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ESP and adult education in a communicative language teaching context: A dynamic cooperation for effective and efficient teaching

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Abstract

The article explores the connection between Adult Education and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It emphasizes how their integration promotes the development of communicative competence in adult learners. In today's fast-changing technological, economic, and social landscape, lifelong learning is crucial. Adults increasingly need to acquire specialized skills to perform effectively in professional settings where English serves as a global lingua franca.

Adult education differs from traditional schooling in that adult learners bring prior experiences, professional responsibilities, and well-defined goals to the learning process. Their learning tends to be goal-oriented, problem-centered, and directly linked to real-life needs. Consequently, traditional language teaching methods that focus on general grammar and abstract knowledge often fall short of meeting adult learners' expectations. ESP offers an appropriate pedagogical framework by concentrating on learners' specific communicative needs within academic or professional contexts.

The theoretical foundations of adult education emphasize autonomy, experience, motivation, and relevance. These principles underpin the concept of andragogy, which focuses on self-directed learning, intrinsic motivation, and practical application of knowledge. ESP aligns well with these principles by emphasizing needs analysis, authentic communication tasks, and learner-centered course design. A key component of ESP is needs analysis, which identifies learners' current skills, professional objectives, and the communicative demands of their target environments. By customizing course content based on these needs, ESP programs boost motivation and ensure that learning remains relevant and applicable to real-world contexts.

The paper further examines the development of communicative competence, encompassing linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and strategic skills. Approaches like Communicative Language Teaching and **Task-Based Learning** allow learners to engage in meaningful interactions that **simulate** professional communication. Despite its benefits, adult ESP education encounters challenges such as learner diversity, limited time, and institutional constraints. Nevertheless, advancements in digital technologies, flexible learning environments, and enhanced collaboration between educators and professional communities present promising opportunities for the future.

In summary, integrating adult education principles with ESP forms an effective approach that fosters communicative competence, supports professional growth, and encourages lifelong learning.

Keywords: Adult Education; Communicative Language Teaching; Communicative Competence; English For Specific Purposes (ESP); Needs Analysis; Andragogy

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1. Introduction

Adult education has become a vital field promoting lifelong learning, employment, and social participation in modern countries marked by rapid economic, technological, and social transformations. Adults must progressively adjust to changing demands in the workplace, which frequently call for the development of specific skills rather than general knowledge (Aguaguña Pilla et al., 2025). “English as a lingua franca” refers not only to an intercultural communicative setting in which speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds use English as a medium of communication but also to the various communicative strategies or even practices that those speakers employ in intercultural communicative contexts (Marlina & Xu, 2018). Given the above status of the English language as a global lingua franca in commerce, academia, healthcare, technology, and other occupational areas, proficient English communication in certain professional contexts has become especially important. As a result, scholarly and pedagogical interest in the relationship between adult education and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has increased (Ananta et al., 2023).

Adult learners bring extensive personal, professional, and educational experiences along with well-defined goals related to their present needs, which makes adult education fundamentally different from formal schooling. Adult learning is frequently goal-driven, problem-oriented, and strongly tied to real-world circumstances. As a result, conventional methods of teaching languages that emphasize decontextualized grammar and broad language proficiency often fall short of the expectations of adult learners (Anthony, 2018). With its emphasis on learners' unique communicative needs and professional contexts, ESP provides a pedagogical framework that closely adheres to adult learning principles. This alignment implies that collaboration between ESP and adult education can result in learning outcomes that are more significant, successful, and long-lasting (Basturkmen, 2019).

Communicative competence is the key idea that guides this collaboration. The ability to use language responsibly and successfully in real-world professional relationships is part of communicative competence for adult learners, which goes beyond linguistic accuracy. This entails responding to sociocultural norms within professional societies, comprehending genre-specific conventions, negotiating meaning, and engaging in workplace discourse. In addition to improving language skills, ESP courses created within an adult education framework seek to enable students to work independently and with confidence in their professional settings (Belcher, 2018). Consequently, the development of communicative competence equals to acquiring both the knowledge and the ability for language use with respect to whether something is formally possible, i.e. reflecting accuracy, feasible in virtue of the means of communication and appropriate in relation to a context within which it is used, i.e. reflecting fluency (Hymes, 1972). The notion of communicative competence is, thus, different from the linguistic competence, which according to Chomsky is the “native speakers’ knowledge of their own language, the set or system of internalized rules which enables them to create new grammatical sentences and stand sentences spoken to them” (Paulston, 1974 & Munby, 1978).

