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EXPLORING ADULT ESP LEARNERS' SELF-EFFICACY IN ESP SETTINGS: A FOCUS ON PRODUCTIVE SKILLS

Tesina para optar al grado de Magíster en Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this piece of work to my beloved wife, whose unwavering support, patience, and love have been my anchor throughout this journey and in life in general. To my children, Javiera Paz and Miguel Alonso, who inspire me every day with their curiosity, resilience, and joy. And finally, to my entire family, whose encouragement and belief in me have been a constant source of strength. Thank you all, this is as much yours as it is mine.

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Abstract

Self-efficacy is a key psychological construct influencing engagement, persistence, and performance in second and foreign language learning, particularly in productive skills such as speaking and writing. In English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts, where learners perform domain-specific communicative tasks in high-stakes professional environments, self-efficacy is especially relevant. Prior research has often focused on general EFL or treated self-efficacy globally, with limited attention to adult ESP learners' perceptions of speaking and writing in Chilean professional settings. This qualitative study explores adult ESP learners' perceived self-efficacy in productive skills. Ten participants from the Chilean Army and Navy, all of whom had completed specialized ESP courses and possessed prior experience using English as a lingua franca, were interviewed. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews guided by an instrument consisting of open-ended questions, comprising three sections: speaking self-efficacy and writing self-efficacy (both adapted from Wang et al., 2014), as well as a third section covering ESP contextual factors. The instrument was designed to elicit beliefs, experiences, and challenges related to productive language use. Findings indicate that learners' self-efficacy in speaking and writing is shaped by contextual demands, vocabulary knowledge, opportunities for practice and exposure, ESP instruction, and professional engagement. Speaking self-efficacy was highly context-dependent, stronger in familiar, low-stakes interactions and lower in technical or native-speaker settings, while writing self-efficacy was more limited, reflecting higher cognitive demands. The study highlights the role of authentic practice, autonomous learning, and professional experience in strengthening self-efficacy beliefs. Pedagogical implications include fostering productive-skills self-efficacy through contextualized tasks, explicit work with technical vocabulary and genres, and communicative practice aligned with learners' professional realities.

Keywords: self-efficacy, productive skills, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and adult learners.

Resumen

La autoeficacia es un constructo psicológico clave que influye en la participación, la persistencia y el rendimiento en el aprendizaje de segundas lenguas y lenguas extranjeras, particularmente en las habilidades productivas como hablar y escribir. En los contextos de Inglés para Fines Específicos (IFE), donde los estudiantes deben realizar tareas comunicativas propias de su disciplina en entornos profesionales de alta exigencia, la autoeficacia resulta especialmente relevante. Investigaciones previas se han centrado principalmente en contextos generales del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (ILE) o han tratado la autoeficacia como un constructo global, con escasa atención a las percepciones de los adultos aprendices de IFE respecto de la expresión oral y escrita en escenarios profesionales chilenos. Este estudio cualitativo explora la autoeficacia percibida en habilidades productivas de adultos aprendices de IFE. Diez participantes del Ejército y la Armada de Chile fueron entrevistados, todos ellos han realizado cursos especializados de IFE y tienen experiencia previa en el uso del inglés como lengua franca. Los datos se recopilaron mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas y un instrumento compuesto por tres secciones: autoeficacia en expresión oral y escrita (ambas adaptadas de Wang et al., 2014), además de una tercera sección sobre factores contextuales del IFE. El instrumento fue diseñado para indagar percepciones, experiencias y desafíos relacionados con el uso productivo del idioma.

Los hallazgos indican que la autoeficacia en hablar y escribir está determinada por las demandas contextuales, el conocimiento de vocabulario, las oportunidades de práctica y exposición, la instrucción en IFE y la experiencia profesional. La autoeficacia en expresión oral se percibió como altamente dependiente del contexto, mientras que la de escritura fue reportada como más limitada, reflejando mayores exigencias cognitivas. El estudio resalta el rol de la práctica auténtica, el aprendizaje autónomo y la experiencia profesional en el fortalecimiento de las percepciones de autoeficacia. Las implicaciones pedagógicas incluyen fomentar la autoeficacia en habilidades productivas mediante tareas contextualizadas, trabajo

explícito con vocabulario y géneros técnicos, y práctica comunicativa alineada con las realidades profesionales de los aprendices.

Palabras clave: autoeficacia, habilidades productivas, Inglés para Fines Específicos (IFE), aprendices adultos.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 General context

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) refers to an approach to English language teaching and learning that is designed to address the immediate or anticipated academic, professional, or occupational needs of learners (Anthony, 2018). From this perspective, ESP emphasizes relevance, purpose, instruction, and learner-centeredness by focusing on the specific language, genres, and skills required in particular domains. In doing so, ESP distinguishes itself from General English teaching through its use of both general and discipline-specific materials and methods tailored to real-world communicative demands.

Building on this foundation, ESP has become an important component in English language education, as it addresses specific linguistic needs of learners regarding their professional or academic field. Over the past decades ESP has been studied as a way of providing targeted instruction. According to Salmani-Nodoushan (2020), ESP research began approximately fifty years ago, covering a wide variety of fields, including business, medicine, and engineering.

ESP relevance lies not only in its adaptability across disciplines but also in its alignment with contemporary education priorities which emphasize learners' autonomy, contextualized instruction, and real-world applicability. In line with this idea, according to Anthony (2018), ESP flexibility also allows it to integrate teaching ideas from other approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Project-Based Learning (PBL), while maintaining its strong connection with learners' specialized area and their real-world communicative needs.

As ESP is primarily recognized by most research as a learner-centered approach, it aligns with the broader shift in second language research from teacher-led instruction to

learner-focused inquiry. As Montaño-González and Cancino (2020) observed, "second language scholars have shifted the research focus from teachers' teaching to learners' learning" (p. 1). Although this quotation is not specifically directly to ESP teaching, it nonetheless reinforces ESP´s commitment to provide relevant and purposeful English instruction focused on learners' needs. Nevertheless, research indicates that ESP curricula do not always fully meet students' expectations or real-world communicative needs (Nazim & Hazarika, 2017; Duo et al., 2023). This disconnection is critical, particularly when it affects learners' ability to perform effectively according to their professional domains.

While ESP aims to provide relevant and purposeful instruction tailored to learners' professional and academic needs, research suggests that curricula do not always fully meet students' expectations or real-world communicative demands (Espinoza et al., 2019). This underscores the importance of considering not only factors such as instructional design but also the internal psychological factors that shape learners' engagement and performance. Given the inherently learner-centered nature of ESP, particular attention is placed on the development of productive skills, i.e. speaking and writing. These skills are widely regarded as cognitively demanding and fundamental for effective professional communication (Golková & Hubáčková, 2014). Consequently, it becomes crucial to explore how learners perceive their own abilities in these areas. In this context, self-efficacy (SE) emerges as a key construct for understanding how confidence, motivation, and perceived competence influence learners' success in the ESP contexts. Recent empirical research highlights the predictive value of SE in ESP learning outcomes. For instance, Šafranj et al. (2022) demonstrate that SE is a stronger predictor of ESP achievement, understood as students' academic success in ESP courses, measured through grades and classroom performance, than anxiety, emphasizing the pivotal role of learners' confidence in shaping academic performance. Beyond its direct effects, SE has also been shown to operate in interaction with other learner-related variables. In this regard, Zhang et al. (2023) show that SE interacts with language proficiency,

motivation, and motivational intensity to significantly influence achievement in English for Specific Purposes (ESP)/English for Academic Purposes (EAP) settings, underscoring its central role in learner success.

Although SE has been widely studied in general English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, its role in ESP settings may be qualitatively different. Unlike EFL, which often emphasizes general communicative competence, ESP requires learners to perform professionally or academically specific communicative tasks, frequently in high-stakes contexts. As a result, ESP learners' SE is tied not only to their perceived language proficiency but also to their confidence in performing domain-specific, real-world tasks. This situational and task-specific nature of ESP may amplify the influence of SE on learners' motivation, anxiety regulation, engagement, and achievement, compared to the broader and less contextualized scope of SE typically examined in EFL settings. Recognizing this distinction is essential for understanding how SE operates within ESP learning environments.

In the last decades, SE has emerged as a crucial psychological construction regarding learners' engagement and performance in language learning (Raoofi et al., 2012). SE, as conceptualized by Bandura (1995, 1997), refers to individuals' belief in their capacity to perform specific tasks. In educational contexts, this construct has been shown to significantly influence learners' motivation, resilience, and the adoption of better learning strategies, particularly when facing cognitively demanding challenges (Duo et al., 2023; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Montaño-González & Cancino, 2020; Genç et al., 2016; Raoofi et al., 2012).

In ESP settings, SE has been found to play a pivotal role in shaping learners' engagement with specialized language tasks. Studies have indicated that learners with higher SE are more likely to participate actively, persist through difficulties, and demonstrate greater confidence when using English in domain-specific contexts (Duo et al., 2023; Wang & Sun, 2024). This is especially relevant in the case of productive skills such as speaking and

writing, which require not only linguistic competence but also a strong belief in one's ability to communicate effectively in professional environments (Raoofi et al., 2012).

Diana (2025) highlights that ESP learners with high SE tend to show stronger commitment, increased confidence, and more proactive engagement with language learning tasks. According to her, this is particularly evident in speaking, which is one of the most demanding and essential skills in real world professional communication. This complexity is further emphasized by Putri et al. (2023) who highlights that the speaking skill is not only about producing sounds but it involves complex cognitive and linguistic processes.

Montaño-González and Cancino (2020) highlight the particular challenges learners face with productive skills. Specifically, their study revealed that learners reported the lowest levels of SE in speaking and writing, underscoring the difficulty students experience in mastering these productive skills. This finding is in line with previous research, and suggest that speaking and writing are the most challenging language skills due to their cognitive and affective demands (Gan et al., 2022; Golkova & Hubackova, 2014; Putri et al., 2023; Wang & Sun, 2024). In addition, learners in diverse contexts often report lower proficiency and SE in these productive domains compared to receptive skills (Espinoza et al., 2019; Orna-Montesinos, 2013). This distinction is further emphasized by Golková and Hubáčková (2014), who stated that productive skills, i.e., speaking and writing, are considered active processes requiring learners to generate language output, through spoken or written forms. Therefore, they demand greater cognitive effort, coordination, and creativity compared to receptive skills, i.e., listening and reading, which are considered passive and involve no language production.

In the Chilean context, despite the efforts in the last decades to enhance English language teaching, studies reveal that there are persistent challenges to be faced (Barahona, 2016, Espinoza et al., 2019). These challenges include limited instructional time, insufficient teacher training, and a lack of continuity in language policies at the primary level (Barahona,

2016). These challenges can also negatively affect self-efficacy, reducing learners' confidence in their ability to succeed in ESP tasks. Moreover, there is often inadequate alignment between ESP curricula and the actual communicative demands of the workplace, which affects learners' employability and confidence in using English in technical and professional contexts (Espinoza et al., 2019). This highlights the need to explore how learners perceive their productive competence and the elements that contribute to their confidence in utilizing English in their domain specific contexts.

Following this lead, and considering the specialized nature of ESP instruction, understanding learners' needs is not merely a pedagogical concern, it is a practical imperative. In other words, understanding what learners need is not just about teaching and learning but it is something that must be done to help them succeed in real-life communicative situations. ESP learners very often operate in high-stakes environments where effective communication is essential, and their ability to perform in English directly influences their professional readiness. These needs are particularly pronounced in productive skills such as speaking and writing, which require not only linguistic competence but also confidence and strategic engagement. In the military context, for example, learners must be able to report, brief and respond clearly under the pressure of being able to make themselves understood in both written and spoken language, this makes their perceptions of communicative ability especially relevant. Therefore, addressing these needs through the lens of SE offers valuable insights into how learners engage with ESP tasks and how instruction and working contexts influence their productive skills development.

Building on this rationale, the present study explores adult ESP learners' perceptions of their productive skills SE, focusing on learners enrolled in specialized ESP courses and who have worked in multinational environments using the English language as a lingua franca. The objective is to provide insights into how these perceptions impact learners'

readiness for real-world communication within their professional context, shape engagement, and how their perceptions may inform instructional strategies.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Nazim and Hazarika (2017) argue that ESP does not completely meet students' needs, particularly in contexts where instruction fails to foster learners' confidence in applying English productive skills. Their study reveals that students often lack opportunities to develop discipline-specific writing and speaking skills, which undermines their ability to perform communicatively in their professional settings. This gap between curricular content and learners´ perceived communicative readiness suggests a need to examine how ESP instruction influences SE in productive language use. Similarly, Duo et al. (2023) emphasizes the importance of addressing learner-centered needs, which, as Nazim and Hazarika (2017) also indicate, are not adequately supported, particularly in terms of empowering learners to use English confidently in real-world contexts.

Even though it is well known that General English remains widely used in teaching and learning these days, it has not fully transitioned into English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Rather, General English continues to dominate many curricula. At the same time, some research postulates that there has been a gradual movement toward ESP. Nazim and Hazarika (2017) postulate that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching has gradually moved from General English teaching to ESP, becoming widespread, particularly in countries where English is not the primary language. Given this shift and considering the student-centered nature of ESP in EFL teaching and learning, it becomes relevant to explore learners' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of ESP instruction and how their working contexts influence these perceptions. This is particularly relevant in the context of modern education, which promotes student-centered teaching and learning strategies, thus fostering lifelong learning and independent thinking. In line with this, Espinoza et al. (2019) highlight that both teachers and students perceive English as an important social tool for improving future job

opportunities. However, their study also indicates that high school graduates often possess deficient English level proficiency, which not only limits their ability to engage effectively in general communicative situations but also hinders their capacity to perform in domain-specific contexts, where ESP instruction is most needed. This gap is partly explained by the fact that English for Specific Purposes is typically delivered to adult learners in higher education or professional training, whereas high school students mostly received General English instruction. As a result, graduates often enter university or the workplace without prior exposure to ESP, making the transition to domain-specific use more challenging. Similarly, Barahona (2016) emphasizes that despite increased national efforts to improve EFL teaching in Chile in general, significant gaps remain. It is important to note that these observations concern English language education in general and are not specific to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Unfortunately, such general efforts have not yet translated into substantial improvements in students' English proficiency, thereby affecting the potential impact of ESP programs designed to prepare learners for professional and occupational demands.

Recent research has made important contributions to the understanding of SE in ESP contexts. For instance, Diana (2025) examined overall SE among ESP learners and found generally positive attitudes toward learning English for professional purposes. Her findings underline the relevance of SE in shaping learners' motivation and engagement. However, her study primarily measured general SE without differentiating between specific language domains, particularly the productive skills (speaking and writing), which are essential for communicative performance in professional settings.

While Diana (2025) and Hoesny et al. (2023) have contributed to the broader understanding of SE in ESP, and Cancino and Gonzalez (2023) have examined reading SE in Chilean high school EFL learners, there remains a notable gap in research specifically addressing adult learners' SE in speaking and writing within Chilean ESP contexts. This

underexplored area is particularly relevant given the communicative demands placed on professionals in domain-specific environments.

Limited research, particularly within Chilean ESP contexts, has explored how adult ESP learners perceive their SE in productive skills such as speaking and writing, and how these perceptions are shaped by their learning and professional experiences. These individuals have actively utilized their language skills in real communicative settings, because they have been deployed in multinational environments where English is used as the lingua franca. Addressing this gap is critical because SE in speaking and writing directly influences learners' willingness to communicate, their persistence in overcoming linguistic challenges, and their overall learning trajectory in ESP courses and workplace environments. Therefore, the present study seeks to build on existing literature by exploring learners' perceptions of their SE in productive skills and examining how these perceptions are shaped by their instructional and professional experiences within the ESP contexts.

Productive skills are particularly demanding, as they require learners not only to produce accurate and fluent language but also to adapt their communication to task-specific contexts, integrating professional terminology and pragmatic conventions (Golkova & Hubackova, 2014; Putri et al., 2023). Understanding how capable these learners believe themselves to be when applying their language skills is particularly relevant, since proficiency in speaking and writing not only enhances their ability to communicate effectively in their professional fields but also strengthens their confidence, and improves their career prospects (Espinoza et al., 2019; Orna-Montesinos, 2013).

Building upon this gap described above, little is known about how adult ESP learners perceive their SE in productive skills and how these perceptions influence their learning process in real-world ESP contexts. Given the limited research on this topic in the Chilean context, particularly regarding adult learners, exploring ESP learners' perception of their productive skills SE in real-world situations becomes increasingly relevant. It is also

important to distinguish between SE in General English (EFL) and in ESP. In General English contexts, SE often reflects learners' confidence in broad communicative abilities such as everyday conversation or general writing tasks. In contrast, ESP SE is tied to discipline-specific demands, requiring learners to believe in their ability to perform specialized communicative tasks, such as writing technical reports, delivering professional presentations, or interacting in multinational workplace settings. This distinction underscores why ESP self-efficacy is particularly critical: it directly influences learners' readiness to apply English in professional domains where accuracy, precision, and task-specific language are essential. Adding to this idea, the personal rationale behind this research is rooted in the challenges that ESP teachers face when determining the most suitable approaches and content for ESP instruction, ensuring that learners are adequately prepared for real-world English use, especially in professional domains where precise communication and task-specific language are essential (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2020; Cigan & Kordić, 2013; Laborda & Litzler, 2015).

Given the considerations mentioned above, this study is highly relevant because ESP plays a crucial role in preparing learners for their professional context where EFL proficiency is essential (Arnó-Macià et al., 2020). Examining learners' perceptions of their SE in productive skills will provide insights into their ESP experiences, influencing this way learners' motivation and confidence to continue developing their language skills (Gan et al., 2022; Putri et al., 2023; Golkova & Hubackova, 2014; Wang & Sun, 2024). Additionally, the findings may inform teachers about effective strategies and potential curriculum improvements.

