


Scientific Realism in the English for Nursing Course Plan: A Content Analysis

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A B S T R A C T

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emphasizes the importance of designing language instruction that reflects authentic professional practices and workplace demands. Aligning course plans with real-world contexts is therefore essential to ensure that learning outcomes are meaningful and applicable. This study aimed to examine how the principles of scientific realism are represented in an English for Nursing course plan used at a health college in Bengkulu City. A qualitative content analysis approach was employed to analyze the course plan through three stages: document collection, pre-analysis, and systematic coding. The data were organized according to three core principles of scientific realism: causal mechanisms, approximate truth, and explanatory success. The findings revealed that the learning outcomes reflected the principle of causal mechanisms by emphasizing logical relationships between language use and nursing practice. The instructional materials represented approximate truth through authentic professional content, while the assessment components demonstrated explanatory success by evaluating students' ability to apply language in realistic nursing contexts. Overall, the study concludes that integrating scientific realism into ESP course planning enhances the relevance, authenticity, and practical value of English for Nursing instruction.

Keywords: *Content Analysis, Course Plan, ESP Curriculum, English for Nursing, Scientific Realism*

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INTRODUCTION

In modern scientific inquiry, understanding how knowledge is constructed and justified is essential, especially in connecting theories to real-world situation. This is important in in nursing department, because as nursing students English plays vital role in order to help students in communicating and understanding clinical concept for their professional future job. Scientific realism is classifying as one of the most important philosophical views in creating modern science and producing knowledge. This view holds that scientific theories aim to describe the world as it is, even when it comes to phenomena that we cannot see, such as structures, mechanisms, and causes (Ladyman, 2002; Psillos, 2005). From this starting point, scientific realism is not simply a fixed idea. It is a group of ideas about what science aims to do. What distinguished it from other types of realism is its belief in the existence of an external world (Mukumbang et al., 2023). This understanding helps explain how scientific realism moves from philosophy into educational practice.

In educational field, scientific realism helps teachers in creating learning goals, selecting teaching materials, and designing assessments to help the students in understanding the material (Hacking, 1983). These point of view show that scientific realism is more than just an abstract idea. But, it is a practical approach that essential in curriculum studies, such as health, nursing, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where theory must align with the real professional practice. The recent analysis about ESP in Indonesian context indicate that ESP material hould be aligned with the real clinical communication and profesional parctices (Faidah et al., 2024; Nata, 2025).

The connection between scientific realism and curriculum planning becomes clearer when we look at the role of a course plan. In this case, the course plan is more than just a technical document; it serves as a guide that reveals the beliefs, values, and goals underlying teaching and learning. According to (Richards, 2017) the structure and organization of course plan reflect its philosophy and influence how teachers make decisions in learning. The document related to curriculum creating how teachers interpret educational goals and enact them in practice (Biesta et al., 2017). In addition, the course plan outlines what knowledge is important, how learning should occur, and how students are expected to demonstrate their knowledge. Based on the realist perspective, it helps us to find out whether the outcomes, materials, and assessments are aligning with the real professional setting and the challenges that will face by the students. So, it makes the course plan is important in order to examine how a course plan is organized and how it reflects the knowledge that students need to learn.

The course plan used in this research is designed for second-year nursing students at a health college in Bengkulu City. It is an official document that outlines the structure, goals, activities, and assessments for a 2-credit course designed that aim to improve their English skills. This course plan explained that this subject is not just general English it goes beyond it. Because it combines language skills with clinical communication, so students are expected to be able in carrying out both academic and tasks in workplace.

Moreover, in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) this focus is particularly important. Since English for Nursing is essential to help students develop their communication skills clinical practice with scientific terms, including understanding medical terminology, recording patient conditions, explaining procedures, and working with other health professionals. These skills show the main goal of ESP proposed by professions (Basturkmen, 2010) where objective of ESP is to prepare learners for the communication needs of their chosen and the recent ESP research in Indonesia supports this requirement. A needs analysis study with nursing students from (Jubhari et al., 2022) found that materials and classroom tasks should align with the real language and communication needs that they will encounter in their future jobs. Because nursing is included in biomedical science and evidence-based practice, English for Nursing must emphasize accuracy, truthfulness, and clear explanations. Then, viewing the course plan from the scientific realism perspective is important because this approach values real-world facts and structures, which are the same foundations that support effective nursing communication.

