RESEARCH ARTICLE

APPRAISING THE CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE TEACHING OF ESP TO ADVANCED LEARNERS IN BENINESE HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This research work aims at examining the challenges related to English for specific purposes (ESP) teaching in the advanced learners' classroom. It specially intends to find out the various methods used in ESP teaching classroom, the barriers affecting its success and the solutions to those barriers. Besides, it explores the teacher's roles in their learners' ESP achievements and the importance of ESP in higher education. Grounded in a mixed research methodology, this research was conducted in six universities and vocational schools located in various Beninese region (Littoral, Atlantique, Mono, and Borgou). The research instruments used to obtain the data are questionnaires and interviews. Two hundred and sixty - three (263) final year or graduate students majoring in Accounting, Economics, Law, Technology, Political science, and Medicine; and twenty-eight (28) lecturers who teach ESP course participated in the study. Findings indicate that ESP is a very important course in higher education. Moreover, teachers and students have recognised the place of ESP in learners' professional environment as English is becoming the most used medium of communication across the globe. However, many learners do not have the required basic English level to learn ESP. Also, many ESP teachers are not trained to teach the course as most of them are EFL teachers. In this light, this study has concluded that there is a need to train ESP teachers so as to improve the quality of ESP teaching and meet students' specific needs. Additionally, immersion programmes in English-speaking countries for students been recommended in order to help them gain a better ESP teaching or learning experience in advanced learners.

Keywords: *English for specific purposes (ESP), challenges, Needs assessment, Advanced learners.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, the English language plays a fundamental role in virtually every area of human activity. Across nations, this language is now a very important tool for verbal communication among people. In fact, not only is it an important tool for verbal communication, but it is also an essential tool in occupational contexts as more and more people, today, use the English language in their professional settings. Al-Roomy (2017) argues that the reason for giving English a dominant role is caused by its global status around the world as English holds a privileged status globally for many reasons, whether it is regarded as a first or second language, or a lingua franca with official status in many countries. Consequently, this has led to a rapid growth in English courses aiming at specific disciplines such as English for medical doctors or English for lawyers, in place of the general English taught in secondary schools. In other words, in non-English speaking countries (e.g., the Republic of Benin), English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) to learners at an earlier stage (primary or secondary school), but at a later stage, when these learners major in a specific field in higher or tertiary education or are already working adults, each in his or her speciality or varying occupation, they need the English language for specific purposes (ESP). Khoirunnisa, Suparno and Supriyadi (2018) define ESP as an approach to language learning which is designed to meet the specific needs of the learners in certain disciplines or professions in contrast to EFL or English for General Purposes (EGP) teaching which is for a general purpose, ESP provides English language instruction that aims to serve the communication needs of a targeted group of students in a certain domain. In fact, addressing learners' specific goals to use English in a specific area is what distinguishes ESP from other English language teaching discipline (Hyland, as cited in Kenny & Isik-Tas, 2020). Ahmed (2014) puts that if a student intends to use English in their future profession or wants to continue their academic studies, they need another sort of English that ought to meet some particular needs. Besides, Islam (as cited in Khalil & Semono-Eke, 2020) adds that introducing ESP in various non-native or international settings is to help equip learners with necessary English language skills to face their practical situation communication challenges in their future careers.

Over the years, more attention has been given to exploring issues related to EFL teaching in contrast to ESP teaching. Fortunately, of recent times, quite a number of researches have been carried out on ESP teaching. Speaking ESP requires not only the mastery of accurate terminologies related to a specific field, but also a solid foundation of general English that is, EGP taught in secondary schools where students are familiariarised with English language grammatical structures of the. Unfortunately, it has been observed that the ESP movement in Benin is yet to achieve remarkable achievements due to challenges faced by both teachers and learners. This study investigates the challenges related to the teaching of ESP to Beninese advanced learners in higher education. For this purpose, quantitative and qualitative studies have been carried out in universities and vocational training schools located in some Beninese regions (Littoral, Atlantique, Mono, and Borgou), with EFL teachers and students majoring in accounting, economics, law, technology, political science, and medicine.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Teaching a foreign language comes with lots of challenges and there are more challenges for a teacher who teaches ESP because according to Falaus (2016, p.1) the acquisition of general grammar and vocabulary "may not be enough in some circumstances". ESP focuses on the specific needs of the learners, concentrating more on language in context and on the students' need to acquire a set of professional skills and particular job-related functions." In Benin, more and more people resort to the English language as a tool of communication and an asset for professional promotion.

The fact that Benin is close to Nigeria and **the important role that the English language plays across the globe increase the necessity to have a good command of it.** The challenge is that people do not just want to speak English fluently but they also want to use appropriate vocabulary related to their professional environment. Therefore, it is not just to teach them how to use the language that is important but also how to use it in a specific setting. For instance, the mechanic who wants to buy vehicle spare parts in Nigeria must know the name of the parts he needs, otherwise he will buy the wrong ones. It is the same for lawyers and medical doctors who yearn to learn English to meet the requirements of their English-speaking clients or patients. That is why learners in higher schools majoring in specific fields of training are taught ESP to enable them to communicate in the active life.

