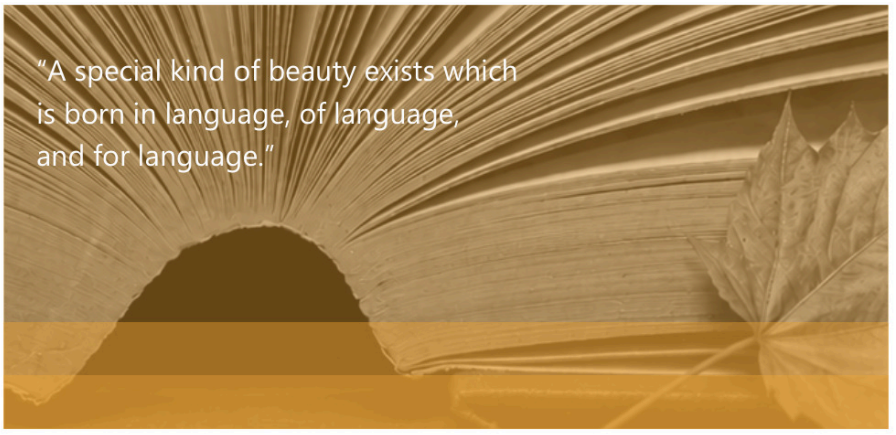
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Cogito, ergo sum

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The role of specialized vocabulary in developing the lexical competence of oil and gas students

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Annotation *Specialized vocabulary is essential to English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly in technical disciplines where learners are expected to understand and use field-specific language in academic and professional contexts. For oil and gas students, lexical demands extend beyond knowledge of individual technical terms to include specialized meanings, multi-word units, collocations, and appropriate contextual use. This article examines the role of specialized vocabulary in developing the lexical competence of oil and gas students. Drawing on research in ESP and second-language vocabulary studies, it distinguishes specialized vocabulary, understood as field-specific lexical content, from lexical competence, which encompasses learners' broader knowledge and ability to understand and use lexical items. The analysis suggests that systematic attention to specialized vocabulary can contribute to several dimensions of lexical competence, including knowledge of lexical meaning, contextual appropriateness, collocational knowledge, and productive lexical use. The article further discusses pedagogical implications for selecting, presenting, and practising specialized vocabulary in Oil and Gas ESP courses.*

Keywords *Lexical competence, specialized vocabulary, English for Specific Purposes, Oil and Gas English, technical vocabulary, vocabulary teaching*

Neft-gaz yo'nalishi talabalarining leksik kompetensiyasini rivojlantirishda maxsus leksikaning o'rni

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Annotatsiya *Maxsus maqsadlarga yo'naltirilgan ingliz tilini (ESP) o'qitishda maxsus leksika juda zarur hisoblanadi, ayniqsa, talabalardan akademik va kasbiy kontekstlarda sohaga oid til birliklarini tushunish va qo'llash talab etiladigan texnik yo'nalishlarda muhim ahamiyat kasb etadi. Neft-gaz yo'nalishi talabalari uchun leksik bilimlar alohida texnik terminlarni bilish bilan cheklanmay, balki sohaviy ma'nolarni, ko'p komponentli leksik birliklarni, barqaror so'z birikmalarini (kollokatsiyalarni) hamda ulardan kontekstga mos ravishda foydalanishni ham qamrab oladi. Mazkur maqolada neft-gaz yo'nalishi talabalarining leksik kompetensiyasini rivojlantirishda maxsus leksikaning o'rni o'rganiladi. Maxsus maqsadlarga yo'naltirilgan ingliz tilini o'qitish va ikkinchi til leksikasini o'zlashtirishga oid ilmiy tadqiqotlar tahlili asosida muayyan sohaga xos leksik birliklar majmui sifatida qaraladigan maxsus leksika hamda o'rganuvchilarning leksik birliklarni tushunish va qo'llashga doir bilim va ko'nikmalarini qamrab oluvchi leksik kompetensiya o'rtasidagi farqlar*

