Thailand's higher education ESP practitioners: Problems, solutions and a potential practices model

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Abstract

A comprehensive needs analysis is crucial to guide the design and teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. However, a number of studies neglect certain elements of needs analysis, which can result in problems in subsequent stages of ESP teaching. This mixed-method study aimed to identify the problems that higher education ESP practitioners in Thailand encountered and the solutions they employed and to develop a potential practices model for ESP practitioners. Semi-structured interviews and Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) pairwise comparisons were employed to reveal 54 problems in six categories. Three highest-ranked problems were 1) the ESP practitioners' lack of specialization in relevant fields (34.62%), 2) unsuitable classrooms and facilities (29.15%), and 3) the lack of specific course objective-oriented and cost-effective commercial textbooks (19.09%). The average consistency ratio (C.R.) was 0.32. The study suggested the need for training provisions and inclusion of ESP courses in English curricula. The ESP practices model suggested practices for institutions, such as conducting comprehensive needs analysis and providing suitable facilities and budgets. ESP practitioners were advised to utilize needs analysis for course design and employ active learning approaches. These recommendations aimed to enhance ESP education and improve an English curriculum, teaching practices, and evaluation processes.

Keywords: ELT, English curriculum, ESP education, English policy, ESP courses, Needs analysis.

Contents

Contribution of this paper to the literature
The study highlights problems encountered by ESP practitioners instructing English majors in Thailand, where English is a foreign language. It underscores the importance of integrated needs analysis in English curricula and ESP courses design. Additionally, a practical model for efficient ESP course management within educational institutions is proposed.

1. Introduction

In response to the forces of globalization and the demand for an internationally adept workforce, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has gained prominence across diverse professional domains (Kuo, 2016). ESP courses are meticulously tailored to address the distinctive requirements of learners in various sectors, including science, business, and medical science. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) put forth three main approaches for ESP course design: language-centered, skill-centered, and learning-centered approaches. In addition, ESP practitioners are expected to fulfill multiple roles (Khemri & Kadri, 2017), including teacher, course designer and material provider, researcher, collaborator or negotiator, and evaluator.

ESP practitioners encounter challenges including the absence of a standardized ESP framework, the dual requirement to attain proficiency in both language and subject matter, and the dynamic evolution of English language instruction (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Addressing these concerns involves continuous training, collaborating with learners to harness their existing knowledge, and cultivating fundamental comprehension of learners' disciplines (Antić, 2016).

Among the countries in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), English has been designated as a working language due to the diverse official languages (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008). However, there is an imbalance in labor supply and demand among ASEAN countries, and certain professions lack standardized regional development (Koty, 2016). In Thailand, efforts have been made to enhance English standards in higher education institutions (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2016), and the "Bundit Pan Mai" or "New Generation Graduates" Project is initiated aiming to develop undergraduates in line with the government's objectives (Ministry of Higher Education Science Research and Innovation, 2023).

The Thai learners involved in this crucial mission can be classified into three groups: learners currently employed and seeking occupational mobility, higher education learners studying in various disciplines who enroll in ESP courses, and English major students in higher education institutions who choose ESP courses as major electives or major free electives (Mae Fah Luang University, 2020). The institutions responsible for these learners can vary, ranging from language institutes and English departments/majors to specific discipline faculties/schools, depending on their organizational and administrative structures. However, there is a growing concern that ESP courses may be diminishing in quality due to the lack of emphasis on ESP in the TQF1 for the Bachelor in English (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2017). Consequently, higher education institutions may reduce the number of ESP courses offered, or worse, eliminate them altogether. For example, despite revising its Bachelor's English curriculum in 2023, the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University has continued to offer only one ESP course, English Business Writing, for its English Major undergraduates since 2009 (Faculty of Arts, 2009). Similarly, the School of Liberal Arts at Mae Fah Luang University has recently revised its curriculum, discontinuing the Business English Track and introducing a small number of newly revised ESP courses such as English for Business and Entrepreneurship, and English for Services and Hospitality Industry for English Major undergraduates (Mae Fah Luang University, 2020).

Despite the establishment and implementation of revised English-related policies in Thailand over the years, and the recent determination of learners' English levels based on international standards like the CEFR, the EF English Proficiency Index of 2022 (Europeiska Ferieskolan (EF), 2022) ranks Thailand 8th in terms of English proficiency among the nine ASEAN nations (excluding Brunei) and 21th among 24 Asian countries. Pratoomrat and Rajprasit (2014) attribute this situation to English being viewed as a foreign language rather than an official language, as well as weaknesses in English language education. They also highlight the difficulties experienced by many Thai professionals and novices in effectively applying English in their respective fields. In accordance with the COVID-19 pandemic that has further impacted employment, particularly in industries like tourism and air travel, ESP practitioners have a responsibility to equip undergraduates with the necessary knowledge and skills to compete in these industries.

English language education in Thailand faces challenges such as inadequate proficiency levels of teachers, disparities in provision, ineffective teaching practices, and impractical assessments. Solutions include granting ESP practitioners the freedom to design courses according to students' needs, basing changes on thorough assessment and scientific evidence, and promoting the use of information technology in teaching. It is important to adapt assessment and evaluation methods to accurately reflect students' required competences in ESP education.

