



Majid Farahian\*, Yusef Rajabi  
Department of ELT,  
Kermanshah Branch, Islamic Azad University,  
Kermanshah, Iran

\*Islamic Azad University,  
Imam Khomeini Campus,  
Farhikhtegan Blvd.,  
Kermanshah, 6718997551  
Iran

Tel: +98 83137243181  
Fax: +98 83137243196  
Email:  
majid.farahian@iau.ac.ir

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Quality of ESP Courses for Nursing Students: Expectations and Challenges

**Background:** The present study set out to examine English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for nursing instructors' perceptions of what constitutes quality ESP delivery and their perceptions on the challenges that may inhibit the provision of the quality in ESP education for nursing students.

**Methods:** To obtain data, first, the questionnaire of quality of education in ESP was given to ESP instructors. They were asked to fill in the questionnaire and rank strategies for effective ESP education. Secondly, 13 volunteer instructors were interviewed to delve into the problems of teaching ESP to nursing students. Thirdly, to examine ESP students' expectations, 15 students were interviewed.

**Results:** The findings from the first research question showed that the quality of ESP courses was not satisfactory. Comprehension of the texts and communication in the foreign language were among what the students' prioritized. With particular reference to the strategies for effective ESP education, the instructors pointed to the integration of skills. Moreover, the instructors believed that certified professionals need to be hired to go with ESP specialization as well as the fact that a needs-based curriculum has to be redesigned. The major problems that ESP instructors often cope with were i. e., organizational, learner-related, and teacher-related problems.

**Conclusion:** ESP for the students of nursing seems to be experiencing a deeply-felt demand for reform and this kind of reform depends on a series of remarkable changes. Hence, the present study has important implications for ESP educational policymakers, and curriculum designers.

**Keywords:** Quality of ESP Courses, Nursing Students, Expectations, Challenges to ESP Course

## جودة دورات ESP لطلاب التمريض: التوقعات والتحديات

**الخلفية:** تم إعداد الدراسة الحالية لفحص اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة (ESP) لتصورات مدرسي التمريض حول ما يشكل تقديم عالي الجودة وتصورتهم حول التحديات التي قد تمنع توفير الجودة في تعليم ESP لطلاب التمريض.

**الطرق:** للحصول على البيانات، أولاً، تم إعطاء استبيان جودة التعليم في برنامج ESP لمدرسي ESP. طُلب منهم ملء الاستبيان وترتيب الاستراتيجيات لتعليم فعال في برنامج ESP. ثانياً، تمت مقابلة 13 مدرباً منطوقاً للتعمق في مشاكل تدريس برنامج اللغة الإنجليزية لغير الناطقين بها لطلاب التمريض. ثالثاً، لفحص توقعات طلاب ESP، تم إجراء مقابلات مع 15 طالباً.

**النتائج:** أظهرت نتائج السؤال البحثي الأول أن جودة دورات ESP لم تكن مرضية. كان فهم النصوص والتواصل باللغة الأجنبية من بين أولويات الطلاب. مع الإشارة بشكل خاص إلى استراتيجيات تعليم ESP الفعال، أشار المدربون إلى تكامل المهارات. علاوة على ذلك، يعتقد المدربون أن المحترفين المعتمدين يجب أن يتم توظيفهم للعمل مع تخصص ESP بالإضافة إلى حقيقة أنه يجب إعادة تصميم المناهج الدراسية القائمة على الاحتياجات. كانت المشكلات الرئيسية التي غالباً ما يتعامل معها مدرسو برنامج ESP هي: هـ، المشكلات التنظيمية والمتعلقة بالمعلم والمعلم.

