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State-of-the-art review: Revisiting the ins and outs of ESP practice

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Abstract

This review article attempts to tackle the fundamental questions in ESP practice and will also provide a methodological framework for designing and implementing ESP courses. In recent times, the ESP approach has cogently exerted its influence on language teaching practice around the world, especially in the EFL setting. This article captures the development of the ESP approach and specifically examines how ESP is differentiated from general English teaching. The ESP approach is centered on the premise that learners' needs and wants are fully addressed. A typical ESP course incorporates authentic materials, specialized linguistic resources and communicative training. ESP course development and implementation is a spiraling, cyclical progression, which is based on a set of essential curricular procedures. This article offers a concise overview of the principles and practices of the ESP approach while focusing particularly on the pedagogy.

Keywords: needs analysis, ESP: typology, pedagogy, evaluation

1 Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is specialized English language teaching that aims to develop *specific* skills of the learner in response to the needs identified or indicated by various stakeholders. The ESP approach is sometimes referred to as Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), because specific-purpose instruction can be in any language (Swales, 2000). This *specificity* includes equipping learners with 'not only knowledge of a specific part of the English language, but also competency in the skills required to use this language' (Orr, 2002, p. 1).

ESP has emerged as an influential pedagogical approach both in EFL and ESL settings (Basturkmen, 2006; Belcher, Johns & Paltridge, 2011). In present times, ESP instruction deals with a wide range of occupational and academic contexts. Furthermore, ESP learners comprise almost all adult age groups, as well as cultural, linguistic, professional and academic backgrounds. English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) are two well-established branches of the ESP approach. A substantial and growing body of literature on these areas is reshaping language instruction practices around the globe. Epistemologically, it is crucial to delineate ESP as an approach rather than a method. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), the ESP practitioner typically embraces multiple roles, such as teacher, course and materials developer, collaborator and assessor (also, Nunan, 1987; Paltridge, 2009). However, the EOP practitioner may also need to engage in business development and marketing, as well as specialized evaluation in terms of cost-benefit analysis and return on investment.

The defining attributes of ESP are widely agreed upon: that course syllabuses and teaching materials are expressly designed based on a prior analysis of the learner's communicative needs (Belcher, Johns & Paltridge, 2011; Gimenez, 2009; Munby, 1978); and that ESP focuses on learners' reasons for taking the course and their improved communicative performance in the workplace (Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991; Orr, 2002; Robinson, 1991). Although ESP courses involve learning the very same set of skills as learning general English, ESP, in addition, focuses on the acquisition of specialized lexicon and registers. However, qualms were raised that close attention to subject-specific language might result in a narrowness of instructional focus and could also create an unfounded sense of security in participants (e.g., Swales, 1990). In fact, the ESP approach does not prescribe to de-contextualized language education or employ linguistic resources in isolation; rather, instructional materials string together speech events of the professional and social discourse. This proposition implies that ESP as a subfield of ELT utilizes the same affective and cognitive principles of language teaching/learning in spite of the remarkably different focus, approach, procedure and materials. This article looks at the ESP approach in its entirety and examines some key aspects in light of current practice (or best practices).

2 Development of ESP

The evolution of ESP dates back to the post-World War II era, but over the past few decades, ESP pedagogy has been instituted distinctively within language teaching practice. ESP has dominated language instruction practices 'as a result of market forces and a greater awareness amongst the academic and business community that learners' needs and wants should be met wherever possible' (Brunton, 2009, p. 2). ESP is unique in the sense that it is offered, on the one hand, to learners for academic purposes in educational institutions, and, on the other, to experienced workers and professionals in the workplace to enhance their communication abilities (Gimenez, 2009; Hutchinson & Waters, 1989; Orr, 2002). With this curricular variation, ESP courses can be placed within an academic or a workplace context.

