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TRAINING ESP AT TERTIARY LEVEL TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE LABOUR MARKET AT UNIVERSITY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

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1. INTRODUCTION

English has become an essential medium of communication in today's globalized labour market, where graduates are increasingly expected to possess not only disciplinary knowledge but also the ability to communicate effectively in professional contexts. For university graduates, English proficiency is no longer viewed as an additional qualification but as a core employability skill that directly influences recruitment opportunities, career advancement, and workplace performance. This trend is particularly evident in developing countries such as Vietnam, where economic integration, foreign direct investment, and international business cooperation have substantially increased the demand for employees capable of using English in discipline-specific settings.

Unlike General English (GE), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) focuses on developing language competencies that are directly related to learners' academic disciplines or future occupations. ESP courses aim to equip students with the linguistic knowledge, communicative skills, and professional discourse required to perform effectively in specific workplace contexts. Previous studies have consistently argued that effective ESP instruction should be grounded in learners' target needs rather than general language proficiency alone (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Consequently, curriculum design, teaching materials, instructional methods, and assessment practices should all reflect the communicative demands of the labour market.

In recent years, many Vietnamese universities have incorporated ESP courses into their undergraduate curricula with the expectation that graduates will be better prepared for increasingly competitive employment markets. Typically, ESP is introduced after students complete foundational General English courses, serving as a bridge between language

learning and disciplinary knowledge. However, despite the widespread implementation of ESP programmes, numerous studies and institutional reports suggest that graduates still encounter considerable difficulties in applying English effectively in professional environments. Employers frequently report that university graduates possess limited ability to communicate in specialised contexts, interpret professional documents, participate in workplace discussions, or perform job-related tasks in English.

The mismatch between university ESP instruction and labour market expectations has become an increasingly important issue in higher education. While many universities continue to emphasise linguistic knowledge and specialised vocabulary, employers often place greater value on practical communicative competence, problem-solving ability, and the capacity to perform authentic workplace tasks using English. This discrepancy suggests that current ESP programmes may not adequately address the real communicative needs encountered by graduates after entering the workforce.

Needs analysis has long been recognised as the cornerstone of ESP curriculum development. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the effectiveness of an ESP programme largely depends on how accurately learners' target needs are identified and translated into curriculum design. Similarly, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) emphasised that ESP courses should be continuously informed by stakeholders, including students, teachers, subject specialists, and employers. Recent research has further highlighted the importance of aligning ESP instruction with industry requirements, advocating closer collaboration between universities and employers to ensure that graduates acquire both disciplinary knowledge and workplace communication skills. Nevertheless, empirical evidence examining such alignment remains relatively limited in the Vietnamese higher education context.

Although previous studies have investigated ESP teaching in Vietnam, most have focused primarily on students' learning motivation, classroom practices, textbook evaluation, or teachers' perceptions. Comparatively fewer studies have examined ESP training from multiple stakeholder perspectives by simultaneously incorporating the views of students, lecturers, and employers. Moreover, limited attention has been devoted to investigating whether current ESP programmes adequately reflect labour market expectations and how curriculum improvement can be informed by employer needs. This represents an important research gap, particularly as Vietnamese universities increasingly adopt outcome-based education and competency-based curriculum frameworks.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the alignment between university ESP training and labour market requirements through the perspectives of three key stakeholder

groups: students, ESP lecturers, and employers. By combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study seeks to identify strengths and limitations of current ESP programmes, examine employers' expectations regarding graduates' professional English competence, and propose practical recommendations for enhancing ESP curriculum design and instructional practices.

Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What English competencies do employers expect graduates to possess for effective workplace performance?
2. To what extent do current ESP programmes meet these labour market expectations?
3. What challenges do students and lecturers encounter during the teaching and learning of ESP?
4. What improvements can be made to ESP curriculum design, teaching practices, and learning resources to better prepare graduates for professional communication in the labour market?

The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of ESP research by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between university ESP instruction and labour market demands in Vietnam. More importantly, the study offers practical implications for curriculum developers, university administrators, ESP lecturers, and policymakers seeking to strengthen graduate employability through more responsive and needs-based ESP education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. English for Specific Purposes and Employability

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an approach to language education in which course objectives, content, teaching methods, and assessment are determined by learners' academic or occupational purposes. Unlike General English, ESP focuses on the language, genres, skills, and communicative activities associated with a particular discipline or profession (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Therefore, ESP should not be understood simply as the teaching of technical vocabulary. It should prepare learners to use English to perform authentic tasks, such as reading professional documents, writing emails and reports, participating in meetings, giving presentations, and communicating with colleagues or customers.

