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Exploring Motivational Factors among Saudi Healthcare Learners of English for Specific Purposes^(*)

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استكشاف العوامل التحفيزية لدى طلاب الرعاية الصحية السعوديين في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة

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الملخص

في ضوء إعلان رؤية المملكة 2030، أصبحت إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية أمراً محورياً لتحقيق أهداف هذه الرؤية في ظل البيئة العالمية الراهنة، ولا سيما لطلبة التخصصات الصحية، حيث يُعدّ تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة (ESP) عنصراً أساسياً لنجاحهم الأكاديمي والمهني. يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة العوامل الدافعة التي تحفز طلبة التخصصات الصحية في المملكة العربية السعودية على تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة، والتعرّف على المهارات اللغوية التي يسعون لتطويرها، وفهم أساليب التعلّم المفضلة لديهم. وقد اعتمد البحث على المنهج المسحي باستخدام استبانة وُزعت على عينة مكوّنة من 190 طالبة سعودية يدرسن اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة ضمن دبلوم تطبيقي صحي. أظهرت النتائج أن الدافعية لتعلّم اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة تنبع من مزيج من العوامل الداخلية والخارجية. كما تبين أن غالبية الطالبات يشعرون بثقة أكبر في مهارات الاستماع والقراءة مقارنة بمهارات الكتابة والمحادثة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فضّل المتعلمون الأنشطة اللغوية التفاعلية وطرق التعلم التي تمزج بين الأساليب التقليدية والتقنيات الحديثة. وتشير نتائج الدراسة إلى أهمية التركيز على أساليب تعلّم محددة تجمع بين العوامل الدافعة الداخلية والخارجية، وزيادة الممارسة والتدريب لتعزيز مهارات الكتابة والمحادثة، إلى جانب مبادرات تدعم تحسين تجارب التعلّم عبر الإنترنت غير المتزامن.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة؛ العوامل الدافعية؛ المهارات اللغوية؛ أساليب التعلم؛ القطاع الصحي؛ المملكة العربية السعودية

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Abstract

In light of the announcement of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, focusing on English language acquisition has become critical to achieving the goals of this vision in the current global environment, especially for healthcare students, as teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is essential for their educational and professional success. This research aims to examine the motivational factors that drive healthcare students in Saudi Arabia to study English for Specific Purposes (ESP) identify the language skills they wish to develop and understand their preferred learning styles. A survey research approach using a questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of 190 Saudi female students studying ESP in an Applied Health Diploma. The study results indicated that motivation to learn ESP stems from a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Furthermore, it was found that the majority of students surveyed felt more confident in their listening and reading abilities than in their writing and speaking skills. Additionally, learners were found to prefer language acquisition games and methods that blend traditional learning with modern technologies. The study findings suggest a greater focus on specific learning approaches that combine intrinsic and extrinsic motivational elements increased practice and training to enhance learners writing and speaking skills and other initiatives to enhance asynchronous online learning experiences.

Keywords: ESP; motivational factors; language skills; learning methods; healthcare; Saudi Arabia

Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), a branch of applied linguistics, addresses the unique study needs of learners by providing them with the appropriate language to communicate outside their specific contexts, whether in their academic pursuits or future careers (Hyland & Jiang, 2021). The era of globalization and the COVID-19 pandemic have created new requirements for English language skills, especially for students in the healthcare field, where learning ESP is crucial for their academic achievement, which is subsequently linked to their professional success (Arroyyani et al., 2022). In the field of education, mastering and utilizing effective communication skills is crucial for students in today's global healthcare landscape. This requires the ability to clearly and accurately communicate medical information to diverse audiences, in addition to proficiency in the English language (Lodhi et al., 2018; Nasiri & Khojasteh, 2024). Accordingly, the medical English course materials are designed to meet the unique needs of students. For example, verbal communication in healthcare settings is a core focus of the medical English course, as effective dialogue is critical to achieving positive health outcomes (Tomak & Šendula-Pavelić, 2017).

Since researchers consider motivation to be the main factor influencing performance, it is necessary to explore the extent to which motivation actually affects language acquisition (Pavel, 2020). The pursuit of language acquisition is a critical issue in higher education today. The ability to speak a foreign language in various professional fields is an essential skill for qualified individuals and professionals (Krainyk, 2019). Furthermore, when it comes to learning English as a second language, positive student attitudes in the classroom are essential for successful language acquisition (Alaga, 2016; González Ardeo, 2016).