The development of ESP is attributed to a number of factors. The chief reason was the perceived ineffectiveness of traditional language instruction in the wake of fast specialization in the professional world during the 1960s. These traditional language instruction practices did not take into account the learners' objectives and needs (Belcher, Johns & Paltridge, 2011; Master, 1997). Hutchinson and Waters (1989) identified three key factors that led to the development of ESP. First, the second half of the 20th century brought about massive expansion in almost all spheres of human life, and thereby human activities became more specific. As a consequence, individuals' communicative needs also became *specific*. Thus, the linguistic resource for a specific communication is predictable both in academic and workplace settings (but not all concur, see Bachman,

1990 and Douglas, 2000). Second, it became obvious that English language needs vary from one context to another and those needs require specific attention. Third, developments in educational psychology laid emphasis on the centrality of learners in teaching practices. Against this backdrop, a new approach to language instruction evolved in response to new challenges and thus paved the way for the genesis of ESP.

The ESP approach burgeoned in spite of all kinds of criticism and was popularized at the same time as a bona fide branch of ELT. It brought about a radical shift in the existing approaches to language teaching because of its emphasis on learner-centeredness. However, learner-centeredness is not unique to ESP alone (Robinson, 1981). ESP courses typically cater to the needs of people, irrespective of their age, who already have some proficiency in English (but this may not be always the case). An ESP course is a redirection (or advancement) in the study of English, and as discussed previously, this objective is achieved by paying close attention to the needs of learners (Basturkmen, 2003; Gatehouse, 2001; Johns & Price-Machado, 2001). ESP practice has evolved into a spiraling protocol of standard procedures: assessing the learner's needs, selecting/developing teaching materials, implementing the teaching plan, and reflecting on the curriculum. Each standard procedure is indispensable because 'ESP is taught as a tailor-made language package to specific communities of learners with highly specialized language needs' (Orr, 2002, p. 2). Also, this spiraling or non-linear protocol distinguishes ESP programs from general English teaching.

The development of the ESP approach impacted the traditional job description of language practitioners by involving multiple skills and services that were considered outside the scope of language educators. For instance, ESP practitioners are necessarily innovative and capable of adjusting instruction to best suit the communicative needs of diverse learner groups that range from hospitality staff to air-traffic controllers (EOP) or undergraduate students to graduate medical interns (EAP). As discussed in the previous section, ESP practitioners are charged with designing customized curriculums, preparing materials, carrying out investigations/research and evaluating linguistic development (Belcher, 2006; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Practitioners perform these jobs being wholly responsible for, as well as accountable for, developing language proficiency in response to the specific needs of learners. Assessment of needs is central to the ESP approach, because ESP learners study the language to perform a specific role in the workplace or academic context, instead of studying for open-ended or unspecific objectives (Belcher, 2004; Robinson, 1981). A multiplicity of roles thus makes ESP practitioners a decisive factor in the success of the program and the learners' communicative development (Belcher, Johns, & Paltridge, 2011; Hutchinson & Waters, 1989; Swales, 1990).

3 ESP typology

ESP programs or products are designed according to the learner's reasons for learning the language and the immediate context where communication is situated. Although systems to classify ESP programs vary, the following diagram sums up a commonly used categorization (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Johns & Price-Machado, 2001; Jordan, 1997; McDonough, 1984; Qadir, 1996).

ESP	
EAP	**EOP**
English for Academic Purposes:	*English for Occupational Purposes:*
Science and technology	Road transport and aviation
Music and musicology	Business and industry
Medical studies	Entertainment sector
Social sciences	Office management
Earth sciences	Hospitality industry
Education	Technical services

Figure 1. ESP classification

This listing is by no means exhaustive and cannot be because ESP programs cater to the communication needs of learners for an array of variable and dynamic discourse practices around the world (Belcher, 2006; Swales, 2000). However, this classification is built around two primary spheres of activity, that is, educational and occupational, which also overlap to a certain degree due to their discourse features (Hutchinson & Waters 1989; Trimble, 1985). Also, in the literature, this classification is flexible in order to accommodate emerging trends and developments in ESP practices.