aniqlashtiriladi. Tahlil natijalari maxsus leksikani tizimli ravishda o'rgatish leksik kompetensiyaning bir qator jihatlarini, jumladan, leksik ma'nolarni bilish, leksik birliklardan kontekstga mos ravishda foydalanish, kollokatsion bilimlar va leksik birliklarni nutqda faol qo'llash ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishga xizmat qilishi mumkinligini ko'rsatadi. Shuningdek, maqolada neft-gaz yo'nalishi talabalari uchun maxsus maqsadlarga yo'naltirilgan ingliz tili kurslarida maxsus leksikani tanlash, taqdim etish va amaliy mashqlar orqali mustahkamlashning pedagogik jihatlari muhokama qilinadi.

Kalit so'zlar *Leksik kompetensiya, maxsus leksika, maxsus maqsadlarga yo'naltirilgan ingliz tili (ESP), neft-gaz sohasi uchun ingliz tili, texnik leksika, leksikani o'qitish*

Роль специализированной лексики в развитии лексической компетенции студентов нефтегазового профиля

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Аннотация *Специализированная лексика играет важную роль в обучении английскому языку для специальных целей, особенно в технических дисциплинах, где от обучающихся требуется понимание и использование профессионально ориентированной лексики в академическом и профессиональном контекстах. Для студентов нефтегазового профиля овладение лексикой не ограничивается знанием отдельных технических терминов, а включает понимание специализированных значений слов, многокомпонентных лексических единиц, устойчивых словосочетаний (коллокаций) и их уместное употребление в различных контекстах. В данной статье рассматривается роль специализированной лексики в развитии лексической компетенции студентов нефтегазового профиля. На основе анализа исследований в области английского языка для специальных целей и изучения лексики второго языка проводится разграничение между специализированной лексикой как совокупностью лексических единиц, характерных для определённой профессиональной области, и лексической компетенцией, охватывающей более широкий комплекс знаний и умений обучающихся, необходимых для понимания и использования лексических единиц. Результаты анализа свидетельствуют о том, что систематическая работа со специализированной лексикой может способствовать развитию различных аспектов лексической компетенции, включая знание лексических значений, уместность употребления лексических единиц в контексте, знание коллокаций и продуктивное использование лексики. Кроме того, в статье рассматриваются педагогические аспекты отбора, представления и практического освоения специализированной лексики в рамках курсов*

профессионально ориентированного английского языка для студентов нефтегазового профиля.

Ключевые слова *Лексическая компетенция, специализированная лексика, английский язык для специальных целей (ESP), английский язык для нефтегазовой отрасли, техническая лексика, обучение лексике*

Introduction

English plays an important role in the academic and professional development of specialists working in internationally oriented technical fields such as the oil and gas industry. Students preparing for future careers in this sphere are expected to work with technical literature, professional documentation, equipment descriptions, operating procedures, safety instructions, and other discipline-specific materials in English. This leads to the necessity of the familiarization of technical terms associated with the students academic specialization which extend beyond general English.

The relationship between learners' specific needs and language-course content has long been central to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define ESP as a learning-centred approach in which decisions related to language teaching are closely connected with learners' reasons for learning English and the needs for their target situations. Similarly, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) emphasize the relationship between ESP teaching and the disciplinary and professional needs of particular learner groups. From this point of view, vocabulary instruction for oil and gas students should reflect the lexical requirements of their academic and future professional contexts.

Vocabulary occupies a significant place in specialized language learning. Nation (2001) distinguishes between high-frequency, academic, technical, and low-frequency vocabulary, highlighting that vocabulary learning priorities should correspond to learners' particular goals. Once students have acquired a sufficient foundation of general high-frequency vocabulary, greater attention can be directed towards vocabulary relevant to their specialized field. For oil and gas students, this includes lexical items associated with exploration, drilling, production, transportation, processing, safety, and storage. However, specialized vocabulary cannot be reduced to lists of technical terms. Chung and Nation (2004) demonstrate that identifying technical vocabulary is a complex process because words differ in the extent to which their meanings and uses are specialized within a particular discipline. Their work also demonstrates that the identification of technical vocabulary is an important starting point for determining how it should be addressed in teaching and learning.

