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Evaluating ESP in Entrepreneurial Contexts: Toward a Quality-based Framework for Communication, Training, and Start-up Ecosystem Readiness

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ABSTRACT: *The integration of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within entrepreneurship and start-up programs has redefined the communicative demands placed on learners, particularly in contexts where innovation, persuasion, and cross-cultural negotiation are central. Notwithstanding this transformation, the evaluative frameworks governing such programs remain underdeveloped and conceptually misaligned with contemporary demands. The dominant institutional approach continues to privilege Quality Control (QC) mechanisms, focusing on retrospective assessment and the correction of observable deficiencies in language performance. This conceptual paper argues that QC, while operationally useful, is structurally insufficient as a primary framework for evaluating ESP in entrepreneurial ecosystems, and that a Quality Assurance (QA)-oriented evaluative model is required. Specifically, the study identifies proactive QA standards and systematically aligns them with complementary QC measures to ensure both preventive and corrective dimensions of program quality are addressed. To operationalize this dual-logic approach, the paper develops a comprehensive evaluative checklist grounded in four theoretically and empirically measurable dimensions: (1) disciplinary communication competence, (2) innovation-oriented language use, (3) instructional training effectiveness, and (4) start-up ecosystem readiness. These dimensions are grounded in foundational needs analysis models, constructive alignment principles, international quality standards, and entrepreneurship competency descriptors. The principal contribution lies in a dual-logic checklist that explicitly maps QA and QC indicators across all four dimensions, generating a multi-layered diagnostic profile. Rather than treating quality as a binary judgment, the framework positions it as a dynamic, evidence-informed continuum that supports iterative improvement. Future empirical validation across diverse entrepreneurial higher education contexts is identified as a necessary next step.*

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurial education; ESP evaluation; evaluative checklist; framework; higher education governance; quality assurance; quality control; start-up ecosystems.

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1. Introduction

Contemporary higher education operates at the intersection of three main accelerating transformations: the globalization of professional communication, the rise of innovation-driven economies, and the institutionalization of quality-oriented governance structures. Within this intersection, *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) has emerged as a strategically critical educational field, particularly for programs preparing learners to participate in *entrepreneurial* and *start-up* ecosystems (Hyland, 2022; Paltridge & Starfield, 2023). Undoubtedly, in these contexts, language proficiency is not merely an instrumental skill but a constitutive element of entrepreneurial identity, capacity for persuasion, and participation in cross-cultural innovation networks (van Werven, Bouwmeester, & Cornelissen, 2019; Spinuzzi et al., 2014).

In this context, the traditional conception of ESP as a 'service' discipline – tasked with equipping learners with lexis and grammatical patterns appropriate to a professional register – no longer captures the complexity of the communicative work to be performed. In fact, contemporary ESP scholarship increasingly positions the discipline within a socio-rhetorical framing in which learners acquire not only linguistic resources but also the capacity to negotiate identities, interests, and power asymmetries within professional communities of practice (Hyland, 2022; Paltridge & Starfield, 2023). For *entrepreneurial ESP*, this repositioning is particularly consequential: the learner is not merely a communicator but a prospective founder whose linguistic performance is consequential to material outcomes including funding decisions, partnership formation, and market entry (van Werven, Bouwmeester, & Cornelissen, 2019).

Notwithstanding the foregoing, a persistent paradox characterizes the evaluation of ESP programs operating in entrepreneurial environments. To put it differently, while curricular content has evolved to incorporate pitch rhetoric, investor communication, and innovation-oriented discourse (Majka, 2024; Hu & Ma, 2025), the evaluative instruments used to govern program *quality* remain rooted in retrospective, deficit-oriented models of assessment. This misalignment produces what Williams (2016) terms an 'evaluation gap' – a systemic condition in which the indicators used to judge program quality no longer correspond to the competencies the program claims to develop. Consequently, programs may appear satisfactory under conventional quality metrics while systematically underperforming against the communicative demands of contemporary entrepreneurial practice.

This *conceptual* paper proposes that resolving the evaluation gap requires moving beyond the dominant *Quality Control* (QC) paradigm – which is *reactive* and corrective in nature – toward a dual-logic framework that integrates QC with *Quality Assurance* (QA) – being *proactive* and preventive. Building on Donabedian's (1988, 2005) structure-process-outcome typology, adapted for educational quality governance by Harvey and Williams (2010) and further operationalized through ISO 21001:2018 (ISO, 2018; Kayyali & Khosla, 2021), the framework developed here conceptualizes quality as a *continuum* rather than a threshold. The central contribution is a four-dimensional *evaluative checklist* – the Dual-Logic ESP-Entrepreneurship Checklist (DLEEC) – that distinguishes preventive QA standards from corrective QC indicators across four dimensions grounded in needs-analysis scholarship (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998), constructive alignment theory (Biggs, 1996, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2011), and entrepreneurship competency frameworks (Bacigalupo, Kampylis, Punie, & Van den Brande, 2016; Morselli, 2019).

1.1. Problem Statement

Despite widespread institutional investment in ESP provision for business and entrepreneurship cohorts, three interrelated problems persist. First, the evaluative logic dominant in ESP program governance is *retrospective*: it measures what has already gone wrong rather than ensuring structural conditions for quality (Rosa, Sarrico, & Amaral, 2012). Second, the conceptual architecture of entrepreneurial communication, which includes pitch rhetoric, investor narrative, stakeholder negotiation, and innovation-oriented discourse, is not adequately captured in existing ESP evaluation instruments (Spinuzzi et al., 2014; van Werven, Bouwmeester, & Cornelissen, 2019). Third, QA standards applicable to higher education (such as

ISO 21001 and ENQA standards, standing for the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) are often treated as parallel to, rather than integrated with, program-level performance metrics (Ab Wahid, 2019; Kayyali & Khosla, 2021).

In point of fact, the persistence of these problems reveals a deeper conceptual deficit: the absence of an integrative model that explicitly links preventive design logic (QA) with corrective diagnostic logic (QC) through operationally *measurable* indicators. Without such a model, institutions risk what Williams (2016) describes as 'quality theatre' i.e. performative compliance with documentation standards that do not meaningfully advance learning outcomes.

1.2. Research Objectives and Questions

This conceptual paper pursues four interrelated objectives. First, it critically examines the limitations of QC-dominant evaluative cultures in ESP for entrepreneurship. Second, it develops a theoretically grounded dual-logic framework that integrates QA and QC in mutually reinforcing relationships. Third, it *operationalizes* this framework through a four-dimensional evaluative checklist that specifies measurable indicators at both QA and QC levels. Fourth, it articulates the practical and governance implications of adopting a dual-logic approach for ESP curriculum design, institutional accreditation, and entrepreneurial ecosystem alignment.

In line with the aforementioned targeted objective, three research questions structure the analysis: (1) What are the conceptual and operational limitations of QC-driven evaluation in ESP for entrepreneurship programs? (2) How can QA standards be systematically integrated with QC measures to form an evaluative framework aligned with the communicative demands of entrepreneurial ecosystems? (3) What indicators, at both QA and QC levels, constitute a theoretically defensible and operationally usable evaluative checklist for such programs?

