

Global English in higher education: exploring the current role of world englishes and ESP

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Abstract

This article explores how the global adoption of English in higher education has led to World englishes (WE) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) becoming key trends in English Language Teaching (ELT). It provides a sociolinguistic and historical perspective on the spread of English, especially its association with innovation and its gradual expansion into more sociolinguistic domains. Its impact on educational systems and students worldwide is also discussed, along with emerging debates about the role of English varieties and culture in higher education courses such as English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), especially in light of research on WE. Next, the main tenets, areas, and research perspectives of ESP, such as discourse analysis in science and transfer of skills, are examined. The article also explores how technology can complement these fields through big data and generative AI. Finally, to encourage local research and debate, potential research topics for Bolivia within these trends are suggested.

Key words: global English, world englishes, English for specific purposes, English as a medium of Instruction

Resumen

Este artículo explora cómo la adopción global del inglés en la educación superior ha llevado a que los Ingleses del Mundo y el inglés para Fines Específicos se conviertan en tendencias importantes en la enseñanza del inglés. Se proporciona una perspectiva sociolingüística e histórica sobre la expansión del inglés, especialmente su asociación con la innovación y su expansión gradual hacia más dominios sociolingüísticos. También se aborda su impacto en los sistemas educativos y en los estudiantes de todo el mundo. Los debates emergentes sobre el papel de las variedades de inglés y la

cultura en cursos de educación superior, como el inglés como Medio de Instrucción, son analizados, especialmente, a la luz de las investigaciones sobre los Ingleses del Mundo. A continuación, se examinan los principios, áreas y perspectivas de investigaciones principales dentro del inglés para Fines Específicos, como el análisis del discurso en la ciencia y la transferencia de habilidades. El artículo también explora cómo la tecnología puede complementar estos campos a través de los *big data* y la inteligencia artificial generativa. Finalmente, se sugieren temas potenciales de investigación para Bolivia dentro de estas tendencias, para fomentar la investigación y el debate local.

Palabras clave: inglés global, ingleses del mundo, inglés para fines específicos, inglés como medio de instrucción

Introduction

English has gained increasing importance, being considered a non-official lingua franca as it has been used as the primary language for science, entertainment, commerce, politics and more (Malreddy & Schulze-Engler, 2025). Today, it is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, comparable to Chinese. However, English has more non-native speakers and is spoken in 186 countries worldwide, whereas Chinese is spoken in only 86 countries (Ethnologue, 2022). Globalization has expanded the use of English in diplomatic, academic, and professional domains. Consequently, it has been included in the curricula of most universities worldwide, and students are often required to show proficiency in this language as it is considered beneficial for internationalization and student mobility (Adriansen et al., 2023). Consequently, debates about its impact on societies and its role in higher education around the world have started to attract the attention of more researchers in English Language Teaching (ELT).

The expansion of English has generated significant sociolinguistic and educational debates. Concerns about the validity of English varieties used in diverse global contexts and the perceived prestige of native varieties over non-native ones have become important issues to be addressed (Saraceni, 2009). As a result, the field of World Englishes (WE) has gained prominence as a critical current trend in ELT, especially within higher education contexts, as most English university courses attract students from different countries and regions, causing English classrooms

to be places where intercultural communication takes place. This field has been essential to explore the educational implications of English being adopted globally and institutionally. It has also prompted discussions about the role of native and non-native English materials, instructors, and teaching practices. Likewise, the role of the local language and culture in English language instruction is encouraging debates, especially in countries that prioritize their cultural heritage, such as China or Japan. Therefore, translanguaging has also become another current important framework to assist WE in addressing interlingual and intercultural aspects present in these educational contexts.

In a world where English is globally present, especially in higher education, disciplines like English for Specific Purposes (ESP) have gained greater relevance. ESP is one of the most dynamic and current interdisciplinary areas in ELT, addressing specific linguistic and learning needs for professional and academic purposes. Its growing influence was reflected when the English for Specific Purposes journal ranked number one in the English and Literary Studies category on Google Scholar in 2022 (Bolton & Jenks, 2022). Furthermore, it has expanded its research focus with new subfields such as English for Research Publication Purposes and Survival English for Immigrants (Hyland, 2022). Therefore, analyzing its current state and challenges is essential to understanding future trends in English, science, and research.

