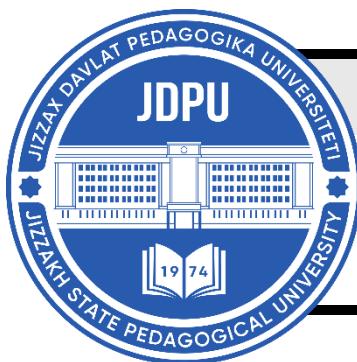


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TOWARDS AN ESP FRAMEWORK FOR SPORTS MANAGEMENT EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN: A NEEDS ANALYSIS APPROACH

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: The study investigates the English language needs of sports management students in Uzbekistan to establish a foundation for designing an effective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) framework. As the global sports industry continues to expand, professionals are increasingly required to communicate fluently in English for international collaboration, event organization, and cross-cultural management. However, current English instruction in Uzbek universities remains largely general and insufficiently aligned with the communicative and professional requirements of sports management. A mixed-methods approach was applied, combining survey, classroom observation, and document analysis to ensure data triangulation. The results revealed that most students recognize English as essential for their future careers, especially for negotiation, oral communication, and professional correspondence. The study concludes that developing a specialized ESP course integrating communicative and content-based learning is vital to bridge the gap between linguistic knowledge and professional practice. The proposed framework can enhance students' professional competence and prepare them for

Introduction. In today's globalized world, English has become the dominant medium of communication in education, business, and sports. Within the field of sports management, the ability to use English effectively is essential for interacting with international partners, managing events, promoting athletes, and negotiating sponsorships. Consequently, English language proficiency has emerged as a key component of professional competence for future sports managers.

In Uzbekistan, the sports industry has been rapidly developing as part of the country's integration into the international sporting community. Despite these positive changes, English language teaching at universities often focuses on General English, with limited attention to the specific communicative and professional needs of sports management students. As a result, many graduates face difficulties when communicating in professional contexts such as conferences, tournaments, and cross-border collaborations. To address these gaps, needs analysis serves as a crucial step in developing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses tailored to learners' professional requirements. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Flowerdew (2012), needs analysis helps identify what learners must know, how they prefer to learn, and the contexts in which they will use English[3, 8]. In recent years, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has further strengthened ESP pedagogy by integrating subject knowledge and language learning.

The present study aims to analyze the English language needs of sports management students in Uzbekistan using a triangulated approach that combines survey, observation, and document analysis. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of a practical ESP framework that reflects the communicative, cognitive, and professional needs of learners while aligning with the goals of modern sports education.

Literature review. Over the past decade, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has emerged as one of the most important fields in applied linguistics and language instruction. ESP was developed in response to learners' needs to use English in specific academic or professional contexts rather than for everyday communication [3]. ESP focuses on adjusting course materials, techniques, and content to the unique goals, aptitudes, and fields of study of the students. English instruction is made relevant, goal-oriented, and in line with real-world professional contexts [7]. Dudley-Evans & John (1998) pointed out that the ESP varies from General English due to its content selection, applied approaches, and goals[1]. They suggest that the foundation of ESP training should be a thorough examination of the target situations—what

the learners will need to do with English in their future careers—and the learning situations—how they prefer to learn. As a result, ESP curriculum design is built around a methodical needs analysis, which helps instructors and course designers identify suitable language skills, assignments, and evaluation techniques. There are three dimensions of needs analysis: target needs, learning needs, and present situation needs [8]. Course developers can determine the communicative needs as the target requirements of a specific professional field, learning needs reveal learners' preferences and difficulties during the learning process, while the present situation needs identify learners' current language proficiency [4]. This framework is one of the widespread approaches in ESP research and has proven effective in designing context-sensitive courses.

There exist previous studies on identifying learners' needs in the physical education and sports field. Researchers such as Pranoto & Suprayogi (2020), Tejera & Merino (2018) discuss that ESP courses in fields like sports science, coaching, and sport management must focus on the implementation of authentic communication tasks—such as interviews, presentations, and report writing—that mirror actual workplace situations [11–13]. Further research shows that professionals mostly struggle with communicating in the target language. Furthermore, in the context of Uzbekistan, research on ESP needs analysis for sports management students remains scarce. Most English language programs continue to focus on general linguistic competence rather than professional language use, indicating a significant gap in the current curriculum.