4 ESP programmatic characteristics

As a cardinal rule, an ESP program establishes the course objectives principally based on the *needs* of learners and stakeholders. ESP instruction is centered around, in no uncertain terms, helping learners enhance their linguistic competence for professional or academic communication. ESP course development is initiated by this guiding principle and the curricular procedures exclusively focus on authentic (or semi-authentic) communication (Basturkmen, 2006; Lee, 1995). Also, the ESP curriculum is:

> … not a particular kind of language or methodology, nor does it consist of a particular type of teaching material. Understood properly, it is an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need. The foundation of all ESP is the simple question: Why does this learner need to learn a foreign language? (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989, p. 19)

Thus, the overarching characteristics of a *true* ESP program include being needs-oriented and being related to the learner's academic or professional career. It is pertinent to mention that a language program cannot represent the ESP model unless these two characteristics are displayed in the full sense. However, a program can be an ESP-type of a varying degree, according to its proximity to the ESP approach. In other words, ESP-type programs partially observe principles and practices of the ESP approach in program design, such as ongoing needs analysis, materials development, and assessment procedures. This unique category or label represents *hybrid* programs (ESP and general English), which are not uncommon, particularly in language teaching in academic settings. Nevertheless, the creation of this category is untenable in the literature, because it is built around a deficit premise.

The ESP approach is a cognitive response to specific language development needs and can be described through absolute and variable characteristics (Dudley-Evans & St. John 1998; also Strevens, 1988). The *absolute characteristics* include meeting learners' communicative needs, using discipline- or occupation-

specific methodologies/activities, and focusing on the target linguistic resource (e.g., syntax, lexis) and communication applications (e.g., register, genre). On the other hand, *variable characteristics* are subject to change, given local demands and delimitations. For instance, an ESP program may be designed for a particular academic discipline or the teaching methodology may take a different path from general English teaching. Also, ESP programs are typically offered at higher education institutions or on site to adults who have some proficiency in the English language. *Absolute* and *variable* characteristics set a working framework for ESP programs. In the wake of debates over ESP characterization and ensuing confusion, this basic framework is quite useful.

Thus, the characteristics of ESP programs have both firm and elastic strands. Over the years, the ESP approach has witnessed a number of developments. As mentioned earlier, ESP was essentially a learner-centered approach. But now it is passing through a learning-centered phase, which focuses more on the learning process than on language application (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989; Richards, 1989). This development led to a major shift in ESP practice, that is, instead of metalinguistic knowledge, real life communication/authentic language is targeted. It may not be a realistic assumption that describing and exemplifying what people do with language will help the learner to learn it (Abrar-ul-Hassan, 2011). Thus, a growing trend in ESP methodology is understanding the language learning processes (Brunton, 2009; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998) and the application of this understanding in the curriculum.

5 ESP pedagogy

A distinguishing characteristic of ESP pedagogy, which differentiates it from general English teaching, is that it is responsive to the learner's communicative needs and is flexible to course objectives. In other words, it 'is not the existence of a need as such but rather an awareness of the need' and this 'awareness will have an influence on what will be acceptable as reasonable content in the language course and, on the positive side, what potential can be exploited' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989, p. 53). ESP pedagogy tends to be eclectic and does not subscribe to any singular approach or method of language teaching. The following five aspects of the pedagogy are examined below.

5.1 Needs analysis

In the ESP approach, needs analysis (NA) even precedes pedagogy. Although needs analysis (also known as needs assessment) plays a crucial role in designing and running language courses, it is essential for an ESP course (Gimenez, 2009; Long, 2005; Yogman & Kalayni, 1996). The three fundamental questions that direct an NA process include the intended use of language in a context, specific language skills and the target proficiency level, and the types of genres for comprehension or production (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Long, 2005; Swales, 1985). Therefore, NA provides the basis (the *what* and *how*) for an ESP course, and the curricular procedures draw upon the analysis (Belcher, 2006; Johns & Price-Machado, 2001). It is vital that the analysis be realistic and contextualized.

