

From Theory to Practice: Esp Curricular Design Challenges in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This scholarly article examines the challenges associated with developing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula in Uzbekistan, alongside ongoing reforms aimed at addressing them. It emphasises practical recommendations derived from academic research, juxtaposed with the principal stages at the national level required for implementing a substantive curriculum. Furthermore, it addresses critical issues that instructors encounter regarding the equilibrium of content within the formulated ESP syllabus. The imperative for student engagement in the course design process, aligned with their individual needs and motivations, has garnered significant attention in the existing scholarly literature.

Keys words: ESP, Curriculum development, national project, content development, needs analysis, soft skills, teacher training.

Introduction

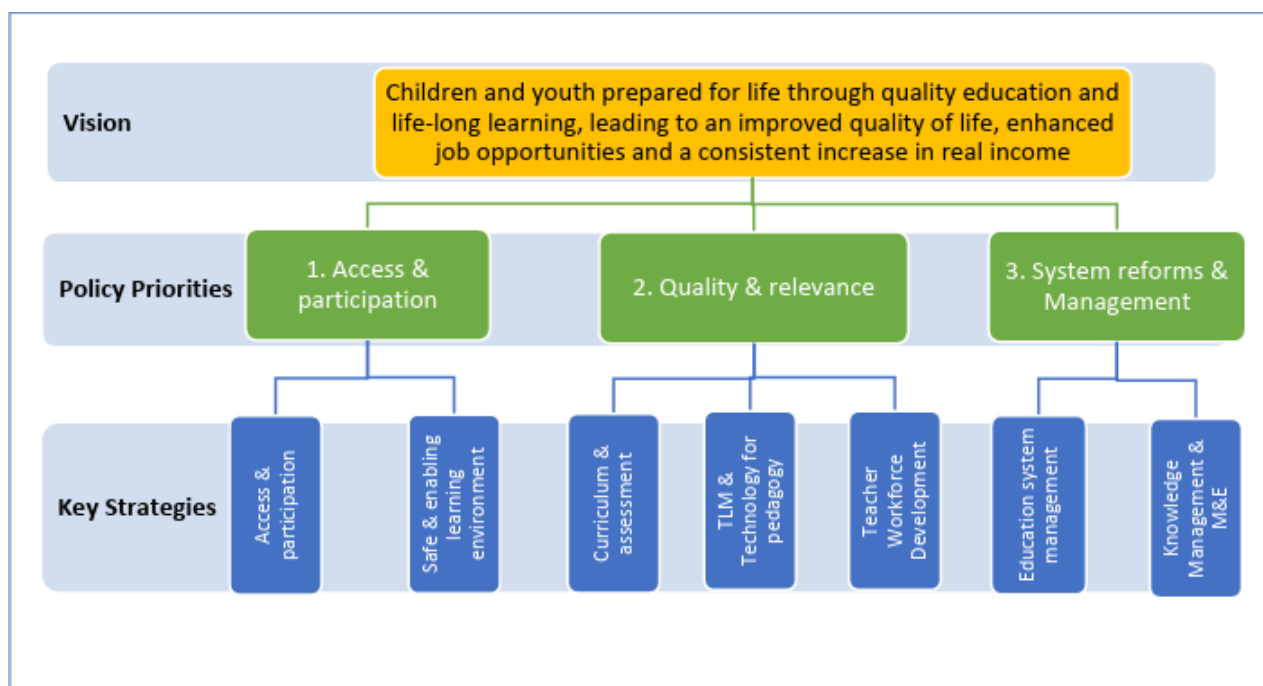
Due to increased demand for technical specialists in digitalised infrastructure across all spheres, universities are required to enhance students' English academic knowledge aligned with their programs. By acquiring English academic terminology in their field, graduates increase their chances of attracting the attention of prestigious employers. Despite the small number of specialists in teaching ESP courses in Uzbekistan, B.X. Kutlimuratova and A. D. O'razboyev list the most critical issue as the lack of qualified English teachers that Uzbek students face. They claim that efforts to enhance English instruction in Uzbekistan have fallen short due to the shortage of qualified teachers. Non-native speakers dominate the field without native assistance, and many lack essential language skills. This proficiency gap undermines effective teaching. As a result, students struggle to achieve fluency. The government's initiatives, while well-intentioned, still leave much to be done to improve the situation.