Unfortunately, it has been noticed that most of the learners do not even master EGP though they have completed their secondary school education where they are supposed to have learned English for

some reasonable amount of time. Hence, all effort to teach them ESP, by supposing that they have a good background in English, will fail, because of that. In addition, many teachers who handle ESP courses are EFL teachers who, initially, were not trained to teach EGP. The need to understand the requirements of other professions and the willingness to adapt to these requirements are among the key elements that differentiate ESP teachers from their colleagues teaching EFL (Graham as cited in Lotfi and Zarei, 2018).

The fact that some of these learners have been taught ESP as part of their training at university, yet are unable to hold conversations in real contexts, questions the efficiency of ESP teachers beyond the classrooms. In view of the aforementioned, this paper explores the importance of ESP and provides alternative solutions to overcome the obstacles that impede the effectiveness of its teaching to Beninese ESP learners. This study also attempts to find out the various approaches or methods that teachers use to teach ESP and highlights the teachers' roles in ESP learners' achievements.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main questions that form the basis of this research are:

1. How importance are teachers' roles in the teaching of ESP for successful outcomes?

2. What are the methods and approaches that teachers most frequently to teach ESP to their learners in Benin?

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3. What are the barriers affecting the teaching of ESP in Benin higher education?

4. What are the alternatives to the challenges in the teaching of ESP?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section provides an overview of existing research on this study.

2.1 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ESP AND EGP

The English for General Purposes (EGP) is essentially the English language education in junior and senior high schools. Learners are introduced to the sounds and symbols of English, as well as to the lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical conventions on which the spoken and written discourses are based. There is no particular situation targeted in this kind of language learning. Rather, it focuses on applications in general context: appropriate dialogue with restaurant staff, bank tellers, postal clerks, telephone operators, English teachers, and party guests as well as lessons on how to read and write the English typically found in textbooks, newspapers, magazines, etc.

EGP curriculums also include cultural aspects of the second language. EGP conducted in English-speaking countries is typically called ESL, and EGP conducted in non-English-speaking countries is normally called EFL.

The question of the difference between ESP and EGP has been addressed in existing literature in terms of theory and practice. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) report that there is no difference between the two in theory; however, there is a great deal of difference in practice. ESP differs from EGP in the sense that the words and sentences learned and the subject matter discussed are all relevant to a particular field or discipline. Falaus comments that:

> Due to its oriented focus, ESP exhibits some characteristics that differentiate it from ESL (English as a Second Language) or EGP (English for General Purposes). First, it is language in context, this fact requiring real life learning situations, scenarios that tent to replicate the specific working or professional settings the ESP students might be related to or interested in. Instead of focusing on general grammar, vocabulary and language structures, this teaching – learning intercourse stresses the importance of practicing the necessary skills one would mostly employ in their future fields of activity. In comparison with the ESL learning contexts, the ESP students' motivational levels should thus be enhanced by their knowledge of the subject matter, their interest in the field fuelling their active participation in English classes. (Falaus, 2016; p.1)

The design of syllabuses for ESP is directed towards serving the needs of learners seeking for or developing themselves in a particular occupation or specializing in a specific academic field. That is why needs analysis is one of the features that differentiates ESP from EGP. Moreover, Scrivener (2005) differentiates clearly both terms by stating that ESP contrasts with EFL in that ESP "implies that we are going to take the client's needs and goals more seriously when planning the course, and rather

than teach 'general English', we are going to tailor everything to his or her character and particular requirements" (p. 324). ESP courses utilise vocabulary tasks related to the field such as negotiation skills and effective techniques for oral presentations.

A balance is created between educational theory and practical considerations. Moreover, Far (2008) indicates that the distinction between EGP and ESP provides a better understanding of the latter's traits. That is, while EGP has an ultimate purpose education in general, ESP is mostly centred on training. The former is usually in the position of predicting with difficulty the very needs of the learners, whereas the latter is meant to be employed in specific professional contexts. However, Dudley-Evans and John (as cited in Falaus, 2016) adds that in the case of ESP, the teacher is no longer the "primary knower" of the carrier content of the material because the learners, in many cases, are more accustomed to the subject to be taught, their only flaw residing in their lacking the ability to use English to express their knowledge.

2.2 SOME STUDIES RELATED TO ESP

These days, ESP is gaining interest and attention from scholars. The review of literature provides an array of research works which have been conducted on ESP. For example; Ahmed (2014) has discussed some Issues, tasks and challenges of ESP teachers. In his paper, he presents some basic concepts of ESP, its effectiveness, strategies and objectives of teaching. He also explains the ESP teachers' roles and the tasks the teachers must perform in their ESP classes.

