



***ESP LEARNING CHALLENGES FACED BY MIDWIFERY STUDENTS
AT UNIVERSITY OF MALAHAYATI***

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Abstract

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is essential for midwifery students' academic and professional communication, yet many students experience learning difficulties. This research aimed to identify challenges in ESP learning and determine the most dominant factors. A descriptive quantitative design was employed involving 36 midwifery students at the University of Malahayati. Data were collected using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire. The findings revealed that linguistic factors, particularly limited medical vocabulary, were the most significant challenges, followed by psychological, cognitive, and pedagogical-historical factors. These results indicate that ESP learning challenges are multidimensional and interconnected.

Keywords: *English for Specific Purposes, ESP Challenges, Language Learning Medical English, Midwifery Students*

INTRODUCTION

English has an essential role as a communication tool because it is an international language, which can offer a chance to help future development. According to Hutchison and Waters (1987), language learning must be customized to the needs of the students. In order to prepare students with specific academic and professional communication, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is necessary. ESP is essential for healthcare education considering students need to understand clinical discourse, medical terminology, and professional documents in English. Basturkmen (2019) states that a successful ESP lesson significantly improves students' academic performance and prepares them for work, especially in the medical and health sectors.



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Despite the importance of ESP, many healthcare students experience substantial difficulties in mastering ESP. English has been becoming the most used language in global medical communication. Hyland & Wong (2019) state that most scientific journals, clinical guidelines, and evidence-based medical resources are published in English, which means healthcare workers will never be able to avoid English. For midwifery students, having limited English competence can hinder them in acquiring medical knowledge and actively participate in international medical conversations.

According to Anthony (2018), the goals and focus of ESP and General English are different. While General English emphasizes everyday communication, ESP prioritizes language use in specific professional contexts. However, Atai & Nazari (2019) state that many students have difficulties when transitioning from General English to ESP due to limited linguistic foundations, like medical vocabularies, and insufficient exposure to specialized discourse.

Numerous researches have reported that difficulties on vocabularies are the most significant barriers in ESP learning. In ESP for health contexts, students often struggle with specific vocabularies in ESP, which negatively affects comprehension and communication (Lei & Liu, 2016; Nguyen & Nation, 2018). These problems commonly reduce students' confidence and limited classroom participation.

Another major issue is the dissimilarity between ESP course objectives and students' language competence. Basturkmen (2019) states that ESP courses are designed to set up students with language skills which are relevant to their professions; however, many students fail to meet expected learning outcomes due to inadequate preparation and ineffective pedagogical approaches. This gap shows that ESP instruction may not sufficiently facilitate students' readiness levels.

Furthermore, challenges faced besides students' language problems, which is also an important factor, is anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence. Shao, Pekrun, & Nicholson (2019) state that research in applied linguistics consistently shows that anxiety and negative emotions can significantly hinder the language learning process and student engagement.

Even though ESP research has expanded considerably over the past decade, studies that specifically explore midwifery students' perspectives remain limited. Most ESP

studies focus on curriculum development, needs analysis, or instructors' viewpoints, while students' voices are less frequently examined (Anthony, 2018; Basturkmen, 2019).

Moreover, Many researchers often discuss linguistic challenges without sufficiently integrating affective and psychological dimensions into the learning process. Dornyei & Ryan (2015) state that new research on language learning emphasizes that linguistic competence and affective factors relate and influence learning outcomes closely and cooperatively . Therefore, factual research which combines linguistic and affective perspectives is needed to understand the challenges of learning English for Specific Purposes among midwifery students better.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on midwifery students' perspectives on ESP learning challenges by integrating linguistic, psychological, cognitive, and pedagogical–historical factor within a single quantitative framework. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize linguistic or curriculum-related issues, this research highlights the interconnected nature of multiple factors influencing ESP learning among healthcare students, particularly in the context of midwifery education.

Based on the issues discussed above, this research addresses the following research questions:

1. What challenges do midwifery students face in learning English for Specific Purposes?
2. Which factors most significantly hinder their ESP learning?

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a descriptive quantitative research design to find out the challenges faced by midwifery students in learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Creswell & Creswell (2018) state that descriptive quantitative research aims to describe phenomena systematically as they naturally occur through numerical data. This design was considered appropriate because the research focused on identifying and categorizing perceived barriers rather than examining causal relationships. In ESP research, descriptive quantitative approaches are commonly used to find out students' perceptions, needs, and difficulties, particularly when investigating language-related and affective factors (Basturkmen, 2010).

The participation of this research consisted of 36 midwifery students enrolled in ESP course at University of Malahayati. Since the total number of students was relatively small, the researcher used total population sampling to apply. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), total sampling is appropriate when the population size is manageable and the researcher intends to include all members to avoid sampling bias and ensure data representativeness. The participants had previously completed General English course in previous semesters, making them suitable respondents for evaluating ESP-specific learning challenges.

The main instrument used in this research was a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of twenty close-ended statements, measured using a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree), to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was designed to measure linguistic, psychological, cognitive, and pedagogical and historical factors. All questionnaire items were written in clear and accessible language to ensure content clarity and students' comprehension.

