

Disciplinary Discourse Functions in an Agri-Food ESP Handbook: A Case Study

Zineb Siradj¹

siradj.zineb@univ-ghardaia.edu.dz

Department of English, Kasdi Merbah Ouargla University, Algeria

Phd. Dr. Djamel Goui²

goui.djamel@univ-ouargla.dz

Department of English, Kasdi Merbah Ouargla University, Algeria

Received: 12/03/2026 Accepted: 16/06/2026 Published: 29/09/2026

Abstract

This study examines how disciplinary discourse functions are represented and treated in a vocational English for Specific Purposes (ESP) handbook designed for the Agri-Food industries Branch in middle-and southern east Algerian Institutes of vocational training: namely those in El Menia, Ghardaia, Ouargla, Tamanrasset, and Tougourt. The study brushes on the difference between learning technical vocabulary and grammar and actual technical English use. A qualitative case-study design has been applied, combining discourse-function analysis of the handbook with an examination of the official training programme and a questionnaire completed by the two ESP teachers of the Ghardaia institute who were also present as editors in the work and production team when the handbook was being made in 2023. The analysis of the discourse disciplinary functions of Agri- Food industries aimed at finding out whether they were explicitly taught and assessed by the teachers of the branch. The findings showed that the handbook provides significant exposure to disciplinary functions, including identifying, defining, describing, expressing function and purpose, explaining, sequencing processes, instructing, reporting, and interpreting. However, the material shows more didactic emphasis on understanding recognizing, retrieving, and controlled practicing than it shows towards sustained autonomous production of disciplinary discourse.

The questionnaire findings further indicate that teachers adapt the handbook according to the allocated instructional time, learner needs, and local conditions, while extended technical paragraph production and interpretation receive comparatively limited classroom attention. The study concludes that the main issue is not the absence of disciplinary discourse functions but the uneven progression from representation to learner performance. It also shows a clear contrast between the program objectives and those of the handbook of the branch. The findings provide a diagnostic basis for subsequent instructional intervention focused on explicit discourse-function development and learner production.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP); disciplinary discourse; discourse functions; vocational English; ESP materials; Agri-Food industries; pedagogical treatment; Algeria.

1. Introduction

¹ Received: 13/04/2026 ; Accepted : 02/09/2026 ; Published : 03/11/2026

© 2026 The Author. Published by AVADA-CROMA. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, adaptation, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author and source are properly credited.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

By 2032, the first students learning English from the age of 08 will finally reach university. Algeria is doing massive educational system reform in preparation for this event. As we have seen in the late two years and even with the school entry this year, reformulation is even touching upon subject matter at secondary school, narrowing the curriculum modules even further to eliminate those deemed less supportive of the core specialties. We are moving more and more towards subject specificity and professional depth.

English is slowly moving from being the target into being the carrier of authentic scientific text. At university, a few technical specialties have already switched into full teaching of subject matter in English (the first English Cohorts at Algiers 3 – July 9th 2026 - according to the ministry of higher education website). ESP is slowly and gradually fading from scientific specialties as a discovery module and is becoming more introduced authentically as medium of channeling science.

One question any ESP teacher who has been working for some time asks themselves repeatedly over the years, is are we really teaching ESP? Is the shift to full English programs easily done knowing teachers of subject matter are hardly equipped to teach in English? How much teacher training is necessary for us to say the leap towards full English instruction would be smooth and flexible?

Upon visiting several scientific departments at the University of Ghardaia, one sees some encouragement from the teachers' side and the university's side towards embracing English as medium of instruction. All Algerian Universities are parallelly offering teacher trainings locally (Intensive English Language teaching Centers **IELTC**) and internationally in terms of scholarships to help teachers be prepared for Generation Alpha.

These reform changes have resulted in many specialties dropping ESP as a module, having the module but not finding an ESP teacher, or having a subject matter teacher volunteer to teach discipline English without prior training. Fluctuations of teaching methodology and what teachers understand as ESP pedagogy at university makes one go for vocational specialties in the hopes of finding an ESP classroom. At least vocational trainees are simultaneously learning and working; their needs are relatively more immediate than EAP Students.

Vocational specialties introduce disciplinary content where English is introduced as disciplinary carrier but still put it at the center of the learner's awareness in terms of focusing on form and proper genre performance. This is the reason the Agri-Food Vocational branch has been selected for the present study.

Another reason for this choice is that this branch has an official pedagogical and technical handbook entitled: *Technical and Pedagogical Handbook of professional English for Trainees of the Agri-Food industries Branch*. The handbook is considered 'the' guide novice teachers receive when they first get installed in the institute of vocational training in Ghardaia. The handbook was published in 2023. It is intended to sum up the main linguistic needs of learners in the Agri-Food industry Branch. It also helps build a foundation for any scientific branch a teacher is assigned to because it focuses on the scientific genre and most of the disciplinary discourse functions this genre entails. The guide was made by a team of 10 teachers of English from Ouargla, Tamanrasset, Tougourt, and Ghardaia along with the IFEP Team of Ouargla's vocational institute. The initiative to make this handbook came from the regional institute raising the concern of the English curriculum being still in need of content samples for novice teachers. It was mainly made by teachers of English who have been teaching multiple specialties for years and who have formulated an idea of the learners' needs in the vocations the regional institutes offer across the mid-east and south east of the country.

ESP methodology has always emphasized language use as the first trigger of curriculum design. Be it academic, occupational, or vocational, the starting point is what makes a learner functional in their field of choice. Consequently, ESP pedagogy does not only focus on disciplinary vocabulary and grammar but investigates the larger communicative functions learners perform in their specific field.

In technical fields like The Agri-Food industry, disciplinary performance involves recurring communicative functions. Professionals may need to identify and define technical entities, describe equipment and materials, explain processes, classify phenomena, give instructions, interpret information, and report technical observations or work incidents. These functions are not simply examples of vocabulary use; they represent ways of using language to perform disciplinary work. From an ESP perspective, therefore, the presence of specialized terminology in teaching materials does not by itself demonstrate that learners are being prepared to communicate effectively within their target field.

This issue is particularly relevant to professional and technical English programmes in which learners have limited exposure to English and limited instructional time. In such contexts, teaching materials have an important role in determining not only which technical words learners encounter but also which forms of disciplinary communication should become visible and practicable to them.

The present study examines this issue through a case study of the Agri-Food Industries Branch handbook. It was designed for Level 5 trainees in the Agri-Food Industries branch and is organized into three principal chapters: 1 technical vocabulary, 2 grammar in the technical context, and 3 technical and administrative documentation. Its particular performance criteria reads as (Korichi et al 2023):

1. Recognition of the branch vocabulary
2. Correct use of the grammar rules
3. Respect the spelling rules
4. Reading and interpreting the technical documents of the branch
5. Writing administrative documents respecting the rules of writing (p.7)

According to the formal training programme of the branch made in 2005, English is identified as a complementary module. The programme document specifies that the trainee should be able to read equipment user manuals and identify the correct use of such manuals as a general performance criterion. English is allocated 72 hours in the first semester and 24 hours in each of the second and third semesters, with no English allocation in the fourth semester. Thus, English occupies a relatively limited and progressively reduced place within the four-semester programme.