Needs are gaps between program goals and the learner's proficiency at that stage, which is defined with reference to communicative functions and discourse communities.

Needs or 'Target Needs' are comprised of necessities, lacks and wants (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989, p. 54). First, *necessities* are 'determined by the demands of the target situation.' This procedure involves the estimation of necessary skills required for the learner to work efficiently in the target situation. Second, *lacks* are the gaps between the target proficiency and existing proficiency of the learner. Third, *wants* are perceptions of the learners about their own needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989, pp. 55–57). A systematic NA is comprised of a diagnosis of necessities, lacks and wants, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Necessities, lacks, and wants (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989, p. 58)

	OBJECTIVE (i.e., as perceived by course designers)	**SUBJECTIVE** (i.e., as perceived by learners)
NECESSITIES	The English needed for success in Agriculture or Veterinary Studies	To reluctantly cope with a 'second-best' situation
LACKS	(Presumably) areas of English needed for Agricultural or Veterinary Studies	Means of doing Medical Studies
WANTS	To succeed in Agricultural or Veterinary Studies	To undertake Medical Studies

Although an NA can clearly inform course developers and practitioners about necessities, lacks and wants, it is far from being complete as a one-time activity at any stage of the course. In fact, it is ongoing, cyclical, or more appropriately *spiral*, because an analysis of needs is fed by emerging data and the situational analysis as the course progresses. Thus, NA is essentially a work-in-progress protocol, because needs are continually reassessed and more specific details emerge during the course.

There is no one standard NA practice, and multiple procedures are employed to gather data on learners' needs. The use of procedures may be largely determined by *feasibility*, in terms of time and resources. For instance, one key issue is the availability and accessibility of learners to interact with the assessor(s) and to take part in the NA process. A variety of methods are being used for NA, such as diagnostic tests, self-assessments, samples of learners' written and oral speech, observations, one-shot surveys, structured interviews, learner diaries, case-studies, follow-up investigations, and previous research (Jordan, 1997; Johns & Price-Machado, 2001). The most commonly employed tools for NA are questionnaires and interviews (McDonough, 1984). Like all other tools and methods, questionnaires and interviews are effective, but have their limitations, such as reliability of the questionnaire and logistical constraints in conducting interviews. Observations, on the other hand, are considered indispensable diagnostic tools to determine learners' linguistic needs (Smoak, 2003). In a nutshell, assessors should be clear about two key factors. First, prior to choosing needs analysis tools or procedures, the *types* of information required should be clearly identified. Second, the selection of an information collection instrument should be contextualized (Long, 2005). In sum, to obtain *reliable* as

well as *valid* data on learners' needs, instruments are selected according to the demands of a specific context and multiple instruments are used rather than relying on any particular one. In ESP best practices, locally-developed tools and multi-method procedures are considered effective in assessing learners' needs, because they yield relatively accurate and reliable data. Research on effective NA practices has suggested that any assessment cannot be comprehensive or exhaustive in spite of using reliable and valid tools (Belcher, Johns, & Paltridge, 2011; Molle & Prior, 2008), and NA is considered 'in need of continual reassessment' (Belcher, 2006, p. 135). This situation arises due to various factors, such as the versatility or dynamism of the target discourse community, readjustment of curricular practice during the course, and the like. Assessing needs is, in fact, an inherently complex process.

Authentic needs analysis is an emerging concept (Abrar-ul-Hassan, 2010). It triangulates data gathered from all potential sources of information or stakeholders in real-life settings. The authentic NA involves three elements: being cyclical (i.e., pre-course, on-course and post-course stages), using qualitative and quantitative data, and reaching out to *all* stakeholders (Abrar-ul-Hassan, 2010). Authentic NA aims to integrate ideas with realities (see Appendix). Thus, ESP professionals 'must use all of the tools at hand to systematically assess the needs, identities, and issues faced by learners and the language and discourses of their contexts' (Belcher, Johns & Paltridge, 2011, pp. 3–4).