Globalization has also fostered the development of new technologies, presenting new perspectives and challenges in ELT. The corpus linguistics methodology offers new opportunities to complement ESP since the use of corpora offers new insights about material design to meet specific needs. Technology might also contribute to raising awareness about the different English varieties around the world, complementing WE research. Considering these social, cultural, and technological aspects reshaping ELT in a globalized world and higher education, it is essential for educators to stay informed about how English is perceived and used globally to update their teaching practices.

This article explores how the adoption of English in higher education globally has driven the emergence of World Englishes and ESP as the primary current areas in ELT. It examines the sociolinguistic dynamics of the global spread of English and the impact of its integration into higher education. Next, the pedagogical and sociolinguistic insights from research around the globe in these areas are discussed,

as well as how technology could complement them. Finally, the article discusses the implications of these trends for Bolivia to inspire local research and generate debate on these critical issues.

Development

The Emergence of English as a Global Lingua Franca

Global English is the umbrella term encompassing English's social and linguistic dynamics as a global lingua franca. When discussing globalization and the rise of English in the world, many factors must be considered. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the main factors promoting language expansion can be geographical or ideological (Lastra, 1997). Geographical expansion involves the occupation of more territories, whereas ideological factors can have a political, cultural, or economic nature. English expanded geographically due to its early presence in colonies. However, that did not determine its current global reach, as other languages, such as Spanish and French, have also been present in various regions. One important factor in the expansion of English was mainly ideological, since it started to be associated with innovation and technology (Phillipson, 1992). During the Industrial Revolution in Britain, several words were coined in English to describe the technological and scientific advances made during that time, so most inventors and scientists had to learn English to keep up with these advances (Crystal, 2003). By the dawn of the twentieth century, nearly half of the scientific and technological works were written in English, reflecting the expansion of its functions. In addition, the U.K. started to gain more economic influence, which increased the prestige of its official language.

In the twentieth century, the economic expansion of the United States due to oil energy increased the influence of this English-speaking country. After the Second World War in 1945, the U.S. gained more international recognition by helping allies reconstruct their countries. In addition, the prestige of English increased as it was included in the treaties made after the war, being used for international diplomacy. In the following years, technology and commerce became even more important on a global scale, prompting people to learn this language not only for science and technology, but also for fields such as commerce, business, travel, and more (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). This period marked the emergence of academic discussions and developments in methodology for English Language Teaching (Brown, 2000). Additionally, diplomatic

institutions such as the British Council and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) started to promote this language by sending books and written material for learning English to other countries (Phillipson, 1992). Therefore, the English teaching profession gained more recognition.

Language expansion also occurs horizontally, among certain groups, and vertically, by reaching the entire population within a society. (Lastra, 1997). In the beginning, English expanded horizontally in diplomatic and educational institutions. The United Nations and UNESCO started to arise, leading to a more interconnected world. As a consequence, the idea of having one global community started to emerge, with one main barrier: language. The association of English with innovation and progress made it a candidate for international communication. Therefore, universities also started to consider English important for staying updated with new technological and scientific discoveries, as well as for international relations and trade.

Technological developments in mass communication, such as the telephone, radio, and eventually television and the internet, accelerated the spread of English, as they enabled the world to become more interconnected. English expanded vertically by reaching all people in societies due to the increased popularity of entertainment such as movies, songs, and books, among others. It was not only for specific fields; it was for general purposes such as global pop culture and entertainment. All of this promoted more positive linguistic attitudes toward this language. The expansion of the internet and its global presence conferred English the status of a non-official lingua franca.

The increasing adoption of English globally revealed that each country used a variety of English with features that differed from those of countries where English had been historically a native language, such as the United Kingdom and the United States. All of this fostered the development of studies that dealt with the recognition of the different local English varieties, in contrast to the prestige of native varieties. In addition, the growing demand for English in fields such as commerce, science, and other specific areas led to a proliferation of courses, programs, and research in the English for Specific Purposes area in higher education contexts.

