

“Teaching English for Military Purposes (EMP): Needs Analysis, Pedagogical Approaches, and Implementation Challenges”.

I Debora Gjoni

1. *Defense and Security Faculty, English Department, Tirana, Albania*

Abstract- English has become the primary language of multinational military operations, training exercises, and peacekeeping missions. As a result, English for Military Purposes (EMP) has emerged as a specialized branch of English for Military Purposes (EMP), addressing the communicative needs of military personnel. This article focuses on needs analysis, the pedagogical methods and the challenges that ESP brings to teachers. Drawing on ESP theory and military education practices, the study examines operational language requirements, task-based and scenario-based teaching approaches, and assessment aligned with international standards such as NATO STANAG 6001. This study employs a semi-structured interview with 4 English teachers working at the Faculty of Defense and Security. The results show that effective EMP programs must be needs-driven, context-sensitive, and closely integrated with professional military tasks. Some recommendations are offered for curriculum design, teaching practice, and future research in military language education.

Keywords: *Governance; Political Economy; Development; Growth; Inequality; English for Military Purposes; ESP; Military Language Training; NATO; Needs Analysis; STANAG 6001; Needs Analysis*

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 (CC BY-NC 4.0) International License.

Introduction

Global role of English in military and security contexts

English plays a vital role in communication, thus playing the role of a Lingua Franca that enables interoperability, coordination, and stability among armed forces worldwide. It helps as a primary working language in NATO contexts, UN peacekeeping missions and joint exercises. The personnel from different linguistic backgrounds can share their knowledge and operational information. In NATO, English (alongside French) is an official language, with English being the dominant operational language. Interoperability—the ability of forces from different nations to operate together effectively—depends heavily on language. English is widely used in international military academies and training institution and joint training exercises and staff courses. As such, it is also the language of international communication practices (Dewey, 2007; Giddens, 1999; House, 2003; Seidelhofer, 2001, 2004, 2005). Not surprisingly, English also stands as the vehicular language for the Military, in an international geopolitical scenario marked by the globalization of conflicts beyond national borders and consequently by the integration of armies in multinational and multicultural coalition forces (Febbraro, McKee & Riedel, 2008; Stewart et al., 2004). All these studies show the importance of English language, especially in the military when it comes to understand the multicultural contexts.

Importance of EMP in multinational operations and training

As we mentioned previously, English functions as LINGUA FRANCA of modern military operations, particularly with NATO, UN peacekeeping missions and joint exercises as well. It firstly is essential for operational interoperability because many forces rely on shared terminology, command structures and language to coordinate maneuvers, logistics and intelligence sharing.

Secondly, EMP supports effective training and professional development by providing joint exercises, simulations and military education programs that are conducted in English. Thirdly, EMP contributes to command and control efficiency. Clear communication between commanding officers and multinational units enhances decision-making, ensures compliance with rules of engagement, and facilitates rapid response to evolving operational scenarios. So, in general EMP is not just a linguistic tool but a strategic enabler in multinational military operations and training.

Distinction between General English, ESP, and EMP

The use of English can be categorized according to the learners' need. General English (GE), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and English for Military Purposes (EMP)

differ primarily in their objectives, content, methodology, and target learners.

General English (GE)' aim is to develop overall proficiency in the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—without targeting a particular professional or academic field. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a learner- and needs-oriented approach to language teaching. English for Military Purposes (EMP) is a specialized branch of ESP tailored specifically to military contexts. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Swales (1990) established the foundation of ESP by highlighting the importance of tailoring language instruction to specific domains and purposes. ESP has since been defined as teaching English that addresses learners' specific needs in specialized contexts, focusing on domain-specific vocabulary, discourse patterns, and communicative skills. Bloor and Bloor (2004) and Jordan (1997) contribute to the discourse on EGP by emphasizing the broad nature of language instruction encompassing diverse language skills and contexts. Another study was conducted by Azalmad (2023), who challenged the prevailing assumptions and highlights the limitations of the ESP vs. EGP dichotomy. The key findings reveal that the boundaries between ESP and EGP are blurred and that considering all English language teaching as ESP provides a more comprehensive and inclusive approach.

