



DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GENERAL ENGLISH AND ESP
TEACHING

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ABSTRACT. This article examines the principal differences between General English and English for Specific Purposes in modern language teaching. General English is traditionally designed to develop broad communicative competence and overall language proficiency through grammar, vocabulary, speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities applicable to everyday communication. English for Specific Purposes, by contrast, is structured according to clearly defined academic, occupational, or professional needs and therefore focuses on target-oriented language use within specific discourse communities. The study analyzes differences in instructional objectives, curriculum design, lexical selection, methodological principles, teaching materials, teacher competence, and assessment systems. Particular attention is given to the growing role of ESP in higher education where students increasingly require language skills directly connected with future professional activities. Comparative analysis demonstrates that General English provides a linguistic foundation, whereas ESP increases practical relevance and learner motivation by directly linking language instruction with specialized communicative tasks. The findings suggest that effective differentiation between these two instructional models requires systematic needs analysis, authentic professional materials, and flexible curriculum design adapted to specific learner profiles.



Keywords: General English, English for Specific Purposes, ESP methodology, language curriculum, needs analysis, communicative competence, vocational English, academic English.

English language teaching today performs multiple educational functions because English has become a global medium not only for communication but also for science, business, medicine, engineering, and international cooperation. Under these conditions, language education increasingly differentiates between broad communicative instruction and professionally oriented instruction. This distinction has produced two major directions in language pedagogy: General English and English for Specific Purposes.

General English remains the most widespread model in schools, universities, and language centers. Its primary objective is to develop general language competence that enables learners to function in everyday communicative situations. Learners study grammar structures, common vocabulary, pronunciation, reading strategies, and speaking patterns that are not limited to any professional field.

English for Specific Purposes emerged as a pedagogical response to specialized communicative demands. Unlike General English, ESP is not organized around language as an isolated system but around the real communicative tasks learners must perform in their academic or professional lives. Medical students require clinical terminology, engineers need technical descriptions, economists need financial discourse, and lawyers must understand legal terminology.

The growing importance of ESP is directly connected with globalization and labor market transformation. Modern students increasingly expect language learning to support concrete academic and professional goals. In higher education institutions of Uzbekistan, this tendency is becoming

more visible because university programs increasingly integrate professional English into discipline-based curricula.

The relevance of this study lies in clarifying methodological boundaries between these two teaching models and identifying why they require different instructional strategies.

The theoretical basis of ESP teaching has been developed through the work of Hutchinson and Waters, Robinson, Basturkmen, Dudley-Evans, and Hyland. Hutchinson and Waters emphasize that ESP should be understood as an approach in which all teaching decisions are determined by learners' reasons for studying English. This principle distinguishes ESP from General English because course planning begins not with general grammar progression but with analysis of target communicative situations.

Robinson defines ESP as instruction based on needs analysis, where language content is selected according to specific professional or academic objectives. This means that vocabulary, grammar, texts, and tasks are determined by future communicative demands rather than by textbook sequence.

General English follows a broader pedagogical logic. Grammar progression usually determines syllabus design, beginning with simple structures and gradually moving toward more complex forms. Vocabulary themes often include everyday topics such as travel, family, hobbies, shopping, education, and social interaction.

Recent pedagogical studies published in international educational research confirm that ESP requires stronger integration between language teaching and disciplinary knowledge. Basturkmen explains that ESP teaching becomes effective only when authentic discourse from the target field is incorporated into classroom instruction.

The methodology of this article is based on comparative qualitative analysis of contemporary pedagogical literature and recent educational

practice. Sources from 2020–2025 were examined to identify how modern educational systems differentiate General English and ESP. Comparative criteria included instructional goals, lexical organization, grammar priorities, material selection, teacher roles, learner motivation, and assessment principles.

The analysis demonstrates that the first major difference between General English and ESP lies in instructional objectives. General English seeks to build broad communicative competence that can function across multiple situations without immediate specialization. Learners study language for general interaction, examination preparation, travel, or social communication.