World Englishes: Legitimizing Linguistic Diversity

Debates arose concerning the different status of American and British varieties and the other varieties of Japan, China, or India as English expanded

its language functions and presence, especially in higher education institutions around the world. In order to understand the presence of English in all countries, Kachru (1985) divided the expansion of English into three circles to distinguish its use as a first language (L1), a second language (L2), or a foreign language. In his work, the inner circle included countries that had English as an L1, such as the U.S., the U.K., and Canada. They served as a model for the other varieties. The outer circle included countries with English as an L2, like India, Singapore, and the Philippines. English was used for administrative or educational purposes due to colonial ties from the past. The expanding circle referred to contexts in which English was used as a foreign language for international communication in countries such as China, Japan, and Germany. This led to the emergence of the notion of World Englishes (WE).

Kachru's division is still used by some authors in contemporary research, even though this separation has been questioned due to its sociolinguistic implications. The inner circle being used as the model for teaching diminished the importance of the other varieties. Authors like Saraceni (2010) proposed the idea that WE should bring equity and reduce linguistic discrimination. Therefore, English was projected to be not just the property of one group or country, but the lingua franca of the world with different varieties. It was necessary to separate the form from the function to give importance to other varieties with different grammars and phonologies from the British or American ones. This was important to reduce linguistic prejudices and stereotypes that arise from marked accents or pronunciation of users whose native language is not English (Garcia, 1993). This impacted the ELT field since there had been a stereotype that native English teachers were better than those who spoke English as a second or foreign language (Huashan & Adcharawan, 2024).

Thanks to these discussions about local varieties, locally produced materials were given more importance in ESP. Kachru (1988) noticed that each type of specialized local discourse was unique, such as the legal English in varieties of South Asia, which differed from the legal English used in native-speaking countries. However, these subvarieties were not considered in instructional materials, which mostly had biases against them. He advocated for including local English varieties in the ESP research agenda. Bhatia (1991) encouraged local genre analyses of academic discourses, since they showed

not only linguistic features, but also the cognitive processes involved in the selection of those specific genres. It became clear that register and discourse were influenced by local culture and practices. As a result, material design spread throughout ESP communities. This also happened because it was hard to implement mass-produced materials in specific countries and classes, since each class had different needs. That is why most teachers started to design or adapt their own materials.

Today, various approaches complement the field of World Englishes (Bolton & Jenks, 2022). This field also gives insights to sociolinguistic and cultural dynamics resulting from encounters between students with different cultures, especially at universities. Therefore, new fields have also gained relevance to address these issues, such as intercultural communication and translanguaging, which uses code-switching to enhance language and cultural awareness (Fang & Xu, 2024). In addition, corpus linguistics is used to record and describe emerging English varieties worldwide, while critical linguistics and English as a Lingua Franca examine the impact of English in multilingual regions and the potential inequalities that may arise in local contexts.

World Englishes and education: language contact, EMI and translanguaging

Today, English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. English has been increasingly adopted in educational systems around the world, especially in higher education. Its presence has had an impact on every institution where it has been adopted, encouraging research interest in educational, cultural, and methodological aspects. The debate about the recognition of different varieties of English mainly arose from researchers in the English teaching field, since they were the first to notice all these new sociolinguistic and cultural issues occurring in their institutions and classrooms.

The inclusion of a foreign or second language in the curricula can have a huge impact on any country, as higher education must address the social demands of a country and its potential economic development. Therefore, more research has been carried out within WE, ESP, and ELT in general, especially in Asia and Europe, where the impact of English in education is discussed the most. In countries like Qatar and China, students must take exams to show proficiency in this language to graduate or get a job (Liang, 2024). Nordic universities that receive international students have

implemented English as the main language for their courses, or English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), as it has come to be known (Adriansen et al., 2023).

The adoption of English in educational systems has caused language contact and displacement in many countries. In Algeria, Arabic had spread as the medium of instruction in its educational system, whereas French was seen as the language of the world, so it was compulsory in both primary and higher education. However, it seems like English has displaced French in education. Since the independence of this country, English has gained more influence, as it is seen as a tool for globalization. As a result, it has been adopted as the medium of instruction in higher education since 2023 (Benabdallah, 2024). However, this has raised concerns about the capability of English practitioners to deliver this type of instruction, especially in countries with English as a foreign language.