What reforms are being implemented today to improve the situation? The plan, developed by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on 29 April 2024, aims to align with the law and improve the quality of teacher training by establishing a new system of purposeful and continuous training for students in general secondary educational institutions. They are implementing vocational pilot classes for high school students on an experimental basis to develop professional skills alongside other subjects. Therefore, English lessons are also being redesigned to align with the specialisation's content. However, for the realisation of the project above, there is a strong need for content-teaching developers, ESP methodologists, and assessment professionals. There is a significant shortage of professionals in ESP teaching and material development, even in higher education institutions. According to a survey, most teachers expressed a desire to receive training from specialists to teach

content-related material effectively. We have a large number of scholars in linguistics, linguadidactics, lexicology, and methodology. Still, we face a scarcity of professionals in Academic English and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) who consider all the factors that affect a student's well-being in professional development. They also state that a separate curriculum for pedagogical classes will be developed based on advanced foreign experiences. However, it is a time- and cost-consuming process that will likely affect only a few teachers, even though there are thousands throughout Uzbekistan. Organisers should view the project objectively, with a broad range of instructors, and continually refine the ESP methodology.

The Education Sector Plan (ESP) of Uzbekistan 2019-2023 provides a broad diagram of the theory of change and the Key strategic areas to realise quality education.

Copied from Chart /Figure 58: Theory of change: The higher-level, broader sectoral causal chain



We have learnt the second policy priority, which deals with curriculum and assessment. The program insists that a key challenge in curriculum reform is to develop and successfully implement a new basic education curriculum at all levels that is more relevant to all students, focusing on 21st-century skills, soft skills (including personal development and employability), and higher-order thinking skills. Moreover, reducing content will allow teachers to spend sufficient quality time covering the whole curriculum without cutting instruction time. The program calls attention towards textbook updating and reproduction:

“Due to the curriculum reform process with its new focus on competency-based learning outcomes – in line with the new Law on Education and also the National Action Strategy about upbringing “independently thinking youth”, thus realising the “creative and intellectual potential of the younger generation” (Sub-Area 4.5) –, textbooks need to be updated and produced in large numbers particularly for Preschool and General Secondary Education, together with teachers’ guides and revised training materials for educational professional colleges and institutions of higher learning which are charged with the training of teachers.”

1.1 National and overseas scholars' views on curricular development.

The initial research began with a review of the existing ESP curriculum. We have started our research on the ESP design project, conducted in cooperation with foreign experts. National research, British Council, Uzbekistan State University of World Languages, Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Republican research centre for the development of

innovative methods in teaching foreign languages, discuss the curriculum development. In the fourth section they provide practical recommendations on the application of basic principles in the development of training programs, methodological developments, educational materials and assessment criteria, which are presented in accordance with the following seven components of the course creation in the CEFR (2001: 7)

- ✓ identification of needs;
- ✓ identification of goals;
- ✓ identification of content;
- ✓ selection or creation of materials;
- ✓ compilation of curriculum in areas;
- ✓ methods of Applied teaching and language learning;
- ✓ assessment, testing and control.