1.3. Significance and Scope

The significance of the framework developed here is threefold. *Theoretically*, it contributes to the scarce scholarship on evaluative logics in ESP, where conceptual work on QA integration remains underdeveloped relative to other subfields of applied linguistics (Basturkmen, 2010; Flowerdew, 2012). *Methodologically*, it provides a design-based conceptual instrument that can be empirically validated in future research across diverse institutional contexts. *Practically*, it supports ESP coordinators, institutional quality officers, and entrepreneurship program directors in constructing evaluative instruments that are simultaneously preventive and diagnostic. Of note, the scope of the paper is confined to conceptual development; as for empirical validation, it is identified as a necessary next step but is beyond the scope of the present paper.

To elaborate further on the *methodological* stance, in adopting a design-based conceptual synthesis, this paper does not present new empirical data but constructs a theoretically defensible evaluative instrument through the disciplined integration of four established scholarly traditions (Donabedian-derived quality governance, constructive alignment, ESP needs analysis, and entrepreneurship competence). The critical argument advanced is that the QC-dominant *status quo* of ESP evaluation is not merely incomplete but structurally miscalibrated to the phenomena it purports to govern; the paper's contribution is therefore diagnostic (naming the misalignment) and constructive (offering an instrument that operationalises the corrective logic). All along, claims are warranted by citation, internal coherence, and explicit mapping of theory to indicators, rather than by empirical proof, which the concluding section identifies as the necessary next research step.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

This section explores the theoretical foundations and supporting research that inform the design, evaluation, and effectiveness of ESP programs, particularly those focused on entrepreneurial communication. It examines how ESP has evolved from a product-driven concept to a pedagogy that focuses on learners'

needs, guided by frameworks like constructive alignment and the EntreComp framework. It is argued that in ESP, the QA/QC distinction, on which the present suggested framework is buildt, has received limited but growing attention. It also considers the genre-based nature of entrepreneurial communication and its distinct challenges, highlighting that successful entrepreneurial communication necessitates understanding rhetorical strategies, audience expectations, and multimodal techniques i.e. going beyond traditional language skills. The section eventually emphasizes the need to evaluate ESP programs in a dynamic and multifaceted business environment by considering factors like entrepreneur's communicative needs, genre-specific demands, and audience considerations. The section proceeds in six moves: needs analysis, constructive alignment, QA/QC governance, entrepreneurship competencies, entrepreneurial rhetoric, and the resulting conceptual gap.

2.1. ESP Theory and the Evolution of Needs Analysis

The theoretical foundations of ESP were laid by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) in their seminal learning-centered approach, which redefined ESP not as a product but as a pedagogical response to learners' reason for learning. Their distinction between target needs (what learners must do with English in professional contexts) and learning needs (what learners require to progress toward target performance) established *needs analysis* as the cornerstone of ESP curriculum design. This conceptualization was subsequently expanded by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), who situated ESP within a broader framework of absolute and variable characteristics, underscoring the discipline's responsiveness to specific communicative and occupational demands. Basturkmen (2010) further extended needs analysis into a recursive process involving present situation analysis, target situation analysis, and rights analysis, arguing that contemporary ESP must account for power dynamics and learners' claims to communicative legitimacy within their professional communities.

More recent scholarship has problematized the static, pre-course model of needs analysis, arguing that in rapidly evolving professional ecosystems, particularly those of entrepreneurship and innovation, needs shift faster than traditional instruments can capture (Hyland, 2022; Paltridge & Starfield, 2023). Flowerdew (2012) observed that the genre-based turn in ESP has made visible the socio-rhetorical complexity of professional communication, requiring evaluation to attend not only to lexical-grammatical accuracy but also to genre-appropriate rhetorical moves. For ESP in entrepreneurial contexts, this implies that evaluation must measure whether learners can produce and interpret genre-specific texts such as pitch decks, investor memos, and crowd-funding narratives (Spinuzzi et al., 2014; van Werven, Bouwmeester, & Cornelissen, 2019).

The genre turn in ESP, developed extensively in Bhatia's (2004, 2014) work on genre analysis and further elaborated by Swales (1990, 2004) within the English for Academic Purposes tradition, has profound implications for needs analysis in entrepreneurial contexts. Rather than specifying language needs at the level of vocabulary and structure, genre-informed needs analysis examines the rhetorical moves, communicative purposes, and audience expectations that characterize each target genre. For entrepreneurial communication, this entails recognizing that a pitch deck is not simply a persuasive document but a complex multimodal genre with conventional moves (e.g., problem articulation, solution demonstration, market quantification, traction evidence, team legitimation, financial projection, and explicit investment query), each carrying its own rhetorical and linguistic demands (Spinuzzi et al., 2014; Majka, 2024).

2.2. Constructive Alignment and Outcomes-Based Program Design

The principle of *constructive alignment*, developed by Biggs (1996, 2003) and elaborated in Biggs and Tang (2011), holds that quality in higher education emerges from the systematic coherence between intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks. Biggs's (1996) formulation has become foundational in higher education quality discourse, with over 7,000 citations reflecting its influence on *outcomes-based curriculum design* (Kandlbinder, 2014). Ali (2018)

demonstrated how constructive alignment can structure both curriculum design and evaluation in outcomes-based higher education systems, while Hristov, Nakov, and Miočinović (2023) empirically examined its role in linking objectives, teaching activities, student competencies, and assessment methods.

For ESP in entrepreneurship contexts, constructive alignment provides a normative template for evaluating whether the stated competencies of a program (e.g., the capacity to pitch a business idea to investors) are actually supported by the learning activities and assessment tasks. Of note, Biggs and Tang (2011) argued that misalignment between these components is a primary source of *quality failure*, a point that reinforces the need for QA-oriented evaluation that inspects structural coherence before relying on outcome measurement.

2.3. Quality Governance: From QC to QA Logics

The distinction between QA and QC has its deepest intellectual roots in the healthcare quality scholarship of Donabedian (1988, 2005), whose *structure-process-outcome* triad continues to inform institutional quality governance across sectors, including higher education. *Structure* refers to the organizational and resource conditions of service provision; *process* refers to the activities through which services are enacted; as for *outcome*, it refers to the results attributable to service delivery. Notably, Donabedian (2005) argued that exclusive reliance on outcome measurement (the hallmark of QC) is diagnostically insufficient because it cannot explain why observed outcomes occurred or how to improve them.

The translation of this typology into higher education has been undertaken by Harvey and Williams (2010), who identified enduring confusions between the logics of accountability (aligned with QC) and improvement (aligned with QA). The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2015) and ISO 21001:2018 both formalize the QA logic through management-system requirements oriented toward the design of conditions that make quality outcomes probable (ISO, 2018; Kayyali & Khosla, 2021). Ab Wahid (2019) provided an influential analysis of ISO 9001-based quality management in higher education, illustrating both its achievements and the adaptive work necessary to prevent ritualistic compliance. Jingura, Kamusoko, and Tapera (2019) similarly examined the applicability of ISO 9001 to higher education, cautioning against the uncritical transfer of industrial-quality paradigms into educational contexts.