On the other hand, EMP plays a distinct role for a standardized communication in military context. Since English has an important role in international missions, including NATO and UN, there comes a need to know it academically. Knowing how to communicate in English, makes it possible to avoid misunderstandings that could lead to operational failure or safety risks, especially during joint exercises, briefings, and combat-related coordination. A significant proportion of military training materials, doctrines, manuals, and technical documentation are produced in English which allows the personnel to access up-to-date tactical and strategic knowledge. According to Elamin (2010) findings indicate that officers with higher English proficiency complete training modules 25% faster, reflecting improved comprehension. His study reveals that enhancing English proficiency among Sudanese military officers improves operational efficiency by 37% during joint exercises with foreign forces.

Aim and significance of the study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the teaching and learning of military English by examining the specific linguistic and communicative needs of military personnel, the pedagogical approaches employed in EMP instruction. It aims at exploring the practical challenges faced by instructors and institutions

and propose context-sensitive recommendations for improving EMP curriculum design and instructional practices. As for the significance of the study, it contributes to the limited body of research on English for Military Purposes, offers practical value for EMP instructors and curriculum designers and holds institutional and strategic relevance for military education and training establishments.

Research questions

The research questions of this study, which are also part of the interview when considering the methodology, are listed below:

1. What are the communicative needs of military personnel?
2. Which teaching methods are most effective in EMP contexts?
3. What challenges affect EMP instruction?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Key principles of ESP (needs analysis, authenticity, learner-centeredness)

The first influential concept of a large-scale analysis of students' needs emerged in the 1970s. Richterich and Chancerel (1987) conducted research for the Council of Europe into adult learners' language proficiency needs to examine the educational process of learning. The analysis adopted a **learner-centered perspective**, emphasizing learners' needs as the core focus of instruction. Grounded in the theoretical framework of needs analysis developed through the Council of Europe's project on adult learners' language needs (Richterich & Chancerel, 1987), this approach acknowledges that language is employed across a wide range of social and professional contexts. As a result, conducting a systematic analysis of learners' needs became essential for defining course objectives, informing ESP course design, and determining the content of teaching and learning materials.

In ESP, language instruction is shaped by what learners need to do with English, rather than by general language objectives. In military contexts, needs analysis identifies communicative tasks such as giving orders, participating in briefings, writing reports, or engaging in multinational operations. Authenticity refers to the use of realistic language, tasks, and materials that reflect the learners' actual professional environment. ESP emphasizes exposure to authentic texts and scenarios, such as manuals, standard operating procedures, radio communications, and mission briefings.

Authenticity and learner-centeredness are central

principles in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and are particularly significant in English for Military Purposes (EMP). Authenticity enhances learners' readiness for real-life professional situations by exposing them to **realistic language, tasks, and discourse practices** drawn from the target context (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). In military settings, authentic materials—such as operational briefings, standard operating procedures, and scenario-based communication—promote the accurate use of specialized terminology and improve learners' confidence in high-stakes, mission-critical communication. By reflecting real operational demands, authentic tasks help bridge the gap between classroom instruction and practical application, ensuring that language learning is directly transferable to professional performance (Basturkmen, 2010).

In EMP contexts, learner-centered instruction encourages active engagement through simulations, role-plays, and problem-solving activities that mirror military operations. Such approaches increase motivation, support learner autonomy, and align language instruction with both individual professional needs and broader institutional objectives, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and relevance of EMP programs (Basturkmen, 2006; Long, 2005). Also the findings of Koltai (2018) with the Hungarian students suggested that the language-related difficulties the students met with stemmed from their unfamiliarity of the specialist field of the EU and its language. These difficulties emerged from the specific features of vocabulary which were identified when examining different EU genres and reading skills. Together, needs analysis, authenticity, and learner-centeredness constitute the foundational pillars of English for Specific Purposes and play a crucial role in the successful delivery of English for Military Purposes. As far as these principles are implemented in a consistent manner, they ensure that EMP programs remain pedagogically effective.

Role of English in NATO and international missions

English plays a vital role in multinational military missions, functioning as the primary working and operational language among partner states. As NATO comprises countries with diverse linguistic backgrounds, English serves as a *lingua franca*, enabling effective communication, coordination, and interoperability across allied forces. In NATO contexts, language proficiency is not merely a communicative skill but a matter of operational effectiveness and safety. English also plays a crucial role in peacekeeping, crisis management conducted under NATO, UN or EU mandates. Emphasizing the importance of English,

Dewey (2007, p. 350) states that: *"The globalization of English is simply the most recent stage in the continual (sometimes more gradual, sometimes more accelerated) transformational processes that have been present throughout the history of the language. Periods of significant social change have indeed signaled periods of heightened linguistic change throughout the history of languages, particularly English. It is thus inevitable, given the pace and extent of change in geopolitics and communication technology, that linguistic changes such as those described here are occurring..."*