In the same vein, after having read many literature reviews, Andriani (2014) analyses the emerging problems in teaching ESP in higher education. His results show that there are five problems encountered in ESP teaching: (1) teaching pedagogy (2) the teachers (3) the design of the course (4) students' ability and (5) students' needs. Also, Chalikandy (2013) delineates how to successfully teach an ESP course. Here is what he concludes:

> All four language skills; listening, reading, speaking, and writing, are usually stressed equally in an ESL/EFL classroom, while in ESP it is learners" needs that decides which language skills are focused, and the course is designed accordingly… To conclude, ESP always goes with ESL/EFL teaching, but whatever the current trend is it is the responsibility of ESP practitioners to be sensitive to learners" needs and their learning contexts. (p.321)

Al-Roomy (2017), conducted a critical review of the previous research carried out in Saudi context in ESP in the last ten years. The results of his study reveal that the way preceding researchers related their finding to the students' specific needs remained unclear. Therefore, he suggests some pedagogical implications to correct such a situation. Similarly, Khalil and Semono-Eke (2020) investigate the accurate teaching methods for teaching General English and ESP in Saudi context. The results of their study show that 73% of the teachers choose to use Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Also, Muliyah and Aminatun explore teachers' beliefs about teaching English for Vocational school. Their results show that:

"the teacher's beliefs are not always realized in their classroom practices for a variety of potential reasons. The inconsistency between belief and practices are related to various factors, including class density, time constrains, incompatibility of the assigned text-books, huge workload, and students need". (Muliyah and Aminatun, 2020; p122)

Other studies cover the same topic, in general, viewed in different fields of study. For instance, Fatmawati, Gani, and Samad, (2018) work on the techniques for ESP students in teaching English for ICT learners. Also, Khoirunnisa, Suparno and Supriyadi (2018) work on ESP teachers' and students' perceptions on teaching speaking for a tourism programme. Particulary, Hatauruk (2015) compiled courses on ESP. This compilation covers lessons like ESP and ESL, ESP Course at Technical Secondary, Vocational School for Construction and Building Trade students, ESP Vocabulary Teaching at the Vocational Secondary School of Furniture Industry, ESP International Sample lesson plan.

Closer to the current study, Iswati, and Triastuti (2021) investigate in a state and four (4) private higher educational institutions the fundamental challenges that the ESP teachers face. They found the following challenges to be noticeable: lack of knowledge on learners' field of study, lack of ESP training, lack of proper needs analysis, large classes, and various learners' English competencies. All the research works mentioned above are related to the current study which uses a mixed method as a result

to correct some of these works and to have strong tools for analysis of the findings.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As previously stated, this study explores the importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It focuses on the challenges of teaching ESP to its learners and attempts to find out alternative solutions to the issue. To this end, a mixed (quantitative and qualitative) research method has been used for this research work. The term "mixed methods" according to Wisdom and Creswell (2013), refers to an emergent methodology of research that advances the systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative data within a single investigation or sustained program of inquiry. In other words, collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data is referred to as mixed methods. The research was conducted in six Beninese universities and colleges located in Littoral, Atlantique, Mono, and Borgou regions. The research instruments used to obtain data are questionnaires and interviews.

3.1 SAMPLING

ESP lecturers and final year learners specializing in Accounting, Economics, Law, Technology, Political science, and Medicine are the participants in this study. The research sampling used consists of two hundred and sixty-three (263) final year or graduate learners: 101 females and 162 males. Seven (7) female lecturers participated in the study against twenty-one (21) male lecturer, thus a total of twenty-eight (28) ESP lecturers. It has to be stated that the participants were non-randomly chosen.

3.2 INSTRUMENTATION

The questionnaires have been extremely useful in gathering quantitative and qualitative data for this research work. In this present study, two different questionnaires have been designed. The first is addressed to ESP teachers while the second is to the final year students majoring in the fields selected for thie research work. The teachers' questionnaire comprises of eleven (11) questions, among which seven (7) multiple-choice questions (MCQ), three (3) Yes/ No questions and one (1) open-ended question.

Students' questionnaire consists of nine (9) multiple-choice questions (MCQ).Another instrument which has been used to collect data for this study is interviews. Interviews are research instruments that **involve** face-to-face verbal interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. To gather more reliable data, a semi-structured interview was conducted with fourteen (14) ESP teachers. The aim of the interviews is to identify the challenges that teachers while teaching ESP, their teaching methods, their perceptions on the importance of ESP and on their roles in their ESP students' learning achievements.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

