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QUALITATIVE APPROACHES USED IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES RESEARCH: A TREND ANALYSIS

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เจนจิรา จิตรไพบูลย์*

Jenjira Jitpaiboon*

อติชาต รุ่งสว่าง**

Atichat Rungswang**

วิรุฬพัชร์ เจียรธนานันต์***

Virulpat Jearathananant***

* อาจารย์ ภาควิชาภาษา คณะศิลปศาสตร์ สถาบันเทคโนโลยีพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าคุณทหารลาดกระบัง

* Lecturer, Department of Languages, Faculty of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang

* Email: jenjira.jit@kmitl.ac.th

** อาจารย์ ภาควิชาภาษา คณะศิลปศาสตร์ สถาบันเทคโนโลยีพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าคุณทหารลาดกระบัง

** Lecturer, Department of Languages, Faculty of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang

** Email: atichat.ru@kmitl.ac.th

*** นักศึกษาปริญญาตรีหลักสูตรศิลปศาสตรบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ คณะศิลปศาสตร์
สถาบันเทคโนโลยีพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าคุณทหารลาดกระบัง

*** Bachelor Degree student in English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang

*** Email: virulpat.pink@gmail.com

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาแนวโน้มของการใช้วิธีวิจัยแบบองค์รวมและการใช้วิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพที่ถูกนำมาใช้ในงานวิจัยทางด้านภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อวัตถุประสงค์เฉพาะ โดยศึกษาจากงานวิจัยเชิงประจักษ์ (empirical research articles) ทั้งหมด 24 เรื่องที่ได้รับการตีพิมพ์ในวารสารภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อวัตถุประสงค์เฉพาะ (English for Specific Purposes journal) ในระหว่างปี พ.ศ. 2544 ถึง พ.ศ. 2562 การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลแบ่งออกเป็น 2 ขั้นตอน โดยขั้นตอนแรกผู้วิจัยกำหนดช่วงเวลาตีพิมพ์เป็นสองช่วง ช่วงแรกคืองานวิจัยที่ตีพิมพ์ระหว่างปี พ.ศ. 2544 ถึง พ.ศ. 2557 และช่วงหลังคือระหว่างปี พ.ศ. 2558 ถึง พ.ศ. 2562 โดยนำเอางานวิจัยที่ตรงตามเกณฑ์ 24 ชิ้นดังกล่าวมาจัดเข้ากลุ่มตามช่วงเวลาการตีพิมพ์ เพื่อวิเคราะห์วิธีวิจัยโดยนับความถี่ จากนั้นนำมาเปรียบเทียบกัน ซึ่งพบว่าม้งานวิจัย 12 เรื่องที่ใช้วิธีเชิงคุณภาพ งานวิจัย 8 เรื่องใช้วิธีแบบผสม และงานวิจัย 4 เรื่องใช้วิธีการวิจัยเชิงปริมาณ โดยงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ 5 เรื่องจาก 12 เรื่องมาจากการตีพิมพ์ช่วงหลัง ขั้นตอนที่สอง นำงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ 5 เรื่องดังกล่าวมาศึกษาการใช้วิธีวิจัยเชิงลึก จากประเภทของงานวิจัยตามคำนิยามของ Creswell (2003) และ Dressen-Hammouda (2013) ผลการศึกษาพบว่าวิธีการวิจัยเชิงชาติพันธุ์วรรณา (ethnographic methods) ได้ถูกนำมาใช้อย่างแพร่หลาย และการวิเคราะห์ความต้องการ (needs analysis) ยังเป็นวิธีวิจัยที่งานวิจัยส่วนมากให้ความสำคัญอีกด้วย

คำสำคัญ: การวิเคราะห์แนวโน้ม, วิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ, งานวิจัยทางด้านภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อวัตถุประสงค์เฉพาะ

Abstract

This study primarily investigates the holistic trends of research methods and how qualitative approaches were used in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) research. The data employed in this study were 24 empirical research articles published in English for Specific Purposes journal (ESPj) from 2001 to 2019. The data analysis was divided into two phases. At the first phase, researchers appointed the period of publication as two timeframes: 2001-2014 and 2015-2019 to explore the trends holistically. All 24 research articles were then categorized into timeframe of publication in order to analyze research method by focusing on frequency. After

that, they were compared and contrasted between both timeframes, together with previous studies. It was found that of 24, 12 articles are qualitative research, 8 articles are qualitative/quantitative or mixed methods research and 4 articles primarily are quantitative research. At the second phase, only 5 qualitative research articles published from 2015 to 2019 were further investigated in details and tallied since there has been no study found reporting ESP research trends in the mentioned period. Based on Creswell (2003) and Dressen-Hammouda (2013)'s definitions of research methods, the findings revealed that the ethnographic methods were overwhelmingly used and needs analysis was the research focus in most research articles.