Recent ESP scholarship has increasingly connected language learning with graduate employability. From this perspective, professional English competence is not limited to

linguistic knowledge but includes the capacity to apply language, disciplinary knowledge, and generic skills in workplace situations. Chi and Vu's (2024) study of Vietnamese graduates found that ESP courses contributed to specialised language knowledge and some employability skills, but weaknesses in course design and teaching practices limited their workplace relevance. Their findings also indicate that many graduates perceived mismatches between what they had studied and the tasks encountered after graduation.

The relationship between ESP and employability is particularly important in Vietnam, where universities have introduced ESP courses to prepare students for increasingly internationalised workplaces. However, English education contributes to employability only when students can transfer classroom learning to professional settings. English competence should therefore be integrated with disciplinary understanding, workplace practices, confidence, and the ability to communicate with different professional stakeholders (Nghia et al., 2024; Tran et al., 2024).

2.2. Needs Analysis and ESP Curriculum Development

Needs analysis is the foundation of ESP curriculum development because it identifies what learners must be able to do in the target situation and what they need in order to achieve that competence. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) distinguish between target needs and learning needs. Target needs include necessities, or the competencies required in future situations; lacks, or the gap between the required competencies and learners' current abilities; and wants, or learners' own expectations and preferences.

Contemporary needs analysis normally draws on multiple sources rather than relying exclusively on students' perceptions. Students can report their difficulties and learning preferences, lecturers can evaluate curriculum implementation and classroom performance, and employers can identify workplace tasks and expected standards. Smith et al. (2022) demonstrate that combining questionnaires, interviews, observations, and document analysis can improve the reliability of needs analysis and provide a stronger basis for curriculum evaluation. Their study also shows that needs analysis should be used not only when a course is initially designed but also when evaluating whether existing learning outcomes and activities address learners' actual needs.

Needs analysis should therefore be continuous and task-oriented. A course may contain relevant professional topics but remain ineffective if it does not prepare students to perform the tasks required in real communication. Lin (2023), for example, used needs analysis to inform the design of context-aware materials and activities for occupational English learning. The study illustrates how workplace settings and authentic activities can be incorporated into

ESP course design rather than treating professional language as decontextualised terminology.

For the present study, needs analysis involves comparing three elements: the abilities expected by employers, the programme implemented by lecturers, and the learning experiences and competence of students. Agreement or disagreement among these groups provides evidence of the extent to which the ESP curriculum responds to labour-market needs.

2.3. Alignment Between ESP Education and Workplace Communication

Curriculum alignment refers to the consistency between target needs, learning outcomes, course content, teaching activities, and assessment. If employers require graduates to communicate with clients and write professional correspondence, but students mainly study vocabulary and translation, the course is only partially aligned with workplace requirements.

Recent workplace-based research shows that professional communication is complex and socially situated. Al Hilali and McKinley (2021) found that workplace writing was shaped not only by language forms but also by organisational relationships, purposes, audiences, and professional practices. They consequently argue that classroom instruction alone may not fully prepare learners unless it incorporates evidence from actual workplaces and exposes students to realistic communication contexts.

Authentic or appropriately adapted materials can help reduce the distance between classroom learning and professional communication. These may include emails, reports, contracts, forms, presentations, telephone conversations, and workplace case studies. However, authenticity should not mean simply placing difficult workplace documents in a textbook. Materials must be selected and adapted according to students' proficiency, disciplinary knowledge, and learning conditions.

Recent research in Vietnam provides direct evidence of the university–workplace gap. Chi and Vu (2024) found that Vietnamese graduates valued the specialised terminology gained from ESP courses, but the courses made more limited contributions to professional communication and career development. Similarly, Do's (2026) needs analysis of hotel front-desk staff identified a disconnection between college English training and workplace communication, particularly in listening, speaking, handling complaints, and telephone interaction. Although these studies concern different disciplines, they suggest that ESP programmes should be developed around occupational tasks rather than specialised vocabulary alone.

