THE TERMINOLOGICAL PORTFOLIO AS A TOOL FOR INDEPENDENT VOCABULARY LEARNING IN ESP

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Abstract. Independent study is essential for developing the depth of terminological competence required for professional communication, yet is frequently left unguided in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction. This paper presents the terminological portfolio — a structured, learner-compiled record comprising an illustrated glossary, labelled drawings, short professional texts, reflection notes, and a self-assessment instrument — as a practical tool for organising independent vocabulary learning. Grounded in the theory of learner autonomy, the portfolio is described in terms of its components, its integration with a staged independent-study task sequence, and its assessment criteria. Preliminary use of the portfolio, illustrated with architecture-related terminology, suggests it supports sustained, self-directed terminological development beyond the classroom.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), learner autonomy, terminological portfolio, independent study, vocabulary learning, self-assessment.

Classroom instruction alone cannot ensure the depth of terminological competence that professional communication requires; learners must extend their engagement with field-specific vocabulary beyond the classroom, searching for and analysing terms independently, connecting them to visual material, and applying them in professionally oriented tasks. This extension of learning is grounded in the theory of learner autonomy, which holds that the capacity to take charge of one's own learning is both a desirable educational outcome and a necessary condition for the depth of vocabulary acquisition required in a specialised field (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). In practice, however, independent vocabulary study in ESP contexts is frequently left unstructured, amounting to little more than unsupervised translation-list memorisation. This paper addresses that gap by presenting the terminological portfolio, a structured tool for organising and assessing independent terminology learning.

The terminological portfolio is a learner-compiled record that consolidates independent work on professional vocabulary across a course of study. Rather than a single artefact, it comprises several complementary components, summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Components of the terminological portfolio

Component	Function
Illustrated glossary	Records target terms with definitions, translations, images, and example sentences.
Labelled drawings	Demonstrates the ability to connect terms to authentic visual/technical material.

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Short professional texts	Demonstrates productive use of terms within realistic genres (e.g., project descriptions).
Reflection notes	Records the learner's own account of progress and persistent difficulties.
Presentation materials	Demonstrates oral command of terminology for professional communication.
Self-assessment sheet	Requires the learner to evaluate their own competence against explicit criteria.

These components are populated through a staged task sequence adapted from classroom practice: the learner receives a topic (task-setting), identifies a set of relevant terms from authentic sources (assignment), defines and visually contextualises them (analysis), produces a written or spoken artefact using the terms (application), and receives feedback before completing a self-assessment (feedback). Distributing this sequence across a semester, rather than assigning it as a single end-of-course task, allows the portfolio to grow cumulatively alongside classroom instruction, with each new topic adding a further layer of glossary entries, drawings, and short texts organised by semantic field (e.g., structural elements, materials, sustainability).

A brief excerpt from a sample portfolio illustrates the intended depth of engagement. Following a drawing-annotation task, one learner wrote: "I labelled the load-bearing walls in red and the partition walls in blue, since these two terms are often confused. Comparing my annotated plan with a classmate's, I noticed I had mislabelled one partition wall as load-bearing, which we discussed and corrected together." Such entries demonstrate not only terminological accuracy but also the learner's growing awareness of their own recurrent errors — an awareness that the reflection and self-assessment components are specifically designed to cultivate (Benson, 2011).

Assessment of the portfolio addresses seven criteria: the relevance and coverage of selected terms; the accuracy of definitions; the quality and relevance of visual examples; the correctness of contextual use; the learner's ability to explain terms orally; the completeness and organisation of the portfolio; and the consistency of professional register. Each criterion is scored on a four-band scale (excellent-good-satisfactory-unsatisfactory), and the accompanying self-assessment sheet mirrors these criteria in learner-facing language, allowing discrepancies between self-rated and teacher-rated scores to be identified and discussed — discrepancies that often indicate a mismatch between a learner's confidence and their actual competence, and that provide a natural focus for subsequent feedback.

Preliminary use of the portfolio suggests two benefits in particular. First, because learners select and annotate their own material, engagement with the glossary component appears more sustained than with teacher-issued vocabulary lists. Second, the reflection notes surface specific, individual error patterns (such as the load-bearing/partition wall confusion above) that whole-class instruction does not always reveal, allowing subsequent classroom feedback to be more precisely targeted. These observations derive from small-scale, non-randomised classroom use and should be treated as formative; a controlled comparison of portfolio-based and conventional independent-study assignments is needed to establish the approach's comparative effectiveness.

This paper has presented the terminological portfolio as a structured, theoretically grounded tool for organising independent vocabulary learning in ESP contexts. By combining an illustrated glossary, authentic visual and textual artefacts, reflection, and self-assessment within a single cumulative record, the portfolio operationalises learner autonomy in a concrete, assessable form. Illustrated here with architecture-related terminology, the approach does not depend on features

specific to that field and is proposed as a transferable independent-study tool for ESP instruction more broadly.

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