondly, the study relied on qualitative data which may affect the depth and objectivity of conclusions drawn. The mixed methods would be employed in the future studies to further strengthen the depth and objectivity of the findings. Finally, the study was limited to one academic semester, and therefore cannot account for longitudinal changes in ESP. Hence, longitudinal research should be conducted in the future to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the practices of teaching and learning ESP.

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