**الخلاصة:** يبدو أن برنامج تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية لطلاب التمريض يواجهون طلباً عميقاً للإصلاح وهذا النوع من الإصلاح يعتمد على سلسلة من التغييرات الملحوظة. ومن ثم، فإن الدراسة الحالية لها آثار مهمة على صانعي السياسات التعليمية في برنامج تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية ومصممي المناهج الدراسية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** جودة دورات ESP، طلاب التمريض، التوقعات، تحديات دورة ESP

## کیفیت دوره های زبان انگلیسی تخصصی برای دانشجویان پرستاری: انتظارات و چالش ها

**زمینه و هدف:** هدف از این مطالعه، تعیین انتظارات اساتید و دانشجویان پرستاری انگلیسی برای اهداف ویژه از دوره های زبان تخصصی و نیز بررسی برداشت مدرسین در مورد چالش هایی است که ممکن است مانع از ارائه انگلیسی برای اهداف ویژه با کیفیت بالا برای دانشجویان پرستاری شود.

**روش:** ابتدا پرسشنامه کیفیت آموزش در انگلیسی برای اهداف ویژه از طریق گوگل فرم به مدرسان دوره های زبان تخصصی ارسال شد. از آنها خواسته شد که پرسشنامه را تکمیل کنند و راهبردهای لازم برای آموزش مؤثر انگلیسی برای اهداف ویژه را اولویت بندی کنند. در مرحله بعد، با 13 مدرس داوطلب جهت بررسی مشکلات آموزش انگلیسی برای اهداف ویژه پرستاری مصاحبه شد. سپس برای بررسی انتظارات دانشجویان انگلیسی برای اهداف ویژه از این دوره، 15 دانشجو توسط اولین محقق مصاحبه شدند. **یافته ها:** یافته های سؤال تحقیق اول نشان داد که کیفیت دوره های انگلیسی برای اهداف ویژه رضایت بخش نیست، با توجه به انتظارات دانشجویان پرستاری، درک متون و ارتباط با زبان خارجی اولویت دانشجویان بود. در مورد راهبردهای آموزش مؤثر انگلیسی برای اهداف ویژه، مربیان ادغام مهارت ها را ضروری دانسته و بکارگیری اساتید متخصص را مهم دانستند. همچنین اظهار کردند که باید یک برنامه درسی مبتنی بر نیازها تدوین شود. مشکلاتی که مربیان با آن روبرو هستند به سه دسته تقسیم می شوند: سازمانی، مرتبط به فراگیر، مرتبط با معلم.

**نتیجه گیری:** برنامه درسی انگلیسی برای اهداف ویژه برای پرستاری نیاز به اصلاحات دارد و اصلاحات به تغییر قابل توجه در تعدادی از عوامل از جمله سیاست های آموزشی و برنامه درسی بستگی دارد.

**واژه های کلیدی:** کیفیت دوره های انگلیسی برای اهداف ویژه، دانشجویان پرستاری، انتظارات، چالش های دوره انگلیسی برای اهداف ویژه

## نرسنگ طلباء کے لیے ESP کورسز کا معیار: توقعات اور چیلنجز

**پس منظر:** موجودہ مطالعہ نرسنگ انسٹرکٹرز کے تصورات کے لیے مخصوص مقاصد کے لیے انگریزی (ESP) کا جائزہ لینے کے لیے ترتیب دیا گیا ہے کہ معیاری ESP ڈیوری کیا ہے اور ان چیلنجز کے بارے میں ان کے تاثرات جو نرسنگ کے طالب علموں کے لیے ESP تعلیم میں معیاری کی فراہمی کو روک سکتے ہیں۔

**طریقے:** ڈیٹا حاصل کرنے کے لیے، سب سے پہلے، ESP میں تعلیم کے معیار کا سوالنامہ ESP انسٹرکٹرز کو دیا گیا۔ ان سے مؤثر ESP تعلیم کے لیے سوالنامہ اور درجہ بندی کی حکمت عملی کو بھرنے کے لیے کہا گیا۔ دوم، نرسنگ کے طالب علموں کو ESP سکھانے کے مسائل کے بارے میں جاننے کے لیے 13 رضاکار اساتذہ کا انٹرویو کیا گیا۔ تیسرا، ESP طلباء کی توقعات کو جانچنے کے لیے، 15 طلباء کا انٹرویو کیا گیا۔

