

Research Article

Design and Implementation of a Blended ESP Course for Iranian Vocational School Students of Photography: A TBLT Approach

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Abstract

In the increasingly interconnected world, English proficiency has become essential for developing technical skills and opening up global career opportunities. However, Iranian technical and vocational education has not adequately addressed the need for English language instruction tailored to students' specific fields of study and occupations. To address this gap, the present study aimed to develop a blended Task-Based Language Teaching English for Specific Purposes course tailored to second-year vocational school students specializing in photography. Through basic interpretive qualitative design, data was collected using interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and reflective journals. A comprehensive needs analysis was conducted through interviews with five administrators at the Iranian Ministry of Education, five experienced photography teachers, and 25 photography students. Based on these findings, the course was designed and subsequently implemented. The effectiveness and potential challenges of the course were then evaluated. The findings revealed that photography students found the blended course effective in learning photography terminology and tools in English, practicing photography and editing techniques, utilizing multimedia and interactive games, and enhancing motivation and self-confidence. However, students also faced some linguistic and technological challenges. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on ESP course development, emphasizing the importance of ESP courses in preparing students for future careers and offering practical pedagogical strategies for integrating language instruction with vocational content in the technical and vocational education context.

Keywords: Blended learning, English for specific purposes, Photography students, Task-based language teaching, Technical and vocational education

Introduction

In the world of education and job training, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses are considered essential for preparing learners for future professional occupations across various fields of knowledge (Rodríguez-Peñarroja, 2022). These courses are carefully designed to meet the specific needs and preferences of learners. A key aspect of ESP is its consideration of various factors, including students' language proficiency, depth of understanding, experiences, interests, and motivations for learning (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Recently, there has been a noticeable increase in the global presence of English, especially in fields like education and business (Rafiq et al., 2021), leading to a surge in enrollment in ESP courses. This development has coincided with the growing use of technology in the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in the context of ESP (Dashtestani & Stojkovic, 2016). Consequently, tools such as the Internet, online meetings, and advanced learning systems are increasingly being used to help learners improve their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Anwar & Arifani, 2016; Mulyadi et al., 2020).

Despite many studies examining the use of ESP in Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) (Fadlia et al., 2022; Kamaruddin et al., 2021), significant progress remains to be made in this area. Important steps have been taken, with researchers emphasizing the importance of ESP in the Iranian higher education system (Atai & Mazlum, 2013; Mostafaei Alaei & Ershadi, 2016). These studies have explored the challenges and strategies of teaching ESP in Iranian universities (Davoudi-Mobarakeh et al., 2014; Vosoughi et al., 2013), and researchers have also highlighted the role of ESP in helping graduates of technical and vocational programs communicate effectively in the workplace. This underscores the need for practical language skills to succeed professionally (Ghaemi & Sarlak, 2015; Khany & Tarlani-Aliabadi, 2016).

Amidst the various studies on developing online ESP courses, there is a noticeable gap in the integration of technology into vocational schools in Iran (Montalbán, 2022; Yu, 2021). English is a compulsory course in Iranian vocational schools. Every year, students are required to participate in English classes using the same textbooks, regardless of their varying competence, intelligence, and interest levels (Atai & Mazlum, 2013). Based on the researcher's own experience teaching English in technical and vocational schools, these textbooks focus on general topics and fail to address the language needs specific to students' fields of study and future occupations. Furthermore, the vocational school curricula allocate only one hour of English instruction per week. Due to these inadequacies, learning essential

language items is slow and limited, leaving students unprepared to perform successfully in relevant occupational settings after graduation.

The current textbooks for technical and vocational schools in Iran, similar to other high school English curricula, place a heavy emphasis on cognitive functions while neglecting students' authentic needs, skills, preferences, potentials, and developmental stages (Asakereh et al., 2019). Conversely, as Robinson (1991) states, ESP courses are closely related to learners' needs and preferences, with needs analysis (NA) being a critical criterion for ESP course design. Moreover, ESP courses are intended to fulfill learners' needs in real-world contexts, and syllabi should be designed based on these authentic needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a pedagogical approach that prepares learners to tackle real-world tasks in the target language (Van den Branden et al., 2009). TBLT is also well-suited to online language teaching, as tasks can be completed over the Internet at a distance and at students' own pace (Doughty & Long, 2008). Additionally, in line with NA as the main requirement of an ESP course, TBLT is developed through a well-structured NA as its first step (Long, 2007). Accordingly, the present study aimed to bridge the existing gap in Iranian TVE by conducting a comprehensive NA, which led to the development of a blended TBLT-based ESP course tailored to second-year vocational school students specializing in photography. The NA was conducted through interviews with TVE administrators at the Iranian Ministry of Education, experienced photography teachers, and photography students. The primary focus of this study was to discern the fundamental elements essential for successfully developing a blended TBLT-based ESP course customized for photography students. Additionally, following the course implementation, the study explored students' perspectives on the course's efficacy, aiming to identify any obstacles they encountered during their engagement. A trial implementation of the course prior to the actual study provided valuable insights for refining materials and instructional strategies, thereby aligning them more effectively with the specific needs of the students. This approach allowed for a holistic evaluation of the course's effectiveness and offered a roadmap for potential improvements.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

