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BILINGUALISM, LINGUISTICS, EDUCATION NEXUS DEVELOPMENT, AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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BILINGUALISM, LINGUISTICS, EDUCATION NEXUS DEVELOPMENT, AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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TECHNOLOGY-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

THEME 3: LINGUISTICS

SUBJECT-MATTER LECTURERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN ESP FOR OIL AND GAS AT A TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY AND WORKPLACE REQUIREMENTS

Duong T. Huong[1]

Abstract: *This paper explored the alignment between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction at a technical university and the professional requirements of the Vietnamese oil and gas industry. By synthesizing a conceptual framework that integrates Needs Analysis, Teacher Cognition, and Curriculum Alignment, this study examines how subject-matter lecturers (teaching ESP) conceptualize and address the gap between academic training and workplace demands. A qualitative case study was conducted with ten participants, including 05 lecturers, 02 faculty leaders, and 03 alumni. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews regarding pedagogical beliefs and reported practices, accompanied by a critical document analysis of the English for Oil and Gas syllabus. Findings identify personal and institutional factors influencing curriculum coherence and pedagogical realization. The study offers practical recommendations to bridge the mistmatch between technical knowledge and linguistic instruction, aiming to adjust the professional preparedness of engineering graduates. These insights contribute to the discourse on hybrid practitioner roles in specialized technical education contexts.*

Keywords: *ESP instruction, Subject-matter lecturers, Curriculum alignment, Teacher cognition, Oil and gas industry.*

1. INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) focuses on language contextualization in specialized fields like engineering, equipping students with the communicative skills necessary for professional careers (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). However, a significant gap persists between university instruction and workplace demands, particularly in Vietnam's oil and gas sector. Recent evidence highlights a disconnect between ESP syllabi and industry requirements (Hoang *et al.*, 2024; Vu, 2025), echoing earlier findings on curriculum misalignment (Huong, 2019).

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This gap is most acute for subject-matter lecturers-technical specialists who teach ESP without formal linguistic training. As hybrid practitioners, they mediate between engineering knowledge and language instruction, yet their professional needs remain underserved (Can, 2022; Ngo, 2021). Bridging this gap requires aligning pedagogical methods with institutional policies and real-world demands (Bocanegra-Valle, 2016). Consequently, this study employs a qualitative case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to explore how these lecturers perceive and apply curriculum alignment. By incorporating perspectives from lecturers, faculty leaders, and alumni, the findings aim to inform policymakers and enhance the professional relevance of technical education in Vietnam.

To achieve these objectives and address the identified gap in the current pedagogical landscape, this paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do subject-matter lecturers perceive and address the alignment between the ESP for Oil and Gas curriculum and the communicative requirements of the workplace?

2. What personal and institutional factors influence the realization of curriculum coherence in this specialized technical context?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Empirical Perspectives on ESP Alignment and Workplace Demands

A core concern in applied linguistics is the divergence between academic ESP instruction and professional communication. When curricula fail to mirror real-world discourse, graduates often experience discourse shock, struggling with the specialized linguistic demands of their professional communities (Evans, 2012). In Vietnam, recent evaluations confirm that even high-achieving graduates face difficulties managing technical documentation and workplace briefings due to persistent misalignment (Hoang *et al.*, 2024; Vu, 2025). This disconnect stems from a pedagogical focus on isolated technical vocabulary rather than functional, pragmatic communication.

A significant gap remains regarding the practitioners responsible for bridging this mismatch. Subject-matter lecturers, as technical experts transitioning into ESP roles, differ fundamentally from ELT-trained instructors. While the latter focus on linguistic scaffolding, subject-matter lecturers prioritize technical accuracy based on domain expertise, often lacking formal language pedagogy (Ngo, 2021). Their instructional choices are filtered through "cognitive baggage", internal beliefs shaped by their own experiences as engineering students (Borg, 2015). Understanding these hybrid practitioners is essential, as their cognitions directly determine how the ESP curriculum is practised within technical universities.

2.2. Conceptual Frameworks

2.2.1. Needs Analysis in ESP: Establishing the Benchmark for Alignment

Needs Analysis (NA) provides the methodical framework for determining professional requirements and how educational programmes fulfill those demands (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Central to this study is the distinction between target needs- the communicative skills required in the oil and gas sector (Target Situation Analysis), and learning needs-the current instructional methods within the university (Learning Situation Analysis) (Bocanegra-Valle, 2016). By identifying the empirical gap between these two dimensions, NA establishes a baseline against which curriculum alignment is measured.

