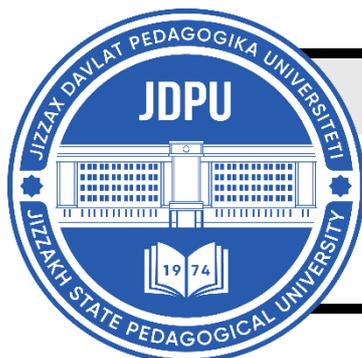


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METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>IMPROVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR FIRST-
YEAR FOOTBALL STUDENTS THROUGH ESP AND COMPETENCY-BASED
APPROACH: NEEDS ANALYSIS IN UZBEKISTAN**Durdona Najmiddinova***1st-year Doctoral Student,**Research Center for the Development of Higher Education**Email: durdonann@gmail.com**Tashkent, Uzbekistan*

ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: ESP, competency-based approach, needs analysis, football students, English language teaching, curriculum design, higher education.

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Abstract: This study investigates the English language learning needs of first-year football major students from three universities in Uzbekistan, with the goal of informing the development of an effective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) syllabus tailored to football education. As football and the global sports industry continue to expand, students are increasingly required to use English for professional communication, understanding sport-specific terminology, and participating in team and managerial activities. However, current English instruction in Uzbek universities remains largely general and does not fully address the communicative and professional needs of football students.

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of students' needs, the study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, using a structured questionnaire alongside interviews with instructors. The results indicate that students consider speaking and professional terminology as the most important skills and prefer classroom activities such as football terminology exercises and role-plays. They also show strong interest in ESP and competency-based courses that connect language learning with professional practice.

The study concludes that designing an ESP syllabus for football students, integrating task-based, interactive, and authentic materials, is essential to enhance language competence and prepare students for effective participation in the professional sports environment.

Introduction. English proficiency has become increasingly essential for students in higher education, particularly those pursuing studies in sports disciplines such as football. In the context of the global sports industry, professionals are expected to communicate effectively in English for international collaboration, comprehension of specialized terminology, and participation in team and managerial activities. However, English instruction in Uzbek universities remains largely general and insufficiently aligned with the professional and communicative needs of students in football and other sports-related fields.

The strategic importance of foreign language education in Uzbekistan is emphasized in the presidential decree PQ-5117, which identifies the promotion and improvement of foreign language learning as a national priority [1]. The decree highlights the need to enhance the quality of language instruction, expand scientific research in language education, and increase public engagement in learning foreign languages. This legal framework underlines the necessity of developing English programs that not only strengthen general language skills but also meet the specific professional requirements of students.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) provides a pedagogical solution by focusing language instruction on professional contexts and practical requirements. Previous research has shown that ESP programs, especially when combined with competency-based approaches, can improve both language proficiency and professional competence, equipping students for real-world tasks in their respective fields. Despite its relevance, there is limited research addressing the English language needs of football students in Uzbekistan, revealing a gap between current language abilities and the competencies required for professional practice in sports.

The present study aims to investigate the English language learning needs of first-year football students from three universities in Uzbekistan: Uzbekistan State University of Physical Education and Sport, Gulistan State University, and Namangan State University. The findings are intended to inform the design of an ESP syllabus tailored to football students, integrating task-based, interactive, and authentic materials while emphasizing professional terminology and communicative competence.

Materials and Methods. Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the English language learning needs of first-year football students from three universities in Uzbekistan: Uzbekistan State University of Physical Education and Sport, Gulistan State University, and Namangan State University. The design integrates quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to enhance the validity of results and allow for a well-rounded interpretation of findings.

The methodological framework of this study was grounded in Basturkmen's (2010) model of needs analysis in *Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes*, which emphasizes collecting data from multiple sources to ensure a triangulated, context-specific understanding of learners' needs. This model draws on the established traditions of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) by addressing learners' present, target, and learning-centred needs, but extends them through practical data triangulation and integration [2].

Participants

The study involved 170 first-year football students aged 17–23 years from the three universities mentioned above. Their English proficiency ranged from A1 to B1 according to self-assessment. Additionally, 10 instructors participated in semi-structured interviews, including 8 English language teachers and 2 football theory lecturers, to provide both linguistic and disciplinary perspectives relevant to ESP course design.

Data collection instruments

To obtain a comprehensive and contextually accurate understanding of students' English language learning needs, four complementary instruments were used: a questionnaire, instructor interviews, classroom observation, and institutional document review. These tools were designed following Basturkmen's (2010) multi-source model of ESP needs analysis, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative procedures to capture learners' present, target, and learning-centred needs [3].

1. Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was developed and administered to first-year football students using Google Forms. Its design was informed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Basturkmen (2010), ensuring coverage of both linguistic and professional aspects of ESP. The questionnaire included closed- and open-ended questions exploring students' English proficiency, their perceptions of important language skills, preferred classroom activities, and attitudes toward ESP and competency-based learning. Responses provided quantitative data for statistical analysis and qualitative comments reflecting students' professional motivations.

2. Instructor Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten instructors, including eight English language teachers and two football theory lecturers. These interviews provided expert insights into students' learning challenges, communication needs, and instructional strategies relevant to football contexts. Data were analyzed thematically to identify common perceptions and pedagogical recommendations that could guide ESP syllabus design.

3. Classroom Observation

English lessons for football majors were systematically observed to document teaching methods, interaction patterns, and levels of student engagement. The focus was on how football-related terminology, communicative tasks, and task-based learning techniques were integrated into classroom practice. Observations offered contextual evidence about the practical alignment of instruction with ESP principles and revealed areas requiring improvement.

4. Institutional Document Review

A review of institutional and administrative documents was conducted to examine the current organization of English teaching within sports faculties. In line with Basturkmen (2010), this analysis evaluated how well existing programs reflect ESP and competency-based principles.

The review covered curriculum-level documents (e.g., subject program, course framework, and joint institutional regulations) and course-level documents (lesson plans and syllabi). Additionally, HEMIS records and attendance monitoring reports were analyzed to assess course implementation and student participation.

The findings showed that while communicative competence is emphasized in official documents, explicit connections to football-related professional skills are limited. These insights underscored the need for a revised ESP syllabus integrating football-specific terminology, authentic materials, and interactive, task-based instruction.

Results and Discussion. 1. Students' English proficiency levels

Out of 170 first-year football students, the majority demonstrated pre-intermediate (A2–B1) levels of English proficiency. According to the self-assessment data, 44.1% (n = 75) of students placed themselves at A2, 23.5% (n = 40) at B1, while 26.5% (n = 45) were uncertain of their exact level. Only a very small percentage reported lower competence, confirming that most learners have moved beyond the beginner stage toward a basic communicative level.

These results indicate that students can handle simple and routine professional exchanges, such as introducing themselves, describing a football match, or understanding short

tactical instructions, yet they still experience difficulty expressing complex ideas or understanding authentic materials. This aligns with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which defines A2–B1 users as capable of understanding familiar topics but still needing support in extended communication (Council of Europe, 2020) [4].

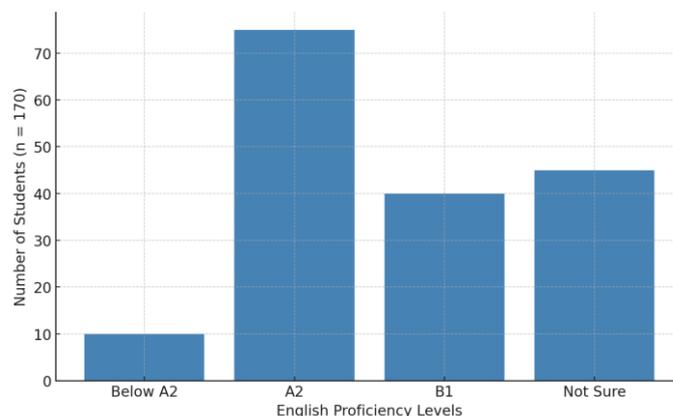


Figure 1. Students’ English proficiency levels

2. Priorities in language skills development

Students rated speaking and professional terminology as the most important skills for their studies and future careers, followed by listening and vocabulary development. Skills such as reading, writing, and grammar were viewed as moderately important. This trend suggests that students prioritize communicative competence and situational fluency, especially for tasks like tactical meetings, interviews, and press conferences. Similar findings have been reported in recent ESP studies in sports education, where speaking remains the most valued skill (Romanowski, 2023) [5].

