



## Optimization of English for Specific Purposes: A Comprehensive Analysis of Language Needs in Physical Education and Sports Science Students

Ali Fakourian<sup>1</sup> and Mohammad Sadegh Ghalibafan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Sport Physiology, Faculty of Physical Education, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran; [ali.fakourian@gmail.com](mailto:ali.fakourian@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Corresponding author, Department of English Language, Faculty of Foreign Languages, South Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran; [msghalibafan@gmail.com](mailto:msghalibafan@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

In modern society, proficiency in a foreign language is an indispensable asset for athletes, enhancing their ability to communicate in diverse professional settings. This study investigates the English language needs of undergraduate students specializing in Physical Education and Sports Science, focusing on the perceived inadequacies of commonly used English for Academic and Specific Purposes (EAP/ESP) textbooks. The study aims to bridge the gap between learners' needs and the instructional materials provided. Employing a needs analysis approach, the research involved 60 undergraduate students (30 males and 30 females) aged 19 to 25 from the Physical Education Faculty of Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran branch. Additionally, three faculty members with Ph.D. qualifications participated in semi-structured interviews to share their perspectives on language requirements in the curriculum. The findings reveal a significant recognition of English as a critical component in the professional development of student-athletes. However, discrepancies were noted between students' and faculty members' perceptions regarding the adequacy of current EAP/ESP textbooks in meeting academic and professional demands. The findings confirm English as vital for student-athletes' professional development. The needs analysis questionnaire demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.82), and EFA identified a four-factor structure—Content (50%), Appearance (22.7%), Perceived Importance (13.6%), and Perceived Effect (13.6%)—with robust construct validity (KMO = 0.623;  $\chi^2(231) = 1047.71$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These results underscore the importance of incorporating tailored language programs into sports education to prepare students for successful careers in an increasingly interconnected world.

**Keywords:** EAP/ESP textbook, English language, needs analysis, physical education sports science students, student-athletes

### 1. Introduction

In the globalized era, English has become a critical tool for communication across various disciplines, including physical education and sports science. While English for General Purposes (EGP) is commonly taught at various educational levels, the unique requirements of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly for physical education students, remain underexplored. In the context of



physical education, the necessity to comprehend and use English arises from its pivotal role in accessing international resources, engaging in global competitions, and collaborating within a multilingual professional environment. However, many physical education students, especially in non-English-speaking countries like Iran, exhibit low motivation and insufficient preparation to learn English. This challenge is compounded by inadequate curricula and a lack of specialized materials tailored to their professional needs.

Historically, English language instruction in Iran has been dominated by the grammar-translation method, emphasizing rote memorization and deductive grammar learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). While this approach may help learners develop theoretical knowledge, it often fails to equip them with practical language skills, such as speaking and listening, which are crucial in professional contexts. For physical education students, these shortcomings manifest in their inability to effectively engage with English-language academic resources, participate in international seminars, or publish in foreign journals. The inadequacy of the existing educational framework necessitates a focused investigation into the specific linguistic and professional needs of this group.

Extensive research underscores the importance of tailoring ESP courses to the needs of specific learner groups. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) assert that needs analysis is fundamental to designing effective ESP programs. This involves identifying both objective and subjective needs, such as the professional tasks learners must perform and their individual learning preferences. Studies by (Eslami, 2010; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008) emphasize the significance of systematically examining students' academic and professional language requirements to design targeted interventions. For physical education students, the dual focus on general communicative competence and specialized vocabulary presents a unique challenge. Scott et al. (2021) highlights that teaching English to student-athletes should address both practical everyday communication and specialized professional contexts, such as understanding sports terminology, engaging with international coaching techniques, and navigating cultural nuances in sports diplomacy. Furthermore, the integration of authentic materials, such as sports commentary, blogs, and thematic forums, can enhance learners' engagement and provide a "live" language experience (Boyd, 2023).

Despite the theoretical advancements, gaps remain in practical implementation, particularly in the Iranian context. The uniformity of EAP textbooks and the lack of systematic needs analysis have been cited as significant drawbacks in Iranian universities (Eslami, 2010). This limitation is particularly evident in physical education programs, where the lack of tailored materials and pedagogical strategies hinders students' ability to meet their professional and academic demands. The core issue addressed in this study is the disconnect between the linguistic needs of physical education students and the current ESP offerings in Iranian universities. This disconnect manifests in students' inability to comprehend specialized texts, effectively participate in international professional activities, or advance their academic careers.