Problem of the study

Given the transformations taking place in Saudi society to achieve the goals of Vision 2030, along with the increasing demand and urgent need for professionals to acquire ESP in the healthcare sector, there is also a lack of Saudi research exploring the motivational factors that influence students' learning of ESP (Altalib, 2019; Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020). In this context, this research seeks to examine the motivational factors influencing

healthcare students in Saudi Arabia as they engage in learning ESP. It will also identify the language skills students aspire to improve based on their motivational factors. Furthermore, it will offer insights into the ESP learning methods students prefer and how they influence their motivation.

Significance of the study

Within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and especially after the announcement of its Vision 2030 in 2016, it has become clear that focusing on teaching English as a second language is crucial to achieving the goals of this vision (Albiladi, 2022; Altalib, 2019; Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020; Ndiaye et al., 2024). This ambitious vision has become a historical milestone in the Kingdom due to the clear and beneficial transformations that have taken place in various economic, social, and educational sectors (Al-Mwzaiji & Muhammad, 2023). Therefore, this research is in alignment with the Saudi Vision 2030 concerning the evaluation and enhancement of ESP learning among Saudi health care students.

Objectives of the study

This study aims at:

- 1- Investigating the intrinsic factors for healthcare students in Saudi Arabia to learn ESP.
- 2- Exploring the extrinsic motivational factors for healthcare students in Saudi Arabia to learn ESP.
- 3- Investigating levels of self-assessments of English language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) among healthcare students in Saudi Arabia.
- 4- Exploring the learning methods used by healthcare students in Saudi Arabia to learn English.

Research Questions

- 1- This research will focus on the main question: What are the preferred motivational factors (intrinsic and extrinsic) for learning ESP among healthcare students in Saudi Arabia? This question is supported by the following sub-questions:
- 2- What are the preferred intrinsic motivational factors for healthcare students in Saudi Arabia to learn ESP?
- 3- What are the preferred extrinsic motivational factors for healthcare students in Saudi Arabia to learn ESP?

- 4- What are the levels of self-assessments of English language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) among healthcare students in Saudi Arabia?
- 5- What learning methods do healthcare students in Saudi Arabia prefer to learn English?

Literature Review

Motivations for Learning English for Specific Purposes

The importance and ability to communicate among the world's populations has recently increased due to globalization and the exchange of ideas on diverse topics. In light of this new reality, foreign language education, particularly English, has become a common global language in various scientific and academic disciplines, adapting to meet specific professional and academic requirements, enhancing effective communication among language learners and improving their linguistic skills (Akhter, 2021; Zizhe et al., 2024).

The ESP program targets the skills that a student must acquire to use English in a professional context (Arroyyani et al., 2022; Stötzer & Farkas, 2025). In addition, ESP, which was first created in the 1960s, arose as an attempt to help students learning English, as a second language, explore and employ various learning resources in the fields of science and technology (Yang et al., 2023). It is important to recognize that ESP emerged from three main factors: first, the scientific, technical, and economic demands for English as a global language after World War II; second, the major shift in linguistics brought about by differences in language based on context or setting of use; and third, the shift in teaching to prioritize learners, addressing their needs and enhancing their communicative skills in business, technology, finance, or healthcare (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Students' motivation to learn English is primarily influenced by intrinsic factors related to their effort, self-regulation, and expected academic benefits from learning, along with extrinsic factors such as peer influence, course requirements, and existing educational and academic values (Ghazali et al., 2022). This distinction between intrinsic motivation (the motivation to engage in an activity for its value) and extrinsic motivation (the motivation to engage in an activity as a means to an end) is widely recognized (González Ardeo, 2016). Encouraging students in the field of ESP is crucial