1.3 Purpose of the study

Considering the points discussed above, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perceptions of adult ESP learners enrolled in specialized English courses in the Chilean Army and Navy regarding their SE in utilizing their productive skills, i.e., speaking and writing, in diverse communicative contexts. This study specifically responds to a gap in

the literature concerning how ESP adult learners perceive their ability to use English productively in real-world, often high-stakes, communicative settings. Given the demands placed on these learners and the role of English in professional scenarios, understanding learners' confidence and challenges in these skills is essential for improving ESP instruction and learning outcomes.

Based on this pedagogical context and considering the importance of productive skills, the following research questions (RQ) were developed to guide the inquiry:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of adult ESP learners regarding their SE in productive skills? This question aims to uncover learners' confidence levels, challenges and beliefs about their ability to speak and write effectively in English.

RQ2: How does the ESP learning setting influence these learners' perceptions of SE in productive skills? This question seeks to explore how workplace demands, pedagogical practices, and contextual factors within these ESP contexts shape learners' SE.

1.4 Background of the study

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has gained prominence as an approach to English language teaching due to its alignment with learners' particular linguistic and professional needs. In contrast to general English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, ESP is more contextualized, task oriented, and highly dependent on learners' communicative demands within their respective fields of work (Cigan & Kordić, 2013). These authors also highlight that ESP is mainly addressed to adult learners, typically those in tertiary education or professional environment, whereas general English instruction is more commonly associated with younger learners in primary or secondary education. Regarding learners' proficiency levels, ESP learners are generally expected to possess intermediate language skills (B1-B2), while general English learners tend to be at beginners or pre-intermediate levels (Cigan & Kordić, 2013). However, this classification may not accurately reflect the broader Chilean reality, where many learners, particularly those outside specialized programs, struggle to

reach English intermediate proficiency. Nonetheless, it aligns with the profile of the participants in this study, as an intermediate level of English is a mandatory institutional requirement for selection to participate in international missions.

This is in line with the idea that, despite curriculum reforms, Chilean students consistently fail to reach the proficiency levels expected by national curriculum (Barahona, 2016). By the end of secondary education, learners are expected to achieve a B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). However, large-scale assessments such as SIMCE Inglés reveal that these targets are not met. According to the Agencia de Calidad de la Educación (2019), the 2017 national SIMCE results showed an average score of 51/100, with 68% of students performing at the A1 level and only 32% reaching A2-B1. These outcomes indicate that the majority of Chilean adolescents complete secondary education without attaining the expected B1 level. These systemic difficulties do not only affect adolescents in secondary education but extend to adult learners who pursue English for Specific Purposes later in their careers. The 2024 EF English Proficiency Index ranked Chile 47th globally and classified the country in the "moderate proficiency" band (EF Education First, 2024), suggesting limited communicative competence among adults. In professional and military contexts, where precision, clarity, and specialized communication are essential, this moderate level of proficiency is insufficient, reinforcing the need to strengthen productive skills training in ESP contexts.

Cigan and Kordić (2013) also emphasize that learners' needs and instruction aims differ significantly between ESP and general English. ESP focuses on the communicative requirements of learners' professional or disciplinary contexts, employing flexible, needs-based, and context-sensitive methodologies. Instruction often includes targeted language use for specific domains such as law, medicine, or engineering, incorporating specialized terminology and genre-specific discourse. In contrast, general English instruction is broader in scope, less specialized in grammar and vocabulary, and typically follows a more

standardized methodology. Moreover, (Cigan & Kordić, 2013) argue that ESP builds upon English for General Purposes (EGP), refining general language skills into domain-specific competences. While EGP provides the linguistic foundation, ESP tailors instruction to meet real-world communicative demands in professional or academic contexts.

In Chile, there has been a national effort to enhance English proficiency, which has led to reforms in language curricula and teachers' education (Barahona, 2016; Espinosa et al., 2019). Nevertheless, as mentioned above, research points out that there are still some gaps between curricula goals and learners´ communicative readiness.

1.5 General Organization of the Research Work

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter one presents the introduction, including the rationale for conducting the study, the general context, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and an overview of the research structure. Chapter two contains the literature review, which introduces the research topic and explores the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), its historical development, pedagogical implications, and contemporary perspectives. It also examines the concept of SE as a psychological construct, its role in education and EFL contexts, and its specific relevance to productive skills. Additionally, the chapter reviews empirical studies conducted in ESP settings across various domains, with particular attention to the Chilean context. Chapter three outlines the methodology, including an introduction to the research design, a description of the participants, the data collection instrument, the study procedures and its phases, the method of data analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter four presents the results and discussions. Finally, chapter five offers the conclusions, acknowledges the study´s limitations, discusses pedagogical implications, and provides suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the present study, focusing on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and the construct of SE (SE), with particular attention to its role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and in productive skills. The chapter also examines SE as a general construct and in ESP contexts and synthesizes empirical studies which highlight the intersection between SE and ESP, setting the foundations for the present research on adult ESP learners' SE in productive skills (speaking and writing).

2.2 English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

2.2.1. Historical and contextual foundations

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emerged in the post-World War II era, shaped by globalization, occupational mobility, and the growing demands for scientific and technical communication (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Anthony, 2018). During this period, the motivation for learning English shifted significantly, moving from general culture or literary interest to practical, goal-oriented needs in professional and academic contexts (Duo et al., 2023). This shift laid the groundwork for a more targeted approach to language instruction. In other words, learners moved away from studying English for prestige or personal enrichment and began viewing it as a practical tool to meet professional and occupational needs, one of the defining functional orientations of ESP (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In this vein, Gracia and Litzler (2025) emphasize that learners began studying English not for social or enjoyment, but to meet professional demands and workplace requirements, underscoring the pragmatic foundation upon which ESP was built.

Scholars have proposed various classifications of ESP, but most agree that it comprises three main branches: (i) English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which includes English for academic publications, study, and research; (ii) English for Professional Purposes (EPP), which encompasses domains such as medicine, law, and the military; and (iii) English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), which refers to workplace English used by technicians, tourism staff, and similar roles (Basturkmen, 2010; García Laborda & Litzler, 2015).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) highlight that ESP courses can be categorized according to the learner's stage of professional development into: 1) Pre-experience courses, which can be taken before entering a profession; 2) During-experience courses, which are developed while working in a specific area; and 3) post-experience courses, designed for professionals seeking advancement or retraining. This framework remains influential in contemporary ESP scholarship. For instance, Laborda and Litzler (2015) reaffirm the relevance of these categories, noting that ESP course design continues to be shaped by learners' professional trajectories and the need to align instruction with workplace demands. Their study emphasizes that ESP should be viewed as a flexible approach that adjusts to learners' changing needs and professional contexts, which reinforces the relevance of distinguishing between pre-experience, during-experience, and post-experience stages when designing curricula.

Throughout its development, ESP has been defined in multiple ways, often emphasizing specificity and utility in teaching and learning contexts. Mackay and Mountford (1978, as cited in Mohamed & Alani, 2022) described ESP as a utilitarian practice, proposing that "ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose" (p. 31), thereby highlighting functionality over theory or methodology.

Expanding upon this early definition, over time, ESP gradually moved beyond its initial emphasis on practical language use, evolving toward a more learner-centered approach

grounded in needs analysis. Accordingly, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) later defined ESP as a language teaching approach designed to meet the specific needs of the learners and focused on the learners' reasons for learning the language. This marked a key milestone in ESP´s evolution. This shift reflected a transition from teaching English for practical goals to systematically analyzing learners' needs. Needs analysis and learner-centered principles became integral to ESP. By the 2000s, ESP had evolved to prepare learners for specific communicative environments, emphasizing communicative efficiency in context. Following this idea, Hyland (2002) emphasizes that language is a tool we use to achieve specific goals and to participate meaningfully within particular social and professional groups. From this perspective, "ESP is centered on the language, genres and skills required by particular learners in specific contexts" (Hyland, 2002, p. 386).

More recent definitions similarly highlight the specialized, contextual nature of ESP. Saber (2016) conceptualized ESP as "a variety of English delineated by professional or disciplinary boundaries" (p. 2), framing it not just as a pedagogical approach but as a specialized variety of English linked to domains such as medicine or law. According to Sarre and Whyte (2017), ESP became "the branch of English language studies which concerns the discourse and culture of professional communities" (p. 150). They argue that ESP has incorporated discourse analysis and socio-cultural perspectives. In other words, ESP teaching and learning now extends beyond vocabulary and efficiency to include understanding the language, genres, and cultures of professional groups.

A more recent definition by Anthony (2018) describes ESP as "an approach that targets the current and/or future academic or occupational needs of learners, focuses on the necessary language, genres, and skills to address these needs, and assists learners in meeting these needs" (p. 11). This comprehensive view integrates needs analysis, discourse, and communicative skills, situating ESP within a functional and forward-looking framework.

Considering the points stated above, ESP initially adopted a form-focused approach, closely tied to teacher-centered instruction. Over time, it has shifted toward function-focused and learner-centered methodologies, reflecting broader changes in language pedagogy. This evolution marks a transition from teaching language at the sentence level to fostering the ability to use English effectively in specific academic or professional contexts. In essence, ESP now emphasizes communicative competence for particular purposes, rather than mere mastery of linguistic forms (Shahid et al., 2023). In this study, ESP will be understood as a learner-centered approach to English language teaching, tailored to the specific professional and occupational contexts of learners. It emphasizes aligning instruction with communicative demands to ensure that language learning remains both practical and contextually relevant.

2.2.2. Pedagogical Implications and Contemporary Perspectives

As mentioned earlier, ESP emerged as a response to address the demands of a rapidly developing world, including factors such as international trade and digital technology (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2020). The construct is grounded in the principle that learners should acquire the linguistic and communicative skills required in their professional or academic context rather than a broad, general command of English. In this sense, ESP does not target learners outside TESOL, but rather represents a specialized branch within it. While general TESOL instruction emphasizes broad communicative competence, ESP focuses on learners whose needs go beyond general English, requiring domain-specific communicative skills to perform effectively in professional or occupational contexts. These factors made ESP a plausible and cost-effective approach for addressing specialized language needs distinct from those encountered in general TESOL settings (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2020).

Unlike general EFL teaching, ESP emphasizes learners' future job responsibilities and professional demands, as highlighted by Rahman (2015), Supunya (2023), and Zhang et al. (2023). This orientation toward real-world application distinguishes ESP from General

English instruction, which typically focuses on broad communicative competence. Cigan and Kordić (2013) further underscore this distinction by noting that ESP and General English differ in purpose, orientation, content, material selection, and learners' needs and motivations. According to them, these features make ESP a highly appropriate teaching approach for learners who need to focus their learning process on specific linguistic and communicative needs. Moreover, Salmani-Nodoushan (2020) emphasizes that the evolution of ESP is still ongoing and he also suggests that ESP is driven by clearly defined objectives, tailored to meet learners' particular communicative demands. He also emphasizes that ESP addresses learners' specific communicative needs so they can communicate effectively in real life contexts where English is required. Following this idea, his research also points out that ESP instruction is rooted in authentic and real scenarios, not artificially constructed, which makes it more meaningful for learners' future use. Another important factor highlighted by Salmani-Nodoushan (2020) is the consensus among researchers that ESP is mainly directed towards adult professionals and/or academics which is also highlighted by Cigan and Kordić (2013). According to him, the difference between English for General Purposes and ESP is that the latter is characterized by: (a) the use of authentic teaching resources that represent real-world activities, (b) an orientation to real-world communication goals, i.e., interactions that learners will encounter in their professional or academic context, and (c) a promotion of learner autonomy, since it helps learners to become independent language users and encourage them to self-regulate their learning practices.

To illustrate the difference between ESP and English for General Purposes (EGP), Salmani-Nodoushan (2020) uses the analogy of "Driving" and "Cars". What he suggests is basically that knowing how to drive represents a general competence, while different car models reflect specific applications of that skill. According to this, knowing English provides a foundational ability, but using it effectively in specialized contexts requires targeted

training in the appropriate genres and discourse conventions. In other words, learners do not need to learn a new language, but they must adapt their use of English to specific communicative demands according to their specific professional fields, which includes certain familiarity with rhetorical moves, metadiscourse, register, and other linguistic features.

It is also important to highlight that, according to Salmani-Nodoushan (2020), the distinction between ESP and General English remains a topic of scholarly debate. This ongoing discussion is also emphasized by Supunya (2023) and Rahman (2015). However, most scholars agree that ESP and General English do not differ in linguistic and/or functional terms, but rather in terms of genre, text types, task types, purpose, context, and the situations in which the language is used, which is also highlighted by Cigan and Kordić (2013).

In addition to these theoretical and pedagogical distinctions, recent studies have also emphasized the importance of learners' perceptions in shaping effective ESP instruction. For instance, Arnó-Macià et al. (2020) found that students value ESP for its contribution to their academic and professional communication, particularly in developing productive skills such as speaking and writing. These findings reinforce the relevance of ESP in discipline-specific contexts and suggest that understanding learners' perspective is essential for aligning instruction with real-world communicative demands (Arnó-Macià et al., 2020).

2.3 Self-efficacy: Foundations and relevance in educational contexts

According to Bandura (1997) "perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). In contrast to broader construct or emotional assessments of one's worth, SE refers specifically to individuals' judgement about their ability to carry out a particular task in a specific context. In other words, it has nothing to do with how much people value

themselves or perceive their intelligence but rather to their confidence in successfully executing a task.

Building on this definition, SE is a central construct in Albert Bandura´s social cognitive theory, portraying it as a central mechanism of human agency, influencing how individuals think, feel, and act (Bandura, 1992, 1997). He states that SE in human agency represents our capacity to act intentionally and shape the course of our lives. In other words, as human beings, we possess the ability to make choices, initiate actions, and influence our outcomes (Bandura, 1997). He further argues that among the various psychological mechanisms that enable agency, such as motivation, goal-setting, or self-regulation, beliefs in personal efficacy are the most fundamental. Following this vein, he argues that individuals are more likely to engage in tasks when they believe they can succeed in them. According to him, high SE fosters perseverance when facing setbacks, enhances efforts and strategy thinking, and contributes to achievements. Moreover, it is associated with reduced anxiety and stress in challenging situations.

To explain how these beliefs are formed, Bandura (1997) identifies four primary sources of SE. The first is mastery experiences, which are considered the most influential. This implies that successes build a robust belief in one´s efficacy, while failures undermine it. Bandura states that repeated success strengthens SE, while repeated failure weakens it. The second source is vicarious experiences, which implies observing others succeed. This can boost one´s own confidence, especially when the observer identifies with the model, such as peers with similar backgrounds or challenges, their own belief in success can be enhanced. The third source is social persuasion, this implies that verbal reinforcement and constructive feedback from teachers, peers, or mentors can help learners feel more capable, particularly when feedback is specific, actionable, and grounded in genuine belief in the learner's potential. The fourth source is physiological and emotional states, which influence how

individuals interpret their internal responses. Feelings of anxiety and stress may be interpreted as a sign of inability, whereas calmness and emotional regulation can reinforce a sense of readiness and competence.

These sources are especially significant for adult learners in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), who often face demanding communicational tasks in their professional settings. Many learners report experiencing anxiety, when required to use English for professional communication (Šafranj et al., 2022; Rochmawati & García-Sánchez, 2023). Such difficulties are frequently linked to lingering effects from past setbacks in language learning and limited opportunities to observe peers or professionals successfully using English in similar contexts, an important factor in SE development as proposed by Bandura (1997). When learners do not observe others from similar backgrounds succeeding in work-related communicative tasks, their belief in their own capabilities may weaken, reducing persistence and engagement in language learning (Zhang et al., 2023). These perceptions are influenced not only by linguistic demands but also by the social and emotional dimensions, where confidence and a sense of belonging are closely associated with communicative success (Rochmawati & García-Sánchez, 2023; Wijaya, 2024). Consequently, supporting the four sources of SE, experiencing success in meaningful tasks, observing others succeed, receiving constructive feedback, and developing strategies to manage stress and emotional responses, is essential from the learner's perspective (Bandura, 1997; Šafranj et al., 2022). Strengthening these beliefs contributes not only to improved performance in speaking and writing (Wijaya, 2024), but also to a deeper sense of personal and professional competence. Understanding how learners perceive their own progress, challenges, and potential is thus central to evaluating the impact of ESP instruction (Zhang et al., 2023).

The theoretical insights regarding SE described above have significant implications for educational practice. In language education, fostering learners' belief in their capacities is

essential for overcoming affective barriers and enhancing performance. Building on these theoretical insights, in education, SE is widely recognized as a critical predictor of academic achievements and learners' persistence. Bandura (1997) argued that SE beliefs shape the goals learners set, the strategies they use, and the resilience they demonstrate when confronted with challenges. Learners with high levels of SE tend to persevere longer, show greater adaptability, and recover more quickly from setbacks, compared to learners with low SE. This has been confirmed across diverse educational contexts, where strong SE consistently correlates with higher motivation, strategy learning behavior, and academic performance (Borzone, 2017; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007). SE not only impacts the cognitive dimension of learning but also influences affective and behavioral outcomes. Learners with higher SE beliefs demonstrate lower levels of anxiety and are more willing to engage in demanding tasks (Raoofi et al., 2012). This is particularly important in language education, where affective barriers such as fear of failure or communication apprehension often hinder performance. In this sense, cultivating positive SE beliefs becomes an essential pedagogical objective.

On the other hand, teachers' practices and learning environments play a central role in fostering SE. Usher and Pajares (2008, as cited in Cancino & González, 2023) highlight that instructional strategies which provide opportunities for mastery experiences and constructive feedback are especially effective in shaping efficacy beliefs. Similarly, Cancino and Viguera (2024) show how innovative pedagogical approaches such as gamification can create engaging learning contexts that generate repeated success experiences, thereby strengthening learners' beliefs in their capabilities. These findings resonate with Bandura´s (1997) assertion that mastery experiences are the most powerful source of efficacy development.

Peer collaboration and vicarious learning opportunities are also key contributors. According to Raoofi et al. (2012), observing peers with similar backgrounds succeed in

language tasks can enhance learners' confidence, especially in contexts where adults may feel apprehensive about their abilities. This is particularly relevant in ESP courses, where learners often work in professional teams, and role models or collaborative activities can foster both linguistic development and efficacy beliefs.