This study used theory outlined by (Psillos, 2009) where scientific realism mentioned as philosophical approach to understand how knowledge is presented in the course plan. It focuses on several values like causal mechanisms, approximate truth, and explanatory success. *Causal mechanisms* means that science seeks the underlying reasons why things happen, not just what we see. While *approximately true* means that while theories may not be perfect, they get closer to showing how the world really works over time. Another important value is *explanatory success*, when a theory can clearly explain and reliably predict what happens, this is seen as strong evidence that it matches real features of the world. In addition, scientific realism views science as a way to systematically reveal how the world works through causal analysis, theory development, and explanation evaluation. Based on this explanation, make this theory as a strong basis for analysing curriculum documents, such as the *English for Nursing* course plan that important in this study. Because it helps to determine whether their learning outcomes, materials, and assessments align with the real causal, practical, and communication needs of professional nursing.

There are some previous studies related to this research. The first is the research from (Sugianti et al., 2022) entitled *Harmony of the Philosophical Foundation of Textbooks and the 2013 English Curriculum*. The result of this study found that several philosophies were present in the textbook, including essentialism, humanism, perennialism, progressivism, and social reconstruction and these finding aligned with the curriculum's philosophical approach. The study also found that LKS also helped students develop 21st-century skills like critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. However, the study noted that

idealism was absent from the LKS. In general, the research showed that English teaching materials can reflect curriculum philosophy and help achieve clear learning goals. Another related research by (Megawati & Zuchdy, 2020) entitled *The Compatibility between Philosophical Foundation of 'English in Mind' Textbook and Curriculum 2013*. In this study, the researchers found that these philosophies matched those in the 2013 Curriculum. In addition, both the curriculum and the textbook focused on critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, and character development. The researchers mentioned that foreign-published textbooks can reflect the philosophical foundations of the Indonesian curriculum when designed with clear teaching principles.

Those previous studies have examined the philosophical foundations in English textbooks and compared them with the 2013 Curriculum, that focusing on philosophical values such as essentialism, humanism, perennialism, progressivism, and social reconstruction. These studies showed how teaching materials align with curriculum philosophy, but they did not analyse course plans (RPS) for ESP class or use scientific realism to examine them. However, English for Nursing is closely connected to biomedical facts, causal relationships, and real clinical communication needs. Because of this reason, scientific realism is a useful perspective for evaluating how knowledge is presented. So, this researcher of this study wants to fill that gap by analysing the English for Nursing course plan using scientific realism, that focus on its learning outcomes, materials, and assessments that show realist principles and meet the practical needs of nursing education.

This study is essential because it introduces a new way to know how an English for Nursing course plan presents knowledge, drawing on scientific realism. By checking whether the learning outcomes, materials, and assessments align with real clinical practice and the core ideas of nursing science, the study is useful for educators and curriculum designers ensure whether the RPS supports accurate, meaningful, and practical language learning. The results can improve curriculum alignment, strengthen ESP course planning in health education, and support nursing students as they enhance their professional communication skills. According to the explanation above, the present study addresses the following research question: "How are the principles of scientific realism reflected in the learning outcomes, materials, and assessments of the English for Nursing course plan?"