A recent review of the literature on this topic by a group of researchers in Uzbekistan lists three major skills. The first, necessary for successful communication in a professional environment, is the ability to use jargon appropriately in a specific professional context. Second, it is the ability to use a more generalised set of academic skills. Third, it is the ability to use language effectively for everyday communication, regardless of professional context. [S. A. Khamzaev et al. 2020] H. Maksudova, after a deep survey being taken in the field of Pharmacy, suggests that Internal and External needs meet dilemmas. The vital offer is to occupy the workplace with the laboratory's reading instructions for proper utilisation. Reading and comprehensible discussions in a foreign language with patients, as well as practical interaction in Uzbekistan hospitals, are included to develop academic language. For external recommendations, she proposes a partnership with a foreign pharmaceutical company, which would involve further international negotiations, meetings, forums, and webinars. [Kh. Maksudova, 2023]. Outlining the possible future of ESP in Pharmacy studies, we can say that the past decade has already demonstrated significant cooperation with overseas chemists, which is a central outcome. However, a neglected area in the field of cooperation is student involvement in the process, which is typically handled by higher authorities. Moreover, hospital visits by international patients can raise several issues. For example, students may create resentment among staff members or patients. Additionally, many patients, regardless of their nationality, may lack the appropriate medical terminology, which can lead to dissatisfaction. As cited in N. SH Saddridinova's paper, Jarvis emphasises the vast importance of ICT in teaching ESP, utilising online platforms, legal databases, and virtual simulations to provide comprehensible input and output. [N. Saddridinova, 2025]. Kh. A. Akhmadjanov examines the importance of rubric tools for summative assessment in his dissertation. He suggests that rubrics stimulate student motivation to complete an assignment. In addition, he also discusses instructors' awareness of students' achievements at each level, which eases student grades and provides consistent evaluation. [Akhmadjonov K. A., 2022]

Nilufar Karimova investigated the integration of soft skills within higher education curricula. The study identifies a significant gap in the inclusion of soft skills, particularly in Uzbekistan, despite their recognised importance for individual and societal progress. Analysis of the bachelor's degree curriculum for English language teachers demonstrates a primary focus on self-awareness, with limited attention to cultural adaptability. This finding indicates a broader deficiency in the integration of soft skills. The link between cognitive knowledge and soft skills, essential for connecting theoretical learning with practical application, is often insufficient. Specialised non-academic courses designed to develop transferable skills address only a limited subset of the soft skills most valued in the current job market. Consequently, many graduates lack the necessary soft skills to compete effectively in the workforce.

To address the changing requirements of the modern labour market, which increasingly values applied skills over cognitive abilities, Karimova recommends a comprehensive revision of higher education

curricula and syllabuses. The proposed changes aim to develop students' transversal, or soft, skills alongside academic knowledge, thereby improving their adaptability to current employment demands. This curricular revision forms part of a broader strategy to modernise the educational system, consistent with the government's ongoing educational reform efforts in Uzbekistan. [N. Karimova, 2020]

Moreover, content developers must consider not only linguistic aspects but also that materials be designed to foster interest, motivation, and collaboration through real-world practice involving language skills. This approach will not ignore the vital contribution of foreign expertise, especially in curricular development. However, as Huynh states, teachers play a crucial role in designing courses, developing materials, and evaluating them [Huynh, 2020]. Also, the author represents a synthesis of existing research models of curriculum development in a total of 7 steps for ESP courses:

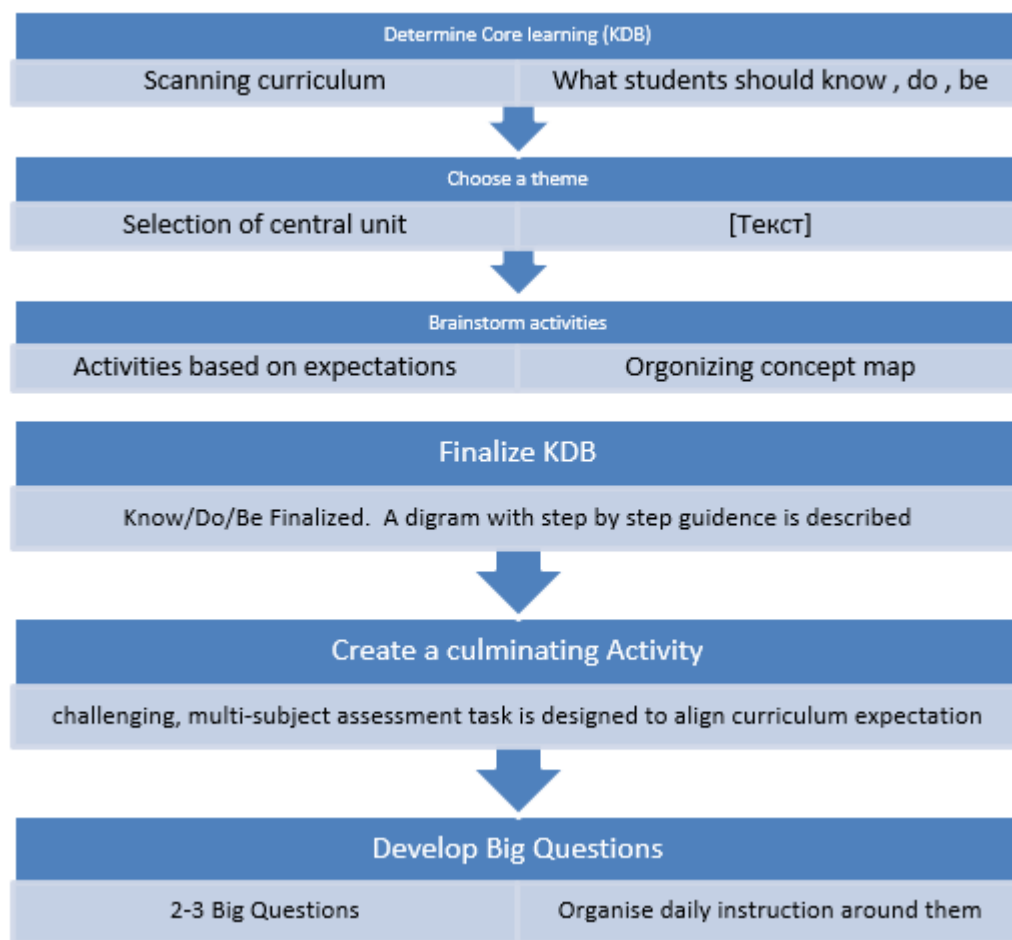
- 1) Analysing ESP needs,
- 2) Specifying the course goals or objectives,
- 3) Selecting and sequencing the contents,
- 4) Determining teaching and learning methodology,
- 5) Selecting or compiling coursebooks or teaching materials,
- 6) Determining methods and contents of assessment,
- 7) Evaluating the performed curriculum through different channels or tools.

The ESP curriculum program developed by the National Research, British Council, et al project discusses the curriculum development in the fourth section. They provide practical recommendations on the application of basic principles in the development of training programs, methodological developments, educational materials and assessment criteria, which are presented in accordance with the following seven components of the course creation in the CEFR (2001: 7), with further manual of instructions.

- 1) Identification of needs;
- 2) Identification of goals;
- 3) Identification of content;
- 4) Selection or creation of materials;
- 5) Compilation of curriculum in areas.
- 6) Methods of Applied teaching and language learning;
- 7) Assessment, testing and control.

The selective notions of Huynh's curriculum development have many similarities with the Uzbek national ESP project design. We have identified only one difference in the seventh component, suggesting that the curriculum be evaluated through different channels or tools.

Further, N. Karimova outlined similar stages of the ESP curriculum, stating that the specific context of Uzbekistan may influence certain aspects. The author suggested the 8th stage, named **integration and expansion**. [Nodra Karimova, 2024] Integration is the primary purpose of ESP pedagogy. Here is the case study by Dr Susan M. Drake, which could be a good example of curriculum integration. In her work, she demonstrates a gradual, structured method for planning which connects various subject areas. She provides the following key steps



The case study summary included both positive and negative thoughts. Most educators were enthusiastic about the integrated curriculum, seeing it as both the most challenging and the most exciting. They were concerned about meeting a specific subject goal; however, they were delighted to achieve many particular goals and expectations in developing 21st-century skills, such as the realisation of Communication, Inquiry, and critical thinking. [Drake, S. M., & Reid, J., 2010] During our workshops, we strongly recommend going through this Interdisciplinary Planning Process and reflecting on their individual creative approaches to implement their subject area to cover the ESP syllabus as a practical approach.