In ESP specifically, the QA/QC distinction has received limited but growing attention. Rosa, Sarrico, and Amaral (2012) noted that the language of total quality management (TQM) and quality certification often obscures rather than clarifies the pedagogical work of program evaluation, while Dugarova, Starostina, and Kimova (2016) examined QA as an internal mechanism of institutional competitiveness. For the present framework, the key insight from this literature is that QA and QC answer different questions and require different instruments: QA asks whether conditions for quality have been designed, whereas QC asks whether predetermined standards have been met.

Pushing further, critical scholarship has also examined how QA discourses can be appropriated in ways that undermine their improvement orientation. Williams (2016), reviewing fifteen years of quality in higher education, argued that the rhetorical convergence of QA and QC in institutional practice has often resulted in bureaucratized compliance regimes that satisfy assessment requirements without producing substantive improvement. Similarly, Harvey (2018) cautioned that quality governance can degenerate into 'impression management' when the indicators used to judge quality are only loosely connected to the educational experiences of learners. These warnings inform the design of the present DLEEC, which is constructed to resist 'compliance-theatre' uses by specifying indicators whose evidentiary base is observable, contestable, and directly linked to educational practice.

In the same line of thought, a body of Algerian ESP scholarship offers direct empirical and conceptual purchase on the QA-oriented reasoning. Saaid (2020) argued that Quality Circles (QCs) methodology – originally a workplace improvement technique – can be productively adapted to higher-education settings as a mechanism for embedding critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and reflective practice into

ESP teaching. His theoretical review positioned QCs as a bridge between institutional quality discourse and the everyday pedagogical work of ESP instructors, thereby anticipating the dual-logic argument advanced here: quality is not a terminal inspection but a designed condition of professional practice. To push further, Saaid (2025) operationalised this argument through a quasi-experimental investigation of QCs in a Legal English ESP setting. Combining pre- and post-tests, focus-group discussions, and questionnaires, the study reported measurable gains in learner proficiency, motivation, and collaborative skill among the experimental group, and it identified scalability conditions – sustained instructor engagement, curricular alignment with professional demands, and iterative review – that closely track the QA indicators specified in the DLEEC. Two implications for the present framework follow. First, the Algerian evidence corroborates the claim that QA-oriented interventions produce diagnostically richer information than terminal QC assessment alone. Second, it demonstrates that quality-based ESP innovation is neither exclusively European nor necessarily resource-intensive: it can be enacted in emerging higher-education systems provided that institutional space is created for participatory review. The DLEEC can therefore be read, in part, as a formalisation of the operating logic that Saaid (2020, 2025) documented in practice.

2.4. Entrepreneurship Competencies and the EntreComp Framework

Contemporary entrepreneurship education increasingly relies on structured competency frameworks that articulate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for entrepreneurial action. The most influential of these is the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp), developed by Bacigalupo, Kampylis, Punie, and Van den Brande (2016) on behalf of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre. EntreComp organizes entrepreneurial competence into three areas: Ideas and Opportunities, Resources, and Into Action; these comprise fifteen competencies that have since been operationalized across diverse educational and professional contexts (McCallum, Weicht, McMullan, & Price, 2018). For example, Joensuu-Salo, Viljamaa, and Varamäki (2022) empirically validated EntreComp in relation to start-up behavior across seven European countries, demonstrating its predictive value for entrepreneurial intent and action; more recently, Banha, Graça, Góis, and Banha (2025) analyzed national frameworks in light of EntreComp, while Pasic, Vatres, Bijelonja, and Pasic (2023) applied the framework to engineering students' competency development.

For ESP in entrepreneurial contexts, EntreComp provides a structured competency lexicon that enables curriculum designers to specify communication-related learning outcomes with disciplinary precision. It might be worth noting that several EntreComp competencies (such as mobilizing others, motivating and persuading, and working with others) are fundamentally communicative, making ESP evaluation directly relevant to entrepreneurship competence development (Myyryläinen, 2022; Morselli, 2019).

2.5. The Rhetoric of Entrepreneurial Communication

In point of fact, entrepreneurial communication is a distinct communicative domain characterized by high stakes, compressed time horizons, and adversarial audiences. Spinuzzi et al. (2014) analyzed the pitch deck as a revisable genre through which entrepreneurs negotiate meaning with investors, while van Werven, Bouwmeester, and Cornelissen (2019) examined the micro-level rhetorical strategies by which founders achieve narrative plausibility and resonance. Hu and Ma (2025), in a video-based study published in the Journal of Finance, showed that investors' perceptions of entrepreneurial credibility are shaped by multimodal communicative cues that extend well beyond propositional content. Pushing on similar lines, Majka (2024), synthesizing findings on how start-ups attract investors, emphasized the persuasive work performed by both elevator pitches and extended pitch decks.

For ESP evaluation, this body of scholarship implies that communicative competence in entrepreneurial contexts is genre-specific, multimodal, and audience-sensitive. Evaluative instruments that measure only generic speaking or writing ability will systematically underestimate the communicative

capacities that entrepreneurial performance requires; conversely, they may overestimate the preparedness of learners who perform well on generic tasks but lack genre-specific competence.

Figure 1 presents a diagram positioning the ESP program at the center of an ecosystem, illustrating its continuous interaction with external entrepreneurial forces such as investors, pitch environments, start-ups, and cross-cultural communication contexts.

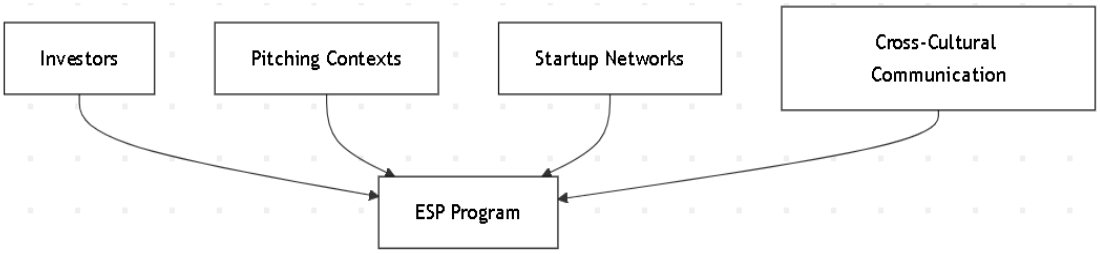


Figure 1. Ecosystem Embeddedness Model

2.6. Summary of the Conceptual Gap

Across the literature reviewed above, a consistent conceptual gap emerges: despite rich scholarship on ESP needs analysis, constructive alignment, QA governance, entrepreneurship competencies, and entrepreneurial rhetoric, no integrative framework explicitly combines these strands into an evaluative instrument suited to ESP programs operating at the interface of language education and entrepreneurial ecosystems. The remainder of this paper addresses this gap through the development of the Dual-Logic ESP-Entrepreneurship Checklist (DLEEC), a theoretically grounded and empirically measurable framework seeking future validation.

