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The Educational Advantages of Improving Professional Communicative Competence in ESP Students using Corpus-Based Methods

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ABSTRACT

The growing need for professional communication skills in academic and professional settings calls for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction that is more contextual and relevant to students' fields of study. This study aims to analyze the educational advantages of a corpus-based approach in enhancing the professional communication competencies of ESP students. The study employs a literature review using a qualitative descriptive approach through an analysis of literature on corpus linguistics, data-driven learning (DDL), ESP instruction, specialized vocabulary, genre competence, and language learning technology. The results of the study indicate that the corpus-based approach provides access to authentic language data that can support the mastery of specialized vocabulary, contextual understanding of grammar, genre competence, as well as writing and speaking skills. This approach also fosters student engagement and autonomy through activities that involve exploring and discovering language patterns. However, its implementation requires corpus literacy, pedagogical support, scaffolding, and the use of appropriate technology. Thus, the corpus-based approach can serve as a relevant strategy for linking ESP instruction to real-world professional communication needs.

Keywords: *Corpus-Based Methods, Data-Driven Learning, English for Specific Purposes, Professional Communication, Professional Communicative Competence.*

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1. | INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly global professional landscape, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become a critical competency for students, particularly those studying English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP instruction requires not only mastery of general linguistic aspects but also the ability to understand and use language appropriate to the needs of specific academic or professional fields. Therefore, instruction must provide exposure to authentic and contextual language use so that students can develop communicative competencies relevant to their fields (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2020). In this context, corpus linguistics offers an approach that allows learners to observe patterns of language use based on real-world data, including vocabulary choices, collocations, grammatical structures, and characteristics of professional discourse (Friginal, 2018).

Conceptually, the use of corpora in language learning is rooted in research that utilizes collections of linguistic data to empirically understand patterns of language use (Sinclair, 1991; Wilson, 2001). Through the development of corpus linguistics, descriptions of spoken and written language have also been increasingly supported by evidence of language use in various contexts (Biber et al., 1999). However, these developments need to be effectively translated into pedagogical practice. Chambers (2019) highlights a gap between advancements in corpus research and its implementation in the classroom. This situation underscores the importance of learning strategies that do more than simply provide access to corpus data; they must also help students utilize it purposefully for learning objectives.

One relevant approach is data-driven learning (DDL), which encourages students to actively explore language data to identify patterns and characteristics of language use. This approach positions students as language researchers who can compare authentic examples and build their understanding through observation and analysis (Boulton, 2021). Research on DDL also indicates increasingly broad developments, both in terms of research approaches and its application in various language learning contexts (Boulton & Vyatkina, 2024; Casal & Kessler, 2024).

For ESP students, the use of corpora holds significant pedagogical value because their communicative needs are closely tied to discipline-specific language. Corpus analysis can help students identify specialized vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and communicative conventions used in specific disciplines or professions. The study by Dong and Lu (2020), for example, demonstrates the relevance of corpus-based genre analysis activities in supporting the development of discipline-specific genre competencies. Similarly, Otto (2021) emphasizes the potential of DDL in selecting and learning specialized vocabulary for professional needs. In language learning for specific purposes, the application of DDL can also be developed through scaffolding so that students receive adequate support when interacting with complex language data (Corino & Onesti, 2019).

In addition to vocabulary development, corpus-based approaches have the potential to support professional writing and communication skills through an understanding of language patterns used in real-world contexts. Chen and Flowerdew (2018) position DDL as a key approach in academic writing instruction, while Flowerdew and Petrić (2024) further emphasize the importance of a corpus-based pedagogical perspective in understanding specific language needs. However, the effectiveness of its implementation remains dependent on pedagogical readiness, corpus literacy, and the selection of appropriate technologies and learning activities (Callies, 2019; Gilquin & Granger, 2022; Hampel & Stickler, 2024).

Based on this discussion, this study aims to analyze the educational advantages of a corpus-based approach in enhancing the professional communication competencies of ESP students. The discussion focuses on the contribution of using authentic language data to the mastery of specialized vocabulary, contextual understanding of grammar, the development of writing and speaking skills, and the fostering of students' independent learning. While maintaining professional communication needs as the core of learning, this article is expected to provide insight into the potential of the corpus-based approach as a strategy for linking language learning to the demands of real-world language use.

2. | RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a literature review method with a qualitative descriptive approach. This method was chosen to conduct an in-depth analysis of the educational advantages of a corpus-based approach in enhancing the professional communication competencies of students in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The analysis focuses on the relationship between the use of authentic language data, corpus-based learning, data-driven learning (DDL), and the development of communication skills tailored to both academic and professional needs.

The research data sources consist of journal articles, books, and scientific publications relevant to corpus linguistics, DDL, ESP, professional communication competencies, specialized vocabulary learning, genre analysis, and the application of technology in language learning. The literature primarily includes publications from recent years to provide a more up-to-date perspective, supplemented by several foundational works that serve as the conceptual foundation for the development of corpus linguistics and data-driven language studies, such as Sinclair (1991), Wilson (2001), and Biber et al. (1999).

The data collection process involved identifying and reviewing sources based on their relevance to the research focus. Each source was then classified into several main themes, namely: (1) the use of corpora and authentic language data in learning; (2) the application of DDL in language teaching; (3) the development of vocabulary and grammar tailored to professional contexts; (4) the development of genre competence as well as writing and speaking skills; (5) student autonomy and engagement in learning;

and (6) pedagogical challenges and technology integration in the implementation of corpus-based approaches.

The data were analyzed using content analysis techniques. The analysis phase included data reduction, grouping information by theme, comparing findings across sources, interpreting interrelationships between concepts, and compiling a synthesis. The results of the synthesis were used to explain how a corpus-based approach can contribute to improving the professional communication competencies of ESP students. With this approach, this study did not focus on measuring effectiveness through experiments but rather on a comprehensive understanding of the potential, benefits, and pedagogical relevance of the corpus-based approach based on the findings of the literature reviewed.

3. | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that a corpus-based approach has strong educational potential for enhancing the professional communication competencies of students in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This potential arises primarily because learning is not solely focused on abstract language rules but provides students with the opportunity to observe how language is actually used in specific contexts. Corpora provide a collection of linguistic data that enables students to recognize patterns of vocabulary, collocations, grammatical structures, and discourse characteristics based on authentic language use. This perspective aligns with Sinclair (1991), who identifies corpora as a vital resource for understanding the relationship between language use, concordance, and collocations. Wilson (2001) also points out that corpus linguistics allows for the study of language based on evidence of actual usage, while Biber et al. (1999) demonstrate that variations in spoken and written language can be understood more comprehensively through data-driven analysis. Thus, the use of corpora in ESP learning can bridge the gap between the language studied in the classroom and the language students will use in academic and professional settings.

Table 1. Summary of the Benefits of a Corpus-Based Approach in Developing ESP Students' Professional Communication Competencies

Aspect Developed	Main Findings	Supporting Literature
Specialized vocabulary	Helps students recognize terms, collocations, and expressions commonly used in professional fields	Friginal (2018); Otto (2021)
Contextual grammar	Enables students to understand the use of grammatical structures based on authentic contexts	Biber et al. (1999); Sinclair (1991)
Genre competence	Helps students understand patterns and characteristics of texts according to their disciplines	Dong & Lu (2020); Flowerdew & Petrić (2024)

Writing skills	Provides language models and rhetorical patterns for academic and professional writing	Chen & Flowerdew (2018); Maher & Milligan (2019)
Speaking skills	Provides exposure to language use in professional communication	Salmani-Nodoushan (2020); Tleuzhanova et al. (2021)
Learner autonomy	Encourages students to explore and identify language patterns independently	Johns (1991); Boulton (2021)
Scaffolding and pedagogy	Requires guidance to help students understand complex corpus data	Corino & Onesti (2019); Gilquin & Granger (2022)
Technology and corpus literacy	Effectiveness depends on pedagogical readiness, corpus literacy, and appropriate use of technology	Callies (2019); Hampel & Stickler (2024)

Based on Table 1, the corpus-based approach demonstrates interrelated contributions to the development of ESP students' professional communication competencies. These contributions are evident not only in the mastery of linguistic elements but also in students' ability to understand language based on context, genre, and professional communication needs. One of the key findings of this study is that authentic language data contributes to the acquisition of vocabulary that is more relevant to students' fields of expertise. In ESP learning, it is not enough for students to simply master general vocabulary, as professional communication demands proficiency in discipline-specific terms and expressions. Friginal (2018) explains that the use of corpora in language teaching allows instructors to employ various resources and activities grounded in real-world language use. This finding is reinforced by Otto (2021), who demonstrates that data-driven learning can be used to identify and study specialized vocabulary, including in the field of civil engineering. This means that students can identify frequently occurring terms, relationships between words, and the contexts in which they are used, so that the vocabulary they acquire is not merely memorized but understood based on its communicative function.

