



Research Article

## AN ESP SYLLABUS DESIGN IN THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM OF AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER:

### STUDENTS' NEEDS AT VIETNAM AVIATION ACADEMY

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#### ABSTRACT

*This paper presents the preliminary stage of a needs analysis project conducted within the Air Traffic Controller study program in Vietnam. The study aims to identify the needs of a specific group of learners and implement a course design based on those needs. It also focused on the perceptions of both students and lecturers regarding the current syllabus and the challenges they encounter. The participants comprised two groups: ESP experienced instructors and students in their first and second years. The study findings underscored the necessity for a highly specialized ESP language course centered on the program. It affirmed that students encountered various challenges at the faculty, notably deficiencies in essential skills like speaking and listening. Besides, there was a need for ESP training that caters to both the immediate needs and future professional needs of the students in the program. These findings emphasize the importance of developing a targeted language curriculum to address the specific linguistic needs faced by students pursuing this program.*

**Keywords:** air traffic controller; design; ESP; needs analysis

#### 1. Introduction

The term "Aviation English" refers to general English at aeronautical and/or aviation institutions and is not just used to describe the language spoken by pilots and air traffic controllers (ATC). It might be created as an integrated ESP (English for Specific Purposes) curriculum for students studying aviation and/or aeronautics. Both the English language skills and the vocabulary appropriate to their field of study should be mastered by ESP learners.

The Vietnam Aviation Academy (VAA) might add Aviation English to its list of ESP specialties. To help ESP students learn the target language more successfully and in

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accordance with the requirements stipulated by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), needs analyses have been conducted and curricula created for an integrated course in Vietnam. VAA tries to build a potential ESP teaching strategy that would be more suitable for Vietnamese learners by reexamining the ESP theories.

The language and communicative needs of ATC trainees should be thoroughly examined as part of the needs analysis (Korba et al., 2023). This involves defining the precise linguistic abilities necessary for them to efficiently perform their jobs, such as comprehending aviation jargon, giving clear orders to pilots, and managing emergency circumstances. A gap could develop, nevertheless, if the need assessment overlooks the variety of communication activities and scenarios that ATCs deal with in their professional capacities (Buarqoub, 2019). It is crucial to make sure that the needs analysis reflects the various linguistic demands and obstacles experienced by ATCs, such as contacts with pilots, ground personnel, and other ATCs, as well as the capacity to understand and interpret challenging technical documentation.

The unique qualities of the ATC trainees should also be included in the needs analysis (EUROCONTROL, 2001). Every trainee may be at a different stage of learning, have a different educational background, and have had various aviation or language learning experiences in the past, failing to take into consideration these unique distinctions between the syllabus's design and the particular demands and talents of the ATC trainees (Wium & Eaglestone, 2022). The needs analysis should include evaluations of students' language proficiency, such as through standardized tests or diagnostic tools to identify their proficiency and areas requiring improvement.

Additionally, if the needs analysis ignores the context in which the ATC study program takes place, a gap might develop. The needs analysis should take into account elements such as the unique regulatory requirements, operating procedures, and technological developments in the aviation industry. According to Lykou et al. (2019), the syllabus design must be in line with current industry standards and involve the utilization of pertinent hardware, software, and communication technologies used in ATC operations. The ESP syllabus and the demands for ATCs in the real world may not match if this context-specific knowledge is ignored. Effective communication in the aviation industry depends on the study of Air Traffic Controller (ATC) programs and the layout of their English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula (Council, Education, Integration, & Automation, 2019). The needs analysis used to construct the ESP syllabus in the ATC study program research, however, might have certain flaws. The depth and accuracy of the needs assessment represent one possible weakness (Foster et al., 2021; Irwin & Kelly, 2021). Researchers and curriculum designers should use a thorough and multifaceted needs analysis in ESP syllabus design for ATC study programs to solve these gaps. To do this, extensive interviews and observations with seasoned ATCs must be conducted. Additionally, related documents and industry

standards must be reviewed, and stakeholders including aviation authorities, ATC training institutions, and ATCs must be consulted. The needs analysis procedure ought to be continuous and iterative, enabling regular updates and modifications to the curriculum in light of developing market trends and shifting demands.

