Navigating English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Morocco: Challenges, Opportunities, and Technological Integration

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Abstract

This study examines the perceptions and experiences of law and humanities students at the multidisciplinary faculty of Taza, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, regarding English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education in Morocco. Using a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data from a survey of 130 students is complemented by qualitative insights from interviews and classroom observations. Findings reveal that 79% of respondents stress the need for ESP curricula tailored to their academic disciplines, with over 70% advocating for increased class frequency and interactive instructional methods. Challenges include technological limitations, such as compatibility issues with the Rosetta Stone application, and significant disparities in student proficiency levels, which complicate instruction in large, diverse classes. A gap in lesson adequacy is also noted between law and humanities students, underscoring the need for discipline-specific approaches. Recommendations include enhancing collaboration between language instructors and subject-matter experts, addressing logistical barriers, and improving technology integration. These measures aim to strengthen ESP programs in Morocco, equipping students with the skills needed for academic and professional success.

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing importance of English as a global lingua franca has transformed its role in education and professional domains, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries. In Morocco, the growing demand for English proficiency has driven a shift toward specialized language instruction, exemplified by the adoption of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs in higher education. These programs aim to bridge the gap between general language skills and the specific linguistic needs of students in fields such as law, humanities, and science. Unlike traditional English language courses, ESP focuses on tailoring instruction to meet the professional and academic requirements of learners, making it a critical component of language education in Morocco. Despite its potential, the implementation of ESP programs in Morocco faces significant challenges. Limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and a lack of interdisciplinary collaboration often hinder the effectiveness of these programs. Additionally, the rapid advancement of technology has introduced both opportunities and complexities in ESP instruction, with tools like Rosetta Stone offering self-directed learning pathways while posing accessibility issues for some students. Addressing these challenges is vital to ensuring that ESP programs fulfill their intended purpose of equipping students with the language skills necessary for their academic and professional success.

This article explores the perceptions and challenges faced by Moroccan students enrolled in ESP programs, drawing on survey data, qualitative interviews, and classroom observations. By analyzing these insights, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of ESP in Morocco and propose practical solutions for improving its implementation. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of literature on ESP education and its role in supporting student success in diverse fields.

2. Theoretical Framework: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Higher Education

The field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has evolved significantly over the decades in response to the growing demand for tailored language teaching methodologies. Unlike traditional language instruction, ESP hones in on the practical and contextual needs of learners, whether in professional environments or academic disciplines (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 4). This specialized focus enables learners to engage with language in a way that directly supports their objectives, such as comprehending technical documents, participating in professional dialogue, or navigating specific academic challenges. ESP diverges from general English by prioritizing content-based instruction, which integrates language acquisition with discipline-specific themes like law, humanities, or science (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 16). This shift ensures that learners are equipped not just with linguistic skills, but with the contextual knowledge needed to apply those skills effectively in their respective fields.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 65) notably emphasize that ESP is not a static product but an adaptive approach. It builds its framework around the specific needs of learners, tailoring course content to align with their goals and professional aspirations. This perspective is particularly relevant in the Moroccan higher education context, where many students require English proficiency tailored to their academic or professional fields. Whether aspiring lawyers learning legal jargon or humanities students deciphering discipline-specific texts, Moroccan students benefit from ESP's focus on needs-based instruction, which bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

2.1. Needs Analysis in ESP

A cornerstone of ESP is the implementation of a comprehensive needs analysis to inform curriculum design. Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991, p. 304) underscore the critical role of this process, describing it as the foundation upon which effective ESP courses are built. Needs analysis involves identifying both the target situation needs—what learners will need to accomplish with English in their professional or academic contexts—and the present situation needs, which assess learners' current language proficiency. This dual focus enables educators to design courses that not only address students' immediate gaps but also prepare them for future challenges.

In Morocco, where students in fields such as law and humanities often encounter discipline-specific texts, an effective ESP program must incorporate systematic strategies to address these unique demands. For example, students studying law may require instruction in interpreting legal documents, drafting contracts, or participating in mock court proceedings. Conversely, humanities students might benefit from ESP courses emphasizing critical analysis of texts, academic writing conventions, and effective oral presentations. By addressing these nuanced requirements, ESP fosters a learning environment that is directly applicable to students' real-world needs.