**نتائج:** پہلے تحقیقی سوال کے نتائج سے پتہ چلتا ہے کہ ESP کورسز کا معیار تسلی بخش نہیں تھا۔ متن کی فہم اور غیر ملکی زبان میں بات چیت طلباء کی ترجیحات میں شامل تھی۔ مؤثر ESP تعلیم کے لیے حکمت عملی کے حوالے سے خاص طور پر، اساتذہ نے مہارتوں کے انضمام کی طرف اشارہ کیا۔ ای ایس پی کے انسٹرکٹرز جن بڑے مسائل سے اکثر نمٹتے ہیں وہ تھے c، e، i، تنظیمی، سیکھنے والے سے متعلق، اور اساتذہ سے متعلق مسائل۔

**نتیجہ:** ایسا لگتا ہے کہ نرسنگ کے طالب علموں کے لیے ESP میں اصلاحات کی شدید ضرورت محسوس ہو رہی ہے اور اس قسم کی اصلاحات کا انحصار نمایاں تبدیلیوں کے سلسلے پر ہے۔ لہذا، موجودہ مطالعہ ESP تعلیمی پالیسی سازوں، اور نصاب کے ڈیزائنرز کے لیے اہم مضمرات رکھتا ہے۔

**مطلوبہ الفاظ:** ESP کورسز کا معیار، نرسنگ طلباء، توقعات، ESP کورس کے لیے چیلنجز

## INTRODUCTION

From among the wide range of disciplines and sub-disciplines associated with the broader field of applied linguistics, ESP has found its way into the mainstream of pedagogical enterprises from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century until now. In fact, the ESP movement was an attempt to account for the dimension of specificity that was largely overlooked in English teaching practices up to its inception time. Such specificity originated from the kind of need on the part of a considerable number of individuals to get acquainted with the language and content of specific subject matters and disciplines which came to being as a consequence of rapid technological innovations with specific reference to subjects such as technology and business.

Moreover, the proliferation of world organizations, transnational companies, and the Internet have all contributed to the prestigious status of English in recent years (1) and the development of English in higher education has been particularly remarkable, altering the conditions under which language learning occurs (2). English teaching practices across the globe prior to the emergence of ESP were heavily concerned with the development of competence in general English as represented in English for General Purposes (EGP).

For Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP is an approach to language learning and teaching in which the needs of the learner(s) determine the content and methodology adopted (3). Therefore, ESP involves the learning and teaching of the English language with the goal of using it in specific subject matter domains. ESP is basically divided into two main branches of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (2,3). Other branches include English for vocational purposes (EVP), English for medical purposes (EMP), English for business purposes (EBP), English for sociocultural purposes (ESCP), and English for legal purposes (ELP) (4).

ESP mainly deals with students who need to get to grips with specific texts in either university or workplace settings. Therefore, according to Hyon (1996), ESP scholars are interested in genre as an instrument for analyzing and teaching such texts (5). Mainly, three factors contribute to the emergence of ESP: the demands of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics, and a focus on the learner (3).

Along with the globalization of English, students of various disciplines, especially medical and nursing students, must have an acceptable level of basic knowledge of English as well as specialized and technical language skills related to their field (6, 7). In the context where the present study is carried out, i.e., Iranian universities, ESP is delivered by both content (technical) and language (non-technical) instructors to undergraduate students as well as the graduate ones. It has to be noted that the mastery of technical and special English is a prerequisite to the entrance to both undergraduate and graduate levels across medical and non-medical universities. In fact, one of the educational goals of nursing courses is to train nurses who have used the general and specialized English language skills taught to them during their studies in order to improve productivity and to communicate with

foreign patients. Bearing in mind the important role of English language proficiency in nursing students' professional future, especially its role in studying up-to-date nursing resources, which are mainly developed in English, as well as the need to conduct research activities such as publishing articles in specialized English journals, it seems incumbent to examine the quality of ESP courses delivered to nursing students.

As a corollary of such significant status, the quality of ESP courses delivered to students irrespective of the major and level is of utmost importance. To ensure such quality, instructors' and students' perceptions of what constitutes a quality ESP course have to be examined in terms of their views on different aspects of ESP programs including notions like setting goals and objectives, analyzing learners' needs and interests, conceptualizing content, design, methodology and evaluating the ESP endeavor (6).

