ESP RESEARCH TRENDS IN ASIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

Due to the influence of global and regional economic changes, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) plays a more vital role in English language studies worldwide, including in Asian context. A look at any issues relating to Asian ESP will shed light to the needs of English in this content. This present study therefore surveyed recent trends of ESP research in this context, with the purpose of the study which aimed to explore recent trends in Asian ESP research from 2005 to 2013. The Asian ESP Journal which has been a flagship in this area was chosen for the content analysis in this study. The results revealed that the research trends in ESP were primarily based on qualitative research method. Future research study may explore international ESP to compare the results of the study with this one.

Keywords: *ESP, trends in research, Asian context*

Introduction

Asian English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or Asian ESP was a focus of this present study for these reasons: primarily, specifically, strategically, economically, pragmatically and academically.

First, primarily, as an international language, English has been used for international communication, work and study. Its importance draws attention to more studies relating to the language for more insights which contribute to the studies of the language academically and the use of the language for communication and work practically.

Second, specifically, as countries in this continent communicate through their own official languages, this has caused communication breakdown to some extents. With the influence of globalization and the advance of technology and innovations (e.g. computer and the Internet), English therefore becomes an unofficial language for communication, work and study among countries in Asia.

Third, more specifically, the language will be an official language for ten Southeast Asia countries including Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. This will increase the importance of the language for regional communication in the Southeast Asia and Asian contexts.

Fourth, strategically, these ten Asian countries will form economical economic cooperation as AEC community. This will increase the importance of Asia as powerful economic base in the future which has recently been led by major Asian countries like Japan, China, India and Russia.

Fifth, economically, as a result of the strategic cooperation, AEC will be one of the mechanisms which will drive the economic mobility in this region. Economic changes will be evident in these eight careers: engineering services, nursing services, architectural services, surveying qualifications, accountancy services, dental practitioners, medical practitioners and tourism.

Sixth, pragmatically, as the eight careers will become strategic cooperation among AEC country members, any preparations for English for specific needs used for work in the eight careers and other related careers should be encouraged to prepare for job mobility in the near future.

Lastly, academically, English for specific needs for work especially the eight careers under the ASEAN Economic Communityor AEC cooperation have not been studied yet as AEC cooperation will be effective in 2015. More attention has been given to academic English preparations whereas little attention has been given to English for specific needs or the field of English Specific Purposes (ESP). With the influence of AEC cooperation, ESP will play a vital role and might be even more vital than academic English in work areas.

Therefore, it is needed to prepare for the

imminent career challenges. As AEC cooperation has not been effective, a study in the field of ESP in Southeast Asian region is impossible. A wider picture of Asian ESP might be a compensatory solution. This present study therefore focused on Asian ESP with an attempt to relate Asian ESP to AEC preparation with a specific focus on research trends. A look at any issues relating to Asian ESP trends would shed some light to AEC preparation and would be beneficial to ten AEC country members and Asian countries as a whole with the following research question.

What are the current trends in Asian ESP research?

Purposes of the Study

The study explored the current trends in Asian ESP research with a focus on: general research types (quantitative, qualitative and triangulation or mixed method) and subcategories of research types (i.e. experimental, correlational, survey, grounded, ethnographic, narrative, phenomenology, triangulation, embedded, explanatory, and exploratory).

Research Method
Design

This was on a content study, gleaned primarily from the articles published between 2005 and 2013 in *Asian ESP* as this study aimed to explore the current trends of Asian ESP research and the journal has been the flagship journal of the field, it was chosen for this study. The year 2005 was the first year the journal originally started its life as *Asian ESP* journal and lasted in 2013 which was the year this study started its life as a research study. There were 148 articles under the analysis in this study.

Data Collection
Procedure

On data collection, all 148 articles were retrieved from www.asian-esp-journal.com during 2005 to 2013. The data collection followed this procedure.