Belcher (2006, p.135) further highlights that ESP must be dynamic, evolving alongside the changing contexts and demands of learners' professional and academic environments. This adaptability is crucial in legal education, where students often need to master specific terminology, genre conventions, and communication practices. Drawing from Bhatia (1993, p. 102), ESP courses for law students might include activities such as analyzing legal briefs, simulating courtroom scenarios, or engaging in debate. These practical, context-driven approaches ensure that students can bridge the gap between language proficiency and their future professional roles.

2.2. ESP and Technology Integration

The integration of technology into ESP instruction has transformed the way students engage with language learning. With tools like computer-assisted language learning (CALL), students can access tailored resources that enhance their proficiency in specific domains. For example, interactive platforms like Rosetta Stone allow students to engage in self-paced learning, providing immediate feedback and opportunities for targeted skill development. Chapelle (2001, p. 28) notes that such tools are particularly effective in ESP contexts, where learners benefit from customized pathways that address their unique linguistic and contextual needs.

In the Moroccan context, the use of technology in ESP programs has become increasingly prominent, with online resources supplementing traditional classroom instruction. Educators can incorporate digital tools to simulate real-world tasks, such as analyzing case studies, drafting professional documents, or engaging in discipline-specific dialogues. These resources not only enhance linguistic proficiency but also foster learner autonomy, empowering students to take control of their own educational journeys.

Moreover, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) framework provides a complementary approach to ESP. CLT emphasizes practical, real-world communication, enabling students to participate in activities such as mock trials, academic discussions, or group problem-solving tasks (Richards, 2006, p. 22). When combined with ESP principles, CLT fosters a student-centered learning environment that prioritizes active engagement and collaboration. For instance, law students might work together to draft a legal argument, while humanities students collaborate on interpreting complex texts. By blending technology and CLT methodologies, ESP courses can offer a dynamic, interactive learning experience that prepares students for the demands of their academic and professional fields.

Benson (2011, p. 45) underscores the importance of learner autonomy in modern education, particularly in ESP. By equipping students with the tools and strategies to manage their own learning, ESP fosters a sense of independence that extends beyond the classroom. In Morocco, where language needs vary widely across disciplines, this approach is invaluable, allowing students to adapt their learning to the specific demands of their fields. Through the integration of technology, CLT, and needs-based instruction, ESP continues to evolve as a dynamic and effective framework for higher education.

2.3. Challenges in ESP Implementation in Morocco

The implementation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Morocco faces significant challenges that hinder its effectiveness in addressing learners' specific needs. Ennaji (2005, p. 45) identifies several key issues, including the scarcity of resources, insufficient training for ESP instructors, and a lack of collaboration between language teachers and subject-matter experts. These factors often result in ESP programs that are poorly aligned with the practical

requirements of students' academic and professional contexts. For instance, a law student may struggle with interpreting legal documents in English if the course material does not adequately integrate legal terminology and genre-specific conventions. This disconnect between course content and real-world applications highlights the need for a more structured and context-sensitive approach to ESP in Morocco.

Another persistent challenge lies in the limited availability of specialized training for ESP instructors. Teachers often lack the necessary expertise in both language pedagogy and the specific content areas they are tasked with addressing. Without adequate professional development opportunities, many educators are unable to design or deliver courses that effectively balance language instruction with discipline-specific content. Additionally, the absence of collaboration between language teachers and subject-matter experts further exacerbates this issue. Effective ESP instruction requires input from both linguistic and domain-specific perspectives to ensure that learners are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need for their fields. Scholars like Farmati et al. (2022, p. 12) emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in overcoming these barriers, advocating for tailored, context-specific course designs that integrate input from various stakeholders, including industry professionals and academic specialists.