The present article aims to examine the theoretical and methodological convergence between ESP and adult education, emphasizing how their collaboration might help students become communicatively competent. The paper specifically looks at the fundamentals of adult education, what makes ESP unique, and how these two disciplines work well together in real-world situations. It, also, addresses the difficulties and potential future paths of this multidisciplinary approach, as well as the function of communicative skill as a critical learning result in adult ESP environments (Bhatia et al., 2018). Initially, the key traits of adult learners as well as the theoretical underpinnings of adult education **are outlined**. The idea, scope, and salient aspects of ESP are then described, with a focus on needs analysis. **What follows is the presentation of** areas where adult education and ESP overlap, emphasizing learner-centeredness, experiential learning, and motivation. After that, the topic of communicative competency in adult ESP learners is covered, and present issues and potential solutions are examined. A summary of the key points and their implications for adult language instruction is provided in the article’s conclusion (Hyland, 2018).

2. Theoretical Framework for Adult Education

Based on the understanding that adults learn differently from children and adolescents, adult education is a separate area of educational theory and practice. It includes a broad range of learning activities carried out by people who have grown into adult positions in society and who choose to pursue education, frequently in addition to their social, familial, and professional obligations. Autonomy, experience, relevance, and purposefulness are highlighted in the theoretical framework of adult education; these components are especially important when adult learners are learning a language for work-related or professional purposes (Hyland, 2022).

2.1. What Is Adult Education

The structured educational methods that help adults learn new information, abilities, attitudes, or values outside their initial formal schooling are generally referred to as adult education. In addition to non-formal and informal learning activities like workplace training, community education, and self-directed learning, adult education includes formal education programs like continuing professional development courses and higher education programs for mature learners. Adult education differs from other types of education not just because of the learners' age but also because of their social responsibilities and learning objectives (Kakoulli Constantinou, 2023).

The idea of lifelong learning, which presents education as an ongoing process that lasts the entirety of a person's life, is intimately associated with adult education in modern discourse. According to this viewpoint, adult education is essential for promoting people's flexibility, employability, and social engagement. In order to meet the demands of the job market and promote professional mobility, language learning—especially ESP—is often incorporated into adult education programs. As a result, adult education offers an adaptable and context-sensitive framework for the meaningful development of ESP (Kormos & Michel, 2018).

At this point it would be useful to give some definitions related to adult education. The words “adult/adulthood” can be interpreted as: i) a stage in the lifecycle of the individual, ii) a certain form of societal status (acceptance by the society in which they live) and iii) as a collection of ideas and values (the notion of adulthood) (Rogers, 2002 & Sifakis 2003). In 1976 UNESCO determined that adults are those people whom their own society deems to be adults: an adult is both self-recognizing and recognised by others (UNESCO, 1976). UNESCO defines “adult education” as a form of education “specifically targeting individuals who are regarded as adults by the society in which they belong to improve their technical or professional qualifications, further develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge with the purpose to complete a level of formal education, or to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies in a new field or to refresh or update their knowledge in a particular field. This, also, includes, what may be referred to as “continuing education”, “recurrent education” or “second chance education” (<http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/adult-education>).

2.2. Adult Learners' Features

Designing and implementing successful educational programs requires a thorough understanding of the traits of adult learners. Adults usually have a plethora of past experiences that influence their expectations, attitudes, and learning methods when they enter educational settings. These encounters can serve as useful tools that help students connect new information to well-known situations, but they can also produce fixed presumptions that affect how learning is viewed (Long, 2019).