to their language development, career success, and continued academic progress (Krinsky, 2019). By identifying the factors that influence students' motivation, educational, social, and economic contexts can be considered encouraging and beneficial for students' learning of ESP (Kabdrgalinova et al., 2023). In addition, it is clear that the motivation has shifted to a highly productive research area, helping the student-centered educational environment adapt curricula to ensure successful learning of ESP (Pavel, 2020; Tomak & Šendula-Pavelić, 2017). Wang (2023) examined the motivational factors influencing Chinese medical students to study ESP through a questionnaire, revealing two main motivations: achieving academic success and preparing for future research in their field of specialization. In addition, Pavel (2020) explored the motivations (intrinsic and extrinsic) of students at the University of Brasov (Romania) to learn English for medical purposes, revealing that intrinsic motivations were more important than extrinsic motivations for students. A study from Iran investigated the motivational factors affecting ESP students in the medical sector using various tools, including a checklist, interviews, and questionnaires (Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2019), the authors categorized students' motivations into eight main themes: teacher qualities, educational resources, aspiration to emigrate, sense of social duty, desire to learn English, exam results, practical motivation, and learning environment. Furthermore, Tomak and Šendula-Pavelić (2017) studied the motivational factors for ESP learning among medical and healthcare students at the University of Rijeka (Croatia), their findings indicated that medical and healthcare students learn ESP in order to integrate into the target language community or to collaborate more effectively with peers from that community, and in terms of intrinsic motivation, students find enjoyment in learning English.

In Saudi Arabia, Almegren (2022) noted the increasing desire of Saudis to study English following the announcement of Saudi Vision 2030, primarily to enrich their vocabulary. Consequently, the strong economic boom associated with foreign investment, privatization of public services, localization of manufacturing industries, and the growth of the hospitality sector has created unparalleled opportunities for English learners in Saudi Arabia. By mastering English, an increasing number of Saudi citizens can engage in the private sector and reduce their dependence on foreign labor.

Increased job opportunities could also lower unemployment rates among Saudis and reduce the cost of social protection initiatives to help them live long and healthy lives (Al-Mwzaiji & Muhammad, 2023). Acquiring English language skills enables Saudi professionals to compete in local and international markets in the fields of scientific innovation, technological advancement, business, and ICT-enabled services. Therefore, English language acquisition is a fundamental pillar in developing Saudi human resources and human capital (Al-Mwzaiji & Muhammad, 2023; Albiladi, 2022). Another Saudi study (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020) indicated that university students across various academic institutions demonstrate strong motivation to learn English, suggesting that motivation plays a crucial role in influencing learners' perceptions of a foreign language. Motivational factors included the following themes: family, friendship, education, work, the internet, and pleasure (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020). In addition, Altalib (2019) examined the motivations of Saudi university students for English for General Purposes (EGP) learning and ESP courses, concluding that the EGP group showed more positive attitudes toward the language learning experience than the ESP group.

Based on the above literature survey, this research will use the concept of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation as it is frequently used by linguists (Almegren, 2022; Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020; Ghazali et al., 2022; González Ardeo, 2016; Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2019; Kabdrgalinova et al., 2023; Pavel, 2020). As mentioned earlier, intrinsic aspects relate to motivations that arise from within the learner, including feelings of competence, curiosity, and the desire for knowledge or personal growth, while extrinsic aspects relate to the motivations that drive the learner to succeed in achieving a specific outcome or reaching an external goal (Almegren, 2022; Pavel, 2020).

English language skills

Healthcare students must be proficient in English for oral and written communication, including exchanging and acquiring information related to their field of study. Reading and writing skills are considered an integrated whole, as each assesses a student's ability to read and write (López Henao, 2017). In writing, students express their thoughts and feelings in written form, while in reading, they receive ideas and information from a written work (Purnamasari et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, the other two language skills, specifically listening and speaking, are essential components of students' communication skills and need to be mastered (Pavlovskaya et al., 2022). For learners of ESP, mastery of spoken English is a pressing requirement, while gaining proficiency in listening requires the learners' active participation (Havrylenko, 2023). These two abilities are interconnected and work together (Mukhtorova & Ilxomov, 2024). Furthermore, a systematic review study from Saudi Arabia revealed significant interest in teaching English language skills at Saudi universities, with a primary focus on writing, reading, and comprehension. This highlights the need for greater emphasis on other skills such as speaking, listening, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (Alsowat, 2017).