After retrieving the data, a survey of all articles began. Then a content analysis of the articles was conducted according to the purpose of the study, consisting of: 1) general types (i.e. quantitative, qualitative and triangulation or mixed method) and 2) sub categories (i.e. experimental, correlational, survey, grounded, ethnographic, narrative, phenomenology, triangulation, embedded, explanatory, and exploratory).

Coding Process

In coding process, each coding terms was defined as seen below. Then, the researcher used them as the coding guideline in this study.

On the completion of the coding process, the researcher double-coded all the data to recheck the result, then triple-checked with the reviewer. Then the data were adjusted to reviewer's advices.

Data Analysis

On the analysis, this present study was a combination of two frameworks. One was proposed by Merve GEÇİKLİ (2002). His framework was chosen for this study as it provided a comprehensive review of trends in ESP research tradition drawing from the articles published in two indexed online journals - English for Specific Purposes and English for Academic Purposes- during a five-year period (2008-2013) which was almost the same period of this present study (2005 - 2013).

The other was proposed by Master (2005) as his framework looked into details of qualitative research which were the majority of ESP articles in the international ESP journal as well as the Asian ESP. Therefore, this present study also looked into the details to draw out insightful findings which shed lights to Asian ESP trends and directions.

On reliability and validity check, the data were coded as explained in the data collection and based on the purpose of the stduy. On reliability check, the researcher had coded and then doubled the coding. Finally, the doubled coding version was compared with the reviewer's coding. Then, the researcher adjusted according to advice.

On validity check, the coding terms were defined as follows and these terms were employed as coding guidelines. The researcher and the reviewer followed the coding guidelines strictly by counting the words, sentences, or texts themselves that manifested the meaning as defined in this study.

Finally, a conclusion of the study was drawn from the analysis based on the purpose of the study.

Definitions of Terms

Important terms in this study included the following:

Quantitative Research

Quantitative research in this study covers "a hypothesis being tested and the phrasing of the research questions which govern how data will be collected (i.e. a locally developed survey, commercial instrument, or final course grades) as well as the method of statistical analysis used to examine the data" (Creswell, 2002). It also includes Bryman's definition (1988) which is based on quantitative research through the supplement of a comprehensive content of the quantitative based system by emphasizing the sophisticated manner of this research:

> "Quantitative research is often conceptualized by its practitioners as having a structure in which theories determine the problems, to which researchers address themselves in the form of hypotheses derived from general theories. These hypotheses are invariably assumed to take the form of expectations about the likely causal connections between the concepts which are the constituent elements of the hypotheses. Because concepts... are frequently believed to be abstract, there is a need to provide operational definitions whereby their degrees of variation and covariation can be measured. Data are collected by survey, experiment. Once the survey orexperimental data have been collected, they are then analysed so that the causal connection specified by the hypothesis can be verified or rejected." (p. 18)

In general, a research design of quantities generally tends to use numbers in the data collection and analysis process, to stress on the numbers directly relating to the measurement of specific points on individuals, and is commonly based on the comparison among groups or relation of factors about individuals. In the followingsection, the research designs which are presented under the title of quantitative research or directly related to it are offered.

Experimental Designs

The experimental design in this study is an approach in which the researcher intervenes in the natural setting and control a number of variables to determine a causal relationship between two or more properties of an individual or unit. (Scott and Morisson, 2006: p.103)

Correlational Designs

Correlational designs are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators measure the degree of association (or relationship) between two or more variables using the statistical procedure of correlational analysis. This degree of association, expressed as a number, indicates whether the two variables are related or whether one can predict another. (Creswell, 2005: p.52)

Survey Designs

Survey design is 'an approach in which there is empirical research pertaining to a given point of time which aims to incorporate as wide and inclusive data as possible (Denscombe, 1998: p.7). The main characteristics of this research design are collecting information "1) from a group of people in order to *describe* characteristics such asattitudes, opinions, beliefs, aptitudes, abilities, or knowledge; 2) by *asking questions* in which the responses or answers to those questions constitute the data of the survey; 3) from a *sample* rather than every member of the population" (Fraenkel and Wallen 2003: p.396.).