ESP offers a targeted approach that enhances language learning enjoyment by aligning with learners' specific needs and purposes (Ronaldo, 2016). Historically, ESP emerged during distinct periods, such as aftermath of World War II and the 1970s oil crisis, leading to the global spread of English adapted to learners' diverse needs (Gatehouse, 2001; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

The definition of ESP revolves around customization to learners' explicit needs and fields, emphasizing skills encompassing reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, semantics, and discourse (Evans & St. John, 1998). The continuum of English Language Teaching (ELT) courses, stretching from General English to highly specialized ESP courses, highlights the inherent specificity of ESP (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). The design of an effective ESP course hinges on factors such as the incorporation of authentic materials, a clear orientation toward specific purposes, and fostering self-directed learning, all of which contribute to the development of real-world language skills (Gatehouse, 2001).

Moreover, using blended learning technology in ESP classes can provide two important outcomes: (a) students learn more quickly and effectively through a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) that is flexible and allows them to set their paces based on their interests and needs; and (b) teachers have more time to focus on what they do best, which is using the classroom's many resources to create engaging lessons (Lungu, 2013). Sharma and Barrett (2008) defined blended learning as a mixture of classroom instruction and the right application of technology. Because it accommodated the advantages of both face-to-face interaction and technology-based teaching or a completely online course, Blended learning, defined by the rapid rise of the internet and technology in education (Bizami et al., 2023) has been thought of as the efficient learning approach (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Lalima & Dangwal, 2017). Blended learning is also thought to be effective because it can increase students' motivation for learning, support their innovation and teamwork, and provide them with the knowledge and abilities needed to function in an increasing technology society (McGuinness & Fulton, 2019; Meydanlioglu & Arikan, 2014).

Many studies have been conducted on blended learning, each delving into different dimensions of its application. Mulyadi and Purnama (2019) investigated ESP students' perspectives of blended learning. Qualitative methods were employed, utilizing questionnaire data subjected to descriptive analysis using SPSS 21. The findings indicated students' overall satisfaction and enthusiasm for blended learning in ESP courses. However, the study highlighted the importance of English classroom interaction and time management skills, emphasizing their significance for the development of ESP blended learning curricula. Additionally, in a study Gaffas (2023), a comparison was made between student perspectives of e-learning experiences in virtual and blended ESP classes within an EFL context. The investigation involved two groups of Saudi ESP undergraduate students who undertook the same ESP course in virtual and blended formats. Data collected via a

questionnaire revealed similarities between the groups in evaluating course structure, individual learning processes, and learning outcomes. However, both virtual and blended learners expressed concerns regarding limited interaction between students and instructors, as well as among peers. Notably, the virtual group exhibited greater proficiency in using the learning management system and displayed heightened enthusiasm for collaborative work in small groups.

Likewise, Iranian researchers have been actively investigating various aspects of ESP within higher education contexts. Within Iran, the study by Mazdayasna and Tahririan (2008) emphasized the significance of tailored curriculum design in ESP, particularly in the context of nursing and midwifery education. This approach is seen as crucial in addressing the diverse challenges faced by both students and instructors in these specialized fields. Furthermore, Jafari Pazoki and Alemi (2020) assessed ESP programs in engineering departments, revealing challenges and underscoring the importance of aligning stakeholders and course content. Mostafavi et al. (2021) investigated learners' perspectives of ESP needs among students and instructors. The findings revealed disagreements in views on course content authenticity and needs fulfillment. Moreover, in the study by Sholeh and Talebinejad (2022), a comparison was made between traditional TBLT-based ESP instruction and online TBLT-based instruction in the context of TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning). This research underscored the potential of the TELL-and-TBLT method to enhance writing proficiency. The study not only informed ESP writing instruction practices but also highlighted the importance of embracing contemporary approaches to language education on a local scale.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