In this research, Target Situation Analysis encompasses safety briefings, technical documentation, and intercultural correspondence, while Learning Situation Analysis evaluates existing university materials. Rather than a fixed rule, NA serves as a diagnostic construct to examine how subject-matter lecturers perceive and address these competencies. This socially situated approach aligns with the study's qualitative design, focusing on how stakeholders determine the communicative priorities of the ESP classroom.

2.2.2. Teacher Cognition: The Pedagogical Mediation of Professional Needs

While Needs Analysis identifies what should be taught, Teacher Cognition explains how alignment manifests in practice. Defined as the "unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching," this framework encompasses the beliefs, knowledge, and decision-making processes that govern instructional behaviour (Borg, 2015). Rather than passively implementing curricula, lecturers act as active interpreters who filter institutional policies through their personal and contextual perspectives.

In ESP instruction, cognition is vital as practitioners operate at the intersection of language pedagogy and disciplinary knowledge (Basturkmen, 2012). According to Borg (2015), three factors shape this cognition: (a) schooling history (the 'apprenticeship of observation'); (b) contextual elements (institutional culture and assessment); and (c) professional coursework. In this study, Teacher Cognition serves as the primary lens to analyze how subject-matter lecturers interpret the communicative needs of oil and gas students. By examining the interaction between a lecturer's technical background and restrictive assessment regimes, this framework explains why certain misalignments persist, connecting macro-level curriculum design to micro-level classroom realities.

2.2.3. Curriculum Alignment: Evaluating Coherence between Education and Industry

Curriculum Alignment provides the structural framework for assessing coherence between ESP instruction and professional requirements. Based on Biggs's (1996) theory

of Constructive Alignment, effective design requires a systematic link among learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment. To evaluate this, the study adopts a tripartite framework adapted by Le (2017), examining alignment at three levels: (a) Intended (syllabus objectives); (b) Implemented (actual instructional and assessment practices); and (c) Achieved (graduates' communicative preparedness). This model treats alignment as an ongoing evaluative process involving feedback cycles between educational and professional communities (Biggs, 2014).

2.2.4. Integrating the Three Constructs: A Mediated Alignment Model

This research adopts a tripartite conceptual model that synthesizes NA, Teacher Cognition, and Curriculum Alignment into a dynamic evaluative structure. Within this framework, the model functions as a mediated process: NA establishes the objective industry benchmarks, while Teacher Cognition serves as the central mediating filter through which subject-matter lecturers interpret and translate these demands into practice. Finally, Curriculum Alignment measures the structural coherence between these internal perceptions and external workplace realities. In this configuration, misalignment is conceptualized not as a simple syllabus failure, but as a divergence occurring when lecturers' beliefs, rooted in their technical backgrounds, clash with industry requirements, or when institutional pressures obstruct pedagogical responsiveness. By framing alignment as a process mediated by teacher beliefs, this model moves the research beyond description to a theoretically informed analysis of the "what, why, and how" of ESP-workplace alignment, justifying a qualitative approach to uncover the unobservable cognitions that define engineering education.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative case study design grounded in a constructivist paradigm to explore ESP alignment at a technical university in Hanoi (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using purposive, criterion-based sampling, the research involved 10 participants: five subject-matter lecturers (L1–L5), two faculty leaders (M1–M2), and three industry alumni (A1–A3). This multi-stakeholder approach facilitated the triangulation of pedagogical beliefs with workplace requirements.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis of the English for Oil and Gas syllabus. The interviews, lasting 45 to 60 minutes, focused on instructional rationales and institutional constraints. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2008) six-phase thematic framework, in which transcripts and materials were systematically coded to identify patterns in curriculum coherence and instructional challenges. This process ensured the findings remained grounded in participants' lived

realities while directly addressing the research questions regarding ESP implementation and barriers.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Conceptual Mismatch between Academic Instruction and Industry Requirements

The primary finding reveals a significant conceptual "mismatch" between the linguistic priorities of the university curriculum and the pragmatic communicative demands of the oil and gas sector. While the English for Oil and Gas syllabus heavily prioritizes technical vocabulary and grammatical accuracy, data from alumni and industry leaders suggest that professional efficacy is instead predicated on functional, safety-critical communication.

Subject-matter lecturers (L1, L3, L5) consistently reported that their primary instructional focus remains the transmission of "hard" technical terms. L1 noted, "My main goal is to ensure students master the specialized terminology of drilling and production, as I believe this is the foundation of their professional English". This sentiment was echoed by L4, who emphasized that without a dense lexical base, students cannot navigate technical manuals. However, this focus on "Linguistic Competence" often comes at the expense of "Pragmatic Competence" (Basturkmen, 2010).