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is characterized by the collection and analysis of textual data (surveys, interviews, focus groups, conversational analysis, observation, ethnographies (Olds et al., 2005)), and by its emphasis on the context within which the study occurs. In qualitative research, to promote the qualified explanation of the qualitative data it requires comprehensive descriptions of this data related to the context. Numbers can also beused to present the data in a brief illustrative description, but thick description is important to answer the questions through rich and contextual reports.

Several texts provide descriptions and examples of qualitative research in the social sciences (Creswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002), and two recent publications describe the conduct of qualitative research within the context of engineering (Chism, Douglas, and Hilson Jr., 2008; Koro-Ljungberg and Douglas, 2008).

Grounded Theory Designs

Grounded theory research is a qualitative approach to generating and developing a theory from the data the researcher collect in a research study (Scott and Morrison, 2006).

Strauss and Corbin (1994) defines grounded theory as " a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed"(p.273). They point out the inductive nature of grounded theory research by stating that " One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge"(p.23).

Ethnographic Designs

Ethnographic designs are qualitative procedures for describing, analyzing, and interpreting a cultural group's shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop over time (Creswell, 2005;p.436). In this research design, the detailed description of the culture-sharing group within its own context is provided through the display of the patterns the group shares by exploring the issues with interview, observation, and collecting documents on this group.

Narrative Research Designs

Narrative research designs are qualitative procedures in which researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about these individuals' lives, and write narratives about their experiences (Creswell, 2005;p.53).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology refers to the description of one or more individuals' consciousness and experience of a phenomenon such as the death of a loved one, viewing oneself as a teacher, the act of teaching, the experience of being a minority group member, or the experience of a winning a soccer game (Johnson and Christensen, 2000; p. 364).

Mixed Methods

Mixed methods has been described as the "third methodological movement" (following quantitatively and qualitatively oriented approaches) (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003). Different descriptions of mixed methods have been identified in the established academic platforms. However, these descriptions have been generally criticized by scholars for being too divisive by artificially emphasizing differences specifically. Because, it is strictly stated that quantitative and qualitative paradigms "cannot and should not be mixed" (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 14).

Instead, they are proponents of pragmatism, in which "what is most fundamental is the research question, researchmethods should follow research questions in a way that offers the best chance to obtain useful answers" (Johnson and Onwueghuzie, 2004, pp. 16-17).Creswell et al. define a mixed methods study as follows:

> "A mixed methods study involves the collection or analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research"(Creswell et al., 2003, p. 212).

In the research literature, on the basis of the followed procedures and the use of quantitative and qualitative research components, four basic mixed method designs are identified.

Triangulation Designs

The term triangulation in research was first used by Denzin (1978) to describe bringing together complementary methods or data sources to offset weaknesses in each. Data are collected concurrently in one phase, and interpretation involves comparing the results of each to best understand the research question (Morse, 1991).

Embedded Designs

Embedded designs are not distinguished by the concurrent or sequential nature of data collection (either is allowed) (Creswell and Clark, 2007). Rather, one type of data takes a supplemental role to the other. According to Creswell and Clark (2007), a study is embedded if the secondary data are not useful or meaningful without the primary study.

Explanatory Designs

Explanatory mixed methods designs are characterized by an initial and extensive quantitative phase built upon by a subsequent qualitative phase. Usually, the qualitative results serve to explain the quantitative results. Integration occurs between phases, as the quantitative results often inform the questions or sampling in the second phase (Creswell et al., 2003).

Exploratory Designs

Exploratory designs begin with a primary qualitative phase, then the findings are validated or otherwise informed quantitative results. This approach is usually employed to develop a standardized (quantitative) instrument in a relatively unstudied area. The qualitative phase identifies important factors, while the quantitative phase applies them to a larger and/or more diverse sample (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007).