5.2 Course design

ESP practice has traditionally followed an *apriori* approach in course design and development. Since its early days (i.e., the 1950s), ESP has been an adult education program and more commonly has been offered at intermediate and advanced levels (Basturkmen, 2003; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). ESP programs are characterized for being *training*, rather than their educative functions:

> ESP is essentially a training operation which seeks to provide learners with a restricted competence to enable them to cope with certain clearly defined tasks. These tasks constitute the specific purposes which the ESP course is designed to meet. (Widdowson, 1992, p. 6)

This characterization is an outline of ESP course design, which is 'the process by which the raw data about a learning need is interpreted in order to produce an integrated series of teaching-learning experiences, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989, p. 65). Course design focuses on closing the gap between existing and desired linguistic proficiency and is guided by a careful NA. The ESP course design is guided by two elements: the course design approach and the course objectives. This process can be sketched as follows:

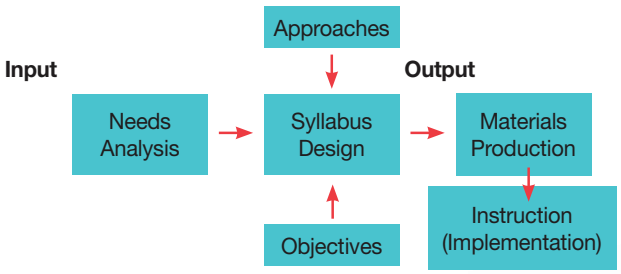

Figure 2. ESP course design approach

ESP course design practices are various and no particular one can be singled out as being the most effective. For instance, at the macro-level, ESP curricular practices have been markedly influenced by learner autonomy, content-based instruction (CBI), genre analysis and corpus-based approaches. The process employs multiple approaches according to the demands of a specific context. One approach might be more preferred than another, such as genre analysis for its relevance to developing linguistic and communicative skills of ESP learners (e.g., Bhatia, 1997; Yogman & Kalayni, 1996). Course design includes syllabus development, instructional methodology or approach and assessment procedures. Decisions on these segments of course design are made in response to the needs of diverse learner populations. Therefore, a single-approach design is untenable. It is important to dispel a common misconception that CBI is synonymous with ESP.

Over the years, ESP courses have been influenced by three approaches: language-centered, skills-centered and learning-centered (Feak, Reinhart & Sinsheimer, 2000; Hutchinson & Waters, 1989). In fact, these approaches evolved in the same order and are considered effective in their own ways. The *language-centered* approach is based on the fact that the nature of the target situation activity will determine the outlines of an ESP course. This approach is close to *genre analysis* practice (e.g., Molle & Prior, 2008; Swales, 1990). On the other hand, the *skills-centered* approach is not focused on visible performance, but on the underlying competence to be gained by the learners. This competence is based on a hypothesis that 'underlying any language behaviour are certain skills and strategies, which the learner uses in order to produce or comprehend discourse' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989, p. 69). Furthermore, the *learning-centered* approach goes beyond the competence that enables someone to perform a communicative act. In other words, this approach places emphasis on the process rather than the product. The *learning-centered* approach takes into account the language learning process and learners' effort at every stage of the course and is akin to the student-centered approach, which focuses on the learner.

The approach to course design is realized in the form of a syllabus, which spells out (either in terms of temporal chunks or curricular transitions) what is to be learnt. The prime objective of a syllabus is to break down vastly stretched knowledge into manageable units (Nunan, 1988). The syllabus therefore is a statement of purpose in the anticipated sequence of the learning process. The ESP syllabus is inherently realistic because it is needs-driven (and flexible) due to its alignment with learners' needs and wants. Language learning in general is complex and the teaching-learning process cannot be intuitively outlined. Thus, a certain degree of adaptability as well as flexibility in the syllabus is required (Basturkmen, 2003). According to Nunan (1988), an ESP syllabus designer would equally focus on 'language functions' as well as on 'the subject matter through which the language is taught' (p. 11). This view of syllabus design is among the factors responsible for the emergence of ESP. Although the syllabus is based on the outcome of needs analysis, the syllabus should have a built-in mechanism to accommodate emerging challenges and undiscovered realities. This principle seems valid for all kinds of syllabuses, but it is particularly relevant to ESP courses.