According to the Bureau for International Language Coordination (BILC, 2013): *"Standardization makes a vital contribution to the combined operational effectiveness of the military forces of the Alliance and enables opportunities to be exploited for making better use of economic resources. Extensive efforts are made to improve cooperation and to eliminate duplication in the research, development, production, procurement and logistic support of defense systems, primarily through the promulgation of NATO Standardization Agreements, known as STANAG-s. Implementation of STANAG-s helps countries to achieve the required levels of interoperability and to better accomplish their common strategic, operational and tactical tasks, to understand and execute command procedures, and to employ techniques, material and equipment more efficiently."*

Aduabato and Efthymiopoulos (2014) did a study about the necessity of language skills. The article reflects the initial result of a preliminary study and address questions regarding the importance of the English language as a tool for NATO capabilities. The findings showed that NATO must become more involved in the training of national English language teachers as well as those who test English language proficiency in accordance with STANAG 6001. There is no official NATO test but merely national interpretations of the language levels outlined in STANAG 6001 and often one nation's Level 2 is another nation's Level 3. Allied Command Transformation (ACT), the command responsible for education and training, financially supports language testing seminars held at the George C. Marshall Center in Germany, but they do not even have the means to test their own personnel. Only Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) has a testing team and regularly tests newly assigned personnel to the command.

Teaching methods in EMP

Teaching methods for Military Purposes focus on practical, mission-oriented and also some interactive strategies to improve the operational competence. These key approaches include: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Scenario-Based Learning, Audio-lingual Method (drills) and Content-Based Instruction.

When employing Task-Based Learning, the main objective of the teacher is to give the learners the opportunity to complete meaningful realistic tasks. In the military context, this could involve simulations of mission briefings, communication in tactical situations or negotiation scenarios (Lica & Negoescu, 2025). They point out that during the classes all the skills are exercised, but each semester one or two skills are given precedence over the others, the emphasis being on communication through interaction in the target language, on authentic texts, on the creation of opportunities for cadets to concentrate, not only on language, but also on the learning process itself. When learners participate in realistic role-play activities, task-based learning (TBL) helps them enhance their confidence, fluency, accuracy, and overall communicative competence. Moreover, because these tasks are closely connected to the cadets' professional responsibilities, they tend to be more engaging and motivating for the learners. A study conducted by Gaddala Subbarao explored the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning in improving English proficiency. The findings demonstrated "that students in the TBL group experienced a significantly greater improvement in overall language skills compared to the control group."

Task-based and scenario-driven approaches are widely recognized as effective methods in English for Military Purposes (EMP) instruction. When learners engage in realistic role-play activities, Task-Based Learning (TBL) supports the development of confidence, fluency, accuracy, and overall communicative competence. Because these tasks are directly linked to cadets' professional duties, they tend to be particularly motivating and relevant (Basturkmen, 2010; Willis & Willis, 2007). Complementing TBL, scenario-based exercises immerse learners in **authentic military situations**, requiring them to apply English in contextually appropriate ways. Such exercises may include simulated emergency responses, operational briefings, or peacekeeping missions, each designed to replicate the challenges and demands of real-world military operations (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Together, these approaches bridge the gap between classroom instruction and practical application, ensuring that language learning is both operationally meaningful and learner-centered.

The Audio-Lingual method emphasizes repetition, drilling and habit formation. ALM remains highly recommended in military contexts where accuracy and speed is provided. In military contexts, communication often relies on predictable structures and it is used to train the personnel through substitution drills, transformation drills etc. This type of repetitive practice builds automatic responses, which are crucial in high-pressure operational environments. ALM supports

memorization of structured dialogues for common operational scenarios such as: requesting backup and reporting incidents. Like the Direct Method, it is also an oral-based approach. The Audio-Lingual Method drills students in the use of grammatical sentence patterns (Turgay, n.d).

While the Content-Based instruction is stated by many scholars up to now. Snow (1991) observes "throughout the history of second language teaching, the word "content" has had many different interpretations" (p.315). Hutchinson and Waters (1984) contrast CBI with more traditional forms of instruction:

-in a content-based approach, the focus is on exploiting the information conveyed by a text

-in a language-based approach, the text is used as a source for language exercises (p.113). All the above mentioned methods help teachers and especially cadets perform better and boost their English communicative skills.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study uses a qualitative research design by using open-ended questions to help the subjects express their view clearly. It aims at finding out the best way to overcome challenges when teaching and learning ESP.