2. Conceptual Framework

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) propose a cyclical process of needs analysis as a comprehensive framework to guide ESP practitioners in conducting ESP courses effectively see Figure 1. This process comprises five stages that are essential for achieving the objectives of the courses. The first stage, known as language needs analysis or needs analysis in short, involves the analyses of five key elements: target situation, learning situation, present situation, means, and language audits. These elements are thoroughly analyzed and subsequently utilized in the subsequent stages (Rahman, 2015).

Firstly, the target situation analysis entails the recognition of specific language skills required for real-life workplace settings. Valuable insights into these language skills can be obtained from "outsiders" such as professionals currently working in those workplaces. Secondly, the learning situation analysis encompasses the subjective, experiential, and process-driven needs of learners. It aids in determining learners' preferences regarding their desired areas of learning and identifying effective methods for acquiring skills and language, as well as an investigation into the underlying motivations driving learners' desire to learn. Next, the present situation analysis represents the learner's current knowledge, skills, and understanding of the subject matter or problem being

addressed. It serves as a baseline from which ESP practitioners can evaluate learners' existing abilities and customize instruction accordingly. Following that, means analysis examines the readiness of ESP practitioners, institutions, curriculum, learning materials, and facilities to meet the needs of the learners at present. Lastly, language audits analysis involves large-scale study that focuses on the language needs of industries, regions, and countries. This analysis contributes to the development and execution of relevant regional, national, and institutional policies.
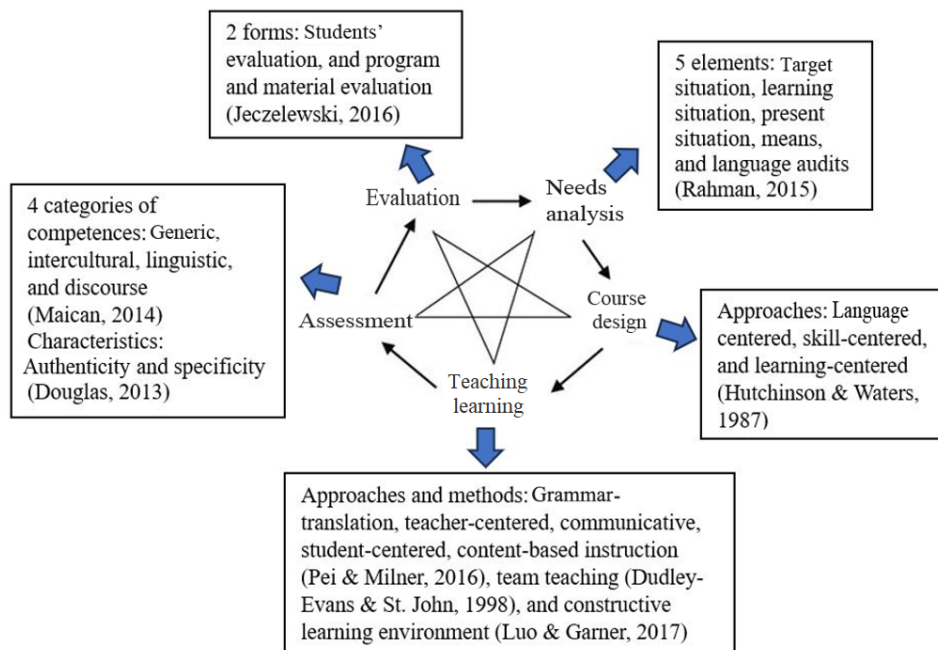

Figure 1. The cyclical process of needs analysis.
Note: Douglas (2013); Jeczelewski (2016); Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) and Pei and Milner (2016).

Although it is recommended to analyze all five key elements to facilitate the entire ESP cyclical process, many studies tend to focus primarily on learners' needs or present situation, neglecting the implementation of the other crucial elements. For instance, Axmedovna, Gapporovna, Rozmatovna, and Gayrat qizi (2019) emphasize the significance of needs analysis as an essential and primary stage for identifying learners' needs, desires, and prerequisites. They also highlight the importance of understanding learners' language background and preferences to design successful and effective courses. Similarly, Nuemaihom (2017) addresses the use of needs analysis to analyze learners' specific reasons for studying ESP. The findings from this analysis guide the selection of language contents and instructional approaches that cater to the learners' unique needs. Furthermore, Ibrahim (2020) views needs analysis as a comprehensive process that encompasses various activities aimed at gathering information about students' learning needs, wants, wishes, and desires. However, the researcher views that the process only sometimes involves considering the expectations and requirements of other stakeholders.