The role of English in most higher education institutions is still vague, resulting in courses that do not fulfill students' educational needs. One important aspect to consider is whether educators have adequate proficiency to teach EMI. For example, Adriansen and her colleagues (2023) noted that most courses in EMI did not have clear objectives, and some instructors thought they did not have the proficiency to express themselves properly in English. There have been training programs directed at these instructors to certify that they have the competence to simplify complex messages and meanings for students. Preferences for native versus non-native English-speaking instructors have also been studied. In a study about students' perceptions of native speakers and global English varieties in Qingdao, China, Huashan and Adcharawan (2024) found that there was a preference for native teachers, who were perceived as more effective for pronunciation and linguistic features, whereas non-native teachers were considered better for teaching grammar. Some others considered native teachers ineffective since they lacked knowledge about the context in which they were teaching and because they had never learned English as a Foreign Language. Students preferred British and American varieties as models for language and culture, but they wanted materials that included diversity. There is still a strong preference for inner circle varieties in ELT, despite studies in WE that aim to demonstrate that non-native speakers should also be considered legitimate English speakers and that there is no single acceptable English variety (Cogo, 2012). Consequently, more debates and socialization about these topics are needed.

The place of culture in ELT is another important topic, especially in higher education systems. Inside classrooms with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, intercultural competence has gained equal importance as communicative competence. Intercultural competence means understanding others' cultures in order to engage effectively in communication. This can be developed not only in classrooms with people from different countries, but also with people from different regions within a country. For example, in a study involving students from different countries in Asia, Fan Fang and Yidie Xu (2024) found that students regarded intercultural competence as important as understanding more about English varieties, since it helped them understand local and foreign cultures with English as the main tool. Students reported that they had also engaged in translanguaging practices without even knowing about that concept. They concluded that WE and translanguaging are important to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and foster respect for differences.

New perspectives are challenging traditional ELT views about the role of English in instruction. Most ELT methods have assumed that the only language to be used in classrooms is English, as it helps to develop native-like proficiency. Dobinson and his colleagues (2023) analyzed two Australian campuses with students whose native languages were not English. They found that some students did not want to engage in debates, perceiving their knowledge of English as insufficient. They were also reluctant to participate in translanguaging interactions at the university since it was implied that it was an English-only environment. Most English classes use only English and do not include the L1 of students, and the same is true for EMI classes.

However, new studies from the translanguaging approach seem to point out that using the students' culture and native language can enhance English instruction.

Translanguaging can use code-switching between English and the local language for pedagogical purposes. Today, it has expanded to encompass not only the transmission of information, but also the representation of values and identities (Li, 2011). Consequently, translation, code-switching, and the use of L1 are regaining importance. Liang (2024) highlights the importance of using English to reinforce local culture and to gain awareness of other cultures. Some concepts or notions cannot be translated directly into English, so encouraging the translation of philosophical or cultural texts can help students to reflect on their own culture and encourage them to express themselves more creatively in English. There are

more studies aimed at recognizing the value of the local language since it can help to notice the cultural and linguistic differences in both languages. Sayuki Machida (2008) found that using the L1 in translation activities helped her students to negotiate meaning between Japanese and English.

Leo Tak-hung Chan (2015) also considers the idea of using translation as a tool to develop structural, conceptual, and sociolinguistic awareness.

There are other sociolinguistic critical views related to Global English and inequality. Phillipson (1992) pointed out that most countries where English is a second or foreign language cannot produce their own materials since those varieties of English do not have enough prestige compared to the materials of countries where English is the native language. As a consequence, materials are not contextualized, and inequality prevails. In response, WE can help to address these challenges with more research about these educational and social issues, so local needs and contexts gain more recognition. In addition, more discussion on the role of technology and language learning is needed today, given that these technologies might be used to promote equality and provide more access to education.