What such a goal implies at the first glance seems to be the communicative use of English in study as well as in job-related contexts. However, a quick look at the past and current ESP practices in Iranian universities points clearly to the bitter reality where the courses are limited to vocabulary, reading, and at best comprehending the field-specific content materials. An overemphasis on vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension aspects of language in such courses has resulted in the negligence of other skills which are of primary importance if the courses are to fulfill their main purpose, i.e., the communicative use of English in the study and job-related contexts.

To further trouble the waters in designing such courses, very little attention if any, is paid to the needs- both content and language needs- of the learners. Furthermore, there are serious problems with the methodology and assessment practices that prevail in ESP courses. One such acute problem has to settle the kind of opposition that persists concerning who should teach the ESP course: language instructors who are not experts in the content or content instructors who are in majority of cases novice in language content or content instructors.

On practical grounds, a considerable body of research has been carried out in Iran and other parts of the globe to investigate various aspects of ESP enterprising such as issues of needs analysis, means analysis, methodology, design, and implementation. The results of several studies on needs and means analyses for ESP students in the field of health care pointed to the idea that the needs of nursing students have been largely ignored with special reference to their cultural backgrounds and their needs to be accepted within the mainstream culture of the community where they are going to work to increase the number of nurses from culturally diverse backgrounds (8- 10).

In a study on ESP teachers' beliefs, Rajabi, Kiani, and Maftoon (2012) examined the impact of an ESP in-service teacher training program on Iranian ESP teachers' beliefs and instructional practices as well as on students' attainments (11). Their findings pointed to a significant difference between the achievement levels of students who were taught by an experienced ESP teacher and those who were taught by inexperienced ESP teachers. However, among these

studies, very few have concentrated on the quality of ESP courses.

Compared to EGP courses where learners are trying to master the linguistic aspects of English with an emphasis on proficiency in the four major language skills, ESP instructors and students alike face certain challenges. A number of researchers unanimously believe that the students' level of motivation to learn in general English courses seems quite higher than that in ESP courses primarily due to the entertaining atmosphere EGP creates for the learners (12-16). At the second place, ESP learners have to cope with a more burdensome undertaking than EGP students in that they need to master not only the general aspects of English but also the content-related issues of their particular discipline (17).

Educational improvements are undoubtedly the key to the economic, social, and cultural welfare and prosperity in any society which in itself lead to overall human development. Higher education compared to other levels of education casts a substantial influence on individual and socioeconomic development. As Haseena and Mohammed (2015, p. 100) succinctly argue, "the 21st century knowledge-driven society has 'Quality' as its defining element, in the same way as 'Tradition' defined the ancient society, 'Religion' defined society in the Middle Ages and 'Reason' was the defining element of the 19th century modern society" (7).

In general terms, quality refers to the worth of something or more accurately to the difference between the average and excellent, the difference between failure and success (7). These authors view quality as "a relative concept satisfying priorities of different interest groups of beneficiaries. These beneficiaries are students, teachers, technical and administrative staff, parents, would-be employees, funding agencies and the society" (p. 100). In education, thereby, quality connotes notions of meeting certain pre-ordained standards.

Griffith (2008, p. 99) defines quality as "the extent to which the delivery of the school curriculum realizes the learning outcomes defined in the educational standards" (12). Discussing issues relating to setting standards, McLeod et al. (1996) provide several defining features of the term 'standard' as follows: standard denotes learning outcomes that are desired by or expected from students, standards comprise useful tools to guide the attainment of quality education, they are concise and at times elaborate accounts of what learners have to know and be capable to do as a consequence of schooling, and finally they specifically determine what performance is going to be acknowledged as evidence that the desired learning has occurred (13).