Emotional regulation is another important component. As Bandura (1995) noted, learners interpret physiological and affective states, such as anxiety or calmness, as indicators of their competence. Bandura (1997) emphasizes that it is not the emotional state itself, but rather how individuals interpret that state, that influences SE. For example, a learner who experiences anxiety before a speaking task may perceive it as a sign of inadequacy, thereby undermining their confidence. Conversely, a sense of calmness may be interpreted as evidence of preparedness and control, reinforcing their belief in their ability to succeed. Putri et al. (2023) emphasize that in speaking tasks, affective factors such as confidence and self-control play a decisive role in learners' oral performance. For ESP learners, who must often perform under high-stakes professional conditions (e.g., presentations, negotiations, report writing), the ability to manage stress and maintain confidence is essential.

2.3.1 Self-Efficacy in second/foreign language learning contexts

SE in second and foreign language learning has emerged as a central construct within educational psychology, particularly through the lens of Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory. Raoofi et al. (2012) define SE in second and foreign language learning as an individual's belief in their ability to plan and execute the actions required to achieve specific learning goals. These beliefs are not merely reflections of actual ability but often serve as more accurate predictors of academic performance than aptitude itself. While it is true that learners with lower linguistic proficiency often report lower SE (Raoofi et al., 2012), research also shows that strong SE beliefs can enable learners to succeed in complex tasks despite limited language skills. For example, Magogwe and Oliver (2007) found that SE significantly

influenced strategy use and persistence among EFL learners, regardless of their proficiency level. From this perspective, learners who believe in their ability to succeed in a task are more likely to engage actively, apply effective strategies, and persevere through challenges, factors that can lead to successful task completion even when linguistic competence is still developing.

Raoofi et al. (2012) further emphasize that SE influences not only achievement but also motivation, persistence, and emotional resilience. Learners who believe in their capabilities are more likely to engage with challenging tasks, recover from setbacks, and sustain effort over time. Repeated successful performance plays a pivotal role in strengthening SE, as learners who consistently experience academic success tend to develop more robust efficacy beliefs. This aligns with Bandura's assertion that mastery experiences are the most influential source of SE. To foster these beliefs, Raoofi et al. (2012) emphasize the importance of instructional practices that enables learners to build mastery through achievable tasks. They also highlight the importance of vicarious experiences, observing peers successfully complete tasks, as a powerful mechanism for enhancing SE in language learning environments.

In the EFL domain, SE has been shown to be a reliable predictor of performance and persistence. Learners with high SE are more willing to attempt demanding language tasks, persist through difficulties, and experience lower levels of anxiety (Raoofi et al., 2012). Mizumoto (2013) demonstrates that SE significantly influences vocabulary learning strategies, suggesting that learners with stronger efficacy beliefs are more strategic and autonomous in their approach. Cancino and González (2023) extend this understanding to reading contexts, showing that reading SE correlates positively with comprehension outcomes in blended learning environments. Similarly, Cancino and Viguera (2024) highlighted the role of gamification in enhancing vocabulary SE among Chilean learners,

reinforcing the pedagogical value of designing engaging tasks that promote repeated mastery experiences. The aforementioned studies underscore the multifaceted role of SE in EFL learning, not only as a predictor of performance but also as a driver of motivation, strategy use, and emotional regulation. They highlight the importance of instructional design that cultivates efficacy through meaningful, scaffolded, and socially enriched learning experiences.

While the studies reviewed above highlight the broad role of SE in second and foreign language learning, it is important to note that SE can also be assessed in relation to specific language skills. Among these, productive skills such as speaking and writing are particularly demanding, as they require learners to generate language output and adapt it to diverse communicative contexts.

2.3.2 Self-Efficacy and Productive Skills

Productive skills, speaking and writing, are particularly demanding since they require active language production, integration of multiple linguistic resources, and adaptation to communicative demands (Golková & Hubáčková, 2014). Learners often struggle with accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic appropriateness, and these difficulties are exacerbated in ESP contexts, where specialized terminology and discourse conventions are required, particularly in the speaking skill (Putri et al., 2023).

SE plays a critical role in productive skills acquisition. Learners with high speaking SE are more likely to participate actively, manage anxiety, and sustain oral interaction (Gan et al., 2022; Hoesny et al., 2023). In specialized environments, speaking SE has been shown to predict oral proficiency, persistence, and willingness to communicate, factors that are essential for real-world professional tasks (Wang & Sun, 2024). Similarly, writing SE influences learners' willingness to engage in drafting and revising, thereby affecting overall text quality (Pajares & Valiante, 2006, as cited in Raoofi et al., 2012). Earlier research by

Pajares and Valiante (1997) confirmed that learners' belief in their writing abilities significantly predicted performance, reduced anxiety, and increased tasks valuation. This is particularly relevant in ESP context, where writing is often perceived as a weaker skill compared to reading and listening, despite its central role in professional documentation and correspondence (Espinoza et al., 2019; Orna-Montesinos, 2013). Empirical evidence further supports this relationship. Alharbi (2015), in a quantitative study involving adult English language learners in the United States, found a significant positive correlation between learners' SE beliefs and their performance in both speaking and writing tasks. Participants with higher SE demonstrated greater proficiency in oral presentations and written assignments, suggesting that self-beliefs directly influence productive skill outcomes. The study also highlighted the role of mastery experiences, instructor feedback, and peer interactions in shaping learners' efficacy beliefs, factors that are particularly relevant in ESP contexts where communicative demands are specialized and performance pressure is heightened.

2.4 Empirical Studies on Self-Efficacy

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that SE is a key predictor of learners' success in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, and particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts. This is particularly evident in tasks requiring productive skills such as speaking and writing. Studies highlight that learners' beliefs about their communicative competence influence not only their performance outcomes but also their motivation, persistence, and emotional regulation.

Alharbi (2015) conducted a quantitative study investigating the relationship between English language learners' SE and their productive language skills, specifically speaking and writing. The study involved 84 adult EFL learners enrolled in intensive English programs in the United States. To measure SE, the researcher employed a validated SE questionnaire

targeting learners' confidence in performing various speaking and writing tasks. Participants also completed structured speaking and writing assessments, which were evaluated for coherence, accuracy, and fluency. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between learners' SE beliefs and their performance in both speaking and writing tasks. Learners with higher SE demonstrated greater linguistic accuracy and organization in their written texts, as well as more fluent and confident oral production. The results underscore the critical role of SE in shaping learners' engagement and success in productive language use. In particular, writing SE was found to influence not only the technical quality of learners' output but also their emotional readiness to engage with writing tasks.

Pajares and Valiante (1997) similarly found that students with higher writing SE tend to be more persistent, less anxious, and more motivated to complete writing assignments. Their study, conducted in three public elementary schools in the United States with a sample of 218 fifth-grade students, demonstrated that writing SE significantly predicted students' writing performance, even when controlling for prior writing achievements. This early research emphasized that learners' beliefs about their writing capabilities are often stronger predictors of future success than actual skill level alone. These findings highlight that productive skills are not only cognitively demanding (Golková & Hubáčková, 2014) but also deeply intertwined with learners' self-perceptions and affective states, reinforcing the need to address emotional and motivational dimensions in ESP instruction.

Ahmed et al. (2025) conducted a large-scale cross-sectional study exploring the relationship between public speaking and SE among 1.130 Sudanese medical students across multiple universities. Using the Personal Report of Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) scale and the Generalized SE (GSE) scale, the study found that while public speaking anxiety was prevalent, especially among students with lower academic performance and limited extracurricular involvement, 87% of participants reported high levels of SE. A statistically

significant negative correlation was found between SE and public speaking anxiety, suggesting that higher SE may serve as a protective factor against anxiety in high-stakes communicative tasks. These results reinforce the importance of fostering SE in ESP contexts, particularly where learners are expected to perform oral tasks under pressure. The study also highlights the relevance of culturally responsive pedagogical strategies that build learners' confidence and resilience in professional communicational settings.

Speaking is widely regarded as one of the most complex and demanding skills in language learning, because it requires the simultaneous integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, and affective regulation. In ESP settings, this complexity is heightened by the need to employ domain-specific vocabulary, appropriate register, and pragmatic competence in professional situations such as meeting, presentations, or negotiations (Putri et al., 2023). While individual differences such as extroversion or anxiety may shape learners' attitudes toward oral communication, research shows that personality alone does not determine performance outcomes. Instead, SE has been identified as a strong predictor of learners' willingness to engage in speaking tasks, their persistence in overcoming difficulties, and their eventual communicative success (Putri et al., 2023). Hoesny et al. (2023) reinforce this point in their study of ESP learners. They conducted a quantitative study examining the relationship between speaking SE, speaking proficiency, and gender within an ESP context. The research involved 60 university students enrolled in ESP courses. To measure SE and speaking proficiency, the authors employed a speaking SE questionnaire and a structured oral performance assessment. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between speaking SE and speaking proficiency, indicating that learners with higher SE were more likely to perform better in oral tasks. These results reinforce the importance of fostering SE in ESP instruction, particularly in speaking tasks that require learners to engage in professional interactions such as presentations, negotiations, or client briefings. These findings align with

broader research in second language acquisition, which suggests that SE not only influences actual performance but also mediates key affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, and willingness to communicate (Gan et al., 2022).

Gan et al. (2022) further contributed to this field by developing and validating the SE for EFL Speaking Scale (SEESS), a multidimensional instrument grounded in self-regulated learning theory. Their study involved 316 undergraduate students in China and identified three interrelated dimensions: performance SE, self-regulatory efficacy, and linguistic SE. Learners with stronger SE were more willing to engage in communicative tasks and demonstrated higher oral proficiency. In contrast, those with weaker SE often avoided participation, reinforcing the importance of meaningful practice and feedback.

Raoofi et al. (2012) reinforce the importance of considering SE across domains, concluding that while high SE consistently predicts achievements in speaking, writing, and other areas, its effects vary by skills. This finding aligns with the notion that SE is inherently domain-specific. A learner may, for instance, exhibit high writing SE but struggle with oral performance due to anxiety, lack of practice, or affective barriers (Putri et al., 2023). This variability underscores the importance of measuring speaking and writing SE separately, rather than treating language learning efficacy as a generalized belief. For ESP learners, such distinctions are especially relevant, since professional communication often demands simultaneous mastery of both oral and written skills in highly specific contexts, from drafting reports to delivering oral briefings (Espinoza et al., 2019).

2.5 Self-Efficacy and ESP Settings

SE in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has received growing attention, as learners' beliefs about their ability to perform in specialized communicative tasks are central to their success. Unlike general English instruction, ESP requires learners to engage with domain-specific language, discourse conventions, and communicative practices that reflect real-world

professional demands. In such settings, SE functions not only as a psychological mechanism but also as a practical determinant of learners' readiness to apply language skills in authentic, high-stake environments (Cassidy, 2015; Diana, 2025). García Laborda and Litzler (2015) argue that professionally relevant and contextually grounded ESP instruction fosters stronger efficacy beliefs by offering learners authentic mastery experiences. These experiences, such as completing discipline-specific tasks or engaging in simulated workplace scenarios, enable learners to internalize success as evidence of capability. This is in line with Bandura´s (1997) assertion that SE is strengthened when individuals engage in tasks that are both achievable and personally meaningful. Similarly, Arnó-Macià et al. (2020) found that engineering students valued ESP courses that aligned with their academic and professional trajectories, reporting increased confidence in speaking and writing tasks that mirrored real-world communication demands.

For adult learners, particularly those in professional education, the interplay between SE and ESP becomes critical. Oblova and Gerasimova (2024) demonstrated that working technical students in a blended ESP course showed significantly greater improvement in productive skills than their classmates who are not currently working, attributing gains to contextualized instruction and learner autonomy. In the same vein, Diana (2025) reported that engineering students with high SE beliefs were more likely to engage proactively with ESP tasks, demonstrating resilience and strategic learning behaviors.

In the military and peacekeeping context, where ESP learners must operate in multilingual, multinational environments, SE is closely tied to operational readiness. Orna-Montesinos (2013) highlighted that Spanish military personnel perceived English proficiency, particularly in speaking and writing, as essential for mission success, coordination, and institutional representation. However, many of them expressed low confidence in productive skills, underscoring the need for targeted instruction that builds both competence and beliefs

in one´s ability to perform under pressure. In such high-stakes settings, productive skills are not merely academic outcomes but essential tools for diplomacy, safety, and strategic communication. Moreover, affective and cognitive dimensions of SE, such as anxiety regulation, emotional resilience, and self-monitoring, play a pivotal role in learners' engagement with ESP tasks. Studies by Genç et al. (2016) and Wang and Sun (2024) emphasize that learners with higher SE are more likely to adopt metacognitive strategies, persist through challenges, and perform effectively in speaking and writing tasks. These findings reinforce the importance of designing ESP instruction that not only builds linguistic competence but also cultivates learners' confidence through mastery experiences, peer modeling, and supportive feedback mechanism.

All these perspectives underscore the pedagogical imperative of recognizing the importance of SE and intentionally integrating its development into the goals and design of ESP courses. By aligning content with learners' professional objectives, incorporating authentic communicative tasks, and fostering emotional supportive environments, educators can empower learners to succeed in their specific domain, whether in engineering, healthcare, business, or in the military.

2.6 Self-efficacy and productive skills in the Chilean ESP context.

Research within the Chilean context has consistently highlighted the persistent challenges in achieving intended English proficiency outcomes, both in general EFL instruction and particularly in ESP programs. These difficulties are especially pronounced in the development of productive skills such as speaking and writing. Espinoza et al. (2019) found that ESP students graduating from technical-professional high schools often lacked the necessary proficiency to communicate effectively in workplace situations. According to Espinoza et al. (2019), this limitation is particularly evident in speaking and writing, which, according to what has been stated in previous sections, are the skills most frequently required

in professional contexts where individuals must produce communication outputs such as reports, technical documentation, and oral briefings.

These challenges are particularly concerning when viewed in light of national policy goals, which aim to raise learners' English proficiency to internationally recognized standards by the end of secondary education. However, various large-scale assessments have consistently shown that these targets remain unmet, with many learners falling short of the expected communicative competence. Importantly, these difficulties are not limited to adolescents but also extend to adult learners, including those in professional and military contexts, where precise and task-specific communication is essential. This underscores the urgency of strengthening productive skills training and developing more effective instructional approaches.

While most of the evidence in Chile highlights persistent difficulties in achieving communicative competence, especially in productive skills, recent innovations in EFL research provide useful insights that can inform ESP instruction. Although these studies are not directly situated in ESP contexts, they demonstrate how self-efficacy can be strengthened through pedagogical strategies such as blended learning, gamification, and targeted writing support. The principles identified in these works, including mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and emotional regulation (Bandura, 1995), are equally applicable to the development of speaking and writing in ESP programs, where learners face high-stakes communicative demands.

Recent innovations, however, suggest promising directions for addressing these challenges. Cancino and González (2023) showed that blended learning environments not only improve reading SE but also foster greater learner autonomy and engagement, two factors closely tied to SE development. Similarly, Cancino and Viguera (2024) showed that gamified vocabulary activities enhanced learners' motivation and vocabulary SE, providing

evidence that interactive and technology-enhanced approaches can help learners build confidence and persistence in language learning. Although these studies focused on receptive skills and vocabulary, the same principles, like learning through success, observing others, receiving encouragement, and managing emotions (Bandura, 1995), also support the development of speaking and writing skills.

Taken together, the Chilean context reveals both a challenge and an opportunity. On one hand, learners continue to struggle with productive skills, which limits their employability and professional development. On the other hand, research points toward the potential of innovative pedagogical strategies, particularly technology-mediated approaches, to enhance SE and thereby improve learners' ability to perform communicative tasks effectively. For adult ESP learners in military and technical domains, these insights underline the importance of tailoring instruction to professional needs while also building the confidence necessary to apply English productively in real-world contexts.

Despite these contributions, it is important to note that research explicitly addressing English for Specific Purposes in the Chilean context remains scarce. Among the few available studies, Espinoza et al. (2019) examined ESP in technical and professional secondary education, highlighting its potential role in enhancing employability while also revealing persistent deficiencies in productive skills such as speaking and writing. Beyond this work, most Chilean studies have focused on general EFL or receptive skills, leaving a significant gap in understanding how self-efficacy relates to productive skills in adult ESP learners. This scarcity of ESP-specific research underscores the relevance of the present study and provides a clear rationale for further investigation into how self-efficacy shapes learners' engagement and performance in domain-specific communicative tasks.

2.7 Summary of findings and identification of the research gap

In summary, the literature reviewed highlights the importance of SE in language learning, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts where learners must perform complex, domain-specific communicative tasks (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hyland, 2002; García Laborda & Litzler, 2015; Salmani-Nodoushan, 2020; Arnó-Macià et al., 2020; Espinoza et al., 2019). Theoretical foundations rooted in Bandura's social cognitive theory emphasize that SE significantly influences learners' motivation, persistence, emotional regulation, and performance (Bandura, 1997; Raoofi et al., 2012). This is in line with empirical studies which have consistently shown that high SE correlates with improved outcomes in productive skills such as speaking and writing (Pajares & Valiante, 1997; Gan et al., 2022; Hoesny et al., 2023). These skills are particularly critical in ESP settings, as they constitute the basis for learners' ability to perform effectively in professional environments (Espinoza et al., 2019). While international research has explored SE in various language domains, studies within the Chilean context remain limited and have largely focused on receptive skills or general EFL instruction (Cancino & González, 2023; Cancino & Viguera, 2024; Meza & González, 2020). It is relevant to highlight that there is a lack of research examining how SE relates to productive skills in adult ESP learners, especially those preparing for technical, professional, or military communication. This gap underscores the need for context-sensitive research that investigates how instructional practices and professional demands shape learners' SE beliefs and their engagement with speaking and writing tasks.

Such exploration is essential to uncover how ESP instructional and professional settings shape learners' self-perceptions and to understand how these environments can empower learners to communicate confidently and effectively in their specific fields.

Moreover, this inquiry contributes to existing literature and offers valuable insights for informing pedagogical practices.