2.4. Factors Affecting ESP Teaching and Learning

The effectiveness of ESP education is influenced by teacher competence, student readiness, materials, classroom conditions, and assessment. ESP lecturers are expected to undertake several roles, including language teacher, needs analyst, course designer, materials developer, collaborator, and assessor. However, many language lecturers have limited disciplinary knowledge, while subject specialists may lack language-teaching expertise. Collaboration between the two groups is therefore essential for ensuring both linguistic and professional accuracy.

This challenge has also been identified in recent Asian research. Petraki and Khat (2022) found that ESP course development was constrained by insufficient teacher training, students' low English proficiency, and difficulties in producing suitable materials. These conditions are comparable to those found in many EFL higher-education settings, where lecturers must teach specialised content to large, mixed-proficiency classes with limited institutional resources.

Students' General English proficiency and learning strategies also influence their ESP achievement. Learners with limited vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, reading, or listening competence may be unable to process specialised materials or participate in professional communication activities. Furthermore, students who rely primarily on memorisation and translation may recognise terminology but remain unable to use it appropriately in workplace contexts. ESP programmes should therefore combine disciplinary language with explicit support for learning strategies, contextualised vocabulary use, and communicative practice.

Assessment is another important element of curriculum alignment. Traditional vocabulary, grammar, and translation tests may measure knowledge about specialised English but provide limited evidence of students' ability to perform professional tasks. Dursun et al. (2020) argue that workplace-language assessment should be based on a systematic analysis of the target language-use domain. Performance tasks should consequently represent the kinds of communication that learners are expected to complete beyond the classroom.

For ESP programmes, assessment may therefore include professional emails, reports, presentations, interviews, role-plays, case analyses, and simulated meetings. Such tasks can measure not only language accuracy but also comprehensibility, appropriateness, organisation, interaction, and successful task completion.

2.5. Research Gap

Recent studies have highlighted the value of needs analysis, authentic workplace tasks, performance-based assessment, and cooperation between educational institutions and

employers. Research in Vietnam has also identified limitations in the contribution of ESP courses to graduates' employability. Nevertheless, relatively few studies have simultaneously compared the perspectives of students, lecturers, and employers within the same institutional context.

This omission is significant because the three groups may evaluate ESP education differently. Lecturers may prioritise specialised vocabulary and reading, students may focus on course difficulty and examinations, while employers may place greater emphasis on practical communication and workplace performance. The present study addresses this gap by examining these three perspectives together to determine the degree of alignment between ESP provision at a Vietnamese university and the English competencies required by the labour market.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the alignment between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training and labour-market needs. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires administered to students, ESP lecturers, and employers, while qualitative data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with selected participants. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enabled the study to provide both a broad overview of stakeholders' perceptions and a deeper understanding of the issues affecting ESP curriculum implementation.

3.2. Participants

The study involved three groups of participants. The first group consisted of undergraduate students who had completed at least one ESP course at a university in Hanoi. A total of 100 students were selected through convenience sampling. The second group comprised six lecturers responsible for teaching ESP courses in different disciplines. The third group included representatives from 20 enterprises that regularly recruit university graduates and require English for professional communication. These three groups were selected to provide complementary perspectives on the effectiveness of current ESP programmes and their relevance to workplace requirements.

3.3. Instruments

Three questionnaire versions were developed for students, lecturers, and employers, respectively. The questionnaires consisted mainly of closed-ended items using Likert scales and multiple-choice questions, together with several open-ended questions to collect

additional comments. The student questionnaire explored learning experiences, perceived difficulties, and expectations regarding ESP courses. The lecturer questionnaire examined curriculum implementation, teaching practices, assessment methods, and challenges encountered in ESP instruction. The employer questionnaire investigated the English competencies expected of university graduates and evaluated the extent to which current graduates meet workplace communication requirements.

To complement the survey findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected lecturers and employers. The interviews provided more detailed explanations of the survey responses and offered practical suggestions for improving ESP education.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period. Questionnaires were distributed directly to participants, and interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on participants' availability. All responses were collected voluntarily, and participants were informed of the purpose of the study before providing consent.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Qualitative interview data were transcribed and analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to ESP curriculum, teaching practices, learner needs, and labour-market expectations. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled data triangulation and enhanced the credibility of the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the three stakeholder groups: six ESP lecturers, 100 students, and representatives of 20 enterprises. To keep the article concise, closely related questionnaire items are combined into six summary tables.

