



BỘ NÔNG NGHIỆP VÀ PHÁT TRIỂN NÔNG THÔN  
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC THỦY LỢI

# TUYỂN TẬP HỘI NGHỊ KHOA HỌC THƯỜNG NIÊN NĂM 2021

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### Tiểu ban: Cơ khí

- 1 Nghiên cứu xây dựng và mô phỏng mô hình không gian hệ thống treo của ô tô bằng phần mềm Amesim  
*Nguyễn Văn Kỵ* ..... 3
- 2 Giải thuật điều khiển trung tâm phay CNC 5 trục ảo kiểu Hexapod  
*Nguyễn Tiến Thịnh* ..... 6
- 3 Ảnh hưởng của góc đánh lửa sớm đến đặc điểm làm việc của động cơ sử dụng CNG được chuyển đổi từ động cơ xăng  
*Nguyễn Tường Vi, Bùi Thị Len, Nguyễn Hữu Thành, Nguyễn Ngọc Hùng* ..... 9
- 4 Nghiên cứu mô phỏng ảnh hưởng của góc phun sớm đến tính năng kỹ thuật và phát thải của động cơ LPG/ diesel  
*Nguyễn Tường Vi, Nguyễn Trọng Dũng* ..... 12
- 5 Dự đoán góc quay vô lăng của xe tự lái sử dụng mạng nơ-ron tích chập  
*Bùi Văn Hiệu* ..... 15
- 6 Nghiên cứu mô hình xác định lực tác dụng trên vô lăng khi đánh lái  
*Nguyễn Ngọc Linh, Nguyễn Tuấn Anh, Đặng Ngọc Duyên, Bùi Đức Tiến* ..... 18
- 7 Nghiên cứu hiệu quả của nhiên liệu diesel sinh học trên động cơ diesel  
*Nguyễn Hữu Tuấn, Nguyễn Văn Tuấn, Nguyễn Văn Ninh, Nguyễn Phi Trường, Nguyễn Huy Chiến* ..... 21
- 8 Nghiên cứu ảnh hưởng của cấu hình hệ thống điều khiển thủy lực đến hiệu quả sử dụng năng lượng  
*Nguyễn Hữu Tuấn* ..... 24
- 9 Nghiên cứu thiết kế bộ điều khiển - Lập trình điều khiển cho robot song song  
*Triệu Thị Minh Thu* ..... 27
- 10 Điều khiển robot vẽ chữ XY Plotter bằng ARDUINO  
*Triệu Thị Minh Thu* ..... 30



- 156 Factors influencing students' interaction in virtual English classrooms  
*Lê Nguyễn Bình Minh* .....
- 157 Teacher praise revisited and some pedagogical implications  
*Nhạc Thanh Hương* .....
- 158 Textbook adaptation strategies: How the book compact has been adapted in the course TAI at Thuyloi University  
*Lâm Thị Lan Hương* .....
- 159 An introduction to task - based approach in English teaching  
*Nguyễn Thị Hồng Anh* .....
- 160 Alignment between ESP teaching at a technical university and requirements from workplace  
*Dương Thủy Hoàng* .....
- 161 Teaching English via zoom clouds meeting  
*Vũ Đình Hưng* .....
- 162 Using movie dubbing in the English pronunciation training course for the 1<sup>st</sup> year English-major student's at Thuyloi University  
*Phạm Thị Linh Thùy* .....
- 163 Transitivity analysis of "a tale of two cities"  
*Nguyễn Đạo Lý Nhân Phúc* .....
- 164 Students' perceptions on the effectiveness of breakout rooms in zoom for pairwork in speaking lessons  
*Phạm Thị Hồng Nhung* .....
- 165 Advantages of break-out rooms and channels in Microsoft Teams in teaching speaking skills for students at a university  
*Nguyễn Hồng Vân* .....
- 166 To measure or not to measure: That continues to be the question  
*Trần Thị Ngọc Hà* .....
- 167 Online extensive reading: A qualitative study on students' perspectives at Thuyloi University  
*Tạ Minh Phương* .....
- 168 A study on english similes *as...as* and their Vietnamese equivalents  
*Nguyễn Thị Thảo* .....
- 169 Investigating students' reluctance to speak English in class  
*Nguyen Phuong Linh* .....
- 170 Reasons for English - Vietnamese code-switching in conversations of Vietnamese engineers  
*Nguyễn Thị Thu Phúc* .....

# ALIGNMENT BETWEEN ESP TEACHING AT A TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY AND REQUIREMENTS FROM WORKPLACE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has recently attracted language researchers' attention due to the requirements of workplaces and the society. ESP teaching and learning at tertiary level in Vietnam, therefore, has been implemented either a compulsory or an optional subject aiming to equip students with specific language in their working contexts and professional skills. In order to investigate the effectiveness of ESP teaching at a technical university, the study tries to identify the gaps between ESP teaching at a technical university in Vietnam and the requirements for the language used in the working context. The findings will be precious data which help ESP practitioners to innovate the ESP syllabus and make teaching and learning ESP activities practical and close to the workplace's requirements.