CHAPTER 3

Methodological Framework

3.1 Introduction

In this section, the methodological framework adopted to carry out this research is outlined, considering the research design, contextual parameters, participant profiles, and the data collection instrument developed to gather relevant information.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how adult learners of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), who have participated in multinational peacekeeping operations within the military field, perceive their SE regarding their productive language skills, namely speaking and writing, across diverse communicative situations relevant to their professional contexts. In line with this objective, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of adult ESP learners regarding their self-efficacy in productive skills?

RQ2: How does the ESP learning setting influence these learners' perceptions of self-efficacy in productive skills?

The first research question aims to uncover how the participants perceive their capabilities in speaking and writing skills, as well as the possible challenges they may encounter when applying these skills in ESP-related contexts. The second research question seeks to examine the extent to which the ESP context influences these learners' perceptions regarding their productive skills and the possible challenges they may encounter in such learning settings.

3.2 Overall Study Design

This research aims to explore adult ESP learners' perceptions of their SE regarding their productive skills, i.e. speaking and writing, the challenges they associate with developing these skills, and the opportunities they identify as supporting their development of their speaking and writing SE. To achieve that goal and gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon to be researched, a qualitative research design was adopted. The rationale for adopting this approach lies in the idea that this exploratory research seeks to uncover participants' perceptions and beliefs in the ESP context. Such an approach facilitates a deeper understanding of how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences within the specific educational and operational environments they have been exposed to, which is in line with Braun and Clarke (2013), who emphasize that individuals' perceptions are shaped by their lived experiences and their social interactions.

Creswell and Poth (2025) argue that when the research questions are open-ended, exploratory, and aimed at uncovering depth rather than breadth, qualitative inquiry is ideal. Building on this idea, Creswell and Poth argue that qualitative research is best suited for exploring complex social phenomena through participants' perspectives.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with adult ESP learners from the Chilean Army and Navy. These participants were enrolled in ESP courses and had experience of deployment abroad. Interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom, a platform widely recognized as practical and effective for qualitative research when in person meetings are not feasible (Archibald et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020). In this study, face-to-face interactions were not possible because participants were located across different regions of Chile. While some technical issues may arise, the platform offers notable advantages in terms of rapport building, ease of use, security, and cost-effectiveness. This interview-based design is appropriate for exploring participants' perceived challenges, opportunities and beliefs

regarding their speaking and writing SE in the contexts where English is used as a means of communication within their professional or operational environment. To analyze the data, Braun and Clarke (2013) reflexive thematic analysis was used, allowing for the identification and interpretation of patterns of meaning across participants' reflections and responses.

3.3 Participants and context

The chosen participants in this study were ten military personnel who have been deployed abroad and have taken part in a pre-deployment process which included a four-week ESP course. Nine male and one female, all of them adult learners who have been enrolled in specialized English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses tailored to reinforce their language skills in preparation for the operational demands of multinational military environments. None of the participants had previously taken a similar ESP course, which underscores the novelty of the training experience and its potential impact on their perceptions of self-efficacy.

These individuals were selected because they were actively engaged in training programs designed to equip them with the communicative competence required for executing operational tasks where specific military vocabulary and intercultural communication are essential. Their lived experiences within these instructional and professional contexts provide rich insights into the development of productive language skills and SE in high-stakes, multilingual settings.

Participants come from varied ranks and professional backgrounds, including both commissioned and non-commissioned officers who were deployed in an international, multilingual environment where English served as a lingua franca. This diversity offers a range of perspectives regarding the use of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Their ages range between 33 and 45 years, and their English proficiency is assessed at the B2 level at the moment they undertook the ESP course, according to an institutional assessing system, which

is aligned with the descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). This level of English proficiency constitutes the minimum institutional requirement for personnel to be eligible for participation in missions abroad, according to institutional policies.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the ten participants, including age, gender, English proficiency level, years of service, and place of residence. This profile illustrates the diversity of backgrounds represented in the study and highlights the institutional requirements that shaped their participation in the ESP course.

Table 1.
Demographic profile of participants.

Participant	**Age**	**Gender**	**English level**	**Years of service**	**Current residence**
P1	33	Male	B2	14	Santiago
P2	41	Male	B2	21	Concepción
P3	42	Male	B2	22	Santiago
P4	35	Male	B2	16	San Antonio
P5	41	Male	B2	23	Santiago
P6	43	Male	B2	24	Arica
P7	42	Male	B2	22	Santiago
P8	43	Male	B2	23	Arica
P9	45	Male	B2	25	Punta Arenas
P10	33	Female	B2	14	Arica

Importantly, the communicative demands faced by these participants, such as delivering oral briefings, drafting technical reports, coordinating with international counterparts, and responding effectively in operational scenarios, were directly reflected in

the objectives of the ESP course. The training was designed not only to strengthen linguistic accuracy and fluency but also to prepare learners for authentic communicative tasks that mirrored their professional responsibilities. By emphasizing task-specific language use, military terminology, and intercultural interaction, the course sought to build both competence and confidence, enabling personnel to perform effectively in multinational missions. In this way, the alignment between participants' professional demands and the instructional objectives of the ESP course underscores the relevance of exploring their perceptions of self-efficacy in productive skills.

Following Creswell and Poth (2025), participants were chosen through purposive sampling, a strategy that involves intentionally selecting individuals who are especially knowledgeable or experienced regarding the phenomenon under study. According to this approach, qualitative researchers identify participants and sites based on their potential to provide the most meaningful insights into the central phenomenon. Accordingly, individuals were purposely selected for their ability to offer rich, contextually embedded insights that align with the study´s objectives.

3.4 Data collection instrument

To achieve the goals of this qualitative research, data were collected using semi-structured interviews designed to explore learners' SE in productive skills. As Ruslin et al. (2022) argue, semi-structured interviews provide a powerful tool for obtaining in-depth information while maintaining a clear focus on the research topic. They also offer a balance between structure and flexibility, allowing researchers to adapt questions based on participants' insights and emerging themes.

The data collection instrument was based on Wang's Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy (QESE), which includes 32 items measuring SE across four domains: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Wang et al., 2014). The QESE was validated by Wang et al.

(2014) with 167 Korean undergraduate participants and demonstrated strong psychometric properties across four language skills.

For the purpose of this study, only the items related to speaking and writing were retained, as they align with the research focus on productive skills. This domain-specific adaptation is consistent with Bandura´s (1997) recommendation that SE measures be tailored to the specific tasks under investigation. To support the exploratory nature of this research, the selected QESE items were transformed into open-ended questions. This transformation was intended to encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences, beliefs, opportunities, and challenges related to the use of English in their specific professional contexts. By doing so, the instrument enables a deeper understanding of the factors shaping speaking and writing SE within ESP environments.

The instrument was first thoroughly reviewed by an experienced researcher, who recommended including a section addressing contextual influences on SE. These suggestions, provided by the experienced researcher, were included in the instrument. Subsequently, the revised version of the instrument was piloted with two ESP students to ensure clarity and relevance. At the end of each piloting interview, participants were invited to provide feedback on the instrument´s clarity and comprehensibility.

Learner feedback from the piloting stage included the following observations: The first learner suggested changing the term "military grammar" in Question 12, which was initially phrased as: "Can you confidently recount a personal or professional experience in English, using the military vocabulary of your field and the appropriate military grammar?" This was later modified to: "Can you confidently recount a personal or professional experience in English, using the military vocabulary of your field and grammar appropriate to the context?". The second learner indicated that the protocol was understandable and relevant but recommended providing examples to clarify certain questions. For instance, in Question

29 ("What aspects of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) have been most difficult for you in relation to speaking and writing?"), he suggested including examples of what was meant by "aspects of English for Specific Purposes." In accordance with his suggestion, examples such as technical vocabulary in your field, formal expressions, discipline-specific structures, participation in meetings or interviews, writing emails and reports were added, resulting in the final version: "What aspects of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) have been most difficult for you in relation to speaking and writing (for example, technical vocabulary in your field, formal expressions, discipline-specific structures, participation in meetings or interviews, writing emails and reports, etc.)?" Learners' comments and suggestions were integrated into the final version prior to conducting the full set of interviews.

Beyond task-specific confidence, research in English for Specific Purposes emphasizes the importance of learners' perceptions of contextual demands, perceived difficulties, and judgments of usefulness in understanding the effectiveness of ESP instruction (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Basturkmen, 2010; Anthony, 2018). From a SE perspective, learners' beliefs about their communicative capabilities are influenced not only by perceived performance, but also by task complexity, contextual constraints, and professional relevance (Bandura, 1997; Hyland, 2019). In response to these theoretical considerations, and following recommendations provided during the expert review of the instrument, the interview protocol was organized into three distinct sections: Section A, addressing speaking SE; Section B, addressing writing SE; and Section C, addressing perceived challenges, benefits, and impacts of ESP.

The final version of the interview protocol includes three main sections, each designed to explore different dimensions of learners' SE in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). For further insights, the complete interview protocol is provided in Appendix 1, which contains the full set of guiding questions organized into three sections:

oral skills, written skills, and challenges/benefits/impacts of ESP. Appendix 1 illustrates how the adapted questions from Wang's QESE were transformed into open-ended questions and contextualized for military ESP learners, offering transparency and methodological rigor in the design of the instrument. Following this description, the interview protocol was structured as follows:

Section A, which is designed to explore learners' speaking SE focusing on learners' confidence, challenges, and strategies in oral communication tasks within their instructional and professional contexts. Examples of questions included in this section are: "Can you confidently recount a personal or professional experience in English, using the military vocabulary of your field and the appropriate grammar to the context?" and "How confident do you feel discussing general or work-related topics with colleagues in English, whether during informational meetings or informal conversations?"

Section B, which seeks to explore learners' confidence and strategies in producing written texts, ranging from short messages to formal reports. Examples of questions included in this section are: "How confident do you feel when writing reports, emails, or other professional documents in English?" and "To what extent do you feel capable of completing written tasks in English using appropriate military vocabulary?".

Section C, which includes questions related to challenges, benefits, and impacts learners may encounter in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within their instructional and professional environments. Examples of questions included in this section are: "What do you think are the main challenges presented by the use of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in your professional environment?" And "Do you consider that the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) environment has had a positive or negative impact on your learning process, particularly with regard to your speaking and writing skills?"

3.5 Study procedures

In this section, the procedures followed to conduct this research are described. The research procedure comprised four main phases: preparation, recruitment, data collection, and data preparation. Each phase was systematically planned and executed as follows:

3.5.1 Preparation phase

In this phase, the researcher elaborated the interview protocol based on the Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy (QESE) developed and validated by Wang et al. (2014). Only the items relevant to speaking and writing SE were adapted into open-ended questions, and translated into Spanish. An experienced researcher reviewed the instrument and recommended including questions concerning contextual influences. Those suggestions and other minor comments were incorporated into the instrument, and the revised instrument was subsequently re-reviewed by the same expert to ensure its appropriateness and quality.

After being approved by the expert, the interview protocol was piloted with two purposely selected learners who matched the profile of the study participants selected for the research interviews, but were not included in the final dataset. The pilot interviews aimed to verify comprehension and relevance of the questions. At the end of the piloting interviews, learners provided feedback noting that certain terms required clarification and that the order of some questions could be adjusted to improve flow and interviewees engagement. The necessary adjustments were made accordingly, including refining terminology, inserting clarifying examples, and reordering selected questions to enhance coherence. These changes were incorporated into the final version of the interview protocol. The final instrument contained three sections with a total of 37 open-ended questions: 14 related to speaking SE, 13 related to writing SE, and 10 focusing on participants' perceived challenges, benefits, and impacts of ESP in their educational and professional contexts

3.5.2 Recruitment phase

In this phase, participants were selected through purposive sampling in line with Creswell and Poth (2025). Ten adult military personnel who had enrolled in ESP courses and have been deployed in peacekeeping operations were invited to participate. The potential participants were contacted by email, and they were informed about the aim of the study, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation. Those who agreed to take part signed an informed consent form prior to scheduling the interviews.

3.5.3 Data collection phase

The data were collected using semi-structured interviews conducted in Spanish, which is the mother tongue of participants, via Zoom, following all the ethical and security procedures described previously. The interviews were conducted during September 2025, and only one interview was scheduled per day. Each session lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the study, reviewed the ethical procedures, and reminded participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence. With participants' consent, interviews were video-recorded. The interview protocol included 37 open-ended items and it was used flexibly; follow-up questions were used during the interviews as a way of encouraging elaboration and clarify responses when needed. Field notes were taken during and after the interviews as a way of identifying potential improvements to the protocol, any minor refinements were incorporated to the protocol when necessary. Participants were also informed that recordings and their personal information would be stored securely, and the transcriptions were going to be anonymized using pseudonyms.

3.5.4 Data preparation phase

Following the data collection, all interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were reviewed against the original audio-video recordings to ensure accuracy and

completeness. Each participants' transcript was anonymized using "P" followed by a number (e.g. P1, P2), and all the transcriptions were organized for analysis. The transcriptions were initially analyzed and labeled as codes by identifying meaningful units of information, which were subsequently grouped into themes for interpretation.

3.6 Method of data analysis

This section outlines the analytical procedures employed to examine the qualitative dataset obtained through the semi-structured interviews. The analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke (2013) reflexive thematic analysis, which enables the identification, organization, and interpretation of patterns of meaning (themes) across participants' narratives. This analytical approach was selected due to its flexibility and suitability for exploring participants' perceptions and experiences within their specific contexts, aligning with the exploratory and interpretive nature of the present study.

3.6.1 Analytical framework

The main objective of the analysis was to explore how adult ESP learners perceive their SE regarding their productive skills and how the ESP learning and professional settings influence these perceptions. To conduct this analysis, the researcher followed the six steps described by Braun and Clarke (2013) regarding thematic analysis. These steps imply: (1) familiarizing with the data by reading and re-reading the transcriptions as a way of gaining an overall understanding of the data; (2) generating initial codes by labeling meaningful features across the dataset, particularly those that revealed confidence, challenges, or contextual influences related to productive skills in both general and ESP-specific contexts; (3) searching for themes by grouping related codes that addressed the research questions; (4) reviewing themes to ensure they accurately represent the data and research focus; (5) defining and naming themes to clarify their conceptual scope: and finally (6) selecting illustrative

quotes and linking the identified themes to relevant theoretical frameworks and existing literature.

3.6.2 Analysis by research questions

To ensure alignment between the research questions, the data collection instrument, and the analytical objectives, the data analysis was organized according to each research question, as summarized in Table 1 and as described below:

For RQ1 (What are the perceptions of adult ESP learners regarding their SE in productive skills?), the researcher focused on identifying patterns related to participants' confidence, difficulties, and contextual support for speaking and writing. For RQ2 (How does the ESP learning setting influence these learners' perceptions of SE in productive skills?), the analysis aimed to interpret how the ESP learning environment and participants' professional contexts influenced their SE beliefs in their productive skills. Guided by Braun and Clarke´s (2013) thematic analysis framework, the researcher explored how instructional practices, learning opportunities, and contextual challenges influenced participants' perceptions of their SE. Codes and themes were identified to capture patterns reflecting how environmental and pedagogical factors either strengthened or hindered learners' confidence in using English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Table 2.
Summary of analysis aspects

Research question	Analytical focus	Instrument	Type of Analysis	Participants
RQ1: What are the perceptions of adult ESP leaners regarding their self-efficacy in productive skills?	Perceptions of self-efficacy in speaking and writing.	Semi-structured interviews, using an instrument adapted from the Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy (QESE) (Wang et al., 2014),	Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013)	Ten participants (1 woman, 9 men), aged 35–45, from varied ranks and professional backgrounds (commissioned and non-commissioned officers).
RQ2: How does the ESP learning setting influence these learners' perceptions of SE	Influence of instructional and professional contexts on			

in productive skills?	SE perceptions	which also included a section on contextual components.		

3.7 Ethical considerations

Regarding ethical considerations, all participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and their rights as participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and individuals were informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without having to justify their decision. Participants were also informed that, to ensure confidentiality and data protection, their personal information will remain anonymous. None of their personal data would be shared, and their real names would not be used. In cases where it was necessary to refer to them, pseudonyms would be assigned.

Data collected during the interviews, including videos, audio recordings as well as transcriptions were securely stored in digital formats. After completion of the research process, all data will be permanently deleted.

Furthermore, participants were also asked to sign a consent form indicating that they voluntarily agree to participate in the study and that they did not receive any financial or material incentives for participation in the study. The consent form also specified their right to ask any questions about the research, to withdraw from the research at any stage, and to access the research results if they wished.

CHAPTER 4

Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings derived from the thematic analysis of the interview data. Following Braun and Clarke´s (2013) six-phase framework for thematic analysis, codes were generated inductively from the participants' accounts and subsequently organized into coherent themes that address the two research questions. In relation to research question 1, four themes emerged concerning learners' perceptions of their SE in productive skills (speaking and writing). Regarding research question 2, three themes were identified in relation to how ESP learning environment and professional settings influenced participants' perceptions of their communicative competence.

The analysis drew on a set of 19 codes including: Oral confidence across contexts, context-specific oral insecurity, lack of confidence in specific contexts, compensatory strategies for lexical gaps, lexical limitations in technical contexts, need for technical vocabulary in ESP, oral confidence in professional settings, conditional use of idiomatic expressions, writing confidence in everyday tasks, writing limitations in formal/professional contexts, experiential learning, ESP instruction: confidence and limitations, general English as foundation for ESP, technical vocabulary needs in ESP, autonomous learning strategies, experiential learning in authentic contexts, professional training as a source of SE, peer interaction as a learning resource, and practice and repetition as SE enhancers. These codes were clustered into seven themes, reflecting broader patterns of meaning across participants' experiences as adult ESP learners in a professional military context. A detailed presentation of the research questions, the identified codes, and the resulting themes is illustrated in Table 2, which is presented below.