Conversely, alumni currently in management positions (A1, A3) argued that lexical knowledge alone is insufficient for the high-stakes environment of the energy industry. A2 reflected on this gap:

"On the job, it is not enough to just know the word for 'drill bit.' We actually need to give clear safety talks under pressure or fix technical disagreements during meetings. The university taught us the facts, but they never showed us how to actually communicate as professionals." (A2)

This mismatch shows a lack of External Curriculum Alignment (Biggs, 2014). Although the 'Intended Curriculum' (the syllabus) aims to prepare students for their careers, the 'Implemented Curriculum' still relies on a traditional model focused mainly on vocabulary. Academic managers (M1, M2) recognized this mismatch but identified the lack of recent industry feedback as a structural barrier. M2 (Head of Department) noted that while the faculty aims to prepare students for the industry, the current assessment methods still focus on testing vocabulary recall rather than communicative performance.

From the perspective of NA (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), these findings indicate that while Learning Needs (the students' immediate need to pass exams) are being met, the Target Needs (actual workplace requirements) remain secondary. The industry needs what Evans (2012) calls "professional communication," but in class, the focus is still almost entirely on memorising lists of technical terms. This gap exists because these lecturers

usually teach the same way they were taught as engineering students. For them, getting the technical facts right has always been more important than being a fluent speaker. This old way of thinking, what Borg (2015) calls the "apprenticeship of observation", now controls how they handle their own ESP classes, even when they know the students need more practical skills.

4.2. The Pedagogical Beliefs of Subject-Matter Lecturers in ESP Delivery

Another finding concerns how lecturers' prior experiences shape what happens in the classroom. Their decisions are rarely guided by formal language pedagogy. Instead, they draw heavily on how they themselves were trained as engineers. L5 reflected on this influence: "I often find myself explaining English terms exactly the way my old professors explained technical concepts to me, focusing on the mechanics and the 'truth' of the machine rather than how to talk about it". This is not surprising, but it has clear consequences for ESP delivery. Borg (2003, 2015) describes this as the "apprenticeship of observation," and it is evident in many of the accounts collected here.

For most lecturers (L2, L3, L5), technical accuracy is the priority. Fluency comes later, if at all. L2, for example, relies heavily on word-by-word translation to explain complex points, stating: "If I don't translate exactly, students might misunderstand a pressure valve setting. In drilling, a wrong word isn't just a grammar mistake; it's a potential explosion. Since these lecturers were originally engineering students, they never studied language teaching or translation theory. Instead, they simply use translation as a practical tool to make sure students understand the technical facts. The reasoning is simple: in a technical field, a small mistake can lead to serious safety risks. From that perspective, focusing on precision feels like the only responsible way to teach.

At the same time, this belief shapes classroom practice in very specific ways. Several lecturers noted that they spend more time explaining engineering concepts in English than letting students talk. As a result, opportunities to actually use the language are limited. This reflects what Pajares (1992) calls "entrenched beliefs." Even though these lecturers now teach ESP because they have met the required English proficiency levels, their past as engineering students still guide how they handle the classroom today.

Academic leaders (M1, M2) raised a related concern. While subject-matter lecturers have strong disciplinary knowledge, they often find it difficult to adapt that knowledge to pedagogical practice. Language is approached as content rather than as a skill to be developed. In practical terms, this leads to classes that resemble technical lectures delivered in English. Alumni (A1, A3) recognized this pattern and described it in similar terms.

These findings expand upon recent studies in the Vietnamese context (Ngo, 2021; Vu, 2025), which argue that the professional identity of the 'subject-matter expert' often overrides

their role as a 'language facilitator.' While previous research highlights the struggle of ELT teachers to gain disciplinary credibility, this study shows that subject-matter lecturers face a 'pedagogical trap': their very expertise in engineering makes them prioritize content accuracy to a degree that hinders communicative growth. This confirms the significance of investigating 'hybrid practitioners' (Ngo, 2021), as their internal cognitions, rooted in the safety-critical culture of the oil and gas industry, create a unique form of cognitive dissonance when faced with the fluidity required by modern ESP instruction.

4.3. Institutional and Structural Barriers to Curriculum Coherence

This section explores the systemic and institutional constraints that prevent ESP instruction from matching industry requirements. While Sections 4.1 and 4.2 focus on mismatches in how lecturers think about and perceive their roles, data from academic managers (M1, M2) and lecturers (L1–L5) show that this lack of coherence is made worse by rigid university structures and 'assessment mismatches' (Biggs, 2014). Specifically, the current institutional focus on standardized testing often forces practitioners to prioritize technical vocabulary over the communicative fluency required in the oil and gas sector.

