Attitudes towards learning English for specific purposes (ESP): A study on changes in attitudes of international studies students at Saigon university

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Abstract: English for specific purposes (ESP) is absolutely indispensable in any university programs in countries where English is not an official language. After finishing ESP courses, students are expected to approach the best practices that have already been in place around the world. However, students' attitudes towards ESP are considered as one of the challenges in ESP teaching practice. On this account, this study was conducted to investigate the changes in students' attitudes towards ESP courses to make some significant suggestions to the future practices in ESP teaching and learning. To achieve this objective, two surveys, called pre-course and post-course ones, were conducted at Saigon University with the participation of 165 students in the pre-course survey and 146 students in the post-course one. They all major in International Studies and have completed an ESP course. The findings show that there are negative and positive changes in students' attitudes towards the ESP course after they took the ESP course, compared to the result of the survey conducted before the ESP course. The negative changes in students' attitudes are mainly due to teaching methods and partly due to assessment methods whereas the positive changes in students' attitudes are partly due to the content of the course. From these findings, the program managers need to make necessary changes to teaching methods to foster students' motivation, to assessment methods to increase students' satisfaction, and to the content of the ESP course to improve students' learning outcomes.

Keywords: Attitude, Changes in attitude, ESP course, International studies students, SGU.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

English for specific purposes (ESP) is absolutely indispensable in any university programs in countries where English is not an official language because it helps students approach the best practices that have already been in place around the world. That is why, as stated in the curriculum of International Studies at Saigon University (SGU), course's expected learning outcomes (CELOs) require students to be equipped with not only specialized knowledge and skills but also English knowledge and skills they can apply to and use in their future job, respectively. Despite having been delivered for a long time due to necessity, ESP teaching and learning practices have been facing many challenges such as inappropriate teaching methods and activities, poor teaching and learning materials as well as inappropriate assessment methods. Thereby, in order for the practices in ESP teaching and learning to be more effective, it has been required to explore the challenges both lecturers and students have encountered in ESP teaching and learning as a basis for making any adjustments or changes if necessary. However, the issue has yet to be uncovered completely because when an aspect of the issue is uncovered, there is another aspect to explore. In this regard, considering student's attitudes as one of the challenges in ESP teaching, we plan to conduct an investigation at SGU into changes in students' attitudes towards learning ESP, served as a basis for proposing practical solutions to ESP teaching and learning practices. Hopefully, the results will make a significant contribution to the practices in ESP teaching and learning not only at Saigon University but also at other universities where ESP courses are included in the curriculum.

1.2. Research Gap

In the world, a number of studies have explored attitudes and motivation towards learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) across various contexts and fields. Tomak and Šendula-Pavelić (2017) investigated the motivation of medical students learning ESP, specifically Medical English. Their findings indicated that students were more integratively motivated, particularly those who self-assessed their English skills as proficient. Similarly, Ameri (2013) focused on Iranian students' attitudes toward ESP courses, revealing that most students considered ESP courses necessary, with an emphasis on translation and reading comprehension of specialized texts as the main objectives. Furthermore, Syakur et al. (2020) conducted developmental research to create ESP textbooks for Pharmacy students, finding positive student responses toward the digital-based learning materials developed. Arslan and Akbarov (2012) highlighted the shift in language teaching from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach, noting that students often express dissatisfaction with ESP courses due to a lack of relevant terminology that aligns with their academic needs. Ahmad et al. (2019) examined the challenges faced by ESP lecturers in engineering programs, particularly in developing effective language tests, which were hampered by systemic challenges at the macro level. Similarly, Siddiq et al. (2019) explored Afghan students' and teachers' perspectives on ESP and English for General Purposes (EGP), revealing that students' motivation increased with more homogenous classes, relevant materials, and qualified teachers. In contrast, Ardeo (2003) compared monolingual and bilingual students' performance in ESP within various fields and found no significant differences in attitudes toward English between the two groups, both showing generally positive attitudes. Anwar (2017), however, found negative attitudes among Bangladeshi engineering students toward ESP courses, as students felt the course contents did not align well with their mainstream academic subjects, leading to a lack of motivation.

In Vietnam, research on the language attitudes of Vietnamese learners of English has garnered significant attention from scholars in recent years. These studies have examined various aspects of learners' attitudes towards English, offering insights into the relationship between language attitudes and linguistic behavior. One of the early works in this area is Vu's (2005) study, Initial Steps to Understand the Relationship between Attitudes and Linguistic Behavior, which explored how attitudes influence language use. Vu (2006) continued this line of inquiry with Language Attitudes and Linguistic Behavior: A Sociolinguistic Study of a Vietnamese Language Community, providing a more comprehensive analysis of how sociocultural factors shape language attitudes. More recent studies have focused on specific learner groups and contexts. For instance, Vo (2017), in Undergraduate Students' Attitude Towards Learning English: A Case Study at Nong Lam University, investigated the attitudes of university students towards English, highlighting how these attitudes impact their learning outcomes. Similarly, Truong (2020), in a study at Hue University, examined the attitudes of fourth-year students towards different English accents, revealing how exposure to various accents affects learners' preferences and perceptions. Other studies have expanded the scope to explore the influence of modern technology and media on language attitudes. Trinh's (2014) research on Linguistic Attitudes Towards the Phenomena of Changes in Vietnamese on the Internet examined how the digital environment has led to evolving attitudes towards language use, while Tran's (2018) PhD thesis, English Words in Vietnamese Media, focused on the prevalence of English loanwords in Vietnamese media and how these reflect changing societal attitudes towards English. Additionally, Tran et al. (2020) conducted a study titled Attitude of Second-Year Students Towards Learning English: A Study at the University of Information and Communications Technology – Thai Nguyen University, which provided valuable insights into the attitudes of younger university students. Vu (2019) further contributed to the discourse by analyzing University Students' Attitudes Toward Learning English, emphasizing the role of motivational factors in shaping learners' language attitudes.