To adopt the more recent definition and conceptualization of ESP which conceives of ESP as the branch of English language studies that considers the language, discourse, and culture of English-language professional communities of practice and specialized groups along with the learning and teaching of this object from a didactic point of view (a), nursing ESP stakeholders need to cater for opportunities to base the specification of content and methodology on what teachers and students perceive of as worthy as they cope with different aspects of the course in progress. Nonetheless, a

number of investigations including interesting case studies have been carried out to identify the features of a quality ESP course for nursing students. In her case study on an ESP program for the students of nursing, Hussin (2002) referred to the application of genre analysis in designing tasks, a team approach to teaching, and the ESP teachers' involvement with the texts and tasks of the specialist language to develop learning activities around them as the features that contribute to the ultimate success of the program she was involved in (14).

The careful review of a number of recent publications on ESP course design, needs analysis, quality assurance, motivating factors, efficient teachers, stakeholders' views, and quality system pointed to the following issues as features that ESP courses need to encompass. The agreement between the present situation and target situation needs (3), the significant role of the context and teaching quality (15), dissatisfaction with and the need to revise current nursing ESP textbooks (10, 16), making English the sole medium of instruction (9, 17), a compromise between ESP teaching objectives and teaching demands along with reforms in ESP teaching methods (18-20), developing ESP quality assurance requirements including specification of objectives in performance terms, target learning situation needs analysis, formative and summative program evaluation, and continuous process of curriculum re-design (21, 22), and the higher efficiency of language instructors and professional ESP teachers to teach ESP were compared to content ones (8, 19, 23). Overall, this review points to the fact that a quality system has to be developed to be applied to the teaching of ESP in which the quality of teaching methodology, materials, and evaluation has to be taken into consideration by ESP stakeholders including curriculum and materials developers, course designers, and teachers.

Taking into account the significance of quality of education across all subject matters in general and in ESP in particular, the present study is an attempt to investigate ESP nursing instructors' views regarding the quality of education in English for students of nursing. More specifically, the study is going to examine ESP nursing instructors' expectations of what constitutes quality ESP delivery as well as to explore their perceptions on the challenges that may inhibit the provision of quality ESP education for nursing students. To this end, the following research questions are in order:

1. What are the perceptions of ESP for nursing instructors in terms of quality ESP enterprising?
2. What are ESP for nursing students' expectations of their ESP courses?
3. What strategies do ESP instructors deem effective in delivering ESP lessons to nursing students?
4. What are the problems to teach ESP for nursing students from the instructors' perspective?

## METHODS

The present study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. That is, in the first phase of the study the results of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively through descriptive and inferential statistics while in the second phase, qualitative content analysis was used to

interpret the interview findings. The study was carried out in academic year 2018-2019. Two groups of participants from medical sciences universities were chosen in the present study, namely, ESP instructors (N=76) and ESP nursing students (117). As a cross-sectional survey, the quality of ESP courses was taken as the dependent variable that would undergo variations as a function of challenges (independent variable) in such courses. These variables were examined during one week at the end of an academic year using two different data collection instruments. The universities included both state and Islamic Azad universities from the west of Iran recruited based on the Kerejci-Morgan's Table (24). The universities included those from cities of Kermanshah, Sanandaj, and Khorramabad and the ESP instructors were either TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) professors or instructors from the related departments. The teaching experience of the instructors as ESP professors ranged from 6 to 24 years. The inclusion criterion for ESP instructors was teaching ESP to nursing students for one or more terms during their whole teaching career and for the students, it was being an ESP student or having passed the course.

In order to elicit quality of education, the quality of education in ESP questionnaire (25) was employed in the present study. As reported, the first draft of the questionnaire was compiled based on the literature (6, 13, 26-28). The reliability of the questionnaire estimated through Cronbach's alpha was 0.633. There are 17 items in the scale designed on a five-point Likert scale including 1 "not at all", 2 "to a small scale", 3 "to some extent", 4 "to a moderate extent, and 5 "to a great extent.

In line with the quantitative instrument, the interview, was conducted. Fifteen ESP students and 13 ESP instructors were interviewed. The students and instructors who were accessible were interviewed by the first researcher in their departments and those who were not accessible were interviewed via phone.