To ensure that the ESP syllabus design in Air Traffic Controller study programs is effective, it is critical to fill in gaps that may exist in the needs analysis methodology. To achieve this aim, five following research questions are set to be obtained:

1. What are the future professional needs of the students?
2. What are the students' needs in terms of language skills and tasks?
3. What are the language-skill deficiencies observed in the students?
4. What are the students' preferences regarding learning styles, methodology, and teacher roles?
5. What are the students' suggestions for enhancing ESP (English for Specific Purposes) training?

Researchers can close these gaps and create customized curricula that meet the linguistic and communicative needs of ATCs in the constantly changing aviation industry by conducting a thorough and context-specific needs assessment, accounting for individual learner characteristics and industry requirements.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. English for Specific Purposes (ESP)**

Numerous academics have offered definitions of ESP in a variety of contexts. Otilia (2015) defines English for Specific Purposes as the instruction and acquisition of English as a second or foreign language for domain-specific usage (p. 54). According to Harmer (cited in Otilia, 2015, p. 54), ESP refers to situations when learners have particular language acquisition demands. Additionally, the majority of researchers seem to concur on these two aspects of ESP, namely that it belongs to a particular domain and that it is based on the individual needs of learners (Otilia, 2015).

### **2.2. Needs analysis**

Designing an ESP training requires a thorough needs assessment study. Performance characteristics and a summary of the learner's competencies would result from observation and awareness of the data. The means serve as a gauge of how well students have grasped the new subject matter and help students interpret newly acquired information. Therefore, the complete teaching and learning process as well as the transcribing of ESP content would be built upon this indicator. The information gathered would serve as the beginning point for the teacher and students to convey their newly acquired knowledge, and it would be accepted as the basis for new knowledge as it emerged (Korba et al., 2023).

### **2.3. English for Air Traffic Controllers**

Aviation English usage was divided into several categories (Ragan, 1997). Air Traffic Control and Flight Services are the first flight-related topics. Second, technologies related to avionics, aircraft manufacturing, airframe and power plant mechanics, and flight line

operations engineering about aerospace and aeronautical engineering. Next, matters relating to marketing, fixed-base operations, airport management, and airline/charter services will be discussed. Finally, education and training in the fields of engineering, business administration, maintenance, and flight.

One of the most important aspects of flight operations is the voice communication between pilots and air traffic controllers (de Oliveira et al., 2006). Pilots and those working in air traffic control may have quite different goals and views since they draw their information from various sources. To share responsibility for safely and effectively coordinating air traffic, both parties need to continuously maintain a mutual awareness of the situation (Tiewtrakul & Fletcher, 2010). However, operational errors and pilot deviations generally have been linked to pilot-ATC communications errors as a major contributing factor.

### **3. Research Methods and Results**

#### **3.1. Research Methods**

This study focuses on presenting the data obtained from students' questionnaires and interviews, offering comprehensive insights into their perceived needs as language learners and users. It is important to note that the needs analysis project developed for this study goes beyond the methods used before the course, commonly known as "initial needs analysis" (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998; Graves, 1999), and also considers other stakeholders besides the learners. The main goals of this section of the research project were:

- Identifying potential professional needs of the students.
- Determining the students' needs in terms of language skills and tasks.
- Documenting the language-skill deficiencies observed in the students.
- Eliciting the students' preferences regarding learning styles, methodology, and teacher roles.
- Recording the students' suggestions for enhancing ESP (English for Specific Purposes) training.

In this section, we provide a summary of the main goals, which involve analyzing data from questionnaires and interviews to gain insights into students' needs as language learners and users, considering various factors beyond the initial needs analysis, and considering the input of multiple stakeholders. Furthermore, we identify professional needs, language skill requirements, areas of improvement, preferred learning styles and methodologies, and suggestions for enhancing ESP training.

A simple random sampling approach was used to select 73 ATCs from the population for the study's participants. The random sampling employs Yamane's (1967) formula. Participants were 67.12% male and 32.88% female. Their ages ranged, but the majority of them (89.04%) were between 20 and 22. Furthermore, they had a spectrum of English language proficiency, from beginning (31%) to upper intermediate (59%) to advanced (9%).

The needs analysis study used a multi-method approach that combined quantitative and qualitative research techniques. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, triangulation of sources and methodologies (Jasso-Aguilar, 1999; Long, 2005) was also attempted. The students' questionnaire, which was given to 75 students and contained both closed- and open-ended questions, was used to collect data. In addition, 25 students participated in semi-structured interviews to glean additional insightful information about the circumstance.