Table 2.
Research questions, codes and emerging themes

RQ	Codes	Themes
RQ1: What are the perceptions of adult ESP learners regarding their self-efficacy in productive skills?	1. Oral confidence across contexts. 2. Context-specific oral insecurity. 3. Lack of confidence in specific contexts	Contextual variability in speaking self-efficacy.
	1. Compensatory strategies for lexical gaps. 2. Lexical limitations in technical contexts. 3. Need for technical vocabulary in ESP. 4. Oral confidence in professional settings. 5. Restricted use of idiomatic expressions.	Vocabulary as a Key Determinant of Self-Efficacy.
	1. Writing confidence in everyday tasks. 2. Writing limitations in formal/professional contexts.	Writing SE challenges and limitations.
	1. Experiential learning and 2. Consistency of language use.	Practice and exposure as drivers of SE.
RQ2: How does the ESP learning setting influence these learners' perceptions of self-efficacy in productive skills?	1. ESP instruction: confidence and limitations. 2. General English as foundation for ESP. 3. Technical vocabulary needs in ESP.	ESP instruction as a source of confidence and limitations.
	1. autonomous learning strategies and 2. Self-directed exposure.	Autonomous learning and self-directed exposure.
	1. Experiential learning in authentic contexts. 2. Professional training as a source of SE. 3. Peer interaction as a learning resource. 4. Practice and repetition as SE enhancers.	Professional experience enhances SE.

Each theme is presented and discussed in depth, integrating participants' perceptions with key theoretical and empirical findings from the fields of SE (Bandura, 1997), ESP instruction (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Basturkmen, 2010), communicative competence (Hyland, 2003), and vocabulary development (Heidari, 2024). This chapter concludes with an integrative section that explicitly addresses the two research questions and synthesizes how the themes contribute to answering them.

4.2 Perceptions of self-efficacy in productive skills

4.2.1 Theme 1: Contextual variability in speaking self-efficacy.

This theme captures the dynamic and situational nature of learners' SE beliefs in oral communication. It was included in the analysis because participants consistently emphasized that their perceived capability to speak English was not fixed but fluctuated according to the communicative context, the type of interlocutor, and the degree of domain-specific terminology and linguistic complexity involved. Recognizing this variability is crucial in ESP research, particularly in high-stakes settings such as military environments, where communicative demands shift rapidly between everyday exchanges, professional briefings, and highly technical interactions. By examining this theme, the study underscores how contextual pressures shape learners' judgments of oral SE and how these perceptions evolve progressively through exposure and experience. The identified codes associated to this theme are: oral confidence across contexts; context-specific oral insecurity; and lack of confidence in specific contexts.

Participants consistently reported that their oral SE in speaking was strongly shaped by the communicative context, underscoring the situational and dynamic nature of their perceived capability in speaking skill. For example, Participant 2 (P2) noted: "The everyday English… at my level of English, my experience is that it will always be a bit simpler than the professional". This account illustrates a SE judgment: everyday tasks were evaluated as

manageable, whereas professional contexts were judged as more demanding, lowering his perceived ability to perform successfully. Similarly, Participant 3 (P3) explained: "If it's something short and an everyday thing, I don't have a problem… For me personally, I don't have major difficulties". Here, the participant's account reflects higher SE in casual exchanges but reduced efficacy in professional domains.

Another dimension of this variability was the distinction between speaking with native and non-native speakers. Participant 6 (P6) emphasized that interlocutor type shaped confidence:

> The structures used by non-native speakers, obviously, are, in my view and opinion, simpler and somewhat more related to the level or the way in which one also learns the language. In general, I would say that I feel more confident speaking with non-natives…

This statement reflects context-dependent SE: P6 judged his ability to be greater when speaking with non-native English speakers due to the use of simpler structures. Similarly, Participant 1 (P1) elaborated:

> I would make a distinction between speaking with a native speaker and with someone who uses English as a second language. In my personal case, I feel a bit more confident when speaking with someone who uses English as a second language, since I find myself in the same conditions… Quite the opposite happens when I speak with a native speaker, and many times, not being able to keep up with the pace of conversation or the use of certain idioms… it makes it more difficult for me to understand them.

This distinction highlights how SE beliefs fluctuate depending on interlocutor type, with lower efficacy in native-speaker contexts due to idiomatic usage and rapid speech.

Overall, nine out of ten interviewees described feeling highly confident in everyday interactions, especially with non-native speakers, but significantly less secure in professional or native-speaker contexts where speed, accent variability, and technical language increased perceived difficulty. These accounts demonstrate SE judgments: learners assessed their capability as higher in familiar, low-stakes contexts and lower in demanding, technical, or intercultural settings. Several participants indicated that conversations with non-native speakers felt more manageable because these interlocutors tended to use "neutral English" or "simpler, more commonly used words", which reduced anxiety. Participant 5 (P5) explained: "It is much easier to understand non-native English speakers because they have a less extensive vocabulary and also a different modulation of words… Since they don't have such a wide vocabulary, they tend to use more common words". This reflects how simplified input enhances perceived communicative efficacy. Likewise, Participant 1 (P1) observed: "Non-native speakers use, so to speak, a neutral English… easy to understand and to be understood. They do not use so many idioms or slang, which could otherwise complicate communication for a second-language speaker". Participant (P8) reinforced this this idea:

… I once learned somewhere that you have to keep it simple, I remember. It was in Bosnia, I think someone said that. I believe that's what happens to me with non-natives: since they use simpler vocabulary, I feel more confident speaking with them. Obviously, it sometimes gets complicated when they don't have a good level either…

These accounts highlight how interlocutor simplicity strengthens SE, while low proficiency among interlocutors can undermine it.

Conversely, communicating with native speakers often generated insecurity due to rapid speech, idiomatic expressions, or strong accents. Participant 1 (P1) explained: "…when I speak with a native, many times I can't keep up with the pace of the conversation or with the use of certain idioms… it makes it a bit more difficult for me to understand them". This

reflects reduced SE in contexts where linguistic demands exceed perceived capability. Others noted that British, Irish, or Scottish accents were "very complex" and required repeated clarification. Participant 2 (P2) added:

> When speaking with people who, like me, are not native English speakers, it sometimes gets complicated because communication between us can be difficult… But overall, I feel more comfortable speaking with non-natives because they have more or less the same limitations as we do.

This account demonstrates how shared limitations among interlocutors foster higher SE by creating a sense of equity and mutual understanding. When both speakers operate within similar linguistic constraints, the interaction is perceived as less threatening, reducing anxiety.

Confidence also fluctuated depending on the level of technicality, which involved the use of specialized vocabulary, military jargon, formal registers, or complex structures. Participants commonly reported strong confidence in everyday topics such as giving directions, ordering food, or discussing daily routines. However, insecurity emerged in highly specific or military-technical contexts where communication required specialized terminology, acronyms, or discipline-specific expressions. Participant 5 (P5) described this shift as a "turning point":

> Since I don't have much background or extensive experience with military language use, I encounter a very marked turning point when I move from speaking normal, everyday English to when I need to speak about specific functions of my job or matters related to military English. Because I haven't practiced it before… a turning point definitely occurs.

This account illustrates how lack of mastery experiences in technical contexts lowers SE, which is consistent with Bandura´s framework.

Several participants also highlighted that their speaking confidence developed progressively through exposure and experience. Many noted that accent comprehension improved "after a while" as they adapted to the linguistic diversity of multinational teams, and that real communicative demands such as participating in briefings or daily coordination meetings helped them to "validate and consolidate" their oral performance. Participant 8 (P8) explained:

> Through empirical knowledge, having gone through real experiences where you've had to face situations and see the need to communicate effectively, that generates more confidence. At least for me, that's how it works. When I've had those experiences, I say to myself: I can do it perfectly. And then it repeats in the future with new experiences, and… it goes well, it always goes well.

This account reflects Bandura´s (1997) source of mastery experiences as the most powerful driver of SE. Similarly, Participant 5 (P5) mentioned: "With the level I have and the practice I've had, I don't find it complicated. I feel much more confident when speaking".

This account underscores how repeated practice strengthens perceived capability. It illustrates Bandura's (1997) argument that mastery experiences, successful performance through practice, are the most powerful source of SE. P5´s testimony shows that accumulated practice reduces the perceived difficulty of oral communication, enabling him to evaluate his ability to perform successfully with greater confidence.

Taken together, these findings strongly align with Bandura's (1997) view of SE as context-dependent, influenced by perceived task difficulty, interlocutor characteristics, and situational demands. They also echo L2 communication research showing that unfamiliar accents, power asymmetries, or professional stakes reduce communicative SE (e.g., Cui et al., 2025). Moreover, recent psycholinguistic research confirms that speaking SE is not a fixed trait but a multidimensional construct, with both a dominant general factor and context-

sensitive subdomains such as organization, language, and delivery (Zhang et al., 2023). In ESP settings, especially military environments where clarity, accuracy, and timely decision-making are critical, these contextual pressures intensify, reinforcing Basturkmen's (2010) assertion that ESP communication is inherently situational, domain-specific, and cognitively demanding.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Vocabulary as a Key Determinant of Self-Efficacy

This theme highlights the central role of vocabulary knowledge in shaping learners' SE beliefs in productive skills. It emerged as one of the most recurrent and salient dimensions across interviews, with participants consistently identifying lexical mastery, particularly of specialized military terminology, acronyms, and technical expressions, as the decisive factor influencing their confidence in both oral and written communication. Unlike general English proficiency, which participants often considered sufficient for everyday exchanges, professional contexts demanded precise and context-specific vocabulary. The inability to access or employ such lexis was repeatedly described as a barrier to effective communication, directly undermining SE by lowering perceived capability and credibility in high-stakes situations. This theme was included because vocabulary was not simply mentioned as a linguistic resource but framed by participants as a professional competence and communicative capital. Their accounts revealed that lexical gaps restricted their ability to perform institutional duties, participate in briefings, or engage in operational tasks, while mastery of specialized terminology enhanced their confidence and legitimized their professional identity. The codes associated with this theme are: compensatory strategies for lexical gaps, lexical limitations in technical contexts, need for technical vocabulary in ESP, oral confidence in professional settings, and restricted use of idiomatic expressions.

As introduced below, vocabulary emerged as one of the strongest and most recurrent determinants of participants' SE in productive skills. Across multiple interviews, learners

consistently reported that limitations in specialized vocabulary, particularly military terminology, acronyms, and technical expressions, restricted their ability to communicate clearly and confidently in professional contexts. In contrast, interviewees who reported greater familiarity with NATO doctrine and military discourse demonstrated higher levels of SE when expressing ideas related to their professional field.

When asked about their main limitations regarding productive skills, several interviewees explicitly identified lexical gaps as their main communicative barrier. Participant 1 (P1), for instance, stated that "The lack of technical vocabulary… which I believe I still need to include in my vocabulary". This account illustrates how insufficient mastery of specialized terminology directly undermined his SE: without access to the words needed to express professional ideas, he judged his ability to perform successfully as limited. This perception was echoed by most interviewees, who emphasized that such difficulties were particularly evident when discussing professional duties, institutional procedures, or operational tasks. Similarly, Participant 6 (P6) noted: "When it comes to describing my work, I have a significant weakness in technical vocabulary". Similarly, Participant 2 (P2) stated:

> I believe that perhaps the overarching limitation in everything related to writing would always be vocabulary, the conjugation of verb tenses, and eventually some spelling errors. Obviously, managing those factors would give me greater confidence, I would say both in writing and also in speaking.

In these accounts, participants explicitly linked lexical gaps to reduced confidence in professional communication, reinforcing the idea that vocabulary knowledge functions as a gateway to SE in productive skills.

A recurrent concern among participants involved the difficulty of mastering military acronyms and NATO terminology, which were perceived as both essential and cognitively demanding. These lexical items typically compress complex operational concepts into

abbreviated forms that require rapid, context-sensitive interpretation and may overlap in meaning across domains. Their specialized nature, combined with high professional stakes and intercultural variation, appears to impose a heavier cognitive load than everyday vocabulary, as reflected in participants' accounts. For instance, Participant 10 (P10) highlighted the frequency and importance of this terminology, explaining: "… As I mentioned, in my case acronyms were often a real headache to figure out, since they were used in every talk or presentation, during briefings or presentations". This testimony underscores the central role of specialized vocabulary in shaping learners' communicative SE. In line with Bandura's framework, repeated exposure to demanding terminology without sufficient mastery may undermine confidence, while successful management of acronyms reinforces perceptions of task difficulty on SE judgements: when lexical demands exceed perceived capability, confidence declines, when learners succeed in managing specialized lexis, SE strengthens.

Participants also described how lexical gaps made communication less spontaneous and increased insecurity. In response to these challenges, some participants reported relying on external resources to ensure accuracy. Participant 3 (P3), for example, described consulting glossaries to confirm appropriate usage: "… it's quite difficult… So, in those cases you always have to go to the glossary, check that you're using the right term… I think it's especially difficult at the beginning". This reliance on external resources illustrates how lack of vocabulary interrupts fluency and reduces perceived capability, particularly in early stages of ESP learning. Participant 7 (P7) emphasized the high-stakes nature of military vocabulary:

> Military vocabulary is quite specific and necessary, in my opinion. In fact, it is also quite repetitive, but one has to be careful… if you make a mistake with an acronym, it

> either won't be understood or it completely changes the meaning of what you want to say.

Such accounts highlight how lexical gaps affect not only comprehension but also learners' perceived credibility and communicative safety, reinforcing the connection between vocabulary mastery and SE. Participants shared the perception that although military vocabulary is repetitive and highly standardized, it demands precision, as even minor errors may result in misunderstanding or distortion of meaning. In this sense, lexical gaps undermine SE by reducing learners' confidence in their ability to communicate accurately in professional environments, while mastery of specialized lexis strengthens their perceived capability and credibility.

For many participants, vocabulary was framed not merely as a linguistic resource but as a core professional competence. Participant 4 (P4) articulated this clearly:

> I believe that rather than simply contributing, it is essential, in professional terms, to be able to manage in English or with the specific words of the language. Because if I cannot manage, as I mentioned earlier, if I cannot manage the technical words of my profession in my own language, I will be even less able to do so in English. And vice versa, that is, I need to have that vocabulary in order to perform professionally in whatever area I work in.

This account reveals a strong connection between lexical mastery and professional identity. Vocabulary knowledge legitimized their role within a specialized domain, while gaps undermine their ability to project competence. In this sense, vocabulary directly shaped SE: the ability to command work-related lexis enabled professionals to participate confidently in their field, while limited vocabulary constrained their perceived capability in both speaking and writing.

As stated before, vocabulary is not presented as a mere linguistic resource but as a form of professional capital that legitimizes one's role within a specialized domain. The participant's account also underscores the interdependence of native and foreign language competence, suggesting that gaps in technical terminology in the first language will inevitably hinder performance in English, a challenge that becomes even more pronounced when ESP instruction is insufficient. In this sense, vocabulary knowledge functions as a gateway to SE: the ability to command work-related vocabulary enables professionals to participate confidently in their field and to project competence across linguistic boundaries. Conversely, limited vocabulary can undermine professional performance and constrain communicative effectiveness, highlighting the critical role of lexical mastery in sustaining confidence in specialized contexts.

Participant 4 (P4) recounted an early professional experience that illustrates the limitations of general English proficiency in ESP contexts:

> …On the very first day, I was leading a workshop with 12 people from different countries and I didn't understand anything they were saying to me. So, even though I understood English, I couldn't understand what they were telling me because I didn't know the specific vocabulary in English and because of the pronunciation.

This narrative underscores how gaps in specialized vocabulary and pronunciation awareness can severely undermine professional performance and SE, reinforcing the need for targeted ESP instruction that bridges general language competence and specific communicative demands.

Participants also reported difficulties with idiomatic expressions and culturally bound language. For instance, participant 2 (P2) admitted struggling with idioms, stating: "I think I struggle not to interpret them literally", leading him to avoid their use unless fully confident. This cautious stance was widely shared among participants. Participant 4 (P4), for instance,

explained: "I rarely use idiomatic expressions… I prefer not to use them unless I am certain of their meaning". Others noted that in multinational military settings, idiomatic language could easily generate misunderstanding, reinforcing a preference for clarity and precision.

These accounts suggest that while idiomatic expressions are perceived as valuable, they are not considered essential for effective communication. Their avoidance reflects a SE concern: learners judged their ability to use idioms successfully as low, and therefore avoided them to maintain communicative safety. This highlights low lack of vocabulary in culturally bound expressions reduces flexibility and lowers SE in intercultural communication.

To cope with lexical gaps, many participants reported using compensatory strategies such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, repetition, or message simplification. Participant 6 (P6) noted: "I often relied on the strategy of paraphrasing or repeating what was being said to me," while Participant 5 (P5) explained: "…if I don't know the specific word related to military usage, I try to paraphrase it… so that the purpose is to convey the information I need to give". These strategies enabled participants to maintain communication despite lexical limitations and can be interpreted as manifestations of strategic competence that temporarily support SE. However, participants also emphasized that such strategies did not fully alleviate the insecurity caused by lacking precise terminology. True confidence, they argued, emerged only with access to the appropriate lexical resources.

Several interviewees reported a marked increase in professional confidence once they gained control over relevant terminology. Participant 9 (P9) stated: "I feel more secure when one has command of the terminology and the appropriate way of expressing it," particularly in high-stakes situations such as briefings, meetings, or issuing instructions. Similarly, Participant 10 (P10) emphasized that technical vocabulary functions as a shared professional language, noting that: "by using the phrase or acronym, one gains access to a broader sphere of mutual understanding". These accounts illustrate how mastery of specialized vocabulary

strengthens SE by enabling learners to judge their capability as sufficient to meet professional demands.

Taken together, these findings reinforce Heidari's (2024) view of vocabulary as the foundation of communicative competence and Dang et al. (2017) argument that domain-specific lexis is indispensable in professional settings. Within ESP frameworks, specialized vocabulary is not peripheral but central to communicative readiness (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Participants' accounts also align with Bandura's (1997) assertion that SE is shaped by perceived control over task-relevant resources, in this case, mastery of specialized vocabulary.