As stated earlier, questionnaires and interviews have been the research tools used for the collection of data. A formal letter was submitted and an authorisation obtained before the questionnaire and interviews were administred to the participants in the study for the data collection. To follow the researchwork data collection procedure, the questionnaire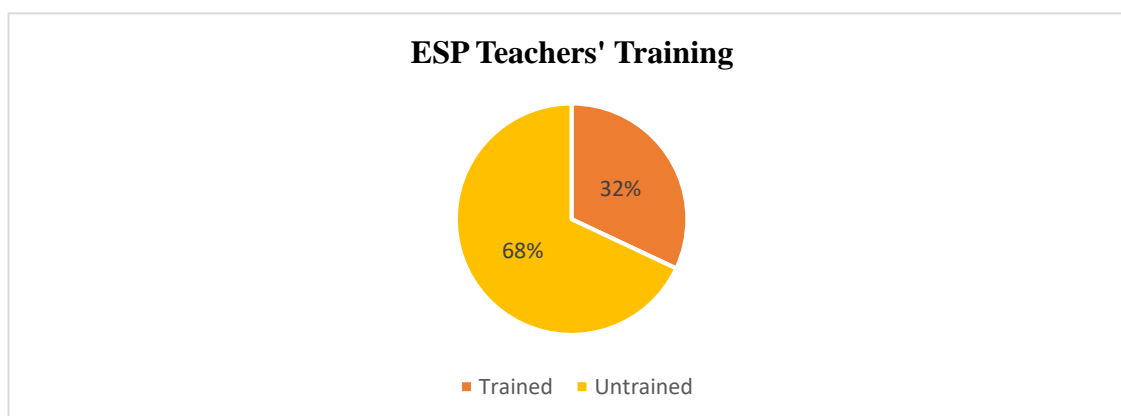s were distributed to both teachers and learners. Time was spent explaining in details the purpose of the study to them.

The participants were reassured of the confidentiality of the investigation and consequently, were asked to feel free to withdraw from the study anytime they wished to do so. All the questionnaires were filled in and collected on the spot. It is important to specify that for some participants, the various questionnaires were sent and obtained via email.

Finally, the interview with the teachers was mostly carried out after they had filled in the questionnaires. However, the interview with some teachers were conducted on a later date due to their busy schedule. On the whole, both teachers and learners participed fully in thr research. The collected data have been analysed and displayed based on the information obtained from the questionnaires and the interviews. Learners' and teachers' responses related to the questionnaires have been developed and tabulated for easy analysis and better understanding. Information obtained from the interview with the teachers have been analysed and classified into different categories. It is worth noting that it is the most relevant data which are provided in the next section to highlight the analysis of the findings.

4. FINDINGS

The findings from the questionnaires and the results of the interview carried out in the target schools are displayed below.

4.1 Results related to Teachers' Questionnaire

 Figure 1: ESP Teachers' Training

The findings, here, reveal that the majority of the teachers have never taken any training courses in ESP or have never been trained to teach ESP. Figure 1 shows that only 32% of the respondent teachers are specially trained to teach ESP while 68% of them have not been trained to teach ESP.
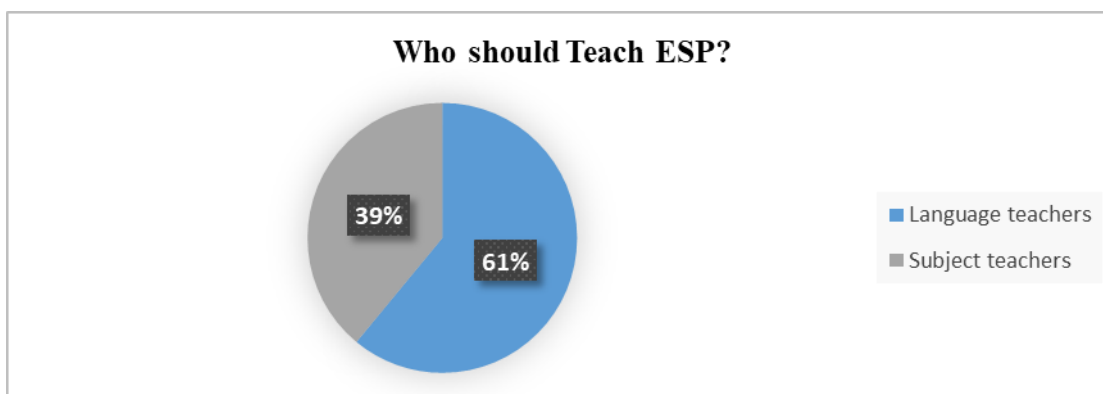
Table 1: Have you ever taught EFL classes?

Teacher's Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	26	93
No	2	7
TOTAL	28	100

The results in table 1 shows that ESP teachers' experience in EFL teaching. As expected, the overwhelming majority of the teachers, 93% reported that they have taught EFL. However, surprisingly, 7% of the respondents reported that they have never taught EFL classes.

Table 2: If yes, are you currently teaching EFL classes?