5.3 Materials development

Materials development is a particular feature of ESP courses, because one-size-fits-all materials are not commonly used in

ESP practice. However, owing to time constraints, many ESP instructors do not involve themselves in NA and materials selection and development (Gatehouse, 2001). Shortage of time and a lack of expertise are common factors that lead to reliance on commercially published materials, especially in resource-challenged contexts. It is not unusual that institutions utilize off-the-shelf materials that are deemed suitable for the target discourse communities. These materials include online and paper versions of teaching materials in a range of fields, such as aviation, economics, medicine, law and the like.
Also, it is not atypical that ESP practitioners are charged with adapting or developing materials in the face of tight constraints. Materials development in ESP practices does not necessarily involve writing a great deal of new materials. Over the years, commercially produced ESP materials have proliferated and have been widely used, especially in pre-service courses. However, these materials cannot address the *specificity* in an ESP course.
The use of authentic materials is consistently emphasized in ESP practices (e.g., Corbett, 2003; Harwood, 2005; Master, 1997; Robinson, 1991). Although what is *authentic* is interpreted differently (Belcher, 2006; Feak, Reinhart & Sinsheimer, 2000). A well-known explication of this construct does exist, that is, any materials are authentic, provided they were not prepared or developed for language teaching purposes (Lee, 1995; Nunan, 1985; van Lier, 1996). For practical purposes, teaching materials can be classified as *authentic*, *semi-authentic* and *pseudo-authentic* along a continuum. Authentic, in the real sense of the word, signifies materials, as mentioned before, that were not prepared for instructional purposes. Once an authentic material is adapted to a certain extent for mitigating linguistic difficulty level or resizing for pedagogical purpose, it is semi-authentic. If materials are developed to fit the mold of target discourse features, these are pseudo-authentic materials in content and form. Simulated materials or activities also fall into this class. Thus, the degree of authenticity in materials development can be determined using a continuum approach.
Both authentic and semi-authentic materials are in use, because classroom language does not fully incorporate the discourse features of target communication practice (Lee, 1995; van Lier, 1996). The starting point of materials development is the gathering of authentic data (Swales, 2000; Robinson, 1981). Two approaches are prevalent in materials selection: the wide approach and the narrow approach. The *wide* approach (Benesch, 2001; Hirvela, 1998) rests on the 2,000-word common core lexicon (Coxhead & Nation, 2001). According to this approach, any teaching materials will be suitable in ESP programs that cover this lexical range. On the other hand, the *narrow* approach emphasizes the relevance of materials to the area of activity (i.e., professional/academic) of the learners. Consequently, the materials will interest the learners and will enhance their motivation (e.g., Belcher, 2006). However, 'Reading and writing about a profession is not the same as reading or writing texts actually used in that profession' (Smoak, 2003, p. 23). In fact, materials development should not be directed by the perception of ESP practitioners about the target communicative practices and should entail analyses of the lexicogrammatical aspects and genre functions in a particular context. The four basic precepts in ESP materials development are: suitability for the proficiency level, relevance to learners' needs, creativity in tasks/activities and discursive strategies, and stimulation of the target speech acts. Some overarching characteristics of instructional materials are that they 'do not teach', but facilitate the learning process; present 'a clear and coherent unit structure'; are in consonance with pedagogical approaches; and offer problem-solving tasks, as well as lay down models for language use (Harwood, 2005; Hutchinson & Waters, 1989, pp. 107–108). These principles establish a macro-level framework for materials development, but ESP practitioners need to make adjustments for 'appropriate *contextual realization*' (Jolly & Bolitho, 1998, p. 92, original emphasis) in process and products of materials development.