While previous studies have laid a solid foundation in understanding language attitudes among Vietnamese learners of English, most have primarily focused on general attitudes toward English or specific linguistic behaviors, with relatively few examining shifts in students' attitudes over time. This gap is particularly evident in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where addressing negative factors and fostering positive ones are crucial for enhancing language learning outcomes. Existing research underscores the importance of aligning ESP course content with students' academic

and professional needs, as well as addressing motivational factors to increase the effectiveness of these programs. However, no studies have thoroughly explored how students' attitudes toward ESP courses evolve over time, a crucial area for evaluating and improving teaching practices. Understanding these attitudinal changes would offer valuable insights into refining curricula and instructional methods to better meet learners' evolving needs and motivations.

1.3. Objective of the study

The current study is conducted to investigate the changes in the attitudes of International Studies students at Saigon University towards learning English for specific purposes to make some significant suggestions for adjustments or changes to the future of ESP teaching and learning practices.

1.4. Hypothesis of the study

Based on what has been discussed so far, this study is going to examine whether there are any changes in students' attitudes towards the ESP course in terms of teaching methods, the content of the course and assessment methods. If yes, what are the exact changes in students' attitudes?

1.5. Scope of the study

The research was conducted with the participation of International Studies students who have completed an ESP course at the Faculty of Culture and Tourism, Saigon University. The focus of the study is on exploring the changes in students' cognitive, emotional and behavioral attitudes towards teaching methods, the content of the course and assessment methods. This is because teaching methods, the content of the course and assessment methods are factors that most students in Vietnam are affected the most.

1.6. The significance of the study

Through the results of surveying the changes in students' attitudes towards ESP course, the program managers will get more insights into students' attitudes in doing the ESP course. Thereby, it contributes to positive changes in future teaching and learning practices. In addition, the results of this study are beneficial not only to lecturers who teach ESP courses, but also to people who design curriculum.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. English for Specific Purposes

According to Day and Krzanowski (2011), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an approach focused on teaching the specialized skills and language required by particular students for a specific purpose. This means that, beyond general English, students are taught the specific skills relevant to fields such as technology, science, business, and media. To achieve this, ESP must be a student-centered and innovative teaching approach. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 19) explain, "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the student's needs."

ESP is characterized by several key features, as outlined by Strevens (1988) and Dudley-Evans & St John (1998). First, ESP courses are tailored to meet students' specific needs within the contexts of the disciplines they study or are interested in. Second, course materials and teaching tasks must be authentic, helping students engage with real-life professional situations. Third, a student-centered approach is essential, as it not only addresses students' needs (Muñoz-Luna & Taillefer, 2018) but also promotes cognitive development through challenging, real-world tasks (Jendrych, 2013). Finally, students' cognitive and linguistic levels, as well as their motivation, play a crucial role in designing ESP courses, developing materials, and making pedagogical decisions. Since ESP typically serves intermediate or advanced learners who have already achieved a certain level of English proficiency, these factors must be carefully considered. Based on these characteristics, a questionnaire has been designed to gather teachers' evaluations of the challenges and difficulties they encounter in teaching ESP.

In connection with the information above, it is clear that the foundation of ESP lies in the straightforward question: what do students need to learn English for? The answer to this question revolves around the learners' needs, the specific language skills they must acquire and to what level, as well as the learning context, which pertains to the genres they need to master for either comprehension or production purposes.

2.2. Key Aspects of ESP Teching Practices
2.2.1. Objectives in ESP Teaching

An objective in ESP teaching refers to a desired pattern of behavior that learners are expected to demonstrate. Formulating these objectives assumes that ESP teaching is a neutral process aimed at helping non-native English speakers handle the language demands of their specific environments. Stern (in Basturkmen, 2006) categorizes language education objectives into four types: proficiency, knowledge, affective, and transfer objectives. Proficiency objectives focus on mastering language skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Knowledge objectives deal with acquiring linguistic and cultural knowledge, including language analysis and cultural norms. Affective objectives aim to develop positive attitudes toward language learning, while transfer objectives focus on applying learned skills in new contexts. Competency-based occupational education further emphasizes the practical application of language skills in real-world situations, aligning closely with proficiency objectives.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that ESP should focus not only on language skills but also on developing students' knowledge of disciplinary concepts. This dual focus helps students acquire both the language and the content needed for their specific fields. Douglas (2000) suggests a model of specific purpose language ability that includes language knowledge, background knowledge, and strategic competence, with the latter acting as a bridge between external contexts and internal knowledge. Teaching ESP to students with prior experience in their disciplines aims to enhance their strategic competence. Moreover, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) emphasize the role of ESP teachers in helping learners consciously apply their latent content knowledge. Instruction that aims to raise students' critical awareness about language use and norms in target environments ties into Stern's cultural knowledge and affective objectives. Ultimately, instructional objectives in ESP should be clearly defined, behaviorally measurable, and aligned with the intended learning outcomes.

