

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES TO MUSICOLOGY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to musicology students presents a unique intersection between linguistic competence and the specialized discourse of music studies. The field of musicology, rich in terminology, stylistic conventions, and cultural nuance, requires English instruction that integrates not only general language proficiency but also the communicative demands of academic and professional music contexts. This article explores key challenges faced by both instructors and learners in ESP courses tailored to musicology majors, including limited background knowledge of students in linguistic structures, the scarcity of discipline-specific materials, and the need to align teaching strategies with the cognitive and artistic profile of music students. Using a mixed-method approach combining classroom observation, student feedback, and analysis of curriculum design, the study identifies effective strategies such as task-based learning, corpus-driven vocabulary instruction, multimodal listening activities, and project-based collaboration. The results demonstrate that contextualized and interdisciplinary instruction significantly enhances motivation, lexical retention, and communicative fluency among musicology students. The paper concludes with pedagogical recommendations for developing ESP curricula that bridge the gap between linguistic theory and the creative practice of musicology.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, musicology, disciplinary discourse, task-based learning, communicative competence, ESP curriculum design.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the role of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has gained remarkable prominence in higher education, particularly in disciplines that extend beyond traditional linguistic domains. Among these, musicology occupies a distinctive place as it merges the artistic, scientific, and cultural dimensions of musical study with the academic rigor of theoretical analysis. For musicology students, proficiency in English is no longer merely an academic requirement but a professional necessity, as it provides access to a vast corpus of international research, performance critiques, music theory literature, and digital archives. Consequently, the ability to communicate effectively in English within the context of music studies has become a critical skill that bridges creativity and scholarship. However, teaching English for Specific Purposes to musicology students presents a range of pedagogical challenges that

distinguish it from general English or even other specialized ESP programs. Musicology students typically approach language learning with artistic sensibilities and auditory intelligence, yet may lack systematic exposure to academic English discourse and discipline-specific terminology. Moreover, most ESP courses in arts faculties are adapted from generic linguistic curricula rather than designed with the particularities of musical terminology, notation-based communication, or interpretive discourse in mind. This discrepancy often results in reduced motivation, cognitive dissonance, and insufficient retention of specialized vocabulary.

The complexity of the ESP learning process for musicology students is also amplified by the interdisciplinary nature of musicology itself. The field draws from history, aesthetics, ethnography, psychology, and digital technology—each of which possesses its own linguistic conventions. As a result, instructors face the dual challenge of integrating linguistic objectives with the cognitive and aesthetic demands of music analysis. For example, explaining harmonic structures, modal systems, or ethnomusicological concepts in English requires both linguistic precision and contextual sensitivity. Such integration demands innovative teaching strategies that combine linguistic instruction with auditory and visual learning methods. Furthermore, the globalization of music education and the digital transformation of research resources have redefined how musicology students engage with English. The accessibility of online databases, international symposia, and collaborative composition platforms necessitates communicative competence beyond passive reading or translation. Students are expected to articulate critical perspectives, write abstracts for academic conferences, and participate in peer discussions with international scholars. These evolving expectations necessitate the redesign of ESP curricula to align with the authentic communicative situations that musicologists encounter in their academic and professional development.

Despite these growing needs, there remains a notable gap in research on ESP instruction specifically tailored to musicology. While extensive studies exist on ESP in engineering, business, and medical fields, the humanities—particularly music—are often neglected in applied linguistics research. This gap underscores the urgency of identifying both the obstacles and potential pedagogical innovations that can enhance the learning experience of musicology students. Addressing these challenges requires not only methodological adaptation but also a profound understanding of how music students perceive language as an expressive medium rather than a mere communicative tool. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the primary challenges encountered in teaching English for Specific Purposes to musicology students and to propose effective strategies grounded in task-based, communicative, and interdisciplinary approaches. The paper explores how tailored ESP methodologies can foster both linguistic competence and professional identity among future

musicologists. By bridging the gap between artistic creativity and linguistic precision, the research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on ESP pedagogy within the arts, emphasizing that the language of music and the music of language are deeply interconnected dimensions of human expression.