3. The Dual-Logic Framework: Conceptual Architecture

The proposed Dual-Logic Framework is based on QA and QC concepts. The former focuses on the program design to ensure it meets needs and aligns with outcomes, whereas the latter analyzes actual performance, such as student pitch skills or real-world entrepreneurial outcomes. The analytical claim of this section is that QA and QC are not competing paradigms but complementary logics answering non-substitutable questions; their integration is therefore an epistemic, not merely an operational, requirement.

3.1. Conceptualizing QA and QC in ESP Evaluation

The framework proposed here rests on a fundamental conceptual distinction, drawn from Donabedian (1988, 2005) and operationalized in educational quality scholarship by Harvey and Williams (2010), between QA and QC. Quality Assurance is a *prospective*, preventive, and design-oriented logic: it asks whether the structural and procedural conditions of a program have been intentionally configured to make intended outcomes probable. As for QC, it is a *retrospective*, diagnostic, and outcome-oriented logic: it asks whether predetermined thresholds of performance have been met and, if they have not, where corrective action is required.

Figure 2 conceptualizes the hierarchical relationship between QA and QC, positioning QA as a proactive, system-level governance layer and QC as a corrective, diagnostic mechanism. It illustrates how preventive design and alignment processes condition, rather than follow, evaluative outcomes. This figure also models ESP evaluation as a system, where contextual conditions (including needs analysis, constructive alignment, curriculum design, and stakeholder integration) feed into QA-based design structures, which in turn condition QC diagnostic processes (such as assessment, error detection, and gap analysis), culminating in observable performance outcomes.

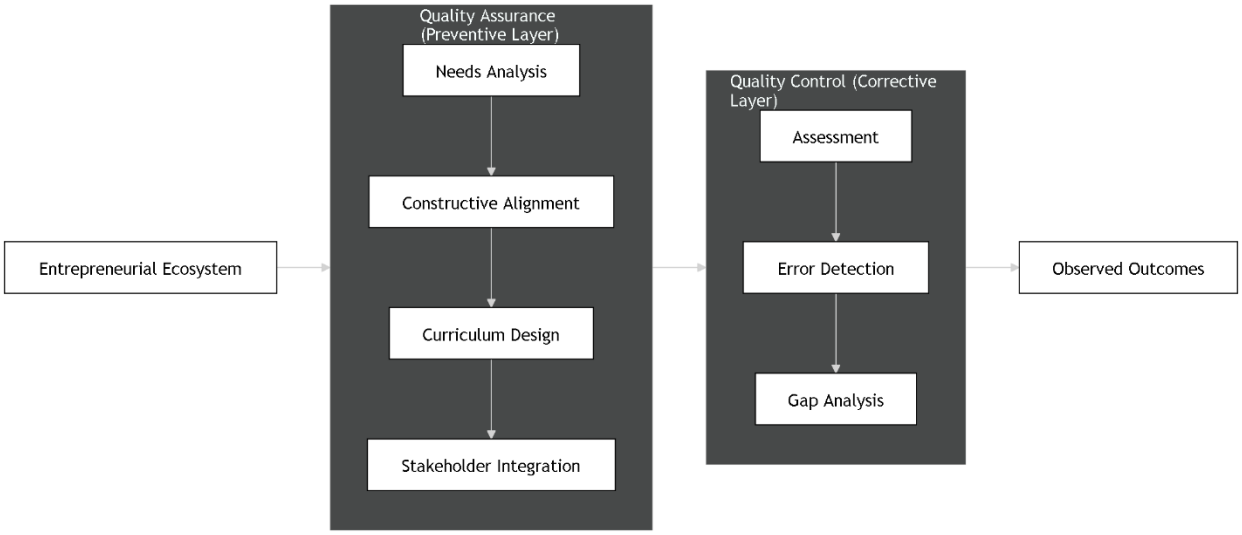


Figure 2. Layered QA-QC Governance Architecture in ESP Evaluation

Clearly, applied to ESP for entrepreneurship, the foregoing QA-QC logics answer distinct evaluative questions. A QA inquiry asks whether the curriculum has been designed around a defensible needs analysis, whether learning outcomes are constructively aligned with assessment tasks, whether instructional materials reflect authentic entrepreneurial genres, and whether teaching staff possess the disciplinary knowledge to mediate innovation-oriented discourse. A QC inquiry, by contrast, assesses whether learners produce pitch artefacts that meet stipulated rhetorical criteria, whether assessment results meet distributional expectations, and whether graduate performance in real-world entrepreneurial contexts corresponds to program claims. Neither inquiry is sufficient alone; a program, that is, may exhibit strong QA design yet weak QC performance, or vice versa, and diagnostic precision requires both. Table 1 further explains the distinction therein.

Dimension	Quality Assurance (QA)	Quality Control (QC)
Temporal Orientation	Prospective and preventive	Retrospective and corrective
Primary Question	Have the conditions for quality been designed?	Have predetermined quality thresholds been met?
Evidentiary Basis	Structural and procedural evidence (documents, design records)	Performance and outcome evidence (artefacts, scores, graduate outcomes)
Locus of Action	Curriculum design, staffing, resourcing, policy	Assessment, assessment, graduate tracking, remediation
Principal Risk Avoided	Systemic quality failure through design deficit	Individual-level failure through performance deficit
Theoretical Roots	Donabedian (1988, 2005); Biggs (1996); ISO 21001 (ISO, 2018)	Donabedian (1988); ISO 9001; traditional accreditation assessment
Representative Instruments	Curriculum maps, alignment matrices, policy inventories	Rubric scores, examination results, employer surveys
Limitation in Isolation	Risk of quality theatre without performance evidence	Risk of diagnostic blindness without structural evidence

Table 1. Comparative Characteristics of QA and QC Logics in ESP Evaluation

3.2. Why QC-Dominant Evaluation Fails in Entrepreneurial ESP

The persistence of QC-dominant evaluation in ESP program governance reflects both historical and institutional factors. Historically, language testing evolved within psychometric traditions that privilege measurable outcomes (Bachman & Palmer, 2010), while institutionally, accreditation and assessment cycles incentivize the production of outcome evidence over design evidence (Harvey & Williams, 2010). In conventional ESP contexts, this orientation has been partially adequate because the communicative

demands learners faced were relatively stable and could be captured by standardized performance indicators.

Entrepreneurial ESP ruptures this adequacy in four ways. First, the communicative genres of entrepreneurship – pitch decks, investor memos, crowd-funding narratives, and innovation storytelling – are genre-specific, multimodal, and audience-sensitive in ways generic assessment rubrics cannot capture (Spinuzzi et al., 2014; van Werven, Bouwmeester, & Cornelissen, 2019). Second, the communicative demands shift rapidly as the entrepreneurial ecosystem itself evolves, meaning that an assessment benchmark valid in one year may be obsolete the next (Hyland, 2022). Third, entrepreneurial communication is evaluated by real-world audiences (e.g., investors, customers, regulators) whose judgments do not reduce to rubric scores (Hu & Ma, 2025). Fourth, the consequences of communicative failure in entrepreneurial contexts are practical (e.g., loss of funding, failed partnerships) rather than purely pedagogical, elevating the stakes of evaluation beyond the institutional classroom.

