



Addressing challenges of evaluating learners in an ESP course at a tertiary level

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ABSTRACT

Evaluating learners' performance in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course at a tertiary level presents several challenges. These challenges include the diverse needs of learners, the difficulty of developing valid and reliable assessments, and the need to balance formative and summative assessments. Learners in ESP courses often come from different academic and professional backgrounds, which can make it challenging to design assessments that are fair and relevant to all learners. Since evaluation is one of the four main pillars of ESP, assessing language proficiency in specific fields requires specialized knowledge, training and resources. Developing valid and reliable assessments that

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accurately measure the desired outcomes of the course can also be a significant challenge for teachers, especially in a context where ESP has been introduced recently and uses a teacher-centered approach.

Therefore, this study focuses on evaluating learners of ESP courses at two universities, UBT in Kosovo and SEEU in North Macedonia. Namely, the sample comprised 20 English language university professors and 60 EFL students from both universities. The research methods used are teacher surveys and student questionnaires. Data reveals that both groups of respondents, teachers and students, identified potential factors posing challenges in assessing students in ESP courses mainly related to their previous education, inclusion of technology in teaching and a variety of continuous assessment methods used by their professors. The overall study suggests that addressing these challenges requires careful planning, collaboration among educators, and ongoing evaluation of assessment practices. Therefore, it proposes some practical tool that can effectively measure learners' performance in ESP courses at the tertiary level.

Keywords: ESP, challenges, evaluation, tertiary level, assessment tools, content knowledge.

1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has traditionally helped language learners manage the unique characteristics of a particular language or develop the abilities needed to function well in a particular field of study, profession, or work setting (Basturkmen, 2012). According to Strevens, who is quoted in Flowerdew and Peacock's edited volume "Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes" (2001:13), ESP/EAP is an approach to English language education that is specifically designed to meet the needs of students. Thus, this is identified through the material and how closely it relates to certain fields, professions, and activities. With an emphasis on subjects like syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, and discourse analysis, ESP/EAP focuses on the linguistic abilities and structures that are pertinent to these tasks. It differs from the more all-encompassing method of teaching "General English." ESP is not tied to a specific language or instructional technique, and it does not depend on specific teaching materials. Instead, ESP is an approach to language learning in terms of the specialized fields students are interested in.

Furthermore, the key inquiry in ESP is to comprehend the purpose behind a learner's pursuit of a foreign language. This query initiates a series of additional investigations into the particular language competencies necessary for learners in their specific learning environment. In ESP, all determinations regarding content and methodology are guided by the motivations and objectives that drive learners' language learning journey (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). "Evaluating and measuring the progress of the students and the courses they learn have always been an

obsession for educators. Regarding the ESP courses, the evaluation requirements take on even more importance by the fact that these courses normally have specified objectives" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987 cited in Hatam & Shafiei, 2012:68). Pritchard (2003) pointed out that several typical approaches to evaluation commonly mentioned by different authors include questionnaires, checklists, rating scales, interviews, observation, discussion, record-keeping, and assessment.

The primary objective of this research was to investigate the challenges that English lecturers face in the process of evaluating students taking ESP courses at the university level in different teaching contexts, specifically at the University for Business and Technology (UBT) in Kosovo and South East European University (SEEU) in North Macedonia. Additionally, the study aimed to identify the most effective evaluative methods that could yield positive outcomes in an educational setting. The paper presents and analyses teachers' and students' viewpoints on evaluation in ESP courses and offers some practical recommendations for teachers and researchers.

2. Literature Review

English for specific purposes (ESP) courses have been developed to respond to the needs of learners from different fields who study English for occupational purposes. The main features of ESP which distinguish it from general English language teaching, include the use of target language (Business, tourism, medicine, engineering, etc.). Also, needs analysis which analyses the linguistic and communicative needs of learners from different fields, authenticity of materials used to teach these courses, specialist vocabulary and student evaluation where teachers use different methods to assess learners' progress continuously. The main concern is effective learning and how this can best be achieved in ESP courses by aligning course content with learners' specific needs, using relevant and authentic materials, employing learner-centered teaching methods, and continuously assessing and adapting instructional approaches to ensure that students acquire the language skills necessary for their professional or academic fields.