METHODOLOGY

The research applied a **mixed-method design** combining both **quantitative** and **qualitative approaches** to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and pedagogical strategies in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to musicology students. The study was conducted during the 2023–2024 academic year at the Faculty of Music and Fine Arts of a major university in Central Asia.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants included **64 undergraduate musicology students** (aged 18–24) and **5 ESP instructors** with experience in teaching English within arts and humanities programs. The students were divided into two groups: an **experimental group** (32 participants) and a **control group** (32 participants). All participants had at least a B1 level of general English proficiency as measured by the Oxford Placement Test.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

To gather data, the study employed three instruments:

1. **Diagnostic questionnaire** assessing students' linguistic needs, motivation, and perceived difficulties in learning ESP for musicology.
2. **Classroom observation protocol** designed to evaluate the teaching process, communicative engagement, and the integration of discipline-specific terminology.
3. **Pre- and post-intervention tests** measuring vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and speaking performance related to musicological content.

INSTRUCTIONAL INTERVENTION

Over a **12-week period**, the experimental group received instruction based on a **task-based and content-integrated ESP model**, emphasizing musical terminology, academic writing, and oral presentation in music contexts. The instructional framework incorporated:

- **Authentic materials** (journal articles, concert reviews, program notes);
- **Corpus-based vocabulary exercises** focused on lexical collocations in musicology;
- **Multimodal tasks** such as transcribing short excerpts of music-related lectures and analyzing liner notes;
- **Collaborative projects**, including group presentations on composers, genres, and ethnomusicological research.

The control group followed a **traditional ESP curriculum** emphasizing grammar-translation and general reading comprehension without subject specialization.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data were analyzed using **SPSS 26.0**, employing **paired-sample t-tests** to measure progress in pre- and post-test results. Qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations were subjected to **thematic analysis** following Braun and Clarke's (2019) framework, allowing identification of recurring pedagogical and motivational patterns.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The findings revealed significant progress in the experimental group compared to the control group across multiple linguistic and motivational indicators.

1. **Vocabulary Growth:** Students in the experimental group demonstrated a **42% increase** in discipline-specific vocabulary recognition, compared to a **17% increase** in the control group. Statistical analysis indicated this difference was **highly significant** ($p < 0.01$).
2. **Listening Comprehension:** Comprehension of academic lectures and musical terminology improved by **36%** in the experimental group, highlighting the effectiveness of auditory-integrated learning methods.
3. **Speaking Fluency:** Oral communication scores rose by **28%** in the experimental group, while the control group achieved only a **9%** improvement, suggesting that project-based and collaborative activities fostered confidence and fluency.
4. **Academic Writing:** Students trained with authentic materials produced structurally coherent and contextually accurate abstracts, achieving a **31% higher mean score** than the control group.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Classroom observations and interviews revealed several pedagogical insights:

- **High engagement** was observed when students analyzed authentic music reviews, concert programs, and composer interviews.
- **Motivational increase** stemmed from the connection between linguistic tasks and students' artistic identity. Learners expressed that English became a "medium for expressing art" rather than a foreign linguistic obstacle.
- Teachers emphasized the importance of **integrating listening and writing tasks** around musical topics rather than isolating skills.
- The use of **corpus-driven activities** helped students identify lexical patterns common in musicology research, strengthening academic discourse competence.

The results support the hypothesis that **discipline-specific, multimodal, and communicative approaches** significantly enhance ESP learning outcomes for

musicology students. The intersection of auditory and linguistic training was particularly effective in promoting vocabulary retention and conceptual understanding. Students responded positively to the contextual learning environment, which mirrored authentic professional communication in the music domain.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide compelling evidence that teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to musicology students requires a differentiated, interdisciplinary, and multimodal pedagogical approach. The findings align with the broader literature on ESP (Hutchinson & Waters, 2018; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 2017), confirming that student motivation and linguistic outcomes improve significantly when instruction is rooted in the learners' disciplinary context. However, the results also reveal deeper insights specific to musicology—a domain where auditory perception, aesthetic sensitivity, and interpretative cognition shape linguistic behavior. One of the most notable outcomes concerns the **integration of auditory learning and linguistic tasks**. Musicology students, being trained in listening and interpretation, benefited considerably from the inclusion of audio-based materials—lectures, interviews with composers, and sound analysis tasks. The correlation between auditory exercises and vocabulary retention reached $r = 0.76$, indicating a strong positive relationship between listening comprehension and lexical acquisition. This suggests that auditory-oriented learners internalize linguistic structures more effectively when meaning is conveyed through sound-related stimuli. Equally significant was the **impact of corpus-driven vocabulary instruction**. Students exposed to authentic lexical data from academic journals and concert reviews demonstrated better collocational awareness and academic writing skills. Table 1 below summarizes comparative vocabulary acquisition patterns between the two groups:

Table 1. Vocabulary Acquisition Comparison

Indicator	Control Group (Traditional ESP)	Experimental Group (Task-Based ESP)	Improvement Rate (%)
Music terminology recognition	58%	87%	+29%
Contextual use in writing	46%	81%	+35%
Collocation accuracy (lexical bundles)	39%	76%	+37%
Retention after 4 weeks	41%	73%	+32%

The data reflect a clear advantage in contextual and retention-based learning when instruction is linked to authentic disciplinary materials.

Furthermore, qualitative findings emphasize that **musicology students perceive English not only as a tool for academic exchange but also as a channel for artistic expression**. Interviews revealed that students felt motivated when linguistic tasks paralleled the analytical processes they use in music interpretation. For example, analyzing a musical review in English was described as “similar to analyzing a sonata form—both require understanding structure, emotion, and coherence.” Such analogical connections between art and language fostered deeper cognitive engagement. However, challenges persist. Instructors reported **difficulty balancing linguistic objectives with content depth**, as excessive focus on music-specific details could overshadow grammatical accuracy. Moreover, a lack of specialized textbooks for ESP in the arts continues to hinder standardization of methodology. Table 2 outlines major challenges and the corresponding effective strategies derived from the study.

Table 2. Identified Challenges and Effective Strategies

Identified Challenge	Observed Impact	Recommended Strategy
Lack of specialized ESP materials for musicology	Reduced learner engagement and unclear objectives	Develop context-based modules with authentic texts and terminology
Limited student exposure to English academic discourse	Difficulty producing structured arguments in writing	Integrate writing workshops and peer-reviewed abstracts
Overreliance on traditional grammar-translation methods	Passive learning, poor communicative fluency	Implement task-based and project-based learning
Low confidence in oral communication	Inhibited participation in discussions and presentations	Use collaborative performance tasks and role-plays
Limited integration of auditory learning tools	Incomplete comprehension of music-related vocabulary	Employ multimodal listening and transcription activities

These strategies demonstrate that ESP instruction for musicology students must not only address linguistic proficiency but also respect the **cognitive and artistic nature** of music learners. The discussion thus supports the premise that effective ESP pedagogy in musicology should merge linguistic accuracy with creativity and critical listening, fostering holistic communicative competence.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the evolving discourse on English for Specific Purposes by highlighting the unique intersection between language, art, and cognition in the education of musicology students. The research confirms that **traditional ESP approaches are insufficient** to meet the complex communicative needs of learners whose academic discipline is inherently artistic and interpretive. Through a twelve-week experimental intervention, the study demonstrated that **task-based, multimodal, and corpus-informed instruction** significantly enhances linguistic performance, learner motivation, and professional readiness in musicology. The most crucial insight derived from this research is that **ESP instruction in the arts should not imitate the methodologies used in science or business**, but rather be shaped by the semiotic and perceptual logic of the artistic disciplines themselves. When students engage with language as an expressive tool—akin to the use of musical instruments—they internalize linguistic patterns more naturally and meaningfully. The integration of auditory learning, authentic materials, and collaborative creative projects proved to be especially beneficial.

Moreover, this study underscores the necessity of **teacher training programs** that prepare ESP instructors to work effectively within artistic faculties. A cross-disciplinary collaboration between linguists and musicologists could further refine curricula, leading to sustainable improvement in teaching quality. Future research should expand the participant base, include comparative international perspectives, and explore the use of AI and digital platforms in designing adaptive ESP materials for music students. Ultimately, teaching English for Specific Purposes to musicology students should be viewed not merely as language instruction but as a **dialogue between art and communication**—a process where words resonate like melodies, and language learning becomes a creative act of interpretation, much like music itself.

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