The handbook itself nevertheless exposes learners to a considerably wider range of technical language and documents. Its first chapter introduces professional tasks, equipment, tools, materials, and technical terminology; its second chapter provides explicit instruction in grammatical forms; and its third chapter introduces technical documents such as manuals, food labels and brochures as well as administrative documents including application letters, curriculum vitae, cover letters, and workplace incident reports.

The first chapter in particular contains numerous examples of disciplinary communication. Technical objects and equipment are identified and named; terms are defined; equipment and materials are described; and the functions or purposes of machines and tools are repeatedly expressed. Examples include descriptions of equipment used to separate cream from milk, store products, measure properties, or sterilize materials. Process descriptions are also represented, for example in descriptions of grain processing and olive-oil production.

However, the presence of these functions in the texts does not necessarily mean that the functions are explicitly taught as communicative abilities. The activities frequently require learners to identify, match, classify, complete, retrieve or reproduce information. For instance, learners are asked to use a dictionary to define technical terms, to match terms with definitions, to identify equipment corresponding to specified functions, to complete tables, and to fill gaps in process descriptions (Korishi et al 2023). This distinction is central to the present study. A learner may encounter a definition without being explicitly taught how to construct it; may read a description of a technical process without being taught how to produce a process description; or may recognize the function of a piece of equipment without being asked to communicate that function independently. The pedagogical question is therefore not simply which discourse functions are present, but how learners are expected to appropriate and use those functions.

This question is also relevant to the reported use of the handbook. The two experienced teachers who responded to the questionnaire (and also helped produce the handbook) reported different degrees and forms of reliance on the handbook. Their responses indicate that the handbook may function as a teaching resource, a reference, or a source of vocabulary, texts and exercises, while materials may also be adapted or supplemented according to teaching time, learner level, and other contextual considerations. The teachers also reported that learner activities tend to involve recognition, matching, completion, and work from models, whereas independent production of extended technical paragraphs or texts is limited or not even reached because of time limitations. These responses are treated in the

present study as contextual evidence about the handbook in use rather than as representative evidence about ESP teachers in general.

Recent ESP scholarship has increasingly called attention to the relationship between specialized discourse, genre, and pedagogical practice. Genre-focused ESP research considers not only the linguistic features of specialized texts but also their rhetorical organization and communicative purposes, while current research agendas emphasize the need to understand how specialized registers are actually learned in instructed ESP settings. Research in Algerian ESP contexts has likewise reported continued attention to vocabulary and language forms alongside calls for greater attention to genre awareness and disciplinary discourse practices (Messerhi 2025).

The present study contributes to this area by examining the agri-food ESP handbook at the level of disciplinary discourse functions and their pedagogical treatment. Rather than evaluating the handbook in general terms, the study asks what forms of disciplinary communication it represents, how these forms are introduced and practiced, and how the material is used in teaching.

2. Research Problem

The central problem addressed by this study is the possible gap between representing disciplinary discourse and teaching learners to produce disciplinary discourse.

The Agri-Food ESP handbook contains substantial technical vocabulary, descriptions, definitions, explanations, process information, and technical documentation. However, the pedagogical treatment of these discourse functions appears frequently to involve recognition, matching, completion, and retrieval activities. This raises the question of whether the material sufficiently supports progression from encountering a disciplinary function in a text to using that function independently in the production of disciplinary English.

The problem can therefore be stated as follows:

Although the Agri-Food ESP handbook exposes trainees to a range of disciplinary discourse functions, it is unclear to what extent these functions are explicitly developed as learner-produced communicative abilities, particularly within the limited instructional time available to the programme.

This problem is significant because the formal programme objective identifies the ability **to read equipment manuals as the principal expected English outcome**, while the handbook extends across a wider range of technical and administrative genres. The study therefore examines not only the functions represented in the handbook but also the relationship between those functions, the activities through which they are taught, and their reported implementation in ESP teaching.

3. Aim of the Study

The study aims to:

identify the disciplinary discourse functions represented in the Agri-Food ESP handbook, examine how these functions are introduced, practiced and developed, and investigate how the handbook is used and adapted in teaching in order to identify areas requiring further explicit development.

4. Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

RQ1. What disciplinary discourse functions are represented in the Agri-Food ESP handbook?

RQ2. How are these discourse-functions introduced, practiced and developed in the handbook?

RQ3. How is the handbook used, adapted and supplemented in Agri-Food ESP teaching?

RQ4. What pedagogical gaps or priorities emerge from the analysis of the handbook in relation to its reported classroom use?

5. Literature Review

5.1 English for Specific Purposes and vocational communication

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between language learning and the particular purposes, needs, and contexts for which learners require English. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) conceptualize ESP as a learning-centred approach in which course design begins with an understanding of why learners need English and how their learning needs can be addressed. Their approach also emphasizes the importance of syllabus design, materials, methodology, and evaluation in translating identified needs into teaching practice. This perspective is particularly relevant to vocational education, where English instruction is expected to support learners' preparation for specific occupational contexts rather than provide general language knowledge alone.

Kennedy and Bolitho (1984) similarly situate ESP within the relationship between language, learners, and the purposes for which English is required. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) subsequently broaden this perspective by emphasizing the importance of professional and disciplinary contexts, needs analysis, materials development, and the role of the ESP practitioner. Harding (2007) also stresses the need to connect ESP teaching with the specialist knowledge and communicative practices of particular fields. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that vocational ESP materials should not be evaluated only according to the amount of technical vocabulary or grammatical content they contain. They should also be considered in terms of how effectively they prepare learners to understand and produce language associated with their occupational domain.

This distinction is important in the present study because the Agri-Food ESP handbook is designed for trainees in a specific vocational branch. The official training programme identifies English as a complementary module and gives particular importance to learners' ability to read and interpret technical documents, while the handbook extends this orientation through technical vocabulary, grammar in technical contexts, and technical and administrative documentation. The relevant question, therefore, is not simply whether English is present in the vocational curriculum, but how the handbook translates occupational communication functions into teachable language and discourse practices.

5.2 From language forms to discourse in use

A discourse-oriented perspective provides a useful basis for examining how specialized language is organized and used in context. Cook (1989) and Coulthard (1985) treat discourse as extending beyond isolated sentences and grammatical forms, drawing attention to relationships between language, context, meaning, and the organization of stretches of communication. Similarly, Nunan (1993), Johnstone (2002), Paltridge (2006), and Salkie (1995) demonstrate the importance of examining language as connected discourse rather than as a collection of independent linguistic items.

This perspective is especially relevant to vocational ESP because occupational communication involves texts and communicative events in which individual linguistic forms contribute to larger purposes. A grammatical structure, technical term, or lexical pattern may perform different communicative roles depending on how it is used within a text. McCarthy (1991), for example, approaches discourse analysis specifically from the perspective of language teaching and considers its implications for grammar, vocabulary, spoken language, and written language. His approach supports the view that linguistic items are better understood when their contribution to discourse is taken into account.