In the era of technology, the use of different online learning tools poses a challenge for teachers around the globe because they should respond to the digital native generations and use technology for learning purposes. On the other hand, the inclusion of technology offers different opportunities for collaboration, creation of virtual environments and online courses, and it is very useful in promoting learner autonomy (Arno, 2012). These applications are examined within the current LSP

scenario, paying attention to conditions and challenges for implementation, as well as to the roles of teachers and learners.

However, incorporating technology in teaching ESP might have several difficulties. A key difficulty can be lack of access to technology where many institutions may lack the necessary infrastructure to implement technology-based teaching effectively. Teachers and students may not have access to reliable internet or devices, which can hinder the integration of digital tools in the classroom (Cahyani & Cahyono, 2019). Also, insufficient teacher training is considered as another difficulty because teachers may not always have the necessary training to utilize it effectively in an ESP context. This can lead to ineffective use of tools, where technology does not enhance learning but rather complicates it (Ghobrini & Ersözlü, 2021). Finally, curriculum constraints may pose difficulties for ESP practitioners because ESP courses are often designed with specific, specialized content in mind, which can make it challenging to align existing technology tools with course objectives (Anthony, 2018).

Moreover, students' evaluation in ESP courses is another challenge teachers face in teaching English for different professions and assessment in fact, it does not stand alone, but occupies a prominent place in the ESP process giving an ESP teacher a wealth of information on the effectiveness and quality of learning and teaching" (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998:121). Also, they believed that assessment in ESP is an interaction between needs analysis, course design, teaching/learning, assessment and evaluation. When it comes to testing, "ESP tests are related in content, themes and topics to particular disciplines, and involve a higher degree of language specificity. Special lexical, semantic and syntactic characteristics of technical language, in addition to its communicative function, enable people in a particular academic, professional or vocational field to convey the meaning more specifically" (Tratnik, 2008:5). Furthermore, "Despite access to a range of course management and test development software, it has been noted that currently available assessment testing tools can be employed to develop fairly basic multiple-choice and blank-filling tasks, which allow for the incorporation of video, audio, and graphics as part of their input" (Lesiak-Bielawska, 2015:13).

There have been several studies conducted in different teaching contexts focusing on assessment and evaluation in ESP. Kereković (2021) in her study examined the application of formative assessment and its impact on the enhancement of student participation and motivation in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Business English for Engineers, at the University of Zagreb in Croatia. The formative assessment involves an ongoing process in which teachers and students collaborate to achieve

learning objectives by continuously monitoring progress and providing feedback. In this context, the Business English for Engineers course, tailored for graduate students in mechanical engineering, focuses on refining the presentation skills necessary for future engineers. Students take charge of their learning by preparing presentations on engineering topics outlined in the syllabus. These presentations are followed by interactive sessions involving questions and group discussions and are evaluated by peers and the teacher. In addition to presentations, students engage in collaborative tasks during class. Grades are assigned based on the quality of presentations and completion of tasks, contributing to the overall course grade. Feedback from students via a post-course questionnaire indicates that such formative activities and assessment strategies effectively boosted their motivation and engagement in class.

Furthermore, Stan et al. (2014) conducted an experiment assessment session at the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj, Romania, with special reference to students in Horticulture, Landscape Architecture, Forestry, and Land Survey. The experiment begins from the idea that when students start an ESP course, they already know about 20-25% of the terminology, which they are supposed to acquire by the end of the academic year. Several types of tests and questionnaires are suggested to detect this terminology, on the one hand, and to find out information and data concerning students' needs and directions for the course design and syllabus development, on the other. Pre-course tests for reading, writing, speaking, and listening are taken by all the potential course participants before the actual language course begins. They are used to seek information about the students' specialist areas, work experience, personal background, and other relevant details that would play some role in conceiving the course and the following assessment stages. ESP assessment is designed in such a way as to obtain relevant results for the teaching process.