Adult learners are typically goal-oriented and driven by well-defined social, professional, or personal aims. Adults frequently anticipate instant relevance and practical application of what they learn, in contrast to younger learners. This translates into a preference for content in language instruction that directly supports professional duties, real-life interactions, and workplace communication. As a result, adult learners might show little tolerance for tasks that seem abstract or unrelated to their requirements (Martin & Broadley, 2018).

Adult learners are, also, characterized by their propensity for self-directed learning. It is common for adults to take charge of their learning choices, including the choice of learning objectives, methods, and assessment of results. This autonomy has significant ramifications for the work of the educator and is intimately related to adults' sense of identity and competence. Adult learners generally prefer collaborative connections with educators and value mutual respect and acknowledgment of their competence, as opposed to acting as passive recipients of knowledge (Otilia, 2020).

Constraints including time constraints, cognitive load from many duties, and anxiety from prior educational experiences can all have an impact on adult learners' learning engagement. These elements emphasize the necessity of learner-centered, adaptable, and supporting methods, especially in challenging fields like ESP (Paltridge & Starfield, 2020).

2.3. Adult Learning (Andragogy) Principles

One of the most commonly applied frameworks to explain adult learning is andragogy, a term popularized in the 1960s by Malcolm Knowles, an American educator. The term “andragogy” is often compared to “pedagogy”, which is used to describe teaching techniques for children (Knowles, 1977 & Gordon-Ross, 2003). Andragogy is based on the following six assumptions (Daily, J. A. & Landis, B. J., 2014): i) adults need to know why they learn something, ii) the motivation to learn is internal rather than external, iii) there is a change in time perspective as people mature, from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application, iv) the readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his/her social role, v) adults accumulate a growing reservoir of experience, which constitutes a

valuable resource for learning and vi) adults' self-concept moves to that of a self-directing human being. Consequently, the andragogical process aims at establishing a suitable physical and psychological learning climate – characterized by mutual respect, collaborativeness, supportiveness, openness – as well as involving adult learners in mutual planning. This leads to the notion of the “learning contract” which was promoted as a tool for assisting adult learners to exercise self-direction through personally identifying goals, resources, implementations and means of evaluating their learning (Knowles in Gordon-Ross, 2003).

The idea of andragogy, which explains a collection of concepts uniquely dedicated to adult learning, is frequently linked to the theoretical underpinnings of adult education. Andragogy places a strong emphasis on the learner's need to comprehend the necessity of learning, the significance of autonomy and self-concept, the importance of experience, readiness to learn, problem-centered orientation, and internal motivation. These ideas offer a helpful framework for analyzing ESP in particular as well as adult language learning in general (Rahman, 2020). Adults must view education as pertinent to their current needs, according to a fundamental tenet of andragogy. This idea is demonstrated in ESP contexts through the emphasis on needs analysis and the creation of courses that target certain communicative scenarios, genres, and professional practices (Rahman, 2020).

The effectiveness of education is reinforced when learning content and learners' occupational realities are aligned. This increases motivation and engagement. The importance of experience is another basic idea. The experiences of adult learners serve as both sources of information and benchmarks for interpreting new information. Experience can serve as a catalyst for learning rather than a barrier when ESP training incorporates real-world problems, promotes reflection, and pulls from students' professional histories (Rahman, 2020).

In addition, andragogy emphasizes the value of problem-centered learning as opposed to subject-centered methods that are frequently used in conventional education. Learning is most successful for adult learners when it is structured around tasks and issues from real life. By emphasizing communicative duties like negotiations, presentations, report writing, and professional encounters, ESP readily fits with this attitude (Saragih, 2018).

Andragogy has been the focus of critical debate despite its widespread popularity. According to academics, adult learning is varied and context-dependent, and not every adult demonstrates the same level of autonomy or preparedness for self-directed learning. However, as a flexible framework rather than a prescriptive model, andragogical concepts continue to be highly significant. When used critically, they provide insightful information for the creation of adult ESP programs that seek to produce learners who are communicatively competent (Sava & Lupou, 2021).