Each interview lasted for 25 minutes. Then, the interviewees' responses were recorded and transcribed. Strauss and Corbin's model (1998) was used to analyze the data (29). It should be stated that there are three types of coding techniques, namely, open, axial, and selective in Strauss and Corbin's model. Based on the coding strategies, the interviewees' comments were first transcribed. Finally, the transcribed data were codified.

As the first stage, the questionnaire of quality of education in ESP was sent via Google Form to ESP instructors. They were asked to fill in the questionnaire and at the same time rank strategies for effective ESP education. As the next step, 13 volunteer instructors were interviewed to probe the problems to teach ESP to nursing students. The interview was conducted over the phone call. In the next phase, to examine ESP students' expectations of the course, 15 students to whom we had access were interviewed by the first researcher.

**Data analysis**

The quantitative analysis of the data was run through SPSS and, the descriptive statistics were calculated. In addition, a

chi square was used. Regarding the qualitative data, content analysis was carried out using Strauss and Corbin's model (1998).

**RESULTS**

Table 1 shows the result of the questionnaire of quality of education in ESP and addresses the first research question. Based on the Table, the means of all subscales are below the hypothetical mean (3) indicating that the quality of ESP is not satisfactory based on the teachers' perception. In addition, As Table 2 displays, while the organizational subscale received the highest mean score (M = 2.18), the educational subscale received the lowest mean score (M=1.93).

Variable	N	Mean (SD)
Organizational	76	2.1823 (0.71280)
Educational	76	1.9342 (0.68771)
Personal	76	2.1349 (.81286)

To answer the second research question, a semi-structured interview was conducted. Table 2, illustrates the results of the first semi-structured interview.

Themes	Frequency (Percentage)
To comprehend the content of the subject matter texts	15 (100)
To listen and comprehend conversations related to the subject matter	14 (93)
To speak in English about the subject matter	14 (93)
To communicate ideas related to the subject matter with foreigners in English	14 (93)
To understand vocabulary items related to the subject matter	13 (86)
To translate the texts related to the subject matter	8 (53.3)
To write in texts related to the subject matter in English	7 (46.6)
To prepare herself for MA or Ph.D. entrance exam	3 (20)

As the Table shows, the first priority for the interviewees was comprehending the content of the subject matter texts. In this regard, one of the students reported that "The most important thing for us is to comprehend the content of subject matter texts."

It was no surprise to find that the second and third priorities for the participants were listening and speaking skills and the fourth item was communicating ideas in English. One of the students explained, "We meet with foreign patients and go to conferences abroad. Sometimes we watch

English medical films, so it is very important to master both listening and speaking”.

As the Table shows, understanding technical vocabulary items is essential in ESP courses as vividly echoed in the following excerpt:

“Learning technical medical terms is very important for us and learning them in their appropriate context is much more important”.

Translating the texts, writing in English, and being prepared for higher-level entrance exams were other expectations reported by the students.

With regard to translation, one student, for example, commented:

“When I was watching an educational medical film, I needed to take notes in English. But I felt so embarrassed when I found that I was not able to write down the sentences I had heard in the film.”

Writing text related to the subject matter in English was another expectation of the students. As a student explained: “Sometimes it may be necessary for us to write the text in English”.

It was not surprising to find out that one of the expectations of the interviewees was to prepare them for MA or Ph.D. entrance exam.

“We expect the course to prepare us for higher educational levels”.

Regarding the third research question that enquired ranking of expectations of nursing ESP instructors, a Friedman test was used. The results of this test are shown in Table 3. All in all, the findings demonstrated that for the majority of the ESP instructors, the highest rank is that of “To integrate all language skills” with the mean rank of 8.36 and the lowest is “To ensure students with homogeneous language abilities attend ESP courses.” with the mean rank of 2.7.

As illustrated in Table 3, the present researchers decided to determine if there are any significant differences between the ESP teachers’ priorities regarding strategies for effective ESP

education. Therefore, a Friedman test was run. As the result of Chi-square (370.5) suggests, and since  $P < 0.05$ , the difference in the mean rank in ESP training strategies is significant.