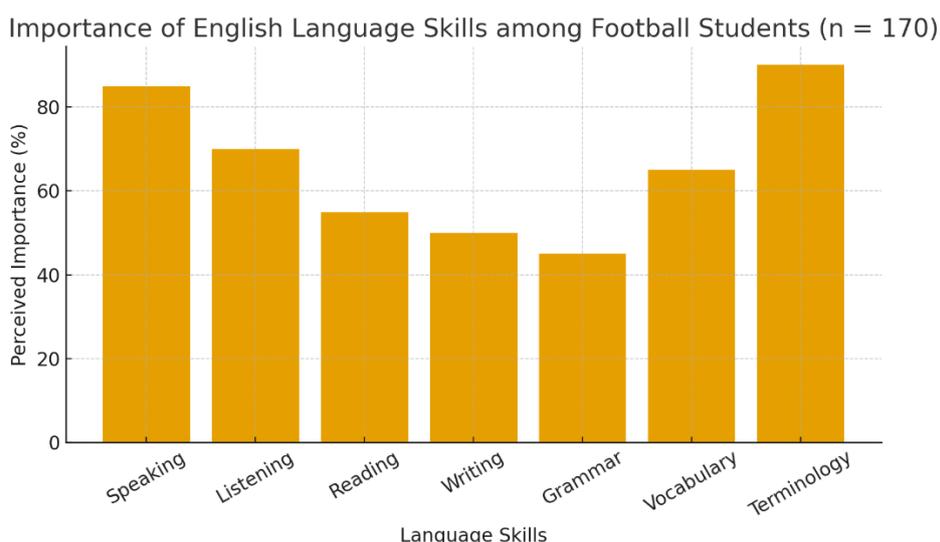


Figure 2. Importance of English skills

3. Perceived difficulties

When asked about difficulties in learning English, the majority cited pronunciation, grammar usage, and use of professional vocabulary as the most challenging areas. Many also expressed low confidence during speaking tasks. Data from instructor interviews confirmed these difficulties: teachers noted that limited exposure to authentic football materials and insufficient speaking practice were key obstacles. Observation data showed that classes often relied on general EFL materials, lacking content relevant to sports communication.

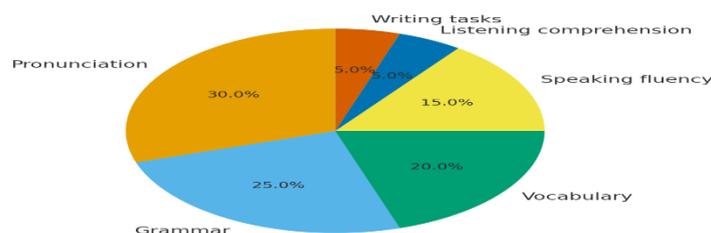


Figure 3. Perceived difficulties in learning English

4. Relevance of English in Professional Contexts

Students identified several contexts in which English was essential for their professional development. The majority—61.8% (n = 105)—reported that English was most needed for understanding football rules and terminology, while 55.9% (n = 95) mentioned communication with foreign specialists and reading professional materials. Only a small proportion linked English to academic research or email correspondence, indicating that students primarily associate English with oral and practical communication in their future careers.

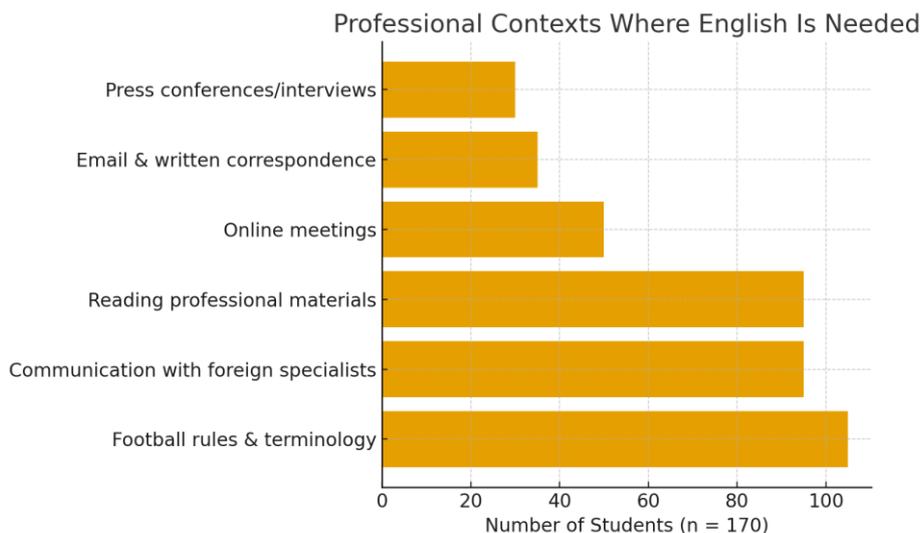


Figure 4. Professional contexts where English Is needed

5. Preferred Learning Activities

In terms of classroom activities, students showed a strong preference for terminology-based exercises (47.1%, $n = 80$) and role-plays (14.7%, $n = 25$) simulating real football communication scenarios. 17.6% ($n = 30$) preferred written assignments (emails, reports), while smaller groups favored authentic videos and articles. These responses confirm students' inclination toward task-based and interactive learning methods. Instructors observed that engagement increased when lessons involved football-related discussions, interviews, or press-conference simulations — confirming the need for an A2-level ESP coursebook built around communicative, sport-specific activities.