Hence, Zaki (2022) in his theoretical paper addressed and provided a comprehensive overview of essential knowledge and skills in language assessment tailored for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers, learners, as well as language teacher educators and other language professionals. It delves into the rationale behind equipping both teachers and learners with opportunities to acquire and enhance their assessment-related knowledge and integrated skills encompassing writing, reading, listening, and speaking. Furthermore, the study endeavours to showcase the benefits of incorporating assessment practices within the ESP classroom. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks and practical instances derived from professional experience, the author contends that utilizing assessment tools to evaluate students' English language proficiency levels proves advantageous for

overall language development within the specific content language required by the students' educational framework.

Álvarez Gil (2019) conducted a study highlighting the importance of self-assessment in tertiary-level foreign language classes, emphasizing the involvement of both students and lecturers. The research, based on a learning proposal and an empirical study in an English class for tourism students, aims to demonstrate that self-assessment techniques promote a more effective and efficient learning process. The activities led to increased awareness of students' strengths and weaknesses, fostering self-regulation and improved outcomes. The findings indicate that self-regulation and self-assessment notably enhance written and oral expression skills, resulting in higher grades for students in these areas.

Similarly, the study by Shanavas, Singh, and Vargheese (2024) examines the challenges associated with teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in tertiary education settings. The authors highlight that ESP has evolved since its inception in the 1960s, often characterized by its materials-driven and teacher-led approach. One of the primary challenges identified for educators transitioning from general to specific language teaching is the need for disciplinary expertise. The research is based on qualitative interviews with both novice and experienced ESP teachers in India, focusing on the collaborative strategies they employ and the obstacles they face. The findings emphasize the critical role of ESP educators in enhancing English language instruction for undergraduate students, shedding light on the unique context of ESP education in India and its implications for teaching practices in higher education.

Generally, based on the reviewed literature, the most-used assessment methods nowadays are the following:

Assessment method	Description
Performance-based Assessments	Assess students' ability to perform specific tasks relevant to their field of study or profession, such as presentations, simulations, role-plays, case studies, and projects.
Authentic Assessments	Evaluate students' skills using tasks and materials that replicate real-world situations encountered in their intended professions, such as analysing authentic texts and workplace simulations.
Portfolio Assessment	Students compile a collection of their work throughout the course, including writing samples, projects, and reflections on their learning progress, providing a holistic view of their abilities
Peer Assessment	Students evaluate each other's work based on predetermined criteria, promoting collaboration, critical thinking, and self-reflection while reducing the workload on instructors.
Self-assessment	Students assess their learning progress and performance against established criteria, fostering metacognitive skills and encouraging ownership of the learning process.
Technology-enhanced Assessment	Utilize digital tools and platforms, such as online quizzes, interactive simulations, and multimedia presentations, to engage students and provide immediate feedback

Table 1. Assessment methods.

It can be seen that such methods in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) offer diverse approaches to evaluating students' language proficiency and addressing their specialized needs. By incorporating a combination of these methods, instructors can create dynamic, engaging, and effective learning environments that promote meaningful language learning experiences.

3. Methods

The methodology section will give more insights on how the overall study was conducted.

3.1. Participants and Procedure

To investigate the difficulties encountered when evaluating learners in an ESP course at a tertiary level, researchers focused on the English departments of two universities: UBT in Kosovo and SEEU in North Macedonia. The study encompassed two aspects: firstly, 20 English language lecturers teaching in the English language departments were selected as the initial participants as they were the ones who taught or were teaching ESP. The study was conducted online. There were two questionnaires, the first one was utilized with the lecturers and the second with the students. Hence, 60 students pursuing English language studies within those departments were included. The choice of these two universities was deliberate, as the researchers were affiliated with them, allowing for easier access to the participants. The students were all on their last year of their academic studies.