English for Specific Purposes in the Era of Global English

Due to all the social, economic, and cultural aspects that caused English to acquire more functions and be included in higher education institutions, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has gained more importance in ELT and the scientific world. Its influence was evident when the journal *English for Specific Purposes* ranked first in the Google Scholar Metrics in the area of Language and Literature in 2022 (Bolton & Jenks, 2022). The trend in the historical development from General English to ESP also parallels the evolution of linguistic research, transitioning from words and structures to broader aspects such as discourse and pragmatics.

Originally, ESP emerged from the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach by emphasizing the role of language in serving real-world purposes and considering students' needs (Richards, 2006). Then, the pioneering work of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) in their book *English for Specific Purposes: A Learner-Centred Approach* helped to unify and define the ESP field. Needs analysis has been essential to ESP practice since it helps to make decisions about the goals and content when designing a course. Today, it has gone beyond ESP since it is being applied for planning

workshops, General English courses, and even for language curriculum design (Nation & Macalister, 2010). A critical needs analysis approach began to emerge, focusing not only on content and methodology, but also on the ideologies present in scientific and institutional discourses, the power relations within those areas, and the essential survival needs of speakers. This critical view of the needs of speakers has led to the development of programs and courses aimed at providing survival skills and literacy to refugees and immigrants. For example, Emily Feuerherm and Toko Oshio (2020) carried out a needs analysis to propose a program aimed at helping immigrants learn English in Flint, U.S.

The main focus of ESP has gone beyond specialized vocabulary, grammatical features, and even text analysis. Today, it is focused on discourse (Hyland, 2022), and it is highly flexible in its methodology, being able to incorporate tenets from other approaches. In general, the teaching methodology of ESP is:

1. Purpose-Driven: Identifying the learning needs and specific requirements, such as lacks, wants, and wishes. Then, the entire course is guided by these aspects.
2. Function-oriented: Emphasizing language functions for real-world language use.
3. Learner-Centered: Focusing on learners' specific needs and competencies, and empowering students through negotiated tasks and even syllabi (Cariaga, 2008).
4. Content-Driven: Emphasizing the subject matter of students, often running in parallel with other university classes to complement subject-specific learning (Richards, 2006). ESP teachers can work with subject specialists in adjunct instruction (Olmedo, 2014).
5. Process-Oriented: Integrating tasks and activities that emulate real-world scenarios to ensure the transfer of skills and competencies to the workplace or other real-life contexts.
6. Cognitive focused: Emphasizing problem-solving tasks and the analysis of rhetorical purposes, genres, and other important discourse features to encourage the development of cognitive skills (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).
7. Active in interaction and group work: Fostering interaction, collaboration, negotiation of meaning, and scaffolding by using different kinds of group modalities and project-based learning to enhance learning.

8. Materials-Oriented: Designing or adapting materials depending on the different learning needs, lacks, and wants of students and institutions.
9. Innovative in assessment: Including different types of assessment to ensure students' progress and development of specific skills.

The instructor can use any other approach to make the class more engaging and meaningful. Many other variants of the CLT approach are also encompassed in ESP, such as Content-Based Instruction, Task-Based Instruction, Competency-Based Instruction, and even Project-Based Learning. There is an interest in incorporating more theories of learning, like constructivism, in ESP instruction (Basturkmen, 2024) to foster group work and the social construction of knowledge. It can be complemented by World Englishes insights related to the reflection on the type of English varieties and the different types of discourses found in them.

ESP Areas and Research Perspectives

Today, ESP is an umbrella term encompassing subfields such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Science and Technology, and English for many areas, such as English for business, English for nursing, English for tourism, etc. It has expanded into specific areas like thesis and dissertation writing and English for Research Publication Purposes.

Kingsley Bolton and Christopher Jenks (2022) analyzed 92 articles on ESP from Asia and Europe. Their findings show that in Asia, 61% focused on English for Academic Purposes (EAP), 20% addressed business communication, 14% dealt with workplace communication, 3% covered medical communication, and 2% examined legal language. Most of them dealt with written instead of oral communication. Most articles were from East Asia, specifically Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan. In Europe, the majority (73%) focused on EAP, with a smaller portion addressing workplace communication, business communication, and legal language. The research concentrated on 13 European countries, with Spain being the most studied.