The integration of technology presents both opportunities and challenges in addressing the needs of language learners. Tools such as Rosetta Stone and other computer-assisted language learning (CALL) platforms can provide learners with self-paced, individualized learning opportunities, particularly in contexts where traditional classroom instruction is limited. However, Al-Jarf (2012) emphasizes that technology should complement, rather than replace, teacher involvement in language instruction. She argues that effective integration requires active teacher participation to guide and support students, ensuring that technological tools are utilized to their full potential. For example, while interactive platforms may enhance general language skills, they are insufficient on their own to prepare students for the nuanced demands of academic and professional fields, such as legal drafting or technical report writing (Al-Jarf, 2012, p. 112). This underscores the need for a balanced approach that combines technological tools with teacher-led feedback and contextualized instruction.

To overcome these challenges, a more holistic approach to ESP in Morocco is necessary. This includes not only investing in teacher training and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration but also ensuring that technology is used as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, teacher-led instruction. By addressing these issues systematically, Morocco's ESP programs can become more effective in preparing students for success in their academic and professional pursuits.

3. Methodology
3.1. Research Design
This research employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the effectiveness of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses offered to law and humanities students at the faculty where the study is conducted. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), mixed-methods research integrates both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem. By utilizing this approach, the study explores students' perceptions of ESP courses while also identifying challenges and opportunities, including the use of Rosetta Stone as a supplementary language-learning tool.
3.2. Participants

The study focuses on students enrolled in ESP courses within the Law and Humanities departments. A target sample of 100–150 respondents is sought, ensuring a balanced

representation between the two disciplines. The study also considers demographic variables, such as gender and academic background, to capture potential variations in students' experiences, needs, and preferences. This diversity helps provide a holistic understanding of the effectiveness and relevance of ESP courses for these distinct groups.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

To gather comprehensive data, the study employs three key instruments:

1) **Questionnaire**
   A bilingual questionnaire (Arabic-English) is utilized to collect quantitative data. This survey includes both closed and open-ended questions to capture insights on:

   - Students' perceptions of ESP courses.
   - Challenges encountered in learning English.
   - The use and evaluation of Rosetta Stone as a learning tool. The combination of closed and open-ended questions ensures a balance between structured data and nuanced qualitative feedback.

2) **Follow-up Interviews**
   Semi-structured interviews are conducted with 10–15 participants selected from the survey respondents. These interviews delve deeper into students' experiences, expectations, and feedback regarding ESP courses and Rosetta Stone. Open-ended questions provide participants with the opportunity to express detailed opinions, enriching the qualitative component of the study.

3) **Classroom Observations**
   Observations are carried out to examine teacher-student interactions and the integration of technology in the classroom. Special attention is paid to how Rosetta Stone is utilized within the instructional framework and how students engage with the course material. These observations provide contextual insights that complement the quantitative and interview data.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data is analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive interpretation of the findings:

- **Quantitative   Data   Analysis**
  Questionnaire responses are analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as percentages and means, to identify trends and patterns. For example:
- Bar charts are used to represent the frequency of Rosetta Stone usage, visualizing student engagement.
- Cross-tabulations are employed to explore differences in perceptions and usage patterns between law and humanities students.
- **Qualitative   Data   Analysis**
  Thematic analysis is applied to the open-ended survey responses and interview transcripts. This method identifies recurring themes, providing deeper insights into students' motivations, challenges, and expectations. Key themes, such as technological barriers or the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies, are highlighted.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The study is conducted in strict adherence to ethical research practices, including:

- **Informed Consent:** All participants are informed of the study's objectives and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.
- **Confidentiality:** Responses are anonymized, and data is securely stored for academic purposes only.
- **Institutional Approval:** The research is conducted following the university's ethical guidelines, with formal approval obtained from the ethics committee.

3.6. Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights into ESP practices, it acknowledges the following limitations:

- **Response Bias:** Self-reported data from the questionnaire may introduce bias, as participants might overestimate or underestimate their engagement or challenges.
- **Limited Generalizability:** Findings are specific to the faculty under study and may not fully apply to other faculties or universities with different contexts or resources.
- **Technological Barriers:** Students' access to Rosetta Stone may be hindered by technical issues, such as device compatibility or internet connectivity, potentially affecting their learning experiences.

This methodology ensures a rigorous and multifaceted approach to understanding the effectiveness of ESP courses, combining data from multiple sources to provide actionable insights for improving language instruction in higher education.

4. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the survey responses provides an in-depth exploration of the perceptions, challenges, and expectations of students enrolled in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs in Morocco. These findings reveal a rich tapestry of insights, highlighting the critical aspects that influence the effectiveness of ESP courses and the opportunities for their enhancement.
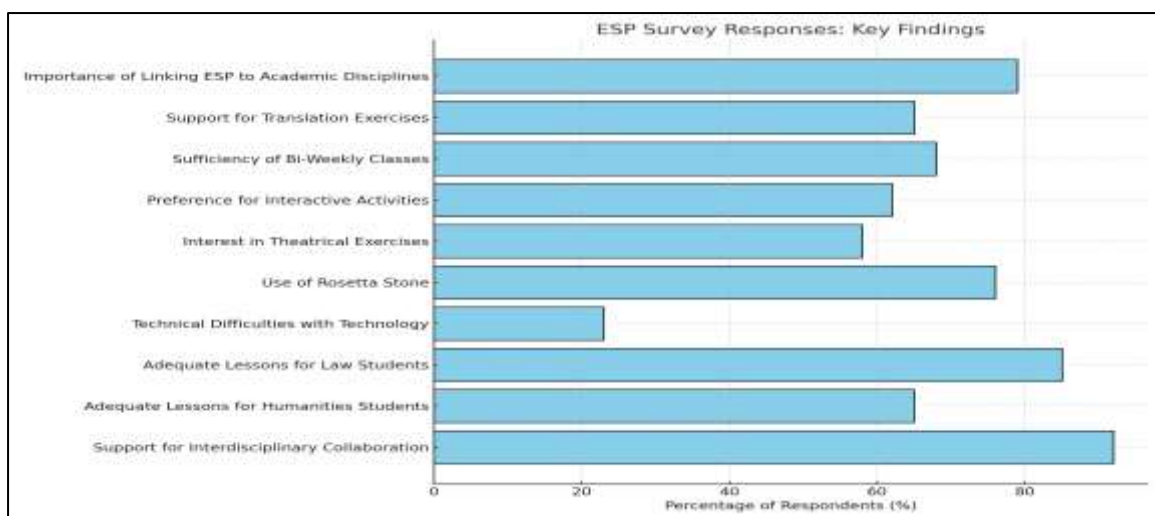

Figure 1: Survey responses highlighting key findings, including the importance of linkig ESP instruction to academic disciplines and challenges with class frequency and technology.

A significant 79% of respondents emphasized the importance of linking English language instruction to their specific academic disciplines. This indicates an overwhelming demand for a curriculum that not only teaches general language skills but also integrates content relevant to the students' fields of study. This finding aligns with the central tenets of ESP, which emphasize tailoring instruction to meet the professional and academic needs of learners (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.8). For instance, translation exercises were specifically highlighted, with 65% of respondents supporting their inclusion as a means to enhance comprehension of specialized terminology. These exercises are particularly valued by students in fields such as law, where understanding precise terms and phrases is critical to success. This suggests that incorporating such targeted activities could significantly improve the relevance and utility of ESP instruction.

Another major challenge identified was the frequency of classes. Approximately 68% of students felt that the bi-weekly schedule of lessons was insufficient for mastering the language, with many expressing a desire for increased session frequency. This finding is consistent with existing ESP literature, such as Belcher (2006, p.135), which underscores the importance of more intensive instruction for achieving language proficiency. The call for additional classes reflects a broader frustration among students who feel constrained by limited contact hours, which impede their ability to develop fluency and confidence in English. Increasing the frequency of lessons could not only address this concern but also provide opportunities for more sustained and immersive language practice.
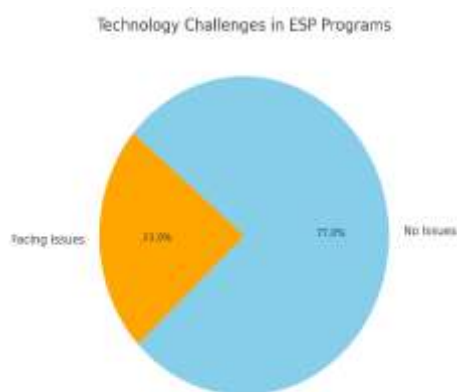

Figure 2: Students' experiences with technology in ESP programs, illustrating the percentage facing compatibility issues with tools like Rosetta Stone.