To enhance the validity and reliability of ESP research, many scholars recommend the use of triangulation in needs analysis. Woodrow (2017) points out, triangulation refers to the combination of multiple data sources, methods, or perspectives to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. In the context of needs analysis, triangulation helps to balance the limitations of any single method by cross-verifying data obtained from different instruments such as surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Flowerdew (2012) emphasizes that triangulated approaches produce richer and more accurate insights into learners' linguistic and professional needs. For instance, while surveys provide quantitative data on learners' perceived needs, observations reveal their actual language use and classroom behavior, and document analysis uncovers institutional and curricular gaps. Combining these methods allows researchers to align learners' subjective perceptions with objective evidence from teaching practice and curriculum content [9].

In the present study, triangulation was achieved by integrating three complementary methods—questionnaire surveys, classroom observations, and document analyses—to ensure that the findings are both valid and contextually grounded. This multi-method approach

strengthens the credibility of the results and provides a holistic picture of the English language needs of sports management students in Uzbekistan.

Materials and methods. Research design

This study employed a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the learners' linguistic and professional needs. The research was guided by the principles of triangulation, which allows for the integration of multiple data sources to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings.

The participants of the study were 80 undergraduate students majoring in Sports Management at the Uzbekistan State University of Physical Education and Sports. Students study in the third and fourth courses, aged between 20 and 24. The students' proficiency is measured according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and recent diagnostic test results have shown that the students represent a mixed proficiency level, ranging from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate. They have General English classes twice a week throughout the whole academic year. The sessions are conducted in a lecture-seminar mode.

Three primary research instruments were used to collect data:

1. Questionnaire (Survey). A structured questionnaire consisting of 15 items was designed and administered via Google Forms. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions to gather data about students' language proficiency, perceived difficulties, and professional communication needs. The questionnaire was divided into three sections corresponding to Flowerdew's (2012) needs analysis framework: target needs, learning needs, and present situation needs.

2. Classroom Observation. This kind of research method allows researchers, curriculum developers and educators to monitor how the learners use their linguistic skills in a real-life contexts. Observations were conducted in several English and professional subject classes to examine how students used English in real classroom contexts. The observation checklist focused on students' participation, communicative behavior, and use of professional terminology related to sports management. Field notes were taken to record examples of language use, classroom interaction patterns, and pedagogical challenges observed during lessons.

3. Document Analysis. It was carried out on existing English syllabi, teaching materials, and course outlines used within the Sports Management Faculty to complement the survey and observation data. This method aimed to identify whether the current curriculum

adequately integrates ESP principles and supports professional communication skills required in the field.

Data collection

The data collection process was conducted in three stages over a period of two months.

- In the first stage, the questionnaire was distributed online to collect quantitative data from 80 participants.
- In the second stage, several classroom observations were conducted to obtain qualitative insights into students' real-time language use and engagement, and evaluate the degree of active participation.
- In the final stage, document analysis was performed to evaluate the content and structure of the existing English language curriculum and materials.

The integration of these three data sources provided a triangulated dataset that allowed for both breadth and depth in the interpretation of the findings.

Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed descriptively using frequency and percentage distributions to identify common trends in students' responses. Qualitative data obtained from observations and document analysis were thematically coded and interpreted to identify recurring patterns, themes, and gaps in the teaching process and curriculum design. The triangulation of these findings allowed for the cross-validation of results, ensuring that the interpretations reflected both learners' perceptions and objective classroom realities.

