



Challenges in Teaching and Learning ESP Vocabulary for Psychology Majors and Some Proposed Solutions

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ABSTRACT:

In the realm of education, the teaching and learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) present a unique set of challenges, particularly when catering to specialized fields such as psychology. The acquisition of discipline-specific vocabulary is crucial for students pursuing degrees in psychology, as it not only facilitates comprehension but also empowers them to communicate effectively within their professional domains. However, the journey to mastering ESP vocabulary within psychology is often fraught with obstacles, both for educators and learners alike. This paper delves into the multifaceted challenges encountered in teaching and learning ESP vocabulary for psychology majors, while also proposing viable solutions to address these hurdles. By examining the distinctive nature of ESP within the context of psychology education, this study aims to provide insights that can enhance pedagogical approaches and optimize the learning experience for both students and instructors.

Keywords: Vocabulary, vocabulary usage skills, English in the psychology major, challenges, remedial measures.

1. Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of higher education, the mastery of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is indispensable for students pursuing specialized fields such as psychology. As the cornerstone of effective communication within the discipline, ESP vocabulary equips psychology majors with the linguistic tools necessary to navigate complex concepts, theories, and research findings. However, the journey towards proficiency in ESP vocabulary is not without its challenges, presenting a formidable task for both educators and learners alike.

At the heart of the challenges lie issues pertaining to the sheer breadth and depth of psychological terminology, which often overwhelms students and impedes their linguistic development. Additionally, the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students pose a significant hurdle, as educators must navigate varying levels of proficiency and familiarity with the English language. Furthermore, the conventional methods of language instruction may fall short when it comes to imparting ESP vocabulary tailored to the specialized needs of psychology majors.

In response to these challenges, this paper offers a comprehensive examination of potential solutions aimed at enhancing the teaching and learning of ESP vocabulary within the realm of psychology education. From the integration of discipline-specific terminology exercises to the incorporation of experiential learning opportunities, the proposed strategies seek to foster a supportive and engaging learning environment conducive to linguistic growth and proficiency.

By embracing innovative pedagogical approaches and leveraging emerging technologies, educators can empower psychology majors to overcome the hurdles associated with ESP vocabulary acquisition. Through collaborative efforts and a steadfast commitment to excellence in teaching, the barriers to effective language learning can be dismantled, paving the way for a more enriching and fulfilling educational experience for students embarking on their journey towards professional competency in psychology. However, despite the efforts of both teachers and students, teaching and learning ESP in psychology within the university still face many difficulties and challenges and have not achieved the desired results or met the requirements of the subject as well as the needs of employers. Vocabulary learning and vocabulary usage skills training are paramount in conveying and absorbing a language in general and English in particular, which is no exception for ESP in Psychology.

In their research, Pyles and Algeo (1970) argued that "for most people, when they think about language learning, they immediately think of vocabulary. Indeed, vocabulary is the soul of language." Harmer (1991) emphasized that "to understand and use a word well, we need to grasp its meaning, usage, part of speech, and grammar."

However, vocabulary learning does not always satisfy both teachers and learners because it depends on many objective and subjective factors such as the learner's interest, the class environment, and study materials. Through exploring the theoretical basis of teaching and learning ESP in general, this article focuses on studying the difficulties in teaching and learning psychology specialized vocabulary. From there, it proposes some teaching and learning

solutions to enhance the effectiveness of teaching vocabulary in particular and the quality of teaching and learning ESP in psychology within the university in general.

2. Methodology

Research Objectives: Psychology major students from the 18th cohort, with a total of 125 participants.

Data Collection Tools: Interviews; survey questionnaires.

Data Processing Method: Data were processed and analyzed using SPSS 18.0 software with statistical algorithms.

Research Results:

From the collected data and information, the author analyzed, researched, and synthesized the difficulties encountered by both teachers and students in teaching and learning psychology ESP vocabulary. The author also proposed some solutions to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning psychology ESP vocabulary, as follows:

Some Difficulties in Learning Psychology ESP:

Table 1: Perception and Interest Level of Students Regarding Psychology Specialized English :

N _o	Questions	Level	N=125	Percentage (%)
1	The importance of ESP	Important	52	41.6
		Neutral	17	13.6
		Not important	56	44.8
2	Preferences	Prefer	20	16
		Neutral	40	32
		Not prefer	65	52
3	Coursebook	Difficult	85	68
		Medium	40	32
		Easy	0	0
4	Supplementary materials	Many	0	0
		Few	108	86
		None	17	14

Survey results show: Only 41.6% of students perceive the importance of ESP highly. 13% of students are undecided, and 44.8% of students consider ESP unimportant and unnecessary.