4.1. Alignment between the Current ESP Programme and Learners' Needs

The findings indicate that the current ESP programme is generally considered relevant to students' disciplinary knowledge and future occupations, but only partially aligned with their actual learning needs and English proficiency. Although lecturers evaluated the curriculum positively in terms of disciplinary relevance ($M = 3.83$) and its potential contribution to workplace requirements ($M = 3.50$), they expressed less confidence in its suitability for students' English proficiency ($M = 3.17$). Half of the lecturers considered the course materials only "relatively suitable" for students' language level, while one lecturer regarded them as less suitable (Table 1).

Table 1. Lecturers' Evaluation of the Current ESP Curriculum. (N = 6)

Criterion	Mean
Suitability for students' English proficiency	3.17
Relevance to disciplinary knowledge	3.83
Relevance to workplace requirements	3.50

(Source: Compiled from the author's research data)

These findings suggest that the programme has achieved a reasonable degree of disciplinary alignment but has not fully addressed learners' linguistic readiness. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), an ESP curriculum should be designed on the basis of both target needs and learning needs. While target needs determine the professional competencies that students are expected to acquire, learning needs concern their current language proficiency, learning strategies, and the support required to achieve those competencies. The present findings indicate that curriculum development has focused primarily on target professional content, whereas learners' existing English competence has received comparatively less attention.

This interpretation is further supported by students' responses. Although 91% regarded ESP as important or very important for their future careers, only a small proportion reported studying ESP regularly outside class. Most students relied on memorisation, dictionary consultation, and note-taking rather than contextualised language practice. Furthermore, translation (83%), pronunciation (78%), vocabulary (70%), and reading comprehension (68%) were identified as the most challenging aspects of ESP learning (Table 2).

Table 2. Students' Perceptions and Learning Difficulties. (N = 100)

Item	Percentage (%)
Students considering ESP important/very important	91
Translation difficulty	83
Pronunciation difficulty	78
Vocabulary difficulty	70
Reading comprehension difficulty	68

(Source: Compiled from the author's research data)

The contrast between students' positive attitudes and their learning difficulties demonstrates that recognising the importance of ESP does not necessarily translate into effective learning. Similar observations have been reported by Chi and Vu (2024), who found that Vietnamese graduates appreciated the contribution of ESP to disciplinary knowledge but considered its impact on workplace communication more limited. Their findings suggest that ESP programmes often succeed in introducing specialised terminology but are less effective in developing communicative competence required in professional contexts.

The findings also reinforce Smith et al.'s (2022) argument that needs analysis should not be regarded as a one-time activity conducted during curriculum design. Instead, curriculum effectiveness should be evaluated continuously by comparing learning outcomes with learners' actual progress and emerging needs. In the present study, both lecturers and students recognised that the curriculum contained relevant disciplinary content; however, the mismatch between course difficulty and students' English proficiency indicates that continuous curriculum review is necessary to ensure that learning materials and classroom activities remain achievable and pedagogically appropriate.

Another important finding concerns the nature of classroom instruction. Lecturers reported that vocabulary teaching relied primarily on explanation, translation, and homework, while activities promoting communicative language use, such as presentations, peer interaction, or project-based tasks, were implemented less frequently. Students' learning behaviour reflected this instructional approach, as listening to lectures, taking notes, and memorising vocabulary were considerably more common than asking questions, participating in discussions, or producing language in authentic contexts.

This pattern suggests that the current ESP programme remains largely knowledge-oriented rather than task-oriented. Such an approach may help students acquire specialised terminology and perform reasonably well in written examinations, but it provides fewer opportunities to develop the communicative competence required in workplace settings. As argued by Lin (2023), effective ESP instruction should integrate authentic tasks and context-aware learning activities so that students can apply disciplinary language in realistic situations rather than simply memorising specialised vocabulary.