2.2.2. Instructional Materials for ESP Teaching

Instructional materials are essential components of any educational program, especially in ESP courses. They are designed to support both teachers and learners by providing resources that help students acquire knowledge, skills, and opinions or develop cognitive processes. These materials may be in printed or non-printed formats, including textbooks, technology-based resources, and web-based tools. In language teaching, instructional materials serve several key functions, including presenting spoken or written content, offering practice activities, providing reference sources, stimulating classroom activities, and acting as a syllabus. Particularly in ESP, materials are tailored to students' needs and interests, functioning as sources of language input and references, while also serving to motivate and support learning. ESP materials expose learners to specialized genres and registers, stimulating cognitive processes, structuring learning progression, and offering resources for self-study (Dudley-Evans, 1998).

When selecting and developing materials for ESP, attention must be given to both language systems (grammar and vocabulary) and language use (speech acts, genres, and social interactions). Scientific and technical writing, for example, often emphasizes certain grammatical structures, such as frequent use of the passive voice, and includes discipline-specific vocabulary. Approaches to interpreting texts in ESP often rely on top-down methods, encouraging learners to use their background knowledge to understand the text. These approaches contrast with bottom-up methods, which focus on decoding language elements progressively. A functional view of language, central to ESP, explores how speech acts, genres, and specific vocabulary are used in professional and academic settings. Teaching students to recognize and use these language forms helps them integrate into their target discourse communities, aligning instructional materials with the linguistic and communicative demands of their fields.

2.2.3. Methodology in ESP Teaching

Methodology in ESP refers to the selection and sequencing of tasks and activities to achieve instructional objectives, with a focus on what students and teachers are required to do (Nunan, 1988; Robinson, 1991). Two key features of ESP methodology are that activities can be based on students' specializations and may serve authentic purposes related to their target fields. Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) highlight that ESP tasks should reflect students' specialist areas. Todd (2003) identifies six key approaches in English for Academic Purposes (EAP): inductive learning, process syllabuses, learner autonomy, authentic materials and tasks, integration of technology, and team teaching, the last being unique to EAP. Common instructional tasks in ESP, such as role-play, simulation, case studies, project work, and presentations, help develop both language and professional skills (Robinson, 1991).

2.2.4. Assessment in ESP Teaching

Assessment in ESP is the process of evaluating students' progress and how well they have achieved the instructional objectives. It serves two main purposes: providing feedback to aid learning and measuring competence (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Effective assessment in ESP not only reinforces learning and builds confidence but also aligns with the specific skills and knowledge taught. It is performance-based, focusing on students' ability to perform communicative tasks relevant to their academic or professional fields (Douglas, 2000). This includes assessing students' ability to communicate in the target language, using specialized content knowledge, and handling real-life language tasks in their discipline. An ESP assessment should closely resemble the tasks learners will perform in real-world situations, ensuring the test's validity and relevance.

2.3. Definition of Attitude and Attitude-Related Research Models

Due to the large scope of effects, attitudes are defined differently from different perspectives. First of all, from the perspective of sociopsychology, the term "attitude" was first mentioned in the work of Gardner and Lambert (1959) which deals with the role of motivation and attitude in L2 acquisition. In particular, attitudes deal with what individuals think and do with language when participating in a language community. In this sense, language attitudes have been studied according to two trends: mentalism and behaviorism. The former refers to attitudes as internal states caused by some types of stimulus while the later mediates subsequent bodily responses (Fasold, 1987). Allport, an American psychologist, (1935, p. 810) defined language attitude as "a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related". Ajzen (1988, p. 4) considered attitude as "a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event". Baker (1992, p. 10) defined attitude as "a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behavior". However, from the perspective of sociology, Gardner (1980, p. 267) defined attitudes as not only being associated with cognition but also a combination of many mental values that influence each person's behavior such as "the sum total of a man's instincts and feelings, prejudice or bias, preconceived notions, fears, threats, and convictions about any specified topic". Besides, from the perspective of foreign language education, Gardner and Lambert (1972, p. 103) repeatedly considered attitudes as "the persistence shown by the learner in striving for a goal". Brown (1987) also claimed that attitudes are learners' beliefs about the language community and their culture.

Starting from different perspectives, criteria for surveying attitudes are also set differently. As an illustration, Gardner and Lambert (1972) introduced two attitude-related concepts: instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. These concepts are also reiterated in the work of Gardner (1980). In these concepts, the integrative motivation deals with the learner's personal desires, specifically positive attitude towards the target language group and the potential for integrating into that group, while the instrumental motivation does with functional reasons such as finding better career opportunities or getting a raise, or simply passing a test. Then, Baker (1985), through the cause-effect model, tested whether learners' attitudes are influenced by many factors at the same time. In another model of research, Baker (1996) proposed the idea of studying language attitudes in connection between the cultural and linguistic background and other sociological factors such as age, gender, learning

outcomes and teaching methods. In this sense, attitude is a factor that has a profound influence on language acquisition. Attitude-related research mainly focuses on students' attitudes toward school, subjects, lecturers, and other students. For instance, students' attitudes towards learning another language were studied by Baker, Gardner and Lambert who have presented issues related to students' attitudes toward L2.