Descriptive statistical techniques were used to report data collected from the questionnaire. All of the questionnaire items' frequencies and percentages were tallied. Data from semi-structured interviews was assessed using data reduction, first-level coding, second-level coding, and pattern coding techniques. Codes produced categories that were 'tagged' by specific names in groups (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To make fewer categories, as indicated in Table 2, comparable concepts with shared attributes were then grouped into themes.

### 3.2. Results

#### 3.2.1. The students' questionnaire

- *The needs and objectives of the learners in using the English language.*

A sizable portion of participants (61.64%) stated the value of knowing English for "transactions in the workplace," and a small portion (6.85%) stated their intention to "continue their studies abroad" with regard to the usefulness of the target language for professional or academic purposes. Additionally, attending "seminars for educational purposes" garnered 16.44% of the total responses, and "communication with English-speaking colleagues" came in second place with 13.70%.

Additionally, the majority of interviewees indicated that they needed to use English "very often" (75%) or "sometimes" (24.66%) when speaking about how frequently they did so. The following purposes were specifically ranked according to how much students needed and expected to utilize the target language: Oral communication, reading and comprehension of texts, listening comprehension, and writing texts are all examples of literacy.

- *The objective of the needs-based course*

In terms of the macro- and micro-level abilities, the needs of the learners had a significant impact on how the needs-based course was focused. The necessity for "reading a subject-specific magazine or newspaper articles" (23.29%) and "reading textbooks or manuals" (76.71%) in particular, were identified as a requirement for reading abilities. A large proportion of the participants (69.68%) reported a need for practice in "reading a text for gist" at the micro-skill level. Similar to this, "reading to check information" earned a sizable percentage (65.75%), and "identification of basic messages" increased by 82.19%.

Writing "notes, memos, e-mails" received a significant proportion (54.79%), making it the most popular work to be included in the ESP syllabus when it comes to writing abilities. With a percentage of 52.05%, "analyzing graphs" came in second, followed by "report

writing" (43.84%) and "formal and informal letter writing" (38.36%), both of which were very highly valued. The students also identified the following processes as areas in which they felt they needed more practice: "developing arguments" (98.04%), "linking sentences and paragraphs" (65.75%), "producing well-developed paragraphs" (60.27%), "developing introduction and conclusion" (54.79%), and "organizing information" (46.58%). Practice using "appropriate vocabulary" (45.21%) and "grammar" (43.84%) was also deemed to be of utmost importance while composing written compositions.

Additionally, when it came to listening skill in the target language, the students thought it was crucial to receive instruction in "comprehending presentations and seminars" (47.95%) and "comprehending recorded materials" (54.2%). Another skill that was highly regarded was the ability to "listen and follow directions" (64.38%). The large majority of participants also placed a high importance on practice in terms of "understanding main points" (65.75%), "identifying specific information" (62.3%), and "keeping notes" (56.16%). Significant percentages were also given to "evaluation of speaker position" (58.90%) and "comprehending speakers with different accents" (63.01%).

The learners identified "job-related communicative tasks" (64.38%) and "giving a presentation" (60.27%) as the most crucial tasks, along with the requirement for the improvement of "oral fluency" (53.42%) and "grammar and vocabulary" (54.79%) in oral communication.

Regarding the learners' deficiencies in grammar and skills, "writing" was rated as the most difficult skill (68.49%), followed by "oral communication" (30.14%), "grammar" (34.25%), and "listening comprehension" (27.04%) and "reading comprehension" (13.70%).

- *The favorite teaching techniques of the students*

When faced with unfamiliar words, many participants (75.34%) expressed a desire that the teacher can translate them while 16.44% desired the opportunity to "explain vocabulary in context," and 15.07% indicated a willingness to "make reasonable guesses and explain unknown vocabulary."

Furthermore, when it comes to learning new vocabulary, their top preference is to "connect new vocabulary with already known" (49.32%), followed by "memorizing vocabulary items" (27.04%), "organizing vocabulary in thematic categories" and "using a dictionary" (13.70%). It is intriguing that "translation by the teacher" appears to be the least popular option (8.96%).