5.4 Instructional procedure

Instruction in virtual or physical space is the penultimate stage in the ESP curriculum. Although ESP curricular procedures are elastic and continually informed by emerging needs, instruction takes place within time and resource limitations. Also, as previously mentioned, ESP does not espouse any particular teaching methodology (e.g., Hutchinson & Waters, 1989; McDonough, 1984). At the curriculum implementation stage, ESP and general English interface with each other a great deal. In fact, the selection of the pedagogical approach is related to a teaching-learning context. Regarding pedagogical choices in language teaching, Brown (2001) proposes an 'enlightened, eclectic' approach, which entails thinking 'in terms of a number of possible methodological options at your disposal for tailoring classes to particular contexts' (p. 40). Therefore, this *eclecticism* best describes the ESP pedagogy.
One common challenge that confronts ESP practitioners head-on is the content area of learners' professional or academic discourse (e.g., Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Feak & Reinhart, 2002). It has long been debated whether practitioners can deal with a broad array of disciplinary content (e.g., medicine, economics, agriculture, management sciences, and others). It is widely agreed that ESP practitioners, who are language educators per se, cannot be content specialists. However, a working knowledge of the target subject or a thorough orientation is desirable. In some cases, 'dual professionalism', that is being trained or educated in the content area and language instruction, is an added advantage to practitioners (Belcher, 2006, p. 140). ESP practitioners' professional skills play a decisive role in the success of an ESP course, because ESP pedagogy is multidimensional, as discussed in the preceding sections. Since ESP instructional approaches have evolved to the *learning-centered* method, it is pertinent to identify its core principles. In essence, this is a process approach, as opposed to a product approach. Language learning is a 'development process, an active process, a decision-making process, an emotional experience, and is to a large extent incidental' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989, pp. 128–130). Furthermore, in spite of the *specificity* of the ESP approach, practitioners interact with a human audience in an on-site or off-site setting, and thus, a number of social and behavioral variables (i.e., unforeseen factors) affect the course dynamics. In sum, instruction will be considered effective if stakeholders' satisfaction is attained and learners' needs are met (against all odds).

5.5 Assessment

The guiding principle of assessment in ESP pedagogy is gathering evidence to understand the effectiveness of the course in terms of the skill enhancement of learners. Traditional

in-class tests in ESP courses are not always a requisite for qualification or indicator of achievement (see Bachman, 1990; Douglas, 2000; Feak & Reinhart, 2002). More specifically, tests are a form of feedback to the practitioners, learners and other stakeholders. As a good practice, assessment is performed by a battery of tests, rather than any one testing event, and includes both formative as well as summative assessment tasks. Although assessment, especially testing, is a widespread procedure in the educational settings, it is carried out differently in ESP courses. For instance, 'ESP is accountable teaching' and all the stakeholders seek to find out the outcome of both their input efforts and their financial investment (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989, p. 144). That is why a comprehensive assessment (or ideally *360-degree*) is advantageous in providing the required evidence, rather than single-shot test(s). Thus, assessment in ESP practices is multifaceted in its objectives, as well as in instrumentation. These objectives, which are non-linear and discrete, include placing the learners in appropriate groups, diagnosing linguistic problems, measuring the learning achievement, determining language level, selecting the learner (for a particular position) according to language level, and fulfilling examination requirements (McDonough, 1984). The following table summarizes a battery of tests and their specific objectives that are typically utilized in ESP assessment procedures:

Table 2. ESP tests and objectives

Test	Objectives
Placement	To group learners according to their linguistic proficiency
Diagnostic	To diagnose learners' academic/ linguistic problems
Achievement	To find out what objectives have been achieved during the course
Proficiency	To assess linguistic proficiency in general terms or in relation to specific communicative functions
Survey (questionnaire/oral interview)	• To what extent an ESP course meets the needs of students as language learners and users • To conduct needs analysis, assess spoken proficiency, or analyze any curricular issue

Assessment adopts multiple forms, and should also include learner input, such as documenting and analyzing learners' responses to the course.