Overall, the findings indicate that the current ESP programme is only **partially aligned** with learners' needs. While its disciplinary content corresponds well with students' academic fields and anticipated occupations, greater attention should be paid to learners' English proficiency, learning strategies, and opportunities for authentic communication. These findings support the needs-based perspective of ESP and suggest that curriculum alignment should be evaluated not only according to professional relevance but also according to learners' capacity to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

4.2. Factors Affecting ESP Teaching and Learning

The findings indicate that the effectiveness of the current ESP programme is influenced by three interrelated groups of factors, namely lecturer-related factors, learner-related factors, and institutional conditions. Both lecturers and students identified similar constraints,

suggesting that the challenges of ESP implementation are systemic rather than attributable to a single stakeholder.

One major challenge concerns lecturers' professional preparation for ESP teaching. Although most lecturers had several years of teaching experience, none had received formal disciplinary training, and only one-third had studied ESP methodology. Consequently, limited disciplinary knowledge and insufficient ESP training were frequently reported as barriers to effective teaching. At the institutional level, all lecturers identified large class size and students' weak General English proficiency as major constraints, while most also considered limited teaching time and inadequate facilities to affect teaching quality (Table 3).

Table 3. Lecturers' Perceived Challenges in ESP Teaching. (N = 6)

Challenge	n	%
Limited ESP teaching experience	5	83.3
Lack of ESP methodology training	4	66.7
Insufficient disciplinary knowledge	4	66.7
Limited classroom activities	4	66.7
Large class size	6	100.0
Students' weak General English proficiency	6	100.0
Short course duration	5	83.3
Uneven student proficiency	5	83.3
Inadequate teaching facilities	4	66.7

(Source: Compiled from the author's research data)

These findings are consistent with Petraki and Khat (2022), who argue that insufficient teacher preparation and limited institutional support remain major barriers to ESP implementation in higher education. Likewise, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) emphasise that ESP lecturers are expected to act not only as language teachers but also as course designers, materials developers, and collaborators with subject specialists. Such roles become difficult to fulfil without appropriate disciplinary knowledge and professional training.

Students reported similar concerns. As shown in Table 4, translation, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension were perceived as the greatest learning difficulties. Moreover, lecturer disciplinary knowledge, class size, and teaching materials were identified as the most influential factors affecting learning outcomes.

Table 4. Students' Learning Difficulties and Factors Affecting ESP Learning. (N = 100)

Item	%
Learning difficulties	
Translation	83
Pronunciation	78
Vocabulary	70
Reading comprehension	68
Writing	58
Grammar	54
Factors affecting learning	
Lecturer's disciplinary knowledge	90
Large class size	87
Teaching materials	80
Teaching facilities	73
Weak General English proficiency	72
Short course duration	66

(Source: Compiled from the author's research data)

The convergence between lecturers' and students' responses suggests that weak General English proficiency represents one of the principal obstacles to successful ESP learning. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP instruction should be designed by considering both learners' target needs and their present knowledge. The present findings indicate that while the curriculum adequately addresses disciplinary content, insufficient attention has been paid to learners' current language competence, making specialised materials difficult for many students.

The findings also reveal a close relationship between teaching methods and students' learning behaviour. Lecturers reported that explanation and translation were their most frequently used instructional techniques, whereas students relied heavily on memorisation, dictionary consultation, and note-taking. These mutually reinforcing practices may facilitate vocabulary acquisition and examination performance but provide relatively few opportunities for authentic communication. Similar observations were reported by Al Hilali and McKinley (2021), who argue that workplace communication competence develops through participation in authentic communicative practices rather than through the acquisition of specialised vocabulary alone.

Overall, the findings suggest that improving ESP teaching requires a comprehensive approach. Consistent with the literature reviewed in Section 2, programme quality depends on the interaction between lecturer expertise, learner readiness, institutional support, and communicative teaching practices. Curriculum reform should therefore include professional

development for ESP lecturers, reinforcement of students' General English competence before ESP instruction, greater collaboration with subject specialists, and increased use of authentic workplace tasks.

4.3. Alignment between ESP Outcomes and Labour-market Requirements

One of the major objectives of this study was to examine whether the current ESP programme equips students with the English competencies expected by employers. The findings reveal a noticeable gap between university ESP provision and workplace communication requirements.

Employers acknowledged that English plays an increasingly important role in professional activities, particularly in enterprises with international cooperation. As shown in Table 5, ESP was most frequently required for reading professional documents (85%), searching for work-related information (80%), communicating with foreign clients or partners (70%), and writing reports, contracts, and emails (65%). These findings suggest that workplace communication requires an integrated combination of receptive and productive language skills rather than specialised vocabulary alone.

