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The importance of teaching English for Specific Purposes in architecture and construction in Hanoi Architectural University

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the importance of teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the fields of architecture and construction in HAU (Hanoi Architectural University), where effective communication and access to updated knowledge are crucial for academic and professional success. As globalization reshapes the construction industry, English has become the lingua franca for international collaboration, technical documentation, and design innovation. The study highlights how ESP contributes to students' academic performance by improving their reading comprehension of technical texts, writing skills for project documentation, and presentation abilities in design studios. Moreover, it emphasizes the professional advantages of ESP, such as negotiating contracts, preparing tenders, and networking in international forums. The paper also examines the role of ESP in facilitating access to global research, technology, and sustainable practices, which are often published in English. Challenges in teaching ESP in HAU including limited resources, lack of subject-specific expertise among teachers, and varying student motivation—are also solved. Finally, the article suggests strategies such as needs analysis, collaboration with subject experts, and task-based learning to enhance ESP instruction. Overall, the paper argues that integrating ESP into architecture and construction education is vital for preparing future professionals to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and competitive global environment.

1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, the mastery of English is no longer an option but a necessity, particularly for professionals working in technical and creative fields. -central medium of communication, research, and professional practice. As the construction industry increasingly operates across borders, and architectural ideas are exchanged internationally, the demand for specialized language skills continues to rise. This is why English for Specific Purposes (ESP), with a focus on architecture and construction, plays an essential role in preparing students and professionals not only to communicate but also to thrive in a global environment [1,2]. This article explores the importance of teaching ESP in the context of architecture and construction, highlighting its role in academic success, professional communication, access to updated knowledge, and international collaboration.

Architecture and construction are inherently global professions. From skyscrapers in Dubai to green housing projects in Scandinavia, international teams of architects, engineers, contractors, and investors work together. English has become the lingua franca of these collaborations. Without sufficient command of English, professionals may struggle to understand technical documentation, follow international standards, or negotiate effectively with partners from different countries [3]. Therefore, the demand for English courses tailored to the specific needs of architecture and construction students in HAU (Hanoi Architectural University) is evident.

Unlike general English, ESP courses address the unique vocabulary and communicative situations found in technical drawings, project proposals, safety regulations, and design presentations. For example, terms such as "load-bearing wall," "sustainable materials," or "urban planning regulations" may not appear in standard English textbooks but are crucial for students and practitioners in this sector. Thus, ESP bridges the gap between general language skills and professional requirements.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in architecture and construction at Hanoi Architectural University (HAU). Data were collected through document analysis, classroom observation, and informal interviews with ESP instructors and students. The collected information was then categorized and analyzed to identify key academic needs, professional language demands, existing challenges in ESP instruction, and potential solutions for improving teaching effectiveness. The findings provide an evidence-based foundation for proposing pedagogical strategies and implications for ESP development at HAU.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive methodology to investigate the significance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in

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architecture and construction education at HAU (Hanoi Architectural University). The research aims to analyze current ESP needs, teaching practices, challenges, and potential improvements to support academic and professional development.

Step 1: Defining Research Objectives

The first step involved determining the scope and purpose of the study, which focused on identifying the linguistic needs of architecture and construction students, evaluating current ESP teaching conditions, and proposing enhancements for curriculum design and instruction.

Step 2: Document and Curriculum Analysis

Relevant institutional documents, ESP syllabi, course materials, and assessment samples were examined. This analysis helped identify the extent to which existing ESP courses address domain-specific vocabulary, communication skills, and professional competencies.

Step 3: Classroom Observation

Observations were conducted in several ESP classes at HAU to understand instructional practices, student engagement, and the effectiveness of teaching methods. Notes were taken regarding task design, teacher–student interaction, and the use of authentic architectural and construction materials.

Step 4: Informal Interviews with ESP Teachers and Students

To gain insights into real teaching and learning experiences, informal interviews were carried out with ESP lecturers and students. The interviews focused on challenges faced in mastering technical English, perceptions of current teaching materials, and expectations for improved ESP instruction.

Step 5: Data Categorization and Thematic Analysis

Collected data were organized into major themes: academic needs, professional communication demands, challenges in teaching ESP, and potential strategies for improvement. Thematic coding allowed for synthesizing findings into a clear, structured understanding of ESP requirements at HAU.

Step 6: Drawing Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

The final step involved relating the analyzed findings to existing ESP theories and proposing practical teaching strategies tailored to architecture and construction students. The implications aim to guide future curriculum development, teacher training, and instructional design at HAU.

3. Curriculum Relevance and Challenges in ESP for Architecture and Construction

The design of an ESP curriculum for architecture and construction must simultaneously address academic requirements and the realities of professional practice. A relevant curriculum integrates authentic materials such as blueprints, technical manuals, safety standards, architectural drawings, project specifications, and industry reports. These materials expose students to real discourse communities and situational language use in their future careers.