This approach also provides students with the opportunity to understand grammar contextually. In conventional instruction, grammatical structures are often introduced through formulas and examples that are detached from real-world usage. In contrast, a corpus allows students to see how a particular structure is used in specific professional texts. Biber et al. (1999) highlight the importance of analysis based on differences between spoken and written language patterns, so that grammar instruction can be directed toward function and context of use. In the context of ESP, this kind of understanding is crucial because the same grammatical forms can serve different functions depending on the genre and purpose of communication. Therefore, corpus analysis can help students move from an understanding of "language rules" to an understanding of "language use."

The study's findings also indicate a close relationship between corpus-based approaches and the development of genre competence. ESP students need to understand not only vocabulary and grammar but also how a professional text is structured

according to the purpose and characteristics of the field. Dong and Lu (2020) found that corpus-based genre analysis activities can support the development of discipline-specific genre competence. These findings are relevant to students' needs when they must produce reports, proposals, academic articles, or other forms of professional communication. Flowerdew and Petrić (2024) also emphasize the importance of a corpus-based pedagogical perspective in thesis writing instruction, taking into account discipline-specific language needs. This suggests that corpora can serve as a source of language models that help students recognize the structures, lexical choices, and rhetorical patterns commonly used in a particular field.

In relation to writing skills, the use of authentic data can help students understand how professional language is systematically constructed. Chen and Flowerdew (2018) demonstrate that data-driven learning (DDL) plays a significant role in the teaching of academic writing, although its implementation still requires critical consideration of how data is used in the learning process. Students can be guided to compare various text examples, identify recurring patterns, and then apply these observations when composing their own writing. Maher and Milligan (2019), through a study of engineering students' thesis writing, also demonstrated the relevance of corpus and genre analysis to learning how to write the introduction of an academic paper. Thus, corpus-based learning not only helps students understand "what is correct" but also grasp writing patterns appropriate to the needs of their discipline.

Beyond writing, a corpus-based approach has the potential to support speaking skills and professional communication. A corpus containing spoken language can provide examples of how to convey information, explain an issue, respond to a conversation partner, and use specific expressions in professional situations. These needs align with Salmani-Nodoushan (2020), who emphasizes that ESP should be directed toward specific communication needs related to both academic and professional fields. In an educational context, communication competence does not stand alone, as it is interrelated with analytical, motivational, communicative, and professional skills. Shved et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of effective relationships between instructors and students in developing professional communication competence, while Tleuzhanova et al. (2021) demonstrate that a topic-based approach can support students' success in foreign language communication. Therefore, corpus data can be integrated with discussion activities, simulations, presentations, and dialogue analysis so that students are able to transfer their linguistic knowledge into real-world communication.

The study also shows that DDL is one of the most relevant applications of corpora for fostering active student engagement. In this approach, students do not merely receive explanations from instructors but act as language researchers by observing, comparing, and identifying patterns in the data. Boulton (2021) explains that DDL research has evolved beyond the mere use of concordance lines to encompass various forms of corpus utilization in language education. This development has broadened, as

demonstrated by Boulton and Vyatkina (2024) as well as Casal and Kessler (2024), who highlight the expansion of methodological approaches and the theoretical and practical possibilities in DDL research. Thus, DDL can be understood as an approach that promotes active, discovery-based learning.

Learning autonomy is another benefit evident from the study's findings. When students gain access to a corpus, they can independently conduct language searches and analyses to answer linguistic questions that arise during the learning process. This principle aligns with Johns's (1991) notion of learners as language researchers who actively discover patterns through authentic data. However, this autonomy does not mean that students must work without support. Corino and Onesti (2019) emphasize the importance of scaffolding in the implementation of DDL, particularly when learners encounter complex linguistic data in CLIL and LSP contexts. Therefore, instructors continue to play a crucial role in defining search objectives, selecting appropriate sources, providing guiding questions, and helping students interpret the results of their analyses.