Under these conditions, QC-only evaluation produces a characteristic failure mode: programs pass institutional assessments while graduates are unable to participate competently in real entrepreneurial discourse. It is then argued that a QA-integrated approach addresses this by inspecting whether the structural preconditions of competent entrepreneurial communication have been built into the program, not only whether individual learners demonstrate prescribed behaviors at the exit point.

3.3. The Dual-Logic Principle: Integration rather than Replacement

The framework proposed here is dual-logic in that it integrates, rather than replaces, QC with QA. This integration operates on three premises. First, QA and QC provide non-redundant evidence: QA evidence reveals *design quality*, while QC evidence reveals *performance quality*, and neither can be inferred from the other. Second, QA and QC are mutually informing: persistent QC failures should trigger QA review (is the design inadequate?), and weak QA configurations should heighten QC scrutiny (is performance evidence sufficiently probing?). Third, QA and QC together enable iterative improvement because they allow institutions to distinguish systemic design problems from localized performance problems, and to target interventions appropriately (Ab Wahid, 2019; Harvey & Williams, 2010).

Consistent with constructive alignment theory (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011), the framework treats program quality as emergent from the coherence of design and performance rather than as a property of either in isolation. This positions quality as a dynamic continuum rather than a binary attribute – a conceptualization that aligns with the iterative, improvement-oriented tenets of contemporary higher education governance (Kayyali & Khosla, 2021; Syahrullah, Yanti, & Adhiana, 2022).

Read together, the foregoing three source traditions resolve reciprocal blind spots rather than merely coexisting within the framework. Donabedian's (1988, 2005) structure-process-outcome triad supplies the diagnostic vocabulary but is silent about what makes structural quality educationally meaningful; Biggs's (1996, 2003) constructive alignment supplies the pedagogical criterion of coherence but is silent about the professional domain within which coherence is judged; EntreComp (Bacigalupo et al., 2016) supplies the professional criterion but is silent about the linguistic labour through which those competencies are enacted. The dual-logic proposal is original in the specific sense that it treats each tradition as complementing the silences of the other two: alignment supplies what Donabedian's structural talk leaves unspecified; EntreComp supplies the domain reference alignment presupposes; and ESP genre analysis (Bhatia, 2004; Swales, 2004) supplies the discursive materiality both frameworks under-theorise. The DLEEC that follows is the operational side of this three-way closure. Now, having established the framework's conceptual architecture, the next section instruments it as the DLEEC and specifies its operating rules.

4. The Dual-Logic ESP-Entrepreneurship Checklist

The suggested ESP-Entrepreneurial Dual-Logic Framework helps in building a checklist that comprises four dimensions; such helps better understand how QA and QC interact in practice. Section 4 proceeds

from the theoretical scaffolding of section 3 to an instrumented specification: subsections 4.1-4.5 elaborate each dimension, subsection 4.6 assembles the DLEEC matrix, and subsection 4.7 supplies scoring and interpretive rules.

4.1. Overview of the Four Dimensions

The suggested Dual-Logic ESP-Entrepreneurship Checklist (DLEEC) operationalizes the framework through four dimensions, each grounded in a distinct theoretical strand and operationalized through paired QA and QC indicators. The four dimensions are: (1) disciplinary communication competence, (2) innovation-oriented language use, (3) instructional training effectiveness, and (4) start-up ecosystem readiness. Together, they generate a multi-layered diagnostic profile that distinguishes design strengths from performance gaps. Table 2 presents an overview of the four dimensions and their theoretical grounds.

Dimension	Core Construct	Theoretical Grounds	Evaluative Focus
D1: Disciplinary Communication Competence	Genre-appropriate and register-sensitive use of English across entrepreneurial communicative events	Hutchinson & Waters (1987); Dudley-Evans & St John (1998); Basturkmen (2010); Hyland (2022)	Whether learners can produce and interpret the disciplinary genres of entrepreneurship in English
D2: Innovation-Oriented Language Use	Rhetorical and pragmatic competencies specific to innovation, pitching, and persuasion	Spinuzzi et al. (2014); van Werven, Bouwmeester, & Cornelissen (2019); Hu & Ma (2025); Majka (2024)	Whether learners can deploy English for innovation storytelling, pitch rhetoric, and stakeholder persuasion
D3: Instructional Training Effectiveness	Alignment between program design, delivery, and entrepreneurial communicative outcomes	Biggs (1996, 2003); Biggs & Tang (2011); Ali (2018); Hristov, Nakov, & Miočinović (2023)	Whether teaching, materials, and assessment are constructively aligned with D1–D2 outcomes
D4: Start-up Ecosystem Readiness	Capacity to participate competently in real entrepreneurial ecosystems post-program	Bacigalupo, Kampylis, Punie, & Van den Brande (2016); McCallum, Weicht, McMullan, & Price (2018); Joensuu-Salo, Viljamaa, & Varamäki (2022); Banha, Graça, Góis, & Banha (2025)	Whether graduates can translate program competencies into functional participation in start-up contexts

Table 2. The Four Dimensions of the DLEEC

4.2. Dimension 1: Disciplinary Communication Competence

Dimension 1 addresses whether learners can produce and interpret the disciplinary genres through which entrepreneurial activity is enacted in English. It draws centrally on Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) concept of target needs and Dudley-Evans and St John's (1998) articulation of ESP's variable characteristics, extended by Basturkmen's (2010) tripartite model of present, target, and rights analysis. The genres at issue include, inter alia, pitch decks, investor update memos, product-market fit narratives, customer discovery interviews, technical documentation for minimum viable products, and crowd-funding appeals (Spinuzzi et al., 2014; Hyland, 2022).

At the QA level, D1 inspects whether program design is grounded in a defensible, recent, and context-sensitive needs analysis; whether curriculum documents explicitly identify the entrepreneurial genres to be taught; and whether learning outcomes are specified using action verbs aligned with genre-specific performance. At the QC level, D1 inspects whether learners' produced artefacts meet genre-appropriate rhetorical and linguistic criteria, whether interrater reliability is maintained across assessors, and whether distributional patterns of performance indicate systemic rather than idiosyncratic weaknesses.

A crucial methodological implication of Dimension 1 concerns the *temporal validity* of needs analysis. Basturkmen (2010) and Flowerdew (2012) both emphasized that needs shift with professional practice, and in entrepreneurial contexts this shift is accelerated by rapid technological and market change. Consequently, the QA indicator for needs analysis should require not only the existence of a documented

analysis but also evidence of *periodic re-analysis* – a requirement consistent with the continuous improvement philosophy of ISO 21001:2018 (ISO, 2018). The QC counterpart, in turn, should include *distributional analysis* capable of detecting drift between stated needs and actual learner performance over time, thereby triggering QA review when drift becomes systematic.