Participants and data collection instrument

The population chosen for conducting this research were 4 English teachers working at the Faculty of Defense and Security. This research conducted a focus group interview with the teachers. All of teachers were aware that the reason of the focus group interview was because of a conduction research. The participants were coded as T1, T2, T3 and T4.

Data collection procedure

Data were collected during the study period. The study used primary data approach through direct interaction with the subjects. This allowed the researcher to collect firsthand information tailored to the research questions. It used focus group technique. All the process took 1 hour at the English Department. All the data was written down by the researcher herself.

Data analysis procedure

The data gathered from the focus group interview used a thematic data analyses including certain themes and concepts. All the process of data gathering uses a manual data processing, using a pen

and a paper. The teachers answer 3 questions including the research questions. The researcher uses an inductive thematic analyses including codes.

RESULTS

Q1. What are the communicative needs of military personnel?

Table 1. Themes and codes of 1st question

Participants	Word encoding	Codes	Themes
T1	Military personnel need to communicate clearly during multinational missions, especially when giving and receiving operational instructions in English.	military personnel operational	Operational Communication in International Contexts
T2	They must master standardized terminology and NATO-specific vocabulary to avoid misunderstandings in tactical and strategic situations.	master standardized misunderstanding	Specialized Military Terminology
T3	Listening skills are crucial, particularly in high-pressure environments such as briefings, radio communication, and emergency coordination	skills High pressure Emergency coordination	High-Stakes Listening and Comprehension
T4	They also need intercultural communicative competence to collaborate effectively with allied forces from different cultural backgrounds.”	intercultural competence collaborate	Intercultural Communication in Multinational Operations

Q2. Which teaching methods are most effective in EMP contexts?

Table 2. Themes and codes of 2nd question

Participants	Word encoding	Codes	Themes
T1	Task-based activities that simulate real missions are the most effective because soldiers need to perform specific communicative tasks, not just learn grammar	task-based effective communicative tasks	Task-Based and Performance-Oriented Learning

T2	Scenario-based simulations and role-plays work best, especially when we recreate multinational operations or crisis situations	scenario-based simulations multinational operations	Simulation and Scenario-Based Instruction
T3	Content-based teaching using authentic military documents and NATO materials helps learners acquire both terminology and functional language.	content-based authentic learners terminology	Content-Based and Authentic Materials Approach
T4	Drills and controlled practice are still necessary for radio communication and standardized phraseology to ensure clarity and accuracy.	drills practice standardized clarity	Controlled Practice for Precision and Standardization

Q3. What challenges affect EMP instruction?

Table 3. Themes and codes of 3rd question

Participants	Word encoding	Codes	Themes
T1	One of the main challenges is the mixed language proficiency levels within the same military group, which makes it difficult to design balanced lessons	challenge language design	Learner Diversity and Differentiation
T2	Limited time for language training due to operational duties and military schedules significantly affects instructional continuity	limited time schedules instructional continuity	Institutional and Time Constraints
T3	Access to authentic military materials is sometimes restricted because of confidentiality and security regulations.	authentic restricted regulations	Limited Access to Authentic Resources

<p>T4</p>	<p>Many learners experience communication anxiety, especially when speaking in high-stakes or multinational contexts</p>	<p>experience anxiety multinational</p>	<p>Affective and Psychological Barriers</p>
------------------	--	---	---

DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, this study aimed at answering three research questions. The results for the first research question evidenced that military personnel need to communicate clearly during multinational missions. Also, here the data suggests that they need intercultural skills in order to deal with allied forces. Additionally, the second research question inspected which teaching methods are appropriate for military context. The findings documented that Task-based activities that simulate real missions are the most effective because soldiers need to perform specific communicative tasks. The results indicate that scenario-based simulations and role-plays work best, especially when we recreate multinational operations

The results of the study are consistent with Lica & Negoescu (2025) who pointed out that during the classes all the skills are exercised, but each semester one or two skills are given precedence over the others, the emphasis being on communication through interaction in the target language, on authentic texts, on the creation of opportunities for cadets to concentrate, not only on language, but also on the learning process itself. Furthermore, the study supports Richards & Rodgers (2014) and Hutchinson & Waters (1987) whose approaches bridge the gap between

classroom instruction and practical application, ensuring that language learning is both operationally meaningful and learner-centered.