Further, Kholturayeva G discusses the importance of needs analysis in curriculum development. In her study, she highlights a participatory approach—engaging learners, instructors, and industry experts—that reflects changes in industry practices and will lead to practical ESP courses. [Kholturayeva G, 2025]

Raikhanova et al emphasise two approaches towards curricular development. The first is Outcome-Based Learning (OBL), which holds that desired learning should align with OBL approaches. The other is Case Study-based Learning (CBL), a practical approach for acquiring both academic and professional skills. [Raikhanova & Bakić-Mirić, 2023]

Personal experience and student surveys suggest that many EFL teachers need to adapt their teaching approach from general English to English for specific purposes. One should point out that it is not a quick process; there is much adaptation and reform needed to be reviewed, starting from teaching methodology, content, vocabulary, and intensive learning, which are among the requirements for providing meaningful ESP lessons. The community of researchers on LinkedIn.com lists the essential skills and competencies for an ESP teacher:

1. Know your context

2. Customise your content
3. Integrate your skills
4. Collaborate with others
5. Evaluate your results
6. Keep learning
7. Suit the needs of learners

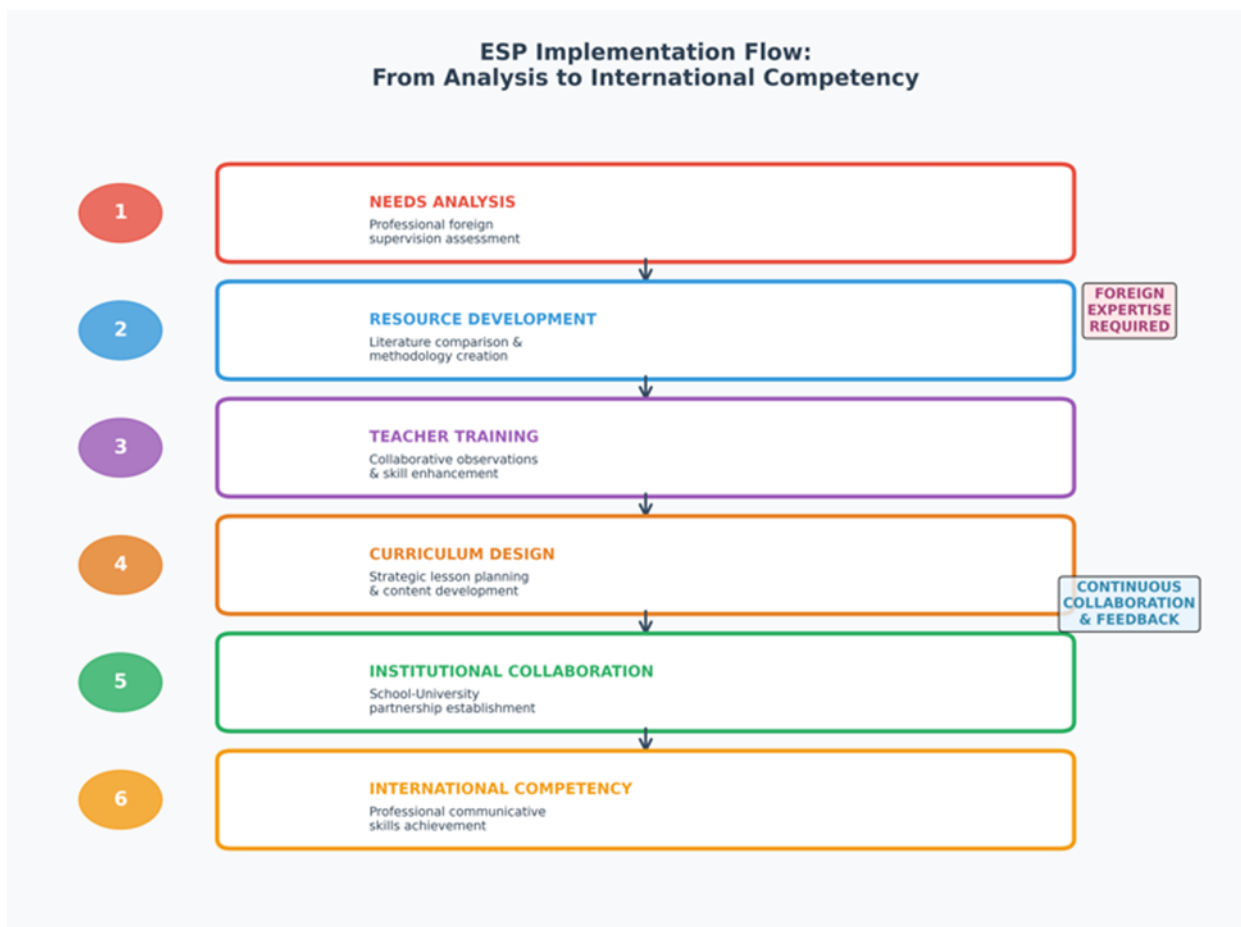
Livia. F Pataki, lecturer and Curriculum developer, states, “A successful ESP teacher will always attempt to make connections between content and real life. For example, when teaching ESP Computer Science classes, a bit of research into the subjects’ students' studies can help us choose the texts they should read. This way, they can make connections between ESP and their other subjects. For example, for computer science ESP modules, we select research articles on machine learning, artificial intelligence, and the ethical issues surrounding AI. As we observed from the lessons, authentic content is more relevant to students' interests and a sense of necessity to learn.