4.3. Dimension 2: Innovation-Oriented Language Use

Dimension 2 extends beyond generic disciplinary competence to address the rhetorical and pragmatic demands specific to innovation-oriented communication. Drawing on van Werven, Bouwmeester, and Cornelissen (2019), this dimension recognizes that pitching a business idea to investors is a micro-rhetorical accomplishment in which narrative plausibility and resonance are co-constructed between entrepreneur and audience. Spinuzzi et al. (2014) showed that pitch decks are revised through dialogic interaction with mentors and stakeholders, while Hu and Ma (2025) demonstrated that multimodal communicative cues (voice, facial expression, bodily manner) materially influence investor judgments. Pushing on the same lines of thought, Majka (2024) synthesized practical guidance on elevator pitches and pitch decks, emphasizing that persuasive success depends on audience-specific calibration rather than on the application of universal rhetorical rules.

At the QA level, D2 inspects whether program design explicitly incorporates pitch rhetoric, innovation storytelling, and multimodal communication; whether instructional materials include authentic or high-fidelity pitch samples; and whether assessment tasks simulate ecologically valid communicative events (e.g., mock pitch competitions, investor Q&A simulations). With regard to QC, D2 inspects whether learner artefacts demonstrate genre-specific rhetorical moves (e.g., problem framing, solution articulation, market sizing, traction evidence, team credibility, financial projection, call to action), whether multimodal performance (such as verbal-visual integration, pacing, audience adaptation) meets defensible criteria, and whether assessment feedback supports iterative revision rather than merely terminal grading.

4.4. Dimension 3: Instructional Training Effectiveness

Dimension 3 directly operationalizes Biggs's (1996, 2003) constructive alignment principle by evaluating whether the program's stated outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks form a coherent system. Biggs and Tang (2011) argued that misalignment among these components is a primary source of quality failure; Ali (2018) and Hristov, Nakov, and Miočinović (2023) provided operational guidance for detecting and remedying misalignment in higher education programs.

As far as QA is concerned, D3 inspects whether intended learning outcomes are explicitly articulated and expressed through measurable verbs; whether teaching and learning activities are demonstrably linked to outcomes; whether assessment tasks operationalize the same constructs that outcomes claim to develop; and whether instructional staff have documented preparation in ESP pedagogy and entrepreneurship content. As regards QC, D3 inspects whether student evaluations of teaching indicate alignment perception, whether assessment results vary appropriately across outcomes (rather than collapsing into a single global judgment), and whether patterns of feedback-revision indicate that assessment is formative and summative.

Of note, Dimension 3 is particularly important in ESP-entrepreneurship programs because of the risk that well-intended curriculum innovations – such as the incorporation of pitch competitions or mentor-led workshops – remain pedagogically peripheral when they are not constructively aligned with assessment tasks and expected outcomes. Biggs and Tang (2011) described this condition as 'curriculum decoration,' where innovative activities appear in syllabi but do not shape the credentialing judgments that ultimately govern learner effort. Given the foregoing, the QA indicators for D3 are intended to surface decoration risks by demanding explicit alignment documentation, while the QC indicators are intended to detect residual decoration through fine-grained, outcome-level assessment analysis rather than aggregate grades.

4.5. Dimension 4: Start-up Ecosystem Readiness

Regarding Dimension 4, it takes evaluation beyond the program limit to ask whether graduates can translate program competencies into functional participation in real entrepreneurial ecosystems. EntreComp (Bacigalupo, Kampylis, Punie, & Van den Brande, 2016) provides the most influential framework for articulating the competencies at issue, organizing them into three areas (namely, Ideas and Opportunities, Resources, and Into Action) comprising fifteen competencies. On their part, Joensuu-Salo, Viljamaa, and Varamäki (2022) empirically connected these competencies to actual start-up behavior across seven European countries, and McCallum, Weicht, McMullan, and Price (2018) translated EntreComp into operational pedagogical guidance.

At the QA level, D4 inspects whether program design explicitly maps learning outcomes to entrepreneurial competencies (e.g., EntreComp domains); whether program partnerships with incubators, accelerators, and investor networks are formalized; and whether ecosystem-facing tasks (e.g., real pitches, customer discovery, ecosystem networking) are embedded in the curriculum. At the QC level, D4 inspects graduate outcomes at defined intervals post-program (participation in start-up activity, raised capital, employment in innovation-intensive firms, communicative self-efficacy), alongside feedback from ecosystem stakeholders (investors, mentors, accelerator staff).

Figure 3 operationalizes the evaluative framework by structuring ESP program quality across the four distinct but interrelated dimensions: instructional effectiveness, communication competence, innovation-oriented language use, and ecosystem readiness. It summarizes and highlights the multidimensional nature of evaluation and the need for a balanced alignment across domains.

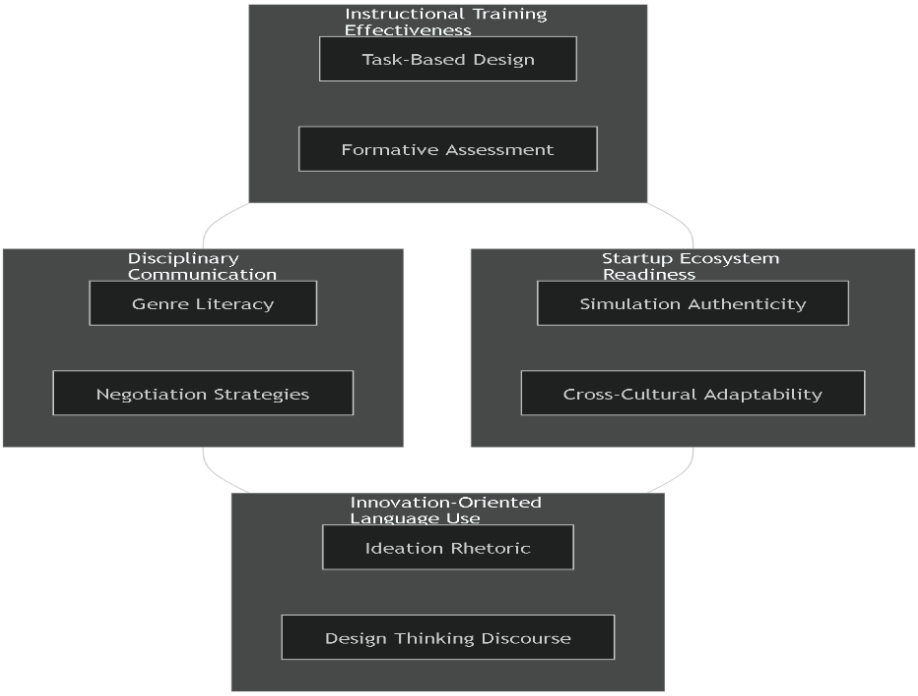


Figure 3. Four-Dimension Alignment Grid

4.6. The Integrated DLEEC Matrix

Table 3 presents the integrated DLEEC matrix, in which each of the four dimensions is operationalized through paired QA and QC indicators. The matrix is designed to be used as an evaluative instrument by ESP coordinators, program directors, and institutional quality officers, producing a multi-layered diagnostic profile rather than a single quality score. Each indicator is formulated to be observable and, where appropriate, scalable across institutional contexts.