Methods to learn English

The environment in which English is learned is one of the factors that influence the effectiveness of its teaching (Nguyen, 2021). Various methods of teaching English as a foreign language have been reported in the literature, including traditional classrooms, blended learning, online classrooms, synchronous distance education, and asynchronous distance education (Kayaoğlu & Akbaş, 2016), collaborative group tasks, digital materials, role-playing exercises, and language acquisition games (Gilakjani & Behdani, 2024; Nguyen, 2021; Wang, 2023). English language teaching methods in Saudi Arabia have undergone a major transformation, moving from a focus on reading texts and grammar to enhancing language skills for practical communication in real-life situations (Alqahtani, 2018). Albiladi (2022) indicated that the educational goals of Saudi Vision 2030 for learning English can be achieved by replacing traditional teaching methods with authentic materials and resources, improving the use of technology in language classrooms, integrating collaborative learning strategies, promoting openness and acceptance among learners, and leveraging language education that provides students with career readiness.

Methodology

Study design

This research relied on the survey research method (descriptive design) using quantitative data. A survey is a research method in which the researcher collects information from a sample of participants to represent the views of the study population.

Study sample

The study population consisted of female students in the second semester of the Applied Diploma in Healthcare program at King Khalid University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the 2024/2025 academic year. According to university records, the number of female students (N) is 221. Therefore, the sample size (n) can be determined using Yamane's (1973) formula.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} \quad (1)$$

Here, (e) denotes the error (e=0.05) associated with a 95% reliability level. Therefore, n is approximately equal to 142. However, the total number of completed responses was 190, making the study sample size 190 participants.

Data collection tools

The research instrument is a questionnaire designed to identify the motivational factors for learning EPS among female students enrolled in the Applied Health Diploma program at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia. The students come from diverse fields, including infection control, sterilization, health economics, and health insurance. The questionnaire also aims to uncover the students' assessments of their English proficiency and their opinions about their preferred methods of learning the language. The questionnaire has been designed based on previous studies (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020; Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2019; Kayaoğlu & Akbaş, 2016; Pavel, 2020; Tomak & Šendula-Pavelić, 2017; Wang, 2023). The motivational factors for learning ESP revolve around ten elements, five of which relate to intrinsic factors and five to extrinsic factors. Additionally, four linguistic skills were analyzed to assess participants' self-assessments of their skills. The preferred ESP learning techniques axis consists of seven elements.

A five-point Likert scale (strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1) was used for the two axes: motivational factors and preference for learning ESP. A five-point Likert scale (very easy = 5, easy = 4, medium = 3, difficult = 2, very difficult = 1) was adopted for the axis of students' self-assessment of their English skills.

Validity and Reliability of the Study Instrument

Validity

Face validity

The research tool was applied to a group of faculty members at King Khalid University. In light of the reviewers' comments, some expressions were deleted, and other wording was modified.

Construct validity

The researcher used the questionnaire tool on 40 students from King Khalid University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Pearson's correlation coefficients were determined for each statement relative to the total score for the relevant category. The results indicated a strong correlation between the scores of each statement and its associated category, particularly in the "self-assessment of language proficiency" category, as shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1.

Correlation coefficients linking the items to the total score of the motivational factors for the ESP axis.

Motivational Factors for Learning ESP			
Intrinsic/Personal		Extrinsic	
Item	Correlation Coefficient	Item	Correlation Coefficient
I have liked learning English since childhood	.633**	Most of the references (books, articles) for my field of study (health) are written in English	.511**
I enjoy learning English	.563**	Learning ESP will help me get better job opportunities, in line with Saudi Vision 2030 goals.	.632**
I learn English just for the sake of learning	.493**	I plan to work/study after graduation in a foreign English-speaking country	.624**
I believe that learning ESP well will boost my self-confidence	.709**	Learning ESP will help me communicate effectively with foreign specialists and patients who speak English	.563**
I plan to learn and improve my knowledge of ESP in the future.	.609**	Learning ESP helps me to have access to additional study resources available on social media	.517**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 2.

Correlation coefficients between individual items and the total self-assessment score on the language proficiency axis.

Self-assessment of Language Proficiency	
Item	Correlation Coefficient
Reading	.862**
Speaking	.833**
Writing	.832**
Listening	.681**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 3.

Correlation coefficients between items and total score for the preference for English language learning methods axis.

