

Developing a Model of Iranian ESP Learners' Communicative Competence

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Abstract

This qualitative study proposed an ESP-oriented communicative competence model in Iranian EFL setting. To this end, a sample of 30 MA-level ESP students were selected based on purposive sampling, from different state and private universities of East and West Azerbaijan provinces, Iran. Among them, 17 were female learners, with eight specializing in mechanical engineering and nine in computer engineering. Additionally, we had thirteen male ESP learners, seven of whom were pursuing mechanical engineering and six specializing in computer engineering. A semi-structured interview was conducted in which the participants were required to speak about their perceptions and experience of ESP students in communicative competence. The findings resulted in a proposed model that emphasized some of the competencies including professional/genre/textual/inter-textual competences that are placed under one category that is professional competence since in ESP competence as the professional competence, ESP students are expected to have knowledge in a specific genre, to be able to read and write specific textual and inter-textual genres, and finally speak professionally. Furthermore, based on the results, linguistic, cultural, discourse and meta-discourse competencies played significant roles in ESP-oriented Communicative Competence. The findings have implications for the stakeholders in the realm of ELT in Iran including policy makers, syllabus designers, practitioners, and learners.

Keywords: Communicative competence, Communicative competence model, ESP courses, ESP learners

INTRODUCTION

It is clear that the trend of globalization in the twenty-first century is fostering greater ties between nations. As a Lingua Franca or a global/international language, English is the language most commonly used for international communication. Given the need to connect internationally and communicate with English speakers, the English language has extended and grown worldwide and cannot be overlooked (Ellis, 2008). Thus, the significance of communication skills can be emphasized.

One of the most well-known and contentious words in the field of English language instruction

is *competence*. Chomsky (1959, as cited in Brown, 1994) was the first to use the term "competence," and he made a distinction between competence (the monolingual speaker-listener's understanding of a language) and performance (the actual use of language in real situations). While the difference between competence and performance was groundbreaking in the field of language and ultimately paved the path for generative grammar, it was really contested by academics like Hymes (1972), who pushed for a communicative approach in applied linguistics. Chomsky's concept of competence, according to Hymes's theory (1972), was unable to effectively take into account the social and functional rules of language. Rather,

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he coined the phrase *communicative competence* to describe a skill that allows people to effectively transfer and comprehend communications as well as exchange meanings with one another in circumstances that are unique (Tas & Khan, 2020).

Even though communicative competence has attracted a lot of interest since the end of the 1980s, it continues to be seen as a new, creating space in L2 acquisition (Dos Santos, 2020). This is because communicative competence development has obtained fewer resources than other aspects of second language acquisition, including grammar, lexis, or phonology. Moreover, it is noteworthy that English language instruction in Iran, functioning within the realm of EFL, has regrettably fallen prey to the confines of a conventional teaching paradigm. Here, students often engage with English primarily as a means to ace examinations, with instructors predominantly focusing on delivering lectures geared towards facilitating this specific objective. In essence, the vitality of effective communication has waned, overshadowed by a disproportionate emphasis on elements like grammar. The result is that students, mostly English for specific purpose (ESP) students, do not possess adequate knowledge of English to communicate effectively with others, hence there is a dire need to develop a communicative competence model for ESP students. All students, no difference in being EFL or ESP students, are required to communicate in order to involve in the society and to gain a good career in future. According to Thomas (1983), learners' inadequate communication awareness and competence is most glaring when they communicate with persons from other cultures. The lack of communication skills among students is partially the fault of the instructors. It is generally observed that teachers tend to focus more on grammar and vocabulary than they do on the pragmatic or sociolinguistic aspect of language (linguistic competence) (Laughlin et al., 2015). It is thought that offering ESP students a communicative competence model may aid them in overcoming the communicative competence failure brought on by ignorance of the sociocultural norms of the target group. It can be

assumed that offering ESP students a communicative competence model may help them to overcome the communicative competence failure caused by a lack of knowledge of the sociocultural norms of the target community because of the significance of ESP courses and the requirement to develop a communicative competence for ESP. Therefore, advocating for the implementation of a communicative competence model tailored for ESP students is posited as a remedy to address their challenges in achieving effective communication, particularly stemming from a lack of awareness regarding the sociocultural norms of the target community. This proposed model is envisioned to serve as a transformative tool, assisting ESP students in navigating and overcoming communicative hurdles.

The communicative competence model, specifically designed for ESP, functions as a comprehensive framework. It not only equips students with linguistic proficiency but also hones their ability to navigate the intricate sociocultural landscape of the professional domains they are preparing for. By integrating contextualized language use with an understanding of the cultural nuances inherent to their field, ESP students can transcend mere language acquisition and develop a nuanced and culturally sensitive communicative competence.