METHOD

The design of this study was qualitative content analysis aimed to see how scientific realism appear in the English for Nursing course plan (RPS). This design helped to explore how documents conducting meaning and allowed for in-depth interpretation of the text (Creswell, 2014), and the researcher used English for Nursing course plan as the main data of this study. While conducting this study, the researcher process three main stages. First, collected documents by obtaining the complete and official English for Nursing course plan. All data were formally requested through the Academic Office and the lecturer responsible for the subject to ensure ethical transparency. Second, a pre-analysis was conducted by reading, identifying, and marking sections related to scientific realism, including learning outcomes, instructional materials, and assessment components (Creswell, 2014). Third, the researcher coded and organized each section of the course plan according to key principles of scientific realism such as: causal mechanisms, approximate truth, and explanatory success and (Krippendorff, 2013) structured content analysis method was used for this step. To clarify the analysis, each principle of scientific realism was identified using simple indicators: causal mechanisms demonstrated through cause-and-effect explanations, approximate truth through the use of accurate and evidence-based materials, and explanatory success through tasks requiring students to explain or interpret nursing topics. These indicators were used to guide the coding process. The process of identifying the scientific realism in the course plan was adjusted with (Psillos, 2009) philosophical view of scientific realism.

The English for Nursing course plan was built around several main parts that organized learning throughout the semester. It provided general course details, set out

learning goals, listed weekly topics, described learning activities, and explained how students would be assessed. The plan scheduled 14 class meetings, followed by midterm and final exams. This course plan started with basic topics like medical terminology and progressed to more specific clinical subjects, including admissions, triage, monitoring vital signs, infection prevention, respiratory care, and wound management. Each session consisted of theory and practice through Student-Based Learning, with activities such as reading, listening, discussions, presentations, and role-plays that already prepared by the responsible lecturer.

Furthermore, in this analysis, the method looked at important parts of the course plan, such as learning outcomes, weekly topics, teaching activities, and assessments, in order to see how the course plan showed elements of scientific realism. These elements appeared in the use of real clinical procedures, explanations of cause and effect, evidence-based information, and assignments that asked students to interpret or explain nursing topics. By reviewing these areas, it helped to show how the English for Nursing course plan included causal mechanisms, a focus on truth, and clear explanations in its goals and teaching methods.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the study in English for Nursing course plan showed that the document effectively reflects the main ideas of scientific realism proposed by (Psillos, 2009), including causal mechanisms, approximate truth, and explanatory success. The findings are organized around the learning outcomes, instructional materials, and assessment strategies in the course plan. The causal mechanisms, approximate truth, and explanatory success appeared through the learning outcomes, materials, and assessments written in the course plan. The principles of scientific realism reflected in the course plan presented as follows:

Causal Mechanism

Causal mechanisms are focusing on processes that explain *why* and *how* something happens. In the English for Nursing course plan, this idea appears when the it asks students to understand the reasons behind clinical procedures and patient conditions, such as why vital signs of patients are needed to be checked, how the infections spread, and what things that cause the breathing problems. When the students learn to describe and explain these processes in English, they are doing more than learning new words. They are learning the real mechanisms in clinical situations. This principle shown in session 6 about *Monitoring Vital Signs*, shows how causal mechanisms are taught.

6	Teori: Mampu memahami tentang proses pemantauan tanda-tanda vital tubuh	Monitoring Vital Signs	Teori	50'	Menganalisis tanda-tanda vital tubuh dan cara memantaunya	Dapat memahami tanda-tanda vital tubuh	Aktivitas individu dan kelompok dalam mendiskusikan monitoring tanda-tanda vital tubuh	60 %
	Praktik: Mampu menjawab pertanyaan tentang tanda-tanda vital tubuh		Student-Based Learning	170'	Reading, Listening, and Presenting about the way vital signs being monitored	Mampu menjawab pertanyaan dengan tepat.	Aktivitas individu dan kelompok dalam menjawab pertanyaan tentang monitoring tanda-tanda vital tubuh	40 %

Figure 1. Excerpt from the "Monitoring Vital Signs" learning unit in the English for Nursing course plan

Figure 1 shows the course plan is expecting students to learn both the terms and the reasons behind changes in vital signs, as well as how these changes show a patient's physical state. It is stated in the learning objectives, in theory and practical activity. In theory it is stated: "*Mampu memahami tentang proses pemantauan tanda-tanda vital tubuh*" and in the practical part, it is stated: "*Mampu menjawab pertanyaan tentang tanda-tanda vital tubuh*". These objectives show that the course plan focuses on the understanding of how to monitor the vital sign of patients.