4. Results

This chapter will shed more light on the data collected from 20 ESP lecturers from both universities lecturing at the English language departments as well as findings from 60 third year students studying at the two respective universities.

4.1. Survey

The survey questions in this particular research included the purpose and aim of this research paper, aiming to introduce the respondents to the reason behind conducting this research. It must be said that the researchers created the statements mostly, but also through consulting literature especially Hutchinson and Waters (1987) who discuss the complexities of evaluating learners' proficiency in ESP courses as well as Hyland (2006). The statements follow a Likert scale as in the

following: SA=Strongly agree; A=Agree; N=Neutral; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree.

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. Evaluating learners' proficiency in a specific ESP course accurately is challenging due to the diverse needs and goals of the learners in the course.	10 50%	7 35%	2 10%	1 5%	0 0%
2. Evaluating learners' proficiency in a specific ESP course accurately is challenging due to the limited amount of time available for instruction and assessment.	7 35%	9 45%	3 15%	1 5%	0 0%
3. Evaluating learners' proficiency in a specific ESP course accurately is challenging due to the lack of standardized assessment tools that are specific to the field of study.	7 35%	8 40%	3 15%	2 10%	0 0%
4. Evaluating learners' proficiency in a specific ESP course accurately is challenging due to the difficulty in balancing formative and summative assessment strategies.	8 40%	4 20%	3 15%	5 25%	0 0%
5. Evaluating learners' proficiency in a specific ESP course accurately is challenging due to the difficulty in assessing language skills beyond the level of proficiency in the specific field of study.	7 35%	8 40%	4 20%	1 5%	0 0%
6. Evaluating learners' proficiency in a specific ESP course accurately is challenging due to the difficulty in assessing learners' ability to apply language skills in real-life scenarios in the specific field of study.	9 45%	7 35%	1 5%	3 15%	0 0%
7. Evaluating learners' proficiency in a specific ESP course accurately is challenging due to the difficulty in designing assessments that are authentic and pertinent to the learners' future academic and professional contexts.	11 55%	4 20%	0 0%	4 20%	1 5%
8. Evaluating learners' proficiency in a specific ESP course accurately is challenging due to the difficulty in ensuring fairness and equity in assessment, particularly for learners with different language backgrounds and levels of proficiency.	11 55%	3 15%	6 30%	0 0%	0 0%
9. Evaluating learners' proficiency in a specific ESP course accurately is challenging due to the difficulty in balancing the use of objective and subjective assessment methods.	10 50%	2 10%	5 25%	3 15%	0 0%
10. Evaluating learners' proficiency in a specific ESP course accurately is challenging due to the lack of opportunities for professional development and training in assessment strategies specific to the field of study.	8 40%	10 50%	1 5%	1 5%	0 0%
11. The course design and content can influence the accuracy of evaluating learners' proficiency in an ESP course.	12 60%	6 30%	1 5%	1 5%	0 0%
12. A clear understanding of learners' needs and objectives is necessary for designing and delivering an effective ESP course.	12 60%	8 40%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%

Table 2. Results on challenges of evaluating ESP courses form diverse perspectives from lecturers' viewpoint.

The results in table 2 show that 50% of the participants (ESP lecturers) strongly agree that the diverse needs and goals of learners make accurate evaluation challenging. This highlights the complexity of catering to a diverse group of learners with varying objectives. Moreover, 35% strongly agree that limited time poses challenges for accurate evaluation. Time constraints have an impact on the depth and breadth of instruction and assessment. Additionally, 35% strongly agree that the lack of standardized tools specific to the field poses challenges. Thus, standardized tools are essential for fair and valid assessment. Furthermore, 40% find it challenging to balance formative and summative assessment strategies. However, making it possible to achieve a balance between the two is crucial for comprehensive evaluation. What is more, 35% strongly agree that assessing skills beyond proficiency is challenging. This emphasizes the need for evaluating applied language skills in real-life contexts. Likewise, 55% strongly agree that designing authentic assessments is challenging. Authentic assessments are vital for relevance to learners' academic and professional contexts. In addition, 55% strongly agree that ensuring fairness, especially for diverse language backgrounds, is challenging. Maintaining fairness is essential for an equitable assessment process. Similarly, 50% strongly agree that balancing objective and subjective methods is challenging. Striking a balance is crucial for a comprehensive and fair evaluation. Moreover, 50% strongly agree that there is a lack of professional development in assessment strategies. Continuous professional development is crucial for staying updated on effective assessment practices. Moving on, 60% strongly agree that course design and content influence evaluation accuracy. Simultaneously, 60% strongly agree that a clear understanding of learners' needs is necessary. Tailoring courses to learners' needs enhances evaluation accuracy. Additionally, 90% strongly agree that materials should be relevant to learners' field of study. Relevant materials are crucial for context-specific language acquisition.