Significantly, this model addresses the prevalent issue of communicative competence failure, which often results from a limited grasp of the sociocultural norms within the target community. By emphasizing real-world applications of language in professional contexts, ESP students can enhance their ability to articulate ideas, negotiate meaning, and effectively communicate within their specific fields. The significance of this model lies in its potential to bridge the gap between theoretical language knowledge and practical, contextually relevant communication skills, thereby preparing ESP students for success in their professional endeavors. Ultimately, it fosters a holistic approach to language learning that goes beyond exam-oriented education, promoting the development of well-rounded and culturally attuned communicators in specialized domains.

A plethora of research has delved into linguistic, communicative, and interactional competences (e.g., Makhmudov, 2023; Mokhtari

& Thompson, 2006; Kiessling & Fabry, 2021; Liao, 2007). However, scant attention has been devoted to the development of a communicative competence model tailored specifically for ESP learners in contexts such as Iran. Recognizing this research gap, and with the intention of addressing it, the current study embarked on the endeavor to construct a communicative competence model for ESP learners through a qualitative research approach. In light of this, the following research question was formulated:

RQ. *How do ESP learners perceive communicative competence (CC)?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

As early as 3000 years ago, the Chinese used written civil service exams instead of recommendations from superiors to select candidates for government positions (Hoge et al., 2005). Social efficiency rose to prominence in the United States around the turn of the 20th century, and after this time, it spread to most professions, including those in education. Competence has been described in a variety of ways by academics. Dubois (1998), for example, described it as "those characteristics—knowledge, skills, mindsets, thought patterns, and the like—that when utilized either singularly or in multiple combinations, lead to effective performance" (p. 10). Competence is based on knowledge, abilities, and values that are learned through fundamental academic instruction, first professional training, and development through professional experience. Hoff, 2020).

Using this notion, competences can be built through understanding, abilities, and mindsets. Nevertheless, only the application of knowledge, the display of successful skills, and visible attitudes-related actions serve as essential and sufficient criteria for competence. Information is factual. According to Hoge, Tondora, and Marrelli (2005), knowledge is the awareness, information, or understanding of facts, rules, principles, concepts, or procedures that is required to carry out a job's duties. Knowledge can be divided into broad knowledge and disciplinary knowledge and is typically obtained through formal schooling, on-the-job training, and professional experience (Evers, Rush, & Berdrow, 1998).

According to Boyatzis (1982), "skill is the capacity to show a system and series of behavior that are operationally associated with attaining a performance objective" (p. 33) is the other factor. The ability may be picked up in a formal school setting or informally while working. Skills are frequently subject-specific. It is necessary to identify the specific abilities required for each job or profession in order to acquire the competencies for that job or career. Skills are not isolated possessions. They are linked to one another, to knowledge, to ideals, and to one another, and they support one another.

Since they are rather simple to recognize and develop through training, knowledge and skills are regarded as "surface" competences (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). However, there are cognitive abilities that allow the person to learn and perform well. These traits are collectively referred to as attitudes, together with analytical thinking skills, motives, engagement, self-image, values, interests, and preferences. Positive attitudes can result in higher performance, whereas negative attitudes might destroy the job (Roe, 1999). Attitudes are of "bi-directional causality" (Roe, 1999). As a result, attitudes are more intricate than information and abilities. Additionally, it takes time to create attitudes when building competence (Üstüner et al., 2009). According to Johnson (1994), since beliefs are not directly observable, they are difficult to define and examine. What is known is that beliefs are made up of unspoken assumptions and views about teaching and learning, are often robust, and are a reflection of the type of instruction a teacher gives their pupils (Chiu & Churchill, 2016).

In light of the aforementioned components, researchers have attempted to develop communicative competence models suitable for particular contexts over the past few decades. For example, one of the most well-known approaches to communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) links it to the knowledge and skills required for communication. Grammar, sociolinguistics, and strategic competency comprised the initial three fundamental components of the theoretical framework provided by Canale (1980) and Swain (1981). In a subsequent iteration of

this concept, Canale (1983, 1984) moved some sociolinguistic competence components into the fourth competency, which he called discourse competence. According to other researchers (Bachman & Palmer, 1982), the morphology, syntax, lexis, coherence, and arrangement of the text are all related to communication ability. Studies have focused on instructors' and student perspectives in the language teaching and learning field in the past and present to acquire data on communicative competence (Boroujeni & Fard, 2013; Candel-Mora, 2015).