Teacher's Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	19	73
No	7	27
TOTAL	26	100

Apparently, table indicates that 73% of the teachers who have informed about their experience in EFL teaching on the previous table, (see table 1) are still teaching EFL classes. However, 27% of the respondent teachers have revealed that they are no longer teaching EFL classes and are limited to teaching only ESP classes.
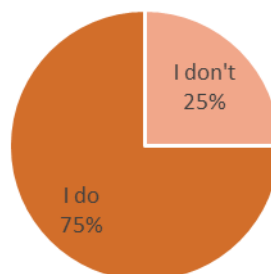
Figure 2: Who Should Teach ESP?

The results in the figure show teachers' opinion about the category of teachers that should teach ESP. It appears that the majority of the teachers, that is, 61% of them are of the opinion that language teachers are in the best position to teach ESP. However, 39% of the teachers are reported that subject teachers are in a better position to teach ESP.

Table 3: Teachers' ESP Teaching Method

Teachers' ESP Teaching Method	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Grammar Translation Method	0	0
Direct or Natural Method	4	14
Audio Lingual Method	0	0
Task-Based Language Teaching	7	25
Communicative Language Teaching	16	57
Computer Assisted Language	1	4
TOTAL	28	100

With reference to table 3, it can be said that many lecturers adopt the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as 57% of the respondents stated using this teaching method in their ESP classes. However, 14% of the teachers revealed that the direct or natural method best describes the teaching method they adopt in their classrooms while 28% of the respondents claimed to use the task-based language teaching. The result on the table also shows that none of the teachers reported adopting the grammar translation method or the audio-lingual method in their ESP classrooms and only 4% of the respondents claimed that they use the computer-assisted language learning method.

Figure 3: Teachers' Awareness of Need Analysis

On the basis of the result shown in the figure, it can be inferred that many teachers teaching ESP have knowledge of the concept of need analysis. Figure 3 shows that 75% of the participants stated they know about the term need analysis while 25% mentioned they do not know anything about the concept of need analysis.

The participating teachers are aware of the various difficulties they face while teaching ESP. The results of the teachers aware of their major challenges in their ESP classes show that all the teacher share the same challenges. They have all mentioned that their main challenges have to do with the teaching resources, students' level of general English, teachers' specialist knowledge, teachers' role as an ESP practitioner and students' demotivation.

4.2 Results Related to Students' Questionnaire

The findings of the students' questionnaire are presented as follows:

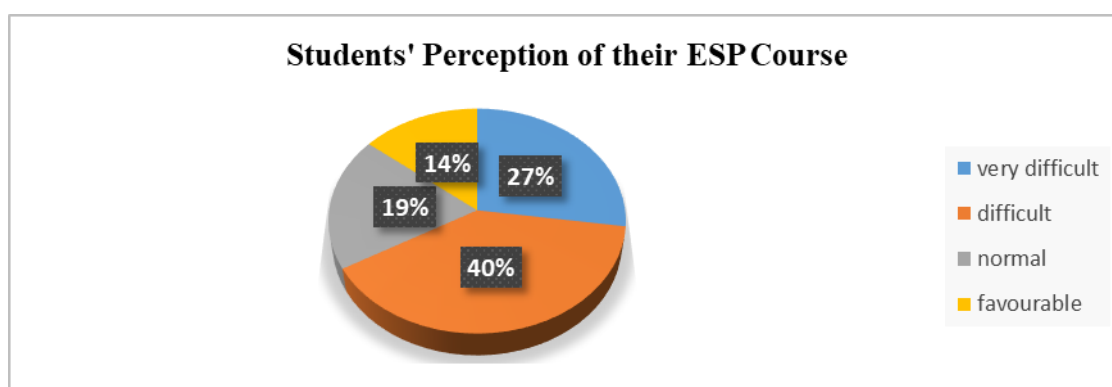**Table 5: Students' Level of Basic English**

Students' Level of English Knowledge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Beginner	127	48
Intermediate	89	34
Advanced	47	18
TOTAL	263	100

The table reveals that the majority of the respondents (48%) have a beginner level of the English language whereas 34% of the students think they have an intermediate level of the language and only 18% claimed to have an advanced level of the English language.

Table 6: Learners' Reasons for Studying English

Students' Reasons	Frequency	Percentage (%)
To pass exams	59	22
Further studies	43	16
Job/Career	124	47
Socializing	21	8
Others	16	6
TOTAL	263	100