Assessment, in general, takes place at three levels. First, learners' performance in the course at any given point in time is measured using psychometric techniques. This performance is assessed in two domains: *communicative language ability* and *specific language ability* (Douglas, 2000). Second, extensive feedback is a major segment of ESP assessment, which includes learners' responses to the courses, instructors' feedback on learners' written or oral tasks, and other stakeholders' degree of satisfaction. Third, analysis is conducted in response to emerging needs, problems that crop up, compatibility of goals with needs, washback effect and other such issues. ESP assessment is a holistic analysis of the curricular practice, and contrary to traditional educational practices, it is not focused on the learner alone. Each act of assessment, therefore, has a specific objective and discrete procedures, and the results or outcomes are interpreted holistically. Three focus-areas of ESP assessment are described as follows:

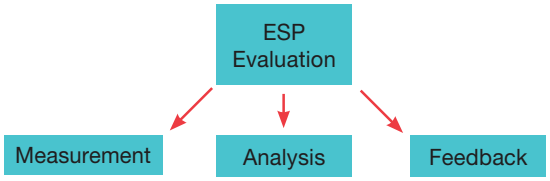

Figure 3. Subdivision of ESP assessment

It is worth mentioning that, in ESP assessment, good 'test tasks and content are authentically representative of tasks in target situation' (Douglas, 2000, p. 19). This assessment design is in conformity with the context-specific discourse approach in ESP practice.

6 Conclusion

An ESP program is an ongoing, spiraling protocol that is essentially 'purpose-driven and problem-solving' (Belcher, 2006, p. 135) from beginning to end. This article aimed to offer a conceptual understanding of various key elements of the ESP approach in the wake of some prevailing confusion about central precepts and the curricular essentials. This confusion arises because the interpretation of ESP sometimes varies, since the ESP approach is offered in a wide variety of settings in the world. ESP emerged as a consequence of discontent with general-purpose English language teaching, which proved insufficient for language development in an age of specialized human communication. Therefore, ESP programs cannot afford to be general-purpose instructional products. The key to success in such courses is conceptualizing and implementing the core principles of the ESP approach. A thorough orientation of practitioners into ESP essentials and best practices is imperative for the effectiveness of pedagogically sound courses. In sum, ESP courses are characterized by needs-based and evidence-based curricular decisions and aimed at fulfilling specific communicative objectives, rather than being driven by instructors' intuitive ideas or a hypothesized curriculum. Furthermore, a distinction should be drawn between (*true*) ESP as well as ESP-type courses. The latter embrace the ESP theory partially in design and/or practice, and such types of ESP programs are not uncommon. It goes without saying that ESP is grounded in a well-defined territory in terms of theory and practice.

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Appendix

Authentic NA *triangulates* data gathered from all potential sources of information/stakeholders in real-life settings. It is cyclical (i.e., three stages), a multi-channel approach (i.e., qual-quan data) to data acquisition, and ensures that no stakeholder is left behind.

Stage 1 (Pre-course): Sets the scene
Preliminary discussions
Field observations
Situational analyses (interviews, surveys)
Baseline investigations (needs, wants, challenges)
Corpus analyses
Stakeholder round tables
Language skill assessments

Stage 2 (On-course): Pilots the product
Classroom observations
Continued assessments
Learner feedback
Practitioners' reflections
Program meetings
Material reviews
Learners' products (writing, speech samples)

Stage 3 (Post-course): Finely hones the product
Data triangulation (NA Cycle stage 1 and 2)
Revisiting needs and wants
Course evaluation
Learner communication performance review
Learner self-assessment
Additional need-based procedure
(Abrar-ul-Hassan, 2010)