This study holds significant implications for both academia and practice. On an academic level, it contributes to the broader discourse on ESP by focusing on a relatively under-researched group: physical education students. By systematically analyzing their needs and evaluating the effectiveness of current ESP practices, this research addresses a critical gap in the literature. On a practical level, the findings can inform curriculum developers, educators, and policymakers in designing more effective ESP programs. In the context of Iran, where physical education students often struggle with language-

related challenges in their academic and professional pursuits, this study offers actionable insights. By highlighting the importance of integrating professional vocabulary, intercultural competence, and context-specific teaching methods, it underscores the potential of ESP to empower students and enhance their career prospects. Furthermore, the study aligns with the broader goal of fostering international collaboration and participation in global sports events, where English serves as the lingua franca.

The Iranian education system has long grappled with the challenge of delivering effective English instruction, particularly in specialized fields. As noted by Eslami (2010), the current EAP curriculum in Iranian universities is often ad hoc, lacking systematic needs analysis and tailored course design. This is particularly problematic for physical education students, who require a unique blend of general and specialized English skills. The reliance on generic textbooks and a uniform curriculum fails to address the diverse needs of this group, resulting in a disconnect between what is taught and what is required in professional contexts. This study seeks to bridge the gap between the linguistic needs of physical education students and the existing ESP offerings. By conducting a comprehensive needs analysis and evaluating the current curriculum, it aims to propose targeted interventions that can enhance the language proficiency and professional readiness of these students. In doing so, it contributes to the broader goal of making ESP more responsive, effective, and impactful, particularly in the context of physical education and sports science.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Key Theories and Concepts

The integration of English language education within the domain of Physical Education (PE) and Sports Sciences has become increasingly essential in addressing the linguistic demands of student-athletes navigating globalized contexts. Foundational to this discourse are theories of needs analysis, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and professional-oriented language training, which collectively guide curriculum design and instructional practices. Needs analysis, as conceptualized by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), serves as the cornerstone of ESP, emphasizing the importance of aligning language instruction with the specific professional and academic requirements of learners. This approach identifies both objective factors (e.g., observable communicative tasks) and subjective factors (e.g., learners' perceived needs), which are particularly pertinent to PE students, whose linguistic demands include mastering communicative competencies and discipline-specific vocabulary. Similarly, Mao and Zhou (2024) emphasizes that effective ESP curricula must cater to these dual facets, reflecting real-world applications of language use. This perspective is deeply rooted in constructivist learning theories, which advocate for the integration of authentic, context-based language acquisition to enhance learners' practical skills.

Within the Iranian context, Eslami (2010) critiques the traditional focus on reading comprehension in university-level English instruction, noting its insufficiency in addressing the multifaceted communicative needs of PE students. Such limitations are pronounced in contexts where students must participate in international conferences, publish in academic journals, or operate within multilingual sports environments. This gap underscores the pressing need for ESP curricula that emphasize active language use and align with contemporary global standards.

## 2.2. Recent Advances in ESP for Physical Education

Recent pedagogical advancements highlight the shift toward modernizing ESP methodologies to meet the evolving needs of PE and sports sciences students Magallanes (2024). Approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and task-based learning have gained traction for their emphasis on interaction, collaboration, and practical application over traditional rote memorization (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). These methodologies have proven particularly effective in addressing the unique requirements of PE students in several key areas:

1. **Specialized Vocabulary Acquisition:** A focus on domain-specific terminology—encompassing sports equipment, rules, and phrases—ensures learners can effectively engage in professional discourse. Kelley et al. (2023) and Scott et al. (2021) underscore the importance of embedding technical vocabulary within instructional materials to foster fluency and confidence.
2. **Use of Authentic Materials:** Incorporating resources such as sports commentaries, blogs, and multimedia content enhances the relevance and practicality of language instruction. Boyd (2023) highlights the value of authentic materials in contextualizing learning and fostering real-world applicability.
3. **Integration of Technology:** Digital tools and platforms have become indispensable in accommodating the demanding schedules of student-athletes. Flexible e-learning resources, virtual simulations, and mobile applications offer opportunities for personalized and asynchronous learning, empowering students to balance their academic and athletic commitments effectively Omona and O'dama (2024).

Despite these advancements, the Iranian educational context presents enduring challenges. The persistence of the grammar-translation method—prevalent in many schools and universities—inadequately prepares students for the active use of English in professional or international settings (Eslami, 2010). Mazdayasna and Tahririan (2008) emphasize the mismatch between existing curricula and the practical expectations of students, particularly in ESP courses tailored for PE majors. This disconnect highlights the need for a paradigm shift in instructional approaches to align with global pedagogical trends.