This table presents learners' reasons for studying English. As it can be seen in the table, 22% of the learners are studying English to pass their exams while 16% are studying English in order to go further in their education. However, the majority of the learners which amounts to 47% stated that they are studying the English language for job or career purposes. 8% said they study English to be able to socialise with people while 6% stated that they are studying English for other purposes.
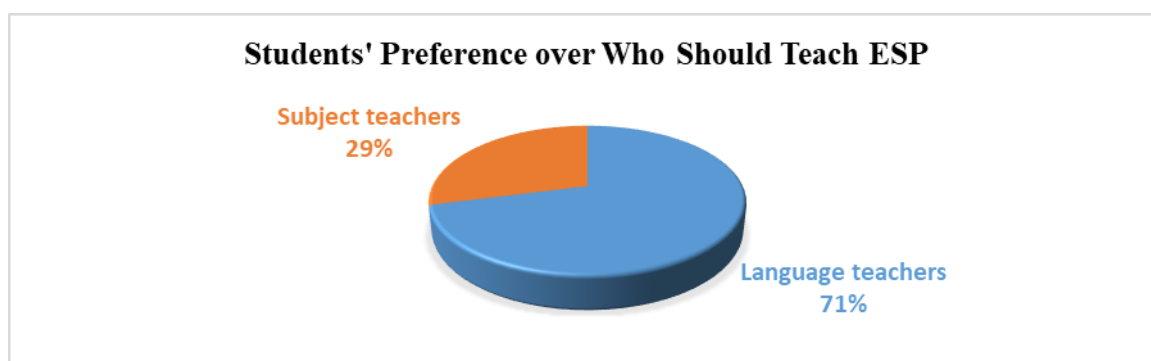
Figure 4: Students' Perception of their ESP Course

The figure indicates that 27% of the graduate students find their ESP course very difficult. Many of the respondents (40%) find it difficult while 19 % of them claimed they find their ESP course quite normal and 14% of them stated that they find ESP class favourable.

Table 7: Language Skills Emphasised in the ESP Class

Skills	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Listening	14	5
Speaking	88	33
Reading	16	6
Writing	23	9
Vocabulary	110	42
Grammar	12	5
TOTAL	263	100

The table indicates the skill that is the most emphasised in the ESP class. According to the graduate learners, five (5) % of them stated that listening skill is most emphasised in their ESP classes while 33% stated it is speaking skills. 6% reported that reading skills are more emphasized and 9% of the student claimed that writing skills are emphasized. However, many learners (42%) claimed that vocabulary is mostly emphasized in their ESP class and 5% said their ESP class is mostly on grammar skills.

Figure 5: Students' Preference over Who Should Teach ESP

The results in the figure indicate that 29% of the graduate students prefer the subject teacher to teach their ESP course whereas 71% are of the opinion that language teachers are in a better position to teach ESP.

Table 8: Students' Perception about the Importance of ESP in Higher Institution

Students' Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I agree	247	94
I disagree	0	0
Neutral	16	6
TOTAL	263	100

The table shows that 94% of the respondent learners agree that ESP is an important course in higher education while 6% of them were of a neutral position regarding the importance of ESP. However, none of the students disagreed that ESP is an important course in higher education.

4.3 ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS

The interview has proved to be an effective tool in obtaining accurate information from the lecturers. Its specific purpose is to find out teachers' perception on their roles in ESP teaching, gather in-depth information about their knowledge of needs analysis and the various solutions to solving the problems both teachers and students encounter in ESP teaching. From the interview, the majority of the respondents revealed that their roles include being a motivator, a guide, an assessor and a collaborator.

The teachers have revealed that regarding the specific methodology to teach ESP, there is none as they could all be tailored to the objective that they persue in the classroom. They stated that it is up to the teacher to choose the method that suits the learner's needs and works with the limited teaching materials. In this regard, quite a number of the respondents pointed out the importance of needs analysis in ESP teaching. Despite the fact that the majority of them acknowledge the role of need analysis, many of them confessed that they do not

carry out need analysis. In addition, the teachers revealed that they supposed to know what students' needs for their professional career are. Some of them stated that instead of carrying out need analysis every year for each category of students, they (lecturers) should work upon what had previously been taught previously to other group of learners in the same field.

Moreover, in view of the various challenges that they face as ESP teachers, teachers revealed that most of their learners do not have the basic level to learn ESP. They stated that many of them even find it difficult to utter a word in the target language. Furthermore, some of the lecturers admitted not having the relevant required knowledge. One of them said: "the terminology is very difficult, so we have to study it first ourselves as a learner of the subject". Besides, many of them are basically EFL teachers. When asked if they collaborate with subject teachers while planning their lessons, the majority provided a negative answer. Nevertheless, almost all the teachers emphasised the need for teachers to be

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trained in the field of ESP teaching to ensure better quality teaching.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Considering the results that have been gathered during the research work through the questionnaires and interviews, this last section of this chapter is organised based on the research questions.

5.1 TEACHING METHODS OR APPROACHES USED IN ESP TEACHING

Teaching methods have a great impact on the students' learning process. The findings for this study have revealed that teachers use the Communicative Language Teaching approach which is the most popular in language classrooms today. Besides, learner-centred method is suggested for ESP and CLT fills in the criterion because the learner is the focus in this approach (Khalili &Semono-Eke, 2020). However, there is no specific method to teach ESP as revealed from the interview conducted with the participating lecturers. This finding is in line with that of Kenny (2016) who states that it is advisable to accept there is no best method and advises to accept that in ESP any method can be chosen to be used in the classroom according to the context, learners, and needs analysis, teaching standard and learning abilities. Moreover, "methods and approaches are used considering students' needs, their levels, their goals, and their field of study. (ibid, p.260).