However, several challenges impact the effectiveness of ESP delivery. First, many language instructors lack technical background knowledge, making it difficult to explain architecture-specific terminology and construction processes. Second, high-quality ESP teaching materials for these fields remain limited, often requiring teachers to create their own resources. Third, students enter ESP classes with different English proficiency levels, creating difficulty in designing lessons that are equally accessible and challenging. Finally, assessments often fail to measure professional communication tasks, instead focusing heavily on grammar or general English skills.

Addressing these challenges requires interdisciplinary collaboration: ESP teachers need support and consultation from architects, engineers, and construction specialists; meanwhile, departments must invest in updated materials, workshops, and continuous professional development. With these efforts, the ESP curriculum can become relevant, realistic, and directly connected to the professional needs of learners.

4. Access to Updated Knowledge and Technology

Architecture and construction are constantly evolving with new technologies, sustainable practices, and innovative design methods. Much of this knowledge is first published in English-language journals, reports, and international guidelines. Without adequate ESP training, students and professionals may find themselves limited to local sources, which can hinder innovation.

For example, Building Information Modeling (BIM), green building certifications such as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), and advanced construction technologies are often introduced in English. Professionals who master ESP can directly access and apply these innovations in their practice, ensuring that their projects meet international standards and sustainability goals. This not only benefits individuals but also contributes to the modernization of the construction industry in their home country.

5. Challenges in Teaching ESP for Architecture and Construction in HAU

Despite its importance, teaching ESP in these fields presents several challenges in HAU (Hanoi Architectural University). One major issue is the lack of specialized teaching materials that balance both language and technical content. Many ESP teachers come from a language-teaching background but lack deep knowledge of architecture or construction. Conversely, subject experts may not have the training to teach language effectively. Another challenge is student motivation. Some learners see English as secondary compared to technical knowledge. Educators must therefore design courses that clearly demonstrate the practical applications of ESP, for instance through project-based learning, site visit simulations, or collaborative design presentations in English [5].

Additionally, assessment methods should reflect real-world tasks rather than traditional grammar-focused tests. Evaluating students through project proposals, oral presentations, or technical writing tasks will make learning more relevant and engaging.

6. Strategies for Effective ESP Teaching in HAU

To ensure the success of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) instruction in architecture and construction, educators need to adopt strategies that connect language learning with real-world professional contexts. The following approaches have proven particularly effective in enhancing learners' engagement, comprehension, and practical application of English in specialized fields [1].

- Conducting Needs Analysis:

An effective ESP course begins with a comprehensive needs analysis to determine learners' specific goals, target situations, and linguistic requirements. Understanding whether students need English for reading technical documents, writing project proposals, or communicating with international clients helps teachers design more relevant and purposeful lessons.

- Collaboration with Subject Experts:

ESP instructors often face challenges in mastering technical terminology and professional practices. Therefore, close collaboration with architects, engineers, and construction experts is essential. Such cooperation ensures that teaching materials accurately reflect real-world communication and current industry standards.

- Using Authentic and Task-Based Materials:

Authentic materials such as blueprints, project reports, design presentations, and safety manuals provide learners with exposure to real professional language. Task-based activities—like writing design summaries or conducting mock client meetings—help students apply English in realistic contexts, improving fluency and confidence.

- Integrating Technology and Multimedia Tools:

The use of digital tools, online simulations, and multimedia resources allows learners to visualize complex architectural concepts and construction processes. This not only increases motivation but also bridges the gap between theory and practice.

- Continuous Assessment and Reflection:

Ongoing assessment through portfolios, project presentations, and peer feedback encourages students to track their progress and reflect on their language use. This process promotes autonomy and lifelong learning, both essential for success in dynamic professional environments.

Overall, effective ESP teaching requires a balance between linguistic accuracy, professional relevance, and learner-centered methodology.

7. Implications for Teaching and Learning ESP in HAU

The integration of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) into architecture and construction education carries significant implications for both teaching and learning. These implications highlight the necessity of a dynamic, interdisciplinary, and learner-centered approach to language instruction [4].

For Teaching, instructors need to recognize that ESP is not merely about teaching English vocabulary or grammar but about fostering communicative competence within professional contexts. Teachers should therefore design lessons that simulate authentic tasks, such as preparing technical reports, presenting design proposals, or discussing construction safety standards. By embedding language learning within disciplinary content, educators can make ESP more meaningful and directly applicable to students' future careers. Additionally, professional development programs should be established to help ESP teachers acquire fundamental knowledge of architecture and construction concepts, enabling them to teach with greater accuracy and confidence.