The omission of a comprehensive cycle of needs analysis, as mentioned above, can give rise to a number of problems and challenges faced by ESP practitioners teaching ESP in countries where English is learned as a foreign language. For instance, in ESP courses in Iran, the students express dissatisfaction with their ESP teachers, both English and subject-related, citing issues such as the teachers' lack of experience, monotonous classes devoid of communicative activities, overcrowded classrooms, and the use of inappropriate and outdated materials (Anbarshahi & Shabani Minaabad, 2021). Furthermore, in Serbia, there is a notable problem concerning a lack of analysis of means (Radovanović & Mitrović, 2018), where ESP practitioners struggle with inadequate collaboration with content teachers. This lack of collaboration hinders the ability to design effective ESP courses, select appropriate materials, and determine suitable assessment methods for their students. Addressing these neglected elements becomes crucial to enhance the quality of ESP instruction and meet the specific language needs of learners. Consequently, this research primarily aims to achieve the following objectives.

3. Research Objectives (RO)
The research objectives were as follows:
1. To identify the problems that higher education ESP practitioners in Thailand encountered (RO1).
2. To identify the solutions that the ESP practitioners employed to overcome the problems (RO2).
3. To develop a potential practices model for the ESP practitioners in the current Thai context (RO3).

4. Literature Review
In numerous countries where English is utilized as a second or foreign language, ESP practitioners have faced a multitude of challenges and a diverse array of issues. While many of these problems have been successfully resolved at a local level, making valuable contributions to addressing similar challenges in the field, there are still unresolved issues that persist due to evolving contexts and demands from various stakeholders. Some studies showing ESP practitioners' efforts on tackling their problems are as follows.

4.1. The ESP Practitioners' Problems in China
According to Luo and Garner (2017), the widespread integration of ESP into college-level English programs in China has presented a significant challenge for English educators, necessitating a substantial redefinition of their roles. Primarily, educators take on a multitude of responsibilities, particularly as collaborative partners with content-focused instructors. The process of collaborating with these content-oriented educators is intricate and

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involves the delineation of collaboration areas and the methods of effective implementation. They posit that, in order to excel in this evolving role, educators must enrich their linguistic proficiency with an in-depth comprehension of one or more specialized disciplines, encompassing subject-specific expertise. Moreover, teachers must adopt an instructional approach that significantly diverges from the traditional norms observed in China. Proficiency in these dual dimensions stands as pivotal for establishing ESP as a distinct pedagogical pursuit, aligning with the objectives set forth by the Chinese government's Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) policy. The attainment of ESP's success relies on a fresh, evidence-based, and practice-centered approach to English teacher training.

Moreover, the study conducted by Tao and Gao (2018), which explores the development and negotiation of professional roles among ESP practitioners in a Chinese university, clarifies that adopting the position of an ESP practitioner involves a complex process that includes changing professional methods and forming professional roles. Participants found contentment in their teaching efforts, aimed at preparing graduates with necessary ESP skills for local economic progress. Nevertheless, their professional roles were affected by the secondary status of ESP within the institution. As the need grows for English educators to teach ESP skills to university graduates in various educational settings, an increased focus on and assistance for enhancing the professional advancement of ESP practitioners, along with fostering their identity development, become crucial.

4.2. The ESP Practitioners' Problems in Serbia

Radovanović and Mitrović (2018) found limited and unsupported collaboration between content teachers and ESP practitioners in tertiary education in Serbia. They specifically investigated the collaborative practice involved in designing an ESP syllabus for English for Health Tourism Purposes (EHTP) at the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja. The aim of the program is to provide students with theoretical and practical knowledge to become competent managers in the field. However, English instruction is typically provided by philologists without expertise in the subject area, leading to initial challenges. The uniqueness of the study program further complicated syllabus design due to the lack of models and academic tradition.

4.3. The ESP Practitioners' Problems in Thailand

The study of Soranastaporn (2018) reveals that the Thai government appointed senior English teachers and scholars with the aim of reforming English education in Thailand and setting educational standards. This initiative arose due to the proliferation of private universities and the elevation of approximately 75 teacher training colleges to university status. The scholars recommended that all universities be mandated to offer a general English course (three credits) in the first semester, followed by English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) courses (three or six credits, preferably six) in the subsequent two semesters. However, this proposal posed challenges for older universities like Mahidol University, as it meant sacrificing one ESP course, given that English courses only accounted for a total of six credits. Despite providing feedback to the government, there was no response received. Simultaneously, influential university administrators compelled the Department to revise the syllabus with a focus on writing skills, resulting in the development of a new English course syllabus. Unfortunately, this change led to the disappearance of ESP characteristics from the current English courses.

Additionally, Suntornsawate (2018) emphasizes the persistent difficulty in implementing significant changes in ESP education in Thailand, despite the growing recognition of its importance and the encouragement of multidisciplinary approaches to course design. The excessive focus on specific content within English Language Teaching (ELT) poses a challenge to the meaningful advancement of ESP. The researcher proposes addressing these ESP-related challenges by advocating for ESP practitioners to enhance their utilization of information technology as a valuable tool for effective teaching and to overcome conventional teaching practices, which require improvement. Furthermore, institutions should establish policies that reinforce an English curriculum aligned with the evolving needs of students and improve the supportive infrastructure for teaching and learning. Moreover, the adoption of 21st-century teaching and learning approaches, such as blended learning, project-based learning, task-based learning, and content-based learning, can assist Thai students in developing the necessary competences for various professional fields.