Dimension	Sample QA Indicators (Preventive)	Sample QC Indicators (Corrective)
D1: Disciplinary Communication Competence	(a) Recent, documented needs analysis informing curriculum; (b) Explicit genre inventory in curriculum documents; (c) Outcome statements using action verbs aligned to entrepreneurial genres	(a) Artefact evaluation against genre-specific criteria; (b) Interrater reliability across assessors; (c) Distributional analysis of performance to detect systemic weaknesses
D2: Innovation-Oriented Language Use	(a) Explicit inclusion of pitch rhetoric and innovation storytelling in syllabus; (b) Authentic or high-fidelity pitch samples in materials; (c) Ecologically valid assessment tasks (mock pitches, investor Q&A)	(a) Learner artefacts evaluated against rhetorical moves (problem, solution, market, traction, team, financials, ask); (b) Multimodal performance criteria; (c) Feedback-revision cycles documented
D3: Instructional Training Effectiveness	(a) Constructively aligned outcomes, activities, and assessments; (b) Documented staff preparation in ESP pedagogy and entrepreneurship content; (c) Program-level alignment matrix reviewed annually	(a) Student evaluations of teaching indicating alignment perception; (b) Outcome-level assessment results (rather than collapsed global grades); (c) Evidence of formative feedback use
D4: Start-up Ecosystem Readiness	(a) Explicit mapping of outcomes to EntreComp (or equivalent) competencies; (b) Formalized partnerships with incubators/accelerators/investors; (c) Ecosystem-facing tasks embedded in curriculum	(a) Post-program graduate outcomes (start-up activity, capital raised, employment); (b) Ecosystem stakeholder feedback (investors, mentors); (c) Longitudinal tracking of communicative self-efficacy

Table 3. The Integrated DLEEC Matrix: QA and QC Indicators across Four Evaluative Dimensions

4.7. Scoring and Interpretation

The DLEEC is designed to produce a *diagnostic* profile rather than a composite score. For each indicator, evaluators record evidence and assign a provisional rating on a *four-level scale*: (1) Absent, (2) Emerging, (3) Established, and (4) Exemplary. Consistent with constructive alignment logic (Biggs & Tang, 2011), the interpretive focus is not the aggregate total but the pattern of strengths and weaknesses across QA and QC indicators within and across dimensions. A program displaying strong QA indicators but weak QC indicators requires attention to implementation fidelity; the reverse pattern requires attention to design coherence. Uniform weakness across both logics signals a need for substantive program redesign, while uniform strength indicates readiness for external benchmarking. The model in Figure 3 maps evaluative outcomes based on the interaction between QA design and QC sensitivity, producing four distinct states that reveal systemic strengths, hidden deficiencies, or structural failures.

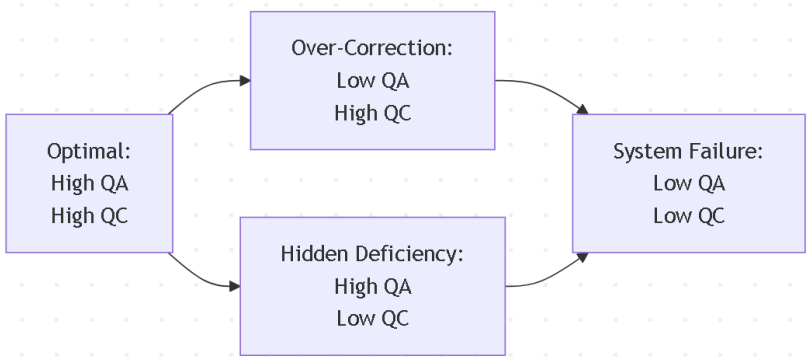


Figure 4. QA-QC Diagnostic Outcome Model

This diagnostic orientation aligns with contemporary quality scholarship (Harvey & Williams, 2010; Ab Wahid, 2019) that emphasizes the improvement orientation of quality work over compliance theatre.

The DLEEC supports iterative quality development rather than summative assessment, which is consistent with the ISO 21001:2018 philosophy of continuous improvement in educational organizations (ISO, 2018; Kayyali & Khosla, 2021).

5. Discussion: Implications, Applications, and Limitations

The discussion is organised analytically rather than descriptively: each subsection defends a specific claim – theoretical contribution (subsection 5.1), design implication (subsection 5.2), governance implication (subsection 5.3), contextual applicability (subsection 5.4), scoped limitation (subsection 5.5), and warranted research direction (subsection 5.6) – and articulates the evidentiary standard on which the claim is defensible.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

The DLEEC makes three principal theoretical contributions. First, it extends ESP evaluation scholarship by explicitly articulating the QA/QC distinction and demonstrating how it can be operationalized through a dimension-by-dimension indicator structure. Although QA/QC language is commonplace in higher education governance (Harvey & Williams, 2010; Ab Wahid, 2019), its translation into applied-linguistics evaluation has been under-theorized, and the present framework addresses that gap. Second, the framework integrates needs analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Basturkmen, 2010), constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011), and competency-based governance (Bacigalupo, Kampylis, Punie, & Van den Brande, 2016) into a unified evaluative architecture, showing that these previously parallel traditions can be made mutually informing. Third, by treating quality as a dynamic continuum rather than a binary judgment, the framework contributes to the broader movement in higher education quality scholarship toward improvement-oriented rather than accountability-dominant models of evaluation (Williams, 2016; Kayyali & Khosla, 2021).

5.2. Practical Implications for Program Design

For ESP program coordinators, the DLEEC offers a structured instrument for self-evaluation and iterative redesign. Rather than waiting for periodic external assessments to surface deficiencies, coordinators can use the QA indicators to inspect structural preconditions at the design stage, and the QC indicators to monitor performance during delivery. This dual orientation supports what Biggs and Tang (2011) describe as reflective practice at the program level – a sustained, evidence-informed engagement with the alignment between intentions and outcomes. Figure 5 represents program quality as a continuous improvement cycle, where QC operates as embedded checkpoints within an ongoing QA-driven process rather than as terminal evaluation stages.