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
13. Course materials should be relevant to learners' specific fields of study in an ESP course.	18 90%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
14. Providing learners with clear and measurable learning objectives can help to accurately evaluate their proficiency in an ESP course.	14 70%	4 20%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%
15. Incorporating authentic materials (e.g. academic articles, reports, case studies) is important for evaluating learners' proficiency in an ESP course.	14 70%	4 20%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%
16. Adapting teaching strategies to meet learners' specific needs can help to accurately evaluate their proficiency in an ESP course.	13 65%	6 30%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%
17. Providing learners with opportunities to use language in real-life scenarios can help to accurately evaluate their proficiency in an ESP course.	13 65%	7 35%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
18. Providing learners with opportunities to work with authentic materials from their specific field of study can help to accurately evaluate their proficiency in an ESP course.	14 70%	6 30%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
19. Incorporating project-based learning or task-based learning activities can help to accurately evaluate learners' proficiency in an ESP course.	11 55%	7 35%	1 5%	1 5%	0 0%
20. Incorporating technology-based activities (e.g. online simulations, virtual reality) can help to accurately evaluate learners' proficiency in an ESP course.	15 75%	5 25%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
21. Incorporating self-assessment and peer assessment activities can help to accurately evaluate learners' proficiency in an ESP course.	12 60%	6 30%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%

Table 3. Results of evaluation methods used by the ESP lecturers.

The statements from questions 13th to 21st presented in table 3 highlight various strategies that professors find beneficial for accurately evaluating learners, including incorporating authentic materials, adapting teaching strategies, providing opportunities for real-life language use, and utilizing technology. Additionally, self-assessment and peer-assessment are perceived to be (90%) very helpful in evaluating learners' proficiency in an ESP course. This shows that students assess each other's performance and self-performance, which, when combined with the teacher's assessment, leads to a more objective evaluation.

Statements	SA	S	N	D	SD
22. Providing learners with opportunities for reflection and feedback can help to accurately evaluate learners' proficiency in an ESP course.	13 65%	7 35%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
23. Ongoing assessment and evaluation should be incorporated throughout the course to accurately evaluate learners' proficiency in an ESP course.	14 70%	5 25%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%
24. An effective ESP course should result in learners being able to accurately transfer their language skills to future academic and professional contexts in their specific field of study.	10 50%	8 40%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%
25. An effective ESP course should result in learners being able to accurately understand and use discipline-specific terminology and concepts.	12 60%	8 40%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%

Table 4: Results of ongoing assessment of the students.

Similarly, the statements from 22nd to 25th presented in table 4 emphasize the importance of ongoing assessment, and that the ultimate goal of an effective ESP course is to enable learners to transfer language skills to future academic and professional contexts. In conclusion, lecturers know several challenges in evaluating learners in an ESP course, such as diversity in needs, time constraints, lack of standardized tools, and difficulty in designing authentic assessments. Factors influencing evaluation accuracy include course design, understanding learners' needs, and the relevance of course materials. Strategies for accurate evaluation involve adapting teaching methods, incorporating authentic materials, and providing opportunities for real-life language use.