Preference for English Learning Methods	
Item	Correlation Coefficient
Traditional classroom (Face-to-face teaching)	.208**
Multimedia resources	.465**
Blended learning (both face-to-face and online learning)	.732**
Online classroom	.694**
Language learning games	.583**
Synchronous distance learning	.735**
Asynchronous distance learning	.604**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Reliability

The internal consistency of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding reliability scores of 0.739 for motivational factors related to learning ESP, 0.818 for self-assessment of language proficiency, and 0.646 for preferences related to English language learning techniques. All of these values indicate high reliability (α exceeding 0.6), according to Pallant (2020). The overall reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was approximately 0.79, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4.

Reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha).

Axis	Number of statements	Cronbach's alpha
Motivational Factors for Learning ESP	10	0.739
Self-assessment of Language Proficiency	4	0.818
Preference for English Learning Methods	7	0.646
The tool as a whole	21	.0786

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used in this research to collect descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations for Likert-type scale responses. To categorize the questionnaire responses into three levels (medium, low, and high), the interval value $(5-1)/3 = 1.33$ was calculated, which resulted in determining the interval levels for the three levels as shown in Table 5.

Table 5.

Means' ratings.

Mean Interval	Rating
From 1.00 to 2.33	Low
From 2.34 to 3.66	Medium
From 3.67 to 5.00	High

Results

Demographic characteristics

Table 6 shows the characteristics of the research sample for learning ESP among students in the healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia.

Table 6.

Characteristics of the study sample (n = 190).

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Study specialization	Infection control	81	42.6
	Sterilization	71	37.4
	Health economics and Health insurance	25	13.2
	Other	13	6.8
Total		190	100.0

Table 6 shows that infection control constitutes the largest category (42.6%), indicating a growing interest in infection control in healthcare. Sterilization represents the second largest category (37.4%), reflecting the significant interest in sterilization in healthcare. Given the close percentage values between infection control and sterilization, we can conclude that these two fields are interconnected and that the majority of healthcare workers are drawn to both. Furthermore, it is noted that health economics and health insurance constitute a minor category (13.2%) and are less popular among students, while other categories that include participants from different fields, such as nursing and public health, constitute a smaller percentage (6.8%).

Preferred motivational factors for learning ESP

Table 7 shows the motivational factors for studying ESP among students in the healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia.

Table 7.

Motivational factors for studying ESP among students in the healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia (n = 190).

Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Rating
Intrinsic			
I have liked learning English since childhood.	4.12	0.99	High
I enjoy learning English.	4.34	0.78	High
I learn English just for the sake of learning.	2.97	1.29	Medium
I believe that learning ESP well will boost my self-confidence.	4.54	0.66	High
I plan to learn and improve my knowledge of ESP in the future.	4.74	0.50	High
Total Intrinsic	4.14	0.53	High
Extrinsic			
Most of the references (books, articles) for my field of study (health) are written in English	4.63	0.64	High
Learning ESP will help me get better job opportunities, in line with Saudi Vision 2030 goals.	4.81	0.47	High
I plan to work/study after graduation in a foreign English-speaking country.	3.87	1.03	High
Learning ESP will help me communicate effectively with foreign specialists and patients who speak English.	4.74	0.49	High
Learning ESP helps me to have access to additional study resources available on social media.	4.64	0.55	High
Total Extrinsic	4.54	0.40	High
Total Intrinsic/Extrinsic	4.34	0.41	High

Table 7 shows the high mean scores for intrinsic (4.14) and extrinsic (4.54) motivational factors, and the overall mean scores for all motivational

factors (intrinsic/extrinsic) (4.34) were also high, noting that students scored slightly higher in extrinsic motivation. This indicates a strong desire among students to learn ESP. The three main intrinsic motivational factors for students learning ESP are "their intention to improve their English language skills in the future" (mean = 4.74), "they will enhance their self-confidence through learning ESP" (mean = 4.54), and "their enjoyment of learning English" (mean = 4.34). These items indicate that students consider self-confidence in learning English, opportunities for personal growth through English, and the enjoyment of learning English to be key factors. The factor "I learn English simply to learn" received the lowest score (mean = 2.97), indicating that learning English simply for learning, without a specific goal, is the least motivational factor.