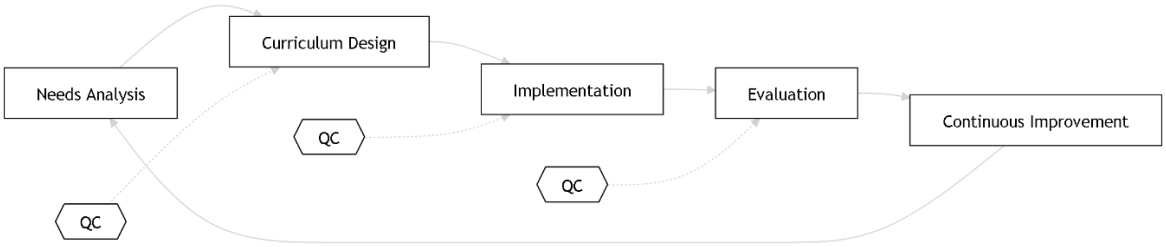


Figure 5. Cyclical QA System with QC Intervention Points

For institutional quality officers, the DLEEC provides a domain-specific extension of institution-level QA systems. Where institutional systems tend to operate at the level of generic indicators (student satisfaction, progression rates, graduate employment), the DLEEC supplies the disciplinary specificity necessary to detect ESP-entrepreneurship-specific risks – such as genre-inappropriate assessment or

ecosystem disconnection – that generic indicators cannot surface. This aligns the program-level instrument with ISO 21001:2018's emphasis on educational organization-specific quality management (ISO, 2018).

For entrepreneurship program directors, the DLEEC clarifies the communicative dimensions of entrepreneurial competence and specifies how language education contributes to EntreComp competencies (Bacigalupo, Kampylis, Punie, & Van den Brande, 2016; Joensuu-Salo, Viljamaa, & Varamäki, 2022). This can support more productive integration between language faculties and business or innovation schools, which historically have operated in disciplinary isolation.

5.3. Implications for Institutional Quality Governance

Beyond program-level applications, the DLEEC carries implications for how institutional quality governance is designed. Three implications deserve emphasis. First, institutions should invest in QA infrastructure – including curriculum mapping tools, alignment matrices, and stakeholder feedback systems – rather than relying primarily on QC assessments to detect quality failures after the fact. Second, accreditation and assessment regimes should request evidence of both *design* quality (QA) and *performance* quality (QC), rather than privileging one over the other. Third, governance bodies should support the development of discipline-specific evaluative instruments like the DLEEC for domains where generic indicators are demonstrably insufficient (Ab Wahid, 2019; Syahrullah, Yanti, & Adhiana, 2022).

A further governance implication concerns the relationship between institutional QA systems and national or supranational regulatory frameworks. The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ENQA, 2015) and parallel instruments in other regions typically specify institution-level requirements without prescribing disciplinary-specific evaluative instruments. The DLEEC can therefore be positioned as a program-level instrument that operationalizes institution-level QA commitments for ESP-entrepreneurship programs, supplying the disciplinary detail that regulatory frameworks deliberately leave to institutions. In jurisdictions where ESP provision sits at the interface of language faculties and business or engineering schools, this program-level specificity is particularly valuable, because institution-level indicators rarely resolve the coordination problems that interdisciplinary provision typically presents (Kayyali & Khosla, 2021; Myyryläinen, 2022).

5.4. Applicability across Institutional Contexts

While the DLEEC is conceptualized as a generalizable framework, its application is likely to vary with institutional context. In contexts where ESP provision is well-established and entrepreneurial ecosystems are mature (e.g., parts of Western Europe and East Asia), the framework is most useful as an instrument for refinement and benchmarking. In emerging contexts – including much of North Africa, where AI and innovation-oriented higher education are expanding rapidly – the framework is most useful as a scaffold for systematic program design in the absence of established evaluative traditions. This contextual sensitivity is consistent with the learning-centered tenets of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and the situated orientation of contemporary ESP scholarship (Paltridge & Starfield, 2023). The Algerian case is instructive on this point. Saaid's (2020, 2025) work on Quality Circles in ESP demonstrates that participatory quality mechanisms can be enacted productively in a context where formal QA infrastructure is still consolidating; the DLEEC extends this line of practice by offering a dimension-by-dimension instrument through which such initiatives can be recorded, compared, and iteratively refined.

5.5. Limitations

Notwithstanding the importance of the present framework, four limitations must be acknowledged. First, the framework is conceptual; its indicators have not been empirically validated for reliability, validity, or usability, and such validation is intended to be a necessary next step by the author or by fellow researchers. Second, while the four dimensions are theoretically justified, alternative dimensional configurations may be warranted in specific institutional or disciplinary contexts. Third, the framework presumes institutional

capacity for systematic evaluation – documentation practices, stakeholder access, data systems – that may not be uniformly available, particularly in under-resourced contexts. Fourth, the framework does not directly address assessment of individual learners, which remains governed by separate language-testing traditions (Bachman & Palmer, 2010); rather, it addresses evaluation at the program level.

5.6. Directions for Future Research

Five research directions arise from the present framework. First, empirical validation studies should test the DLEEC across institutional contexts, examining its reliability, sensitivity, and actionability. Second, comparative studies can investigate how QA and QC indicators co-vary across programs and which configurations are associated with stronger graduate outcomes. Third, longitudinal studies can track whether DLEEC-informed iterative redesign produces measurable improvements in program quality over time. Fourth, discipline-specific adaptations can extend the framework to neighboring domains such as ESP for medicine, engineering, or legal practice, testing whether the four-dimensional structure generalizes or requires modification. Last but not least, digital-era extensions can examine how AI-mediated tools intersect with QA and QC indicators, given that generative AI is reshaping both the production and evaluation of entrepreneurial discourse (Majka, 2024; Hu & Ma, 2025).

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the dominant QC-oriented evaluative culture in ESP for entrepreneurship is structurally insufficient to govern program quality under contemporary communicative demands. Drawing on Donabedian's (1988, 2005) foundational distinction between structure, process, and outcome, and adapting it to higher education through Harvey and Williams (2010) and ISO 21001:2018, the paper has developed the Dual-Logic ESP-Entrepreneurship Checklist (DLEEC) – a four-dimensional evaluative instrument that integrates preventive QA standards with corrective QC measures across disciplinary communication competence, innovation-oriented language use, instructional training effectiveness, and start-up ecosystem readiness.

The framework's central contribution is conceptual: it repositions evaluation from a binary pass-or-fail judgment toward a diagnostic continuum that supports iterative improvement. Its practical value lies in the explicit pairing of QA and QC indicators at the dimension level, which enables program designers and institutional quality officers to distinguish systemic design problems from localized performance problems and to target interventions accordingly. The framework is grounded in established scholarship across needs analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Basturkmen, 2010), constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011), quality governance (Donabedian, 1988, 2005; Harvey & Williams, 2010; ISO, 2018), and entrepreneurship competence (Bacigalupo, Kampylis, Punie, & Van den Brande, 2016; Joensuu-Salo, Viljamaa, & Varamäki, 2022), positioning it as a theoretically defensible and practically actionable instrument.

As ESP continues to evolve in response to innovation-driven professional environments, the integration of QA and QC logics through instruments like the DLEEC is likely to become not only useful but necessary. Future empirical validation across diverse institutional and cultural contexts will determine the framework's generalizability and actionability, but its conceptual architecture is offered here as a contribution to the ongoing project of aligning ESP evaluation with the communicative realities of contemporary entrepreneurship.

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