4.2. Students' questionnaire

The second research tool was utilized to identify students' perceptions of the evaluation in their ESP courses. It comprises three parts:

- Questions related to the content and course design.
- Questions related to the instructions and course instructor.
- Questions related to assessment.

Course Design and Content	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. We took the ESP course seriously.	19(31.67%)	29(48.33%)	11(18.33%)	1(1.67%)	0(0%)
2. The syllabus was clearly written and explained to us.	31(51.67%)	19(31.67%)	10(17.67%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
3. I think the instructor followed the syllabus.	28(46.67%)	24(40%)	6(10%)	2(3.33%)	0(0%)
4. The course content was well-organized.	18(30%)	30(50%)	11(18.33%)	1(1.67%)	0(0%)
5. The course materials were used effectively.	20(33.33%)	27(45%)	10(16.67%)	3 (5%)	0(0%)
6. We were assigned a suitable amount of homework.	16(26.67%)	24(40%)	16(26.67%)	2(3.33%)	2(3.33%)
7. The classroom facilities were in working order.	14(23.33%)	32(53.33%)	14(23.33%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
8. The class size was appropriate.	17 (28.33%)	24(40%)	14(23.33%)	5(8.33%)	0(0%)

Table 5. Results of students' responses on course design and content.

A significant majority of students (80%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they took the ESP course seriously, indicating a positive perception of the course's importance. Additionally, a substantial majority (83.33%) found the syllabus to be clearly written and explained, suggesting effective communication of the course structure. Furthermore, the majority of students (86.67%) felt that the instructor adhered to the syllabus, indicating a positive alignment between the planned curriculum and its execution. Moreover, a large majority (80%) perceived the course content as well-organized, indicating a positive evaluation of the structure and presentation of the material. Simultaneously, the majority of students (78.33%) believed that the course materials were used effectively, suggesting that instructional resources were appropriately employed. Despite varying views on the amount of homework, with a relatively equal distribution between agreement and neutrality, a smaller percentage disagreed with the homework load. Additionally, the majority of students (76.67%) expressed satisfaction with the working order of classroom facilities, indicating positive feedback regarding the learning environment.

Course instructions/instructor	SA	A	N	D	SD
9. The instructor was enthusiastic during the classes.	22(36.67%)	27(45%)	11(18.33)	0(0%)	0(0%)
10. The explanations were easy to understand.	24(40%)	20(33.33%)	13(21.67%)	3(5%)	0(0%)
11. The instructor provided proper responses during the lessons.	23(38.33%)	25(41.67%)	10(16.67%)	2(3.33%)	0(0%)
12. There were plenty of opportunities for class interactions.	13(21.67%)	30(50%)	15(25%)	1(1.67%)	1(1.67%)
13. The instructor motivated the learners.	23(38.33%)	24(40%)	9(15%)	4(6.67%)	0(0%)

Table 6. Results of the students' responses to course instructions and instructor.

Table 6 indicated that the majority of students (81.67%) perceived the instructor as enthusiastic, indicating a positive and engaging teaching style. A significant majority (73.33%) found the explanations easy to understand, suggesting effective communication of course content. Likewise, the majority of students (80%) felt that the instructor provided appropriate responses, indicating a positive interaction between students and the instructor. Moreover, a majority (71.67%) indicated that there were plenty of opportunities for class interactions, contributing to a positive learning environment. Additionally, the majority (78.33%) perceived the instructor as motivating, which is crucial for student engagement and enthusiasm.

Course content and outcomes	SA	A	N	D	SD
14. The ESP instructor used different assessment methods.	11(18.33%)	28(46.67%)	21(35%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
15. ESP helps on improving technical vocabulary.	16(26.67%)	32(53.33%)	10(16.67%)	2(3.33%)	0(0%)
16. We improved our language skills related to our major/ profile of study.	21(35%)	15(25%)	13(21.67%)	1(1.67%)	0(0%)
17. ESP has a positive impact on improving speaking skills.	33(55%)	11(18.33%)	15(25%)	1(1.67%)	0(0%)

Table 7. Results of the students' responses to course assessment.