The results indicate that the three main extrinsic motivational factors identified by students learning ESP were "enhancing employment opportunities through ESP by the goals of Saudi Vision 2030" (mean = 4.81), "interacting efficiently with international specialists and patients who use English through learning ESP" (mean = 4.74), and "the majority of resources in their field are in English" (mean = 4.63). These items indicate that students believe that resources in their field of study are primarily in English and that achieving professional goals, enhancing interactions with international experts, and dealing with patients are important considerations. The generally low standard deviations (0.40–1.29), along with the overall low standard deviation (0.41) for all motivational factors (intrinsic/extrinsic), indicate agreement among students regarding these factors. The relatively high standard deviation for "their plan to work/study after graduation in an English-speaking foreign country" (1.03) indicates a diversity of answers, which may represent varying personal aspirations regarding global prospects. Therefore, learning strategies that enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation may be more beneficial.

Self-assessments of English language skills

Table 8 shows self-assessments of English language proficiency among students in the healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia.

Table 8.

Self-assessment of English language proficiency among students in the healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia (n = 190).

Skill	Mean	Standard deviation	Rating
Reading	3.70	0.96	High
Speaking	3.35	1.05	Medium
Writing	3.34	1.05	Medium
Listening	4.10	0.94	High
Total	3.62	0.79	High

Table 8 shows that the mean listening skill score was high (4.10), indicating that students are confident in their listening skills. The mean reading skill score was also high (3.70), and this relatively high self-assessment indicates strong confidence, although slightly lower than that of listening skills. The mean speaking skill score was medium (3.35), indicating that students have a medium level of confidence in their speaking skills. The mean writing skill score was also medium (3.34), indicating that students possess a medium level of confidence in writing. The mean skill score (3.62) and standard deviation (0.79) indicate that students' overall proficiency and ability in English are strong. The large standard deviations in speaking and writing indicate that students' perceptions of themselves vary from one individual to another, with some students feeling confident while others lack confidence. Therefore, additional speaking and writing activities are needed and should be integrated into the curriculum to enhance students' confidence and skills. Students who lack self-confidence should also be reached out to and provided with targeted assistance, such as tutoring.

Preferred learning methods for English

Table 9 shows the preferred learning methods for English as perceived by students in the healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia.

Table 9.

Preferred methods of learning English as perceived by healthcare students in Saudi Arabia.

Learning method	Mean	Standard deviation	Rating
Traditional classroom (Face-to-face teaching)	4.08	0.94	High
Multimedia resources	3.96	0.88	High
Blended learning (both face-to-face and online learning)	4.13	0.95	High
Online classroom	3.86	1.05	High
Language learning games	4.49	0.75	High
Synchronous distance learning	3.90	0.89	High
Asynchronous distance learning	3.57	1.03	Medium
Total	3.99	0.55	High

Table 9 shows that all English learning methods achieved high scores, with an overall mean score of 3.99. Thus, students demonstrate a strong general preference toward various English learning methods. The language learning game method received the highest mean score (4.49), demonstrating students' interest in engaging and entertaining methods. Similarly, blended learning (4.13) and traditional classroom (4.08) received high ratings. Thus, students demonstrate a strong interest in methods that integrate with other learning techniques and face-to-face learning. It can be argued that incorporating diverse, interactive, technology-based methods enhances language acquisition, and that a comprehensive approach that combines face-to-face and online learning may be the most beneficial.

It is also worth noting that students showed a preference for evaluating multimedia resources (mean = 3.96) and synchronous online learning (mean = 3.90), highlighting the importance of technology-mediated learning. Asynchronous distance learning, on the other hand, recorded the lowest mean (3.57), indicating students' preference for traditional classroom learning methods over self-paced online learning methods. Therefore, it is important to enhance asynchronous online learning experiences, perhaps by increasing the level of engagement with the content.

Standard deviations (between 0.75 and 1.05) reveal a diversity of perspectives, particularly regarding technologies such as asynchronous distance learning and online education, where perceptions may vary based

on personal experiences or access to technology. Furthermore, the low overall standard deviation (0.55) for preferred methods indicates uniformity of assessments across all students.