English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) instructors, scholars, and educators have recognized the significant of L2 instruction in preparing L2 learners for linguistically interacting and effectively communicating in international environments (Hismanoglu, 2011). In addition to having knowledge of language and grammar, L2 learners should be able to develop sociolinguistic and communicative skills to effectively interact and communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds (Ghasemi et al., 2019). Due to the large number of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) students around the world, L2 learners are not the only group that needs to pay close attention to communicative competence. The major stakeholders and investigators should also take ESP competency into consideration. Presumably, in the broad field of ESP, the growth of ESP competence "takes place in behavior, and it depends on learners' experiences, and consequently students form new experiences" (Lka, 2007, p.49) in accordance with the objectives of this study and the statements made above. The ability to creatively use the English language both receptively and productively in communication and professional work is known as ESP competence. It is a person's collection of acquired experience, attitude, and skills developed on the basis of learning.

METHOD

Participants

The population of this study were all of Iranian ESP learners at MA level from mechanical and computer engineering MA candidates who were already studying their specialized courses

in English at university. This study involved a sample of 30 ESP participants, comprising 17 female ESP students (with 8 majoring in mechanical engineering and 9 in computer engineering) and 13 male ESP students (with 7 majoring in mechanical engineering and 6 in computer engineering). They were selected non-randomly, based on purposive sampling, from different universities (Tabriz University, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch, Urmia University, Islamic Azad University, Urmia Branch, Azarshahr Branch, Maragheh University) of East and West Azerbaijan provinces. Purposive sampling was used to include male and female participants from the mentioned majors. In sum, it can be stated that a combination of availability and purposive sampling was used. The students were MA and their age range was between 27 to 38. All individuals in question possess a foundation of knowledge in the English language and have completed courses in both university and external settings. However, they do not qualify as highly proficient in general English.

Materials and Instruments

An open-ended semi-structured interview was conducted in which the participants were required to speak on their perceptions and their experience in communicative competence. For the interview section, just 30 ESP candidates were selected based on purposive sampling, from among ESP students. All of 30 participants voluntarily took part in the interview, after signing the consent form. The questions were formulated by drawing insights from the literature review and were centered on the difficulties participants face in grasping the concept of communicative competence. These inquiries focused on the specific expectations teachers have for students in enhancing their communicative competence levels. These questions were not rigid in nature, but they were flexible and allowed the participants to think and express their own answers freely. Special sessions were organized for those learners who could not come to office-hour sessions and those who expressed interests in continuing to participate in the discussion. Tailor-made life history questions designed to extract in-

formation about participants' perceptions and experiences were employed during the interview sessions. In addition to note-taking, all interviews were recorded in audio format for subsequent transcription. To account for the construct validity of the findings, grounded on the basic tenets and the fundamental issues of communicative competence which were reviewed in the existing literature (Kakhramonovich, 2021; Tulasi & Murthy, 2022), the interview questions were formulated based on the following central topics:

Definition of CC in ESP (e.g., Have you ever heard the term "communicative competence"? What is your definition of CC as an ESP student?)

Actions to tackle CC (e.g., What actions do you take in the class and out of the class to tackle communicative competence?)

Reinforcing CC by ESP teacher (e.g., What activities do your English professor do in the class to improve your communicative competence?)

Solving deficiencies in communication (e.g., What measures or activities teachers implement when they confront with students' deficiencies in communication?)

Role of culture in CC (e.g., What is the role of interacting with another culture in improving CC?)

Role of linguistic competence in CC (e.g., Do you believe that increasing the level of linguistic/grammatical competence lead you to increase communicative and consequently professional competence in ESP course?)

Extra factors pertaining to CC (e.g., Could you mention to the extra factors or competences that resulted in high CC in ESP courses?).

In this study, the researchers tried to decrease the interview bias to its minimum possible degree (Riazi, 2016) by allowing the interviewees to express their ideas freely. Also, there were various new questions as new themes emerged (Drenten, 2012). To assess the credibility of the interview questions, the researcher presented the information obtained from the interviewees and requested them to carefully review each question along with the answers they provided. This was done to identify any discrepancies or issues in the responses. Participants confirmed the accuracy of the data, thereby validating the credibility of the interviews. In terms of dependability, 30% of the interview findings underwent a re-evaluation by two colleagues of the researcher who were well-versed in data analysis. The inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen's kappa and reported to be 90.

Data Collection Procedure

The current study posited that communicative competence extends beyond linguistic, grammatical, and discourse competence. It also hypothesized that specific profile variables, such as cultural competence, may impact the fluctuations in learners' communicative competence. The primary method of data collection in this study involved conducting interviews. In this regard, 20 learners of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) took part in interviews to discuss their perspectives on and attitudes toward communicative competence. In essence, descriptive equivalents or verbal descriptions were offered to facilitate the interpretation of the results. A room was chosen where no interruptions would hinder the audio-taping of the discussions. The interviews started with several easy factual and personal questions (Dörnyei, 2007) such as their degrees, exposure to English outside the university, the level of their learning, and so on.