Table 7 shows that a majority (65%) acknowledged course content and outcomes, suggesting a varied and comprehensive approach to evaluating student performance. Notably, a significant majority (80%) reported improvement in technical vocabulary, indicating positive outcomes in language development. Also, the majority (60%) acknowledged improvement in language skills related to their major, aligning with the course's specific purpose. Additionally, a substantial majority (73.33%) felt free to communicate and share ideas, indicating a positive class environment.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The overall sentiment from the student responses appears positive, with a majority expressing satisfaction with course design, instruction, and facilities. Areas for improvement may include addressing the perception of homework load, as opinions were more diverse in this aspect. The data suggests a positive perception of the course instruction, instructor attributes, and assessment methods among the students. The instructor's enthusiasm, clarity in explanations, and motivation were well-received by a significant majority of students. Opportunities for class interactions were generally perceived positively, contributing to a dynamic learning environment. The use of different assessment methods and positive outcomes in technical vocabulary and language skills related to majors were acknowledged by a high percentage of students. The majority of students felt free to communicate and considered the ESP course important. In conclusion, the feedback from students indicates a generally positive experience with both the instruction and assessment components of the ESP course. Areas of strength include instructor attributes, communication, and the variety of assessment methods. Constructive feedback, such as on class interactions and homework load, can be used for continuous improvement in the course design and delivery.

To conclude, evaluating learners in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses at the tertiary level presents unique challenges that require careful consideration and strategic approaches in both universities (SEEU and UBT). The data analysis has shed light on various aspects of course design, instruction, and assessment. In conclusion, it is evident that while there are areas of success and positive feedback, there are also challenges that need attention. The instructor's enthusiasm and motivation were generally well-received, contributing to a positive learning atmosphere. The majority of students found the explanations easy to understand, indicating effective communication of course content. Many students acknowledged the use of different assessment methods, reflecting a diverse and comprehensive approach to evaluation. Positive outcomes were reported in terms of improved technical vocabulary and language skills related to majors. In contrast, while opportunities for class interactions were generally perceived positively, there were concerns expressed. Views on the amount of homework were varied, indicating a potential challenge in balancing the workload. Although a majority felt the instructor explained assessment methods well, there is always room for improvement in ensuring clarity. ESP courses often cater to students with diverse backgrounds and learning needs. The success of an ESP course is highly dependent on instructor competence and adaptability. The data collected provides a snapshot, but ongoing feedback is essential for continuous improvement. In navigating the challenges of

evaluating learners in an ESP course at a tertiary level, it is crucial to maintain a student-centric focus, fostering a dynamic and inclusive learning environment. By addressing challenges and analysing the gathered data, the ESP course can continue to evolve, providing a valuable and effective educational experience for students pursuing specific purposes within their academic and professional contexts. The data reflects the intricate nature of evaluating learners in an ESP course at the tertiary level. Addressing challenges requires a comprehensive approach, including professional development, adaptive teaching strategies, and a continuous focus on relevance and authenticity. Understanding learners' needs and designing courses accordingly emerge as key contributors to accurate evaluation.

Research Question 1, which was related to examining the obstacles instructors encounter in accurately assessing learners' proficiency in ESP courses, reveals several challenges. These include accommodating the diverse needs and goals of learners, which 50% strongly agree makes assessment challenging. Moreover, 35% strongly agree that time constraints pose difficulties, while an equal percentage emphasizes the lack of standardized tools tailored to the field. Finding a balance between formative and summative assessment strategies is deemed challenging by 40%, and 35% strongly agree that evaluating skills beyond proficiency presents hurdles. Additionally, designing authentic assessments (55% strongly agree), ensuring fairness across diverse language backgrounds (55% strongly agree), and balancing objective and subjective methods (50% strongly agree) emerge as notable challenges. Moreover, 50% strongly agree that a lack of professional development in assessment strategies hinders accurate evaluation. Understanding learners' needs (60% strongly agree) and recognizing the influence of course design and content on evaluation accuracy (60% strongly agree) are also deemed essential.