Discussion

Demographic characteristics

The results showed that infection control and sterilization were the two main areas of interest, accounting for 42.6% and 37.4%, respectively. Together, these two sectors represent more than 80% of the categories studied in the healthcare sector, a conclusion supported by additional research (Bharti et al., 2022; Rutala & Weber, 2019). This indicates a strong emphasis on sterilization and infection control in patient care. There is a clear link between infection control and sterilization, suggesting that healthcare professionals view these two areas as complementary and intertwined, as noted by Baalkhuyur et al. (2025). In contrast, the smaller percentage associated with health economics and health insurance (13.2%) indicates that healthcare professionals are not particularly interested in these fields. Furthermore, fields such as nursing and public health received even less interest, attracting only 6.8% of students, suggesting that students are not particularly drawn to these fields. This is consistent with the findings of Leal et al. (2018) who reported that students often prefer clinical skills over economics and management subjects. These findings underscore the importance of enhancing training in infection control and sterilization, as well as expanding opportunities for healthcare students to engage with health economics and insurance.

Preferred motivational factors for learning ESP

The high scores for the intrinsic factors (4.14) and extrinsic factors (4.54) indicate that students are strongly motivated to learn English to achieve specific goals. These results are consistent with the findings of Pavel (2020), who found that students showed interest in both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors for learning ESP in a manner that was almost identical to each other. Regarding the extrinsic factors, students demonstrated a strong desire to enhance their understanding of ESP in the future, boost their self-confidence through ESP, and appreciate the journey of learning ESP. The mean scores for these three factors were 4.74, 4.54, and 4.34, respectively. Conversely, the motivation to learn ESP of “learning only”

scored low at 2.97. This demonstrates a clear motivation among students to study English for specific goals and confirms their aspiration for personal growth through ESP. Abrar-ul-Hassan (2014) found that people who learn ESP typically have specific career goals, which increases their motivation to learn the language.

Conversely, among the extrinsic factors reflecting social motivations, the aspiration to enhance employment opportunities following Saudi Vision 2030 (mean = 4.81) was the most prominent, closely followed by the importance of effective communication with English-speaking professionals from abroad (mean = 4.74). This is in line with the findings of Almegren (2022) highlighting the importance of national development in promoting English language learning among students. Furthermore, Tomak and Šendula-Pavelić (2017) noted that ESP students must communicate effectively with individuals from English-speaking countries and value the learning process. Furthermore, the low standard deviation in students' responses indicates that they held similar views on motivational factors, despite some differences in intrinsic factors. This suggests the importance of emphasizing learning strategies that combine intrinsic and extrinsic elements of motivation. By implementing these strategies, teachers can improve their students' ESP performance (Pavel, 2020).

Self-assessments of English language skills

The results indicate that students exhibited self-confidence in both listening and reading skills, with high ratings (mean = 4.10 for listening and 3.70 for reading). However, they showed limited confidence in writing and speaking skills, reflected by medium ratings (mean = 3.34 for writing and 3.35 for speaking). This suggests that while the students are successfully developing their listening and reading skills, they require more practice and training to improve their writing and speaking abilities. This finding aligns with the observations of other reported studies (Possú, 2021; Taye & Mengesha, 2024), noting that speaking and writing skills often present greater challenges. Furthermore, the standard deviations in confidence ratings for speaking and writing highlight the need to support students who may be struggling. Increased exercises and training in these areas are essential for boosting students' confidence. Other researchers have also emphasized this need (Nguyen & Pham, 2022; Songsiri, 2007),

underscoring the importance of providing an educational environment tailored to students' needs (Pavel, 2020; Tomak & Šendula-Pavelić, 2017). Additionally, offering individual support, such as private tutoring, can be beneficial for students who require extra help in enhancing their ESP skills (Dashtestani & Stojkovic, 2015).

Regarding students' skills in listening and reading, the results show that students demonstrated confidence in these two skills, scoring high (mean = 4.10 for listening and 3.70 for reading). However, they demonstrated limited confidence in their writing and speaking skills, as evidenced by the mean scores (mean = 3.34 for writing and 3.35 for speaking). This suggests that although students are effectively enhancing their listening and reading skills, they need additional practice and training to develop their writing and speaking abilities. This finding is consistent with the observations of other studies (Possú, 2021; Taye & Mengesha, 2024), noting that speaking and writing skills often pose more challenges. Furthermore, the differences in confidence ratings for speaking and writing underscore the need to assist students who may be experiencing difficulties. Enhanced practice and training in these areas are crucial to raising students' confidence. Other researchers (Nguyen & Pham, 2022; Nguyen, 2021; Songsiri, 2007) have highlighted this necessity, emphasizing the importance of creating a learning environment that is tailored to students' needs. In addition, providing personal assistance, such as tutoring, may be helpful for students who need additional support to enhance their ESP skills (Dashtestani & Stojkovic, 2015; Pavel, 2020; Tomak & Šendula-Pavelić, 2017).