Each participant was interviewed on an individual audiotape to ensure there was no confusion and the participants were identified by the researcher based on the codes. The researcher's desire was to allow the interview to remain fairly conversational and free from anxiety to gain a collection of comprehensive study data. Each student was interviewed once and the interviews were in Persian. Each audio taped interview was transcribed. After this process, the researcher analyzed the transcripts looking for the brief trends and patterns.

The fundamental unit of meaning in this study was the sentences constructed by ESP students. Sentences sharing identical codes were grouped together to create categories, representing a level above the codes in the initial or open coding phase. In this way, the researcher detected a wide range of concepts and categories regarding the challenging factors which were reduced later. Then, the researcher tried to develop

the core categories by generating the connections among the different (sub) categories applying the axial coding. Finally, in selective coding, some categories were integrated to create an overall model for factors related to communicative competence of the Iranian ESP learners.

To explore university students' perspectives on communicative competence, this study concentrated on the perceptions of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners. The analysis of these perceptions involved a detailed qualitative data analysis approach, with the results derived from interviews with ESP learners being discussed and analyzed using grounded theory. The ultimate aim was to formulate a communicative competence model tailored to ESP learners at the Master's level. It is worth noting that in a grounded theory, "a researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind. Rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). In other words, an in-depth analysis of the data is done, and through processing, the researcher's thoughts and impressions emerge in the form of a theoretical concept (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Data Analysis Procedure

The central focus of this study revolved around uncovering the grounded perceptions of communicative competence held by English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners. Systematic data was obtained from the opinions of ESP learners. In the grounded theory approach employed, the theory unfolds at the conclusion of the study and may be represented as a logical diagram, visually illustrating relationships among concepts. To ensure the dependability of data codification, inter-rater agreement assessments were conducted. Randomly selected transcriptions were provided to a colleague with ample experience in qualitative research analysis, who then performed the coding based on the rubric identified by the researchers. Finally, the proposed model was presented.

RESULTS

The data collected from the interviews were directly transcribed in order to avoid any bias. In order to answer the research question of the present study, grounded theory in three coding

stages was employed. Three levels of coding of grounded theory, i.e., open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, were considered in data analysis. First, in the open coding, the data were broken down analytically (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) into chunks and conceptual categories were assigned to the data segments (Dörnyei, 2007). Second, in the axial coding, the researchers tried to find a relationship between categories, to incorporate them, and to group them under the central concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this study, a set of sub-categories were developed in axial coding. Finally, in the selective coding, the researchers selected a 'core category' with a high level of abstraction under which other categories were subsumed. In this study, the sub-categories developed in the axial level were assigned into two main categories of the activities to tackle CC and extra competencies play roles in CC, which resulted in the core category of the ESP students' awareness of CC. In addition to these three levels of coding of grounded theory, this study considered two significant factors that should be considered in qualitative data collection and analysis proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990), that iteration and saturation. The data can be summarized as follows and the elaboration can be observed in the following sections.

Core Category: ESP Students' Awareness of Communicative Competence (CC)

Activities to Tackle CC

- 1. Definition of CC by Students:**
 - Turn-taking in conversation
 - Integration of professional and general English in job settings
- 2. Actions by Students to Improve CC:**
 - Use of social media, YouTube, and Twitter to learn specific words related to majors
 - Utilization of podcasts for improving specific English
 - Finding and collaborating with native friends for writing research articles
- 3. ESP Teachers' Activities:**
 - Oral presentations and report writing
 - Interdisciplinary collaboration
 - Use of ICT for enhancing CC
 - Highlighting the role of professional writing

- Decreasing teacher talk and increasing student talk
- Activating background knowledge

Deficiencies in Communication and Teachers' Strategies to Solve Them

1. Strategies by Teachers:

- Corrective feedback to address low knowledge
- Increasing student talk to improve CC
- Activating background knowledge for better communication

Extra Competencies in CC

1. Culture's Role in CC:

- Culture as a building block of CC
- Intercultural competence's significance in understanding and appreciating one's culture

2. Linguistic Competence:

- Importance of linguistic/grammatical competence for communicative and professional competence
- Weaknesses in verb usage, adverbs, and interjections affecting communication
- Making meaningful connections through transitional devices and conjunctions

3. Additional Competencies in CC:

- Intercultural competence
- Genre familiarity
- Textual and inter-textual competencies
- Professional competence
- Discourse competence
- Meta-discourse competence

Model of Communicative Competence in ESP Courses

• Components:

- Grammatical rules (verbs, nouns, function words)
- Coherence, cohesion, and knowledge of the world
- Genre familiarity, textual and inter-textual competencies
- Intercultural competence
- Discourse and meta-discourse competencies

Specific knowledge of the course

In sum, the ESP-oriented communicative competence model encompasses various components and sub-categories extracted from the interview results and coding procedure. This

codification provides a structured overview of the grounded theory results, emphasizing the key categories, activities, deficiencies, and extra competencies related to communicative competence in the context of ESP courses. Following is a brief description of each category.