According to Ellis (2003), task-based language teaching is a method in language instruction that enables students to actively apply the target language through a range of assignments. The core aspect of this approach is the task itself, which acts as the central context and primary learning objective. This setup encourages language use that reflects a practical real-world scenario. As students work toward completing the task, they naturally acquire language skills expanding their linguistic capacities. Another angle, presented by Long and Crookes (1992), revolves around tasks as activities undertaken in the real world. According to them, a task is described as an activity that someone takes on for personal reasons or because there's something to be gained. In essence, tasks cover the wide variety of things that individuals engage in each day, whether at their job, during their leisure time,

or in the moments between other activities. Ellis (2009) further narrows down Long and Crookes's (1992) extensive task definition by introducing specific criteria for identifying a task. A task should place a primary emphasis on meaning, a 'gap' that prompts the exchange of information or viewpoints, and a clear tangible outcome beyond language use, achieved as students draw upon their unique language skills.

TBLT has gained popularity in English Language Teaching (ELT) as an approach that emphasizes communication skills. It emerged due to the limitations of structure-based approaches like Situational Language Teaching and behaviorism-influenced methods (Widdowson, 1989). TBLT's foundations are linked to weak versions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), focusing on applying language for communication (Howatt, 1984). Frameworks for TBLT vary, with Ellis's model being recognized (Ellis, 2014). Ellis suggests diverse task types, including input-based and real-world tasks. Moreover, Ellis (2003) developed a three-part process, beginning with a preliminary stage called pre-task. This phase intends to make the learners ready for participation in the activities during the task, accomplishing this by boosting motivation and activating vocabulary relevant to the topic. The subsequent task phase involves learners employing their full range of language skills to not only finish the task but also achieve its objectives. The post-task component, focused on practicing language forms, requires learners to present their completed work to the class either through speaking or writing. This method has been adopted to design tasks suitable for this study's blended learning course. The primary focus was on in-person classes, with a significant emphasis on tasks involving oral production.

Accordingly, drawing on the TBLT framework given by Ellis (2003), the present study tried to develop and implement a blended ESP course customized for Iranian vocational school photography students. The following research questions were addressed in this study.

RQ 1: What are the required components of a blended TBLT-based ESP course for photography students from the perspective of TVE administrators, experienced photography teachers, and photography students?

RQ 2: What are the students' perspectives on the effectiveness of the developed blended TBLT-based ESP course, and what challenges do they face with the course?

Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach which according to Ary et al. (2009), attends to a deeper layer of understanding about an issue from

humans' viewpoints within the natural settings. Through basic interpretive qualitative design, data was collected using interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and reflective journals. To answer the first research question, a needs analysis was conducted with TVE administrators at the Ministry of Education in Iran, experienced photography teachers, and technical and vocational school photography students using semi-structured interviews to develop a blended TBLT-based ESP course for photography students. In addition, reflective journals and interviews were conducted with the students after the course implementation to answer the second and third research questions and investigate the effectiveness of the course and the encountered challenges. The study adopted qualitative content analysis using MAXQDA to analyze the textual data.

Participants and context

Three participant groups were engaged in the present study. Convenience sampling was employed for the selection of the first group of the participants. The first group consisted of 25 photography students from a technical vocational school in Robat Karim, a County in Tehran, Iran. The students were all female, aged between 16 and 17, and at the elementary English proficiency level. Purposive sampling was employed for the the selection of the second and third group participants. The photography instructors and TVE administrators were selected because of their expertise, experience, and relevance to the study's focus on curriculum design and photography instruction. The second group consisted of five photography instructors from different vocational schools in Robat Karim County in Tehran, each with over a decade of experience in teaching digital photography. The third group consisted of five TVE administrators renowned for their expertise in curriculum design for technical vocational schools. These administrators were carefully chosen based on their roles, specialization, and experience within the Education Department of the Ministry of Education in Robat Karim County in Tehran. The first group was selected based on convenience sampling whereas purposive sampling was employed for the second and third groups of the participants. All the participants signed an informed consent form before starting the course.