McCarthy and Carter (1994) develop this position by emphasizing the relationship between complete texts, their linguistic properties, and the social and cultural contexts in which they operate. They argue for greater attention to language as discourse in language teaching, particularly because the functions of linguistic forms become clearer when examined in their discursive environment. Widdowson (2007) likewise distinguishes between the formal properties of texts and the ways in which language is used to construct and interpret meaning in context.

These perspectives provide a theoretical justification for examining the Agri-Food handbook at a level that goes beyond vocabulary and grammar as isolated components. They make it possible to investigate what learners are expected to do with language in disciplinary texts—for example, naming, defining, describing, explaining, sequencing, instructing, comparing, reporting, interpreting, and expressing cause and effect.

5.3 Discourse functions in specialized and vocational communication

A discourse-function perspective is particularly useful for analyzing specialized communication because professional texts are organized around recurring communicative purposes. In an ESP context, learners need not only knowledge of specialist terminology but also an understanding of how language is used to perform tasks within a particular field. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) emphasize the importance of analyzing professional and disciplinary communication when designing ESP courses, while Harding (2007) similarly highlights the relationship between specialist knowledge and English language teaching.

From a discourse-analytic perspective, Schiffrin (1994), van Dijk (1997), Johnstone (2002), and Paltridge (2006) demonstrate that discourse can be examined through multiple dimensions, including the organization of texts, the relationship between linguistic choices and communicative purposes, and the contextual conditions under which discourse is produced and interpreted. These approaches do not provide a single fixed taxonomy of vocational discourse functions; rather, they support the analytical principle that stretches of language should be examined in relation to what they accomplish within a communicative context.

For the present study, this principle is operationalized through a set of discourse functions identified in the Agri-Food handbook: naming, defining, classifying, describing, expressing function or purpose, explaining, sequencing processes, instructing, comparing and contrasting, reporting, interpreting, and expressing cause and effect. The purpose of identifying these functions is not to claim that they constitute a universal taxonomy of Agri-Food discourse. Instead, they provide an analytical framework for examining the communicative work performed by the texts and activities included in the particular handbook under investigation.

This approach also allows the study to distinguish between **linguistic realization** and **discourse function**. A grammatical structure or lexical item may be one linguistic realization of a broader communicative function. Consequently, the presence of a grammatical form or technical term in the handbook does not, by itself, demonstrate that learners are being prepared to use that form independently for a disciplinary communicative purpose.

5.4 Texts, discourse organization, and technical documentation

Vocational communication frequently takes place through recurrent text types and documents. The ability to understand such texts therefore forms an important component of ESP instruction. The relationship between discourse, text organization, and context is emphasized across discourse-oriented work by Coulthard (1985), Cook (1989), McCarthy and Carter (1994), Salkie (1995), and Widdowson (2007).

This perspective is directly relevant to the Agri-Food handbook because one of its three principal components concerns **technical and administrative documentation**. The handbook therefore moves beyond individual technical terms and grammatical structures toward texts that learners may need to read, interpret, or produce in vocational settings. Such texts may require learners to identify information, understand descriptions and explanations, follow sequences, interpret procedures, report information, or produce administrative documents according to established conventions.

The distinction between understanding a text and producing one is important here. A learner may be able to recognize the language used in a technical document without being able to construct a comparable document independently. Discourse-oriented approaches to language teaching therefore provide a basis for considering not only what texts are presented to learners but also what opportunities learners receive to work with and produce discourse.

5.5 From representation to pedagogical development

An important issue emerging from the literature is the difference between the **presence of a language or discourse feature in instructional materials** and the **opportunity provided for learners to use that feature communicatively**. This distinction is particularly important in ESP because materials are expected to mediate between identified occupational needs and classroom learning.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize that needs analysis does not automatically determine a course; identified needs must be interpreted through syllabus design, materials, methodology, and evaluation. Their discussion of course design also recognizes that practical constraints, including classroom conditions and available time, influence

what can actually be implemented. This is highly relevant to vocational ESP settings, where the intended curriculum, available materials, teaching time, learner level, and classroom realities may not always coincide.

Brumfit (1984) similarly provides a communicative perspective in which language teaching needs to consider learners' ability to use language rather than merely their knowledge of linguistic forms. McCarthy (1991) and McCarthy and Carter (1994) reinforce the value of examining language in use and connecting linguistic teaching with discourse. Widdowson (2007) likewise foregrounds the relationship between texts and the processes through which meanings are constructed and interpreted in use.

These perspectives support an analytical distinction between several stages of pedagogical treatment. A discourse function may first be **represented** in a text or example, then **explained** explicitly, **recognized or retrieved** by learners, and subsequently practiced through controlled, guided, or independent activities. The presence of a function at an earlier stage does not necessarily mean that the material provides sufficient opportunity for learners to produce it autonomously.

This distinction is central to the present study. The analysis therefore does not treat the identification of a discourse function in the handbook as evidence of full pedagogical development. Instead, it examines how functions move—or fail to move—from representation and recognition toward increasingly independent production. This provides a direct theoretical basis for examining the progression from controlled exercises to guided and independent production in the handbook.

5.6 ESP materials, teacher mediation, and local vocational context

ESP materials operate within particular teaching contexts and are not necessarily implemented exactly as originally designed. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize the importance of the ESP teacher, course design, materials, methodology, and evaluation, while Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) draw attention to the multiple responsibilities involved in ESP teaching and materials development. Harding (2007) likewise recognizes that ESP teachers frequently work at the intersection of language teaching and specialist subject matter.

This is particularly relevant to vocational education, where teachers may have to adapt materials according to learners' proficiency levels, available teaching time, institutional requirements, and the specific characteristics of the vocational programme. Hutchinson and Waters' discussion of course design explicitly notes that the transfer from identified needs to course design is not automatic and that classroom constraints and teachers' experience influence what can be implemented. Their discussion of ESP teacher roles also highlights the challenges created by the specialist knowledge associated with particular professional domains.

Accordingly, an evaluation of an ESP handbook should distinguish between what the material **contains** and how it is **used in practice**. The present study addresses this distinction by combining handbook analysis with questionnaire data from teachers who use and have contributed to the development of the material. Their reported adaptations and perceptions provide contextual information about the extent to which the handbook is supplemented, modified, or selectively used according to classroom realities.

This dimension is important for the present research because the study does not assume that the handbook operates as a self-sufficient teaching system. Rather, it considers the handbook as one component of a broader instructional environment in which teachers mediate materials and respond to learner needs, time constraints, and local vocational conditions.

5.7 A discourse-oriented framework for vocational ESP materials

The preceding literature suggests that vocational ESP materials can be examined at several interconnected levels. At the broadest level, ESP establishes the relationship between language learning and learners' purposes and needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Kennedy & Bolitho, 1984; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Harding, 2007). At the discourse level, language is understood as meaning-making activity situated in context rather than as isolated grammatical or lexical forms (Cook, 1989; McCarthy, 1991; McCarthy & Carter, 1994; Widdowson, 2007). At the textual level, attention can be given to how meanings are organized across connected stretches of language and across different types of texts (Coulthard, 1985; Nunan, 1993; Salkie, 1995; Paltridge, 2006). At the pedagogical level, these linguistic and discourse resources need to be translated into materials, activities, and opportunities for learner use.