The outcomes of the study have provided an insight into the best teaching and learning methods of ESP. However, the generalizability of the results is limited by the characteristics of the study participants which includes only 4 teachers and not a large sample size.

Further research is needed to establish a better understanding of knowing the role of English in NATO and in multinational missions. Also, teaching the best methods based on students' needs, it is the key to a better learning.

CONCLUSIONS

This study paved the way for knowing the best methods of teaching ESP in a military context. As English is becoming a very essential language, there will be always a need for cadets to learn it. The evidence is very clear: Teachers try to implement such methods in class even though the struggle is real due to the lack of facilities, trainings etc. These findings should be interpreted with caution given the limitation of this study, but they encourage future studies for the very important role English is having nowadays especially when it comes to join military schools and having to do with multinational missions.

REFERENCES

1. Adubato, M., & Efthymiopoulos, M.-P. (2014, September). Capacity language building in NATO: Language skill as a crucial tool for interoperability at all levels. *Joint Air Power Competence Centre Journal*, (19).

- <https://www.japcc.org/articles/capacity-language-building-in-nato>
2. AZALMAD, N. (2023). Reconsidering the distinction between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for General Purposes (EGP): Towards a unified perspective. *Journal of Innovative Research*.
<https://doi.org/10.54536/JIR.V1I13.2010>
 3. Basturkmen, H. (2006). *Ideas and options in English for specific purposes*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
 4. Basturkmen, H. (2010). *Developing courses in English for specific purposes*. Palgrave Macmillan.
 5. Bureau for International Language Coordination. (2013). *Standardization*.
<http://www.natobilc.org>
 6. Bloor, T., & Bloor, M. (2004). *The functional analysis of English: A Hallidayan approach*. Oxford University Press.
 7. Dewey, M. (2007). English as a lingua franca and globalization: An interconnected perspective. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 17(3), 332–354.
 8. Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge University Press.
 9. Elamin, M. (2010). *Importance of investigating learning English for military purposes*.
 10. Febraro, A., McKee, B., & Riedel, S. (2008). *Multinational military operations and intercultural factors*. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Research and Technology Organization.
 11. Giddens, A. (1999). *Runaway world: How globalization is reshaping our lives*. Profile Books.
 12. House, J. (2003). English as a lingua franca: A threat to multilingualism? *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7(4), 556–578.
 13. Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1984). How communicative is ESP? *ELT Journal*, 38(2), 108–113.
 14. Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centered approach*. Cambridge University Press.
 15. Jordan, R. R. (1997). *English for academic purposes: A guide and resource book for teachers*. Cambridge University Press.
 16. Koltai, A. (2018). Understanding learner needs: A qualitative study of ESP learner needs in EU English courses in Hungarian tertiary education.
<https://doi.org/10.15476/ELTE.2018.016>
 17. Long, M. H. (2005). *Second language needs analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
 18. Mihăilă Lică, G., & Negoescu, A. G. (2025). The importance of task-based learning and scenario-driven exercises in the teaching of military English. In *International Conference KNOWLEDGE-BASED ORGANIZATION* (Vol. XXXI, No. 2). <https://doi.org/10.2478/kbo-2025-0066>
 19. Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
 20. Richterich, R., & Chancerel, J.-L. (1987). *Identifying the needs of adults learning a foreign language*. Prentice Hall.
 21. Seidlhofer, B. (2001). Closing a conceptual gap: The case for a description of English as a lingua franca. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 133–158.
 22. Seidlhofer, B. (2004). Research perspectives on teaching English as a lingua franca. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24, 209–239.
 23. Seidlhofer, B. (2005). English as a lingua franca. *ELT Journal*, 59(4), 339–341.
 24. Seidlhofer, B., Breiteneder, A., & Pitzl, M. L. (2006). English as a lingua franca in Europe: Challenges for applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 26, 3–34.
 25. Snow, M. A. (1991). Teaching language through content. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (2nd ed., pp. 315–327). Heinle & Heinle.
 26. Stewart, K., Clarke, H., Goillau, P., Verrall, N., & Widdowson, M. (2004). Non-technical interoperability in multinational forces. In *Proceedings of the 9th International Command and Control Research and Technology Symposium*

- (14–16 September 2004, Copenhagen, Denmark).
27. Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press.
28. Turgay, T. (n.d.). *The audio-lingual method*.
29. Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing task-based teaching*. Oxford University Press.