Keywords: Trend Analysis, Qualitative Approaches, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Research

Introduction

A qualitative research is associated with inductive approach which aims to interpret participants' perspective in order to describe and understand the relationships among the purposefully selected participants (Gay, 2009). It is exploratory based primarily on constructivist perspectives or advocacy/participatory perspectives or both which employs strategies such as ethnographies, narratives, case studies, grounded theory studies, or phenomenologies (Creswell, 2003).

Such research approach has continually been reported to be majorly used in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) research and has been increasingly accepted as part of ESP research practice (Dressen-Hammouda, 2013). As reported, for example, in the research findings of Gollin-Kies (2014) who has investigated research methods used in English for Specific Purposes journal (ESPj) and Journal of English for Academic Purposes (JEAP) published between 2003 and 2012, qualitative research methods were overwhelmingly used in both journals in which discourse analysis especially electronically corpus-based was an emphasis, and case studies were also common. Gollin-Kies (2014) reported that ethnographically based analyses and discourse-oriented ethnographies become more popular as the decade progressed and there were also studies described as 'multi-method' using varied

qualitative methods, such as observation, collection of textual artifacts, and interview, which are connected to ethnography. In this regard, Gollin-Kies (2014) explained in her study that ESP is completely context-based then ethnographic methods are undeniably excellent for exploring contextual aspects of ESP. This corresponds with the findings of Lee (2015) who analyzed 311 research articles in ESPj from 2000 to 2014 and the findings also disclosed that qualitative approach dominated ESP research in the mentioned timeframe. In particular, Dressen-Hammouda (2013) studied ethnographic approach in three international peer-reviewed journals in ESP, namely, ESPj, JEAP, and Journal of Second Language Writing (JSLW) between 1980 and 2010 and the results showed that number of ESP research studies using qualitative and ethnographic-oriented approaches in the field's major journals has tripled since the early 1980s.

According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), need analysis is the most essential in ESP course design. Therefore, similar to Gollin-Kies (2014)'s explanation, Flowerdew (2013) has also given reasons why research methods such as detailed, longitudinal observations of the setting, focus group discussions, and analyses of participants' diaries and journals have been largely used. According to Flowerdew (2013), such methods undeniably help in gaining a rich understanding of ethnographically oriented information in a particular context in order that researcher or lecturer obtain sufficient information regarding needs of key stakeholders for designing the most appropriate course.

However, since ESP teaching is context-based which means specific professional contexts must be applied in ESP class (Flu, 2017), there have been concerns that using only ethnography-oriented qualitative approach may not be able to give the broader picture of relationship between text and context (Dressen-Hammouda, 2013). Moreover, the results may not be generalizable to other ESP settings (Flowerdew, 2013). Hence, there has also been a call for more balanced and more triangulation approaches in ESP research. Gollin-Kies (2014); for example, calls for more variety, collaborative, and generalizable, larger scale and greater balance in research methods between quantitative and qualitative research that confirm pedagogical success with more concrete and more persuasive research reports.

To sum up, the qualitative research using ethnographic approach to examine ESP texts and contexts have been increasing in their popularity since the early 1980s. Nevertheless, no study has been found reporting ESP research trends since 2015, particularly on trends of research approach. As a result, this present study aimed to investigate the research approach trends in ESP research between 2015 and 2019. The study was also expanded to cover ESP research articles from 2001-2019 in order to see the trends holistically. The trends between two periods: 2001-2014 and 2015-2019 were also compared and analyzed. Using the purposive sampling technique, the study is small scale which may not be able to be generalized; however, the research approach and findings may be used as the guideline for further analysis and discussions.

Objectives and research questions

This study primarily explored trends from 2015 to 2019. As mentioned previously, the study was also expanded to cover ESP research articles from 2001-2019 with two main specific research questions:

- 1) What are the trends of the research approaches used in the empirical research published in English for Specific Purposes journal from 2001-2019?
- 2) How have the qualitative research methods been used in ESP research articles published in English for Specific Purposes journal between 2015 and 2019?

Methodology

This current study is a mix-method research design based on pragmatic knowledge claims in which explanations on both 'what' and 'how' have been covered holistically (Creswell, 2013).