Understanding specialized vocabulary involves more than recognizing or translating individual terms. Richards (1976) stated that knowing a word involves several dimensions rather than a single form–meaning association. Jiménez Catalán (2002), conceptualizing the lexical competence, identifies considerable variation in the terminology and approaches used to describe the construct. She distinguishes linguistic perspectives, which emphasize the meaning and structure of lexical units, from psycholinguistic perspectives, which focus on vocabulary acquisition and the knowledge and skills involved in learning and using words. Her analysis emphasizes the need to take into account both lexical knowledge and the learner's ability to access and use that knowledge.

Nation (2001) describes word knowledge in terms of form, meaning, and use, each involving receptive and productive knowledge. Schmitt (2014) further examines the distinction between vocabulary size, referring to the number of words known, and vocabulary depth, concerning how well individual words are learned. These perspectives suggest that understanding technical terms alone does not fully reflect students' lexical development.

The selection of vocabulary for specialized instruction is therefore an important pedagogical consideration. Coxhead's (2000) development of the Academic Word List demonstrates the value of corpus-informed vocabulary selection based on frequency and distribution across academic texts. Although academic vocabulary differs from discipline-specific terminology, Coxhead's approach highlights the value of identifying lexical items relevant to learners' language needs. Similarly, Nation (2001) emphasizes the importance of considering learners' goals when establishing vocabulary learning priorities. Further, Coxhead (2013) extends this discussion to vocabulary in ESP, examining approaches to identifying specialized lexical items through expert judgments, specialized dictionaries, and corpus-based methods. Her analysis also draws attention to lexical patterning beyond individual words. These perspectives suggest that vocabulary selection for ESP instruction should consider both the relevance of lexical items to a discipline and their patterns of occurrence in specialized discourse.

For oil and gas students, specialized vocabulary includes not only individual technical terms but also discipline-specific meanings, collocations, and recurrent lexical combinations. Developing lexical competence therefore requires knowledge of these lexical resources and the ability to recognize, understand, and use them appropriately in academic and professional settings. Specialized vocabulary thus serves as a resource for developing lexical competence rather than merely a collection of terms to be memorized.

Against this background, the present article examines the role of specialized vocabulary in developing the lexical competence of oil and gas students. It explores the characteristics of specialized vocabulary, the multidimensional nature of lexical competence, and the contribution of specialized lexical knowledge to its development. The article also considers the pedagogical implications of these relationships for vocabulary instruction in the oil and gas field.

Literature review

Specialized Vocabulary in ESP

ESP is based on the principle that language instruction should respond to learners' specific academic and professional needs. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state that ESP is differentiated not simply by the presence of specialized terminology but by the purposes for which learners need English. Similarly, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) view ESP as an approach in which teaching methodology and content are shaped by the activities and communicative requirements of particular disciplines and professions. Vocabulary selection should therefore be part of a broader process of aligning language instruction with learners' target needs.

Within this framework, specialized vocabulary refers to lexical items that are particularly relevant to a specific field or subject area. Nation (2001) distinguishes technical vocabulary from both high-frequency general vocabulary and academic vocabulary. Technical vocabulary is closely associated with a particular subject area and may account for a substantial proportion of the language encountered in specialized texts. Nation further argues that the value of learning specialized vocabulary depends on learners' goals: vocabulary that is relatively infrequent in general English may be highly important within a particular discipline.