Interactive and varied instructional methods were another prominent theme. Approximately 62% of respondents advocated for engaging activities such as dialogues and group discussions, while 58% expressed a preference for incorporating theatrical exercises into the curriculum. These findings suggest that students are eager for dynamic learning experiences that go beyond traditional lecture-based methods. Interactive approaches, such as role-playing or simulation activities, can create a more engaging environment and foster better retention of language skills. For example, law students could benefit from mock trials or contract negotiation simulations, while humanities students might engage in debates or dramatic readings. Such methods not only enhance language proficiency but also build critical soft skills such as public speaking and teamwork.

Technology usage emerged as both a strength and a challenge within the ESP framework. While 76% of students reported using the Rosetta Stone application as part of their learning process, a significant 23% cited technical difficulties, particularly
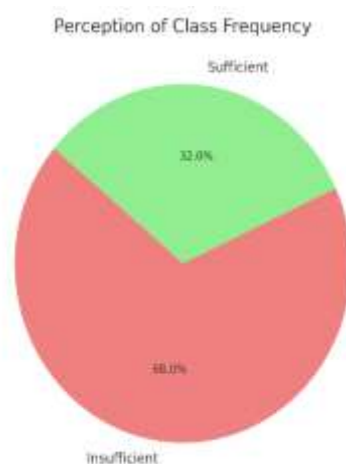

Figure 3: Students' perceptions of bi-weekly class frequency, with the majority considering it insufficient for effective learning.

compatibility issues with older mobile devices. Despite these challenges, 71% of respondents acknowledged the app's utility in improving their English skills. This dual response highlights the potential of technology to augment ESP instruction while underscoring the need for accessible and reliable tools. For technology to be truly effective, institutions must address these barriers by providing appropriate technological support and ensuring compatibility with the devices commonly used by students. Additionally, educators must carefully integrate technology into the curriculum, balancing its benefits with the need for personalized guidance and cultural relevance.

The survey also revealed notable disparities in how students from different academic backgrounds perceived the relevance of their current lessons. Among law students, 85% believed that their lessons adequately addressed their specialization needs, compared to only 65% of humanities students. This gap underscores the importance of tailored approaches within ESP programs. While law students appear to benefit from more targeted content, humanities students may require additional resources or adjustments to ensure that their lessons are equally effective. This finding emphasizes the need for continuous evaluation and refinement of ESP curricula to address the unique needs of diverse student populations.

Interdisciplinary collaboration emerged as a key recommendation for improving ESP programs. An overwhelming 92% of respondents advocated for greater collaboration between English instructors and specialists from their respective fields. This approach could significantly enhance the quality of instruction by integrating discipline-specific expertise into the curriculum. For example, subject matter experts could contribute to the development of specialized vocabulary lists, case studies, or authentic materials that reflect real-world applications. Such collaboration not only enriches the learning experience but also ensures that ESP programs remain relevant and aligned with the demands of various professions.

Qualitative data from follow-up interviews and classroom observations further illuminated the complexities of ESP education in Morocco. Semi-structured interviews with 10–15 students revealed a strong desire for more practical applications of language skills, with many expressing dissatisfaction with purely theoretical instruction. Over 70% of respondents emphasized the need for lessons directly linked to their fields of study, such as translating specialized texts and building technical vocabulary. This feedback highlights a gap between student expectations and current practices, suggesting a need for more applied and experiential learning opportunities.

Classroom observations provided additional insights into the challenges faced by both students and educators. Large class sizes were a recurring issue, limiting opportunities for personalized instruction and meaningful interaction. Additionally, the wide range of language proficiency levels among students created significant difficulties for instructors, who often struggled to address the needs of all learners effectively. Differentiated instruction

Figure 4: Comparison of lesson adequacy as perceived by law and humanities students, emphasizing the need for tailored curricula.