ESP establishes instructional objectives according to clearly defined target situations. Students study English because they must later perform professional tasks through language. This creates immediate practical orientation in the learning process.

A second important difference concerns lexical organization. General English introduces vocabulary with universal communicative frequency. Topics such as family, weather, transport, food, hobbies, and education dominate lexical presentation because they are widely applicable.

ESP vocabulary is determined by disciplinary relevance. In medical English, learners study terms such as diagnosis, symptoms, treatment, prescription, and patient history. In engineering English, vocabulary includes technical concepts such as circuit, voltage, resistance, load, and mechanical structure. Business English emphasizes financial and managerial terminology including assets, liabilities, investment, contract, and negotiation.

Grammar also functions differently in the two models. General English usually follows traditional structural sequence beginning with present tense forms and gradually expanding toward conditionals, passive constructions, and reported speech.

ESP selects grammar according to communicative function. Technical writing often requires passive constructions because processes must be described objectively. Business communication relies heavily on modal politeness and conditional forms because negotiation requires diplomatic expression.

Teaching materials reveal another major distinction. General English commonly uses international textbooks designed for broad audiences. These materials prioritize communicative balance and predictable progression.

ESP relies heavily on authentic professional texts such as reports, manuals, case studies, scientific abstracts, technical instructions, contracts, and discipline-specific dialogues. This authenticity increases relevance and learner engagement because students immediately recognize practical value.

Assessment systems also differ substantially. General English usually evaluates broad proficiency through grammar tests, essays, listening tasks, and oral interviews. ESP assessment focuses on target task performance. Learners may write technical reports, analyze professional cases, interpret specialized texts, or perform role-based professional communication.

The central pedagogical difference between General English and ESP is that General English teaches language as a broad competence, whereas ESP teaches language as an instrument for professional performance. This distinction affects every stage of instructional planning.

In General English, the teacher can rely on universal progression because learners share broad communicative goals. In ESP, however, learner needs vary significantly even when general proficiency levels are similar. A B1 medical student and a B1 engineering student require entirely different discourse preparation.

This makes needs analysis the core mechanism of ESP curriculum design. Before teaching begins, instructors must identify what learners need to

read, write, hear, and say in future professional contexts. Without such analysis, ESP loses its defining methodological advantage.

Teacher competence also becomes more complex in ESP. General English teachers mainly require strong linguistic and pedagogical knowledge. ESP teachers must additionally understand discourse conventions of specialized fields. This does not mean full professional mastery of medicine, law, or engineering, but it does require familiarity with terminology, genres, and communicative expectations.

In many universities this challenge remains unresolved because language instructors often lack systematic interdisciplinary support. Nevertheless, successful ESP programs increasingly rely on collaboration between language teachers and subject specialists.

In Uzbekistan, this issue is particularly relevant because ESP expansion is occurring rapidly in higher education institutions. Universities increasingly introduce technical English, legal English, and business English, yet methodological resources remain uneven.

Another important observation concerns learner motivation. General English learners often experience fluctuating motivation because communicative goals remain abstract. ESP learners usually demonstrate stronger engagement because language content directly connects with future professional success.

This motivational advantage explains why ESP often produces faster visible progress despite narrower content scope.

The comparative analysis confirms that General English and English for Specific Purposes represent two distinct but complementary language teaching models. General English remains indispensable because it establishes fundamental communicative competence necessary for all further specialization.

ESP builds on this foundation by directing language learning toward clearly defined academic or occupational tasks. Its effectiveness depends on needs analysis, authentic materials, flexible methodology, and context-sensitive assessment.

Educational institutions should therefore avoid treating ESP as merely vocabulary expansion within General English. ESP requires independent curriculum logic and specific methodological preparation.

For higher education systems, especially in rapidly developing academic environments, stronger integration of ESP can significantly improve graduate competitiveness and practical communicative readiness.

Future development should focus on localized ESP materials, interdisciplinary teacher training, and stronger connection between language instruction and labor market realities.

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