On this basis, the present study adopts the following conceptual progression:

vocational ESP purposes → specialized/disciplinary discourse → texts and communicative functions → representation in instructional materials → pedagogical treatment → opportunities for learner production.

This progression corresponds closely to the structure of the Agri-Food handbook and to the four research questions. It allows the study first to identify the discourse functions represented in the material, then to examine how those functions are introduced and practiced, and finally to consider how teachers use and adapt the handbook in classroom contexts.

The framework also avoids equating the presence of a discourse function with mastery of that function. The handbook may contain numerous examples of describing, explaining, sequencing, instructing, interpreting, or reporting without necessarily providing equivalent opportunities for learners to produce extended disciplinary discourse independently. The analytical distinction between representation and production therefore becomes a central feature of the present investigation.

5.8 Research gap and conceptual orientation

Although ESP and discourse analysis have generated substantial theoretical and pedagogical literature, less attention has been given to the detailed examination of how discourse functions are distributed and pedagogically developed within vocational ESP materials, particularly in localized vocational contexts. Existing work provides strong foundations for understanding ESP needs, specialized communication, discourse organization, materials, and teacher mediation, but these perspectives do not by themselves show how a particular vocational handbook moves from the presentation of disciplinary language to opportunities for learners to use it.

The present study addresses this issue through a case study of an Agri-Food ESP handbook used in Algerian vocational education. Rather than evaluating the handbook solely in terms of vocabulary coverage, grammatical accuracy, or general communicative orientation, the study examines the discourse functions represented in the material and traces their pedagogical treatment across different activity types. It then complements this analysis with teachers' reported classroom use and adaptation of the handbook.

The study is therefore diagnostic rather than a direct measure of learner achievement. Its purpose is to determine what kinds of disciplinary discourse the handbook makes visible, how those functions are introduced and practiced, and where opportunities for increasingly independent production appear stronger or more limited. This perspective provides the theoretical basis for the subsequent analysis of the handbook and for the interpretation of teachers' reported classroom practices.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research design

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant case study design combining discourse-function analysis of the Agri-Food English handbook with descriptive contextual evidence from a teacher questionnaire. The handbook constitutes the primary object of analysis, while the official programme document and teacher responses are used to establish the intended instructional context and to examine how the handbook is used in practice.

The design was selected because the purpose of the study is not to determine whether teachers or learners perform statistically above or below a particular standard. Rather, it is to identify the disciplinary discourse functions represented in an existing ESP resource, examine how those functions are pedagogically treated, and determine whether reported classroom use reveals areas requiring further development. This follows the broader ESP principle that materials should be considered in relation to the communicative demands of the target context rather than as collections of decontextualized language forms.

The study therefore brings together three complementary sources of evidence: the Agri-Food ESP handbook as the primary instructional resource, the official training programme as the prescribed vocational context, and a questionnaire completed by the two currently relevant Agri-Food ESP teachers. The use of multiple sources permits a limited form of triangulation without turning the study into a large-scale survey.

6.2 Research context and data sources

The main document analyzed is *the technical and pedagogical handbook of professional Agri – Food English* prepared for Level 5 trainees in the Agri-Food Industries field. The handbook is organized into three main chapters. **Chapter 1** presents technical vocabulary related to professions, tasks, equipment, tools and work materials; **Chapter 2** focuses on grammar in technical contexts; and **Chapter 3** addresses technical and administrative documentation.

The handbook describes its overall objective as enabling trainees to apply English language rules and exploit technical documentation in the branch. Its stated performance criteria include ‘interpretation of branch vocabulary, correct application of grammar and spelling, interpretation of technical documents, and writing of administrative documents’ (Korishi *et al* 2023:07).

The official vocational programme provides an additional contextual reference. In that programme, English is presented as a complementary module, and one of the principal-stated outcomes is the ability to read equipment user manuals. This context is important because it establishes that technical-document literacy, rather than English proficiency in the abstract, forms part of the intended professional use of the language (Ministry of Vocational Training and Education, 2005).

The third source is a questionnaire administered to the two current Agri-Food ESP teachers who were also editors of the handbook. This information is important because it helped understand some of the findings related the handbook’s sequencing and organization. The details the teachers have shared during the questionnaire session were backed by facts that were clearly present in the handbook. These facts will be discussed later in the discussion of the findings.

Because the population is limited to two teachers, the questionnaire is treated as contextual evidence rather than as a representative survey. The results are therefore reported descriptively and are used to complement, not replace, the document analysis.

6.3 Analytical and Coding framework

The analysis distinguishes between two complementary dimensions: **disciplinary discourse function** and **pedagogical treatment**. A disciplinary discourse function is understood here as the communicative work performed by language in a technical or professional context, such as defining a technical concept, describing equipment, explaining a process, or directing an occupational procedure. This distinction provides the analytical basis for addressing RQ1, which concerns the discourse functions represented in the handbook, and RQ2, which concerns how these functions are introduced, practiced, and developed.

The coding framework was developed from the handbook's pedagogical and textual organization and refined through repeated examination of the data. Rather than treating technical language as a collection of isolated vocabulary or grammatical features, the analysis focuses on the functions through which disciplinary and occupational knowledge is represented, explained, communicated, and practiced. This approach is particularly appropriate to the handbook because its content encompasses technical vocabulary, occupational tasks, equipment and materials, technical processes, as well as technical and administrative documentation.

The final coding framework comprised twelve core disciplinary discourse functions: identifying/naming (**NAM**), defining (**DEF**), classifying/categorizing (**CLS**), describing (**DES**), expressing function or purpose (**FUN**), explaining (**EXP**), sequencing/describing a process (**PROC**), instructing/directing (**INST**), comparing/contrasting (**COMP**), reporting/recording (**REP**), interpreting (**INT**), and expressing cause and effect (**CAUS**).

The following table defines each discourse function and specifies the criterion used for coding.

Table 1. Coding criteria for disciplinary discourse functions

Code	Discourse function	Coding criterion
NAM	Identifying / naming	Names or identifies people, occupations, products, materials, tools, equipment, processes, parts, or substances.

DEF	Defining	Establishes the meaning, identity, or scope of a technical term, concept, object, or process.
CLS	Classifying / categorizing	Groups, differentiates, or organizes technical entities into types or categories.
DES	Describing	Presents characteristics, properties, components, dimensions, conditions, or features of a technical entity.
FUN	Expressing function / purpose	States what an object, machine, material, process, or procedure is used for or intended to accomplish.
EXP	Explaining	Makes a technical phenomenon, operation, or relationship understandable by explaining how or why it occurs or works.
PROC	Sequencing / describing a process	Represents stages, sequences, operations, transformations, or steps within a technical process.
INST	Instructing / directing	Directs an individual to perform, avoid, or regulate an action or procedure.
COMP	Comparing / contrasting	Establishes similarities, differences, advantages, or distinctions between technical entities or procedures.
REP	Reporting / recording	Records an event, observation, condition, result, measurement, or workplace occurrence.
INT	Interpreting	Presents or organizes technical information in ways that require or support the interpretation of meaning from texts, labels, diagrams, tables, measurements, or other technical representations.
CAUS	Expressing cause and effect	Establishes causal, consequential, or resultative relationships between technical phenomena, actions, or conditions.