3. The idea and scope of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

A student-centered approach to language instruction, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) focuses on addressing the unique communication demands of certain learner groups. ESP concentrates on the practical application of language in well-defined academic, professional, or occupational contexts, in contrast to English for General Purposes (EGP), which strives for the wide development of language competence. Because of this perspective, ESP is particularly pertinent in adult education settings, as learners usually approach language acquisition with specific objectives connected to their professional duties and obligations (Smoak, 2021). As Sifakis states it, ESP can be broken down into its three component letters: “E” which stands for language issues and the need to analyse language in different ways, depending on the focus, “S” which stands for specificity which distinguishes it from general English situations and “P” which pertains to the notion of purposes, knowing learners' needs, their preferred strategies and styles that help them learn more efficiently (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FenAQJ9YxHY>).

3.1. The Meaning and Evolution of ESP

In reaction to significant shifts in the world's scientific, technological, and economic environments, ESP first appeared in the second half of the 20th century. There is a growing need for domain-specific language education due to the increase of scientific research, international trade, and the use of English as a communication medium. Early ESP programs, which focused on vocabulary, structures, and conversation patterns pertinent to specific areas, were primarily motivated by practical demands (Sofroniou & Poutos, 2022).

As time passed, ESP changed from being purely linguistic to being more all-encompassing, learner-centered, and discourse-based. The learner-centered curriculum was an ESP-bound development and it allowed learners to take control of and participate in the learning process, an already mentioned key characteristic of adult learners.

According to modern definitions, ESP is characterized by its focus on students' learning objectives rather than on particular teaching resources or approaches. The fundamental tenet of ESP is that language education should be developed with learners' needs and the communicative requirements of target scenarios in mind. Therefore, rather than being a set product, ESP is best viewed as a method of teaching languages (Suwannasri, 2021).

The distinctiveness of the content and results is one of the main differences between ESP and General English or English for General Purposes (EGP). While ESP focuses on specific genres, registers, and communicative practices connected to academic or professional communities, General English attempts to prepare students for a broad range of communicative circumstances. This uniqueness supports the appropriateness of ESP within adult education frameworks by closely matching adult learners' expectations for relevance and applicability (Teng, 2019).

3.2. ESP Types

The many subfields that make up ESP mirror the variety of learners' objectives and work environments. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) are two categories that are frequently utilized. EAP emphasizes the linguistic abilities needed for academic work, such as reading scholarly materials, producing research papers and essays, and taking part in scholarly conversations. Adult learners participating in postgraduate courses, professional development programs, or higher education will find it very pertinent (Zhang & Sun, 2024).

Conversely, EOP deals with language use in professional and occupational contexts. It covers topics including English for Engineering, English for Medical Purposes, English for Legal Purposes, and Business English. In these settings, communicative tasks that **simulate** real-life professional activities—like holding meetings, preparing reports, communicating with clients, or working with colleagues throughout the world—are prioritized (Smoak, 2021). The notion of “communicative tasks” is of crucial importance when it comes to adult education: they refer to classroom activities that involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is mainly focused on meaning rather than form (Nunan, 1989).

Despite these differences, the lines separating EAP and EOP are sometimes blurred, particularly in adult education settings where students may pursue both academic and professional endeavors at the same time. The dedication to relevance, authenticity, and purpose-driven learning is what unifies all forms of ESP. In order to help students participate more successfully and confidently in particular discourse communities, ESP courses are usually created to mirror the communicative practices of those communities (Sava & Lupou, 2021).

3.3. Needs Analysis in ESP

Needs analysis is a fundamental component of ESP and the main method by which courses are customized to meet the individual needs of learners. It entails the methodical identification and analysis of learners' communicative needs, goals, and language use contexts. Needs analysis is especially important in adult education because adult learners frequently have clear expectations about what they hope to accomplish through language learning (Otilia, 2020). One of the key stages of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is Needs Analysis, i.e. the process of establishing the “what” and “how” of a course (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). At the initial stages of ESP, Needs Analysis consisted in assessing the communicative needs of the learners and the techniques of achieving specific teaching objectives (Otilia, 2015). Nowadays, Needs Analysis aims at collecting information about the learners and at defining the target situation and environment of studying ESP.