Instruments

Semi-structured interview

To comprehend people's opinions, thoughts, and understanding of the subjects under examination, interviews offer possibilities for questioning, probing, and grading (Cohen et al., 2017). Accordingly, semi-structured interviews were developed and conducted with administrators, teachers, and students (Appendix

1). The needs analysis approach to ESP performed by Trujeque-Moreno et al. (2021) served as the basis for the interview questions for the first phase of the study. Four sets of interview questions were prepared. The first set gathered administrators' perspectives on the importance of ESP courses, the Iranian Ministry's perspectives on ESP, curriculum development for ESP courses, and their features (6 questions, Table 2, in the Results section). The second interview gathered photography teachers' perspectives on the importance of ESP, usage of the English language in photography activities, suitable teaching materials, methods, and environments, duration of the course, frequency of the sessions, required teacher education, and the students' main challenges with the English content (13 questions, Table 3, in the Results section). The third set asked for the photography students' personal information, language learning experiences, technology literacy and access, learning styles, study habits, preferred learning environments, materials, and their opinions and perspectives on English proficiency required for their future careers. The students were given multiple options when talking about their personal information (16 questions, Table 4, in the Results section). Finally, the fourth set was used after the course implementation and asked for the students' perspectives about the course' effectiveness and challenges (10 questions, Table 5, in the Results section). All the students who took part in the course were interviewed and the interviews were conducted face-to-face and online upon the participants' request. In all phases of the study, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then translated into English for coding. Subsequently, the data underwent coding using MAXQDA software, followed by a thematic analysis. To ensure the reliability of the coding, a colleague was asked to code 20 percent of the data. The inter-rater reliability was calculated and the reliability of the coding was assured ($\alpha=0.86$).

Reflective Journals

According to Ary et al. (2009), reflective journals are effective for examining potential difficulties and evaluating the success of a course. Additionally, they believed that journals help students to freely express their thoughts and reflect on their experiences. During the second phase when the course was being implemented, students were asked to keep reflective journals manually after each four sessions including two online and two face-to-face classes. During 16 sessions, 100 reflective journals were collected. Students were given hints to identify both positive and negative aspects of their classroom experiences and assess whether their expectations were being met. The Journals were collected anonymously, and they were translated to English, and then analyzed thematically using a MAXQDA.

Blended course

In the initial phase, the specific requirements and preferences of the students were meticulously assessed. Likewise, the professionals' perspectives regarding the features of the ESP course were considered and analyzed. By understanding the specific needs, interests, and expectations of the learners, the course content, course environment, and task types were designed. To develop a course, designing engaging and motivating tasks for learners can be a bit challenging but incredibly important. According to Malone and Lepper's Framework (1987), four main elements were considered for designing this task-based blended ESP course. The first main element was making tasks that matched various learning objectives and also provided feedback on student's progress. Competition was the second key element that supported the sense of accomplishment and helped students to improve. Keeping students engaged using multimedia such as videos, pictures, and sounds was the third important element. The fourth element was recognition in the form of positive feedback and praise which boosted students' self-esteem and reinforced their intrinsic motivation.

Effective course design was enhanced by a diverse range of resources including *Chris Gatum's beginner's photography guide* (2013) to help students master photography terms and *American English files*, the Starter Series, to improve the students' conversational structures. In terms of language instruction, a meaning-focused approach, aligning with the research findings of Haghverdi and Ghasemi (2013) was applied. Furthermore, innovative tools including Storyline and popular platforms such as Kahoot, Quizlet, and YouTube were employed for designing interactive and engaging tasks (Sample tasks have been presented in the Appendix 2).

The tasks were in two forms, online and face-to-face, each serving a specific purpose in the ESP course. The online tasks focused on photography's specific terms/concepts and language functions. Learners were engaged in both synchronous and asynchronous tasks with the aim of learning field-specific terms and concepts, leveraging the advantages of online resources and interactive tools. On the other hand, the face-to-face sessions were mainly focused on oral production and field communication abilities. In these sessions, students had the opportunity to actively use their language knowledge, engage in spoken interactions, and improve their proficiency in a real-world communicative context. This encouraged active participation, practical learning, and immediate feedback. The entire course benefited from ongoing revision and enhancement by qualified online training experts. The materials were covered during 16 sessions with the initial and final sessions dedicated to introductory and wrap-up activities. All tasks during 14 sessions

were designed according to Ellis's (2003) pre-task, main task, and post-task cycle to ensure the active role of learners in this educational journey. The selection of task topics was also informed by the needs analysis in the initial phase and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Outline of the blended ESP Course for Photography Students