The data were purposively selected from only empirical research studies which have the research title containing the word 'ESP' or "English for Specific Purposes in ESPj published from 2001 to 2019. This is due to no established consensus on the concepts and classifications of ESP (Gai, 2018), although ESP has often been divided into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (Knight, Lomperis, van Naerssen, & Westerfield, 2010). Hence, it can be said that this present study focuses on ESP research as a whole regardless of its types.

English for Specific Purposes journal (ESPj) was selected in the current study as it is one of the premier international peer-reviewed journals with the greatest relevance, highest readership, and strongest impact on ESP practitioners (Gollin-Kies, 2014). Moreover, ESPj has also been included in the prestigious Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) which is widely used as an indicator of quality research publications (Johns, 2013).

Regarding the research procedure, the authors began by first finding all research articles in ESPj which contain the specified wordings 'ESP' or "English for Specific Purposes". And then, the results show that between 2001 and 2019, there are 427 articles starting from Volume 20-Volume 56. Of these, only 34 articles meet the criterion. But this study aimed at only research article with empirical findings. Any other type of content - editorials, discussion and research notes, book reviews - was excluded. With this criterion, only 24 articles were sustained. A total of 24 articles were then divided into two timeframes: 2001-2014 and 2015-2019. The reason why the timeframe was divided into two periods is that there was a study done by Lee (2015) who investigated the qualitative approach dominated ESP research from 2000 to 2014 and there has been no study exploring during the latter period. The trends were compared and contrasted between both timeframes, together with previous studies. The frequency and percentage of research approaches used in the articles were employed to demonstrate the trend analysis.

To operationalize the types of research methods, the present study employed Creswell (2003)'s definition to define quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research as shown in Table 1. According to Creswell, any research article using only statistical analysis was deemed quantitative, whereas any research article employing only text and image analysis was regarded as qualitative. In this regard, statistical and text analysis found in any research article was deemed mixed methods research. Moreover, as the study's focus was to explore qualitative approaches used in ESP research, Dressen-Hammouda (2013)'s criterion identifying the qualitative research was also employed. The criterion is purposed that "studies were identified as using qualitative methods if authors used at least one, if not a combination of, qualitative methods including: surveys, questionnaires, interviews, case studies, textography, 'ethnography', 'qualitative analysis', participant and non-participant

observation, evaluations, onsite visits, focus group interviews, writer reflections, peer reviews, think-aloud protocol, researchers' own intuitions as non-native speakers, narrative, literacy histories, network histories, and a situation or contextual analysis of wider sociocultural, sociohistorical, sociopolitical or socioeducational factors" (Dressen-Hammouda, 2013, p. 507).

Table 1 Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods Procedures (Creswell, 2003, p.17)

Quantitative Research Methods	Qualitative Research Methods	Mixed Methods Research Methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Predetermined - Instrument based questions - Performance data, - Attitude data - Observational data - And census data - Statistical analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emerging methods - Open-ended questions - Interview data - Observation data - Document data - And audiovisual data - Text and image analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both predetermined and emerging methods - Both open-and closed-ended questions - Multiple forms of data drawing on all possibilities - Statistical and text analysis

Findings and discussion

Research question 1: What are the trends of the research approaches used in the empirical research published in English for Specific Purposes journal from 2001-2019?

For overall image of research approaches from 2001 to 2019, 24 empirical research articles containing the words 'ESP' or "English for Specific Purposes were extracted. Of 24, twelve articles (50%) are qualitative research, eight articles (33%) are qualitative/quantitative or mixed methods research and four articles (17%) primarily are quantitative research. From this first glance, as shown in Figure 1, the findings confirmed the results in the previous studies and revealed that the popularity of qualitative paradigm still continues to the moment of the present study.