There are several types of needs analysis, such as present situation analysis (**PSA**), which evaluates learners' current language skills and learning experiences, and target situation analysis (**TSA**), which looks at the communication demands learners will encounter in their professional or academic environments. From a different perspective, there are eight components in the concept of Needs Analysis: i) *target situation analysis* (TSA) and *objective needs analysis* which focuses on the tasks and activities for which learners will use English in their future or current professional/academic environment, ii) *linguistic analysis, discourse analysis and genre analysis*, which examines the knowledge of how language and skills (e.g., specific vocabulary, text structures, or speaking patterns) are actually used in those target situations, iii) *subjective needs analysis*, which covers the learners' personal reasons for attending the course, their expectations, and their preferred learning styles or “wants” and, iv) *present situation analysis* (PSA) for the purpose of identifying the learners' current skills and language use, helping to establish the starting point for instruction and finally v) *means analysis*, i.e. information about the environment where the course will be delivered (Dudley-Evans, 1998).

Learner-centered views, also, highlight the significance of subjective needs, including learners' motivations, preferences, and perceptions (Paltridge & Starfield, 2020).

Decisions regarding course content, learning objectives, resources, and evaluation techniques are influenced by needs analysis in ESP situations. For instance, an ESP training for engineers would concentrate on technical documentation, presentations, and cooperative problem-solving, whereas an ESP course for healthcare workers might emphasize oral interaction, terminology, and pragmatic skill in patient communication. Needs analysis improves learning's relevance and efficacy by firmly establishing education in real-world communication practices (Rahman, 2020).

More importantly, needs analysis in adult ESP education should be viewed as an ongoing and dynamic process rather than a one-time diagnostic activity. Adult learners' needs may evolve as their professional roles change or as they gain greater awareness of their communicative challenges. Continuous dialogue and interaction between educators and learners allow ESP programs to remain responsive and adaptive, reinforcing learner autonomy and engagement (Saragih, 2018).

All things considered, ESP offers a flexible and context-sensitive framework for teaching languages that closely resembles the tenets of adult education. ESP is a potent tool for assisting adult learners in developing communicative competence within their particular academic and professional contexts because of its emphasis on needs analysis, authenticity, and purposeful communication. The foundation of a collaborative strategy meant to prepare communicatively competent learners is the intersection of ESP and adult education (Sava & Lupou, 2021).

4. ESP and Adult Education: Convergence Points

The ESP movement is closely related to adult education, a form of education involving professional and vocationally oriented programmes at advanced levels, taken for purposes such as qualification or mainly the development of new skills for work purposes (Rogers, 2002). A common pedagogical philosophy that emphasizes relevance, learner agency, and meaningful engagement with real-life circumstances underpins the collaboration between English for Specific Purposes and adult education. Both disciplines emphasize being attentive to the needs, experiences, and objectives of learners rather than using one-size-fits-all methods. A strong framework for creating language learning activities that promote the growth of communicatively competent adult learners is produced by this convergence (Smoak, 2021).

4.1. Methods Focused on the Learner

A key area of overlap between ESP and adult education is learner-centeredness. In adult education, educators facilitate rather than impart knowledge, and learning is seen as a process influenced by students' personal and professional paths. In a same vein, ESP centers course design around the learner, starting with a thorough examination of the target settings and communicative needs of learners (Sofroniou & Poutos, 2022).

Learner-centered techniques are seen in adult ESP classes when students actively participate in decision-making processes about learning objectives, content selection, and task design.

Adult learners are encouraged to discuss their expectations, consider their communication difficulties, and offer their professional knowledge to the educational process. In addition to increasing motivation, this participative approach cultivates a sense of accountability and ownership for learning results (Suwannasri, 2021).

Additionally, learner-centered ESP education acknowledges the diversity of adult learners, including variations in learning preferences, professional backgrounds, and skill levels. Teachers can accommodate this variation while keeping an eye on common communication objectives by using flexible instructional methodologies, differentiated tasks, and collaborative learning activities. These methods operationalize adult education concepts in ESP practice (Teng, 2019).