## 2.3. Needs Analysis in ESP for Physical Education

A comprehensive understanding of the academic, professional, and social needs of PE students is pivotal to the success of ESP programs. Needs analysis frameworks, as elaborated by Ferris and Tagg (1996), identify critical areas of focus, including:

- **Academic Needs:** Engaging with discipline-specific texts, comprehending research articles, and preparing academic reports are fundamental competencies for PE students.
- **Professional Needs:** Effective communication during international sports events, coaching, and refereeing requires mastery of both formal and informal registers.
- **Social Needs:** Navigating everyday situations in international contexts, such as shopping or dining, necessitates the development of practical conversational skills.

In Iran, a notable deficiency in higher education is the absence of systematic needs analysis for ESP curricula (Eslami, 2010). Existing programs often rely on outdated textbooks and teaching methods that fail to address the interdisciplinary and dynamic demands of modern sports sciences Book et al, (2024). For instance, Mazdayasna and Tahririan (2008) reveal that current instructional practices do not adequately prepare students for the linguistic and cultural challenges of professional sports

environments. To bridge this gap, ESP programs must prioritize the integration of needs analysis into curriculum design, ensuring that language instruction is tailored to the specific requirements of PE students. By adopting innovative pedagogical strategies and leveraging authentic materials, educators can create learning environments that foster linguistic competence and professional readiness, equipping students to excel in both academic and athletic domains Molina-García et al, (2024).

## 2.4. ESP for Physical Education Students in Global and Local Contexts

The integration of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within Physical Education (PE) curricula has gained increasing relevance as globalized sports environments necessitate linguistic competencies that extend beyond general communication Anqi et al. (2024). Addressing the unique needs of PE students, ESP programs aim to provide discipline-specific language skills that encompass multilingual and intercultural communication, professional interactions, and technical knowledge Kremer and Pinto (2025).

## 2.5. Global Trends in ESP for Physical Education

Globally, ESP programs designed for PE students prioritize real-world applicability by emphasizing professional scenarios such as coaching, athlete management, and sports media interactions (Scott et al., 2021). Strategies employed in these programs include:

- **Contextualized Learning:** Activities tailored to the sports domain, such as interpreting match strategies, analyzing player performance, and delivering motivational speeches.
- **Critical Thinking Development:** Scenario-based learning and case studies to foster problem-solving skills in sports-specific situations.
- **Cultural Variability:** Addressing differences in sports language usage, such as British versus American terminology, to enhance global communication. Flexible course delivery models, including online modules and hybrid approaches, cater to the demanding schedules of student-athletes. These innovations reflect the need for balancing academic growth with professional responsibilities (Belcher, 2006).

## 2.6. Challenges and Opportunities in the Iranian Context

In Iran, ESP curricula for PE students emerged following the 1978 Islamic Revolution under the broader framework of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). However, existing programs often fall short of addressing the practical and dynamic needs of PE students. Key challenges include:

- **Overemphasis on Reading Skills:** Current curricula prioritize reading comprehension at the expense of speaking, listening, and writing skills, which are crucial for active participation in sports-related settings (Eslami, 2010).
- **Insufficient Teacher Training:** ESP instructors frequently lack the interdisciplinary expertise needed to effectively teach sports-specific content.

Despite these limitations, opportunities for reform are abundant. Needs analyses conducted by Dou (2024) underscore the importance of aligning ESP curricula with both global trends and local educational contexts. For Iranian PE students, practical tasks such as interpreting sports regulations, discussing match strategies, and analyzing performance data are essential components that could bridge existing gaps Sajadi et al. (2024).

## 2.7. Emerging Gaps and Future Directions

While research in this domain highlights the significance of ESP for PE students, notable gaps remain:

1. **Underutilization of Technology:** Despite evidence supporting its efficacy, digital tools and AI-driven platforms are rarely integrated into Iranian ESP programs.
2. **Neglect of Multimodal Competencies:** Current curricula inadequately address the diverse modalities inherent in sports communication, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements.
3. **Generic ESP Materials:** The use of generalized ESP textbooks fails to reflect the specialized linguistic demands of the sports sciences discipline.