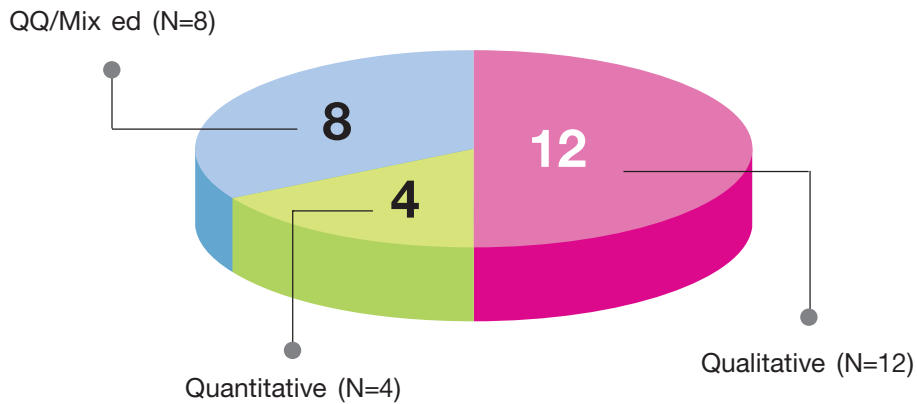


Figure 1 Research approaches in ESPj between 2001 and 2019

The author then analyzed the new timeframe: 2015-2019 where no study regarding the research method trends has been conducted. In the total number of 24 empirical research articles, seven research articles were elicited between 2015 and 2019. Of seven, the number of qualitative research is still the highest (N=5) while the number of quantitative and mixed method research is the same (N=1). As shown in Table 2, when compared with 2001-2014, the results even emphasize the popularity of qualitative approach since such approach is still in the first rank in both timeframes.

The number of research articles between 2001 and 2014 found in this current study can also be adopted to confirm the findings of the two similar studies conducted by Gollin-Kies (2014) and Lee (2015) during the same timeframe even that this current study is smaller scale with purposive sampling technique applied. However, the number of qualitative/quantitative or mixed methods research is far higher than the findings in the study of Gollin-Kies (2014) in which only 16% was reported. This implies that the criterion to select only the research articles which have titles containing the words “ESP” or “English for Specific Purposes” have some impact on the validity of the research results.

Table 2 Research paradigms in two timeframes

Research paradigms	2001-2014 (N=17)	2015-2019 (N=7)
qualitative	7 (41.2%)	5 (71.4%)
quantitative	4 (23.5%)	1 (14.3%)
qualitative/quantitative or 'mixed,'	6 (35.3%)	1 (14.3%)

Research question 2: How have the qualitative research methods been used in ESP research articles published in English for Specific Purposes journal between 2015 and 2019?

In this part, as its main purpose of the study to primarily investigate the qualitative approach in ESP, only qualitative research articles were focused. The research methods applied in five qualitative ESP research articles in ESPj extracted from 2015 to 2019 have been explored in details and tallied as shown in Table 3. All five research articles match with Creswell (2003)'s research definition. That is, they contain only text analysis; therefore, were counted as qualitative research.

The first two articles in the table aim to examine Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach in the teaching of ESP. Therefore, the data were collected in educational setting. Both two articles have the same ultimate goals which are to analyze the needs from two key stakeholders; namely, teachers and students, for quality of syllabus design. The third article still involves ESP teachers in educational setting, but focuses mainly on their identity constructions. The last two articles are related to another key stakeholder who is the professionals, namely nurses in the fourth and senior executives in the fifth article. Needs analysis can explicitly be seen as the research focus of these two articles. All of them applied ethnographic methods to collect and analyze the data.

Table 3 Qualitative research methods in ESP articles from 2015-2019

No.	Year	Research Title Instruments	Qualitative Research	Research Focus
1	2015	The role of content and language in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) at university: Challenges and implications for ESP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institutional documentation - Class observation - Semi-structured focus groups - Questionnaire 	Needs Analysis/Syllabus design/Improving teaching methods
2	2018	Learning subject-specific content through ESP in a Geography teaching programme: An action research story in Argentina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Questionnaire - Diaries - Interviews 	Needs Analysis Syllabusdesign/ Improving teaching methods
3	2018	Identity constructions of ESP teachers in a Chinese university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Life history interview 	Teacher training
4	2018	What do nurses say about their English language needs for patient care and their ESP coursework: The case of Taiwanese nurses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Semi-structured interview - Shadowing observations 	Needs Analysis
5	2019	Long-term workplace communication needs of business professionals: Stories from Hong Kong senior executives and their implications for ESP and higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Semi-structured face-to-face interviews - Follow-up clarification questions by email and instant messaging 	Needs Analysis

Two major themes which can be drawn from the findings in Table 3 are 1) ethnographic methods and 2) needs analysis. Regarding the definition of ethnographic methods, they are one of qualitative procedures used for analyzing, describing, and interpreting a cultural group's shared patterns of behavior, language, and beliefs that develop over time within its own context and the issues can be explored using interview, observation, and collecting documents (Creswell, 2005). From this perspective, it is clear that all five research articles shown in Table 3 are associated with ethnographic design since they adopt at least one of ethnographic methods.

The findings in Table 3 can also be implied that although there is a call for more balanced research methods using both quantitative and qualitative for more concrete evidence, qualitative using ethnographic methods are still pervasive among ESP researchers. In this regard, according to Khaldi (2017), ethnography has also been regarded as the second major approach to qualitative research in educational research since it is deeply rooted in anthropology.