Where a textual segment performs more than one discourse function, **multiple coding** is permitted. This reflects the multifunctional nature of disciplinary discourse: a single statement may, for example, describe a piece of equipment while simultaneously expressing its function or explaining its operation. Multiple coding is therefore used where the segment makes more than one communicative contribution rather than forcing each segment into a single exclusive category.

The analysis also distinguishes discourse function from its **linguistic realization**. Grammatical or lexical features such as the passive voice, modal verbs, technical terminology, sequencing markers, or purpose clauses are therefore treated as linguistic resources through which a discourse function may be realized, rather than as discourse functions in themselves. The same linguistic form may consequently contribute to different discourse functions depending on its use in context.

A second coding dimension concerns the **pedagogical treatment** given to each discourse function. This dimension is necessary because the occurrence of a discourse function in instructional material does not necessarily indicate that learners are explicitly taught to produce that function. A handbook may contain numerous technical definitions or process descriptions while requiring learners only to recognize, match, complete, or retrieve information from them. The analysis therefore distinguishes between the presence of a function in the material and the extent to which learners are pedagogically engaged with that function.

Six principal **categories of pedagogical treatment** were identified:

Table 2. Coding criteria for pedagogical treatment

Code	Pedagogical treatment	Coding criterion
RPR	Representation	The function appears as an example, model, text, dialogue, diagram, or other input, without an explicit requirement for learner analysis or production.
EXP	Explicit explanation	The handbook explicitly explains the linguistic, textual, or communicative features associated with the function.
REC	Recognition	Learners identify, match, select, locate, or retrieve information related to the function.
CP	Controlled practice	Learners reproduce or manipulate the target function through highly constrained exercises such as substitution, completion, ordering, or sentence transformation.
GP	Guided production	Learners produce the function with substantial textual, lexical, structural, or task support.
IP	Independent production	Learners are required by the handbook to produce or perform the discourse function with limited linguistic or textual support.

The code **RPR** is used for *representation* in order to distinguish it from **REP**, which denotes the disciplinary discourse function of *reporting/recording*. Assessment or checking was recorded separately when a discourse function was explicitly evaluated or tested.

The pedagogical categories are analytically distinguished rather than assumed to constitute a universal or strictly linear developmental sequence. In particular, the framework allows the analysis to determine whether and how discourse functions move from representation and recognition toward increasingly supported or independent production. Thus, the presence of a function at one level does not automatically imply that it is developed at subsequent levels.

This two-dimensional framework makes it possible to examine not only which disciplinary discourse functions occur in the handbook, but also how those functions are transformed into pedagogical activity. It therefore permits a distinction between discourse **represented to learners**, discourse **explicitly explained**, discourse **recognized or practiced**, and discourse that learners are explicitly required by the material to **produce or perform**.

An initial examination of the handbook suggests a recurring movement from the identification of disciplinary entities towards increasingly complex forms of disciplinary communication: trainees encounter what things are called, what they are, what they do, how processes operate, how actions are directed, and how technical information is reported and interpreted. This tendency is examined empirically in the subsequent analysis rather than being assumed as a fixed developmental sequence.

6.4 Procedure

The handbook was examined across its three chapters and accompanying exercises and answer key. The analysis began with a first-pass reading to identify recurrent communicative functions in the instructional material and technical texts. Each relevant passage or activity was then considered according to two questions:

1. What is the language doing in this passage or task?
2. What is the learner required to do with that language?

The first question produced the discourse-function coding. The second produced the pedagogical-treatment coding.

Particular attention was paid to the distinction between the function represented in a text and the function required by an exercise. For example, a sentence describing what a machine is used for was coded as a representation of function/purpose, whereas an activity asking learners to match equipment with its use was coded as a practice activity associated with that function.

6.5 Teacher questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered to the two teachers of English working in the vocational institute of trainees in Ghardaia to provide contextual information for the documentary analysis. It focused on five broad areas: teaching context; available resources and guidance; use and adaptation of the handbook; learner activities and the treatment of discourse functions; and perceptions of the handbook's usefulness and areas for further development.

The questionnaire was intended to complement rather than substitute the analysis of the handbook. In particular, it provided information about how the handbook is used in teaching practice, the types of activities through which trainees engage with disciplinary English, and teachers' views of the linguistic and pedagogical demands of the Agri-Food branch.

The two teachers' responses were treated descriptively, and no inferential statistics, reliability coefficients, or population-level claims were attempted. The responses were interpreted in conjunction with the documentary findings, with particular attention to points of convergence between teachers' accounts and features observable in the handbook.

6.6 Trustworthiness and scope

The credibility of the analysis rests primarily on transparent coding categories, systematic attention to both texts and activities, and comparison between the handbook, the programme context and the teacher questionnaire. The questionnaire is not used to generalize beyond the two participating teachers, and reported classroom practices are not presented as direct observations.

The study is consequently best understood as a contextual case analysis of one vocational ESP resource. Its value lies in identifying patterns that can inform subsequent instructional development rather than in producing universally generalizable findings.

7. Results

7.1 Disciplinary discourse functions represented in the handbook

The first research question asked which disciplinary discourse functions are represented in the Agri-Food ESP handbook. The analysis shows that the handbook contains a substantial range of functions rather than focusing exclusively on technical vocabulary and grammar.

7.1.1 Identifying and naming

Identifying and naming are among the most recurrent operations in Chapter 1. Learners are introduced to professions, occupations, tasks, equipment, materials and tools and are repeatedly asked to identify or name them. Activities include naming equipment from illustrations, identifying items and supplying technical terms.

This function is strongly aligned with the handbook's stated vocabulary objective, which explicitly emphasizes recognition of branch vocabulary.

7.1.2 Defining

Definition is also clearly represented. In the first exercise of Chapter 1, learners are instructed to use a dictionary to define technical words. Matching activities similarly require learners to associate technical terms with definitions.

The handbook's technical descriptions also contain definitional structures. For example, technical equipment is introduced through forms such "A flow meter is a device that measures the flow rate of a fluid" (Korishi et al., 2023, p. 31). Definitions reappear in Chapter 3, where the handbook defines technical documentation, manuals and food labeling.

7.1.3 Classifying and categorizing

Classification occurs in several parts of the material. Learners classify professional tasks according to specialization, while other activities ask them to distinguish categories of equipment or materials. Chapter 3 likewise describes types of brochures according to format and layout.

Classification therefore operates both as a technical discourse function and as an organizing principle for disciplinary knowledge.

7.1.4 Describing

Description is pervasive in the handbook, particularly in the equipment sections. Machines and materials are introduced through statements concerning their characteristics, components, operation or technical role. The descriptions range from brief one-sentence formulations to more developed technical passages.

