



A Comparative Study of Traditional Versus Contextualized Approaches in Teaching ESP Vocabulary to Sports Undergraduates

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Abstract

The current study focuses on the effectiveness of two methods of teaching ESP vocabulary to sports students. A sample of 172 undergraduate students enrolled in the 2023-2024 academic year at the Sports University Tirana participated in the study. The subjects were divided into two groups: the control group was taught sports vocabulary using a traditional teaching approach, while in the experimental group videos and live sports contexts were employed to reinforce new vocabulary. A pre and a post-test vocabulary quiz, assessing their knowledge on sports related words were administered. Also, a comprehensive questionnaire using a 9-point Likert scale was designed to measure the subjects' attitudes toward the acquisition of ESP. The reliability of this tool was evaluated by using Cronbach's Alpha, thus justifying the validity of the measurement tool. Descriptive statistics summarized the responses of the questionnaires, while a one-way ANOVA was conducted between the two groups regarding the outcomes in terms of ESP proficiency. One-way ANOVA showed the results of statistically significant differences in performance and engagement at $p < 0.05$. The findings underscore the positive effects of using innovative, context-specific teaching tools in the delivery of ESP programs, hence yielding relevant and interactivity-focused curricula. The existing study offers a valuable evidence of the importance and implications of educational interventions boosting learning outcomes.

Keywords: ESP, delivery methods, technical vocabulary, sports

1. Introduction

Modern education relies heavily on English for Specific Purpose (ESP). Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) established that the learners' needs should be the focus of language acquisition, and therefore, ESP teaching is different from general English. Very recent studies have highlighted the need to adjust ESP instruction according to the professional needs

(Basturkmen, 2022; Paltridge & Starfield, 2016). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) assert that ESP is tailored to meet the specific needs of learners. In sports studies, this underscores the students' needs to understand the language of sports in everyday situations. By imparting the language skills appropriate to their academic and professional settings, sports students are empowered to acquire the distinct terminology of the field, learn to communicate effectively with international peers, and understand sports-related literature and practices, thus ensuring their successful interaction with the global sports community. These abilities can only be developed through the implementation of ESP.

The foundational knowledge in traditional methods is often inadequate, as sports studies rely heavily on application and engagement. Therefore, in the field of sports education, getting students to link theory with practice can be difficult. Nevertheless, contextualized teachings have the advantage of teaching students through a scenario-based approach, that is introducing real-life situations in the language classroom where they can transfer the knowledge acquired through language practice directly to sports contexts. This teaching practice increases not only the students' language proficiency but also their engagement and critical thinking (Villardón-Gallego et al., 2018; Newton & Nation, 2020).

By adopting such an approach, sports education becomes a source of knowledge for the students into what are said to be foreseeable circumstances. To have a complete understanding of the matter, students are the specialists in a certain way because they are required to assess new technology developments, transfer their knowledge with their fellow students, or look after the machinery (Widdowson, 1984). ESP hence, becomes the best way to grow these skills. Furthermore, the work by Robinson (1991) reveals the importance that ESP courses should be providing domain-specific content as a means of empowering students' professional competence. The latest research by Hyland (2022) underscores the need for the application of varied teaching resources to provoke students to involvement, which in turn leads to learning outcomes.

The present study aimed to assess the efficiency of two pedagogical alternatives in an ESP course that is specifically adapted for sports studies. The first strategy included teaching ESP using approved text books, that have for years been the foundation of ESP curricula. The emphasis is on the improvement of language skills through vocabulary lists, grammar exercises, and theoretical activities. They are often not interactive and do not find any relation with the real world, which is necessary not only in sport research but in all fields (Ellis, 1994). The second method involved a real-life teaching approach through visual presentations of sports related videos and re-enactment of sports games.

2. Methods

A number of 172 undergraduates at the Sports University of Tirana's, enrolled in the 2023–2024 academic year for the sports studies program participated in the study. For 14 weeks, all participants had to attend English for Sports lessons. Students were divided into two groups at random to maintain comparability: an experimental group (n=85) that got instruction using a contextualised approach, and a control group (n=87) that received standard teaching techniques.

For the first seven weeks, both groups were subjected to the same course content resources. The intervention phase began in week 8, during which the control group continued to be taught through conventional techniques such as vocabulary lists, grammar drills, and activities based on textbooks. On the other hand, the experimental group were introduced to a contextualised teaching strategy that included live demonstrations, sports-related movies, and

real-world vocabulary applications. This approach was created to replicate real-world sporting environments, strengthening language learning through engaging activities.