5. Research Methodology

5.1. Research Design

This study utilized a sequential and concurrent mixed-method approach (Mackey & Gass, 2016) to effectively examine the problems encountered by ten ESP practitioners involved in the research, as shown in Figure 2. In a sequential mixed-method study, the quantitative data analysis results were used to complement and reinforce the findings of the qualitative data analysis, providing a comprehensive understanding of the identified problems (RO1). Simultaneously, a concurrent study was conducted to collect data on the corresponding solutions the practitioners implemented (RO2). Furthermore, the findings from methodological triangulation, qualitative study, and literature review were utilized to inform the development of a potential practices model for practitioners and stakeholders involved in ESP courses.

5.2. Participants

This study involved ten Thai ESP practitioners who had an experience of one year of designing and teaching at least one ESP course relevant to a business field, and had professional background in either a teaching field or other professional fields, such as business, tourism, and hospitality. They were selected using non-probability sampling approaches, specifically convenience sampling as an initial.
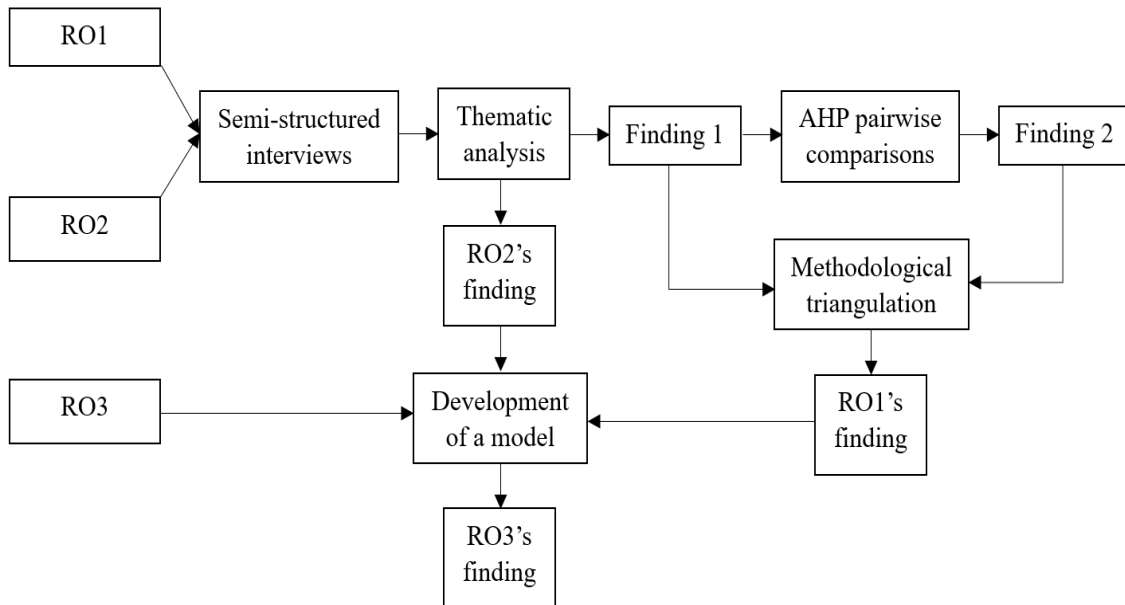
Figure 2. The procedural framework of the research.

Step and snowball sampling as a subsequent method (Deakin University, 2023). They were affiliated in four institutions: seven practitioners in the institution that belonged to Group 1 which focused on global and frontier research, as defined by Ministry of Higher Education Science Research and Innovatio (2021), two in the institutions that belonged to Group 2 emphasizing technology development and innovation, and the other affiliated in the institution that was classified into Group 3 focusing on area-based and community engagement.

5.3. Research Instruments
5.3.1. A Semi-Structured Interview Validated by Using Item Objective Congruence (IOC) Index
There were two parts: Part 1 the ESP practitioners' background information and Part 2 interview questions for problems and solutions comprising nineteen questions based on the cyclical process of needs analysis see Figure 1. The question samples are "Have you encountered any problems related to needs survey and analysis that can affect course design and teaching and learning of your course such as the problems related to analyses of target situation, learning situation, present situation, and means?" and "What is the significance and extent of this/these problem(s) to course design and teaching and learning in your course?".

5.3.2. An AHP Pairwise Comparison Questionnaire Constructed by Utilizing the Finding of Semi-Structured Interview Analysis
The questionnaire comprised fifteen pairs of six questions see Table 1 to be weighed by the participants using the fundamental scale for AHP pairwise comparisons as shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Example of AHP pairwise comparisons.

Problem 1.1 the institutions' misconception about ESP practitioners									Problem 1.2 the appointed ESP practitioners' lacks of specialization in relevant fields of study and background knowledge								
9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Table 2. The fundamental scale for AHP pairwise comparisons.