Preferred English learning methods

The research results indicate that students' attitudes toward learning approaches in ESP learning varied. They expressed a strong interest in participating in language learning games (mean = 4.49), as supported by the findings of Wang (2023); and blended learning techniques that combine traditional and digital strategies (mean = 4.13), which is in contradiction with the findings of Kayaoğlu and Akbaş (2016). This indicates that students prioritize personal interaction in their learning experiences and value the integration of technology in ESP learning. These findings are supported by Garrison (2016) who highlighted that contemporary teaching methods foster a digital and technological learning environment. Students

positively evaluated multimedia learning approaches (mean = 3.96) and synchronous online learning (mean = 3.90), emphasizing the importance of technology in improving ESP teaching (Dashtestani & Stojkovic, 2015).

In contrast, students rated asynchronous online learning at a medium level (mean = 3.57), indicating that this approach presents challenges and barriers. In this context, the lack of direct or immediate engagement can undermine student motivation. Therefore, steps should be taken to enhance asynchronous online learning experiences (Kayaoğlu & Akbaş, 2016; Martyniuk, 2022; Tayebi et al., 2021). Accordingly, understanding students' preferred learning methods gives insights to teachers to promote students' motivations in ESP learning (Wang, 2023). Through incorporating teaching methods that respond to Saudi healthcare students' motivational factors for ESP learning, teachers can offer an effective ESP learning environment to enhance students' language performance.

Regarding the standard deviation, it indicates differences in students' choices of different learning approaches. It is essential to maintain students' motivation in their ESP studies by diversifying learning methods and incorporating technology (Bondarchuk et al., 2024; Procel et al., 2024). Furthermore, although Saudi healthcare students' motivations for studying English vary, their choices align with the global trend in language education in the healthcare sector.

Conclusion

This research surveyed a group of Saudi students working in the healthcare sector to understand their motivations for studying ESP. The results indicated that the main areas in which these students study in healthcare are sterilization and infection control, the close percentage values between infection control and sterilization specialization areas indicated that these two fields are interconnected and that the majority of healthcare workers are drawn to both. Furthermore, it was noted that fields of health economics, health insurance, nursing, and public health constitute a minor category. Findings revealed that students' motivations for learning English stem from a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, with extrinsic factors being slightly more scored (mean= 4.54) than intrinsic ones (mean=4.14). Mean intrinsic motivational factors were found to be intention to improve English language skills in the future, enhancing self-confidence

through learning ESP, and enjoyment of learning English, while learning English simply for learning, without a specific goal, was the least motivational intrinsic factor. On the other hand, it was found that main extrinsic motivational factors include enhancing employment opportunities, interacting efficiently with international specialists and patients, and majority of health field resources being in English. An assessment of students' English language skills revealed that the majority of students were confident in their reading and listening skills, although they were less confident in their speaking and writing skills. This underscores the need to develop effective learning strategies to help students improve their speaking and writing skills, where students who lack self-confidence should also be reached out to and provided with targeted assistance, such as tutoring. Regarding the preferred learning methods, students demonstrated a strong general preference toward language learning game method, blended learning, traditional classroom, evaluating multimedia resources. Therefore, improving and developing teaching methodologies is vital to promoting the teaching of ESP in the healthcare sector, in line with the objectives of the study and international trends in the field.

Limitations

This study has two main limitations. First, it relies solely on quantitative data, which restricts deeper exploration of motivational nuances through qualitative triangulation. Second, the sample population was limited to females and to only one university (King Khalid University), limiting generalizability across genders and institutions.

Recommendations

In view of study findings regarding the deficiencies in speaking and writing of ESP among students, it is recommended that universities should adopt instructional models or intervention programs to address these two skills among students.

Future Research Directions

Further studies investigating analytically motivational factors for ESP learning could test hypotheses based on established theoretical frameworks.

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