Due to the time and scope limitation, the study focuses on a faculty at a technical university: Oil and Gas. This faculty is chosen since it has the most ESP subjects being conducted at the university and 100% oil and gas workplaces has English requirement for their employees.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The paper uses document analysis and interview with ESP stakeholders to investigate the implementation of ESP at a technical university and the requirements from some oil and gas companies. Interviews were

conducted with 3 ESP teachers from faculty of Oil and Gas who have been teaching ESP for more than 5 years and 3 employers (also graduates) who are holding different important positions in PVEP (Petro Vietnam Exploration Production Corporation). The interview questions for ESP teachers focus on the designing and implementing subject's syllabus of the ESP course. Questions for employers from workplaces concentrate on the requirements in English ability and other skills for their candidates who want to apply for a position in the company. All the collected data are analyzed, compared and some recommendations from the findings will be given to help the ESP teaching and learning more practical and useful.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) consists of teaching and learning the specific skills and language needed by certain learners for a specific purpose. It was defined by Hutchinson & Waters (1987) as an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reason for learning. ESP courses are set up according to the learner's particular purpose or the specific need. However, it reveals an enormous gap between higher education provision and industry needs, which makes employers find it hard to employ graduates with appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfill their job's requirement (Bingyao, 2016; Fălăuș, 2017; Khanh, 2015).



In terms of ESP teacher's role, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) regard ESP teaching as extremely varied; therefore, the term "practitioner" rather than teacher is used to emphasize that ESP work involves much more than teaching. They have identified the five key roles for ESP practitioners who need to discharge their work as a teacher; a course designer and material provider; a collaborator; a researcher; and an evaluator. ESP teacher in ESP classes, therefore, is no longer a "primary knower". They need to design the course based on student's knowledge and needs. Besides, they should have connection with field specialists to have authentic and updated materials.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

ESP subjects in the studied institution are designed within 3 credits each (45 hours) for students who completed 6 credits of basic English (which is approximately A2 equivalence). However, students' language competence varies within the same class and most of them have not reached A2 level although they passed two basic English subjects which is the prerequisite condition to enroll ESP subjects. ESP textbooks are written by content teachers of the faculty or edited from oversea textbooks to make it suitable to the duration and outcomes of the course. All interviewed ESP teachers are PhD content teachers who completed their thesis in an English-speaking country, and they are all authors of ESP textbooks. *"We design the subject's syllabus and textbook based on the number of credits and the expected outcomes of the course"* (Teacher 2). *"Since we have only 3 credits for ESP subject, we need to equip our students with vocabulary and reading skills"*. (Teacher 1). However, the "reading skills" interpreted by all 3 ESP teachers is answering questions and translating the given texts into Vietnamese. The requirements from employers, however, are 4 skills in English because *"we need an employee who can handle multiple tasks. For*

*example, a technical position must be able to read documents, instructions in English and then write reports to the manager and write emails to partners"*. (Graduate 3). One of the reasons which causes the mismatch between ESP syllabus and workplace's requirements is the absence of need analysis in the procedure of designing and building ESP syllabus. Therefore, the expected outcomes of the ESP course are what the ESP teachers THINK students will need after their graduation. This perception, to some extent, makes the lessons less interesting and impractical; demotivate students in ESP lessons and therefore, cannot fulfil the requirements from employers.

In terms of teaching and learning activities in ESP classroom, terminologies and translation are believed to be the most important and useful to achieve the outcomes of a 3-credit ESP course. All interviewed teachers have never attended a course for ESP teachers or Professional Development activities, which explains the inappropriate methods in designing and teaching the course leading to students' low motivation and involvement in the lessons. Meanwhile, the requirements vary according to different positions of the workplace. Using ESP at work is also the requirements of social progress and education reform, the demands of the market, the needs of integrating with the world education in the future. Therefore, beside criteria of related-to-job skills and qualifications for different positions, English competence is mandatory for all candidates when they first come to work for the company. Then the standard becomes more advanced during their working time. *"We require the language used in working such as: processing data from partner, answering emails, making phone calls; reading and analyzing documents in English, giving presentations on technical issues; writing daily, weekly, monthly and annual report writing technical documents. All the operating procedures of the equipment are in English"*



even with partners from Russia.” (Graduate 1). The engineers in petroleum companies used global, institutional and organizational knowledge including knowledge of field, focal themes, communities of practice, in-group or out-group members, critical incidents, crucial sites, organization culture, strategy, vision, mission, and organization structure, operation, service, plans and problems. (Le, 2017).

All things considered lead to the mismatch between what ESP teaching is implementing at the university with workplace’s requirements. The triangulation among teachers, learners, employers becomes sporadic and lack of reality and no connection is linked together. This problem cannot be blamed on only teachers who do everything from the beginning to the end of the course. This is a systemic problem in higher education that needs to be better addressed.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Issues in ESP teaching at technical universities have become imperative since the requirements from society changed due to the development and diversity of global economy and society. Development and innovation in implementing at universities consists of a variety of factors which need to be closely linked together. Every issue in ESP at tertiary level should be studied carefully from different stakeholders’ perspectives. The stakeholder who directly takes part in ESP teaching are teachers who “play a pivotal role in facilitating the learning process and their success mainly depends on those behaviors that help them achieve the aspired learning outcomes such as high grades, positive attitudes towards learning and enhanced learning skills” (Javid, 2015). They are multi-functioned person: teacher; course and material designer; collaborator; researcher; evaluator (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Neither language teachers nor content ones can take this position if there is no policy on ESP. No single teaching methodology can be

sufficient to address diverse and peculiar needs of ESP learners and therefore ESP teachers must select carefully from a host of teaching methodologies which account for to run an effective ESP course in collaboration with other ESP stakeholders. Need analysis, therefore, is an indispensable step in designing an ESP course. The first and foremost thing which should be implemented is an appropriate policy on both EGP and ESP including students’ basic English competence, the duration of the ESP course and requirements for ESP teachers. In the years to come, there should be “ESP Certificate” like General English to assess and authenticate students’ or employees’ ESP competence.

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