Session	Specific Terms	Language Functions
2 & 3	Photography equipment Camera phone, Lens, Lens cap, Zoom lens, DSLR camera case, memory card, tripod, spare battery	Shopping for equipment I'm a photography student What' that/this? What are these/those? Here you go. Thank you
4 & 5	Anatomy of a DSLR front view key Shutter-release button, Lens, Autofocus button, Pop-up flash On/Off switch, Mode dial BACK VIEW KEY Viewfinder, Menu button, Info button, Control wheel, LCD screen, Playback button, Shooting info button, Control pad Delete button, zoom button	Imperative sentences Instruction verbs Hold your camera Keep your elbows tucked in Press the shutter-release button Keep your feet apart Rest your elbows on your knees Zoom in/out, turn on/off
6& 7	Lcd screen Aperture, Shutter speed, ISO setting, Image quality, Focus mode	Simple present Ex: ISO setting makes the pictures real
7 & 8	Light, Natural Light, Flat Light, Backlight, Soft Light Hard Light, Golden hour, Sunlight, Sunset, Dark/light	Asking about time What time is it? I need to go. You need to hurry. It's late.
9& 10	Posing and portrait, Body part, Body movement	Imperative, Object pronoun
10 & 11	Anatomy of a toolbar Move tool, Hand tool, Selection tool, Magic wand tool Type tool, Red-eye removal tool, Clone stamp tool Brush tool, Paint bucket tool, Sponge tool, Magnifier tool Eye-dropper tool, Lasso tool, quick selection tool, Crop tool Gradient tool, Blur tool	Can and can't Ex: you can move objects with the move tool.
12 & 13	Colors nature photography	There is There are
14 & 15	Writing photo description, writing photo caption	Present continuous

Results

RQ 1: *What are the required components of a blended TBLT-based ESP course for students of photography?*

To answer the first research question of the study, a comprehensive needs analysis was conducted through interviewing TVE administrators at the Ministry of Education in Iran, experienced photography teachers, and technical and vocational school photography students. The interviews were transcribed, and coded, and the themes and categories were extracted. Table 2 presents the extracted themes from the interviews with the Ministry administrators and their perspectives on the importance of ESP courses, the Iranian Ministry's perspectives about ESP, curriculum development for ESP courses and their features (6 questions). The extracted themes highlighted the inefficiency of general language education and the necessity of ESP in TVE. The data indicated that general English courses are not suitable for students' career needs, which highlighted the importance of ESP courses in TVE. Additionally, the current English textbooks in TVE are found to be ineffective in addressing the specific language requirements of vocational students. Despite facing certain challenges, the Ministry's awareness of the need for ESP courses emphasized the need to consistently include ESP courses in TVE programs, possibly with the support of technology. The lack of trained teachers to teach the ESP courses at TVE was highly emphasized by the Ministry administrators. Overall, the findings strongly supported the idea that general language education in TVE falls short, making ESP essential for addressing the language needs of vocational students and improving their career opportunities.

Table 2

Interviews with the Ministry administrators

Questions (6 questions)	Themes
1. General English courses alignment with professional life	Lack of alignment between courses and professional life
2. Effectiveness of the English courses' textbooks	Inefficiency of English textbooks in TVE
3. ESP's importance for vocational students	The imperative role of ESP in higher education and career advancement
4. Ministry's awareness of the need for ESP courses	Acknowledging the demand for ESP courses despite the existing Ministry challenges
5. Ministry's Vision for ESP courses	The need for consistent ESP courses in the curriculums accompanied by technological tools
6. Predicting ESP integration in school subjects	Not easy regarding the need for specialized trained instructors

The themes extracted from the interviews with photography teachers are presented in Table 3. Teachers' perspectives on the importance of ESP, usage of the English language in photography activities, suitable teaching materials, methods, and environments, duration of the course, frequency of the sessions, required teacher education, and the students' main challenges with the English content were investigated (13 questions). Through interviews, essential materials were identified as specific photography terms related to tools and editing websites and language skills with a hierarchical emphasis on listening, speaking, writing, and reading. The insights from the needs analysis guided the subsequent course design material and features. It was determined that the course should adopt a blended learning approach, combining both online and face-to-face components. Moreover, it was necessary for the course to be continuous and consistent, with a minimum of two sessions per week, each spanning two hours. This approach was carefully tailored to address the specific language requirements identified through the needs analysis, particularly focusing on photography tools and editing websites.