4.2. Situated and Experiential Learning

The emphasis on experiential and situational learning is another important area of convergence. The fundamental function of experience as a basis and a catalyst for learning is emphasized by adult education philosophy. When learning is integrated into relevant contexts and builds upon students' prior knowledge, it is most successful. By emphasizing authentic materials and exercises that mirror real-world communicating practices, ESP strongly conforms with this viewpoint (Giovanoglou, 2025b).

Simulations, role plays, case studies, and project-based activities that **simulate** professional settings are frequently used in adult ESP environments to achieve experiential learning. Students may participate in tasks like running meetings, negotiating contracts, delivering professional projects, or examining books that are particular to their field.

Through these exercises, students can integrate linguistic and pragmatic abilities, apply language in context, and evaluate their performance (Hyland, 2018).

By framing language acquisition as involvement in particular discourse groups, situated learning strengthens this connection even more. ESP students are learning how to communicate as members of academic or professional communities, not only language forms. In line with adult education's focus on relevance and applicability, this viewpoint encourages the development of communication competence that is functional, contextualized, and socially significant (Hyland, 2022).

4.3. Motivation and Lifelong Learning

Motivation represents another critical intersection between adult education and ESP. Adult learners are typically motivated by internal factors such as professional advancement, personal growth, and self-efficacy, as well as external factors including labor market demands and organizational requirements. Adult education frameworks emphasize the importance of acknowledging and supporting these motivations to sustain engagement (Kakoulli Constantinou, 2023).

By directly meeting students' academic and professional needs, ESP is a potent motivator. Learners are more inclined to put in effort and stick with the process when they see a direct link between language acquisition and their practical objectives. ESP's practical focus strengthens adult learners' sense of purpose and raises their perception of learning's worth (Long, 2019). Additionally, the idea of lifelong learning is closely related to both ESP and adult education. Communicative English proficiency is a dynamic ability that needs constant improvement in a society that is changing quickly. By providing learners with techniques for continuous language growth, critical reflection, and independent study outside of the classroom, adult ESP programs support lifetime learning (Martin & Broadley, 2018).

4.4. The Teacher 's Role

A fusion of adult education and ESP concepts is reflected in the role of the educator in adult ESP environments. Teachers take on diverse roles as mentors, facilitators, and mediators between students and target discourse groups rather than just teaching languages. The emphasis on cooperation and respect in adult education is consistent with this change in role (Otilia, 2020).

It is the duty of adult ESP instructors to establish welcoming classrooms that respect students' experiences and promote engagement. They assist students in determining their requirements, choosing pertinent materials, and evaluating their own learning. In order to provide real and meaningful learning experiences, educators must simultaneously be knowledgeable about language pedagogy and the professional contexts that are pertinent to their students (Paltridge & Starfield, 2020).

5. Adult ESP Learners' Communicative Proficiency

One of the main goals of both English for Specific Purposes and adult language education is communicative competence. The ultimate goal of training in adult ESP contexts goes beyond learning specialized vocabulary or grammatical correctness to include the capacity to use language strategically, appropriately, and effectively in real-world professional settings. Thus, communicative competence is viewed as a multifaceted concept that combines linguistic expertise with pragmatic, social, and strategic skills (Rahman, 2020).

5.1. Communicative Competence Definition

In response to merely structural perspectives on language, the idea of communicative competence arose, highlighting the need for more than just grammatical rule knowledge for effective communication. Linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, pragmatic competence, and strategic competence are some of the interconnected components that are commonly thought of as communicative competence in modern language education (Saragih, 2018). Stated somehow differently, Canal and Swain (1980), in a more recent analysis of communicative competence refer to the four dimensions it has: grammatical competence (Chomsky's linguistic competence), sociolinguistic competence (understanding the social context in which communication takes place), discourse competence (the interpretation of individual message elements in terms of their interconnectedness), and strategic competence (strategies employed to initiate/maintain/redirect communication). The knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, and phonological elements required to create meaningful utterances is referred to as linguistic competence. This element comprises language patterns relating to genres and domain-specific terms in ESP situations. The ability to use language effectively in accordance with institutional expectations, professional roles, and social standards is known as sociolinguistic competence. In other words, communicative competence involves using the linguistic system effectively and appropriately (Dubin & Olshtain,

1986). Finally, according to Hymes, communicative competence refers to what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community (1972, 269-293).