1.2 Discussions and suggestions

According to Pauline C. Robinson, any ELT institution has its own notion of how to design an ESP course, the syllabus type, the description of the language, and the nature of language learning. There is no doubt that the institution relies on the availability of materials, instructors' knowledge and experience and financially affordable education for learners. She adds that although an entirely new ESP project is implemented, the newly engaged staff members will have predetermined attitudes to course and syllabus design, and, alongside the development of their ESP course, they will need to work on the development of a general institutional approach to course design, syllabus, methods, and materials.

In the case of our national educational institutions, research suggests that both newly and in-service teachers need practical training from instructors who can approach their duties meaningfully. They should possess a good knowledge not only in the linguistic field but also in psychology, discipline, management, and the content of the professional English they are instructing, as mentioned above. Here to say, we need a strong collaboration with foreign experts and native speakers to overcome these dilemmas. The solutions outlined below can significantly enhance Uzbek educational standards by linking language knowledge to professional skills, thereby fostering an enthusiastic, proficient workforce across all disciplines.

See it in the following diagram with further description below.



1. A professional foreign supervision of needs analysis on ESP curricular design. The analysis of content, style, receptive skills, and emotional and psychological contributions of both students and instructors to gain a specific area in a foreign language
2. The comparison of foreign literature and resources with national ones provides a practical outcome for future practice and implementations in the student's career. The development of educational resources, as well as the base of methodologies, approaches, and strategies to equip ESP teachers and the training team
3. Collaborative work on teacher observations to find out and provide the ailments and weaknesses of ESP teacher practices, and help the instructors apply effective ESP methodologies to make changes in student performance with constructive feedback.
4. Not least but the most crucial lesson planning steps. At first glance, educational resources may seem sufficient for an independent researcher; however, ESP content requires careful consideration to determine learning goals and outcomes, as it offers active, continuous learning, unlike ESL or EFL, where teachers often rely on existing General English topics.
5. Foreign expertise on learning collaboration between public schools and Higher educational organisations (University staff) to make a chain and inclusive, continuous education to support practical life skills with authentic material development to enable future generations to build communicative professional competencies at an international level.

Conclusion

Overall, the ESP curricular development has been theoretically learned and reviewed; however, it needs practical reforms and implementation. ESP curriculum design is a major challenge involving significant linguistic, methodological, and discourse-analytic challenges. The initial step in training ESP instructors with foreign expertise will yield beneficial outcomes. Both the governmental and local authorities

continuously support every step towards realisation. But an ESP instructor should make the vital move to adapt their teaching approach from general English to English for specific purposes, and the student wishes to improve their performance. Effective methodological developments, educational materials and assessment criteria are the only tools that an instructor can implement in their best vision and wise application.

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