The fourth research question investigated the challenges to teach ESP for nursing students from instructors’ perspectives. To this end, 13 instructors were asked to take part in semi-structured interviews the results of which revealed three main themes: 1) organizational, 2) learner-related, and 3) teacher-related. Among the organizational problems were limited time and resources (frequency[f]=13, percentage[P]= 100), top-down curriculum development (f=9, P=69.2), inadequacies in ESP theorizing (f=6, P=46.1), and crowded classes (f=5, P=38.4). On the other hand, learner-related factors included issues such as heterogeneous English proficiency (f=12, P=92.3), and demotivated learners (f=5, P=38.4). Finally, ESP instructors’ unfamiliarity with the content (f=11, P=84.6), their unfamiliarity with and ELT skills (f=5, P=38.4), and their poor English proficiency (f=4, P=30.7) were referred to as teacher-related problems. A detailed analysis of these factors is in order here.

#### Organizational factors

The first item which belongs to organizational problems is time and resources. The majority of ESP instructors expressed their concerns over the limited time and resources. As one instructor put it,

“the amount of time allocated for ESP classes is not enough, and one cannot teach a specific language for two hours a week.”

Another instructor stated that “the curriculum does not pay attention to the opinions of instructors and realities of ESP courses”.

Some instructors believed that ESP theories were not up to date in Iran and that no sound theory was behind the courses. As an instructor commented, “ESP teachers and curriculum planners cannot isolate themselves from current theories in ESP. unfortunately, ESP teaching methodology does not seem to follow a robust theory”.

Overcrowded classes were another concern for the interviewees. In this regard, another teacher pointed out:

“with such overcrowded classrooms, the ESP instructor could not think of their needs”.

#### Learner-related factors

The interviewees also referred to learner-related needs. A Ph.D. teacher pointed to the diverse proficiency level in ESP courses and reported:

“Every term we face students with heterogeneous proficiencies in English. Although they like English language, they do not like the ESP courses held in universities”.

ESP students’ low level of motivation was also a matter of concern among the instructors. They believed that the current courses moving on traditional lines leave students with no or little incentive to be active in the course.

#### Teacher-related factors

As the participants reported some of the problems teaching ESP to nursing students are teacher-related factors. A teacher said, “the biggest problem is that sometimes ELT (English language teaching) instructors do not possess enough

**Table 3. The mean ranks for strategies for effective ESP education**

Element	mean rank
1. To integrate all language skills.	8.36
2. To deploy certified professionals with ESP specialization	7.67
3. To develop a needs-based curriculum	7.19
4. Provide in-service education programs for ESP teachers.	7.04
5. To ensure a small number of students attend each class.	6.53
6. to extend the ESP course to a four-credit course	5.39
7. To develop authentic materials.	4.66
8. To develop materials that empower learners to initiate interaction,	3.55
9. To develop interesting materials.	2.52
10. To ensure students with homogeneous language abilities attend ESP courses.	2.7

subject matter knowledge. Even worse, there are nursing instructors who are not proficient enough in ELT skills and teach ESP courses for several terms”.

It was also reported that some ESP instructors are not familiar with ELT skills. There are also some instructors, as interviewees commented, who do not have adequate language proficiency. These instructors have been recruited by the subject matter department.

## DISCUSSION

The present study explored ESP for nursing instructors' perceptions of quality of ESP courses, the effective strategies for delivering ESP lessons to nursing students, their perceptions on the challenges that may inhibit the quality ESP education for nursing students, and ESP students' expectations of the course.

The findings of the first research question showed that the quality of ESP courses was not satisfactory. This is in tandem with that of Nezakatgoo and Behzadpoor (2017) in that they reported that institution challenges, learner-related challenges, and teacher-related challenges affected the quality of ESP at medical universities (19). In this regard, Iranmehr, Atai, and Babaii (2018) argue that “EAP programs are in dire need for reconceptualizing policy-making and practice” (30). Moreover, concerning medical students, the study conducted by Boniadi, et al. (2013) revealed that “the majority of instructors believed that the size of classes, uninterested and unmotivated students, inactivity and low proficiency of students are the main problems in the ESP course” (31).