In summary, lack of vocabulary directly undermines SE in productive skills by increasing insecurity, reducing spontaneity, and constraining professional performance. Although compensatory strategies such as paraphrasing or simplification help learners manage immediate communicative demands, they do not fully counteract the insecurity generated by lexical gaps in high-stakes military communication. True confidence emerges instead through sustained exposure, deliberate learning, and successful use of specialized lexis, which enable learners to judge their capability as sufficient to meet communicative demands in both speaking and writing. In military ESP contexts, where precision and credibility are critical, vocabulary knowledge thus functions as the decisive factor that transforms linguistic competence into professional confidence and strengthens SE.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Writing Self-Efficacy Challenges and Limitations

This theme captures the difficulties and constraints learners experience in relation to their writing SE. It was included in the analysis because participants consistently distinguished between everyday writing tasks, where they felt capable, and formal or professional writing contexts, where their confidence dropped significantly. The identified

codes associated to this theme include: writing confidence in everyday tasks, writing limitations in formal/professional contexts.

Building on these codes, participants expressed moderate confidence in routine communicative tasks such as short emails, WhatsApp messages, or completing simple forms, noting that these activities aligned with practices developed during their previous English instruction. However, when writing required greater linguistic precision, advanced grammar, domain-specific vocabulary, or adherence to formal conventions, SE diminished sharply. This pattern underscores the situational nature of writing confidence: learners judged their capability as sufficient in low-demand contexts but inadequate in high-stakes professional or ESP-specific tasks. The inclusion of this theme is critical because it highlights how writing SE is shaped not only by linguistic competence but also by contextual demands, practice opportunities, and genre awareness.

In line with these ideas, participants reiterated that completing simple forms or producing general descriptions posed little difficulty. Participant 2 (P2) illustrated this confidence: "Yes, I feel capable, of course, both in filling out forms, for example, small tasks like completing nine-line reports, or when we carried out some medical education exercise, as well as for drafting emails…". This sense of ease with everyday tasks was echoed across the interviewed group. For instance, Participant 4 (P4) emphasized "No, in that sense I have no problem replying to my boss's emails, sending tasks by email, or writing short paragraphs. No, there's no issue with that…"

Despite this ease in routine tasks, confidence was highly context-dependent. Participants reported that SE dropped sharply when writing involved formal documents, technical content, or institutional communication, where greater linguistic precision and genre awareness were required. Participant 4 (P4) exemplified this tension, acknowledging: "I can do it, but with many limitations, without a doubt… I need more practice". Similarly,

Participant (P1) noted: "I feel much more confident with reading and listening… but when it comes to writing, I think I have a big weakness there". He further highlighted that he had not developed the writing skill due to lack of practice: "Completely due to practice. I don't think there is any other answer… It's simply a matter of practice". This lack of practice was also mentioned by Participant 3 (P3):

> ...I believe it comes from experience… you have to study technique and form, but afterwards you have to practice it…Practice, reread it, change something, make it sound better, change it again, and so on…Personally, I would say I still lack quite a lot.

These accounts underscore that confidence drops without regular practice in demanding contexts and suggests that ESP instruction should include clear training in formal writing styles to help learners transition from everyday communication to professional requirements.

Beyond contextual demands, grammar emerged as a transversal challenge. Participants highlighted grammar as their "Achilles' heel," citing persistent issues with verb tense conjugation, accuracy, and orthographic errors that could compromise clarity or professionalism. For instance, Participant 1 (P1) explained:

> …I think the written part, because writing requires a lot of reading and a very good understanding of grammar, which is something I struggle with… So I believe that is the most complicated aspect, and one has to be very careful when writing. At least for me, it is one of the most difficult parts of English.

In line with these difficulties, Participant 2 (P2) noted: "The common limitation across everything related to writing would always be the conjugation of verb tenses and some spelling mistakes…". In line with this difficulty in writing, Participant 5 (P5) noted:

> … I think writing is the most complex skill for me, since it has to be as precise as possible or aligned with grammatical usage, which is something I struggle with quite a lot, the different tenses, the spelling of certain words…

This grammatical insecurity was compounded by difficulties with genre-specific texts. Participants stressed that writing formal ESP texts, such as reports, procedures, or military documentation, required conventions they felt they had not mastered. As Participant 4 (P4) explained: "The most difficult thing is writing a report… more complex texts… they wouldn't come out right on the first try". Similarly, Participant 10 (P10) noted that producing argumentative or analytical documents in English was inherently challenging because such tasks demanded conceptual development and evidence-based reasoning: "If it is an argumentative document, without a doubt it will be more complex in English, because ideas have to be developed and supported, whether positively or negatively". These insights directly reflect Hyland's (2003) view that professional writing requires mastery of discipline-specific genres, rhetorical structures, and audience expectations that extend far beyond everyday language use. More recently, Zhai and Razali (2023) reinforced this perspective in their systematic review, showing that genre-based approaches to ESL/EFL writing pedagogy emphasize the importance of genre awareness, rhetorical conventions, and discipline-specific discourse features as essential components for developing writing SE in professional contexts.

Underlying these challenges was a perceived lack of practice. A prominent pattern across interviews was the belief that limited instructional emphasis and insufficient opportunities to write significantly hindered SE. For instance, Participant 3 (P3) attributed his difficulties to this lack of practice: "… I haven't practiced writing enough… it's harder for me. I mean, I can do it, but yes, sometimes I might be missing a couple of words…". In line with this, participant 8 (P8) noted: "I need to develop that area more… I don't do it very

often". This echoes Bandura's (1997) framework, which posits that SE is strengthened through mastery experiences and repeated practice.

To compensate for this lack of practice, participants often relied on external tools. Translators, grammar checkers, and peer revision were frequently mentioned as coping strategies. For instance, Participant 8 (P8) acknowledged that this dependence reduced his self-confidence:

> … the fact of having access to digital translators, websites, programs, and so on, has made me lose confidence in myself, at least. I feel safer relying on a tool, either to check what I write or simply to translate what I write in Spanish into English…

Nevertheless, experience gradually improved performance. Writing frequent short messages, operational notes, or routine professional emails allowed participants to consolidate patterns and strategies, which can be illustrated by Participant 10 (P10) account: "… At first it was difficult; I looked for examples in emails that had already been sent… After a while it became much easier, at least with the more common topics".

Taken together, these findings reveal a clear divide between general and professional writing SE. Learners feel confident handling everyday, low-demand written communication but experience notable insecurity when writing requires technical vocabulary, advanced grammar, formal style, or specialized organizational structures. These results align with broader ESP and L2 writing research emphasizing that professional writing competence depends on genre knowledge, linguistic accuracy, and domain-specific discourse features (Hyland, 2003; Paltridge, 2013). They also support Bandura's (1997) assertion that SE diminishes when tasks require skills that learners have not fully mastered or practiced. This explains why participants felt more capable in informal writing, where linguistic and structural demands are less stringent.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Practice and Exposure as Drivers of Self-Efficacy

This theme highlights the critical role of practice, repetition, and authentic exposure in shaping learners' SE in productive skills. It was included because participants consistently emphasized that confidence in English was not solely the result of classroom instruction, but rather emerged through real-world engagement in professional and operational contexts. The codes identified for this theme are: experiential learning and consistency of language use.

Participants emphasized that real-life exposure, such as international missions, operational tasks, and interactions with foreign personnel, played a significant role in improving their productive-skill SE. Regular practice, repetition, and exposure to authentic communicative situations were seen as essential for developing confidence and SE. This theme resonates with Bandura's (1997) notion of mastery experiences as the most powerful source of SE: when learners experience successful performance in real contexts, they develop stronger beliefs in their capabilities. Similarly, ESP research highlights the importance of experiential learning and contextualized practice in fostering communicative competence (Belcher, 2006). Participants' accounts also suggest that experiential learning complemented, and at times compensated for, perceived gaps in formal ESP instruction.

Many described how immersion in international missions, daily briefings, operational tasks, and continuous interaction with foreign personnel facilitated a marked improvement in their ability to communicate confidently and effectively in English. A recurring idea in participants' accounts was that exposure to linguistic diversity, various accents, speech rates, and communicative styles, initially posed substantial challenges but gradually led to noticeable development. For instance, Participant 10 (P10) described arriving on a mission and struggling to understand multinational interlocutors: "…At the beginning it was difficult for me, but after getting past that barrier I mentioned, about a month, a month and a half of automatically thinking in English, it became much easier…". In line with this, Participant 1

(P1) noted: "For me, at the beginning the Turks weren't speaking English… the accent was so strong that I found it hard to understand… but after four days or a week, your ear adjusts". This adaptation process, in which comprehension improves through repeated and authentic exposure, was reported by most interviewees. Participant 3 (P3) illustrated this progression even more clearly: "At first you don't understand anything… Later you understand a little, and then you understand everything. So, it's a matter of speaking… It's a matter of throwing yourself in… you have to jump into the pool". Such narratives strongly reflect Bandura's (1997) principle of mastery experiences, where repeated successful interactions shape stronger SE beliefs. From an ESP perspective, such experiences underscore the importance of situating language learning within authentic professional practice, where communication is purposeful and embedded in real tasks (Belcher, 2006).

Participants also stressed that consistent use of English was essential to maintaining and developing productive skills. They repeatedly highlighted that English required ongoing practice, and that confidence deteriorated without continuous exposure. This code complements experiential learning by showing that frequency and regularity of use are as important as immersion in authentic contexts. For instance, Participant 2 (P2) noted:

> …Yes, I believe its use has to be permanent, because if one doesn't use it, since it isn't their native language, it becomes difficult to get back into the rhythm later. So, I think it is very important to use it continuously.

Similarly, Participant 4 (P4) explained: "I think my main problem, my main difficulty, was that I was never consistent in studying… And English, it's like training for a marathon, it requires persistence." These accounts reinforce the idea that language proficiency and confidence deteriorate without continuous practice, particularly in environments where the target language is not the mother tongue. This is also consistent with ESP approaches that emphasize continued use and reinforcement of language skills in professional domains

(Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Recent research further confirms that sustained practice and regular exposure are essential for maintaining SE and communicative competence (Saez-Zevallos et al., 2025).

Another dominant pattern in the data was the belief that "learning by doing", rather than relying solely on classroom instruction, was essential for meaningful development. Several participants explicitly stated that practical engagement was more effective than formal study, underscoring a gap in current ESP instruction, which could replicate those situations in the classroom. For instance, Participant 1 (P1) remarked: "…It's better to study it directly. As one university here in Chile says: learning by doing". According to participants' accounts, this process required repeated engagement in professional tasks, such as writing reports, participating in meetings, practicing radio communication drills, delivering presentations, or whatever situation they are supposed to face in their future position, which served to consolidate language skills.

This emphasis on practice was directly connected to participants' professional experiences while deployed abroad. As Participant 4 (P4) explained: "It's a process… you already know which report you have to write each day… they are processes". The same participant added: "I write a lot of emails… I have many meetings… so without a doubt there is improvement." These accounts demonstrate how structured repetition in real contexts becomes a scaffold for the development of SE.

Moreover, participants described how professional immersion transformed not only their observable skills but also their internal cognitive processes. Several interviewees recounted how they initially relied on mental translation but eventually developed the ability to think directly in English. For instance, Participant 10 (P10) noted: "At the beginning… I first thought in Spanish, then in my mind I translated it into English… after about a month… my thinking changed and I had the ability to switch to English and communicate directly…".

Similarly, Participant 5 (P5) stated: "...What often happened to me at the beginning was that I thought in Spanish and then sort of translated into English. But after a while, it was directly in English only". This cognitive shift suggests deeper internalization of the language, reflecting increased automaticity and fluency, which further strengthens self-belief and communicative confidence (Bandura, 1997).

Another significant aspect mentioned by participants was how international missions provided unavoidable communicative pressure, which accelerated learning. As Participant 4 (P4) noted: "There are two ways… discipline and motivation, or being immersed in an environment that forces you to learn." Participant 9 (P9) emphasized: "The main thing is to interact… that is what gives you experience and security". This connects directly with Belcher's (2006) argument that ESP development is most effective when embedded in authentic professional environments where communication carries real consequences.

Finally, many participants stressed that professional confidence emerged through the ability to perform high-stakes communicative tasks, such as giving instructions, giving briefings, or conducting handover and takeover processes (i.e., transferring operational responsibility from one individual or team to another). As Participant 9 (P9) explained: "The key… is when you can speak on the radio in English… that's when you know you're fine." Participant 10 (P10) added: "I felt confident being able to hand over the position to another person… and transmit the information clearly". These experiences acted as powerful confirmations of capability, reinforcing SE far more than classroom-based activities.

Overall, the data suggest that experiential learning and consistency of language use are mutually reinforcing drivers of SE. Immersive, authentic, and high-frequency use of English in professional contexts provided participants with mastery experiences that significantly strengthened their productive-skill SE. This strongly supports the theoretical stance that real-world interaction is indispensable for ESP development, particularly in

military and operational environments where accuracy, clarity, and confidence are essential (Bandura, 1997; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Belcher, 2006). Consequently, ESP instruction should aim to replicate such authentic communicative conditions in the classroom, providing learners with opportunities to practice communicative tasks that mirror the linguistic and professional demands they are likely to encounter in their professional environments.

4.3 Influence of ESP learning and professional settings on speaking/writing self-efficacy

4.3.1 Theme 5: ESP Instruction as a Source of Confidence and Limitations

This theme examines how participants perceived their ESP instruction as both a source of confidence and a site of limitation. It was included because participants consistently highlighted the dual role of ESP courses: while they provided initial confidence in speaking and writing, they were often insufficiently aligned with the specific communicative demands of military and operational settings on speaking and writing SE, this theme underscores the contextual influence of classroom-based instruction on learners' SE, showing how confidence is fostered but also constrained by the degree of alignment with professional realities. The codes associated with this theme are: ESP instruction: confidence and limitations, General English as foundation for ESP, Technical vocabulary needs in ESP.

Building on these codes, participants consistently described their ESP instruction as beneficial, particularly in building confidence in grammar, pronunciation, and communicative tasks. At the same time, they emphasized that ESP instruction was insufficiently aligned with the specific linguistic demands of military communication. For instance, Participant 4 (P4) noted: "…my constructive criticism of the language center is that they should have been more demanding… including more content specific to the area where one is going to work". Similarly, Participant 6 (P6) stated: "...I think there should have been… it was always

focused on briefings. And I believe the briefing is one part, but you have to go further. More situations…".

All participants acknowledged ESP instruction was a valuable contribution to their education and future work positions, particularly by increasing confidence in grammar, pronunciation, and communicative tasks. However, they emphasized limitations, especially the short duration of course and the lack of alignment with operational realities. Participant 2 (P2) reflected:

> Positive, totally positive. Let's break it down. In the written part, first, yes, it definitely helps to increase the level of confidence by providing topics, and we return to grammar, producing texts correctly, coherently, and grammatically accurately. And in the speaking part, yes, absolutely as well, because it helps to increase the level of confidence, especially for people who are going abroad for the first time for a prolonged period of time… but I believe the time is too short, it is not enough…

He further emphasized: "…helps to improve aspects of grammar, aspects of pronunciation… to ease the fear… of being able to express oneself in another language. But the time is not enough to improve that much…". Similarly, Participant 5 (P5) noted regarding the ESP instruction: "Yes, it was helpful, but in my personal experience it was the first time I had seen it… So, for me, the time was perhaps too short…". Participant 10 (P10) echoed this concern:

> … the language classes at the language school before the pre-deployment helped me to have that necessary linguistic foundation to be able to understand the first concepts or the first things that came up when I was deployed on the mission, but obviously there was not enough time…

Many interviewees explained that General English provided a necessary foundation but was insufficient to fully support their professional performance. For instance, Participant 3 (P3) illustrated this idea of general English as the foundation for ESP by stating:

> … I mean, of course, they complement each other because it's all English. I can't have a list of technical words if I don't speak basic English or if I can't manage the most basic communication, because one thing builds on another. So, I need general English in order to communicate. That is the essential part, let's say. That is the foundation. And on top of that, once I have general communicative English, I can then use technical language in situations that require it.

Participant 8 (P8) reinforced this view, by highlighting the complementary relationship between general English and ESP. While general communication competence was seen as essential, he emphasized that specific-purpose preparation was equally necessary: "…for certain specific situations you have to prepare a bit more, and in the military context it is almost always the case that communication is not as simple as everyday conversation…". This reflection underscores the idea that general English provides the foundation for interaction, but specialized military language is required to meet the demands of professional tasks. Similarly, Participant 1 (P1) highlighted that general English can assist you in most things but also indicated that ESP is necessary:

> … of course with general English they can do and achieve everything they need. In contrast, English for specific purposes becomes necessary to master in order to carry out work… It is absolutely indispensable, I believe that we, as military personnel… need it in any case.

Other participants emphasized that technical terminology is indispensable in operational contexts. For instance, Participant 3 (P3) noted: "There are so many acronyms that if you don't know them, you really can't understand the context. And there are military

acronyms, but also many civilian acronyms that are used in daily life…". In line with this, Participant 8 (P8) remarked: "Clearly, you have to know English for specific purposes in order to communicate better…". Similarly, Participant 7 (P7) added: "One studies general English… but when one needs to refer to the military field, a different learning approach is required, one that is not available everywhere".

Beyond vocabulary, several participants pointed to a disconnection between classroom content and real professional situations. For instance, participant 6 (P6) explained: "In the pre-deployment, I think there should have been… it was always focused on briefings. And I believe the briefing is one part, but you have to go further. More situations…". This perception underscores the need for more authentic preparation which mirrors learners' real needs.

Another recurring theme was the scarcity of instructional materials for military English. Participants explained the difficulty of finding specialized resources. For instance, Participant 6 (P6) remarked that: "I think general-use English is more accessible because it's something one has the possibility to learn anywhere… But it is very difficult to find courses in military English elsewhere…". According to interviewees, this gap often forced learners to rely on informal sources, self-study, or learning through immersion once deployed.