In conducting this research, the researcher need a technique to collect the data. The data were collected through questionnaire during regular class sessions. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 36 students during class sessions. Before completing the questionnaire, the researcher informed participants about the purpose of the research and confirmed that their responses would be kept confidential and anonymous. No personal information was collected, and all data were used solely for academic research purposes. These procedures were conducted in accordance with standard ethical guidelines in educational research (Cohen et al., 2018).

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. The descriptive statistics are appropriate for summarizing Likert-scale data and identifying patterns in respondents' perceptions (Pallant, 2020). To determine the most dominant barriers in ESP learning, mean scores across the four domains were compared. Higher mean scores indicated stronger perceived challenges. The results were categorized based on dominant factors and presented in tables to facilitate clarity and interpretation in relation to the research questions.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The result of the questionnaire shows that midwifery students experience multiple and interrelated challenges in learning English for Specific Purposes. As shown in table 1 to 4, all four factors recorded moderate to high mean scores. It shows that ESP learning is not just caused by a single factor, but rather by a combination of linguistic, psychological, cognitive, and pedagogical and historical factors.

Among the four factors, linguistic factors became the most dominant challenge, with the highest mean score of 3.93, followed by pedagogical and historical factor, 3.57, cognitive factor, 3.56, and psychological factor, 3.53. The findings have clearly answered the second research question by showing that limited ESP vocabulary and difficulties with specialized medical language represent the most significant obstacle for students in learning ESP.

Linguistic Factors

Table 1 Linguistic Factors

Item	SD		D		N		A		SA		Mean
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
Medical Vocabulary is difficult	1	2.8	2	5.6	4	11.1	17	47.2	12	33.3	4.03
ESP Vocab harder than General English	1	2.8	3	8.3	5	13.9	15	41.7	12	33.3	3.94
Difficulty remembering ESP vocab	2	5.6	3	8.3	6	16.7	14	38.9	11	30.6	3.81
Limited vocab affects reading	1	2.8	2	5.6	4	11.1	16	44.4	13	36.1	4.06
Confused in speaking/writing	2	5.6	3	8.3	5	13.9	15	41.7	11	30.6	3.83
Linguistic Mean Score											3.93

The results of table 1 show that linguistic factors, especially ESP vocabulary, are a major challenge for midwifery students. The overall mean score on linguistic factors shows 3.93 which indicates a high level of difficulty. Most students agreed that limited ESP vocabulary affects their understanding of reading texts. This item had the highest mean score, 4.06, showing that vocabulary limitations strongly influence reading comprehension. Similarly, many students reported that medical and midwifery vocabulary is difficult to

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understand, 4.03. Students also perceived ESP vocabulary as more difficult than General English , 3.94. In addition, difficulties in remembering ESP vocabulary, 3.81, and using ESP terms in speaking and writing, 3.83, were commonly reported. Overall, these findings indicate that limited vocabulary and difficulty understanding specialized terms are key linguistic challenges in learning ESP for midwifery students.

Psychological Factors

Table 2 Psychological Factors

Item	SD		D		N		A		SA		Mean
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
Anxiety when speaking	2	5.6	4	11.1	5	13.9	15	41.7	10	27.7	3.75
Fear of mistakes	1	2.8	3	8.3	6	16.7	14	38.9	12	33.3	3.92
Fear reduces confidence	2	5.6	4	11.1	5	13.9	14	38.9	11	30.6	3.78
Stress with ESP assignments	2	5.6	5	13.9	6	16.7	13	36.1	10	27.7	3.67
Low Motivation	3	8.3	5	13.9	6	16.7	14	38.9	8	22.2	3.53
Psychological Mean Score											3.53

As shown in table 2, psychological factors have a mean score of 3.53 indicating a moderate level. It means that this factor has been becoming a moderate challenge for midwifery students in learning ESP. The highest mean score was found in fear of making mistakes, 3.92, which indicates many students felt anxious when using English in medical contexts. Anxiety when speaking English, 3.75, and reduced confidence due to fear of errors, 3.78, were also noted. In addition, students experienced stress when completing ESP assignments, 3.67, and showed relatively low motivation to learn ESP, 3.53. These results suggest that anxiety and fear significantly affect students' emotional readiness to engage in ESP learning.

Cognitive Factors

Table 3 Psychological Factors

Item	SD		D		N		A		SA		Mean
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
ESP is difficult	2	5.6	4	11.1	6	16.7	15	41.7	9	25.0	3.69
Discourages before class	3	8.3	5	13.9	7	19.4	13	36.1	8	22.2	3.50
Ability not sufficient	2	5.6	4	11.1	7	19.4	14	38.9	9	25.0	3.67
ESP harder than	3	8.3	5	13.9	6	16.7	14	38.9	8	22.2	3.53

other subjects											
Doubt	3	8.3	6	16.7	7	19.4	13	36.1	7	19.4	3.42
Improvement											
Cognitive Mean Score											3.56

Table 3 shows that a mean score of cognitive factors is 3.69. It means that this factor is considered a moderate challenge. Many students perceived ESP as a difficult subject which is proved with a mean score of 3.69. Moreover, feeling that their English skills are insufficient to master ESP was 3.67. Some students also have Feelings of discouragement before ESP classes which was approved by the mean score of 3.50. ESP is also seen harder than other subjects, 3.53, although the average score for doubts about improvement was lower, 3.42. These findings suggest that students’ belief and perception regarding EPS difficulty negatively affect their confidence and engagement in the learning process.