A primary barrier reported by all participants is the mismatch between classroom goals and the university's standardized testing system. Although the lecturers (L3, L4, L5) wanted to include more communication tasks, they felt forced to focus on rote memorization to ensure students could pass the final exams. L5 explained this pressure:

" I really want to run a real safety meeting or have students present a field report, but the final exam stops me. Everything in that test is just grammar and random technical words. If I don't teach exactly what is on the exam, my students will simply fail." (L5).

This "backwash effect" (Biggs, 2014; Nation & Macalister, 2010) creates a structural problem in which the goal of preparing students for work is weakened by the pressure of exam performance. Academic managers (M1, M2) also agreed with this, acknowledging that the faculty's assessment policies have not been updated to match the practical communication needs of the modern oil and gas industry.

Another constraint is the limited interaction between the university and industry. Alumni (A1, A2) pointed out that workplace practices are evolving rapidly, especially in relation to digital communication and international standards. By contrast, teaching materials change slowly. As A3 observed, there is little systematic feedback between the two contexts. This absence of a feedback loop, highlighted in Needs Analysis literature (Bocanegra-Valle, 2016; Long, 2010), weakens curriculum responsiveness.

Finally, lecturers themselves face workload pressures. Many balance teaching with technical responsibilities and administrative tasks. Under such conditions, developing new

materials or experimenting with pedagogy becomes difficult. As Borg (2015) suggests, cognition is always shaped by context. Without institutional support, individual effort alone is unlikely to produce sustained change.

4.4. Connecting University Instruction with Industry Realities: A Synthesis

The findings reveal a systemic misalignment in the Vietnamese oil and gas ESP context, shaped by the interaction between ingrained teacher cognition and rigid institutional structures. Although lecturers acknowledge the importance of professional English, they prioritize technical vocabulary, replicating the content-heavy instruction they received as engineering students (Borg, 2015). This focus contrasts with industry requirements, where safety-critical communication is paramount. Consequently, ESP classes often resemble technical lectures rather than skill-based programmes.

This misalignment is exacerbated by institutional barriers, notably final exams that prioritize vocabulary over communicative performance (Biggs, 2014). Furthermore, the absence of a regular feedback loop between the university and industry prevents the curriculum from incorporating modern workplace practices, such as digital safety protocols (Hoang *et al.*, 2024). Without formal industry interaction, the curriculum remains static and disconnected from the sector's evolving needs (Vu, 2025).

Based on these findings, the paper proposes suggestions to improve ESP instruction at the university. First, there is a need for specialized training for subject-matter lecturers. Instead of traditional English teaching approaches, these workshops should focus on guiding subject-matter lecturers to transform their technical expertise into easy-to-follow classroom activities. Second, the university should create a way for teachers and industry to communicate regularly. A good way to do this is to set up a small group of former students and company managers to provide advice. Every two years, this group can look at the lesson plans together. They can make sure that what students do in class, like practicing safety talks or writing technical reports, is exactly what they will need to do at work in the oil and gas sector. Finally, assement should be changed into practical tests, like asking students to give a technical presentation. This change will make sure that the time students spend in class actually prepares them for their future careers.

In conclusion, this paper shows that making a curriculum work well is not something you just design once and forget. It is a constant process of adjustment. By focusing on both how lecturers think and the rules the university sets, technical institutions in Vietnam can better close the gap. This will help ensure that classroom training truly prepares students for the high pressure of the oil and gas industry.

5. CONCLUSION

The paper investigated the alignment between ESP instruction at a Vietnamese technical university and the professional requirements of the oil and gas industry. The findings reveal that while subject-matter lecturers possess significant disciplinary expertise, their instruction is often shaped by fixed pedagogical beliefs and institutional assessment rules. These factors lead to a curriculum that emphasises technical vocabulary over the practical, safety-critical communication needed in the workplace.

This research makes two main contributions. On a theoretical level, it highlights the important role of subject-matter lecturers as hybrid practitioners and how their prior technical experience influences their teaching approaches. In practice, it offers a strategic framework for institutional reform, emphasizing the importance of performance-based assessments and structured feedback loops between industry and academia. While the study is based on a single case, these insights establish a foundation for enhancing the professional readiness of engineering graduates in specialized technical fields. Future research should examine how industry-focused teacher development impacts students' communication skills over time.

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