The effectiveness of content-based instruction has been analyzed in ESP. Within EAP, Song (2006) analyzed the academic success of two groups of students during five years at Kingsborough Community College in New York. One group participated in an academic content-linked ESL program, whereas the other did not. The results show that the students who received content-linked instruction were more successful

academically. Innovative approaches can be used, like Mede and Koparan (2018), who held interviews with graduates from civil aviation courses five months later to see if they had reused or reconstructed the skills from a past ESP class. Materials used during the ESP instruction were also discussed to see their effectiveness. Real work contexts and scaffolding have started to attract attention in ESP course delivery to plan activities that might emulate and facilitate the transfer of skills from classrooms to real contexts (Basturkmen, 2024). Woydack & Lockwood (2020) identified the techniques and strategies used to scaffold novices in acquiring specific competencies in a call center in London. More experienced workers were paired with novices in order to practice scripts, learn vocabulary, and speak fluently. This context provided meaningful and intensive learning via structured and spontaneous training.

ESP can inform and improve the way academic subjects are taught in EMI contexts since more and more countries are adopting this model. Benabdallah (2024) analyzed views of ESP instructors from the Economic, Business and Management Studies faculty about the ongoing implementation of EMI in Tlemcen, Algeria. Their opinions were favorable since they thought EMI might encourage the development of linguistic knowledge and constant updates about content related to their careers. However, there were inadequacies to address socioeconomic and educational needs due to contextual and institutional constraints. Therefore, it is advisable to carry out a more complete needs analysis in order to avoid problems. Also, it is important to identify the types of language explanations, support, and strategies that lecturers give students, since some lecturers usually take brief breaks from the subject matter to give feedback and clarify language points related to the specialized vocabulary they are learning (Basturkmen & Hong, 2023).

Discourse analysis in ESP has started to attract the attention of researchers. ESP has contributed to making more evident the way that science is structured by different types of discourses conveyed in each field. These insights may improve ESP instruction to raise awareness about local and international scientific discourses. The order of ideas and the precise language used in science are key elements to get as much objectivity as possible (Bunge, 2018). ESP focuses on the role of discourse, which consists of language patterns and constructions unique to each group of people. Research in ESP seems to indicate that each scientific community in different countries may have its own discourse, challenging the notion of the existence of a

single universal academic or scientific discourse (Bolton & Jenks, 2022). In addition to discourse analysis, genre analysis has gained significant attention, as it helps to identify how texts are typically structured within specific fields. According to Swales (1990), genre analysis focuses on recurring patterns, features, and linguistic characteristics that define texts within particular genres. These analyses are being fostered by the use of new technologies, such as programs and artificial intelligence that are able to analyze corpora with examples and records of language use.

Challenges and Opportunities for WE and ESP with New Technologies

Developments in technology are expanding the boundaries of the whole educational field by presenting potential tools that might redefine education. The new education model should be based on teaching students how to think critically (UNESCO, 2022), so they avoid misinformation and biases found on the web and artificial intelligence. In this regard, the role of the teacher is important to guide and direct students into good uses of those technologies. The advent of big data has accelerated the creation of corpora by providing access to vast amounts of language data from interactions on social networks, analysis of literary works, historical documents, and more. Consequently, the research perspectives of descriptive schools in linguistics and usage-based approaches have expanded significantly. These schools and approaches have increasingly adopted the methodology of corpus linguistics, which employs corpora to analyze and interpret frequent patterns. It also explores the authentic contexts in which language is used (Divjak, 2015).

Sociolinguistic studies in WE can use corpora and registers to gain insights into the dynamics of language around the world, including the expansion of English and its impact on local languages. Websites like Ethnologue offer valuable insights into the dynamics of languages worldwide. Additionally, corpora can be used for language teaching purposes. Teachers can use this data to analyze the frequency of words, collocations, and other patterns to design more content-specific material that responds to the needs and context of their students. This is important for ESP teachers since most materials cannot be produced massively due to the specific needs that each group of students presents. For example, Alhamani (2022) used the corpus of Google Books to analyze the frequent words and collocations related to engineering to design grammar practice exercises as supplementary material.