Results of the Study

The results of the study will be presented according to the only research question: What are the current trends in Asian ESP research? The articles in general research types fell into three categories: quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method.

Table 1 Percentage and raw data of general research types

	2005	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**Total**
Quant	1	-	2	-	1	4	4	7	1	20 (25.94%)
Qual	1	2	6	2	3	6	9	6	5	40 (51.94%)
Mixed	-	-	-	2	2	2	3	5	3	17 (22.07%)

For general research types, there are 3 categories which are quantitative research, qualitative research and mixed methods. The majority of the articles analyzed qualitative research for 51.94% (n = 40), followed by quantitative research with 25.94% (n = 20). There were 22.07% (n = 17) for mixed methods. This indicates that the ESP researchers in the Asian contexts tended to conduct qualitative studies than quantitative and mixed-methods.

For those 3 research types, each of them contained subcategories as followed; for quantitative, there are experimental, correlational and survey. The majority of quantitative falls into survey for 15.58% (n = 12), followed by correlational for 7.79% (n = 6). For qualitative, the subcategories are grounded, ethnographic, narrative and phenomenology. The majority of articles analyzed narrative for 25.97% (n = 20), followed by grounded for 14.28% (n = 11). Lastly for mixed methods, the subcategories are triangulation, embedded, explanatory and exploratory. The majority of mixed methods fall into explanatory for 16.88% (n = 13), followed by exploratory for 3.89% (n = 3).This indicated that narrative method was the most popular among ESP researchers.

Table 2 Percent and raw data of subcategories of general research types

		2005	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**Total**
Quant	Experimen.	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2 (2.59%)
	Correlat.	-	-	1	-	-	1	2	2	-	6
	Survey	1	-	1	-	1	3	1	5	-	12 (15.58%)

Qual	Grounded	1	1	-	-	1	-	1	4	3	11 (14.28%)
	Ethno-graph	-	1	3	-	-	1	2	1	-	8 (10.38%)
	Narrative	-	-	3	2	2	5	6	-	2	20 (25.97%)
	Phenome-nology	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1 (1.29%)
Mixed Meth.	Triangula-tion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
	Embedded	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1 (1.29%)
	Explana-tory	-	-	-	1	1	2	2	4	3	13 (16.88%)
	Explora-tory	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	3 (3.89%)

Conclusion

This present study helped reveal the evolution and current state of the research designs applied in the inquiry process of research studies under the domain of ESP and documented the prevalence degree of the methods adopted by the researchers. Moreover, this study show what research methods scholars and researchers tend to employ in the field of ESP, and showed what directions the Asian ESP is moving to in the future.

Data collection followed MerveGecikli's framework (2002) with the integration of Peter Master's framework (2005) to get insightful finding of the trends. Gecikli's framework provided a comprehensive review of trends in ESP research tradition which included these topics: quantitative research (experimental designs, correlational designs, and survey designs), qualitative research (grounded theory designs, ethnographic designs, narrative research designs and phenomenology), and mixed-methods (triangulation designs, embedded designs, explanatory designs and exploratory designs).

Qualitative research was the most popular research method among researchers. If we look closer into those subcategories of each general research types, the most popular method on the field of quantitative research was survey designs. The most popular method in the field of qualitative research was narrative research designs, and the most popular in the field of mixed-method was explanatory designs.

Limitations of the study

As this study was a content analysis which is a research method used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or other media content. It is purely descriptive and time consuming. The researcher needed to code the data article by article based on research objectives, double-check all of the information and having a reviewer who followed the coding guideline strictly to create reliability of the results. Moreover, the coding terms that have been used might be varied to some extents. Thus, in the coding process, the opinion and the viewpoint of the researcher and the reader might not be the same.

Recommendations for future research

Future research study may replicate this research in the next 5 or 10 years to see how research trends will change compare with the former results. It may help provide different picture of what directions Asian ESP will move to in the future. In addition, future research study may study international ESP to compare the results of the study with this one.

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