A mixed-method approach was used for the current study. To assess the participants' ESP proficiency, a Pre-test and Post-test Assessment, in the form of a vocabulary quiz was administered to both groups in Week 7 (pre-test) and Week 14 (post-test). The test consisted of 40 multiple-choice and short-answer questions covering technical sports vocabulary. Content validity of the tests was ensured by two ESP specialists.

In addition, a comprehensive 9-point Likert scale questionnaire was distributed at the end of the course to evaluate students' cognitive, behavioural, and emotional engagement with ESP learning. The questionnaire included 30 items measuring motivation, communication skills, and perceived learning effectiveness. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.86, indicating strong reliability.

IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0 was used to analyze the collected data. To summarize questionnaire responses descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were employed. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the performance outcomes of the two groups, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$. Effect sizes were also calculated to determine the magnitude of differences between the groups.

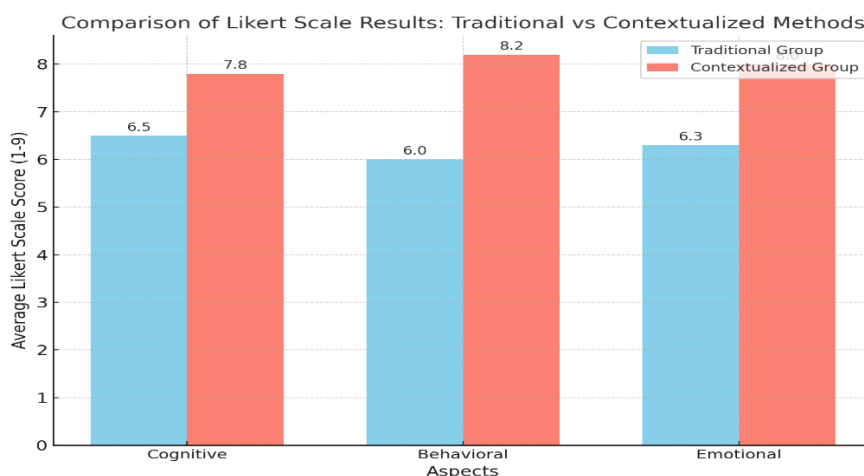
Ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics board prior to data collection. All participants gave informed consent to participate in the study and were assured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. The study adhered to ethical research guidelines regarding participant anonymity and data protection.

This methodological approach ensured that the findings accurately reflected the impact of contextualized teaching on ESP vocabulary acquisition among sports undergraduates.

3. Results

In accordance with the set research task, we examined the attitudes on English language acquisition of both groups across three variables—cognitive, behavioral and emotional—and the results of the descriptive statistics are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Descriptive statistics of the responses of the questionnaires



The results of the descriptive statistics revealed distinct differences between the two teaching methods (traditional vs. contextualized) across the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions of English language acquisition. Mean values of the Cognitive Aspect for the

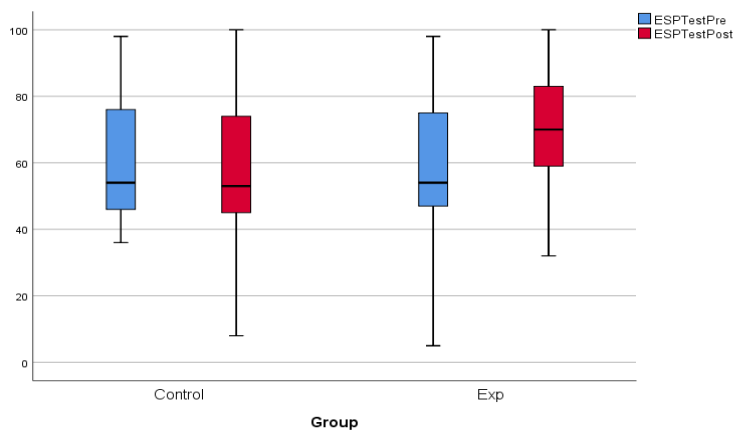
experimental group were 7.8, while for the control group 6.5. This indicates that the method which takes into account certain real-life conditions helps students understand and retain the material better than the traditional method does. The standard deviation of 0.7 in the experimental group, indicates that their performance is more consistent.

Mean values of the Behavioral Aspect for the contextualized group were 8.2 compared to the 6.0 of the traditional group. This is attributed to the fact that the former participate and engage more in a course probably due to the interactive design of the contextualized teaching.

As for the Emotional Aspect, the contextualized group scored mean values of 8.0, while the traditional group scored mean values of only 6.3. This shows that using the contextualized approach in teaching facilitates students in feeling motivated and emotionally connected to the course content.