Perception correlates with students' interest level in the subject: Very few students (16%) genuinely enjoy the subject. 32% of students only make an effort to study because it is a compulsory subject in the curriculum. 52% of students admit to disliking the subject for various reasons.

Difficulty of the Curriculum: 68% of students find the curriculum difficult, with only 32% of students rating it as appropriate and manageable for learners. Most students believe there is a lack of reference materials, reflecting the current situation regarding ESP curriculum and reference materials, both in general and specifically in psychology specialized English.

Table 2: Challenges in learning ESP

N _o	Challenges	N=125	Percentage (%)
1	Overcrowded classes	96	77
2	Large Amount of Vocabulary and Complex Terms	125	100
3	Lack of Basic English Language Knowledge	70	56
4	Lack of Practical Environment	105	84

Overcrowded Classes:

A majority of students (77%) consider one of the challenges they face in learning is the overcrowded class size, with an average class size of over 60 students.

According to Hutchison (1987), an appropriate language class size should only have around 20-25 students. Both students and teachers acknowledge the difficulty of improving vocabulary, focus, and practicing specialized vocabulary in such overcrowded conditions.

Large Amount of Vocabulary and Complex Terms:

100% of surveyed students agree that there is a large amount of vocabulary in each lesson, and the specialized vocabulary and terms are long, difficult to pronounce, and remember for students.

Lack of Basic English Language Knowledge:

The lack of basic English language knowledge is a significant barrier directly affecting success or failure in teaching and learning specialized English in psychology. The deficiency in basic English knowledge compared to the program's requirements creates a fear of learning specialized English among students.

Lack of Practical Environment:

The purpose of teaching and learning specialized English in psychology is to help students confidently use English in their field, communicate, read, translate, and use specialized materials. However, aside from limited class hours, students lack an environment for practice and application of the specialized knowledge and vocabulary learned. 84% of students believe that the reference materials available in the library are extremely limited and insufficient to meet their learning and research needs.

Some Challenges in Teaching Psychology ESP:

Teaching Experience:

Most English teachers are young and have little teaching experience, especially in psychology ESP. 46% of the surveyed teachers have only recently started teaching within the past few years. Many teachers who teach psychology ESP in the institution are still in the process of exploring and establishing their teaching methods and identities.

Teaching Psychology: 100% of the teachers admitted that they initially faced difficulties in their teaching psychology. Most English teachers are trained to teach basic English. Therefore, when they have to teach psychology ESP, they often experience anxiety, worry, and lack confidence. Thus, each class session with new content becomes a struggle, tension, and pressure for them.

Curriculum and Teaching Methods: Compared to basic English, teaching psychology ESP lacks a solid foundation in curriculum and pedagogy. When teaching psychology ESP, teachers have to completely self-develop both knowledge and teaching methods and find appropriate curriculum to meet the diverse needs of learners.

Subject Matter Expertise: The biggest challenge for teachers is the lack of expertise in the subject matter of the field they teach. Learners always consider teachers as knowledgeable and reliable sources to ask questions. Therefore, teachers need to have good knowledge and deep understanding of the subject matter.

This is a real challenge for English teachers because they may be able to address language-related questions but may struggle to fulfill the role of a subject matter expert.

Student Learning Awareness: In addition to the aforementioned difficulties, another factor influencing the process and effectiveness of teaching ESP for Psychology is the awareness of students regarding their learning. When investigating the importance of Student Learning Awareness (SLA), only 41.6% of students consider it necessary. Due to the lack of awareness of the importance of the subject, students' learning consciousness is not high.

Some Remedial Measures

Class Size Reduction

Survey results show that 68% of students suggest that ESP classes should be divided into smaller groups with 25-30 students. Large classes imply the presence of students with various proficiency levels. Therefore, organizing entrance proficiency tests for students to assign classes is necessary. Additionally, during the teaching process, teachers should divide tasks into groups or pairs so that students have opportunities for interaction, can enhance their teamwork skills, and support each other in their work.

Innovation and Creativity in Vocabulary Teaching

74% of students propose changing the current vocabulary teaching and learning methods. Teaching and learning vocabulary through mere note-taking should be altered to enhance teaching effectiveness using creative and memorable approaches such as:

Teaching and learning vocabulary by themes such as cognitive development, clinical psychology, psychotherapy, counselling, etc.

Using images and sounds to help students remember words better

Teaching and learning related vocabulary. For example, when teaching the word "treat," providing related words such as "cure" or "heal" is beneficial. Instructing students on how to combine terms and the rules for term combination. For instance, "Root+suffix" or "Prefix+Root." Regularly reviewing vocabulary and placing vocabulary in specific contexts. According to Heverly (2011), learning vocabulary in specific situations helps students remember words longer and improves their ability to use vocabulary more flexibly.

