

The Role of ESP in International Studies: a Comparative Analysis of Curriculum Integration across Academic Years

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Abstract: *This study investigates the role and scope of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in International Relations, International Law, and International Economic Relations programs at universities, with a focus on whether ESP instruction should span all four years of undergraduate studies or be limited to the initial two. Drawing on the recent curriculum changes at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (UWED) in Tashkent, which reduced ESP instruction to the first and second years, the paper analyzes both the advantages and limitations of each approach. A comparative perspective is provided through curriculum structures of leading institutions such as Georgetown University (USA), University of Geneva (Switzerland), and SOAS University of London (UK). The findings highlight the pedagogical, linguistic, and professional implications of sustained ESP education across the undergraduate cycle.*

Keywords: *English for Specific Purposes, curriculum, lingua franca, English proficiency, language instruction*

Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has long been recognized as a vital component in the education of students in fields like International Relations (IR), International Law, and International Economic Relations (IER), particularly in non-Anglophone countries. As English continues to dominate global diplomacy, legal frameworks, and international economic negotiation platforms, the need for specialized language training becomes increasingly critical (Hyland, 2007). This is especially true in an era of globalization, where interdisciplinary communication across political, legal, and economic boundaries is facilitated through English as the lingua franca (Flowerdew, 2013).

The central question guiding this study is whether ESP instruction should be maintained throughout all four years of undergraduate education or if the first two years suffice. This paper begins by examining the case of the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (UWED) in Tashkent, which has shifted its ESP policy in recent years. It then compares this model to that of leading universities abroad, identifying both convergences and divergences in curricular approaches, and explores the broader implications for student readiness in international settings.

Methodology

This qualitative study adopts a comparative curricular analysis. Data was collected through a review of publicly available university curricula, academic syllabi, and policy documents from selected international universities with established IR, Law, and IER programs. The institutions were chosen based on their global rankings and relevance to diplomatic, legal, and economic education (QS World University Rankings, 2023). Supplementary information was gathered from language instructors and program coordinators at UWED to gain insight into the rationale behind recent curricular revisions and to understand their pedagogical consequences. The analysis focused on the duration, integration methods, and objectives of ESP components in each curriculum.

Results and Discussion

At the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent, English for Specific Purposes was traditionally offered throughout all four years for students enrolled in International Relations, International Law, and International Economic Relations. The ESP courses addressed a range of academic and professional skills, including academic writing, diplomatic correspondence, policy analysis, legal documentation, and economic reporting (UWED, 2022). However, since 2023, a significant change was introduced whereby ESP instruction was limited to the first and second years. According to internal faculty reports, this shift was motivated by the perception that students enter university with a higher level of general English proficiency than in previous years, allowing for a concentrated ESP effort in the early academic stages. Another reason was the curricular need to increase the number of core subject-specific courses in the third and fourth years, particularly within the faculties of International Law and International Economic Relations.

This transition, while pragmatic in some respects, has revealed both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, the new model allows for more in-depth subject learning in the latter years, unencumbered by language instruction. Students are expected to independently navigate English-language academic and policy materials relevant to their fields (Anthony, 2018). It also helps universities allocate teaching resources more efficiently, focusing ESP support where it is believed to be most impactful. On the other hand, the removal of ESP from upper-level studies may leave students less prepared to draft legal texts, conduct economic analyses, or participate in international debates and internships that require advanced language skills (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Without continued guidance, students may stagnate in their professional vocabulary development and academic discourse practices.

In contrast, institutions like Georgetown University in the United States maintain a model where writing and communication are integrated across the curriculum (WAC). Within its School of Foreign Service, students continue to develop discipline-specific communication skills through writing-intensive seminars, international negotiation simulations, and capstone projects (Georgetown University, 2023). While Georgetown does not formally label these activities as ESP, they serve the same function—developing advanced academic and professional English relevant to international contexts (Belcher, 2006).

Similarly, SOAS University of London in the United Kingdom provides sustained academic writing support across all years of study. ESP instruction at SOAS is embedded within content courses and is further reinforced through optional modules and targeted workshops in areas such as legal English, diplomatic writing, and international policy communication (SOAS, 2023). Students, particularly non-native English speakers, have access to continuous support, which ensures that language development evolves in tandem with subject knowledge.

The University of Geneva in Switzerland presents another strong model of multilingual education. In its Global Studies and Law faculties, ESP is formally incorporated in early academic years, but it is also integrated into upper-year seminars and research assignments. Students are expected to complete complex tasks such as drafting UN-style reports and legal analyses in English, often under the joint supervision of language and subject faculty (University of Geneva, 2023). This dual approach ensures that students not only maintain but also elevate their command of professional English in real-world academic and policy scenarios.

When compared, the UWED model appears to diverge from these international standards. Although the emphasis on foundational ESP in the first two years provides a solid base, the lack of structured language support in the final years may create gaps in students' readiness for professional communication in global contexts. Leading international programs favour a model of sustained engagement with language across the full undergraduate cycle. This approach reflects an understanding that language proficiency

– especially in technical and professional domains – is not static and requires continuous reinforcement and contextual application (Basturkmen, 2010).

At the curricular level, the integration of ESP into core subjects beyond the second year could serve as a viable compromise. Rather than maintaining stand-alone language courses, universities like UWED might consider embedding ESP within legal writing classes, international trade simulations, or diplomatic negotiation workshops in the third and fourth years. This would allow students to apply and refine their linguistic skills within the context of their academic specialization, aligning with best practices seen at peer institutions abroad (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013).

Conclusion

While concentrating ESP instruction in the first two years of study may reflect administrative efficiency and confidence in students' early language acquisition, international best practices suggest that sustained, context-specific language instruction across all four academic years leads to better outcomes. The recent changes at UWED, though grounded in practical reasoning, could inadvertently undermine students' long-term communicative competence in professional international settings.

Universities such as Georgetown, SOAS, and the University of Geneva demonstrate the benefits of maintaining ESP support – either formally or embedded within subject teaching – throughout the full undergraduate experience. For institutions in non-native English contexts like UWED, especially in fields as globally engaged as International Relations, International Law, and International Economic Relations, integrating ESP in senior years remains crucial. This not only ensures better academic performance but also strengthens students' readiness for international careers, graduate programs, and policy work on a global scale.

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