This function is particularly visible in the treatment of processing equipment, where descriptions provide information about what a machine does, what materials it handles and, in some cases, how it operates.

7.1.5 Describing function and purpose

Function/purpose is one of the most salient patterns in the handbook. Recurrent formulations include “used to,” “used for,” “designed for” and related constructions. Examples include equipment used for cooling and storing milk, separating cream, sterilizing products, measuring properties and removing unwanted materials.

The frequency of such descriptions suggests that functional description is a central way in which the handbook connects technical vocabulary to professional knowledge.

7.1.6 Explaining

Explanation is represented in more extended equipment descriptions. The treatment of pasteurizers and homogenizers, for example, goes beyond naming or stating purpose and provides information about technical operation and effects. Similarly, several grain-processing descriptions explain how a machine performs a particular operation and why the operation is technically relevant.

Explanation is therefore present as a genuine discourse function, although it often occurs inside descriptive passages rather than as a separately labeled pedagogical category.

7.1.7 Sequencing and process description

Process description is represented particularly clearly in the treatment of olive-oil production. Learners encounter an ordered sequence involving crushing, pumping, warming and mixing, separation of solids and liquids, and subsequent centrifugal processing. Related synthesis activities also reconstruct processes through gap-filling.

Process sequencing consequently constitutes an identifiable disciplinary function in the material rather than an incidental feature of technical vocabulary work.

7.1.8 Instructing

Instruction is especially visible in Chapter 3 through the treatment of technical manuals. The handbook defines a manual as a document providing instructions or guidelines for performing an activity and describes step-by-step instructions as a characteristic feature of user manuals.

Instruction is therefore established as a feature of an authentic professional genre. However, the extent to which learners themselves are asked to produce such instructional discourse is a separate pedagogical question.

7.1.9 Comparing and contrasting

Comparison is present but less central than naming, describing, function/purpose or process. Chapter 3's discussion of food labeling, for instance, refers to comparing similar products and distinguishing different labeling requirements.

Compared with the more frequent technical functions, comparison appears to occupy a more limited role within the handbook.

7.1.10 Reporting and interpreting

Reporting becomes more visible in Chapter 3, especially in the workplace incident report. The genre is presented as a document recording accidents, injuries, property damage and other workplace events, with factual information organized through incident description, cause and result.

Interpretation is likewise present in the handbook's stated objective of reading and interpreting technical documentation. The programme and handbook therefore position interpretation as an important professional activity, although the pedagogical realization of that activity is largely receptive.

7.1.11 Cause and effect

Cause-and-effect relations occur in technical explanations and in workplace reporting. Technical descriptions explain effects produced by processing operations, while the incident-report section explicitly distinguishes incident cause from incident result.

Overall, therefore, the handbook represents a broad range of disciplinary functions. The findings do not support the claim that the material lacks discourse-oriented content. Rather, the question becomes how these functions are transformed from textual representations into learner performance.

7.2 How discourse functions are introduced, practiced and developed

The second research question examined the pedagogical treatment of the identified functions.

A clear pattern emerges across the handbook: representation is extensive, recognition is frequent, controlled practice is common, while independent disciplinary production is less visible.

7.2.1 Representation is extensive

Technical functions are repeatedly embedded in model descriptions, explanations, definitions and document examples. Equipment sections provide numerous examples of technical language in use, while Chapter 3 introduces complete genres and explains their functions, structures and conventions.

This gives learners considerable exposure to the linguistic realization of professional meanings.

7.2.2 Recognition and retrieval are strongly represented

Many exercises require learners to recognize or retrieve previously presented information. These include matching terms with definitions, identifying equipment, classifying tasks, completing tables, answering True/False statements, selecting appropriate vocabulary and naming pictured objects.

The answer key confirms that many of these tasks are associated with predetermined responses, reinforcing their controlled nature.

These activities are valuable for establishing technical vocabulary and familiarizing learners with disciplinary concepts. However, recognition does not by itself demonstrate the ability to construct the relevant discourse independently.

7.2.3 Controlled production is present

The handbook goes beyond pure recognition in a number of gap-filling and completion activities. The olive-oil process, for example, is reconstructed through missing technical terms and stages, while synthesis exercises require learners to complete a technically meaningful passage using provided words or phrases.

These activities provide some movement toward production, but the linguistic and conceptual resources required for the response are substantially constrained.

7.2.4 Guided production is uneven

Guided production appears more clearly in the treatment of professional documents, particularly where learners are given models of letters, forms or reports and information about their structure. Chapter 3 provides models and explicit descriptions of document organization, such as the paragraph structure of an application letter.

However, within the technical Agri-Food material, production is more often supported through sentence-level prompts, word banks, tables or completion exercises than through tasks requiring learners to independently organize an extended technical message.

7.2.5 Independent production is comparatively limited in the technical domain

The strongest pattern identified in the documentary analysis is the limited evidence of sustained, independent production of Agri-Food technical discourse. The handbook contains technical texts and models, but many of the accompanying activities ask learners to identify, match, complete or retrieve information rather than construct an original technical paragraph or extended disciplinary text from relatively open-ended input.

The handbook does contain production-oriented work in administrative genres, so it would be inaccurate to claim that no writing production exists anywhere in the material. The more precise finding is that independent production of disciplinary Agri-Food discourse is less developed than representation and controlled practice.

7.3 Reported classroom use and adaptation

The third research question addressed how the handbook is used, adapted and supplemented in Agri-Food ESP teaching.

The questionnaire responses indicate that the handbook does not function as a rigid sequence followed identically in every class. The two teachers reported different patterns of use, ranging from substantial use of the handbook to more selective use as a reference or supplementary resource. This supports treating the handbook as an instructional resource subject to teacher mediation rather than as a fixed teaching programme.

Time emerged as a recurrent contextual constraint. Both teachers reported limited instructional time, and they indicated that only a small number of English sessions may be available in a semester. They also reported shortening, skipping or adapting parts of the material, with Chapter 2 among the sections more likely to be reduced.

The responses concerning learner activities are particularly relevant to the discourse-function analysis. Both teachers reported relatively limited opportunities for learners to produce extended technical paragraphs or longer texts. In the questionnaire, technical paragraph/text production was rated 2 (“rarely”) by both teachers, while interpretation was also rated 2 (“rarely”) by both. Reporting received a somewhat higher rating of 3 from both teachers.

The responses concerning difficult areas point in a similar direction, although not identically. One teacher identified describing function/purpose, process sequencing, reporting observations/results and interpreting information/results as difficult areas. The other identified process sequencing, interpreting information/results and producing technical paragraphs or texts. Defining was not selected by either teacher among the principal difficult areas.

These responses do not demonstrate that learners actually lack the relevant abilities because learner performance was not directly measured in the present study. They do, however, indicate that teachers perceive a need for more work on functions that require learners to organize and produce disciplinary meaning rather than simply recognize technical language.