For adult ESP learners, this can entail comprehending power dynamics, politeness norms, and formality levels in professional settings (Sava & Lupou, 2021).

5.2. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and ESP

An influential approach to education called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) helps adult ESP learners build their communication ability. CLT places a strong emphasis on learner involvement, meaningful interaction, and using language as a tool for communication rather than as a subject of study. CLT is modified in ESP situations to take into account the unique communication styles of academic and professional fields (Aguaguiña Pilla et al., 2025). CLT is an approach and not a method aiming to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching, develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing) that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication (Richards and Rogers, 1986).

Task-based learning (TBL), in which training is structured around tasks that **simulate** real-life communicative interactions, is one well-known example of CLT in ESP. Tasks like running meetings, giving expert presentations, taking part in negotiations, or working together on problem-solving exercises are all possible for adult ESP learners. Through the integration of linguistic, pragmatic, and strategic abilities, these exercises help students develop communicative competence in a comprehensive way (Ananta et al., 2023).

Because they give students the chance to practice professional interactions in a secure setting, role plays and simulations are also frequently utilized in adult ESP education. Through exploration, introspection, and feedback, these kinds of exercises help students gain self-assurance and flexibility in their communication. Crucially, CLT-based ESP training emphasizes efficacy and fluency in addition to correctness, acknowledging that successful communication in professional settings frequently rely more on the capacity to express meaning effectively and clearly than on perfect language use (Anthony, 2018).

5.3. Evaluation of Communication Skills

There are advantages and disadvantages **when** evaluating communication ability in adult ESP learners. The ability of students to complete communicative activities in real-world situations may not be adequately captured by traditional evaluation techniques that concentrate on discrete language aspects. Consequently, performance-based and formative methods that are in line with adult education concepts are becoming more and more important in ESP assessment (Basturkmen, 2019). Assessing students' performance on communicative activities that mirror real-world work needs is known as performance-based assessment. Oral presentations, mock meetings, written reports, and email correspondence are a few examples. These tests enable the integration of many competence components and offer significant proof of students' communicative proficiency (Belcher, 2018).

In adult ESP environments, formative assessment is essential because it fosters ongoing learning and introspection. By helping students see their strengths and areas for growth, feedback, self-evaluation, and peer evaluation promote metacognitive awareness and autonomy. Opportunities to evaluate their communication skills and establish personal learning objectives are especially beneficial for adult learners (Bhatia et al., 2018).

The fact that it not only supports learners' self-directed orientation **but also** fosters accountability for learning outcomes **makes** self-assessment particularly beneficial in adult education. Adult ESP learners get the ability to monitor and control their continuous language growth in addition to communicative competence through reflective practices. In this sense, evaluation stops being a solely evaluative tool and instead becomes an essential component of the learning process (Giovanoglou, 2025a).

In general, an integrated teaching approach that incorporates theoretical knowledge, communicative practice, and reflective assessment is necessary for the development of communicative competence in adult ESP learners. Teachers can successfully prepare students to handle the complex communicative demands of their academic and professional life by integrating ESP training with adult education ideas and communicative approaches (Hyland, 2018).

6. Difficulties and Prospects

The implementation of adult ESP programs is not without difficulties, even though adult education and English for Specific Purposes have a strong theoretical and pedagogical congruence. In order to guarantee successful learning

outcomes, these difficulties—which arise from learner-related, institutional, and contextual factors—must be carefully taken into account. At the same time, new developments and trends present encouraging paths for the advancement of adult ESP education (Aguaguña Pilla et al., 2025).