Intensity of importance on an absolute scale	Definition	Explanation
1	Equal importance	Two activities contribute equally to the objective
3	Moderate importance of one over another	Experience and judgement moderately favor one activity over another
5	Essential or strong importance	Experience and judgement strongly favor one activity over another
7	Very strong importance	An activity is strongly favored and its dominance demonstrated in practice
9	Extreme importance	The evidence favoring one activity over another is of the highest possible order of affirmation
2, 4, 6, 8	Intermediate values between the two adjacent judgements	When compromise is needed

Note: Saaty (1987).

5.4. Collection of Data
5.4.1. The Semi-Structured Interviews
The practitioners completed Part 1 via the online Google Form application. Then, the interviews were conducted using the online Google Meet and Zoom applications. All interviews were recorded for data analyses (approximately one hour long each).

5.4.2. The AHP Pairwise Comparison Questionnaire

The practitioners completed it via the online Google Form application.

5.5. Data Analyses
5.5.1. Analysis of Data from the Interviews

A type of content analysis namely thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was adopted to examine the qualitative data. The analysis comprised six steps: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up.

5.5.2. Analysis of Data from the Questionnaires

The data were analyzed using a series of calculations proposed by Silwal and Pathak (2018) to prioritize six selected problems. In order to assess the consistency of the decision-making process, the recommended threshold for the consistency ratio (C.R.) value was less than 0.10. This value serves as a guide to determine the level of consistency in the decision-making process.

6. Results
6.1. The Results of the Semi-Structured Interviews

According to Part 1 the ESP practitioners' background information, although not many practitioners held a Ph.D., the majority of them had obtained a Master's degree in ELT and related fields. Their areas of interest were aligned with their areas of expertise. In terms of work experience, 30% of the practitioners had prior experience in related fields before becoming university lecturers and teaching ESP courses. All of them had been working as English lecturers for more than five years. However, only half of them had been specifically responsible for ESP courses for more than five years, and only few had actively participated in English curriculum design and evaluation. These practitioners had taught a variety of ESP courses, such as English for Hotel Industry, English for Airline Industry, and Basic and Professional Business Writing courses. These courses aimed to equip undergraduate students with a wide range of disciplinary knowledge and skills. The practitioners taught students in English-related programs, consisting of the English Program, Business English Program, English for Communication, English for Business Communication, and English for International Communication.

Fifty-four problems encountered by the practitioners, along with their aligned solutions and suggestions, were categorized into six categories based on Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998): needs analysis, course design, teaching-learning, assessment, evaluation, and others. However, only top six problems identified by at least half or more of the participants along with their solutions and suggestions are presented in Table 3. Moreover, there were three additional suggestions provided by the practitioners: training provisions, inclusion of ESP courses, and promotion of an inclusive mindset. Sixty percent of the practitioners emphasized the need for more training provisions and consultations from their institutions. They advocated for up-to-date training sessions on campus and in the workplaces, adequate budgets allocated for ESP-related training, conferences, and professional development programs specifically focused on ESP, and opportunities for practitioners to become interns in relevant workplaces.

Half of the practitioners expressed the expectation for institutions to include and reintroduce ESP courses into the English curriculum. They also emphasized the importance of involving ESP practitioners in the curriculum review process. Their aim was to enhance the uniqueness of the curriculum, respond to market and students' needs, and ensure that the curriculum remains aligned with the latest industry trends. This involvement would help meet the specific needs of ESP learners and maintain relevance to real-world contexts.

Table 3. Top six problems identified by at least half or more of the participants, along with corresponding solutions and suggestions.

Problem (%), solution and suggestion	Category
Problem 1 (90%): The size, table arrangements, and facilities of classrooms that are unsuitable for ESP activities. Solutions: 1. The practitioner requested a change of classrooms for either the entire semester or specific practical activities. 2. The practitioner integrated certain activities with other courses that shared similar objectives. Suggestion: The institution should provide more information technology (IT) facilities.	Teaching-learning
Problem 2 (80%): The lack of specific course objective-oriented, accessible and cost-effective commercial textbooks that could comprehensively cover all the required topics Solutions: 1. The practitioner customized the lessons on a weekly basis, seeking regular consultations from the course designers, co-teachers and specific disciplinary teachers who possessed a stronger business-related background. 2. The practitioner customized the lessons using various relevant resources to gather up-to-date content. 3. The practitioner created effective activities to fulfill the content and skills such as simulations. 4. The practitioner utilized the findings from workplace visits, products from the projects of senior year students, relevant social academic services to class activity adjustments. 5. The practitioner invited guest speakers to class to give lectures and share experiences.	Course design
Problem 3 (60%): The institutions' misconception about ESP practitioners: such as a discourse of "all English teachers should be able to teach ESP courses" Solution: None. Suggestions: 1. The institution should consider recruiting new teachers who have expertise in the relevant fields, whether on a temporary, permanent, or invited basis, to enhance the quality of instruction. 2. The institution should offer training opportunities to the appointed practitioners to enhance their knowledge and skills. 3. The course offerings should align with the areas of expertise of existing faculty members. 4. There should be an emphasis on assigning responsibility for ESP courses either to specific	Needs analysis