Activities to tackle CC

Before moving to the activities enhancing CC and Solving deficiencies in communication, especially in ESP courses, there was a need to explore students' ideas on CC and its definitions. Based on the following extracts, ESP students mentioned to the codes such as turn-taking in conversation and integration of professional and general English in job settings.

Extract 1: *In my idea, turn-taking while taking part in a conversation with a competence person or a native speaker, is called CC in ESP.*

Extract 2: *Using specific and professional English especially in where you work can be called ESP CC.*

Extract 3: *Ability to use English, both general and specific, is called CC.*

Extract 4: *Using specific English in job and integrating it with the delicacies of general English is the gist of CC in ESP courses.*

In terms of actions to improve CC by the students themselves, they pointed out the codes such as using social media in general and you-tube and twitter in particular to learn specific words related to their majors, using podcasts, and finding native friends in social media and writing research articles with them. For example, one of the computer science students (male, 27 years old) stated:

Extract 5: *One of my friends during MA course, find a friend who was originally in England but lived in India for education and they together published an article and this continued until he migrated to Canada to pursue his education. I am sure that this activity (finding native friends in social media and writing research articles with them) resulted in being expert and I try to find native friends to cooperate with them in publishing articles that resulted in high CC.*

The other ESP student (female/ mechanic student) mentioned the activities such as podcasts and using social media that were repeated



by 16 students that surely play significant roles in improving CC.

Extract 6: My general English level is not bad because I got my TOEFL from ILI language center in Tabriz, however to improve my specific English, I listen to the podcasts and use you-tube that its images integrated with voices and sometimes the subtitles help me to obtain update information in my major.

Based on the results of the interview regarding ESP teachers' activities in order to improve the levels of CC in their classes (What activities do your English professor do in the class to improve your communicative competence?), the interviewees reported the various tasks such as oral presentations and report writing, interdisciplinary collaboration, and employment of ICT that some of ESP teachers, but not all of them, do as professional activities to enhance CC.

Extract 7: Some of ESP professors, but not all of them, try to encourage us to use oral presentations and report writing to enhance our language learning experiences and to improve communication skills in general.

Extract 8: One of my educated and high skill professors believed in the synergy produced by group work and interdisciplinary collaboration. He always says that this collaterally improves significantly the communication skills of most students, simply because this approach is based on the needs, preferences, and interests of the students and let them become accustomed to situations in which they will have to apply their knowledge of English to a labor context where people work and communicate across cultures. For this reason, I try to find friends who are interested in team work in order to improve my CC level.

Extract 9: One of the important activities to improve CC by ESP instructors inside the classroom was highlighting the role of professional writing. The teacher taught the steps to be followed when writing technical reports, and gave them the opportunity to explore topics with a certain complexity. These steps prepare ESP students for their future and provide them with information they can apply outside academia.

In terms of the category of deficiencies in communication and teachers' strategies to

solve them, the codes of corrective feedback, increasing student's talk, and activating background knowledge were obtained as a result of iteration and saturation. Extract 10-12 elaborates on the codes.

Extract 10: The professors try to use corrective feedback when the students stop communication as a result of low knowledge. The teachers help students to correct their errors and encourage them to ask whatever they want to know about English language and culture.

Extract 11: Most of the teachers try to decrease teacher talk and increase student's talk to solve the problems in communication and to improve CC, consequently.

Extract 12: Some of the teachers try to activate students' background knowledge and encourage them to remember the related items while they stop communication. The teachers present hints and as a result, the students start speaking and even writing.

Extra competencies play roles in CC

The second major category was extra competencies related to CC. The interviewees point of views towards the role of culture in CC (e.g., What is the role of interacting with another culture in improving CC?) showed the significance role of culture in enhancing CC. all of the participants saw culture as the building block of CC and as cornerstone to increase CC levels in ESP courses. Extract 13 elaborates in this code.

Extract 13: It is necessary to address culture and intercultural competence in Iran's context since in my point of view, they are integrated. It helps ESP students understand and appreciate own culture and consequently increase the level of knowledge in English. The culture and the language are quite interconnected and they move along hand in hand. It Apparently is not plausible to put aside either of them and we should know that language and culture are the flip-side of the same coin. In fact, the integrated and embedded nature of language and culture force teachers and textbook designers to not isolate these two terms.