Despite these limitations, most participants viewed ESP instruction as valuable, particularly because it offered initial exposure to technical vocabulary. Several emphasized its relevance for enhancing professional credibility, stating that employing the appropriate terminology provides more credibility. For instance, Participant 7 (P7) stated: "… mastering this specific vocabulary gives you greater seriousness and makes you appear more capable, more professional, so to speak". Adding to this, Participant 10 (P10) noted: "... it gives more credibility to what one says, it gives more seriousness to the discourse…" However, many insisted that confidence increased only when instruction directly reflected operational

realities. As an example, Participant 8 (P8) stated: "The preparation should be more directed toward that field… the contents need to be adapted to the place where you are going", referring to the work position he was going to develop while abroad.

Overall, participants' accounts corroborate Basturkmen's (2010) and Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) argument that ESP instruction must be tightly aligned with learners' professional needs. When such alignment is limited, particularly concerning acronyms, military procedures, and cross-national terminology, SE remains partially developed rather than fully consolidated.

Recent studies confirm this dynamic. Research in higher education shows that English SE directly predicts the use of language learning strategies, but its impact is mediated by academic and contextual alignment (Saez-Zevallos et al., 2025). Similarly, updated ESP research demonstrates that LMS-based ESP courses foster SE only when instruction is contextualized and authentic to learners' professional domains (Hidayati & Astuti, 2025). In military contexts, integrating specialized materials and operational tasks into ESP instruction has been shown to significantly enhance learners' confidence and communicative performance (Larreategui & Vélez, 2025).

Thus, Theme 5 illustrates that ESP instruction contributes to speaking and writing SE by providing foundational confidence, but its limitations highlight the necessity of contextual alignment with professional realities. Without such alignment, SE remains fragile; with it, learners develop stronger, more durable beliefs in their communicative capabilities.

4.3.2 Theme 6: Autonomous Learning and Self-Directed Exposure

This theme emerged as a central mechanism through which participants compensated for perceived gaps in institutional ESP instruction. Most participants emphasized that not everything can be taught in the classroom, and that learning military English is largely a personal responsibility for each service member. The theme was included because it

highlights how learners actively engaged in autonomous strategies and self-directed exposure to English, reinforcing their SE in communicative tasks despite institutional limitations. The codes associated with this theme are: autonomous learning strategies and self-directed exposure.

Participants consistently described engaging in deliberate, self-directed efforts to acquire technical vocabulary and communicative competence. For instance, Participant 1 (P1) explained:

> I think it's more about individual professional preparation. Individual professional preparation in the sense of being able to read a bit more about the different topics addressed in the military field, whether instruction, equipment, training, challenges, or the organizational culture of another army. I believe that's something more personal, something one has to gradually incorporate into one's own vocabulary through reading…

Reported practices included creating personal glossaries, watching tutorials on YouTube, and reading about military topics. Participant 10 (P10) illustrated this approach:

> I made myself a notebook with acronyms, as a way of learning new terms, and it often served me as an agenda. I believe it's important that each person finds the best way to learn or to make up for, so to speak, what we haven't learned in class. The more technical aspects are important when facing a more complex work situation.

Similarly, Participant 4 (P4) noted: "…I have my Word file, sometimes with classic phrases and classic acronyms… I also made myself a notebook with acronyms… it's important to find the best way to learn the more technical aspects". These strategies reflect learners' active attempts to build mastery experiences, the most influential source of SE in Bandura's framework (1997). At the same time, they also reveal a gap in ESP instruction that learners felt compelled to address independently.

Participants also highlighted the use of digital tools and online content to strengthen domain-specific competence. Several reported following STANAG-focused instructors or micro-learning accounts on social media. (STANAG refers to NATO's Standardization Agreement, which includes standardized language proficiency levels for military personnel). Participant 8 (P8) explained: "I'm always watching microlearning episodes… there's a Polish teacher I follow, she has several videos on STANAG…"

Building on these ideas, Participant 4 (P4) emphasized the importance of sustained engagement with English: "I believe that, first of all, the challenge for anyone is to always stay connected with the English language. Whether through classes, reading, or watching movies, because I think it gives an advantage…".

Other participants described daily exposure strategies such as setting their phone or GPS to English to maintain constant contact with the language. This integrated exposure reinforced listening comprehension, lexical retrieval, and fluency in both everyday and operational tasks.

Self-directed learning was particularly important for productive skills. Some participants described writing and rehearsing dialogues, presentations, or briefings in advance. For instance, Participant 9 (P9) stated: "I used to prepare dialogues… this is the structure… these are the acronyms", as a way to enter professional situations with greater confidence. This anticipatory practice allowed them to internalize not only vocabulary but also genre-specific conventions required in military communication, thereby strengthening their sense of preparedness and SE.

Autonomous learning was not perceived as optional but rather necessary given institutional limitations. Participant 4 (P4) explained that maintaining proficiency requires consistent personal effort: "Just as one tries to stay physically fit… this is the same…", referring to language learning. Participant 1 (P1) emphasized that professional

communication demands exceed what formal instruction alone can provide: "It's more about personal preparation… one has to gradually incorporate it into their vocabulary through reading". In line with this, Participant 7 (P7) testimony strengthens the idea that autonomous learning functions as a compensatory mechanism:

> It comes from experience, so to speak, the factor of self-preparation. By reading documentation in English, by reading manuals, by reading regulations, all of this documentation gradually fills you with the specific technical language that is used to draft military documents.

Overall, participants perceived ESP courses as a helpful starting point, but insufficient on their own to guarantee effective performance in high-stakes contexts. These accounts resonate strongly with broader perspectives in autonomy research. Holec's seminal definition of the autonomous learner as someone who "takes charge of their own learning process" (1981) established autonomy as a cornerstone of language education. Building on this foundation, Ushioda (2011) emphasized the role of self-regulation and motivation, framing autonomy not only as independent action but as a dynamic process of sustaining engagement in language development. Further contributions highlight how autonomy is intertwined with learner identity and motivational trajectories, underscoring that autonomy is not a static trait but a socially and personally negotiated process (Murray et al., 2011).

In addition, research on out-of-class learning demonstrates that diversified, learner-directed activities beyond formal instruction significantly enhance language achievement, SE, and enjoyment (Lai et al., 2015). Together, these perspectives suggest that autonomous engagement supplements ESP instruction and becomes a key driver of productive skill SE, especially within demanding professional environments where learners must integrate general communicative competence with specialized technical language.

4.3.3 Theme 7: Professional Experience Enhances Self-Efficacy

Professional experience emerged as a decisive factor in strengthening participants' confidence to use English in military contexts. Unlike classroom-based learning, which often emphasizes correction and controlled practice, authentic operational demands require participants to communicate meaningfully under pressure, collaborate with peers, and perform specialized tasks in English. These experiences provided mastery opportunities. The associated codes of this theme are: experiential learning in authentic contexts, professional training as a source of SE, peer interaction as a learning resource, and practice and repetition as SE enhancers.

Professional experience, including deployment in international missions, operational responsibilities, and daily collaboration with foreign military personnel, was consistently identified as one of the most powerful drivers of SE. Across interviews, participants emphasized that it was real communicative demands, rather than classroom exercises, that ultimately strengthened their confidence in speaking and writing.

Several participants described their first mission as a turning point in their English development. Participant 2 (P2) noted that serving in Bosnia and Herzegovina: "It marks a before and after… by having to speak in English every day one overcomes the embarrassment and the fear of making mistakes". This account illustrates how exposure, necessity, and continuity foster mastery experiences, Bandura's (1997) strongest source of SE. Similarly, Participant 9 (P9) explained that although the first weeks were linguistically challenging, constant use of English in briefings, reports, and operational coordination meetings led to substantial gains in confidence: "I didn't have a good time linguistically during the first month… but afterwards everything became much easier".

A recurrent idea across interviews was that authentic communicative situations accelerate learning in ways that classroom settings cannot replicate. Participant 7 (P7)

explained: "When one is in a real context using the language, the kind of correction that happens in class doesn't exist… that generates confidence". This contrasts sharply with classroom environments where learners feel constantly corrected, whereas real-world communication emphasizes meaning over perfection.

Similarly, another participant described how immersion promotes fluency: "I worked only with foreign officers… At first it was difficult for me, but after a month I was already thinking automatically in English". This shift from translation to direct thinking in English is a key sign of internalization and heightened communicative SE.

Professional tasks often required participants to perform under pressure, which amplified the learning impact. Participant 10 (P10) described coordinating an aeromedical evacuation: "I had to handle an aeromedical evacuation… write reports, keep a logbook… but in the end everything went well… we were able to communicate what we needed". Such high-stakes communicative experiences served as strong affirmations of capability, reinforcing SE through successful performance under demanding conditions. This aligns with Godwin-Jones' (2019) observation that learner autonomy and agency in authentic, often unpredictable environments, what he terms the "digital wilds", are critical for building confidence and SE. Just as learners in informal digital contexts strengthen their autonomy by navigating real communicative demands, military personnel in operational contexts consolidate SE through agency enacted under pressure.

Many participants also highlighted repetition and routine as key contributors to confidence. Daily briefings, operational meetings, and coordinating tasks allowed them to consolidate linguistic patterns through frequency. Regarding this, Participant 9 (P9) stated: "Every day there was a meeting… a EUFOR briefing… and with the vocabulary that keeps repeating, it becomes easier". This regular exposure helped standardize structures and reduce cognitive load during communication.

A related source of SE was professional familiarity with subject matter. Several participants indicated that confidence increased when speaking about areas they already mastered in Spanish. For instance, Participant 5 (P5) mentioned: "If it is something professional that one has already encountered before, it will be easier… it depends on the experience one has in relation to the topic". Domain knowledge thus acted as a scaffold for ESP performance and supported more fluent communication in English.

Peer interaction also played a decisive role. Participant 5 (P5) described learning new terminology, expressions, and communication strategies through daily engagement with colleagues: "Interacting with other people… day by day one learns new concepts, new words, new ways of wanting to say something… that is the gain of experience". This reflects situated learning principles (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where knowledge develops through participation in a community of practice rather than through isolated study.

Participants further reported that their previous professional training, along with the training they received during their pre-deployment and on-mission, supported their confidence when it provided opportunities to practice specialized tasks in English. For instance, Participant 2 (P2) explained that he participated in a course on peacekeeping missions while in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where he had to summarize the instructions given. Thanks to his prior knowledge of NATO military doctrine, he performed very well. Regarding his experience he stated:

> … although I may not be an expert in the subject, I find it very easy, very approachable. Having to summarize hours and hours of classes in five minutes, using the board, a written summary, speaking, and explaining, it became extremely easy. Everyone understood, it felt approachable, and it even ended with applause.

Participant 3 (P3) added: "The pre-deployment course helps to ease the fear (fear to communicate in English) … but I had the military vocabulary from personal experience".

These accounts suggest that while formal training provides initial scaffolding, true consolidation occurs through repeated real-world application.

Several participants attributed their improved oral performance to being "forced" by circumstances to communicate in English. As Participant 9 (P9) explained: "The practice came about in a forced way… I had to teach military planning in English". Such situations illustrate Belcher's (2006) position that workplace immersion is one of the most effective forms of ESP learning because it requires learners to act, communicate, and solve problems in the target language.

Finally, participants emphasized that professional experience not only enhanced performance but fundamentally transformed their beliefs about their own capabilities. As stated by Participant 8 (P8): "As I said, Bosnia had a big influence… Then it was like realizing, it was a wake-up call, like, wow, you were able to spend six months working fully in English". This recognition of one's ability to function effectively in the target language represents the core of SE theory and aligns with research showing that authentic, high-stakes, domain-specific communication strengthens learners' confidence more than controlled instructional environments.

Together, these insights demonstrate that professional immersion provides authentic, repeated, cognitively demanding communicative experiences that classroom settings cannot fully simulate. Through interaction, responsibility, and exposure, learners develop the mastery experiences that Bandura (1997) considers essential to long-term SE.

The findings also highlight the role of autonomy and agency in SE development. By taking responsibility for their communicative performance, whether through preparing briefings, rehearsing dialogues, or adapting to mission demands, participants enacted agency that reinforced their confidence. Autonomy here is not simply independence but purposeful action in authentic contexts, which generates repeated mastery experiences and strengthens

SE. This resonates with Code's (2020) argument that agency and SE are emergent capacities shaped by intentional engagement and social interaction. Moreover, the accounts align with the concept of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where learning occurs through participation in collective professional activities. Godwin-Jones (2019) extends this perspective to informal and unpredictable environments, what he terms the "digital wilds", showing that autonomy and agency enacted in authentic contexts are critical for building confidence and SE. These parallels reinforce the idea that military personnel, much like learners in digital communities, consolidate SE through agency enacted under pressure and through collaborative participation.

In line with Belcher's (2006) position that workplace immersion is one of the most effective forms of ESP learning, which is also supported by contemporary (Code, 2020; Godwin-Jones, 2019), whose findings underscore that ESP capability is not merely taught, it is lived, enacted, and continually refined in real professional contexts. Professional communities thus function as ecosystems of practice where autonomy, agency, and peer interaction converge to reinforce SE, ensuring that learners can integrate general communicative competence with specialized technical language in high-stakes environments.

4.4 Addressing the research questions

This section integrates the findings derived from the thematic analysis with the two research questions guiding the study. The discussion draws on the seven themes identified in the analysis and situates participants' perceptions within the theoretical framework of SE (Bandura, 1997) and the pedagogical principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). By doing so, this section provides a coherent interpretation of how adult ESP learners perceive their SE in productive skills and how the ESP learning and professional settings influence their perceptions.

4.4.1 Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of adult ESP learners regarding their self-efficacy in productive skills?

According to the analysis carried out, the findings indicate that adult ESP learners' perceptions of SE in productive skills are highly contextualized, uneven across skills, and strongly influenced by task types and communicative demands. Participants did not conceptualize SE as a stable or generalized belief but rather as a situational judgment that fluctuated depending on context, interlocutor, and communicative purposes. This aligns with Bandura´s (1997) assertion that SE is task-specific and context-dependent rather than a global trait.

A central finding concerns the contextual variability of oral SE. Participants consistently reported higher confidence in everyday and informal communicative situations, particularly when interacting with non-native speakers, and lower confidence in formal, professional, or high-stake communicative contexts. This pattern reflects the increased cognitive and affective demands associated with professional speaking tasks, which require precision, technical vocabulary, and pragmatic control (Golková & Hubáčková, 2014; Putri et al., 2023). The findings corroborated previous research indicating that speaking SE tends to decrease as communicative demands increase (Gan et al., 2022; Hoesny et al., 2023).

Another prominent perception shaping SE was lexical competence, which emerged as a key determinant of both speaking and writing confidence. Participants repeatedly associated their perceived limitations in productive skills with insufficient command of technical vocabulary and some minor gaps regarding grammatical knowledge. This supports Dang et al. (2017) and Hyland's (2007) argument that vocabulary plays a central role in ESP performance, as lexical gaps can severely constrain meaning-making in professional contexts. Learners frequently described employing compensatory strategies, such as paraphrasing or simplifying messages, which allowed them to maintain communicative effectiveness despite

perceived limitations. These strategies reflect adaptive self-regulatory behaviors commonly observed among learners with moderate SE (Raoofi et al., 2012).

Writing SE was perceived as more fragile and restricted than speaking SE, particularly in formal or institutional genres. While participants reported confidence in everyday writing tasks, such as emails or short messages, they expressed insecurity regarding formal reports, evaluations, and official documentation. This distinction is consistent with Pajares and Valiante's (1997) findings that writing SE is sensitive to task complexity and evaluation pressure. In ESP contexts, where writing often carries institutional and professional consequences, these affective pressures are intensified (Orna-Montesinos, 2013; Espinoza et al., 2019).

Finally, participants' perceptions reveal that practice and exposure play a decisive role in shaping productive SE. Repeated engagement in authentic communicative tasks was perceived as essential for confidence development. This finding directly reflects Bandura's (1997) emphasis on mastery experiences as the most powerful source of SE beliefs. Learners who reported frequent opportunities to use English productively in professional settings demonstrated higher confidence and greater tolerance for communicative risk.

In general terms, these findings confirm the broader trend in ESP research indicating that SE tends to decrease in high-stakes tasks (Gan et al., 2022; Hoesny et al., 2023). However, in the military ESP context examined here, repeated authentic exposure appears to flip this pattern: learners who reported frequent opportunities to use English productively in professional missions demonstrated higher confidence and greater tolerance for communicative risk. This divergence can be explained by the unique demands of military ESP, where authentic exposure, agency enacted under pressure, and participation in professional communities of practice provide repeated mastery experiences that reinforce SE (Bandura, 1997; Godwin-Jones, 2019; Code, 2020).

4.4.2 Research Question 2: How does the ESP learning setting influence these learners' perceptions of self-efficacy?

The analysis demonstrates that the ESP learning setting exerts a significant and multifaceted influence on learners' perceptions of SE in productive skills. Participants perceived ESP instruction as both a source of confidence and a site of limitation, depending on the extent to which instruction aligned with authentic professional demands.

ESP instruction was generally valued for providing a foundation of confidence, particularly through exposure to relevant terminology and communicative routines. However, participants also highlighted limitations in instructional time, depth of technical vocabulary coverage, and opportunities for sustained productive practice. This perception reflects the broader critique in ESP literature that curriculum constraints often limit the development of productive skills despite their centrality to professional communication (Nazim & Hazarika, 2017; Duo et al., 2023).

A recurring theme was the perception of general English as a necessary foundation for ESP learning. Participants emphasized that communicative competence in ESP contexts presupposes a solid base in general English structures and functions. This finding aligns with Cigan and Kordić's (2013) argument that ESP does not replace general English but rather builds upon it, refining existing competence into domain-specific communicative ability. Beyond its linguistic role, general English also functioned as a source of SE. Learners reported that mastery of GE structures and everyday vocabulary provided a reservoir of confidence that could be transferred into ESP tasks. This foundation enabled them to take communicative risks in professional contexts, bridging the gap between informal and specialized communication. In line with Bandura's (1997) emphasis on transferable mastery experiences, GE competence served as both a scaffold for technical language and a

psychological resource that reinforced learners' belief in their ability to perform effectively in ESP settings.