The questionnaire also suggests that the handbook is considered broadly useful. Both teachers characterized it as quite useful, with strengths including its coverage of the specialization and its treatment of a substantial part of the relevant domain. Both also expressed a preference for more structured complementary resources in the form of a teacher-oriented book, student book and workbook.

An additional finding emerged from the participants’ accounts of the handbook’s production. Both teachers had been members of the team that developed the handbook in 2023 and had contributed as teachers of English with experience across several vocational specialties. They reported that no Agri-Food subject-matter specialist had participated in the development process, particularly in the sequencing of themes and topics. This account was corroborated by the handbook’s production-team page, which identifies ten contributors, all of whom are teachers of English, with no Agri-Food specialist listed.

This composition of the production team is relevant to the interpretation of the handbook because curriculum selection and sequencing may reflect the expertise available during its development. The handbook itself moves from

technical vocabulary and grammatical resources towards technical and administrative documentation. The present study does not assume that this organization is necessarily a consequence of the absence of subject-matter expertise; rather, the production context is considered alongside the textual and pedagogical patterns identified through the coding analysis. In this way, the questionnaire provides contextual evidence for interpreting the orientation of the handbook without treating participants' accounts as independent proof of its pedagogical adequacy or limitations.

One further result concerns the single-priority question. When required to indicate one function as the most important, the teachers' external marks both identified identifying/naming. This result should not be confused with the difficult-area responses described above. Taken together, the responses suggest a distinction between what teachers consider foundational for access to the specialization and what they consider difficult or insufficiently practiced at the level of learner performance.

7.4 Emerging pedagogical gaps and priorities

The fourth research question concerns the gaps or priorities that emerge when the handbook analysis is considered alongside reported classroom use.

The findings point to a gap not between technical content and disciplinary relevance, but between representation and performance.

The handbook contains many examples of the language used to identify, define, classify, describe, explain, state function, sequence processes and interpret technical documents. It therefore provides substantial disciplinary input. The issue is that these functions are not always taken through a full progression from representation to explicit awareness, controlled practice, guided production and independent production.

This gap is especially relevant for discourse functions that require the learner to organize several pieces of information into a coherent technical text. Process description, interpretation, reporting and technical paragraph production emerge repeatedly in the questionnaire as areas receiving comparatively limited classroom attention. Function/purpose also appears among the areas reported as difficult by one teacher, despite being heavily represented in the handbook.

The study therefore identifies a set of potential pedagogical priorities rather than a single target function. The purpose of the article is diagnostic: to establish where the strongest needs for further instructional development appear to lie.

8. Discussion

First, the handbook is clearly vocational in orientation. It draws extensively on Agri-Food professions, tasks, equipment, processing operations, materials and technical documentation. Its technical sections do not simply present isolated terminology; they frequently embed terminology in meaningful descriptions of professional objects and processes. This orientation is consistent with the principles of ESP, which emphasize the relationship between language learning, learners' purposes, and the communicative requirements of particular professional contexts (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Harding, 2007).

Second, however, the presence of disciplinary discourse does not automatically produce disciplinary discourse competence. The handbook gives learners repeated exposure to technical descriptions, functions, explanations and processes, but much of the associated practice is recognition-based or highly constrained. This distinction supports the conceptual orientation developed in the literature review: representation and learner performance are related, but they are not equivalent. A discourse-oriented approach to language teaching similarly draws attention to the distinction between encountering linguistic and textual resources and being able to use them meaningfully in discourse (McCarthy, 1991; McCarthy & Carter, 1994; Widdowson, 2007).

This finding is consistent with discourse- and ESP-oriented perspectives, which emphasize making the communicative purposes and textual choices of disciplinary communication visible to learners rather than treating language as an accumulation of forms. Such perspectives support attention to how language is organized and used to achieve particular communicative purposes and to the relationship between linguistic forms and discourse contexts (McCarthy & Carter, 1994; Widdowson, 2007).

The result is also relevant to discussions of discourse-oriented pedagogy in disciplinary settings. Attention to textual organization, contextualized language use, and recurring patterns of discourse can help learners move beyond decontextualized language exercises and toward an understanding of how language operates within particular communicative contexts (McCarthy, 1991; McCarthy & Carter, 1994; Paltridge, 2006).

The present case therefore suggests that the problem is not a lack of specialized content. The handbook contains considerable specialized content. Rather, the question is whether that content is organized pedagogically so that learners progressively move from seeing how disciplinary meaning is expressed to producing that meaning themselves.

A third point concerns teacher mediation. The questionnaire indicates that the handbook is adapted differently by different teachers and under significant time constraints. This is unsurprising in ESP contexts, where materials frequently require adaptation to local learners, teaching conditions and target needs. ESP scholarship similarly emphasizes the continuing importance of teacher involvement in materials development, adaptation and supplementation rather than assuming that a single resource can meet every local requirement (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Harding, 2007).

The Algerian context makes this issue particularly relevant. Recent Algerian ESP research has reported continuing concerns around course organization, available materials, needs analysis and the relationship between professional demands and classroom practice. More specifically, recent work on genre-based methodology in Algerian ESP reports that teachers recognize the relevance of genre-oriented approaches while such approaches are not necessarily incorporated regularly into classroom practice (Messerhi, 2025).

The present study extends this discussion by focusing not on teachers' general attitudes toward genre analysis but on the internal pedagogical structure of one vocational ESP resource. The analysis shows that genre and discourse are already present in the resource, but that the treatment of discourse functions may not consistently culminate in independent learner production.

The relationship between the official programme and the handbook is also noteworthy. The programme identifies reading equipment user manuals as an important professional objective, while the handbook broadens the documentation component to include manuals, food labels, brochures and several administrative genres. This broader coverage may give learners exposure to a wider range of workplace documents, but it also means that time and pedagogical attention are distributed across several genres and communicative purposes. In a context where teachers report very limited available time, the breadth of the resource becomes an important consideration when deciding which discourse functions should receive deeper production-oriented treatment.

The distinction between foundational and higher-order discourse activity is also important. Identifying and naming are central to technical access because learners must first recognize the objects, processes and terminology of the field. The questionnaire's identification of naming as the single most important function reflects this foundational role. At the same time, the reported difficulty with process sequencing, interpreting, reporting and technical paragraph production indicates that vocational communication requires more than lexical recognition. Learners also need to organize technical knowledge into connected discourse (McCarthy, 1991; McCarthy & Carter, 1994; Paltridge, 2006).

The findings thus support a developmental model in which lexical access provides a foundation for disciplinary meaning-making, but disciplinary competence ultimately involves the ability to deploy technical language for communicative purposes. This distinction provides a stronger basis for ESP materials evaluation than simply checking how much technical vocabulary or grammar a handbook contains.

9. Pedagogical implications

Several implications follow from the findings.

9.1 Discourse functions should be made more visible

The handbook already contains many examples of disciplinary functions, but they are not always presented under explicit discourse-function labels. Teachers and learners could benefit from making the communicative purpose of

a passage more visible: for example, whether a text is defining an object, describing its characteristics, explaining how it works, stating its purpose, or sequencing a process.

Such labeling would not require rewriting the technical content. It would make the discourse work already present in the material more explicit.