Table 3*Interviews with photography teachers*

Questions	Themes
Importance of English language in photography	Global Photography Opportunities Mastering tools and software Staying updated
Frequency of use of English in photography classes	All sessions specially for editing and Photoshop
Use of English in photography activities	Instruction manuals, Photography tutorial videos, editing software proficiency, Mastering camera functions
Use of English materials in photography classes	Restricted because of insufficient language proficiency
Essential language skills for photography students	listening: Photography-related videos Writing: captions Speaking: International galleries, contributing to professional growth. Reading: Manuals and reference materials Vocabulary Expansion
Relevant content for language classes in photography	Specific terms of photography
The use of English for a teacher-photographer	Articles and photography tutorial videos
Learning English for photography: sources and duration of training	University ESP classes and self-study Since starting university

Effective ESP teaching for vocational school students	Practical activities with the use of technology
Weekly teaching hours for an ESP course	Maintaining Consistent and Daily Engagement with English
Effective environment for ESP instructions	Blended learning environments
Major challenges in facing English content	Weak language proficiency
Impact of language proficiency on photography learning	Very high to avoid using Persian translation and symbols for English words

Finally, the interviews with the students investigated their personal information, language learning experiences, technology literacy and access, learning styles, study habits, preferred learning environments, materials, and opinions and perspectives on the English proficiency required for their future careers (16 questions). Table 4 presents students' information and the extracted themes.

Table 4
Interviews with photograph students

Questions	Themes
Internet access	96% have internet access at home. 4% lack internet access at home.
Technological literacy	High level of digital and technology literacy
Years of general English study	Four years of language education at school, with some individuals having prior experience at language institutes
Describing the previous language learning experience	48% Normal 26% Bad 24% Good
Reasons for the described language learning experience	Normal: lack of interest, moderate success, pronunciation challenges, and a fear of failure. Bad: challenging textbooks Good: dedicated practice, a passion for English, and early exposure.
Identifying the most challenging language skill	Speaking 36% Writing 24% Listening 20% Reading 16%
Learning preferences and strategies	Music, games, writing exercises, and interactive conversation activities
Weekly English study time	44% one hour per week 20% two hours per week 20% three hours per week 16% half an hour a week
Independent English learning activities	Watching movies Learning new words Playing games

The necessity of specific English in future profession	Proficiency in English is highly required for career development
Activities requiring ESP in photography	Using cameras, editing, writing captions, acquiring new techniques, staying updated, and interacting with foreign customers.
Past experiences with ESP	No previous ESP courses
Challenges with English language in photography courses	Working with cameras and editing software Understanding the photography teacher's specific terminology
Attempts to learn English for photography	Individual English language classes Self-study
The appropriate duration of weekly time for ESP course	1.5 to 2 hours per week
Preferred learning environment for an ESP course	Online and face-to-face

RQ 2: *What are the students' perspectives toward the effectiveness of the developed blended TBLT-based ESP course as well as their challenges with course?*

The second research question of the study was answered after the development and implementation of the course. The evaluation including interviews and reflective journals written by students throughout the course, revealed considerable positive outcomes. Both the students' perspectives about the effectiveness of the course and their challenges with the course have been presented in Table 5. Notably, the course had a constructive influence across different domains for photography students. Specifically, participants' understanding and their use of photography-related terms improved. The course also boosted their confidence, increased their interest in language, and made them feel more competent overall. The combination of online and face-to-face classes was well-received because it provided more opportunities to practice language skills. The use of gamification was particularly popular as it added a unique educational aspect that cannot typically be found in traditional courses. Multimedia elements like videos also helped participants improve their listening skills. They actively took part in practical photography tasks, which also improved their language and photography skills at the same time. Importantly, participants reported improvements in their English language abilities, including listening, speaking, and writing skills.

Additionally, reflections and interviews revealed the main themes encompassing challenges faced in the ESP course. Within this context, two prominent subthemes emerged: linguistic challenges and technological challenges. The subtheme of linguistic challenges included the need for translations, subtitles, or explanations in their native language to facilitate comprehension. Participants expressed their struggles in understanding the

course content due to limited language proficiency. This subtheme underscored the importance of implementing language support measures to bridge the communication gap and ensure effective understanding and engagement. The subtheme of technological challenges showed obstacles participants encountered in the online course platform. Problems like website loading issues, errors, or other technological difficulties disrupted their learning experience. This subtheme emphasized the significance of a user-friendly and accessible online teaching platform that facilitates seamless interaction and learning opportunities.

Table 4
Participants' perspectives towards effectiveness of the ESP course and their challenges

Questions	Themes
Photography terminology understanding	Improved understanding and use of photography-related terms.
Gaining skills from online materials	improvements in listening, speaking, and writing
Relevance of online resources for photography	Relevant content
Blending online and face-to-face ESP learning	Enhancing English Engagement Increasing Practice Time Interactive Language Games In-person Conversations In-Person Q&A with the Teacher
Collaborative learning with peers	Peer Assistance in Group Work Building Confidence Through Peer Support Enhancing Speaking Skills Through Peer Practice
Practicing photography-specific English	Online Photography words Learning Editing Tools and Vocabulary Combining Photography and English through In-person Sessions
Meeting expectations: English proficiency for photography	Lots of Review Interactive Exercises Avoiding Boredom
Impact of multimedia in photography concept comprehension	Better explanation and retention Comprehensive learning
Addressing language needs in photography	Learning Photoshop Practical conversations Writing captions Working with photography tools
Challenges with the course	Linguistic challenges: the need for translations, subtitles, or explanations in their native language to facilitate comprehension of course content Technological challenges: website loading issues, errors, etc.