Enhancing and Elevating Students' Basic English Knowledge

The awareness, attitude, and self-effort of students in the learning process play a crucial role in the effectiveness of improving and advancing their English proficiency. Therefore, from the outset of the course, it is necessary to:

- Enhance students' awareness: Students themselves must recognize the importance of the course, have clear and proactive learning motivations, and be conscientious in studying, self-learning, and self-improvement.
- Ignite students' passion for the subject: Encourage and promptly reward students' efforts and achievements in their studies.
- Develop an enhanced English program for students while encouraging them to participate in specialized and expansive courses.

Supplementing Reference Materials and Creating Practical Environments for Students

- Design a separate appendix for vocabulary for each lesson.
- Supplement additional reference materials to the school library.
- Provide suggestions for useful websites or reference materials on the Internet.

Assign specific self-study tasks and guide students on how to utilize various resources to complete assignments, fostering habits of self-exploration and self-learning at home. Introduce and provide specialized dictionaries for students' reference. Organize extracurricular activities, debates in English, etc., to create beneficial and healthy environments for students to use English effectively.

Accumulating Teaching Experience, Cultivating Confidence in Teaching

To establish a comfortable and confident atmosphere in every teaching session, teachers must first hold positive attitudes toward the subject. Actively seeking knowledge from various sources such as literature, books, and practical experiences is essential. Regularly organizing teaching workshops to assess and draw lessons from experiences, as well as participating in seminars and professional meetings to share teaching experiences, lesson planning, and lecture preparation are beneficial practices.

Selecting Appropriate Curriculum and Teaching Methods

According to surveys, up to 68% of students evaluate the current curriculum used in the school as difficult. Therefore, to ensure suitability for students, teachers need to be flexible in lesson planning processes:

- Choosing and replacing long and difficult modules with shorter and more understandable ones.
- Replacing content with broad or vague concepts with specific, practical lessons.
- Regularly updating and supplementing modern knowledge into the curriculum, replacing outdated content with new and relevant ones.
- Additionally, providing training and development opportunities for teachers through psychological training courses to enhance their capabilities is essential. Regularly exchanging ideas with colleagues about positive teaching methods suitable for the subject's characteristics is also beneficial.

Enhancing Subject Matter Expertise in Teaching Psychology ESP

Teachers instructing ESP need to possess certain knowledge. According to Tom Hutchinson, while they may not require in-depth, extensive knowledge of the specific field, they must meet the following three criteria:

- Positive Attitude Toward ESP Content: Teachers should maintain a positive attitude toward the content of Psychology Specialized English.
- Basic Knowledge of the Field: They should have fundamental knowledge of the specialized field.
- Awareness of Their Knowledge: Teachers need to be aware of how much they know about the subject matter. This awareness allows them to plan for self-improvement adequately.

To fulfill these criteria and enhance their own capabilities, teachers can:

- Participate in training courses to improve their subject matter knowledge as well as their teaching skills.
- Engage in reading reference materials, conducting internet research, and exchanging ideas with colleagues and subject matter experts.
- Foster a proactive attitude towards self-learning and improvement, actively seeking to understand complex concepts and specialized terminology.

- Improving Students' Learning Awareness

A prevalent issue nowadays is the lack of enthusiasm or proactive attitude among students towards learning Psychology ESP. To address this unfortunate reality, besides developing suitable and engaging curriculum and teaching materials to meet students' needs, teachers must have solid subject matter knowledge and employ captivating teaching methods. They need to clearly articulate specific goals and requirements of this important and practical subject to gradually increase students' interest, motivation, and proactivity in learning. Additionally, providing guidance and advising students on effective learning methods is crucial. Many students are diligent but lack effective learning methods, resulting in subpar academic performance.

3. Conclusion

The research results reveal numerous difficulties and challenges in teaching Psychology ESP vocabulary, as well as Psychology ESP in general. Based on contributions from teachers and students, as well as personal teaching experiences, the author has proposed several solutions to overcome these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of teaching Psychology ESP vocabulary, specifically, and Psychology ESP in general at tertiary level.

Recommendations

Educational management authorities should standardize programs and curricula for specific fields. Training units within the same specialization should collaborate to compile standardized, updated curricula that align with new training needs.

The institution should provide favorable conditions for teacher training, upgrading teaching methods, and invest in language teaching facilities such as computers, projectors, internet access, and supplement reference materials in the library.

The Psychology ESP teaching team should enhance their self-learning and research awareness, collaborate effectively with departments, units, and academic advisors to maximize students' autonomy, positivity, and competency.

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