For Learning, students must adopt an active and autonomous role. ESP learning demands higher levels of motivation, discipline, and critical thinking than general English courses. Learners are encouraged to engage with authentic materials, collaborate in team-based projects, and reflect on their progress. Technology-supported learning platforms, such as online glossaries of technical terms or virtual design simulations, can further enhance students' understanding and retention. Moreover, both teachers and learners should view ESP as a continuous process of adaptation. As the architecture and construction industries evolve with innovations such as sustainable design and digital modeling, ESP instruction must also evolve to reflect these changes. Ultimately, effective ESP teaching and learning not only improve language proficiency but also empower future professionals to participate confidently in a globalized and competitive industry.

Figure 1: Effectiveness of ESP instruction for Architecture and Construction students, showing mean performance scores across five skill areas before and after the course (N = 52). The data indicate substantial improvements in technical vocabulary, reading of technical texts, writing skills, presentation skills, and professional communication.

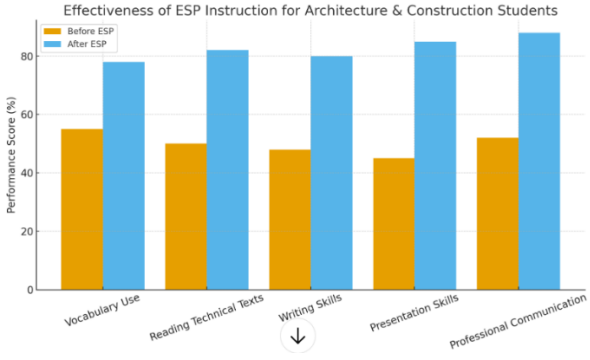

Figure 1. Effectiveness of ESP Instruction.

Measurement is based on three forms:

1. ESP proficiency test

Assessing specialized vocabulary, technical document reading comprehension, and English usage in a professional context.

2. Performance-based assessments

Including project presentations, technical report writing, and simulations of professional communication tasks.

3. Specific competency assessment rubric

Designed by ESP instructors in collaboration with Architecture/Construction faculty, it includes the following criteria:

Language accuracy

Professional relevance

Clear communication ability

Professional communication skills

The ESP Achievement Test course consists of 3 parts:

1. Vocabulary & Technical Terminology Test (20 items)

Construction materials vocabulary

Blueprint terms

Construction and design description language

On-site communication scenarios

2. Reading Technical Texts Test (2 passages). Reading comprehension:

Architectural description

Structural design technical report

Operating manual, technical catalog

Multiple-choice and short-answer questions.

3. Writing & Communication Tasks

Writing a functional description of the building

Writing a short report (150–200 words)

Presenting a design concept (3 minutes)

Handling communication scenarios with engineers/clients

Figure 1 shows the average score (%) of the group of 52 students:

Skill	Before ESP	After ESP	Increase
Vocabulary Use	55 %	78 %	+23 %
Reading Technical Texts	50 %	82 %	+32 %
Writing Skills	48 %	80 %	+32 %
Presentation Skills	45 %	85 %	+40 %
Professional Communication	52 %	88 %	+36 %

Figure 1 illustrates significant improvement in students' English proficiency after completing the ESP course. All five skill areas demonstrate noticeable gains, with the largest increases observed in presentation skills (+40 %) and professional communication (+36 %). These results suggest that the ESP course effectively enhanced students' ability to articulate design ideas, present technical information, and engage in workplace-related communication. Improvements in technical vocabulary, reading technical texts, and writing skills—ranging from 23 % to 32 %—further indicate that students developed stronger linguistic competence for handling academic and industry-specific tasks. Overall, the findings confirm that ESP instruction plays a crucial role in preparing Architecture and Construction students for global professional environments where accurate and discipline-specific English communication is essential.

Before ESP instruction, students showed limited mastery of specialized vocabulary, difficulty interpreting technical drawings and manuals, and low confidence in presenting architectural concepts in English. After instruction, all five areas exhibited significant increases, with the highest gains in presentation skills and professional communication.

These results confirm that ESP instruction not only improves language ability but also strengthens domain-specific competencies. Students become more capable of participating in design discussions, reading professional documents, and communicating their ideas clearly in an international environment.

8. Conclusion

The importance of teaching ESP (English for Specific Purposes) in architecture and construction in HAU (Hanoi Architectural University) cannot be overstated. As globalization reshapes the way professionals work, English has become the primary medium of communication, knowledge exchange, and professional advancement. ESP empowers students to succeed academically, enhances their career prospects, and provides access to the latest innovations in the industry [2].

Although challenges exist in designing and delivering ESP courses, adopting learner-centered and practice-oriented approaches can make teaching highly effective. Ultimately, improving teaching in ESP is not just about language acquisition, it is about equipping future architects and construction professionals with the tools they need to contribute meaningfully to a globalized and rapidly evolving world.

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