Approximate truth

The second principle of this course plan is approximate truth, it refers to the concept that scientific theories and descriptions is not perfectly accurate, but it offers a close and more accurate representation of reality. In the context of curriculum analysis, this principle is clearly seen when instructional materials and learning outcomes encourage accurate and evidence-

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based understanding. Then, in the course plan, approximate truth is showing through the use of biomedical terminology, clinically accurate descriptions, and factual nursing concepts, that help in enhancing students' understanding in professional practice. It is a requirement for students to comprehend terms such as urinalysis, triage, vital signs, infection prevention, and respiratory conditions indicates that the curriculum prioritizes language learning that reflects actual clinical situation, the researcher found this principle in meeting 13 of the course plan.

13	Teori: Mampu memahami tentang perawatan luka	Wound Care	Teori	50'	Memahami perawatan luka melalui teks reading	Dapat memahami macam-macam luka dan cara perawatan serta penyembuhannya	Aktivitas individu dan kelompok dalam memahami macam-macam luka dan cara perawatannya	60 %
	Praktik: Mampu mempresentasikan tentang cara perawatan luka		Praktik	170'	Persentasi mengenai perawatan luka	Dapat mempresentasikan tentang perawatan luka terhadap luka tertentu	Aktivitas individu dan kelompok dalam mempresentasikan tentang perawatan pada luka tertentu	40 %

Figure 2. Excerpt from the "Wound Care" learning unit illustrating the principle of approximate truth in the English for Nursing course plan.

It can be seen in the figure 2 that the part of The *Wound Care* section of the course plan demonstrates the principle of approximate truth by engaging students with biomedical knowledge that closely aligns with clinical practice. The specified outcomes in the assessment table for theoretical and practical activity such as "Memahami macam-macam luka dan cara perawatan serta penyembuhannya" and "Mampu mempresentasikan tentang cara perawatan luka terhadap luka tertentu," those are requiring that the learner must apply factual, evidence-based descriptions of wound types, healing processes, and appropriate treatment methods.

Explanatory Success

The researcher also found explanatory success principle in this course plan as part of scientific realism. The explanatory success happens when a theory or explanation clearly accounts for a phenomenon and can reliably predict or describe outcomes. In addition, in scientific realism, strong explanatory power is essential for demonstrating a concept that reflect in reality. The researcher found that the lecturer who responsible with this course plan applies this idea through performance-based assessments. Students are asked to explain, present, and justify clinical procedures in English. For example, in Meeting 4 with the topic admissions, students analyse the differences between *emergency* and *programmed admissions*, then the students are expected to present all the steps involved in admitting a patient.

4	Teori: Mampu memahami tentang proses penerimaan pasien untuk mendapatkan pelayanan di rumah sakit	Admissions	Teori	50'	Menganalisis emergency admission dan programmed admission	Dapat memahami emergency admission dan programmed admission	Aktivitas individu dan kelompok memahami emergency admission dan programmed admission	60 %
	Praktik: Mampu mempresentasikan dan mempraktikkan proses penerimaan pasien		Student-Based Learning	170'	Reading, Listening, Writing, and Practicing Admission process in hospital	Dapat mempraktekkan bagaimana proses penerimaan pasien hingga mendapat pelayanan di rumah sakit	Aktivitas individu dan kelompok dalam praktik proses penerimaan pasien	40 %

Figure 3. Excerpt from the "Admissions" learning unit illustrating explanatory effectiveness in the English for Nursing course plan.