Regarding research Question 2, the exploration of students' perceptions regarding various facets of ESP courses, encompassing course structure, instructor effectiveness, learning environment, and learning outcomes, yields valuable insights. A significant majority, constituting 80%, either agree or strongly agree that they approached the ESP course seriously. Likewise, 83.33% found the syllabus to be clearly articulated, and 86.67% felt the instructor adhered to it. The majority (80%) perceived the course content as well-organized and believed that instructional materials were effectively utilized (78.33%). Moreover, 76.67% expressed satisfaction with classroom facilities, while 81.67% perceived the instructor as enthusiastic. Understanding explanations was deemed easy by 73.33% of students, and 80% felt the instructor provided appropriate responses. Additionally, 71.67% indicated ample opportunities for class interactions, with 78.33% perceiving the instructor as motivating. Recognizing a varied assessment approach (65%), a substantial majority

reported improvement in technical vocabulary (80%) and acknowledged advancements in language skills related to their major (60%). Furthermore, feeling free to communicate and share ideas (73.33%) and reporting enhancements in general listening skills (71.67%) were prevalent among students. Lastly, a significant majority (81.67%) appreciated the instructor's effective explanation of assessment methods, while 70% deemed the ESP course important.

Finally, the results of research Question 3 related to the investigation into the perceived benefits and enhancements reported by students in ESP courses concerning language skills and overall learning experience, reveal several noteworthy findings. An overwhelming majority (80%) reported improvement in technical vocabulary, while 60% acknowledged enhancements in language skills pertinent to their major. Feeling free to communicate and share ideas was prevalent among 73.33% of students, with a similar percentage reporting enhancements in general listening skills (71.67%). Moreover, a significant majority (81.67%) appreciated the instructor's effective explanation of assessment methods. Additionally, 70% perceived the ESP course as important, indicating its perceived value in fostering language proficiency and meeting learning objectives.

Based on the data collected through the study, recommendations are made for English language lecturers who are teaching or will teach ESP at the university level. Additionally, those recommendations should serve as a reflection of students' viewpoints as well. The recommendations for lecturers can be seen below:

1. Implement ongoing professional development programs for instructors to enhance their assessment strategies and stay updated on best practices.
2. Encourage the development and utilization of diverse, standardized assessment tools tailored to the specific field of study.
3. Provide guidelines and training on effectively balancing formative and summative assessment strategies.
4. Promote the use of authentic assessments that mirror real-life academic and professional scenarios.
5. Establish guidelines for ensuring fairness and equity in assessments, especially for learners with diverse language backgrounds.
6. Encourage continuous feedback mechanisms, reflection, and opportunities for instructors to refine and improve their assessment approaches.
7. Emphasize the importance of incorporating relevant, field-specific materials in course design.

8. Explore and integrate technology-based activities to enhance evaluation methods, keeping them aligned with the evolving landscape of educational technology.
9. Continuously assess and emphasize the development of transferable language skills that learners can apply in future academic and professional contexts.
10. By implementing these recommendations, institutions (UBT college and SEEU university) can work towards overcoming the challenges outlined in the questionnaire, fostering an environment that supports accurate and meaningful evaluation in ESP courses at the tertiary level.

About the authors

Donjetë Latifaj, Ph.D. is a full-time professor at the University for Business and Technology (UBT). She holds a Doctor of Philology degree and lectures on Syntax, Discourse Analysis, Business English, Lexicology, and English for Specific Purposes across various faculties within UBT. With 10 years of teaching experience, she is deeply passionate about English language instruction and research.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

The data of this study—including teacher and student questionnaires and the aggregated statistical results presented in the tables—are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author, Dr. Donjete Latifaj (donjete.latifaj@ubt-uni.net). These data were collected at UBT (Kosovo) and SEEU (North Macedonia) and were used exclusively for academic and research purposes, in compliance with participant confidentiality.

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