To ensure that the control and the experimental group were comparable in terms of English language proficiency, participants were subjected to a pretest quiz. In addition, to track the impact of the two teaching methods (traditional & contextualized) on language proficiency, participants of both groups were subjected to a post-test quiz. The descriptive statistics of the pre and post test results are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Box-Plot Distribution of Tests Results



Both groups had similar baseline scores, which can be observed from the almost equal mean values of the groups in the pretest quiz (Control Group Mean: (M) = 61.13, Standard Deviation (SD) = 18.46; Experimental Group: M = 60.38, SD = 20.72). The groups were comparable in English proficiency before the intervention, ensuring a fair starting point for the study.

While Post-Test Results, reveal different mean values across the groups. In the Control Group, mean values dropped to M = 58.24, SD = 19.31, which indicates a slight decline in proficiency or engagement. While in the Experimental Group, the Mean significantly increased to M = 70.49, SD = 18.58, which reflects a marked improvement in proficiency and engagement due to contextualized teaching methods.

To ensure that these differences were statistically significant, a one-way ANOVA was performed and the results are found in Table 1. The p-value of .047, (less than 0.05), confirms that differences between the two groups are significant, and are unlikely to be due to random chance, therefore reflecting the impact of teaching methods on student outcomes.

Table 1: One-Way ANOVA between control and experimental group

ANOVA - Tests of Between-Subjects Effects					
Transformed Variable: Average					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	1346132.036	1	1346132.036	1898.920	.000
Group	2844.361	1	2844.361	4.012	.047
Error	120511.903	170	708.894		

4. Discussion

Based on the results of the study, significant differences between the experimental and the control group can be observed. The contextualized teaching method led the students to follow instructions, be more attentive, and this resulted in increased interest on their part. As an example, the sports students working on an analysis of the game commentaries or other sports-related situations could attach themselves directly with the text in making the entire learning process very relevant. This testifies to how to make learning meaningful or immediately connected with their field of study.

It was noted that the contextualized approach was a better facilitator in teaching language skills to students, emotionally involving them, and motivating them in general, as it makes learning relevant to their field of study. According to Grabe & Stoller (1997) and Romero-Molina & Alfonso-Vargas (2023), the use of authentic sources, which in the case of sports students might include real game situations, is of vital importance.

Furthermore, the results are in line with the learning constructivist approach, which holds that knowledge is acquired while being in certain contexts and through engagement (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, contextual learning is applied during teaching by providing videos and different real-life sports scenario situations, aligned with the approach of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This situational learning encourages the application of knowledge. Recent pedagogical studies, for instance, Chen et al. (2023) reiterate the earlier findings that language proficiency can be improved through experiential learning. The results were in line with these findings.

Besides, the use of authentic materials, like communication situations in real sports settings, is in line with the recommendations of Tomlinson (1998), who stated that ESP needs to be combined with more engaging, relevant, and realistic-looking materials. Other studies also point out that using interactive and contextualized teaching approaches can help improve ESP results (Hyland, 2006; Basturkmen, 2014), which corroborates these findings.

It has been determined through the research study that language is emotionally acquired. Participants in the experimental group proved to be more motivated and emotionally vested in course content. According to Dörnyei (2005), motivation has been indicated to be one of the crucial elements for a successful acquisition of a language. Mercer and MacIntyre (2014) also suggested that it is a critical condition for positive emotions and long-term language learning.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the current study, we conclude that innovative, context-specific teaching methods improve student engagement, proficiency in language, and motivation in

ESP programs. Moreover, using real-life situations and interactive materials within the contextualized approach provides an opportunity for students to relate even more with their professional domain and thus improve educational results. Key findings suggest that it is possible to create a holistic learning experience by targeting cognitive, behavioral, and emotional aspects of language acquisition. Beyond the immediate scope of this study, these insights have broader implications for ESP instruction across various disciplines. The contextualized approach can be effectively adapted for other specialized fields such as medical, legal, and technical English, where learners benefit from scenario-based learning and real-world application. The results suggest that educators in diverse professional training programs should consider incorporating immersive learning experiences tailored to their students' specific career contexts.

Moreover, the study underscores the need for continuous innovation in language teaching methodologies. Institutions should invest in digital tools, simulations, and multimedia resources to further enhance the contextualization of ESP instruction. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of these methods and their applicability in different cultural and educational environments. Additionally, examining the integration of emerging technologies such as virtual and augmented reality could provide new pathways for experiential learning in ESP programs.

By broadening the scope of these findings, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on effective language education strategies. The emphasis on practical, engagement-driven learning offers valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to optimize ESP instruction for diverse learner populations.

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