The majority of students (94.52%) acknowledged the nature of the ESP course, emphasizing the importance of a "subject-specific" accountancy program. They identified several sources as highly effective for ESP materials, including "the Internet" (46.58%), "subject-specific textbooks" (24.66%), "accountancy-related magazines" (15.07%), and "materials from accountancy firms" (8.53%). Furthermore, 35.62% of the participants expressed the desire for frequent utilization of the Vietnamese language in the ESP

classroom, while 30.9% preferred its occasional use, and 27.40% wished for it to be consistently employed.

- *Students' suggestions*

The interview data was gathered in response to the open-ended items, "What are your suggestions about improving ESP instruction in the VAA?" The categories and sub-categories are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Suggestions to improve the quality of the program*

	<b>Occurrences</b>
<b>1. ESP Course</b>	<b>73</b>
ESP resources	15
ESP curriculum based on needs	13
Concentrate on issues unique to the subject	14
Advice on how to approach texts and tasks	16
Taking the learners' inadequacies into account	15
<b>2. Organizational Challenges</b>	<b>73</b>
All semesters provide ESP courses	21
Trained ESP tutors	15
Student grouping based on ability	15
Low-level students' preparatory courses	17
Smaller ESP class size	5

### 3.2.2 Results of student interviews

The interviews added valuable data to the questionnaire results by revealing the learners' perspectives on the delivery of ESP training. The data were coded to provide 73 codes, which were then categorized into 10 groups and categorized into three main themes: a) ESP class: reasons for attending and expectations; b) the current situation: understanding the ESP environment; and c) recommendations for next training (Table 2).

**Table 2.** *Coding, themes, and classifications*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Coding Themes</b>
<b>I. Reasons for Attending and Expectations for the ESP Course</b>	
Profile	Gender
	English Language Proficiency – Self-Assessment
	English language education degree
Motives for enrolling in the course	English's function as a global language
	English for future employment
	Studying in English at the VAA
	English for further study
The ESP course's objectives	Lexical knowledge relevant to the topic
	Practice with grammar
	Receptive skill development
	Instruction in practical abilities
	Emphasis on communication abilities
	Increase grammatical and syntactical accuracy
For fluency	

Classroom instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current understanding of the subject</li> <li>Materials appropriate for the students' level</li> <li>Audiovisual materials</li> <li>Arrangements that support learning</li> <li>Individual work, work in pairs, or in groups</li> <li>Involvement in ESP actively</li> </ul>
<b>II. The context of the ESP is appreciated in the current situation</b>	
Identifying needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disregard for the needs of the students</li> <li>Lack of concern for the current needs of students</li> <li>Lack of regard for students' learning preferences</li> <li>There is no thought given to the methods that students choose.</li> <li>There was no concern for the language proficiency of the students.</li> </ul>
Methodology/approach for teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conventional teaching methods</li> <li>Regulated activities</li> <li>Lacking in communicative tasks</li> <li>Giving tasks without guidance</li> <li>Students did not cooperate in class activities</li> </ul>
ESP course material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inefficient syllabus organization</li> <li>Testing abilities rather than developing them</li> <li>Inadequate training in listening techniques</li> <li>Practicing writing ineffectively</li> <li>Insufficient speaking practice</li> <li>Reading skills exercise on occasion</li> <li>Prioritize lexical items</li> <li>Used books that are not authentic</li> <li>Obsolete and demotivating tasks</li> </ul>
Teachers' roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher's role as an information provider</li> <li>The teacher as a manager of the educational process</li> <li>Teacher serving as an examiner</li> </ul>
<b>III. Suggestions for more effective training</b>	
Creating a syllabus based on student needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective ESAP development</li> <li>Efficient macro-level practice of skills</li> <li>Micro-level practice of abilities that is effective</li> <li>Think about the findings of the analysis of learners' needs.</li> <li>Recognize preferred learning methods</li> <li>Recognize the advantages and disadvantages of the student</li> </ul>
Roles of teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning process facilitator</li> <li>Sensitive to the needs of adult students</li> <li>ESP/EAP problem training</li> </ul>

*Expectations and recommendations from the students*

The interviews revealed the significance of the ESP course in meeting both the present and future needs of the students. It also highlighted a mismatch between the students' expectations and the current situation, emphasizing the necessity of redesigning the ESP curriculum to effectively address the students' needs. The learners expressed the need for an ESP course that addresses their subject-specific and academic needs. They emphasized the vital role of utilizing authentic and challenging ESP materials, fostering a relaxed learning

environment that promotes active learning, focusing on developing language skills. These concerns indicate the need for a redesigned ESP curriculum that better aligns with the students' needs. It also does not need to be argued that ESP teachers' roles need to be reevaluated.