In the second category, linguistic competence was emphasized. The interviewees reported on the importance of linguistic/grammatical competence, as the following extracts show:

Extract 14: Surely increasing the level of linguistic/grammatical competence leads us to increase in communicative and consequently professional competence in ESP course. Linguistic competence is the mastery of knowledge of the language code itself. This involves controlling the formal organization of the language for producing or recognizing correct sentences and organizing them to form texts. Linguistic competence includes the rules of word formation and vocabulary (lexicon), pronunciation (phonology), and sentence formation (syntax). In order to speak accurately, you should master in all of these areas and without them, speaking, interaction, and communication are not come through.

Extract 15: I myself have low knowledge, ability and skill in determining the function of verb that is to describe an action, state, or occurrence, and forming the main part of the predicate of a sentence. I am also weak in determining the two main categories of verbs and their function in the sentence as well as in recognizing the functions of “verb as a system in which the form of the verb reflects the person, number, and/or gender of one or more arguments. This low ability resulted in my low communication both in speaking and in writing. If I try my best to improve grammar and language knowledge, surely, I will progress my professional knowledge, as well.

Extract 16: The other weakness is in terms of adverbs and in understanding that an adverb in a word or phrase modifies or qualifies an adjective, verb, or other adverb or a word group, expressing a relation of place, time, circumstance, manner, cause, and degree. Meanwhile, I have difficulty understanding the interjections. With all of these problems in mind, how I could speak in English? Hence, definitely knowledge of linguistic competence resulted in the communicative knowledge.

Extract 17: Consider a person who is weak in making meaningful connections of words, phases, clauses and sentences as there is a need for them to have enough knowledge and understanding on the functions and use of transitional devices particularly the different kinds of conjunctions, without understanding all of these facts, it is impossible to communicate in English or each language you are learning.

Finally, the extra factors pertaining to CC (e.g., Could you mention to the extra factors or competences that resulted in high CC in ESP courses?) was questioned. In general, in the second category (Extra competencies in CC), the codes of intercultural competence, grammatical competence, genre familiarity, textual and inter-textual competencies, professional competence, discourse competence, and meta-discourse competence were mentioned by ESP students as ESP related CC. Extracts 18-21 elaborate on the competencies that from them, the model of communicative competence in ESP courses is presented in Figure 1.

*Extract 18: The formation of grammatical rules including knowledge of verbs, nouns, function words, and so on is an urgent task for understanding the role of interaction and communication. Definitely, **grammatical rules accompanied with the knowledge of coherence, cohesion, and knowledge of world** resulted in high communication and interaction.*

*Extract 19: Learning a language, at the first phase, includes the ability to understand and express a certain meaning, formalizing it in the form of phrases and sentences built according to the rules of a given language. At the second phase, it includes producing and using language in the form of speaking, which again is the result of mastery in the former that is the rules of language, however, extra factors and competencies such as **genre familiarity, textual and inter-textual competencies, and professional competence** are needed to increase ESP students' CC levels.*

*Extract 20: I myself believe in both discourse and meta-discourse competencies. By meta-discourse competencies, I mean communicating effectively by native speakers like natives. Furthermore, **knowledge of strategies or strategic competence** that natives use while speaking or writing is of prime importance.*

*Extract 21: Besides **knowledge of linguistic rules, intercultural competence** along with the **specific knowledge of the course** can be mentioned as the other related competencies.*

Based on the interview results and coding procedure, an ESP-oriented communicative competence model was proposed containing different items and sub-categories extracted from the data analysis.



Figure 1
Proposed ESP-oriented CC

As Figure 1 shows, ESP-oriented CC is an integration of various competencies that they are embedded in the major competence that is ESP-oriented CC, however, as it is shown, some of the competencies such as professional/genre/textual/inter-textual competences are placed under one category that is professional competence since in ESP competence as the professional competence, ESP student should have knowledge in specific genre and could read and write specific textual and inter-textual genres, and finally speak professionally. To reach this ability, linguistic competence or knowledge of rules is necessary. Besides, an ESP student to be communicatively skillful, he/she should pertain to both discourse and meta-discoursal competences that can be equated with strategic competence. All of these competencies need knowledge of culture or intercultural competence that without it, communication may happen but not in a straightforward road. Finally, to increase ESP-oriented CC, both ESP professors and students are needed to use activities inside and outside the classrooms, as mentioned by the interviewees, such as using social media, using podcasts, and finding native friends in social media and writing research articles with them, giving corrective feedback, oral presentation, and writing specific genres. All of these surely resulted in high ESP-oriented CC.