The ESP setting also fostered autonomous learning behaviors, which participants perceived as essential for compensating instructional limitations. Learners reported engaging in self-directed reading, vocabulary study, and exposure to authentic materials as a means of strengthening their productive skills. These behaviors reflect high levels of learner agency and align research showing that autonomy and self-regulation are closely associated with SE development (Holec, 1981; Lai et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2011; Ushioda, 2011).

Most notably, professional experience and authentic practice emerged as the strongest enhancers of SE. Participants consistently identified real-world communicative experiences, such as multinational missions, peer collaboration, and operational tasks, as decisive in strengthening their confidence. This finding underscores the importance of experiential learning in ESP contexts and supports Bandura's (1997) claim that mastery experiences outweigh all other sources of efficacy beliefs. In high-stake environments such as military operations, repeated successful communication under pressure reinforces learners' belief in their ability to perform effectively (Orna-Montesinos, 2013).

4.5 Summary

This chapter examined adult ESP learners' perceptions of SE in productive skills and the influence of ESP learning and professional settings on these perceptions. The findings reveal that SE in speaking and writing is context-sensitive, task-dependent, and strongly shaped by vocabulary competence and authentic practice. While learners generally perceived higher confidence in informal communication, professional and formal tasks posed greater challenges, particularly in writing.

The ESP learning setting played a crucial role in shaping these perceptions by providing relevant foundations while also highlighting instructional limitations. Authentic

professional experience emerged as the most powerful factor enhancing SE, underscoring the importance of experiential and task-based approaches in ESP instruction. These findings provide a foundation for the conclusions and pedagogical implications discussed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications

5.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore adult ESP learners' perceptions of their SE in productive skills, specifically speaking and writing, and to examine how the ESP learning setting influences these perceptions. Through qualitative analysis of participants' accounts, the study sought to provide an in-depth understanding of how adults learners interpret their communicative capabilities within specialized and high-stakes professional contexts. Overall, the findings suggested that SE is a central psychological construct shaping learners' engagement, confidence, and perceived readiness to communicate in English for professional purposes.

The results suggest that adult ESP learners perceive their SE in productive skills as context-dependent rather than fixed, with confidence fluctuating according to communicative demands, task complexity, formality, and interlocutor type. Participants consistently described greater confidence in familiar topics, while reporting reduced SE in formal, or high-precision communicative situations. This situational variability reinforces the domain-specific and task-specific nature of SE as conceptualized by Bandura (1997), particularly within ESP contexts where communicative performance is closely tied to professional identity and responsibility.

Across participants' narratives, lexical competence emerged as a central reference point for evaluating communicative ability. Learners frequently associated their confidence in speaking and writing with their perceived control over technical and domain-specific vocabulary, highlighting the critical role of lexical knowledge in ESP performance. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing vocabulary as a core component of disciplinary communication and professional credibility (Dang et al., 2017; Hyland, 2007). In

contrast, writing SE was described as particularly fragile, especially in contexts requiring accuracy, formality, and adherence to institutional or genre-specific conventions. Participants' accounts suggest that the cognitive load and affective pressure associated with professional writing contribute to heightened self-doubt, reinforcing the perception of writing as the most demanding productive skill in ESP contexts.

Rather than establishing definitive causal relationships, the findings indicate that participants strongly associate the development of SE with opportunities for authentic use, repeated practice, and professional exposure. Learners frequently described confidence as emerging through sustained engagement with real communicative tasks, such as operational interactions, professional writing, and collaboration with international counterparts. At the same time, ESP instruction was generally valued as a foundational and supportive component, particularly for raising awareness of language demands and providing initial scaffolding. However, participants often perceived formal instruction as insufficient on its own, emphasizing the need for continued practice beyond the classroom. These perceptions align with social cognitive theory, particularly the role of mastery experiences in shaping efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997), as well as with ESP scholarship highlighting authenticity and experiential learning as key pedagogical principles (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Arnó-Macià et al., 2020).

The relevance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how adult ESP learners interpret their own communicative competence in specialized professional environments, an area that remains underexplored in the Chilean context and in ESP research more broadly. By foregrounding learners' voices, this study advances research by illustrating how SE is negotiated at the intersection of instruction, professional experience, and personal effort, rather than being shaped by formal education alone. The findings underscore the

importance of viewing ESP self-efficacy as a dynamic and situational construct, closely tied to real-world communicative demands.

In doing so, this research contributes to ESP literature by providing empirical support for learner-centered and context-sensitive approaches to instruction, particularly in domains where communicative performance carries professional and operational consequences. Understanding learners' perceptions of their productive skills SE not only deepens theoretical insight into the role of SE in ESP, but also offers a basis for pedagogical reflection, curriculum design, and future research aimed at strengthening learners' confidence and communicative readiness in professional settings.

5.2 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights, limitations should be acknowledged. Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the qualitative nature of the research design limits the generalizability of the findings. Qualitative inquiry privileges contextual depth and participant perspectives, which means the results cannot be statistically generalized to all ESP learners or settings.

Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported data, which may be influenced by participants' subjective perceptions, memory, or social desirability. Observational or performance-based data could complement these perceptions and provide a fuller picture of learners' SE in practice.

Third, the study focused on a specific professional-military context, which may limit the applicability of findings to other ESP domains. Military learners often face distinctive communicative demands, such as operational briefings, multinational coordination, and high-stakes missions, that differ from the goals and backgrounds of learners in business, healthcare, or academic ESP settings. These unique pressures and responsibilities shape SE in ways that may not be directly comparable to other professional environments. Therefore,

while the findings illuminate how SE develops in military ESP, caution should be exercised when extending these conclusions to learners in other domains.

Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for examination of changes in SE over time. Longitudinal research could provide further insights into how perceptions evolve with sustained exposure, professional experience, and ongoing training.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have implications for ESP pedagogy, curriculum design, and teacher education. Given that learners' SE in productive skills was found to be context-dependent, ESP instruction should address not only linguistic competence but also learners' beliefs about their ability to communicate effectively in professional situations.

First, ESP courses should explicitly support productive skills SE by designing scaffolded communicative tasks that allow learners to experience successful performance in realistic professional contexts. According to Bandura (1997), mastery experiences are the most influential source of SE; therefore, tasks should be sequenced from controlled to more authentic activities and accompanied by formative feedback focused on communicative effectiveness rather than solely on accuracy.

Second, greater emphasis on technical vocabulary and genre-specific writing instruction is pedagogically justified by their role in reducing uncertainty and cognitive load during professional communication. Participants associated confidence in speaking and writing with control over domain-specific vocabulary and conventionalized discourse forms. Research in ESP indicates that explicit instruction in disciplinary vocabulary and genres enhances both performance and learners' confidence in formal contexts (Hyland, 2007; Dang et al., 2017).

Third, ESP programs should integrate experiential and task-based learning opportunities, such as simulations and role-plays, that approximate real workplace

communication. These practices provide repeated opportunities for meaningful use of language and support the development of SE through authentic practice (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

Finally, instructors should encourage learner autonomy and self-directed learning by helping learners develop strategies to maintain and extend their language use beyond the classroom, thereby supporting the ongoing development of SE in professional ESP contexts.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Future research could build on this study by employing mixed-methods designs that combine qualitative exploration of learners' perceptions with quantitative measures of SE and productive skill performance. This would allow for a more comprehensive examination of the relationship between perceived confidence and actual communicative ability in ESP contexts.

Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine how SE develops over time, particularly across stages of professional training and workplace experience. Such research would contribute to a better understanding of the dynamic and evolving nature of SE in professional language learning. Further studies should explore instructional practices that emerged positively from this research, including scaffolded communicative tasks, authentic professional practice, and targeted instruction in technical vocabulary and genres. Intervention-based research could provide evidence of how these approaches enhance speaking and writing SE in ESP settings.

Finally, comparative research across different ESP domains and professional contexts would help determine which aspects of SE are context-specific and which are transferable, thereby advancing both theoretical and pedagogical understanding of SE in ESP.

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Appendix 1

Protocolo de entrevista semiestructurada

Protocolo para el entrevistador:

1. Agradecer al entrevistado por su participación e informar que la entrevista será grabada.
2. **Presionar el botón de grabar**.
3. Explicar a los entrevistados el propósito y contexto general de la entrevista.
4. Duración estimada de la entrevista entre 35 y 45 minutos.
5. explicar a los participantes lo que es ESP y mencionar la diferencia que tiene respecto a CLT.

Perfil de los entrevistados: Personal militar que ha participado en misiones de paz y que ha utilizado el idioma inglés como herramienta de comunicación.

Actividad: Entrevista semiestructurada destinada a explorar la percepción de autoeficacia en el uso de habilidades productivas del idioma inglés (expresión oral y escrita), dentro del contexto de uso del idioma inglés con fines específicos (ESP) y como este puede influenciar el desarrollo y desempeño de los entrevistados en estas habilidades.

Estimado/a entrevistado/a,

Le invito cordialmente a participar en esta entrevista, la cual forma parte de un estudio de investigación orientado a explorar la autoeficacia de estudiantes adultos de inglés para fines específicos (ESP), en relación con las habilidades productivas del idioma, es decir, hablar y escribir, dentro del contexto militar.

Este estudio se enfoca particularmente en el uso del idioma inglés para fines específicos (ESP) en el ámbito militar. Para lo que se ha considerado entrevistar a personal militar, quienes han utilizado el inglés como medio de comunicación en el marco de misiones de paz en ambientes multinacionales.

Propósito: Esta entrevista tiene como objetivo recopilar información sobre su nivel de confianza y competencia percibida en el uso del idioma inglés. No existen respuestas correctas o incorrectas; sus respuestas deben reflejar sus experiencias personales. Lo invito a proporcionar tantos detalles como considere relevantes. Si tiene alguna pregunta o inquietud, no dude en comunicársela al entrevistador en cualquier momento.

Es importante destacar que su participación es completamente voluntaria. Toda la información que comparta será tratada con estricta confidencialidad, no será divulgada a terceros y se utilizará sólo con fines académicos.

Información general

Rama de las fuerzas armadas a la que pertenece : _____

Nivel de Inglés: **:** _____

Edad **:** _____

Género **:** _____

Sección A: Preguntas sobre habilidades orales (relacionadas con ESP).

1. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al presentarse en inglés, compartir su formación, experiencia laboral, rol como militar e intereses profesionales?
2. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al mantener una conversación en inglés con un desconocido, por ejemplo, para solicitar información o direcciones?
3. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al ordenar comida en un restaurante o realizar compras en una tienda utilizando el idioma inglés?
4. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al hacer preguntas y responder en interacciones simples, como registrarse en un hotel, reservar una mesa en un restaurante o tomar un medio de transporte?
5. ¿Qué tan capaz se siente de participar en una conversación informal en inglés con hablantes no nativos en actividades sociales o recreativas?
6. ¿Hasta qué punto se siente capaz para expresar sus opiniones respecto a temas de interés general (cine, música, deportes, etc.) en una conversación en inglés?
7. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al discutir temas generales o laborales con compañeros de trabajo en inglés, ya sea durante reuniones informativas o conversaciones informales?
8. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al describir su lugar de trabajo y responsabilidades laborales a otros camaradas extranjeros en inglés?
9. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al dar instrucciones en inglés sobre cómo llegar a las diferentes instalaciones dentro del campo militar o fuera de este?
10. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al formular preguntas sobre su trabajo específico o las tareas que se le han asignado?
11. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al presentarse ante camaradas u otras personas en inglés, utilizando un lenguaje formal o informal de manera adecuada?
12. ¿Puede relatar con confianza una experiencia personal o profesional en inglés, utilizando el vocabulario militar de su área y la gramática apropiada al contexto?
13. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al responder preguntas de superiores o camaradas relacionadas con el inglés militar? ¿Podría dar un ejemplo y cómo lo manejó?
14. Según su experiencia aprendiendo inglés y considerando los contextos en los que ha utilizado el idioma ¿cómo describiría las diferencias, si es que las hay, entre el uso del inglés con fines específicos, como en el ámbito militar, y su uso en situaciones de comunicación general y cotidiana? ¿Cuál de estos dos enfoques considera que le ha resultado más accesible, útil o efectivo en cuanto a las herramientas que le ha proporcionado para desenvolverse en los distintos contextos comunicativos que ha enfrentado?

Sección B: Preguntas sobre habilidades de escritura (relacionadas con ESP).

15. ¿Qué tan seguro se siente al redactar mensajes breves en inglés en situaciones cotidianas, como, por ejemplo, al escribir un WhatsApp, un correo electrónico simple o en redes sociales?
16. ¿Hasta qué punto se siente capaz de escribir un mensaje en inglés para solicitar información general como horarios de atención, precios, disponibilidad, etc.?
17. ¿Qué tan capaz se siente al escribir sobre sus rutinas diarias o planes personales en inglés, como, por ejemplo, planificación para el fin de semana o vacaciones, actividades con familiares o amigos, etc?
18. ¿Qué tan capaz se siente de escribir publicaciones cortas en inglés en redes sociales, tales como comentarios, saludos, actualizaciones, etc.?
19. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al completar formularios básicos en inglés que requieren datos personales o información general?
20. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al redactar mensajes profesionales en inglés relacionados con su área laboral (por ejemplo, correo electrónico u otros medios que utilice en su sección/división)?
21. ¿Hasta qué punto se siente capaz de completar trabajos escritos en inglés utilizando el vocabulario militar adecuado?
22. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al escribir comunicaciones breves (recordatorios, apuntes, notas, etc.) en inglés dirigidas a superiores o subordinados sobre tareas o responsabilidades compartidas?
23. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al construir nuevas oraciones en inglés utilizando vocabulario recientemente aprendido en el ámbito militar?
24. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al redactar mensajes de correo electrónico formales o informales en inglés con fines profesionales?
25. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al usar expresiones idiomáticas en inglés de manera adecuada en textos relacionados con su trabajo o interacciones cotidianas?
26. ¿Hasta qué punto se siente capaz de elaborar documentación en inglés que refleje su experiencia y desarrollo profesional en un contexto militar?
27. ¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al redactar informes en inglés que describen su experiencia profesional y cómo esta ha influido en su proceso de aprendizaje?

Sección C: Preguntas relacionadas con desafíos, beneficios e impactos del inglés con fines específicos (ESP).

28. ¿Cuáles cree usted que son los principales desafíos que presenta el uso del inglés para fines específicos (ESP) en su entorno profesional?
29. ¿Qué aspectos del inglés con fines específicos (ESP) le han resultado más difíciles, en lo relacionado a la expresión oral y escrita (por ejemplo, vocabulario técnico de su área, expresiones formales, estructuras propias del área, participación en reuniones o entrevistas, redacción de correos e informes, etc.)?
30. ¿De qué manera cree usted que el aprendizaje del inglés con fines específicos ha contribuido a mejorar su comunicación profesional?
31. ¿Puede describir situaciones en las que el uso de ESP haya facilitado su desempeño comunicativo, en lo oral y escrito?
32. ¿Cuáles cree usted que son los beneficios comunicacionales que le han brindado los cursos de ESP, particularmente en relación con sus habilidades de expresión oral y de escritura?
33. ¿Usted considera relevantes los cursos de enseñanza del idioma con fines específicos? ¿por qué?

34. ¿Usted considera que el entorno de inglés con fines específicos ha tenido un impacto positivo o negativo en su proceso de aprendizaje, particularmente respecto a su expresión oral y escrita?
35. ¿Usted considera que existen aspectos del curso de inglés con fines específicos que hayan sido especialmente útiles o efectivos para su desempeño respecto a sus habilidades orales y de escritura?
36. ¿Usted considera que existen aspectos del curso ESP que sean poco útiles o que hayan dificultado su aprendizaje?
37. Pensando en su experiencia usando el idioma inglés, ¿le resulta más fácil hablar o escribir en inglés? ¿en cuál se siente más seguro y por qué cree que es así?

¡Agradezco sinceramente su valiosa participación y contribución!

Appendix 2

Correo enviado a los participantes para solicitarles acceder a la las entrevistas

Asunto: Invitación a participar en entrevista de investigación académica

Estimado/a (Nombre del destinatario):

Espero que se encuentre muy bien. Mi nombre es Miguel Aravena y actualmente me encuentro desarrollando un trabajo de investigación en el marco del Programa de Maestría en Enseñanza de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera de la Universidad Nacional Andrés Bello.

En este contexto, quisiera invitarlo/a cordialmente a participar en una entrevista que forma parte esencial de mi estudio. El objetivo de la investigación es explorar las percepciones del personal militar chileno que ha participado en misiones de paz respecto a su autoeficacia en las habilidades productivas del idioma inglés (speaking y writing).

Su colaboración sería de gran valor para el desarrollo de este proyecto, ya que permitirá enriquecer la comprensión de cómo se experimenta y se percibe el uso del inglés en contextos profesionales y de alta exigencia.

Adjunto a este correo encontrará el consentimiento informado, el cual le agradecería pueda revisar, completar y remitir firmado a mi dirección de correo electrónico en caso de aceptar participar.

Agradezco de antemano el tiempo que pueda dedicar a esta actividad y su disposición para apoyar un trabajo que resulta de gran relevancia académica y profesional.

Atentamente,

Miguel Aravena Ortiz
Programa de Maestría en Enseñanza de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera
Universidad Nacional Andrés Bello

Appendix 3

Consentimiento informado para participar en entrevista de investigación

He leído y comprendido la información relacionada con los objetivos, procedimientos y alcance del estudio, el cual forma parte del programa del Maestría en enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera de la Universidad Nacional Andrés Bello.

Declaro que:

Se me ha explicado con claridad que mi participación es voluntaria y que puedo retirarme en cualquier momento sin consecuencias.

Entiendo que la información entregada será utilizada únicamente con fines académicos y de investigación.

Se me garantiza la confidencialidad y anonimato de mis respuestas, las cuales serán codificadas para proteger mi identidad.

Autorizo que mis declaraciones sean registradas y analizadas como parte del estudio.

Por lo tanto, mediante este documento manifiesto mi consentimiento para participar en esta entrevista y colaborar en el desarrollo de la investigación.

Nombre del participante: _____

Firma: _____

Fecha: _____