With respect to the needs analysis, it is widely known that ESP gears towards learner-centered approach therefore needs analysis is considered most important in ESP course design (Dudley-Evans & St.John, 1998). Learner needs have been becoming more and more complex and focused (Basturkmen, 2010). As a result, research in ESP is increasingly critical and ethnographic as it tries to maintain its learner-centered, materials-driven, and needs-responsive focus (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). According to Flowerdew (2013), the majority of needs analyses in workplace situations favor task-based needs analyses carried out through ethnographic on-site observations as evidence in research article no. 4 in which the researcher observed 10 nurses while they were working at their own workplaces.

Identity is also reported to increasingly become a research interest in the area of ESP as well as the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in specific purpose settings (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). The topic of identity is evident in research article numbers 3 entitled "Identity constructions of ESP teachers in a Chinese university" (Tao & Gao, 2018) in which the researchers aimed to examine the experiential accounts of eight ESP teachers in a Chinese tertiary institution; therefore, the researchers need rich and grounded information, life-history interview method has then been used which is explicitly one of ethnographic methods.

In terms of ELF, the issue can be explicitly seen in research article numbers 4-5 entitled “*What do nurses say about their English language needs for patient care and their ESP coursework: The case of Taiwanese nurses*” (Lu, 2018) and “*Long-term workplace communication needs of business professionals: Stories from Hong Kong senior executives and their implications for ESP and higher education*” (Chan, 2019) respectively. These two articles involve Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) which communicative or functional purposes is identified as a goal particularly in international and intercultural settings (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2019). BELF is also associated with multiple varieties of English which are used among business professionals as a common communication code without fixed or spoken norm (Roshid, Webb, & Chowdhury (2018). As each person has his or her distinct identity and each professional context has different language needs, it seems more appropriate to employ qualitative and ethnography approach such as interview and observation to elicit in-depth information and this may explain why there is an ever-increasing use of ethnographic techniques in ESP research.

Furthermore, research methods for collecting data in research articles numbers 1 and 3-5 in Table 3 also match with Gollin-Kies (2014)’s report on the use of multi-method associated with ethnography in ESP research since they apply more than one ethnography-oriented-qualitative method. For example, article no. 1 entitled *The role of content and language in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) at university: Challenges and implications for ESP* (Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015), the researchers aim to explore the importance of language learning in CLIL programs and the implications derived for ESP. The researchers adopt multi-methods by analyzing institutional documentation, observing the class, and exploring lecturer and student views through semi-structured focus groups and a questionnaire which were called by the researchers as a process of triangulation. Similarly, article no. 2 entitled *Learning subject-specific content through ESP in a Geography teaching programme: An action research story in Argentina* (Banegas, 2018) also involves multi-methods using qualitative questionnaire, diaries, along with interviews. These methods add richness and accuracy to the interpretation (Connor & Rozycki, 2013) Paltridge and Starfield (2013) identify that more ethnographically oriented studies in ESP results from the nature of ESP which has sought to locate texts within contexts

and to understand the values that communities give to their texts. This means that ESP has had an ethnographic orientation from its earliest day. However, according to Connor and Rozycki (2013), in today's research, there are no true, intensive long-term ethnographies. Ethnographic methods of observations, interviews, and field notes are majorly used to better understand the textual data. Then, regarding to Connor and Rozycki (2013), these approaches could be called "semi-ethnographic".

Conclusion and Recommendations

Even though the present study comprises of only 24 research articles, the findings still report the same phenomenon as the previous studies. In both two timeframes: 2001-2014 and 2015-2019, the qualitative approach is mostly found in ESP research. And when analyzing the qualitative methods between 2015 and 2019, the ethnographic methods are overwhelmingly used in all five research articles. The interesting thing is needs analysis which is the research focus in most research article. Clearly, needs analysis is most essential in ESP. However, needs analysis is also regarded as complicated issues at the same time. Hence, ethnographic methods seem more promising to gain more understanding of the particular context.

This study is small scale compared to the previous related research; therefore, it may not be able to be generalized; however, the research approach and findings may be used as the guideline for further analysis and discussions. To offer concrete and valid generalization, further study, therefore, should obtain more ESP research articles in various journals to generate the big size of data. In addition, to obtain multidimensional perspectives on qualitative approaches used in ESP research, in-dept analysis of each discipline such as nurse, engineer and agriculture should be conducted and compared in order to demonstrate the characteristics of each genre.

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