## 2.8. The Path Forward

Addressing these gaps requires a dual focus on innovation and contextualization. By integrating needs-based curriculum development, interdisciplinary approaches, and cutting-edge technologies, ESP programs can empower PE students with the linguistic tools necessary for global engagement. Promising areas for future research include:

- **Interdisciplinary Curriculum Design:** Combining sports sciences and language education to create holistic learning experiences.
- **AI-Driven Learning Tools:** Exploring the role of artificial intelligence in enhancing ESP outcomes for PE students.
- **Longitudinal Studies:** Investigating the long-term effectiveness of reformed ESP programs in diverse educational and professional contexts.

In conclusion, positioning ESP within the broader framework of PE education necessitates addressing theoretical and practical challenges with innovative methodologies. Effective ESP programs must provide tailored, relevant, and multimodal learning experiences to meet the demands of an increasingly globalized sports environment Chmelíková and Miština (2024).

## 3. Research Questions

The study aims to:

1. Identify the specific English language needs of physical education students in Iran.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness and shortcomings of the commonly used ESP textbooks and teaching methods in addressing these needs.
3. Propose tailored curricular and pedagogical strategies to enhance the language proficiency and professional preparedness of physical education students.

The primary research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the specific linguistic and professional needs of physical education students in Iran?
2. How effective are the existing ESP courses in meeting these needs?
3. What improvements can be made to the current ESP curriculum to better align it with the students' academic and professional goals?

## 4. Method

This study adopted a rigorous methodological framework to ensure a comprehensive examination of the alignment between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses and the academic needs of Physical Education (PE) students. By employing both quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study sought to offer an in-depth and multidimensional perspective on the effectiveness of ESP instruction. The following sections detail the research design, participant selection, instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations

### 4.1. Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative strategies to achieve methodological triangulation and enhance the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The quantitative component focused on a structured questionnaire to quantify students' evaluations and perceptions of the ESP course. In contrast, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to explore the nuanced experiences and attitudes of both students and instructors. This design ensured a holistic understanding of the research problem.

### 4.2. Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with direct experience in ESP courses tailored to Physical Education (PE). The study involved 60 undergraduate PE students (30 males, 30 female) from the Faculty of Physical Education at Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch. These students, aged 19-25, were in their second or third year of study and actively enrolled in ESP courses. Additionally, three experienced ESP instructors with doctoral qualifications and teaching experience ranging from 5 to 25 years participated. The inclusion of both student and instructor perspectives enriched the data and provided a balanced view of the ESP program's strengths and shortcomings.

### 4.3. Instrumentation

Three instruments were used in this study. They are elaborated on below.

#### 4.3.1. Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire, developed based on prior research (e.g., Eslami, 2010; Holmes & Chalauisaeng, 2006), served as the primary quantitative instrument. The questionnaire included:

**Demographic Information:** Collected participants' age, gender, and academic background.

**ESP Course Evaluation:** Comprised 22 Likert-scale items assessing textbook effectiveness and the role of English in academic and professional contexts.

**Language Needs and Suggestions:** Addressed students' challenges in language skills and solicited recommendations for improving ESP materials.

The questionnaire underwent expert review for content validity and was piloted with six students, leading to adjustments for clarity and relevance. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha produced a coefficient of 0.87, indicating strong internal consistency.

#### **4.3.2. Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews with 15 students and three instructors provided qualitative insights into their experiences and suggestions for improving ESP courses. The interviews, conducted in Persian for accessibility, lasted 30–45 minutes and were audio-recorded with consent.

#### **4.3.3. Classroom Observations**

Non-participant classroom observations were conducted to supplement the interview data. These observations focused on teacher-student interactions, teaching methods, and the application of ESP materials in real-time contexts.

### **4.4. Data Collection**

Data collection followed a systematic sequence:

4. 1. Preliminary Observations: Two ESP classes were observed to familiarize the researchers with the instructional environment.
5. 2. Interviews: Detailed interviews were conducted with instructors and students to explore perceptions and challenges.
6. 3. Questionnaire Administration: Questionnaires were distributed to 60 students during scheduled sessions, with a researcher available to clarify any queries.

### **4.5. Data Analysis**

#### **4.5.1. Quantitative Analysis**

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 22) as follows:

Factor Analysis: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) identified underlying dimensions of the questionnaire. Components with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were retained, and Varimax rotation provided clearer factor structures.

Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, means, and standard deviations summarized responses.

Reliability Testing: Cronbach's alpha assessed the reliability of each scale.