2.4. Research Model for the Study

Based on the above definitions of attitudes and attitude-related research models, the research model in the current study is built as follows:
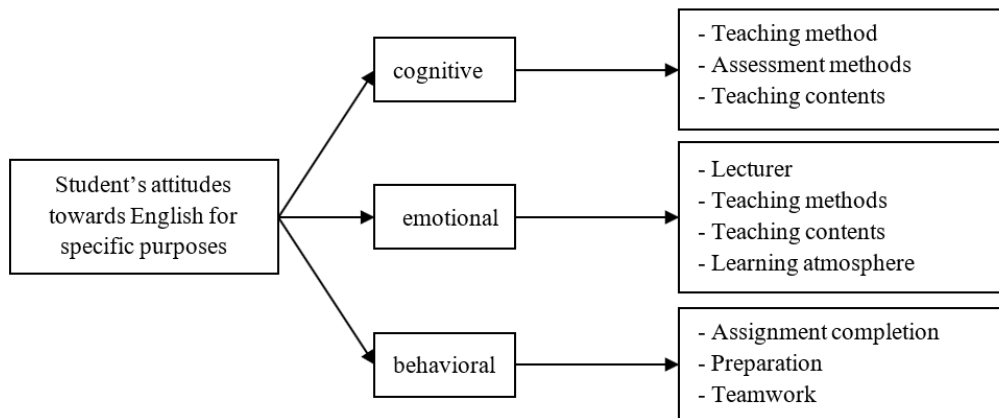

Figure 1.
A proposed model for studying attitudes by the authors of the current study.

The above model (see Figure 1) is proposed for the current study because according to the model, students' attitudes toward ESP are classified into three aspects: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. This classification is from the combination of sociological and psychological perspectives in which learning is a process of a person's positive changes in cognition, emotion, and behavior. This means that when learning a language, each learner has different ways of thinking, believing and behaving. Therefore, language attitudes should be studied from this three-dimensional perspective in which each aspect has a different impact on language acquisition. Each is described as follows:

The *cognitive* aspect of attitude deals with learners' thinking and beliefs about the knowledge they receive and their understanding during the learning process. Cognitive attitudes can be classified into four groups: connecting old and new knowledge, creating new knowledge, testing new knowledge, and applying new knowledge to different situations.

The *emotional* aspect of attitude refers to the learning process which is always associated with emotions. Attitude can help students express their love, indifference, or even hatred of surrounding objects or situations. It can be seen that the inner emotions and moods of foreign language learners influence their views and attitudes towards the target language. Some attitudes formed from strong emotions will become the dominant factor motivating learners to achieve rapid results. For example, learning a rare language comes from the fear of extinction of that language or the love of culture and art embedded in the language being learnt.

The *behavioral* aspect of attitude is associated with how learners behave and react in specific language learning situations. In fact, the success in learning foreign language motivates learners to confidently express themselves to native speakers and in the target language community.

Therefore, this study investigates the student's cognitive, emotional and behavioral attitudes towards ESP courses to find out whether they are positive or negative towards teaching methods, the content of the course and assessment methods.

3. Methodology

3.1. ESP course at Saigon University

Generally, the ESP course for International Studies students at Saigon University is designed with 2 modules of four credit units each. The course is to provide students with knowledge of and skills in English language and in the field of International Studies. In particular, the course equips students with the skills in reading and discussing the articles and reports published in books, newspapers, and magazines in English on various topics in the field of International Studies such as politics, economics, culture, history, negotiations, etc. In addition, the course also helps students master knowledge in doing research in the field of International Studies, feel confident when communicating, discussing, and working with foreigners, improve team-working skills to serve higher-level research.

In terms of course delivery, teaching methods used for the ESP course at SGU are task-based approaches which mainly focus on teaching English language used in the field. The materials for the course are textbooks which are designed to mainly develop students' knowledge of and skills in both English language and the field of International Studies, but they are not considered as authentic materials. Basically, the assessment methods of the course are English exams which mainly evaluate students' English competence rather than professional one.

3.2. Research Design

To achieve the research objective, this research was mainly done through two surveys. The first survey was conducted before the ESP course took place, called pre-course survey. The purpose of the pre-course survey is to collect students' initial attitudes towards the ESP course. The second survey was conducted after the ESP finished, called post-course survey. The goal is to collect students' attitudes after taking the ESP course. The purpose of conducting the two surveys is to find out whether there are any changes in students' attitudes towards the ESP course. Both surveys were conducted through two questionnaires.

3.3. Participants

To ensure the level of precision that the survey results reflect the views from the overall population, all of the International Studies students at Saigon University participated in the current study. Then, 180 questionnaires were distributed to them before and after the ESP course.

In the 5-day pre-course survey, 165 out of 180 questionnaires were returned. Although the number did not reach the targeted population, after calculated by using Yamane's (1967) formula, 165 questionnaires were enough to ensure the level of precision that the survey results reflect the views from the overall population, which is around 98%; equivalently, sampling error is about 2% (see (1)).

$$e = \sqrt[2]{\frac{\frac{N-1}{n}}{N}} = \sqrt[2]{\frac{\frac{180-1}{165}}{180}} = 0.023 \ (\approx 2\%) \quad (1)$$

However, in the 5-day post-course survey, only 146 out of 180 questionnaires were returned. Although the number of students participating in post-course survey is lower than the one in pre-course survey, after calculated by using Yamane's (1967) formula, 146 questionnaires were also enough to ensure the level of precision that the survey results reflect the views from the overall population, which is around 96%; equivalently, sampling error is about 4% (see (2)).