As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) explain, apart from other related opinions, it is necessary to take into consideration learners' voices in ESP courses (3). In the same vein, Richterich, and Chancerel (1980, p. 29) argue that “. . . a need does not exist independent of a person. It is people who build their images of their needs on the basis of data relating to themselves and their environment” (32). As such, the second research question was posed. Based on the results, comprehension of the texts and communication in the foreign language were the students' priorities. This is in tandem with Vahdany and Gerivani's (2016) finding who reported that medical students valued the reading skill higher than the other language skills (33). In compliance with the findings, Karimnia and Khodashenas (2019) also found that reading skill is given priority by medical students and that students prefer training in speaking, listening and communication skills (34).

The third research question inquired expectations of nursing ESP instructors. Among other expectations, the instructors deemed integration of skills as being important. They also regarded deploying certified professionals with ESP specialization as necessary. It was also stated that a needs-based curriculum should be developed. Regarding ESP teachers, as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) hold, ESP teachers should move beyond the limits of their experience and master both language and subject matter (3). Similarly, Hayati (2008) believe that the lack of expert teachers in science and methodology has greatly affected ESP and that both subject matter knowledge and knowledge of code is

essential. As he argues, ESP teachers are either weak in English and teaching methodology or weak in the subject matter knowledge (35).

The fourth research question probed the challenges faced by ESP instructors. As already mentioned, problems faced by ESP instructors are divided into three categories namely, organizational, learner related, teacher-related. Time and resources are among the first challenges reported by teachers. As to the problem of time, Hayati (2008, p.154) recognizes time as one of the “tri-partite problems of ESP programs” (35). Sadeghi and Tahririan (2014, p.68) investigated views of ESP instructors and students and reported that the time allocated to ESP courses is by no means sufficient and “no expectations should be made on the basis of these limited hours of teaching” (36). Learners' heterogeneity was also regarded as a challenge to courses in the present study. ESP students are often from a different socioeconomic, sociolinguistic, and educational background (19).

The findings of the present study have some implications. In terms of organizational factors, curriculum developers should redesign the ESP curriculum and reconsider the role of communicative factors in ESP for nursing programs. In addition, ESP teachers should regularly attend teaching workshops or conferences to raise their awareness about teaching ESP and get familiar with the latest innovations in ESP teaching, testing and material development. Finally, the findings implicate the necessity of incorporating ESP students' interests and needs including those of present and target situations into ESP curriculum development and syllabus design.

There was a major limitation in the present study in that the participants were recruited from the west of Iran as a result of which our findings have to be interpreted with more care. Future studies may choose a sample representing the whole country. Furthermore, further research can investigate policymakers' views regarding implementing innovative approaches in ESP for nursing students. Another limitation was recruiting ESP teachers who had at least one term experience of teaching ESP to nursing students. Perhaps, those teachers who had only one term experience of teaching ESP to nursing students were not experienced enough to report their ideas about the quality of ESP courses, the effective strategies for delivering ESP lessons to nursing students, and their perceptions on the challenges that may inhibit the of quality ESP education for nursing students. As such, further studies may employ ESP for nursing students who have at least one-year experience of teaching or have taught ESP in the last two years. As a final point, further investigations have to be conducted to broaden our understanding of quality of ESP courses for other medical disciplines.

The present study sought the perceptions of ESP nursing instructors in terms of quality of ESP courses, ESP for nursing students' expectations of the course, and the challenges to ESP courses. As Nezakatgoo and Behzadpoor (2017) argue, and as it was found in the present study, the challenges ESP instructors faced were institution related, learner related, and teacher-related (19). While taking into consideration ESP students' expectations of the course, curriculum developers

are required to pay a particular attention to strategies for effective ESP education. In line with the findings, it can be argued that the ESP for nursing is in need of reform and the reform "depends on a remarkable change in a number of factors including ESP teachers' beliefs, curriculum, educational policies, syllabi and textbooks" (20).

### Ethical considerations

Ethical issues including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, redundancy, etc. have been completely observed by the authors.

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