Table 5. Employers' English Requirements in the Workplace. (N = 20)

Workplace task	n	%
Reading professional documents	17	85
Reading work-related information	16	80
Communicating with foreign customers/partners	14	70
Writing reports, contracts and emails	13	65
Reading reports and contracts	12	60
Negotiating contracts	9	45
Exchanging professional information	8	40
Professional telephone communication	7	35
Giving presentations	6	30
Translation and interpreting	4–5	20–25

(Source: Compiled from the author's research data)

The findings support Al Hilali and McKinley (2021), who argue that workplace communication extends beyond linguistic accuracy to include interaction, audience awareness, and the ability to accomplish authentic professional tasks. Similarly, Tran et al. (2024) emphasise that graduate employability depends not only on English proficiency but also on the capacity to apply English effectively in discipline-specific workplace contexts. The present study confirms these observations by demonstrating that employers prioritise practical communication abilities over isolated language knowledge.

However, comparison with the university curriculum reveals only partial alignment. As discussed in the previous sections, lecturers mainly emphasised specialised vocabulary, reading comprehension, translation, and written examinations, while communicative activities such as presentations, workplace simulations, negotiations, and professional writing received relatively limited attention. Students likewise reported that their learning focused primarily on memorisation and note-taking rather than authentic language use.

This discrepancy is reflected in employers' evaluation of graduates' English competence. As presented in Table 6, 45% of employers believed that graduates did not meet workplace English requirements, while only 25% considered their competence reasonably satisfactory. None of the respondents believed that graduates fully met workplace expectations.

Table 6. Employers' Evaluation of Graduates' ESP Competence. (N = 20)

Evaluation	%
Does not meet workplace requirements	45
Meets only a few requirements	30
Reasonably meets requirements	25
Fully meets requirements	0

(Source: Compiled from the author's research data)

These findings reinforce the argument made by Chi and Vu (2024) that although Vietnamese ESP programmes provide students with specialised terminology, they make a more limited contribution to developing workplace communication competence. Likewise, the needs-analysis framework proposed by Smith et al. (2022) suggests that curriculum evaluation should be based on the extent to which learning outcomes correspond to target workplace tasks. In the present study, this correspondence appears incomplete. While the curriculum successfully introduces discipline-specific knowledge, it provides fewer opportunities for students to practise the communicative tasks most frequently required by employers.

Another noteworthy finding concerns recruitment expectations. Employers did not rely solely on English certificates when evaluating applicants. Instead, they attached considerable importance to candidates' ability to communicate effectively during recruitment and to perform professional tasks in English after employment. This observation indicates that language certificates alone are no longer sufficient indicators of workplace readiness. Instead, employers increasingly value functional communicative competence demonstrated through authentic performance.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the current ESP programme is only partially aligned with labour-market requirements. While students acquire relevant disciplinary vocabulary

and reading skills, they receive relatively limited preparation for authentic workplace communication. This gap can be explained through the curriculum alignment framework discussed in Section 2.3. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), an effective ESP programme should be based on learners' target situations, while Al Hilali and McKinley (2021) argue that workplace communication should constitute the foundation of ESP course design. The present findings therefore suggest that future curriculum development should move beyond knowledge transmission towards task-based and performance-oriented instruction that reflects authentic professional communication.

4.4. Implications for ESP Curriculum Development

The findings of this study suggest several implications for improving ESP education in Vietnamese higher education institutions. More importantly, they demonstrate that enhancing ESP effectiveness requires systematic curriculum alignment rather than isolated modifications to teaching materials or classroom activities.

First, ESP curriculum development should be grounded in continuous needs analysis involving multiple stakeholders. The findings reveal differences between lecturers' perceptions of curriculum relevance, students' learning difficulties, and employers' workplace expectations. This confirms Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) argument that ESP courses should be designed according to both target needs and learning needs. Similarly, Smith et al. (2022) emphasise that needs analysis should be an ongoing process that informs curriculum evaluation and revision rather than a one-time activity conducted during course design. Universities should therefore establish regular mechanisms for consulting employers, graduates, lecturers, and students to ensure that ESP programmes remain responsive to changing labour-market demands.