Platforms and applications facilitate English practice and autonomous learning. They can be integrated as a source of extra practice in General English and ESP courses. Language learning applications powered by AI are integrating more communicative activities rather than just translation exercises. For example, Duolingo (2024) has been implementing short podcasts and games to engage learners in more active interaction with the language. One new feature enables users to have video calls and interact with the characters. New applications are being designed to cover not only General English, but also English for specific fields, such as Medical English. An example is the application Medical English – MosaLingua, which contains exercises focused on the medical field. There are more available applications with vocabulary related to legal, travel, and business English. They can be used as a resource for activities based on interacting and using these applications in ESP classrooms.

AI can be used as a complement to make students more autonomous if they are instructed to use it as a tutor for explanations about complex topics, vocabulary, or language points.

According to a survey conducted at the University of Miami by Shai Cohen and his colleagues (2024), students expressed positive attitudes toward AI-powered software, applications, and conversational agents. They identified that students mainly used tools, such as Duolingo, Google Translate, and ChatGPT to support their language courses, particularly for clarification of concepts while studying. In contrast, the faculty members were more skeptical about their use, with 60% reporting that they had never used ChatGPT. Another study in New Zealand by Du & Alm (2024) analyzed the impact of ChatGPT on English for Academic Purposes students.

Students regarded it as useful, even though they had some concerns. They found it suitable as a tutor for feedback on oral and written production. They felt relieved when asking for clarification repeatedly, as these chatbots do not have a problem repeating and explaining things. Additionally, it helped them contextualize the content and the vocabulary they were learning.

However, they felt isolated due to the lack of human interaction, since language is used for communication among people in a society.

Artificial intelligence promises new ways to enhance material design or adaptation, especially for ESP. Generative AI might also reduce the teacher

workload with automated grading of assignments and lesson planning. For ESP courses, teachers can use AI as a source to gain insights about the specific types of discourse and genres related to their field. Since most AI agents are able to analyze vast amounts of language use, they can be used to adapt and design texts. They can generate reading texts or writing models that emulate different types of genres, so they might be useful for developing receptive and productive skills. In order to do this, teachers need to have specialized knowledge about learning and teaching principles. Savitri et al. (2025) analyzed whether pre-service teachers enrolled in an ESP material development course tended to use AI. They found that 62% had used AI, mostly for inspiration while developing materials, while the other 38% had not. The main concern of the students in this course was to develop dependency on these tools. They believed it was essential to have knowledge about ESP and learning principles before using AI to create materials. Ellederová (2022) also encourages carrying out research to improve material and coursebook design for ESP, since most teachers do not base their materials on learning principles. AI can be used as an informant to decide the main language functions and specific language skills for course design. Concerns about plagiarism or complete reliance on these technologies by students are emerging. This emphasizes the need for debates and socialization of successful practices by implementing these technologies.

New technologies, such as corpus-driven software, offer ways to improve vocabulary acquisition. In the context of medical English, Simon and his colleagues (2025) used corpus analysis to identify the frequency of words related to medicine. Then, they developed materials to teach ESP to medical students in Japan. They started by creating a word list from reference materials. They integrated their list into a vocabulary learning tool developed by a member of the team. This tool is called Hi-Lex, and it offers many activities for students to acquire vocabulary. They also sought to track which words were frequently used by the students from that department to improve and refine the word list of medical terms.

Discussion: Critical Perspectives on WE and ESP

It seems that there are two main views of English in higher education. On the one hand, from a macro social perspective, English has expanded to most higher education contexts globally due to its use in science and technology. As a result, ESP

courses and programs have spread throughout the world, which is why this field has gained prominence in recent years.

However, it seems that there is a tendency to go beyond ESP and adopt English as the sole medium of instruction for university programs, especially for higher education, given that EMI is believed to foster internationalization. On the other hand, as a reaction, there is another view that vindicates local language and varieties of English in instruction, since most students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds converge in these courses. So, translanguaging and cultural competence have become important issues to be addressed.