Problem (%), solution and suggestion	Category
disciplinary faculties or establishing collaborative courses jointly led by the English team and disciplinary teams, adopting a Content-based Instruction approach.	
Problem 4 (60%): The appointed ESP practitioners' lacks of specialization in relevant fields of study and background knowledge resulting in a lack of confidence and hesitation in selection of materials, activities and assessment tools Solutions: 1. The practitioner actively sought training opportunities for self-improvement. A group of practitioners allocated its budgets to arrange training sessions by experts. 2. The practitioner gathered needs from the representatives of the workplace during workplace visits. 3. The practitioner exchanged ideas and practices with other colleagues during course team meetings, the institutional meetings, and verification process. 4. The practitioner invited guest speakers to class to give lectures and share experiences. Suggestions: 1. Some assigned practitioners should be encouraged to attend relevant training sessions and subsequently share their knowledge with others. 2. The institution should conduct a survey to identify teachers who are interested in teaching ESP courses and allocate budgets to support their training. It is worth noting that the Dean strongly supported this initiative.	Needs analysis
Problem 5 (50%): Some committee members involved in the verification process lacked a comprehensive understanding of the nature of ESP courses, teaching and learning approaches, and assessment methods. Solutions: 1. The institution appointed the committee who had a background in ESP. 2. The practitioner provided clear explanations of the assessments and the associated rubrics.	Evaluation
Problem 6 (50%): The lack of a Community of Practice (CoP) within the institution preventing the sharing of teaching materials, assessments, opinions, progress, problems and solutions, and good practices among practitioners, resulting in some certain incidence, for example, when practitioners resigned from the university, their materials were not passed on to others, leading to a loss of valuable resources Solution: None. Suggestion: The institution should take proactive measures to establish a strong CoP where experienced practitioners can provide guidance and support to their colleagues. This would facilitate the sharing of teaching materials, assessments, and valuable insights, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment for professional growth and development.	Others

6.2. The Results of the AHP Pairwise Comparison

Using a sequential mixed-method approach to prioritize the problems, the researchers identified six key problems from five categories: needs analysis, course design, teaching-learning, evaluation, and others. The identified problems were used to construct the AHP pairwise comparison questionnaire, which was distributed to the practitioners. The responses collected were then subjected to statistical analysis, leading to the findings presented in Table 4.

According to the findings presented in Table 4, Problem 4, which refers to the appointed ESP practitioners' lacks of specialization in relevant fields of study and background knowledge resulting in a lack of confidence and hesitation in selection of materials, activities and assessment tools, was ranked as the first priority. Additionally, Problem 1, highlighting the size, table arrangements, and facilities of classrooms that were unsuitable for ESP activities, was ranked as the second priority. Furthermore, Problem 2, addressing the lack of specific course objective-oriented, accessible and cost-effective commercial textbooks that could comprehensively cover all the required topics, was ranked as the third priority.

Table 4. The ranks of six selected key problems.

Problem	Average % of importance	Rank
Problem 1 The size, table arrangements, and facilities of classrooms that were unsuitable for ESP activities	29.15	2
Problem 2 The lack of specific course objective-oriented, accessible and cost-effective commercial textbooks	19.09	3
Problem 3 The institutions' misconception about ESP practitioners	7.62	4
Problem 4 The appointed ESP practitioners' lacks of specialization in relevant fields of study and background knowledge	34.62	1
Problem 5 Some committee members in the verification process's lack of a comprehensive understanding of the nature of ESP courses	5.86	5
Problem 6 The lack of a Community of Practice (CoP) within the institution	3.66	6
	The average C.R. value	0.32

The average consistency ratio (C.R.) of all responses, which evaluated the reliability of the judgments by comparing them with random consistency expectations, was calculated to be 0.32. This value exceeded the acceptable level of 0.10 (Senjaya, Daryanto, & Djohar, 2015), indicating that the judgments provided by the practitioners may exhibit inconsistency. A higher C.R. value (close to 1.0) indicates a greater level of inconsistency in the pairwise comparisons, suggesting that the practitioners' judgments may lack coherence or contain contradictions.

6.3. The Potential Practices Model

Using a sequential mixed-method approach to gather effective solutions, suggestions, and practices from the practitioners, the researchers constructed a model, as shown in Figure 3, that displays recommended practices for ESP practitioners and institutions.