strategies could help mitigate these challenges by providing tailored support for students at varying levels of proficiency while fostering a collaborative learning environment.
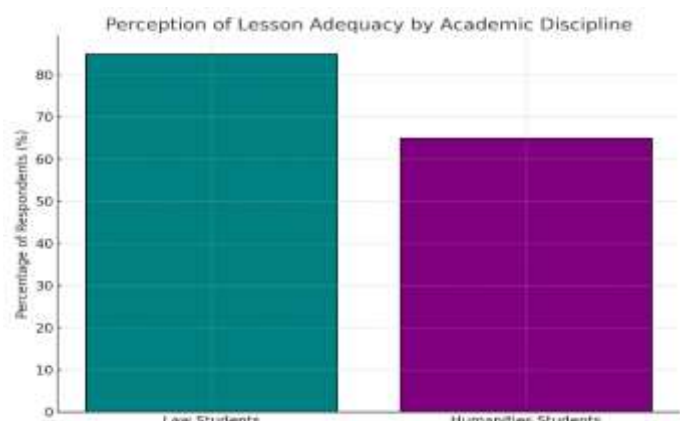
The integration of technology, while promising, was also noted to have limitations. Observations revealed that technical issues, such as the incompatibility of Rosetta Stone with older devices, hindered some students' ability to fully engage with the material. This finding underscores the importance of aligning technological tools with the cultural and logistical realities of Moroccan students. Institutions must ensure that such tools are both accessible and integrated into a broader pedagogical framework that includes teacher-led guidance and feedback.

Overall, these findings highlight the need for a holistic and student-centered approach to ESP education in Morocco. By addressing logistical challenges, increasing lesson frequency, diversifying instructional methods, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, educators and policymakers can create more effective and inclusive ESP programs. Such initiatives will not only enhance students' language skills but also equip them with the tools needed to succeed in their academic and professional endeavors.

In summary, the survey responses and qualitative data provide a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of ESP programs in Morocco. Students' calls for a more integrated and responsive curriculum reflect a clear desire for educational experiences that align with their specific academic and professional goals. Addressing these needs through targeted reforms will ensure that ESP programs continue to evolve, meeting the demands of an increasingly globalized world and empowering Moroccan students to excel in their chosen fields.

5. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education in Morocco, emphasizing its critical role in preparing students for academic and professional success. The findings highlight the necessity of a curriculum that aligns closely with the specific linguistic and contextual needs of learners, addressing their professional aspirations while fostering meaningful engagement. The research reveals a clear demand for an integrated and responsive educational framework, with students advocating for enhancements such as increased class frequency, diversified instructional methods, and practical application of language skills.

Quantitative data from the survey demonstrates that over 70% of participants prioritize a curriculum tailored to their fields of study, such as activities focused on translating specialized texts and building technical vocabulary. This preference reflects the importance of content-driven instruction in fostering relevance and utility for students. Qualitative insights from interviews further illustrate the challenges faced by learners, such as technical barriers with tools like Rosetta Stone and the inadequate incorporation of cultural contexts in learning materials. These obstacles underscore the need for a more holistic approach to technology integration, ensuring that tools are accessible, culturally relevant, and effectively supplement teacher-led instruction.

Classroom observations shed light on additional complexities, such as large class sizes and the diversity of language proficiency levels among students. These challenges highlight the importance of adopting differentiated instructional strategies that address varying skill levels while promoting collaboration and engagement. Tailored approaches, such as small-group activities and interactive methodologies, could significantly enhance the learning experience and outcomes for students.

The implications of this study extend beyond immediate pedagogical concerns, calling for strategic collaboration between language instructors, subject-matter experts, and policymakers. By integrating interdisciplinary expertise and addressing logistical challenges, educators can design ESP programs that are not only linguistically rigorous but also contextually relevant. Such programs have the potential to bridge the gap between academic instruction and real-world application, equipping students with the tools to excel in their chosen fields.

This research serves as a foundational step toward a deeper understanding of ESP education in Morocco. It highlights the pressing need for continuous evaluation, innovation, and adaptation in ESP curricula to meet the evolving demands of a globalized world. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of tailored ESP interventions, further investigate the integration of technology in language instruction, and examine the effectiveness of interdisciplinary collaborations. By addressing these dimensions, stakeholders can contribute to the development of more effective, inclusive, and sustainable ESP programs that empower Moroccan students to achieve their academic and professional goals.

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