Results and discussion. Target Needs. The results of the survey revealed that the majority of students (approximately 65%) considered English as essential for their future professional career in sports management. Many respondents emphasized that English proficiency is necessary for international cooperation, communication with foreign partners, and organizing global sporting events. A smaller proportion (about 10%) associated English with academic goals such as conducting research or pursuing higher education abroad. More than half of the respondents indicated that negotiation and oral communication were the most important specific communicative skills required in their future profession. In addition, presentation skills (10%) and content creation for social media and marketing (15%) were also recognized as valuable (Figure 1). These findings confirm that English for Sports Management should prioritize speaking and interactional competence, aligning with previous studies that emphasize the importance of communicative functions in ESP courses [1]

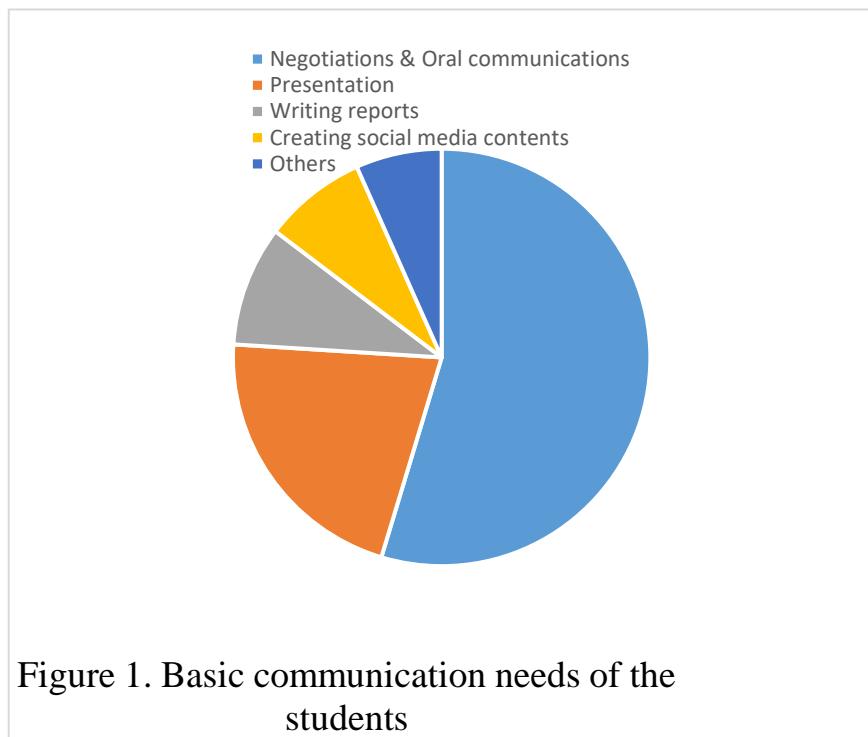


Figure 1. Basic communication needs of the students

Learning Needs

The findings related to learning needs indicated that students found grammar (16%) and reading comprehension (11%) relatively easy, while academic writing (60%) and vocabulary expansion (60%) were perceived as the most difficult areas. This suggests that students' prior exposure to English was largely based on the Grammar Translation Method, which helped them develop structural knowledge but limited their practical communication skills.

When asked about their preferred learning styles, a significant majority (85%) of respondents favored practical and interactive lessons, while 35% supported independent learning through digital platforms, and 25% expressed interest in role-plays and simulations. Only 10% preferred traditional lecture-based instruction. These findings support the need for implementing communicative and task-based learning approaches that foster learner engagement and mirror real professional contexts (Table 1)

Present Situation Analysis

In terms of current proficiency levels, most students assessed themselves as being at the intermediate level (40%), followed by pre-intermediate (15%), upper-intermediate (25%), and advanced (15%) levels. This distribution indicates a relatively mixed group of learners, many of whom possess general English knowledge but require targeted instruction in professional communication and terminology.

The survey also revealed that the most frequent challenges faced by students were limited vocabulary (60%), followed by speaking difficulties (35%) and writing challenges (30%). Problems related to listening comprehension and pronunciation (25%) were also reported. Interestingly, most students did not consider grammar as a major difficulty, confirming that their weaknesses are primarily communicative rather than structural. These findings align with Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) observation that ESP learners often require functional language practice rather than extensive grammatical instruction [3].

Skill/Area	Students Reporting Difficulty (%)	Students Considering It a Priority (%)	Notes / Observations
Speaking	35%	80%	Students feel least confident in oral communication despite recognising its professional importance.
Writing	30%	60%	Many struggle with formal and academic writing related to reports and proposals.
Vocabulary	60%	70%	Limited exposure to domain-specific (sports management) terminology.
Grammar	15%	25%	Generally considered easy due to prior exposure in school-based learning.
Reading	20%	40%	Moderate difficulty; students manage general texts but not technical articles.
Listening	25%	50%	Problems understanding fast-paced or authentic audio materials.