Identifying technical vocabulary, however, is not always straightforward. Chung and Nation (2004) compared several methods

for identifying technical vocabulary, including expert rating, dictionary-based identification, textual clues, and frequency comparisons between specialized and general texts. Their findings demonstrate that technicality is not simply a binary distinction between "technical" and "non-technical" words. Some lexical items acquire specialized meanings only in particular disciplinary contexts. Chung and Nation (2003) further examined the distribution of technical vocabulary in specialized texts from anatomy and applied linguistics. Their findings showed that technical vocabulary constitutes a substantial proportion of specialized discourse and may include words belonging to high-frequency and academic vocabulary. This supports the idea that technicality cannot be determined solely by general word frequency but must also be considered in relation to disciplinary context.

This distinction is particularly relevant to English in oil and gas field. Terms such as "wellhead, drilling rig," and "refinery" have clear technical associations, whereas items such as "pressure, field, formation, recovery," and "flow" also occur outside the oil and gas domain but may carry discipline-specific meanings or form specialized lexical combinations. Teaching specialized vocabulary therefore requires attention not only to terminology but also to the meanings and patterns of use that lexical items acquire in professional contexts. Thus, specialized vocabulary in oil and gas field includes not only technical terms but also specialized meanings, recurrent multi-word expressions, and lexical combinations characteristic of professional discourse.

Lexical Competence as a Multidimensional Construct

Lexical competence extends beyond the ability to recognize the meanings of individual words. Richards (1976) challenged a simplified understanding of vocabulary knowledge by identifying several aspects of knowing a word, including its frequency, syntactic behaviour, associations, semantic properties, and possible meanings. This multidimensional perspective provided a foundation for subsequent models of vocabulary knowledge. Nation (2001) offers an influential framework for understanding what it means to know a word. His model organizes vocabulary knowledge around three broad dimensions: form, meaning, and use. These encompass knowledge of spoken and written forms, form–meaning connections, concepts and referents, grammatical functions, collocations, and restrictions on use. Nation also distinguishes receptive from productive knowledge, indicating that recognizing a lexical item does not necessarily imply the ability to use it appropriately.

Henriksen (1999) proposes three dimensions of lexical competence: partial to precise knowledge, depth of knowledge, and receptive to productive use ability. Her framework emphasizes that lexical development involves not only acquiring more precise knowledge of individual words but also developing relationships among lexical items and the ability to use them productively. This viewpoint supports Nation's (2001) framework by highlighting the developmental nature of lexical competence. Read (2000) similarly emphasizes that vocabulary assessment should account for the complexity of lexical knowledge rather than treating vocabulary as a collection of isolated items. This distinction is important in educational contexts because learners may recognize a word without possessing sufficient knowledge to use it accurately.

Schmitt (2014) further examines the distinction between vocabulary size and depth. Vocabulary size refers broadly to the number of words a learner knows, whereas depth concerns how well those words are known. Although the relationship between these dimensions is complex, Schmitt's review indicates that depth provides information about lexical knowledge that vocabulary size alone cannot fully capture. The significance of vocabulary depth is also supported by Qian (2002), who investigated the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and academic

reading performance. His findings indicated that vocabulary depth, including knowledge of synonymy, polysemy, and collocation, was as important as vocabulary size in predicting reading comprehension. Although the study focused on academic reading rather than ESP instruction, it provides empirical support for considering both the breadth and depth of lexical knowledge.

These viewpoints are particularly relevant to ESP. An oil and gas student may recognize the word "pressure" and know its general meaning, but deeper lexical knowledge involves understanding combinations such as "reservoir pressure, operating pressure," and "pressure drop", interpreting their meanings in technical texts, and selecting appropriate expressions in professional contexts. Similarly, knowing "flow" involves more than translating the word; learners may need to understand expressions such as "flow rate, fluid flow," and "gas flow" and distinguish their contextual uses. Accordingly, lexical competence of ESP students, mainly in oil and gas sphere can be understood as a multidimensional capacity involving knowledge and appropriate use of lexical resources relevant to the discipline. It encompasses not only breadth of specialized vocabulary but also knowledge of meaning, contextual variation, lexical relationships, collocations, and productive use.