Pedagogical and Historical Factors

Table 4 Pedagogical and Historical Factors

Item	SD		D		N		A		SA		Mean
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
Negative past experiences	2	5.6	4	11.1	6	16.7	15	41.7	9	25.0	3.69
Harsh correction	3	8.3	5	13.9	6	16.7	14	38.9	8	22.2	3.53
Afraid to use English now	2	5.6	4	11.1	6	16.7	15	41.7	9	25.0	3.69
Ineffective methods	3	8.3	5	13.9	7	19.4	14	38.9	7	19.4	3.47
Uncomfortable in ESP class	3	8.3	6	16.7	6	16.7	13	36.1	8	22.2	3.47
Pedagogical and Historical Mean Score											3.57

Table 4 presents the findings that pedagogical and historical factors belong to moderate challenge to ESP learning, with a domain mean score of 3.57. Many students reported having negative past experiences in learning English, 3.69, and experiencing harsh correction during previous English classes, 3.53. Past learning experiences were also found to make students afraid to use English actively, 3.69, and feel uncomfortable participating in ESP classes, 3.47. In addition, ineffective teaching methods in the past, 3.47, contributed to students’ negative perceptions toward ESP learning. These results show that students’ previous English learning experience affect their current ESP learning.

Discussions

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The findings of this research show that learning challenges in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) among midwifery students are complex and multidimensional. Linguistic factors were found as the main challenge in ESP Learning, especially difficulties related to medical and midwifery-specific vocabulary. This result is in line with previous researches which discussed that limited mastery of specialized vocabulary can significantly hinder students' comprehension and communication in ESP contexts (Lei & Liu, 2016; Nguyen & Nation, 2018). From an ESP perspective, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state that students require targeted and context-specific language input; without adequate lexical support, students struggle to engage meaningfully in reading, speaking, and writing activities.

Psychological factors were also found to influence students' ESP learning, although to a moderate degree. Fear of making mistakes and speaking anxiety decreased students' confidence and willingness to use English actively in ESP classrooms. This finding supports Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis which suggests that negative emotions can hinder language input and limit learning effectiveness. Similarly, Shao, Pekrun, and Nicholson (2019) argue that anxiety and negative emotions decrease students' participation and engagement in language learning. In the context of ESP for midwifery students, anxiety may be intensified by the perceived complexity of medical terminology and professional communication demands.

Students' learning challenges are also influenced by cognitive variables. Many students find ESP as a challenging subject, which makes it challenging for them to learn the content. Students' perceptions of their language skills have a big impact on their motivation, persistence, and learning results (Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015). When students see ESP as more demanding than other courses, they may create low expectations of accomplishment, which negatively influences their interest and readiness to study.

In addition, pedagogical and historical factors played a significant role in shaping students' attitudes toward ESP learning. Negative past experiences, harsh correction, and ineffective teaching methods were reported to have lasting effects on students' confidence and willingness to use English. This finding supports Horwitz's (2010) argument that negative classroom experiences can result in long-term language anxiety. As Basturkmen (2019) suggests, ESP instruction should take into account students' prior learning

experiences and emotional backgrounds, particularly in professional programs where confidence and communication skills are essential.

Overall, the discussion finds that linguistic challenges cannot be separated from psychological, cognitive, and pedagogical–historical factors. These factors interact and build one another up, creating challenge to effective ESP learning among midwifery students. Therefore, to fix ESP learning challenges need an approach that can combine language development with emotional support, student centered, and context-sensitive teaching techniques. ESP courses should prioritize language instruction relevant to students' need in midwifery contexts, while also creating a supportive classroom climate that fosters active participation and lowers anxiety.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, this research finds that students have difficulties across four main domains: linguistic, psychological, cognitive, and pedagogical–historical factors. Among these, linguistic factor becomes the most dominant challenge. In addition, psychological factor can reduce students' willingness to use English actively in ESP classes. The findings further indicate that psychological factors, such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes, reduce students' confidence and willingness to actively use English in ESP classrooms. Cognitive factors, including perceptions of ESP as a difficult subject and doubts about language ability, also influence students' engagement in learning. In addition, bad past learning experiences and ineffective instructional approaches continue to influence students' attitudes toward ESP, highlighting the lasting impact of pedagogical and historical factors. Overall, the research found that ESP challenges for midwifery students are complex and connected. To address these challenges, an instructional method that takes into account students' feelings, learning views, and previous educational experiences is required, in addition to establishing relevant vocabulary and language abilities. As thus, ESP courses should use student-centered and context-sensitive teaching tactics to boost students' confidence and involvement. Future research may look into specific instructional techniques or qualitative perspectives to better understand and address ESP learning issues in healthcare education.

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