Table 1. Students' Perceived English Language Difficulties and Priorities
Observation findings

The classroom observations further supported the survey data. While students demonstrated a good understanding of grammatical structures, they experienced difficulty using English fluently in subject-specific discussions. During group discussions on topics such as Sponsorship in Sports, Branding in Sport, and Organizing Sport Events, many students were hesitant to participate actively or struggled to recall appropriate professional terms.

In addition, the observed lessons were predominantly teacher-centered, with limited opportunities for students to engage in interactive speaking or problem-solving tasks. This finding highlights a pedagogical gap between students' communicative needs and current teaching practices. It also indicates the necessity of integrating student-centered, communicative activities and authentic materials into the ESP curriculum.

Document Analysis Findings

The document analysis provided important insights into the institutional and curricular context of English teaching at the Sports Management Faculty. The study covered the existing syllabi, course descriptions, and teaching materials used in six academic groups—three with English and three with Uzbek.

The review revealed that the Uzbek-medium groups mainly used materials focused on general English, with minimal integration of sports-related terminology or professional contexts. Conversely, English-medium groups followed subject-specific courses, such as Corporate Sport Management and Leadership in Sports Organizations, which were conducted entirely in English. However, even in these courses, the materials lacked CLIL-based integration, where language and content are learned simultaneously.

These results suggest that although partial efforts have been made to teach English for professional purposes, a fully developed ESP curriculum tailored to sports management has yet to be implemented. The existing materials do not sufficiently address professional discourse, authentic vocabulary, or communicative skills relevant to the sports industry.

This distribution indicates a relatively mixed group of learners, many of whom possess general English knowledge but require targeted instruction in professional communication and terminology.

The triangulated results from the survey, observation, and document analysis consistently indicate a strong need for professionally oriented English instruction in sports management education. The dominance of grammar-focused teaching, limited classroom interaction, and lack of specialized materials have created a gap between students' current competencies and the professional communication demands of their field.

These findings are consistent with international ESP research [8, 2], which emphasizes that course design should be grounded in learners' real professional contexts. Implementing a CLIL-integrated ESP course that emphasizes professional vocabulary, speaking, and listening skills would effectively address these issues. Furthermore, Ellis (2017) highlighted that incorporating task-based and communicative activities can promote learner autonomy and bridge the gap between academic study and workplace communication [6].

Overall, the findings highlight the need for curriculum reform in Uzbekistan's sports management programs to ensure that future professionals acquire not only linguistic knowledge but also the communicative competence necessary for global professional engagement.

Conclusion. Based on the findings of this study, several pedagogical and curricular recommendations are proposed:

1. Develop an ESP curriculum tailored to sports management. The course should focus on professional vocabulary, oral communication, negotiation, and presentation skills required in the sports industry.

2. Integrate CLIL principles into English instruction. Content and Language Integrated Learning can help students acquire both disciplinary knowledge and language skills simultaneously, increasing motivation and relevance [5, 10].

3. Adopt communicative and task-based methodologies. Classroom activities such as simulations, project work, and case studies should be introduced to replicate authentic professional situations.

4. Revise and update teaching materials. Existing textbooks should be supplemented with authentic materials from the field of sports management, including interviews, articles, and event reports.

5. Provide professional development for English instructors. Teachers should be trained in ESP and CLIL methodologies to design effective content-based lessons and conduct needs-oriented instruction.

6. Implement ongoing needs analysis and feedback mechanisms. Continuous assessment of students' evolving needs will ensure that the ESP course remains dynamic, relevant, and aligned with professional trends [15].

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of a systematic, needs-based approach to English language teaching in professional programs. By aligning curriculum design with learners' real-world communicative requirements, higher education institutions in Uzbekistan can significantly enhance the professional competence and global competitiveness of their sports management graduates. The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for further ESP course design and teacher training initiatives within Uzbekistan's higher education system.

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