In the same light, Hutauruk (2015) observed that teachers need to reach a compromise before using an approach or a method because the completely effective teaching method does not exist. There are some effective methods for some usage, but they do not function in other circumstances. Although the findings of this study revealed that none of the teachers claim to use the Task-based method, Chalikandy (2013) is of the opinion that developments in applied linguistics will certainly influence ESP teaching, in particular, and teaching methods such as Content Based Instruction and Task Based Instruction will become more popular in ESP.

In addition, with the age of computer technology, integrating activities in the form of video projections, for example, will go a long way in making the target language more interesting and increase learners' motivation to learn the language. Short-film projections related to learners' specific field or occupation can enable them to learn how the language is used in real-life contexts. Unfortunately, only one lecturer out of the 28 selected has revealed that he uses of technology in his ESP class. Integrating technology in the ESP learning environment provides "potential for an innovative teaching and learning approach based on elements of communication, interaction, and cooperation…" (Giannikas, 2019, p.97). Ahmed (2014) adds that technologies have also been used in a variety of ESP classes to create contexts for communicating with oral, literate, and visual modes of discourse.

Furthermore, teachers have indicated that the direct method is frequently used, especially at the beginning of the ESP lesson, for giving instructions, however, teachers are often obliged to switch to their second language (French) to enable students to understand better. This only serve to show how students' levels are in Basic English.

5.2 BARRIERS AFFECTING ESP TEACHING IN BENIN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The findings from this study has revealed that teachers find ESP teaching very difficult and

challenging. Investigation by Andriani (2014) in India pointed out five problems encountered in ESP teaching: (1) teaching pedagogy (2) the teachers (3) the design of the course (4) students' ability and (5) students' needs. The first three points are well shown through this study. In fact, all the teachers who answered the teachers' questionnaire have emphasised the point. This argument is in line with the results found by Alsharif & Shukri (2018) whose quantitative statistics revealed that teaching ESP was challenging to the majority of the teachers in that study. One of the major challenges of ESP teaching that the field investigation of this study found out is teachers' inadequate specialist knowledge. This happens because many of them have not been trained in the speciality that they teach ESP.

In this study, for example, only 32% are trained to be ESP teachers. Training for ESP teachers should be aimed not only to enhance teachers' knowledge and understanding of teaching methodology but also to equip them with adequate knowledge on the relevant subject matter (Iswati & Triastuti, 2021). Moreover, many of the ESP teachers are basically EFL teachers and are currently still in charge of EFL classes (73%). This finding relates to that of Duyen (2014) who revealed that in Vietnam, most teachers of English in non-English-major universities or vocational colleges are required to teach ESP courses while their backgrounds are unrelated to the disciplines they are asked to teach (p.228). It, however, contrasts with that of Alsharif and Shukri (2018) whose study found out that teaching ESP was a primary teaching field of many of the participants.

Fatmawati, Gani and Samad (2018) go a step further by stating that English lecturers who teach English for ESP students teach general English, which is not suitable for the learning purposes. Those are the facts that often occur in the ESP field and it, perhaps, happens because of lack of experiences, information, and misunderstanding about ESP probably on the part of teachers. In addition, a majority of the interviewed teachers reported that they do not have a close working relationship with subject teachers. Since they (ESP teachers) do not have the adequate or required specialist knowledge, it is, therefore, important for them to consult the teachers in those specific fields in order to better their knowledge of the field in which they are providing ESP course. In this regard, Helsvig (2012), recommended that there must be a close cooperation between the ESP teacher and the subject matter teacher, as ESP teachers found themselves having to teach with textbooks whose content they know little or nothing about.

5.3 SOLUTIONS TO THE CHALLENGES OF ESP TEACHING

All the particiânts involved in the study have put forwards some suggestions and recommendations towards solving the various barriers that impede the teaching of ESP courses at universities and colleges. From the study, challenges of ESP teaching include students' low level of Basic English, teacher's lack of specialist knowledge, students' demotivation, and lack of appropriate materials and course design in line with Andriani (2014).

Regarding student's inadequate level for ESP learning, there is a need to tackle this problem right from secondary school by finding out how English is taught to EFL learners and then, to find solutions to any difficulty that prevents a successful EFL teaching.

In view of teachers' inadequate specialists' knowledge, teachers, themselves, have pointed out the necessity for them to be trained in ESP.

The findings have also revealed that teaching methods plays an important role on students' learning process, to handle the problem of students' demotivation teachers can integrate computer-assisted devices into their lessons. The era of ICT has been reported to increase students' motivation to learn a language. In addition, adult learners participate better when they clearly know the aims and objectives of what they are learning; therefore, teachers need to fully collaborate with their learners. In designing the ESP course, there is a need to conduct need analysis. Unfortunately, many of the participants in this study have revealed that they do not conduct needs analysis. Besides, many teachers have revealed they do not collaborate with teachers in designing or planning the contents of their lessons.