Second, greater emphasis should be placed on authentic workplace communication. The employer survey indicates that graduates are expected to read professional documents, write emails and reports, communicate with international partners, and participate in workplace discussions. However, classroom instruction currently focuses largely on specialised vocabulary, translation, and written examinations. This mismatch suggests that communicative tasks should become a central component of ESP instruction. As argued by Al Hilali and McKinley (2021), workplace communication is socially situated and cannot be developed solely through language explanation or vocabulary learning. Learning activities should therefore include case studies, presentations, business correspondence, role-plays, meetings, negotiations, and project-based tasks that reflect authentic professional contexts.

Third, lecturer professional development should receive greater institutional support. The findings indicate that most lecturers have limited disciplinary knowledge and little formal preparation in ESP methodology. Consistent with Petraki and Khat (2022), these limitations may reduce lecturers' confidence in adapting teaching materials and designing workplace-oriented activities. Universities should therefore provide specialised ESP training, encourage collaboration between language lecturers and subject specialists, and involve industry practitioners in curriculum development and classroom activities. Such collaboration would enhance both the linguistic and professional authenticity of ESP instruction.

Finally, assessment practices should be more closely aligned with expected workplace performance. The findings show that employers place greater value on graduates' ability to use English effectively than on language certificates alone. This suggests that assessment should move beyond vocabulary and grammar tests to include performance-based tasks such as presentations, professional email writing, report writing, interviews, problem-solving activities, and workplace simulations. As suggested by Dursun et al. (2020), authentic assessment provides more valid evidence of learners' readiness to perform real-world communication tasks and better reflects the objectives of ESP education.

Overall, the findings indicate that improving ESP programmes requires an integrated approach that aligns curriculum objectives, teaching methods, learning activities, and assessment with labour-market requirements. Such alignment would not only enhance students' professional English competence but also strengthen graduate employability and improve the responsiveness of higher education to the needs of an increasingly globalised workforce.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the extent to which the current ESP programme at the University of Labour and Social Affairs meets labour-market requirements by examining the perspectives of lecturers, students, and employers. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study provides a comprehensive evaluation of curriculum relevance, teaching and learning practices, and workplace expectations.

The findings indicate that the current ESP programme has established a reasonable disciplinary foundation but remains only partially aligned with labour-market needs. Although lecturers considered the curriculum relevant to students' academic disciplines and future occupations, both lecturers and students acknowledged that many learning materials exceeded students' English proficiency. Students also reported considerable difficulties in

translation, vocabulary, pronunciation, and reading comprehension, while employers expected graduates to demonstrate practical communication skills, including reading professional documents, writing emails and reports, and interacting confidently with international partners. These findings reveal a clear gap between classroom learning and workplace communication requirements.

The study also identified several factors affecting the effectiveness of ESP education. Limited lecturer preparation in ESP methodology and disciplinary knowledge, students' insufficient General English proficiency, large class sizes, limited teaching time, and traditional assessment practices all constrained the implementation of communicative and workplace-oriented instruction. These findings support the view that improving ESP education requires systematic curriculum alignment rather than isolated changes to teaching materials or instructional techniques.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that universities adopt a more needs-based approach to ESP curriculum development by involving employers, lecturers, students, and subject specialists in regular curriculum review. Greater emphasis should be placed on authentic workplace communication, interdisciplinary collaboration, performance-based assessment, and professional development for ESP lecturers. Such improvements would better prepare graduates for the communicative demands of contemporary workplaces and enhance their employability in an increasingly globalised labour market.

This study contributes to the growing literature on ESP by providing empirical evidence from three key stakeholder groups within the Vietnamese higher education context. Unlike many previous studies that focused on a single participant group, the present research integrates the perspectives of lecturers, students, and employers to evaluate the alignment between university ESP education and labour-market requirements. This multi-stakeholder perspective offers practical implications for curriculum designers, university administrators, and policymakers seeking to strengthen graduate employability through more responsive ESP programmes.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted at a single university and involved a relatively small number of lecturers and employers. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution and may not fully represent ESP practices across Vietnamese higher education institutions. Future research should include multiple universities, larger employer samples, and longitudinal investigations that examine graduates' workplace performance after completing ESP programmes. Such studies would

provide further evidence for evaluating the long-term effectiveness of ESP education in meeting evolving labour-market needs.

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