DISCUSSION

This study sets out to develop a communicative competence model for ESP learners using qualitative-based research. The results proposed an ESP-based communicative competence that is a combination of various competences such as professional/genre/textual/inter-textual competences are placed under one category that is professional competence since in ESP competence as the professional competence, ESP student should have knowledge in specific genre and could read and write specific textual and inter-textual genres, and finally speak professionally. Genre competence helps young researchers who are novice academic writers meet their discipline-specific writing needs. The genre-based approach has been argued to be especially helpful in second language (L2) writing instruction, as L2 learners face additional challenges in developing genre competence (Hyland, 2007). The focus on a specific discipline and genre is informed by previous findings that the teaching of rhetorical structures is most effective when tailored to a specific target genre and discipline (e.g., Biber & Conrad, 2009; Henry & Roseberry, 1998; Lu, Casal, & Liu, 2020; Lu, Yoon, & Kisselev, 2018).

The emphasis on engineering RAs is motivated by the growing requirement for young engineering researchers in China to publish in international journals in English that specific-

ly target this need. The current study's findings are in line with those of Dong and Lu (2020), who looked at the possibility of incorporating corpus-based and genre-based approaches to teaching rhetorical structures in a course on academic writing in English that is specialized to a certain discipline. 30 master's level students studying mechanical or electrical engineering at a top-tier Chinese research university who were taking a course on academic writing related to their field participated in this study. The findings demonstrated that using the specific corpus search and analysis techniques used in the study alone could lead to a fragmented understanding of the rhetorical structures of the target genre, and that it is necessary to combine them with other techniques that take a more comprehensive approach to genre analysis.

The results are consistent with Osman's (2004) investigation on the application of genre-based instruction (GBI) to the teaching of writing for particular purposes. The main goal was to demonstrate the preparation needed for GBI and how it was used in an ESP environment. The essay also attempted to emphasize how crucial it is for ESP students to comprehend the methods of discourse and genre knowledge of the profession they would enter into in the years to come.

The researcher concluded that this approach is recommended not only as a basis for teaching ESP but also for the teachers' professional development. Analyzing professional genres and GBI help ESP practitioners gain insight into pedagogical implications. Findings from genre analyses have also contributed to developments in curricula for ESP.

As stated, the current study concluded that in order to reach knowledge in specific genre, an ESP student needs to have linguistic competence or knowledge of rules as a necessity. The following two extracts clearly evident the role of grammatical competence in ESP-based CC.

Extract 22: The basis of the foreign language communicative competence is the grammatical competence, which is based on grammatical skills, knowledge of the rules of the language. I am sure that without knowing the rules of a language, speaking and communicating it is not possible.

Extract 23: To learn and to communicate in English, everybody needs to understand the knowledge of the grammatical elements of the language and the ability to use them in speech. In fact, rules are in our brains and the communication is the result of the mastery of the rules. Hence, these two along with the other elements such as the knowledge of the world are obligatory for high communication.

As it is axiomatic, the gist of communicative competence is grammatical or linguistic competence. The findings are consistent with Voyakina, Korolyova, and Gunina's discussion on the fundamentals of communicative competence and strategies for fostering it in law students in 2020. The research revealed that when teaching a foreign language, the four elements of communicative competence should be respected. As a result, teachers are expected to use strategies and approaches that advance communicative teaching. The researchers came to the conclusion that it is crucial in ESP courses since they are designed to improve students' proficiency in business communication in a foreign language. Language, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competency development are the main topics of the English for Law Students course. The course's tasks properly satisfy the needs and expectations of learners as well as the goals outlined in the educational standards. The development of communicative competence is discussed in the context of teaching and learning foreign languages as a mixture of linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic skills.

The findings are consistent with Tuan's work from 2017, which sought to develop a suggested English language curriculum for five important Vietnamese universities. The study's main conclusions in general show that the academic influence of the students' parents is a factor in determining the pupils' level of communicative ability. Their opportunity for formal and rigorous learning, speaking with an English native speaker, extensive exposure to social media networks, and reading materials written in English all contribute to their linguistic/grammatical and discourse competency. In terms of language proficiency, the students' biggest areas of strength are the

use and functions of nouns, pronouns, and prepositions, while their areas of weakness are the use and functions of conjunctions, adverbs, interjections, and verbs. It has been observed that fourth-year students who are linguistically proficient in a language's entire system and structure—consisting of syntax, morphology, inflections, phonology, and semantics—tend to speak or write with authority about a subject or to engage in conversation. Researchers such as Dáz-Rico & Weed (2010) and Gao (2001) asserted that the aim of language training is to acquire knowledge of and the ability to employ grammatically correct and precise forms of expression. The respondents' emphasis on acquiring grammar skills supports their findings. As the learner gains proficiency, grammatical/linguistic competence becomes more crucial (Gao, 2001) and promotes correctness and fluency in second language performance (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2010). In like manner, along communicative competence particularly linguistic competence, Kroger (2005) discussed that good knowledge on the parts of speech is necessary.