Discussion

In Iranian vocational schools, English is a mandatory subject, with the same classes and textbooks for all students of all majors. However, these textbooks lack relevance to TVE students' fields and offer restricted English instruction. As a result, students struggle to communicate effectively in their future careers. Accordingly, this qualitative study explored the effectiveness and challenges of ESP in TVE from the perspectives of three participant groups, TVE administrators at the Ministry of Education in Iran, experienced photography teachers, and technical and vocational school photography students.

The previous literature showed a significant rise in the global presence of English, particularly in education and business context (Rafiq et al., 2021). Accordingly, the participants of this study recognized the importance of ESP courses for TVE students. This finding accords with previous observations that have noticed the need to tailor language instruction to meet the specific needs of learners in professional contexts, such as photography (Rodríguez-Peñarroja, 2022, Ronaldo, 2016, Senhadji, 2020). As stated by Kankaanranta & Planken (2010), effective communication skills in English are crucial for success in various professional fields, especially in globalized industries. The study also revealed that the existing English learning materials in TVE are not related to the specific needs of students, and they may not adequately prepare them for future career opportunities. This finding corresponds with literature that points out the limitations of general English textbooks for learners in specialized fields (Atai & Mazlum, 2013). It highlighted the importance of developing ESP courses that incorporate domain-specific vocabulary and topics related to students' future careers, such as mechanical tools and technical terminology in photography.

In light of the theoretical framework of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), the study's findings further underscore the value of designing ESP courses that emphasize authentic, task-oriented learning experiences. TBLT advocates for language instruction that centers on practical tasks relevant to the learners' professional or academic needs, which aligns closely with the study's recommendation for ESP courses tailored to the specific language demands of TVE students in photography. By integrating real-world tasks such as creating photography portfolios, engaging in client interactions, or interpreting technical manuals, ESP courses can not only enhance linguistic competence but also build the practical skills students need for their careers. This approach is supported by Ellis (2003), who highlights the importance of task authenticity in promoting deeper learning and language retention.

Moreover, the integration of task-based activities within a blended learning framework could offer a more dynamic and interactive learning

environment, as TBLT encourages learners to use language purposefully and in context. This combination allows students to apply the language in scenarios that mirror real-life challenges in the photography field, thereby making the learning process more meaningful and engaging. The use of tasks that simulate professional contexts, as suggested by the study's participants, aligns with the core principles of TBLT, where the focus is on achieving communicative competence through meaningful use of language in specific tasks. Consequently, this approach not only addresses the linguistic needs of TVE students but also equips them with the practical skills necessary for successful communication in their future professional environments.

The findings of this study on the necessity of an ESP course in TVE aligned with existing literature on ESP and language learning in professional contexts (Kamaruddin et al., 2021; Nurhasanah & Kurniawan, 2023). The study revealed a significant need for an ESP course in photography, as the participants unanimously expressed the necessity of specific English terminology and skills related to photography, such as camera settings, photo editing, and communication with foreign subjects. This finding is consistent with the fundamental principles of ESP, which emphasizes the importance of ESP to meet the specific needs of learners in their professional domains (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In other words, the emphasis on vocabulary enhancement aligned with established principles of ESP, highlighting the importance of teaching domain-specific terminology relevant to learners' professional pursuits (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). The participants' positive feedback on the effectiveness of specific vocabulary instruction supported the notion that targeted vocabulary learning can facilitate precise and effective communication within specific domains (Coxhead, 2000). Furthermore, the use of interactive online games and multimedia resources for enhanced learning experiences was consistent with the growing trend in education that recognizes the benefits of integrating technology into language learning (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). The positive effect of online multimedia, such as photos and videos, on the learning experience was in line with research that highlights the importance of visual and interactive elements in language instruction (Mayer, 2002). The participants' appreciation for hands-on activities and collaboration in face-to-face classes corroborated with the idea that practical elements and teacher presence enhance the learning process (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Moreover, the participants' preference for a blended learning approach, which combines both online and face-to-face components, has been in line with the existing literature that recognizes the benefits of blended learning in ESP courses (Arifani et al., 2019; McGuinness & Fulton, 2019). Blended

learning allows for flexibility, personalized learning experiences, and the integration of technology to enhance language acquisition. This finding reflects a growing trend in language education where educators leverage the advantages of both online and in-person instruction to optimize learning outcomes. Blended learning, which combines online and face-to-face instruction, offers flexibility and personalized learning experiences, which have been recognized as effective instructional approaches (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