6.3.1. The Recommended Practices of Institutions

Institutions with English curricula are recommended to follow certain practices to enhance the effectiveness of their programs. Firstly, the appointment of an English curriculum committee is crucial, comprising members with expertise in ESP and experience in teaching ESP courses. This diverse committee should conduct a comprehensive needs analysis, gathering input from various stakeholders, including organizations, employers, students, faculty members, and alumni. This analysis will inform the development and improvement of the English curriculum.
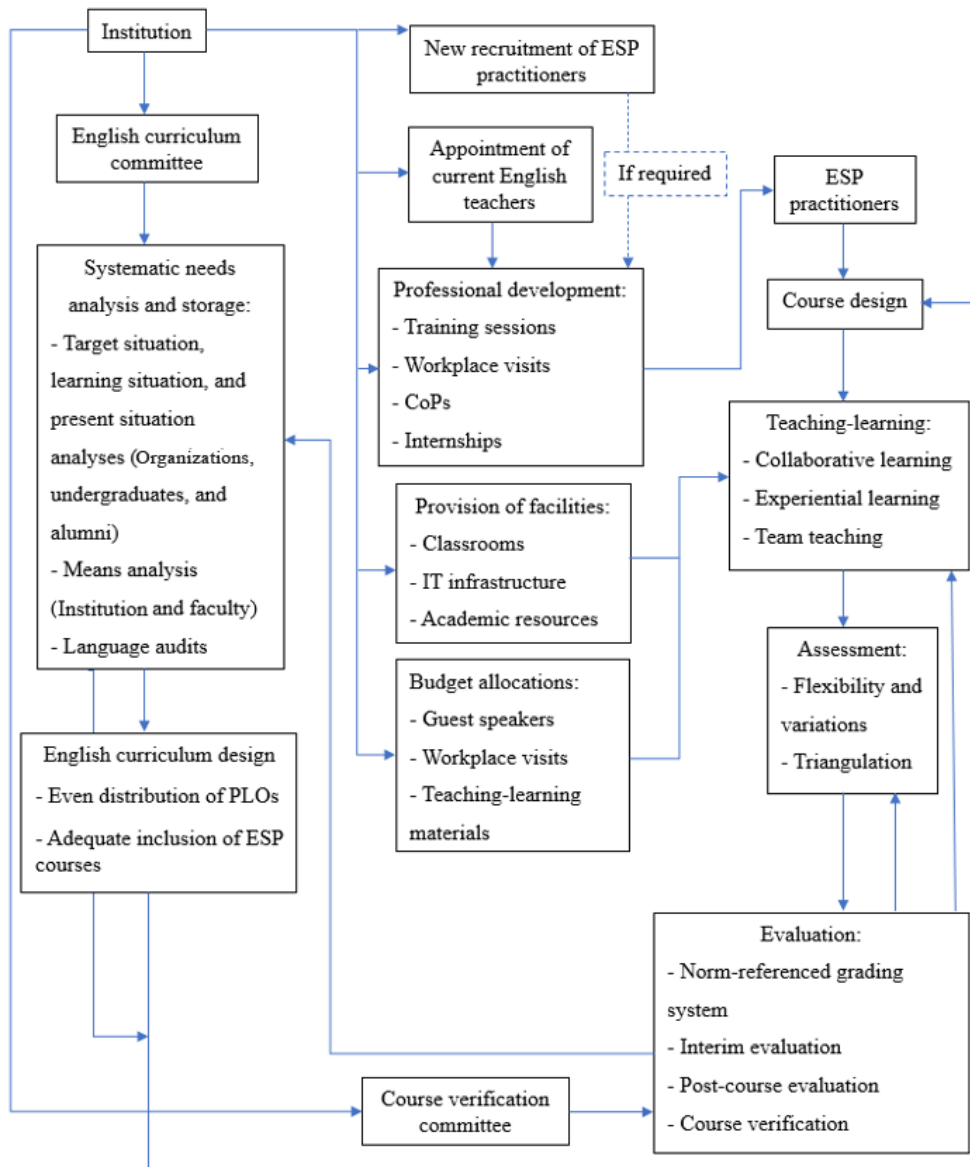

Figure 3. Recommended practices of institutions and ESP practitioners.

To ensure a balanced distribution of program learning outcomes (PLOs) and consistent development of students' competence and qualities, the revised curriculum should prioritize the identified needs and incorporate an appropriate number of ESP courses. Institutions are advised to recruit ESP practitioners with expertise in relevant fields and provide training, workplace visits, communities of practice, and internships to nurture their potential. Faculty members should be surveyed to gauge their interest and experience in teaching ESP, and those meeting the criteria can receive training, visits, communities of practice, and internships to enhance their ESP teaching skills. Adequate facilities, including IT-equipped classrooms, well-equipped libraries, and academic support centers, should be provided. Sufficient budgets are crucial for guest speakers, workplace visits, and teaching-learning material development, allowing for experiential learning and expert contributions. Flexibility in budget allocation and the appointment of a course verification committee with ESP backgrounds and experience are also recommended. Implementing these practices enhances collaborative efforts, needs-driven curriculum design, faculty development, and resource provision, thereby improving the quality and effectiveness of English curricula in institutions.