Additional studies revealed that an ESP student must possess discourse and metadiscourse competences, which are comparable to strategic competence, in order to be communicatively skilled. Without cultural understanding or intercultural competence, any of these talents may be used, but communication would not be easy. Finally, as mentioned by the interviewees, in order to increase ESP-oriented CC, both ESP professors and students must use activities both inside and outside of the classroom, including using social media, podcasts, and making native friends on social media in order to collaborate on research articles, providing constructive criticism, giving oral presentations, and writing specific genres. These all undoubtedly produced a high ESP-oriented CC. The capacity to resolve communication issues before, during, or after they arise is known as strategic competency. Given that this competence gives the ability to solve challenges of different kinds using verbal and non-verbal means of communication, it is essential for learners to have strategic competence so as to feel greater at ease in interactions with the interlocutor whereas understanding a foreign language text (Voyakina, Korolyova, &

Gunina, 2020). In terms of cultural awareness and culturally sensitivity, the findings of the present study were comparable to those of studies by Saricoban and Oz (2014), Gu (2016), Gu (2018), Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018), and Cuartas lvarez (2020). In all of the studies, interculturality and ICC awareness, cross-cultural knowledge, intercultural stance, and understanding of intercultural communicative competence were of prime importance. To sum up, it is worth noting that the components of communicative competence mentioned here as ESP-oriented CC components should be respected in teaching ESP courses, which means that teachers are expected to employ methods and teaching techniques to serve the goal of communicative teaching.

CONCLUSION

Since everyone is involved in communication in today's global environment, it is crucial to understand its importance. Effective communication is regarded as a paramount learning skill, holding immense significance, particularly in ESP contexts. Communication serves as a cornerstone for relationship-building and knowledge transfer. Language, as a vital communication tool, equips individuals with the means to actively engage in society, articulate ideas, and gain insights into the people and environment in their surroundings. Given the pivotal role of communication, this study aims to advance a model for communicative competence specifically tailored to ESP courses. The findings from interviews with 30 Master's candidates in mechanic and computer engineering, who were already immersed in studying their respective courses in English at university, revealed that Communicative Competence (CC) in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context encompassed themes and competencies. These included professional competence with subcategories like professional, genre, textual, and inter-textual competences; discourse and metadiscoursal competences; linguistic competence; genre competence; strategic competence; and intercultural competence. In the open coding process, participants identified these as prominent themes. Additionally, the participants grouped initial codes, such as knowledge of linguistic elements (verbs, prepo-

sitions, connectors, etc.), as essential components contributing to communicative competence. Ultimately, the grammatical and discourse competence of learners is shaped by their limited exposure to the English language, particularly in a context like Iran. It was observed that the higher the exposure of learners to the English language, the more elevated their communicative competence tends to be. In light of the study's findings, a proficiency enhancement program has been put forth, with the conviction that this proposed English language initiative holds the potential to optimize efficiency in second language acquisition.

In order to emphasize the importance of communicative competence, the university administration may explore using computer-aided and animated audio and video presentations to improve the learners' language and discourse skills. They ought to implement a teaching strategy that gives ESP students more exposure to the English language. Students are provided numerous, rich opportunities to improve their communication skills in this way. Although the current study has numerous drawbacks, including a small sample size and a lack of a quantitatively based methodology, it is the first to use a qualitative study with in-depth analysis of the themes to focus on ESP-oriented CC. A mixed-method approach is advised for additional research in order to validate the findings.

In conclusion, the proposed model holds significant implications for stakeholders involved in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. These stakeholders encompass ESP instructors, field experts, ESP students, policy-makers, as well as entities like SAMT Publishing and the Board of Editors, all of whom are users or beneficiaries of this study. The comprehensive outcome of this research delineates the necessary factors and actions that ESP/EAP (English for Academic Purposes) instructors need to undertake to leverage the findings for enhancing the role of communicative competence (CC) in ESP lessons.

This study's findings offer valuable guidance for ESP/EAP instructors, enabling them to deliver more effective education that ultimately elevates the communicative competence of ESP learners, as evidenced by the proposed CC model within

an ESP context. Beyond the ESP community, the insights derived from this study are also pertinent to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. In essence, teachers are entrusted with the responsibility to implement and emphasize diverse communicative methods, ensuring their students enhance their communicative skills. Additionally, teachers play a crucial role in adapting assignments to facilitate student success, simplifying language to expedite learning and comprehension processes. In light of these conclusions, the broader educational community stands to benefit from the actionable recommendations provided by this study, fostering a more robust approach to language instruction and communicative competence development.

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