9.2 Activities should extend beyond recognition

Recognition and controlled practice remain useful, particularly when learners are acquiring specialized terminology. However, these activities should be followed, where appropriate, by tasks requiring learners to reconstruct and then independently produce the same discourse function.

A possible progression is:

model → notice → controlled practice → guided construction → independent production → feedback.

This progression would preserve the handbook's technical content while strengthening the link between comprehension and production.

9.3 Technical content can become the basis for production

The handbook already provides abundant technical material that could serve as the content base for production tasks. For example, equipment descriptions could be transformed into tasks in which learners describe the function of a machine; process information could become a sequencing or process-writing activity; a technical document could become the basis for an interpretation or short reporting task.

This approach would not require replacing specialized content with generic English writing activities. Instead, the existing disciplinary content could be reused for communicative production.

9.4 Teacher mediation should be supported rather than eliminated

The questionnaire indicates that teachers adapt the resource according to available time and local conditions. Consequently, a revised materials package should not assume that every component will be taught in a fixed sequence.

Teacher guidance could instead identify the discourse function being targeted, the expected learner performance, the minimum essential activity, and optional extension activities. This would give teachers greater control while maintaining a clearer progression toward production.

9.5 Future materials should distinguish foundational knowledge from productive performance

The results suggest that identifying and naming play an important foundational role, but they should not be treated as the endpoint of discourse development. A more comprehensive materials structure could therefore distinguish between:

- acquiring technical terminology;
- understanding disciplinary functions;
- recognizing those functions in professional texts;
- reproducing them with support; and
- producing them independently.

This distinction could form the basis of a future student book/workbook structure, which is also compatible with the teachers' expressed preference for more differentiated instructional resources.

9.6 Grammar presentation and practice should be derived from the technical content and not isolated from it

The functional analysis of the handbook reveals a marked discontinuity between **Chapter 1 and Chapter 2**, particularly in the relationship between the technical content introduced in the former and the grammatical examples and practice activities presented in the latter. Although Chapter 1 establishes an Agri-Food technical context through

specialised vocabulary, equipment, materials, and occupational processes, much of the grammatical material in Chapter 2 is illustrated through examples drawn from **general, everyday English** rather than from the Agri-Food domain.

As a result, the grammatical forms are frequently presented independently of the disciplinary content established elsewhere in the handbook. The examples used to illustrate grammatical structures and the topics selected for practice often bear little or no direct relationship to Agri-Food processes, equipment, or workplace communication. This separation weakens the connection between grammar as a linguistic resource and grammar as a means of performing disciplinary and professional functions. In an ESP context, where language is expected to support specialised communication, grammatical presentation and practice would be more meaningful when embedded in the technical content and communicative functions that learners are expected to encounter and perform.

10. Limitations of the study

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, it analyzes a single Agri-Food ESP handbook. The findings are therefore context-specific and should not be generalized automatically to other vocational ESP materials.

Second, the teacher questionnaire involved only two teachers. The responses provide useful contextual evidence, but they cannot be interpreted as statistically representative of Agri-Food ESP teaching more broadly.

Third, the study relies on reported classroom practice rather than direct classroom observation or Teachers' lesson plans. The findings concerning teaching practice therefore describe teachers' reported practices and perceptions.

Finally, the study does not directly measure learner performance. The argument that representation and production are not equivalent is therefore derived from the structure of the handbook and contextual teacher evidence rather than from learner writing data.

11. Conclusion

This study examined an Agri-Food ESP handbook through the lens of disciplinary discourse functions and their pedagogical treatment. The analysis demonstrates that the handbook contains a substantial range of functions relevant to vocational communication, including identifying, defining, classifying, describing, expressing function and purpose, explaining, sequencing processes, instructing, comparing, reporting, interpreting and expressing cause and effect.

The principal finding is therefore not that disciplinary discourse is absent from the material. On the contrary, disciplinary discourse is strongly represented throughout the handbook. The more significant issue is the uneven movement from representation to production. The handbook offers extensive technical input and numerous recognition and controlled-practice activities, while opportunities for independent production of extended Agri-Food disciplinary discourse appear comparatively limited.

The teacher questionnaire provides contextual support for this interpretation. The two teachers report substantial adaptation of the handbook under conditions of limited instructional time, as well as relatively infrequent learner production of technical paragraphs or longer texts and relatively limited opportunities for interpretation. At the same time, they regard the handbook as useful and recognize its broad coverage of the specialization. The findings therefore point not to the replacement of the handbook, but to the possibility of more systematic discourse-oriented development within and around the existing resource.

The study has an additional implication for ESP research. Materials evaluation can move beyond asking whether specialized vocabulary, grammar and technical topics are present and instead examine how communicative functions are represented, practiced and progressively transferred to learner performance. Such an approach places disciplinary communication at the center of ESP materials analysis while preserving the practical value of technical content.

References

- Brumfit, C. J. (1984). *Communicative methodology in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cook, G. (1989). *Discourse*. Oxford University Press.

- Coulthard, M. (1985). *An introduction to discourse analysis* (2nd ed.). Longman.
- Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hani, A., Sekher, A., Bel Alem, A., Korichi, A., Madjem, M., Belouadah, H., Habchi, K., Meghiaouri, K., Anasbaghour, H., Telili, S., Bengatran, S., Rahmani, M., Mabrouki, F., Khlala Oui, A., Hadi Kouider, L., Ben Ahmed, A., Guendouz, M., & Moulay, B. D. (2023). *Technical and pedagogical handbook of professional English for trainees of the Agri-Food Industries Branch*. Vocational Training and Education Institute Salah Eddine El Ayoubi.
- Harding, K. (2007). *English for specific purposes*. Oxford University Press.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Johnstone, B. (2002). *Discourse analysis*. Blackwell.
- Kennedy, C., & Bolitho, R. (1984). *English for specific purposes*. Macmillan.
- McCarthy, M. (1991). *Discourse analysis for language teachers*. Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, M., & Carter, R. (1994). *Language as discourse: Perspectives for language teaching*. Longman.
- Messerhi, M. (2025). Promoting genre-based methodology in Algerian ESP classes: Teachers' attitudes and current practices. *Langues & Cultures*, 6(1), 225–237.
- Nunan, D. (1993). *Introducing discourse analysis*. Penguin.
- Paltridge, B. (2006). *Discourse analysis: An introduction*. Continuum.
- Salkie, R. (1995). *Text and discourse analysis*. Edward Arnold.
- Schiffrin, D. (1994). *Approaches to discourse*. Blackwell.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1997). *Discourse as structure and process*. SAGE Publications.
- Widdowson, H. G. (2007). *Discourse analysis*. Oxford University Press.
- Ministry of Vocational Training and Education. (2005). *Programme Études Contrôle de Qualité dans les Industries Alimentaires – Visa N 340/05 Code LAA 14 – Technicien Supérieur*
- Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. (2026, July). *Le ministre de l'enseignement supérieur préside la cérémonie de remise des diplômes des premières promotions formées en langue anglaise à l'Université d'Alger 3*. [Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique](#)