$$e = \sqrt[2]{\frac{\frac{N-1}{n}}{N}} = \sqrt[2]{\frac{\frac{180-1}{146}}{180}} = 0.036 \ (\approx 4\%) \quad (2)$$

According to statistics, out of the participants, the number of male students who participated in both pre-course and post-course surveys accounted for about 23% whereas the number of female students occupied around 77% (see Figure 2). Although the proportion of male students to female ones is on bias, this is due to the tendency in which the female choose this major more than male.
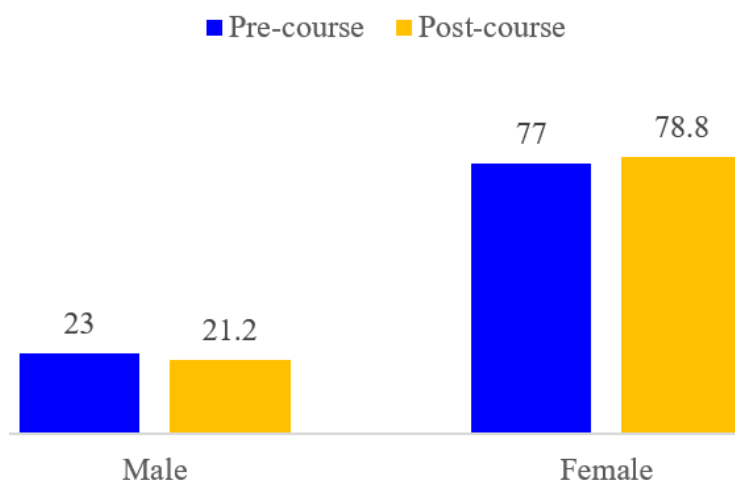
Figure 2.
A comparison of participant's gender before and after course.

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

Data collection instruments used in this study are questionnaires, one for the pre-course survey and the other for the post-course one. Both are divided into two parts. The first part is to know students' gender and the second one is to explore their cognitive, emotional and behavioral attitudes towards the ESP course. The ten question items in second part are designed to ask about their attitudes towards teaching methods, assessment methods and the content of the course. In particular, in both questionnaires, question items 1-5 deal with teaching methods, 6-7 with assessment methods, and 8-10 with the content of the course. All question items, apart from a question about gender, are designed in a 5-point Likert scale from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree to (5) strongly agree.

To ensure the validity of data, the researchers had a group discussion, called preliminary research, of ten students to check their understanding of the questionnaires in terms of language. The main purpose of preliminary research is to calibrate the concepts and information included in the questionnaires.

To measure the reliability level of the items in both questionnaires, the reliability coefficient tests were done. As can be seen from Table 1, the values of Cronbach's Alpha were 0.943 and 0.917 which shows acceptable consistency of reliability in both questionnaires. This means all the items in both questionnaires can measure the research objective reliably.

Table 1.
The reliability of all the items in the pre-course questionnaire.

	Cronbach's alpha	**No. of items**
Pre-course questionnaire	0.943	10
Post-course questionnaire	0.917	10

3.5. Data Collection Procedures

In the pre-course survey, thanks to the support given by the lecturers of the International Studies program managed by Faculty of Culture and Tourism at Saigon University, the questionnaires were distributed to the students directly in class. The data collection procedure took place in the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024, from January 8th, 2024 to January 12th, 2024. In the end, it took five days to collect data.

In the post-course survey, also thanks to the support given by the lecturers of the International Studies program managed by Faculty of Culture and Tourism at Saigon University, the questionnaires were also distributed to the students in class. The data collection procedure took place in the second

semester of the academic year 2023-2024, from April 22nd, 2024 to April 26th, 2024. It also took five days.

3.6. Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis procedures for both pre-course and post-course surveys were divided into two phases as follows. First, the researchers implemented the coding of the questionnaires. Second, the researchers entered the coded data from questionnaires into SPSS Statistics 22 software and made necessary descriptive statistics, such as the mean, SD (standard deviation), the range, variance, maximum and minimum values for summarizing, presenting, and analyzing the findings. In this stage, the results of the survey became more visual and quantitative for discussion, analysis and report. The meaning of the mean scores for the students' attitudes towards ESP course were interpreted as follows:

Table 2.
The description of the meaning of the mean scores for the students' attitudes towards ESP course.

Mean scores	Meaning	% of students*	Possibly interpreted as
1.00 – 1.80	strongly disagree	20% – 35%	A very small number of students
1.81 – 2.60	disagree	36% – 51%	A small number of students
2.61 – 3.40	neutral	52% – 67%	A pretty big number of students
3.41 – 4.20	agree	68% – 83%	Many the students
4.21 – 5.00	strongly agree	84% – 100%	Most/Majority of the students

$$\left(*= \frac{(\text{mean scores} \times \text{total of participants}) \div 5.0}{\text{total of participants}} \right)$$

4. Findings and Discussion

It can be said that attitudes play a significant role in learning English as a foreign language in general and in learning ESP in particular. They function as factors positively or negatively affecting students' perception, feelings, and action in learning. It is also true that attitudes always change, depending on the learners' inner factors as well as factors that come from outside. Therefore, changes in attitudes are unavoidable, but the tendency of changes should be taken into consideration. To be clear, if the changes in attitudes are positive, bad-to-good changes, it is a good indicator for development. However, if the changes are negative, good-to-bad changes, it is an alert to which a great deal of attention should be paid. Therefore, within the scope of this study, examining whether there are changes in students' attitudes towards the ESP course in terms of teaching methods, the content of the course and assessment methods is necessary because it is a valuable source of evidence for any adjustment or improvement.