Likewise, the study identified the essential language skills required for photography students, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This finding aligns with previous literature on ESP which emphasizes the need to focus on practical language skills that are directly relevant to learners' professional domains (Flowerdew, 2012). It also supports the idea that ESP courses should go beyond traditional language learning and integrate practical applications and communication in specific contexts (Nation, 2001).

The subtheme of technological challenges also resonated with the broader literature on online education and e-learning. Technological difficulties, such as website loading problems and glitches, were common challenges faced by online learners (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). Learners' frustration with technological issues hindered their motivation and impeded their ability to interact with course materials effectively (Cavanaugh, 2005). Therefore, the findings highlighted the need for a user-friendly and reliable online platform that provided a seamless learning experience, enabling learners to access course content and engage with the materials without hindrance (Palloff & Pratt, 2003).

With regard to the findings of the present study, the researchers argue that the findings highlight the urgent need for curriculum reform in Iranian vocational schools, particularly through the integration of ESP courses tailored to students' specific fields. The current one-size-fits-all approach to English instruction fails to meet the diverse and specialized linguistic needs of TVE students, as evidenced by their lack of preparedness for professional communication in their future careers. The researchers contend that the inclusion of domain-specific vocabulary and contextualized language practice not only enhances students' language proficiency but also significantly boosts their career readiness. This argument is supported by the positive feedback from participants who expressed a clear preference for ESP materials that directly align with their vocational interests. The researchers further emphasize that bridging the gap between general English education and career-specific language training is essential for aligning educational outcomes with the demands of the globalized workforce.

Overall, the study's findings emphasized the specific context of ESP courses and how challenges in language proficiency and technological aspects could be particularly relevant in professional language learning. While online education has become more prevalent in various fields, ESP courses may have required a more specialized approach to addressing language barriers related to domain-specific terminology and technological challenges specific to professional contexts (Hampel & Stickler, 2005). Therefore, ESP instructors need to be mindful of learners' language needs and provide targeted language support that is aligned with the learners' professional goals and requirements (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Moreover, the study's focus on the subthemes of overcoming language barriers and technological challenges underscored the importance of learner-centered approaches in ESP course design. Tailoring language support and ensuring a smooth online learning experience could enhance learners' motivation, satisfaction, and overall success in the course (Flowerdew, 2015). By addressing these specific challenges, ESP courses could better cater to the unique needs of learners in various professional domains, promoting effective language learning and skill development (Belcher, 2009).

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the significance of specialized English language instruction in the context of technical vocational education. The positive reception and benefits reported by participants in the blended learning course emphasize the practicality and effectiveness of domain-specific language learning, particularly in the field of photography. The course's success in enhancing vocabulary acquisition, boosting confidence, and promoting active language engagement aligns with the core principles of ESP education. Furthermore, the incorporation of interactive online resources and multimedia materials attests to the value of integrating technology to enrich language learning experiences. However, it is important to acknowledge the challenges faced by students, both linguistic and technological, and take them into account when designing future courses. Recommendations for addressing these challenges include a potential adjustment of the language proficiency level to cater to a wider range of students and ensure a smoother learning journey for all.

The development of the online ESP course for photography students in vocational schools has significant implications for teachers, material developers, and syllabus designers. It highlights the potential for using digital platforms to deliver targeted language instruction, integrating specific vocational content with language learning. For material developers, the course offers a template for creating similar ESP courses across various art-related disciplines. Syllabus designers can use these insights to craft tailored

curricula that address the unique linguistic needs of vocational students, ensuring their preparedness for professional communication in their respective fields.

The focus on a small group of second-grade photography students restricts the generalization of the findings of the study. Future research may include a wider range of vocational school students. Additionally, the allocated time for English instruction in vocational curricula poses challenges in TVE. Further research might also delve into the long-term impacts of ESP courses in TVE. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, the insights from this study might shed light on the potential for tailored blended learning approaches to bridge the gap between language proficiency and professional skill development, ultimately fostering a more holistic and effective learning environment for vocational school students.

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Biodata

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