In this globalized context, World Englishes (WE) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) can complement each other, as both focus on specific contexts where English must be used effectively. WE advocate for the legitimacy of local varieties of English and their integration into teaching, which can result in more inclusive curricula that incorporate international and local varieties that are relevant to specific, academic, scientific, and professional communities. This approach fosters cultural awareness by comparing local and global cultures. For instance, inclusion is promoted by avoiding attributing stereotypes such as being too shy in discussions or too obedient in class, like the ones attributed to students from China or Japan (Chan, 2015). Awareness about these issues can be addressed through role-plays, debates, or readings designed to encourage active participation and critical thinking. Further discussion is needed to determine how culture should be integrated into the content of English courses. The evolving role of students' L1 in the classroom can enhance cultural understanding. Encouraging translanguaging, by making students engage in activities such as translation, could raise awareness about the differences in discourse, expression, and the structure of academic texts like research papers, legal documents, or formal letters. In this way, ESP research can significantly contribute to the field of WE by offering deeper insights into different academic and professional discourses, so the sociolinguistic understanding of local and international language dynamics is expanded.

ESP courses and research offer insights into how discourse shapes and defines scientific communities, where knowledge is co-constructed through interaction with other members. In these communities, every format or structural choice in discourse serves a specific rhetorical purpose. Furthermore, ESP can enhance the role of English in higher education by offering valuable descriptions of language and pedagogy to

improve language instruction in higher education, particularly in courses with English as a Medium of Instruction. By defining meaningful purposes for EMI courses based on ESP principles, educators can refine teaching practices and meet the needs of their students more effectively. In this way, ESP today has gone beyond teaching English, it is becoming an important research approach to the use of language for specific contexts with defined principles. Additionally, new technologies, such as conversational agents, can support course design and discourse analysis by enabling access to large collections of discourses and corpora.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the new trends and challenges that the English Language Teaching field is facing in a world where English has become a global language with different varieties emerging around the world. It mainly focused on the debate that is taking place in Asia and Europe, since more written work from these places is found in research engines. The shift from General English to English for Specific Purposes paralleled the emergence of English as a lingua franca due to sociolinguistic aspects such as positive attitudes that resulted from its association with modernity, pop culture, and the economic influence of English-speaking countries after WWII. This increased the demand for learning English for commerce, technology, and more.

Today, more and more countries are including English in higher education for academic, legal, and occupational purposes, even survival competencies. This caused the development of the ESP studies and the expansion of its research agenda. It has become an important branch of applied linguistics as a response to the globalization of world markets. Currently, it encompasses discourse, target situations, and more sociolinguistic domains (Hyland, 2022). Inside the World Englishes field, the notion of English being around the globe raised debates about the status of other local English varieties from places where English is not the native language. Since this field coexists with the increasing attention to ESP, both can complement each other to gain more insights into local and international discursive practices and needs.

This article might serve to inspire research in Bolivia about the current English trends around the world. It is important to encourage deeper and more interdisciplinary research encompassing the impact of sociolinguistic aspects in higher education, rather than just focusing on methodological aspects, such as

teaching techniques or the development of specific skills, which are the main topics in degree works. It is necessary to reflect on new methodologies and principles for material and course design research. The type of Bolivian discourse used in many fields, such as law, medicine, or even business, might be contrasted with the discourse used in the international community. It could also provide insights into the characteristics of Bolivian discourse and how it is aligned with those used in other countries.

English is present in most faculties in public and private universities as part of their curricula. It could be useful to analyze the type of English used in these institutions to see if they have English as a Medium of Instruction, ESP, or just General English. Studies investigating perceptions and practices of instructors teaching those English courses at different faculties could be carried out. They may offer insights into the importance given to the type of English and the instructors' knowledge of ESP methodology. By including target occupational contexts, research about the type of discourse used and the training offered to novice workers at jobs requiring English could be useful to design more effective courses aimed at addressing the demand for work in Bolivia. There has been an undocumented increase in demand for remote jobs in graphic design, community management, and customer service, where specific English proficiency is required. Finally, more critical studies would be valuable to understand the impact of English as a foreign language in Bolivia and its influence on reinforcing cultural awareness or the adoption of foreign values.

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