The alignment between corpus-based learning and the development of professional competencies is also evident in the need for a curriculum that integrates communication skills with subject-specific competencies. Henry et al. (2017) highlight the importance of a competency-based curriculum in integrating professional, communication, social, and cultural awareness skills. In certain educational contexts, professional communication competencies even play a role in the effectiveness of interactions between educators and learners. Griban et al. (2022), for example, highlight the importance of competent pedagogical communication for physical education instructors. Kernas (2024) also underscores the need for the methodical development of communicative skills among prospective educators. These findings reinforce that professional language learning should be positioned as part of the development of workplace competencies, not merely as language mastery.

A more personalized approach can further enhance these benefits. Halchenko (2023) demonstrates that a personalized approach can improve students' communication skills and professional competencies while supporting humanistic values in education. Markova et al. (2021) also identify oral and written communication as key elements in the development of personal and professional character as well as interpersonal relationships within the educational environment. Based on this perspective, the use of corpora can be flexibly adapted to students' needs—for example, by providing corpora organized by field of study, assignment type, or specific communication needs. This strategy enables students to gain learning experiences that are more relevant to their professional goals.

Although it has various advantages, research findings indicate that the implementation of a corpus-based approach does not automatically result in effective learning. One of the main issues is the gap between developments in corpus research and its application in classroom practice. Chambers (2019) highlights the importance

of bridging this gap between research and practice. Instructors must do more than simply provide access to corpora; they need corpus literacy and pedagogical skills to transform data into meaningful learning activities. Callies (2019) emphasizes the importance of integrating corpus literacy into language teacher education, while Gilquin and Granger (2022) note that data-driven learning (DDL) must be implemented with appropriate pedagogical principles in mind.

Technological aspects are also a factor that must be considered. Advances in technology-based language learning open up greater opportunities for students to access corpora, analysis tools, and digital language resources. However, the use of technology must be tailored to users' abilities, learning objectives, and data characteristics. Hampel and Stickler (2024) identify technology as a key element in the development of language learning, but the integration of technology still requires an appropriate pedagogical approach. In this context, Lusta et al. (2023), through a systematic review of language corpora and DDL, demonstrate that the use of both approaches continues to evolve in language learning. Thus, technology should be positioned as a tool that supports the processes of analysis and learning, rather than as the learning objective itself.

Overall, the synthesis results indicate that corpus-based approaches contribute to several interrelated aspects, namely mastery of specialized vocabulary, contextual understanding of grammar, genre competence, writing and speaking skills, student engagement, and independent learning. Its primary strength lies in the approach's ability to provide authentic evidence of language use that is relevant to professional needs. However, its success depends heavily on pedagogical design, corpus literacy among instructors and students, the provision of scaffolding, data selection, and the integration of appropriate technology. Therefore, the corpus-based approach is best viewed as a pedagogical strategy that can strengthen ESP learning when implemented in a targeted manner and tailored to students' professional communication needs.

4. | CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, a corpus-based approach has strong potential for improving the professional communication skills of students in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The use of authentic language data enables students to understand the language as it is used in academic and professional contexts, thereby making learning more relevant to the needs of their respective fields. This approach not only supports the mastery of specialized vocabulary and contextual understanding of grammar but also helps students recognize genre characteristics, develop writing and speaking skills, and increase their autonomy in the learning process. The implementation of data-driven learning (DDL) further strengthens students' active role through activities such as observation, searching, comparison, and the discovery of language patterns based on real data.

Nevertheless, the use of corpora in ESP instruction requires appropriate pedagogical planning. Its effectiveness is influenced by the corpus literacy of both

instructors and students, the selection of appropriate data, the provision of scaffolding, and the integration of technology that supports learning objectives. Therefore, the corpus-based approach should not be positioned as a replacement for other teaching methods but rather as a strategy that can be systematically integrated into ESP instruction. When implemented correctly, this approach can strengthen the connection between language learning and real-world communication demands, while also better preparing students to meet academic and professional needs.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval and Originality Statement

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Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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