This researcher found in meeting 3, the material and activity that demonstrates explanatory success. In this section, the students need to clearly explain the steps of patient admission, explain the difference between emergency and scheduled admissions, and organize the process in a logical sequence. These tasks require clear and accurate explanations, not just memorization. The researcher found that the English for Nursing course plan consistently incorporates principles of realism throughout its structure. The learning outcomes emphasize the understanding of the clinical processes that become the basic of teaching process, teaching factual materials, clinically based content, and the assessment tasks require students to provide clear and accurate explanations of nursing procedures.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the English for Nursing course plan follows the main ideas of scientific realism proposed by (Psillos, 2009), such as *causal mechanisms, approximate truth, and explanatory success*. Viewing these results through philosophical framework and ESP studies shows how the course plan organizes knowledge to fit the real needs and structures of clinical nursing practice at Poltekkes Kemenkes Bengkulu. This discussion section focuses on why these findings are significant, compares them with previous studies, and explains how scientific realism offers a useful framework for evaluating the curricula in educational institutions.

The causal mechanisms in this English for Nursing course plan demonstrate that English language learning is viewed as a way to understand the logic behind healthcare students'. This course plan also encourages the students to use English to explain *why* procedures are done and *how* patient conditions develop. This statement supports (Psillos, 2009) view that real understanding comes from knowing the mechanisms behind what we see and it supports (Hacking, 1983) idea that scientific understanding grows by working with mechanisms, even when using a foreign language (Koopmans & Schiller, 2022). The item of course plan that categorized as causal mechanism because it aligns with scientific realism's view that education should help students understand the hidden structures underlying what we observe. By helping students see how temperature, pulse, breathing, and blood pressure influence the vital sign of body, the course plan supports the idea that real understanding comes from knowing the causes behind what we observe. So, this aligns with the scientific realist idea of causal mechanisms.

The researcher found that this course plan played a role in using English to introduce biomedical knowledge in a simple yet relevant way to students' fields of study, while also balancing the gradual understanding of the scientific accuracy. This supports (Psillos, 2009) idea that scientific truth is reached step by step, not all at once. The course plan also introduces "approximate truthfulness" as a skill, teaching nursing students to share information that is accurate, clear, and suitable for their profession. This approach fits with ESP standards, which say that teaching materials should reflect real disciplinary knowledge (Basturkmen, 2010). Then, because nursing is included in biomedical science and evidence-based learning, so English for Nursing course plan must included the principle of accuracy, truthfulness, and clear explanations (Şik et al., 2025). This principle found in the course plan because the item ensures that linguistic instruction aligns with the actual knowledge and practices nurses use in clinical settings. These is established in nursing science and accurately represent the occurrence, progression, and management of wounds in the professional work settings. By using scientific terminology and clinical accurate procedures, the course plan offers students a realistic description of clinical practice that even it is incomplete, but it is sufficiently accurate and reliable in supporting the development of professional competence.

Furthermore, it was found that the course plan valued structured explanations over memorization as a key component of clinical communication. This aligns with (Psillos, 2009) theory, which states that a strong explanations show how well knowledge aligns with reality. In ESP context, this means English for Nursing course plan applies the principle of (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) into practice, where learners must communicate contextually in the real healthcare professional environment. Thus, the effective explanation serves as a means of connecting scientific realism with the need of nursing communication. The principle of explanatory success because the task items requires them to give clear, logical explanations, not just recall terms. Other activities, such as explaining triage duties, describing handwashing steps, or giving instructions for respiratory tools, also assess whether students can give accurate explanations that align with real nursing practice. Furthermore, when the students are be able to do all of this in a good way, it shows the course plan is success in creating and enhancing both language skills and the ability to communicate, and explanation the things accurately, which is the main goal of scientific realism. These elements show that the course plan not only taught language but also supported the development of clinical communication.

This finding suggests that the course plan reflected the core values of scientific realism in a coherent and practical way.