6.1. Difficulties in Teaching ESP to Adults

Learner heterogeneity is one of the main issues in adult ESP education. Adult learners frequently have quite different learning styles, career backgrounds, educational experiences, and levels of language competence. Diversity like this can improve the learning environment, but it also makes teaching and course design more difficult. ESP teachers must strike a balance between the demands of the individual and the goals of the group, frequently in a short amount of time (Ananta et al., 2023).

Another major obstacle is time limits. Adult learners often balance their education with personal and professional obligations, which may restrict their availability and involvement. Learners may experience emotional and cognitive strain in intensive ESP courses, which could have an impact on their perseverance and motivation. This emphasizes how crucial adaptable course designs and reasonable learning objectives are (Anthony, 2018).

Additionally, anxiety and lack of confidence are common among adult language learners, particularly those with negative prior experiences of formal education. In ESP contexts, this anxiety may be intensified by the high-stakes nature of professional communication, where language performance is closely linked to professional identity and competence. Creating supportive learning environments that encourage risk-taking and normalize error is therefore essential (Basturkmen, 2019).

Institutional difficulties are another factor. Standardized curricula, a lack of funding, or a lack of cooperation between language instructors and subject-matter specialists can occasionally limit ESP programs. These limitations may lessen the efficacy of adult ESP education and impede the creation of genuine, needs-based training (Belcher, 2018).

6.2. Upcoming Innovations and Trends

The future of adult ESP education is being shaped by a number of trends. By providing flexible, individualized, and accessible learning possibilities, digital technologies are revolutionizing language acquisition. Adult learners can interact with ESP content at their own pace while keeping ties to real-world professional situations through online and blended learning environments (Givanoglou, 2025a).

Digital tools also facilitate the use of multimodal materials, simulations, and virtual communication activities that reflect contemporary professional practices. For adult ESP learners, exposure to digital communication genres such as emails, virtual meetings, and collaborative platforms is becoming increasingly crucial. These developments make it easier to combine communication skills with digital literacy (Hyland, 2022).

Increased cooperation between educators, employers, and professional communities is another crucial future path. These collaborations can improve the relevance of ESP curricula, guarantee alignment with labor market demands, and give students opportunities for real-world practice. Additionally, ongoing professional development is essential for ESP educators because it allows them to adapt to changing pedagogical innovations and communicative demands (Kakoulli Constantinou, 2023).

Finally, the necessity of encouraging lifelong language learning outside of formal classes is becoming more widely acknowledged. In order to prepare students to maintain their communication competence throughout their careers, adult ESP education is placing an increased emphasis on learner autonomy, reflective practice, and transferable learning methodologies (Kormos & Michel, 2018).

7. Conclusion

In order to prepare learners who are communicatively competent, the present article has examined the collaboration between adult education and English for Specific Purposes. It has emphasized their shared dedication to learner-centeredness, relevance, experiential learning, and purposeful communication by drawing on theoretical viewpoints from both disciplines. These shared ideas provide a solid basis for the creation and execution of successful adult ESP programs.

While ESP offers a focused approach to language acquisition based on certain professional and academic contexts, adult education offers a flexible and comprehensive framework that recognizes adults' experiences, motivations, and social roles. Together, these methods help students acquire the pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and strategic abilities needed for real-world communication in addition to language competence. According to the conceptualization presented so far, communicative competence is a dynamic, context-sensitive outcome that captures the intricate reality of adult learners' lives.

The review of the relevant literature has also highlighted the difficulties that come with teaching adult ESP, such as learner variety, time restraints, and institutional constraints. Adaptive pedagogical approaches, encouraging learning settings, and continuous stakeholder involvement are necessary to address these issues. At the same time, there are a lot of chances to improve adult ESP education due to technological advancements and a greater emphasis on lifelong learning.

In conclusion, the collaboration between ESP and adult education constitutes a potent pedagogical synergy that successfully addresses the demands of modern communication. Teachers can help adult learners become competent, self-assured, and independent English communicators by coordinating language instruction with adult learning principles and professional realities. In addition to improving a person's employability and professional growth, this strategy advances the more general objectives of lifelong learning and social engagement.

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