#### 4. Conclusion

The outcomes of this study show significant concerns that must be considered due to their substantial implications for the implementation of curriculum modifications. The findings of this study showed the need for creating a language program with a distinct emphasis on ESP. A very tailored ESP course is also recommended to be adopted as part of the curriculum review process (Richards, 2001). Additionally, it was noted that the current arrangements are in no way in line with the "identified needs" (Long, 2005) of students in this study.

To start with contextual issues regarding the necessity and use of English for students' future work, participants in this study agreed that English is necessary for the aviation sector. This finding echoes the findings in the studies of Ulla and Winitkun (2017) and Kaya (2021) who used different groups of students in their studies. This finding shows the unique needs of particular students. The second finding was that the airports will be their most likely job setting. To this connection, the sentence patterns and vocabulary used in an airport setting can be part of an ESP curriculum designed specifically for the students of ATC.

Additionally, it is emphasized that the participants have various needs for using the target language, whether for academic or professional objectives, which emphasizes the benefits of needs analysis in terms of identifying the needs of the learners. This justifies some of the discrepancies in the responses when ranking the students' English usage motivations. This highlights the necessity for an ESP course that serves both the learners' short-term demands as VAA students and their long-term needs as postgraduate students or professionals in the aviation industry.

It might be noted that the variety of needs for the present and the future justifies an approach to English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) that is thought to be more suitable for the specific teaching context because it integrates academic skills with subject-specific skills that are directly related to the learners' subject discipline (Jordan, 1997). Such a strategy is anticipated to assist students in understanding academic and discipline-specific facets of the target language and to inspire them to participate fully in the ESP course.

The success of delivering effective and efficient ESP courses relies heavily on the diverse roles undertaken by ESP lecturers. Thus, they face a considerable challenge and require sufficient training on ESP principles and practice (Chostelidou, 2010).

In conclusion, requirements analysis is viewed as an essential part of any ESP course (Long, 2005), despite the difficulties of launching a needs-based approach to ESP (Bosher & Smalkoski, 2002), which guides course design specifications.

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**THIẾT KẾ ĐỀ CƯƠNG ESP CHO CHƯƠNG TRÌNH KIỂM SOÁT KHÔNG LƯU:  
MÔ TẢ NHU CẦU CỦA SINH VIÊN HỌC VIỆN HÀNG KHÔNG VIỆT NAM**

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**TÓM TẮT**

Bài viết này trình bày giai đoạn sơ bộ của một dự án phân tích nhu cầu được thực hiện cho sinh viên ngành Kiểm soát Không lưu tại Việt Nam, nhằm mục đích xác định các yêu cầu của một nhóm người học cụ thể và thực hiện thiết kế khóa học dựa trên những nhu cầu đó. Bài viết cũng tập trung vào nhận thức của cả sinh viên và giảng viên về giáo trình hiện tại và những thách thức họ gặp phải. Các đối tượng bao gồm hai nhóm: những người hướng dẫn có kinh nghiệm giảng dạy giáo trình ESP và sinh viên năm thứ nhất và năm thứ hai. Những phát hiện của nghiên cứu nhấn mạnh sự cần thiết của một khóa học ngôn ngữ ESP chuyên môn cao tập trung vào Chương trình Kiểm soát Không lưu. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên gặp phải nhiều thách thức khác nhau tại khoa, đặc biệt là sự thiếu sót ở các kỹ năng thiết yếu như nói và nghe. Ngoài ra, còn có nhu cầu đào tạo ESP nhằm đáp ứng cả yêu cầu trước mắt của sinh viên và nhu cầu nghề nghiệp trong tương lai của sinh viên trong Chương trình Kiểm soát Không lưu. Những phát hiện này nhấn mạnh tầm quan trọng của việc phát triển một chương trình giảng dạy ngôn ngữ có mục tiêu để giải quyết các nhu cầu ngôn ngữ cụ thể mà học sinh theo đuổi chương trình này phải đối mặt.

**Từ khóa:** kiểm soát viên không lưu; thiết kế; ESP; phân tích nhu cầu