The clear similarities appeared when the researcher compared this study to the previous studies, both (Sugianti et al., 2022) and (Megawati & Zuchdy, 2020) showed that English teaching documents, such as textbooks or other materials, can reflect underlying philosophical views that shape how knowledge is presented. Then, the previous research also found that educational materials often reflect deeper beliefs about learning, knowledge, skills, and the role of students, even when these ideas are not explicitly stated. Thus, this research clearly supports their conclusion that teaching documents are more than just instructional content, and also show the philosophical and epistemological beliefs that guide learning. Still align with the previous studies, this research highlights the need for consistency between instructional documents and broader curriculum or educational goals (Risager, 2020).

Furthermore, there are important differences depending on what is being analyzed. If the previous studies examined general English textbooks and identified educational philosophies such as essentialism, progressivism, humanism, and perennialism. These study focused on broad educational goals and character development rather than only on specific fields. In contrast, this study examines the English for Nursing course plan, which is directly related to scientific and clinical work. Because of this, the research used the theory of scientific realism, a philosophy that fits with fields that value causal explanation, evidence, and scientific truth.

The findings of this study have important implications for curriculum design in health-focused ESP programs. Since scientific realism in line with the course plan, it should include scientific values in their learning outcomes, materials, and assessments. This approach helps students in developing both language skills and clinical reasoning that important in health education, because the students will become professional health workers in future, so any mistakes will have a fatal consequences (Skedsmo et al., 2023). According to (Jubhari et al., 2022) organizing the course plan around mechanisms, factual accuracy, and clear explanations helps connect language skills with professional knowledge, a key point highlighted by ESP students. It also found in this study, if this course plan shows how integrating philosophical ideas can make ESP curriculum design more practical and relevant.

Based on this findings, it can be concluded that the English for Nursing course plan closely follows the key values of scientific realism. By including *causal mechanisms*, *approximate truth*, and *explanatory success* in its learning outcomes, materials, and assessments, the course plan helps students develop language skills that are closely linked to scientific and clinical thinking. This study also study addresses the gap left by the previous research that focused on textbooks and highlights the value of a philosophical approach, specifically scientific realism, for analyzing the ESP course plan in health education. This core key value not only helps us in understanding how knowledge is organized but also provides practical guidance for creating English course plans that clear, scientifically grounded, and aligned with the real communication needs of nursing practice.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings about how the principles of scientific realism appear in the learning outcomes, materials, and assessments of the English for Nursing course plan. The researcher concluded that all three parts of the course plan consistently reflect the main realist values: *causal mechanisms*, *approximate truth*, and *explanatory success*. Therefore, the research question has been fully answered. This study contributes to the understanding of scientific realism can be applied in analyzing English for Nursing course plans that use by a health college in Bengkulu City. The researcher found that in the learning outcomes show scientific realism by asking students to understand the causes behind clinical phenomena and explain these processes clearly in English. Instead of just learning vocabulary, students are guided to understand why procedures are done and how patient conditions develop, which is key for *causal mechanism*. Then, the instructional materials follow the idea of *approximate truth* by

offering simplified biomedical knowledge that still matches real clinical practice. This approach helps students learn scientific content in a way that is both easy to understand and accurate, supporting their growth toward professional understanding. While, the assessments part of the course plan focus on *explanatory success* by asking students to justify clinical steps, distinguish procedures, and clearly share patient information. The result of this study showed that the course values explanation more than memorization and encourages students to use English for reasoning and professional judgment. Moreover, based on the findings, English for Nursing course plan is more than just a list of topics or activities. It is a carefully structured document that reflects the deeper principles of scientific realism. By including *causal mechanisms, approximate truth, and explanatory success* in its main parts, this course plan helps students not only to use English but also think in ways that course plan match real clinical reasoning. In summary, the findings of this study suggest that basing the English for Nursing course plan on scientific realism makes it more relevant to the real needs of nursing practice. The study also provide insight for educators in designing ESP course plan that integrate language learning with scientific and clinical understanding. By incorporating ideas such as causal mechanisms, approximate truth, and explanatory success helps students build language skills closely linked to scientific and professional thinking. This study highlights the need to design ESP courses that align with health science values, so that students develop not only in communication skills but also clarity, accuracy, and analytical abilities needed for effective clinical work.

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