The Relationship between Specialized Vocabulary and Lexical Competence

Specialized vocabulary and lexical competence are closely related but conceptually distinct. Specialized vocabulary refers primarily to the lexical resources characteristic of a particular discipline, whereas lexical competence concerns what learners know about these resources and how effectively they can understand and use them. For this reason, specialized vocabulary represents an important part of the linguistic input and content of ESP instruction, while lexical competence outlines a broader learner-related capacity. This differentiation helps determine the role of specialized vocabulary in lexical development. First, learning specialized vocabulary expands students' field-specific lexical repertoire. Nation (2001) notes that once learners possess sufficient general high-frequency vocabulary, attention to specialized vocabulary becomes particularly valuable when it corresponds to their academic or professional goals. For oil and gas students, this means acquiring lexical resources needed to understand discipline-specific texts and participate in professional communication.

Second, specialized vocabulary provides opportunities to develop depth of lexical knowledge. Schmitt's (2014) distinction between size and depth suggests that increasing the number of known technical words represents only one aspect of lexical development. Students also need deeper knowledge of individual items, including their meanings, associations, collocations, and contextual use. Third, specialized vocabulary can contribute to collocational knowledge. Nation (2001) includes collocation within knowledge of word use, emphasizing that knowing a lexical item involves understanding the words with which it typically occurs. This is particularly important in technical discourse, where meanings are frequently expressed through recurrent multi-word combinations rather than isolated terms.

Ward's (2007) investigation of engineering discourse provides further evidence of the importance of lexical combinations in specialized contexts. His corpus-based analysis showed that complex noun phrases and collocations can be highly discipline-specific even when their constituent words are less specialized. This suggests that lexical competence for in oil and gas students should involve knowledge not only of individual technical terms but also of the combinations through which specialized meanings are expressed.

Finally, specialized vocabulary provides a basis for productive lexical use. Students who encounter technical words only as translation equivalents may recognize them without being

able to use them appropriately. Contextualized practice, by contrast, can support the transition from receptive recognition to productive use. In oil and gas field for the students studying in this discipline, this may involve using specialized vocabulary to describe equipment, explain technical processes, interpret safety procedures, discuss operational problems, or produce discipline-related written texts. The relationship can therefore be represented as follows:

Specialized vocabulary → field-specific lexical knowledge → deeper knowledge of meaning and lexical combinations → contextualized receptive and productive use → development of lexical competence.

This relationship is not automatic. Exposure to specialized terminology alone does not necessarily result in lexical competence. Its pedagogical value depends on how lexical items are selected, contextualized, practised, recycled, and used by learners.

Method

The present study adopts a qualitative conceptual review to examine the role of specialized vocabulary in developing lexical competence among oil and gas students. Rather than evaluating a specific classroom intervention, the study synthesizes established research in ESP, second-language vocabulary acquisition, specialized vocabulary, and vocabulary pedagogy to identify principles applicable to oil and gas industry.

The sources were examined in relation to three analytical questions: (1) how specialized vocabulary is conceptualized and distinguished from general or academic vocabulary; (2) which dimensions of lexical knowledge are relevant to lexical competence; and (3) how specialized vocabulary can contribute to the pedagogical development of these dimensions among learners in a technical ESP context. The resulting analysis was then interpreted in relation to the lexical demands typically associated with Oil and Gas English.

The analysis draws primarily on influential studies of ESP and needs-based language instruction (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), models of vocabulary knowledge and lexical development (Nation, 2001; Read, 2000; Richards, 1976; Schmitt, 2014), and research on the identification and selection of academic and technical vocabulary (Chung & Nation, 2004; Coxhead, 2000).

Results and Discussion

The synthesis of the reviewed literature identifies four interconnected contributions of specialized vocabulary to lexical competence: field-specific lexical knowledge, depth of word knowledge, collocational and multi-word knowledge, and contextualized receptive and productive use.