Table 3.
Comparing the mean scores of students' attitudes from pre-course and post-course surveys.

Student's attitudes	Mean scores from pre-course survey	Mean scores from post-course one
Student's attitudes towards teaching methods	4.042	3.593
Student's attitudes towards assessment methods	3.873	3.798
Student's attitudes towards the content of the course	3.879	3.988
Average	3.931	3.793

Note: Scale: 1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Comparing the mean scores of students' attitudes from the pre-course and post-course surveys, the researchers find out that there are negative and positive changes in students' attitudes towards the ESP course after they took the ESP course, compared to the result of the survey conducted before the ESP course. First, towards teaching methods, Table 3 shows that the means of students' attitudes in the pre-

course and post-course surveys drop significantly. In particular, the mean (M=4.042) of student's attitudes towards teaching methods in the pre-course survey is much higher than the one (M=3.593) in the post-course survey. These figures indicate that before the ESP course, many of the students had positive attitudes to their lecturers' teaching methods, but after the course they could not maintain such positive attitudes. Meanwhile, towards the assessment methods, the means of students' attitudes also decrease from M=3.873 from the pre-course survey to M=3.798 from the post-course one, but it is not a notable change (see Table 3). This shows that many of the students could not stay positive after finishing the ESP course. Fortunately, the changes in the mean scores of students' attitudes towards the content of the course, from M=3.879 from the pre-course survey to M=3.988 from the post-course one (see Table 3), signal that the content of the course is appropriate to students. From these findings, the researchers conclude that there are negative and positive changes in students' attitudes towards the ESP course after they took the ESP course, compared to the result of the survey conducted before the ESP course. The negative changes in students' attitudes are mainly due to teaching methods and partly due to assessment methods whereas the positive changes in students' attitudes are partly due to the content of the course. A clear picture of the changes in students' attitudes is described in the following sections.

Comparing both global and Vietnamese studies on attitudes and motivation toward learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) reveals commonalities and distinct challenges. Globally, research emphasizes the importance of aligning ESP course content with students' academic and professional needs to maintain high levels of motivation. Studies like those of Tomak and Šendula-Pavelić (2017) and Ameri (2013) highlight that students are generally integratively motivated when ESP courses reflect their specialized fields, with a focus on practical skills such as translation and reading comprehension. Similarly, Syakur et al. (2020) found that using modern, digital-based learning materials elicited positive student responses, while Arslan and Akbarov (2012) stressed the importance of a student-centered approach. However, many international studies, such as those by Ahmad et al. (2019) and Anwar (2017), identified systemic challenges and content misalignment as factors leading to student dissatisfaction and demotivation, especially when courses failed to meet the specific demands of their academic disciplines. In Vietnam, studies have largely focused on broader language attitudes and learning motivations in general English contexts. Researchers such as Vu (2005, 2006) and Vo (2017) explored the sociolinguistic dimensions of language attitudes and how these influence learning behaviors. More recent work, like that of Truong (2020), examined preferences for different English accents, while studies by Tran (2018) and Trinh (2014) analyzed the impact of modern technology and media on language use and attitudes. However, little attention has been given to the dynamics of motivation specifically in ESP contexts, despite the acknowledgment that motivation is key to successful learning outcomes. While Vietnamese research has provided valuable insights into general language attitudes, it lags behind in addressing the particular challenges of ESP, such as the need for more engaging, context-specific course content and teaching methods that actively foster student motivation.

In both international and Vietnamese contexts, the overarching issue remains the alignment of teaching methods and course content with learners' needs. Globally, researchers have begun addressing this gap by exploring new teaching approaches and materials, while in Vietnam, the need for such innovations is becoming more apparent. Moving forward, Vietnamese ESP programs could benefit from incorporating findings from international studies to develop more engaging, student-centered courses that focus on practical application and motivation. Additionally, more research is needed to explore the evolution of students' attitudes and motivation within the ESP framework, allowing for more effective curriculum development and teaching strategies.

4.1. Students' Attitudes Towards Teaching Methods

As mentioned above, students' attitudes towards teaching methods have been generally found to be changing from positively to negatively after the ESP course. However, what aspects of teaching methods contribute to such a change? First of all, students' cognitive attitudes towards their lecturers' teaching methods are highly positive before the course because many of the students thought that the teaching methods their lecturers use would be effective, so they could study well (see the mean (M=4.103) of question item 1 in Table 4). At the same time, the mean (M=4.115) of question item 2 in

Table 4 also indicates that many of the students hoped that they would have more opportunities to participate in in-class activities. However, what they thought and hoped has disappeared after taking the course because many of them found that the teaching methods their lecturers used were ineffective (see the mean (M=3.568) of question item 1 in Table 5) and uninteresting (see the mean (M=3.507) of question item 2 in Table 5).

Table 4.
Pre-course survey results of students' attitude towards teaching methods.