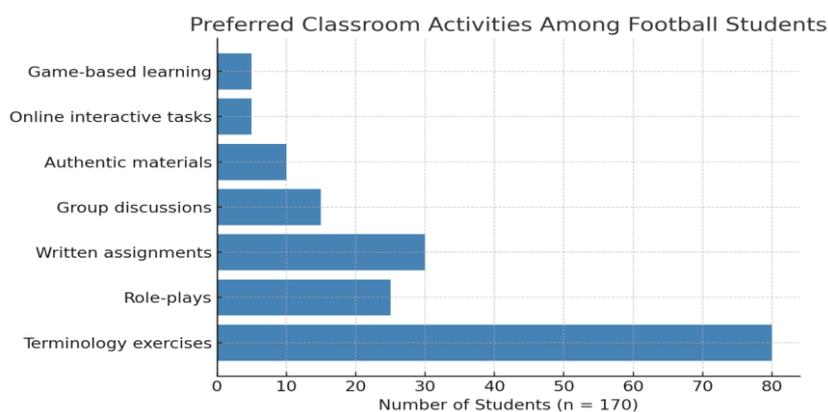


Figure 5. Preferred learning activities

6. Attitudes toward ESP and Competency-Based Learning

A large majority—68.8% ($n = 117$)—expressed interest in attending ESP and competency-based English courses, while 18.8% ($n = 32$) were undecided, and 12.5% ($n = 21$) declined. This positive attitude suggests that students are open to professionally oriented English instruction that links directly to their football studies. Over half of the respondents (51.5%) also demonstrated awareness of formal and informal language use, reflecting an emerging intercultural and pragmatic awareness vital for professional communication.

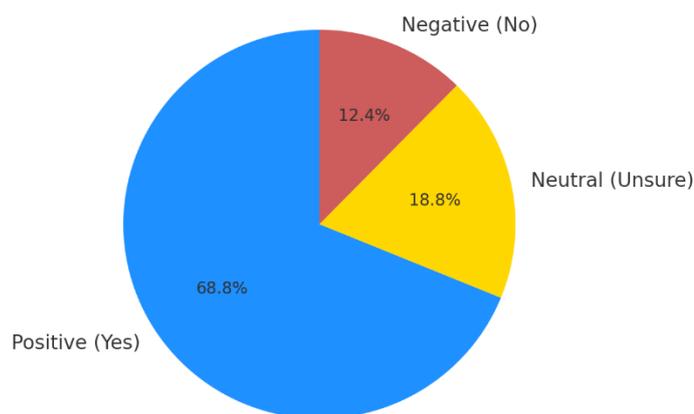


Figure 6. Students' Attitudes Toward the ESP-Based Approach

7. Synthesis of Findings

Across all instruments, the results reveal that English language instruction in sports faculties remains too general and does not adequately address the communicative and professional needs of football students. Both learners and instructors emphasized the importance of football-specific content, interactive methods, and authentic, task-based materials. These findings directly informed the design of an A2-level ESP coursebook for football students, integrating professional terminology, realistic communication tasks, and a competency-based framework consistent with Basturkmen's (2010) model.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion. This study analyzed the English language learning needs of first-year football students from three Uzbek universities and highlighted the urgent need for a professionally oriented ESP curriculum based on the competency-based approach. The results revealed that most students are at the A2–B1 (pre-intermediate) level, possessing basic communicative ability but lacking sport-related vocabulary and functional fluency. Students demonstrated strong motivation to improve their speaking and listening skills, especially within real football contexts such as press conferences, tactical discussions, and team interactions.

The findings show that current English instruction remains too general and disconnected from the students' professional requirements. The integration of football-specific terminology, authentic materials, and interactive classroom activities can help learners bridge the gap between linguistic knowledge and professional communication skills. Consequently, an

ESP curriculum designed for football majors should not only teach language structures but also develop communicative competence through task-based and contextualized learning consistent with the competency-based approach.

This research thus contributes to improving the methodology of teaching English in sports education by providing an empirically grounded model for curriculum innovation in Uzbekistan's higher education system.

Recommendations

ESP Curriculum Development

A specialized A2–B1 ESP curriculum should be implemented for football students. It should focus on functional communication (e.g., giving instructions, describing tactics, conducting interviews) and integrate football-related texts, dialogues, and tasks.

Competency-Based Objectives

Curriculum outcomes should emphasize what learners can do with English in professional situations—for example, communicating during matches, explaining rules, or understanding coach briefings. This ensures that language learning directly supports future job performance.

Authentic and Visual Resources

Incorporate simplified football commentaries, match recordings, and tactical diagrams to strengthen listening and vocabulary comprehension. Visual and interactive materials are particularly effective for pre-intermediate learners.

Teacher Collaboration and Professional Training

English language instructors and football theory teachers should collaborate to design lessons that combine linguistic and disciplinary goals. Training sessions should help teachers apply ESP and competency-based methods more confidently.

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