Development of Field-Specific Lexical Knowledge

The first contribution of specialized vocabulary is the expansion of learners' discipline-specific lexical repertoire. Nation (2001) argues that vocabulary learning priorities should reflect learners' goals and that specialized vocabulary becomes increasingly important for those who need to operate within a particular field. In oil and gas industry, vocabulary education should therefore enable students to recognize and understand lexical items related to the concepts, equipment, processes, and operations of their future profession.

However, the findings of Chung and Nation (2004) caution against equating specialized vocabulary exclusively with highly technical terminology. Some words acquire technical significance through their contextual meanings or relationships with other lexical items. Consequently, vocabulary instruction in oil and gas industry, should include both clearly technical terms and lexical items whose specialized meanings emerge in professional discourse.

Development of Depth of Lexical Knowledge

A second contribution concerns the depth of learners' knowledge of specialized lexical items. Richards (1976), Nation (2001),

and Schmitt (2014) collectively demonstrate that vocabulary knowledge is multidimensional. For oil and gas students, this suggests that learning the translation or definition of a technical term represents only an initial stage of lexical learning. For example, knowing the lexical item "reservoir" involves more than associating the word with a single equivalent in the learner's first language. Students may need to recognize its specialized meaning, understand its grammatical behaviour, distinguish it from related concepts, and interpret combinations such as "reservoir pressure, reservoir rock," and "reservoir capacity". Such knowledge reflects greater lexical depth and is more closely aligned with the demands of professional language use.

Development of Collocational and Multi-Word Knowledge

The reviewed literature also highlights the importance of lexical combinations. Nation (2001) treats collocational knowledge as an aspect of knowing how a word is used. For ESP learners, this is particularly significant because specialized meanings and professional concepts are frequently expressed through multi-word lexical units. In oil and gas industry, expressions such as "pressure drop, crude oil, drilling operation, pipeline network, reservoir pressure," and "flow rate" show how individual lexical items occur in recurrent combinations. Teaching these words only in isolation may therefore provide an incomplete understanding of their professional use. Attention to collocations and multi-word units can help students recognize recurrent patterns and use specialized vocabulary more accurately in discipline-related contexts.

Development of Contextualized and Productive Lexical Use

A fourth contribution concerns the transition from receptive recognition to contextualized productive use. Nation's (2001) distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge is particularly relevant here. Students may recognize specialized terms when reading technical texts but still experience difficulty retrieving and using them in speaking or writing. Specialized vocabulary instruction should provide opportunities for learners to encounter lexical items repeatedly in meaningful contexts and subsequently use them in tasks related to their professional field. Such activities may include interpreting technical descriptions, explaining processes, describing equipment, completing safety-related tasks, discussing operational problems, and producing short technical texts. These considerations suggest that specialized vocabulary can support the development of lexical competence when integrated into meaningful language use rather than taught as isolated terminology.

Conclusion

This article examined the role of specialized vocabulary in developing the lexical competence of oil and gas students through a synthesis of ESP and second-language vocabulary research. The analysis indicates that specialized vocabulary and lexical competence are closely related but conceptually distinct. Specialized vocabulary represents field-specific lexical resources, whereas lexical competence encompasses learners' knowledge and ability to understand and use these resources appropriately.

The reviewed literature suggests that specialized vocabulary can contribute to lexical competence in four ways: by expanding field-specific lexical knowledge, deepening word knowledge, developing collocational and multi-word knowledge, and supporting contextualized receptive and productive use. However, acquiring specialized terminology alone does not automatically lead to lexical competence. Its pedagogical value depends on systematic selection, contextualization, repeated exposure, and opportunities for meaningful use.

For oil and gas students, these findings suggest that vocabulary education should extend beyond isolated technical terms to include specialized meanings, lexical combinations, and their use in professional

contexts. Such instruction can support a more comprehensive development of learners' lexical competence. Future empirical research could examine how different approaches to specialized vocabulary instruction influence lexical competence among oil and gas students, particularly their progression from receptive recognition to accurate and appropriate use in academic and professional communication.

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