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation
1. I think that teaching methods my lecturer uses will be effective, so I can study well.	165	1.0	5.0	4.103	1.1078
2. I hope I will have more opportunities to participate in in-class activities.	165	1.0	5.0	4.115	1.1551
3. I expect that I will feel more motivated to learn because the ESP course is good for my future career.	165	1.0	5.0	4.073	1.1923
4. I am willing to do more research to complete the assignments.	165	1.0	5.0	3.939	1.1245
5. I will actively participate in in-class activities, especially teamworking activities.	165	1.0	5.0	3.982	1.1124
Average score	165	1	5	4.042	11.384

Note: Scale: 1. Strongly disagree   2. Disagree   3. Neutral   4. Agree   5. Strongly agree

Second, students' emotional attitudes towards their lecturers' teaching methods are highly positive before the course because many of the students expected that they would feel more motivated to learn because the ESP course is good for their future career (see the mean (M=4.073) of question item 3 in Table 4). However, what they expected has not happened during the course because many of the students reported that the learning atmosphere would not have been good because they would not have had opportunities to participate in in-class activities (see the mean (M=3.452) of question item 3 in Table 5).

Table 5.
Post-course survey results of students' attitude towards teaching methods.

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation
1. I find that teaching methods my lecturer used were effective, so I studied better.	146	1.0	5.0	3.568	1.2368
2. I find that teaching methods my lecturer used were interesting, so I felt more motivated to learn.	146	1.0	5.0	3.507	1.1641
3. I feel that the learning atmosphere was good because I had opportunities to participate in in-class activities.	146	1.0	5.0	3.452	1.1022
4. I always did more research to fully complete the assignments.	146	1.0	5.0	3.699	1.1825
5. I actively participated in in-class activities, especially teamworking activities.	146	1.0	5.0	3.740	1.0107
Average score	146	1	5	3.593	11.393

Note: Scale: 1. Strongly disagree   2. Disagree   3. Neutral   4. Agree   5. Strongly agree

Furthermore, students' behavioral attitudes towards their lecturers' teaching methods are also highly positive before the course because many of the students stated that they would be willing to do more research to complete the assignments (see the mean (M=3.939) of question item 4 in Table 4) and they would actively participate in in-class activities, especially teamworking activities (see the mean

(M=3.982) of question item 5 in Table 4). Fortunately, what they stated before taking the course has happened because many of the students reported that they always did more research to fully complete the assignments (see the mean (M=3.699) of question item 4 in Table 5) and that they actively participated in in-class activities, especially teamworking activities (see the mean (M=3.740) of question item 5 in Table 5).

Overall, from these findings, the researchers find out that due to the low effectiveness of teaching methods and the less interesting learning atmosphere the lecturers employed and created, respectively, the learning motivation of a big group of students has decreased, possibly resulting in their demotivation in learning ESP. Thereby, the program managers need to make necessary changes in teaching methods. In particular, they need to employ new teaching methods which focus on fostering students' motivation. At the same time, they also need to do some experimental research to examine the effectiveness of the employed methods.

4.2. Students' Attitudes towards Assessment Methods

Assessment methods are especially important because they function as tools to measure the learning outcomes of any kind of learners. In addition, they also contribute significantly to students' learning motivation. As mentioned above, students' attitudes towards assessment methods have been generally found to be changing from positively to negatively after the ESP course. In particular, towards the assessment methods, the mean scores of students' attitudes also decrease from M=3.873 from the pre-course survey to M=3.798 from the post-course survey, but it is not a notable change (see Table 3). First of all, students' cognitive attitudes towards assessment methods are relatively positive before the course because the number of the students who thought that the assessment methods used in the course would be accurate and objective is not very high (see the mean (M=3.873) of question item 6 in Table 6). Fortunately, what they thought was true after taking the course because many of them found that the assessment methods used in the course were accurate and objective (see the mean (M=3.884) of question item 6 in Table 7).

Table 6.
Pre-course survey results of students' attitude towards assessment methods.

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation
6. I think that the assessment methods used in the course will be accurate and objective.	165	1.0	5.0	3.873	1.0773
7. I hope the assessment methods used in the course will be more accurate and objective.	165	1.0	5.0	3.873	1.1485
Average score	165	1	5	3.873	11.129

Note: Scale: 1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

In addition, students' emotional attitudes towards assessment methods are also relatively positive before the course because the number of the students who thought that the assessment methods used in the course would be accurate and objective is not very high (see the mean (M=3.873) of question item 7 in Table 6). Fortunately, what they thought was also true after taking the course because many of them found that the assessment methods used in the course were accurate and objective (see the mean (M=3.712) of question item 7 in Table 7).

Table 7.
Post-course survey results of students' attitude towards assessment methods.

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation
6. I find that the assessment methods used in the course were accurate and objective.	146	1.0	5.0	3.884	1.0668
7. I felt satisfied with the assessment methods used in the course because of their accuracy and objectivity.	146	1.0	5.0	3.712	1.0825
Average score	146	1	5	3.798	10.747

Note: Scale: 1. Strongly disagree   2. Disagree   3. Neutral   4. Agree   5. Strongly agree

Overall, from these findings, the researchers find out that although assessment methods have been found to be accurate and objective, fostering students' positive attitudes towards learning ESP. However, the number of students who reported the assessment methods used in the course would be inaccurate and unobjective is relatively high. Thereby, the program managers need to make necessary changes in assessment methods to evaluate students' progress in terms language skills, specialized knowledge as well as career skills rather than evaluating students' language skills, currently employed.