6.3.2 The Recommended Practices of ESP Practitioners

ESP practitioners teaching or appointed to teach ESP courses have several responsibilities to fulfill. Firstly, in course design, they should utilize the results of needs analysis conducted by the institutions and themselves, incorporating objectively measurable course objectives aligned with teaching-learning activities and valid assessment methods. Additionally, practitioners should utilize the allocated budget to develop teaching-learning materials that meet identified needs and requirements, drawing on their professional development experiences and seeking expert consultations. Secondly, in teaching-learning, practitioners are advised to employ experiential and

collaborative learning approaches, incorporating simulations, feedback, discussions with guest speakers, projects, and workplace visits to develop students' competence and align with real-world demands. Thirdly, in assessment, practitioners should employ a variety of methods accommodating individual differences and based on students' experiences, using reliable criterion-based rubrics and triangulation techniques to mitigate subjectivity. Finally, in evaluation, norm-referenced grading systems are recommended for fair comparisons among students (Hall, 2016), fostering teamwork and collaborative learning while storing evaluation results for further curriculum and course improvements. Interim and post-course evaluations by students and course verification by a qualified committee also provide valuable feedback. By fulfilling these responsibilities, ESP practitioners contribute to effective ESP instruction and continuous improvement of the curriculum.

7. Discussion

The lack of specialization and background knowledge among ESP practitioners, inadequate classroom size and facilities, and the absence of suitable commercial materials are the top three problems in ESP education. To address the first issue, ESP practitioners employ various strategies such as seeking training opportunities, organizing training sessions with institutional support, exchanging ideas with colleagues, and inviting guest speakers. However, the budgets provided by institutions for training are often inadequate. ESP programs in China heavily rely on the preparation and qualifications of practitioners, but there is a shortage of qualified practitioners and limited inclusion of ESP in pre-service training (Luo & Garner, 2017). Lack of training can hinder effective teaching, and many English teachers are required to teach ESP courses without subject-oriented training, leading to a sense of inadequacy. To overcome this, teachers need linguistic knowledge and skills, foundational understanding of the subject matter, socio-cultural awareness, and pedagogical competencies (Ghafar, 2022). In addition to formal training, many ESP practitioners engage in self-study, attend classes or seminars, read books, and participate in discussions to enhance their abilities. According to Asmali (2018), incorporating technology in ESP classrooms has been enthusiastically embraced by practitioners, offering interactive and communicative activities tailored to students' professional fields, as well as tools for feedback and self-evaluation. However, the practitioners express concerns about the suitability of classroom size, table arrangements, and facilities for conducting ESP activities such as simulations, group discussions, and term project presentations. Creating physical and authentic learning environments that resemble workplace contexts is essential to address these concerns and enhance student motivation Castillejos and Cervero (2004). Simulation cases and English presentations provide opportunities for students to engage in their area of expertise and improve their language proficiency.

The third-ranked problem in ESP education is the lack of specific, accessible, and cost-effective commercial textbooks aligned with course objectives. According to Maican (2014), commercial textbooks are often not suitable for direct use in the classroom due to their extensive teaching hours, while ESP courses typically require fewer hours. The ESP practitioners customize lessons using various relevant resources such as library books, official websites, lessons purchased from licensed publishers, workplace visits, social academic services, and student projects. However, limited institutional support requires practitioners to allocate their own budgets for these materials and activities (Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015). Despite the challenges, customizing teaching materials proves to be a rewarding endeavor for both practitioners and students.

The study also highlights unique findings related to ESP courses for students in English and English-related programs. Students' lack of disciplinary background knowledge limits their understanding of their needs, motivation for specific career paths, retention of knowledge required for assignments, and preference for disciplinary professionals to teach the courses (Ghanbari & Rasekh, 2012). ESP courses within the current English curriculum of some institutions hinder the acquisition of essential background knowledge. Institutions often fail to prioritize addressing the identified problems and provide adequate support for practitioners in managing their classes. Some institutions hold a misconception that all English teachers should be able to teach ESP courses, overlooking the diverse nature of ESP teaching and the broader range of roles and responsibilities involved. ESP practitioners employ strategies such as workplace visits, sharing experiences, inviting guest speakers, and incorporating experiential learning to enhance the learning experience and address their concerns.

8. Conclusion

This mixed-method study identified 54 problems encountered by higher education ESP practitioners in Thailand and the solutions they employed. The primary problem revolved around practitioners lacking specialization and background knowledge, followed by the unsuitability of classroom size and facilities for ESP activities. The solutions focused on improving institutional management and supporting professional development. A model was developed, outlining effective practices for institutions and ESP practitioners, covering areas such as curriculum committees, recruitment, facilities, and course design. This study provides practical insights and recommendations to enhance ESP education, aiming to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning in this field.

9. Suggestion

1. Lack of specialization and confidence: The study highlights that ESP practitioners lack specialization in relevant fields of study, which leads to a lack of confidence in selecting materials, activities, and assessment tools. This implies a need for training and professional development programs to enhance practitioners' expertise and confidence in their teaching.

2. Unsuitable classrooms for ESP activities: The study reveals that the size, table arrangements, and facilities of classrooms are not suitable for ESP activities. This suggests the need for institutions to provide appropriate classrooms equipped with IT facilities to facilitate effective teaching and learning experiences.

3. Comparative analysis of ESP practices across institutions: Further research can compare and analyze the implementation of ESP practices in different institutions, considering factors such as institutional policies, resources, curriculum design, and teaching approaches. This comparative analysis can provide insights into the variation in ESP practices and their effectiveness across different educational contexts.

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