Fortunately, the literature for this study has pointed out the need for collaboration between EFL teachers and ESP subject teachers. Alsharif and Shukri (2018) put that this collaborative teaching method can help **to** solve challenges where teachers lack understanding on content and also in situations where teachers lack strong linguistic foundation. They add that teaching should be a continuous procedure that involves proficiency development and self-discovery thorough understanding of the training and learning procedures.

5.4 IMPORTANCE OF ESP AND TEACHERS' ROLES IN LEARNERS' ESP ACHIEVEMENTS

The importance of ESP in the professional world today cannot be overemphasised. From the literature review to the findings of this study, the importance

of ESP has been very much stressed. Moreover, 94% of the learners participating in this study have reported that ESP is very important for their future careers. The interview conducted with teachers has also indicated that the ESP course is a useful medium of eliminating the rate of unemployment as a result of learners' inability to communicate in the English language. Nevertheless, to achieve this goal, teachers have a great role to play to help their learners acquire a good mastery of the necessary skills required to use the English language in their professional environment. The interviewed teachers for this study have pointed out their roles as motivator, guide, collaborator and assessor.

However, Lotfi and Zarei (2018) have argued that the major roles of ESP teachers include course designer, material provider, researcher, collaborator and evaluator. Although the teachers who have participated in this study have not specified their role as a course designer and material provider, it is important for teachers to be conscious of this role. With the help of a needs analysis, teachers are expected to design their course in close relationship with what learners really want to do with the language. There are numerous methods and approaches for EFL teaching, however, only a few are dedicated to ESP teaching. As a result, teachers as researchers need to find materials that are adaptable to the content the ESP course that they teach. These roles are very significant for learners to improve their level in ESP learning to achieve positive outcomes achievements.

6. RECOMMENDATION

The findings from the field investigation of this study showed that many of the ESP teachers are not

trained to teach ESP. That is, only a few are trained as ESP teachers. Besides, as revealed in the teachers' questionnaires, many of them are EFL teachers. It is because of the non-availability of teachers trained specifically to teach ESP that authorities of higher educational institutions use EFL teachers for their ESP courses. This requires the attention of the government towards recruiting more trained teachers into the educational sector. Likewise, in-service training should be organised for EFL teachers who are also ESP teachers.

In addition, school authorities have a role to play in improving the quality of teaching. School administrations could organise immersion programmes to English-speaking countries such as Nigeria or Ghana for ESP learners. This will be a good opportunity for learners to interact and speak English native-like. Finally, teachers should bear in mind that teaching is never an easy task and more importantly, it is not easy to be an ESP practitioner. As stated in this study, the roles of ESP teachers are more complex than those of an EFL teacher. As a result, teachers are advised to conduct needs analysis before designing the ESP course in order to ensure that the course contents fulfil with student's expectations.

Furthermore, it is important for EFL teachers to collaborate with ESP subject teachers who are experts in the discipline in which they offer an ESP course. This will enable them (ESP teachers) to acquire more knowledge in the field they are teaching. Last but not least, in spite of limited teaching materials, teachers should endeavour to provide materials that could be adapted to their learners' context and which could be useful in real-life situations.

7. CONCLUSION

This research work has focused on examining the challenges of ESP teaching in higher education. It explores the importance of ESP and provides alternative solutions to overcoming the obstacles that impede the effectiveness of its on Beninese ESP learners. This study has also attempted to find out the various approaches or methods in teaching ESP and has highlighted the teachers' roles in ESP learners' achievements. The methodology of the work has been based on a mixed method and both ESP teachers and students have played an important role in the data collection.

The field investigation has been carried out in four regions of Benin namely Littoral, Atlantique, Mono and Borgou. Questionnaires and interviews are the instruments that have been used to collect the data which have been presented in tables and figures. The main findings of this research work show that ESP is very important in learners' professional development. However, teachers face difficulties such as students' low level of Basic English, lack of expert knowledge on the part of teachers and course design. Nevertheless, findings have revealed that both teachers and students advocate the use of language teachers to teach ESP courses rather than subject teachers. Unfortunately, many EFL teachers are not trained in ESP courses. However, despite the various challenges, all the participants acknowledged the importance of teaching ESP in Benin higher education.

In conclusion, the research recommends that the government train ESP teachers in order that they might improve the quality of ESP teaching in Benin. It also recommends that school authorities organise immersion programs in English-speaking countries for students and puts forward some and suggestions that are useful in promoting a better ESP teaching or learning in higher educational institutions for ESP teachers. Further research needs to be conducted in other regions of Benin and in other disciplines to find out more about the issues related to ESP teaching in Benin.

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