4.3. Students' Attitudes Towards the Content of ESP Course

The content of the ESP course is also especially important in ESP teaching and learning practices because if it is set at too high level, compared to students' English proficiency, students could face many challenges in doing the course. Or, if it is at too low level, they could be bored. This means that it is best to set the content of the ESP course at appropriate level. Hence, examining the attitudes of students towards the content of the ESP course is necessary. The result will be evidence for making any adjustments to the course materials as well as the determination of input and output levels if the content is too high or too low. Fortunately, the results of two surveys show that, towards the content of the course, students' attitudes are really positive both before and after taking the ESP course. In comparing the means of two surveys, a positive change in students' attitudes has been found towards the content of the ESP course, proved by the increase in the means of two surveys which is from M=3.879 to M=3.988 (see Table 3). Although it is not also a notable change, it indicates that the current content of the ESP course is appropriate from students' attitudes.

First of all, students' cognitive attitudes towards the content of the ESP course are really positive before the course because many of the students thought that their English proficiency would help them finish the ESP course successfully (see the mean (M=3.945) of question item 8 in Table 8). Fortunately, students' cognitive attitudes towards the content of the ESP course becomes more positive after they took the course because many of them found that the content of ESP course was at appropriate level compared to their English proficiency (see the mean (M=4.075) of question item 8 in Table 9).

Table 8.
Pre-course survey results of students' attitude towards the content of ESP course.

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation
8. I think that my English proficiency helps me finish the ESP course successfully.	165	1.0	5.0	3.945	1.1112
9. I don't worry that the content of ESP course will be higher than my English proficiency.	165	1.0	5.0	3.733	1.1849
10. I think I should prepare before class so that I can acquire the lessons completely.	165	1.0	5.0	3.958	1.1442
Average score	165	1	5	3.879	11.468

Note: Scale: 1. Strongly disagree   2. Disagree   3. Neutral   4. Agree   5. Strongly agree

Second, students' emotional attitudes towards the content of the ESP course are relatively positive before the course because the number of the students stating that they didn't worry that the content of ESP course would be higher than their English proficiency is quite high (see the mean (M=3.733) of question item 9 in Table 8). Notably, after taking the course, a large number of students found that the content of ESP course was appropriate to their English proficiency, so they felt more motivated to learn (see the mean (M=3.938) of question item 9 in Table 9).

Table 9.
Post-course survey results of students' attitude towards the content of ESP course.

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation
8. I find that the content of ESP course was at appropriate level compared to my English proficiency.	146	1.0	5.0	4.075	1.0960
9. I find that the content of ESP course was appropriate to my English proficiency, so I felt more motivated to learn.	146	1.0	5.0	3.938	1.1816
10. I often prepared before class so that I could acquire the lessons.	146	1.0	5.0	3.952	1.1224
Average score	146	1	5	3.988	11.333

Note: Scale: 1. Strongly disagree   2. Disagree   3. Neutral   4. Agree   5. Strongly agree.

Moreover, students' behavioral attitudes towards the content of the ESP course are still highly positive both before and after the course. The mean (M=3.958) of question item 10 in Table 8, which is equal to the one (M=3.952) of question item 10 in Table 9, shows that whether the course is easy or difficult, they would actively prepare before class so that they can acquire the lessons completely.

Overall, from these findings, the researchers find out that although the content of the ESP course has been found to be appropriate to the large of students, fostering students' positive attitudes towards learning ESP. However, the number of students who reported the content of the course would be inappropriate, possibly being at higher or lower levels, is a bit high. Thereby, the program managers need to make some minor changes to the content of the ESP course, assisting them in achieving the learning outcomes more easily.

5. Conclusion

From these findings, the researchers conclude that there are negative and positive changes in students' attitudes towards the ESP course after they took the ESP course, compared to the result of the survey conducted before the ESP course. The negative changes in students' attitudes are mainly due to teaching methods and partly due to assessment methods whereas the positive changes in students' attitudes are partly due to the content of the course. In particular, the negative changes in students' attitudes towards teaching methods are due to the fact that the teaching methods and the learning atmosphere have been reported by students to be less effective and less interesting, respectively. As a result of this, a small number of students have felt less motivated to learn ESP. Besides, the negative changes in students' attitudes towards assessment methods are due to the fact that the assessment methods used in the course have also been reported to be less accurate and objective. As a matter of consequence, there were a small number of students felt unsatisfied with the assessment methods used in the course. Although the content of the ESP course has been found to be appropriate to the large number of students, fostering their positive attitudes towards learning ESP, the number of students who reported the content of the course would be inappropriate, possibly being at higher or lower levels, is pretty high.

From these findings, the researchers suggest that the program managers need to make necessary changes in teaching methods. In particular, they need to employ new teaching methods which focus on fostering students' motivation. At the same time, they also need to do some experimental research to examine the effectiveness of the employed methods. In addition, the program managers need to make

necessary changes in assessment methods to evaluate students' progress in terms language skills, specialized knowledge as well as career skills rather than evaluating students' language skills, currently employed. At the same time, the program managers need to make some minor changes to the content of the ESP course, assisting them in achieving the learning outcomes more easily. Moreover, the aforementioned research results, in the authors' opinion, also partly help lecturers teaching English for International Studies at Saigon University to better understand students' attitudes towards the course. Since then, there have been improvements and innovations in appropriate teaching methods so that students have better learning results, helping students apply the knowledge they have learned to handle specific tasks most effectively.

Acknowledgements:

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