#### **4.5.2. Qualitative Analysis**

Interview transcripts and observation notes were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework:

1. Familiarization: Data were transcribed and reviewed thoroughly.
2. Coding: Recurring patterns were coded systematically.
3. Theme Development: Codes were organized into overarching themes.
4. Integration: Themes were compared with quantitative findings to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness.

The study adhered to ethical guidelines as outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013). Key ethical measures included:

- Informed Consent: Participants provided written consent after being briefed on the study's purpose and procedures.
- Confidentiality: All participant data were anonymized and securely stored.

- Voluntary Participation: Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without repercussions.

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, ensuring compliance with institutional and international standards.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Reliability

To make sure that the tests used were truly reliable, the researchers used Cronbach's Alpha to calculate the reliability of the tests that were used in this study. The SPSS output for the reliability of the needs analysis questionnaire is presented in Table 1. As this table indicates, the questionnaire shows the reliability of 0.82 which is actually a very strong reliability coefficient.

**Table 1**

*Reliability of the Needs Analysis Questionnaire*

Test	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Needs Analysis Questionnaire	22	0.821

Table 2 shows the reliability of each factor of the questionnaire. As stated before, Cronbach's Alpha estimated the reliability of the whole items as 0.82. All the four factors yielded good reliability estimates ranging from 0.42 to 0.86.

**Table 2**

*Reliability of Each Factor of the Questionnaire*

Factors	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1	11	0.565
Factor 2	5	0.425
Factor 3	3	0.863
Factor 4	3	0.563

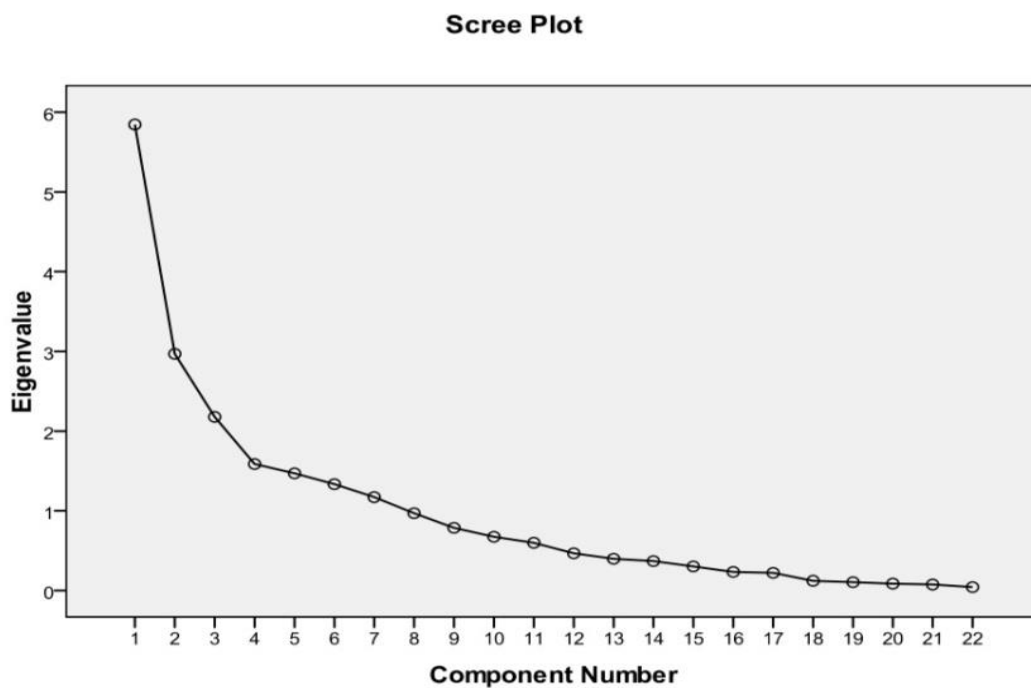
### 5.2. Construct Validation

In the first phase of the study, the researcher intended to substantiate the construct validity of the needs analysis questionnaire by using EFA. To validate the questionnaire, first PCA extracted the underlying factors by calculating the eigenvalues of the matrix greater than 1.0. The Scree test was used in order to decide about the number of factors to retain for rotation. For conducting factor rotation, Varimax (orthogonal rotation) with Kaiser Criterion was used. The result was a rotated component matrix and a transformation matrix. The rotated component matrix indicated the variables loaded on each factor so that the researcher could come up with the new factors. The factorability of the intercorrelation matrix was measured by two tests: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The results obtained from the two tests revealed that the factor model was appropriate.

**Table 3***KMO and Bartlett's Test*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.623
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1047.706
Df		231
Sig.		0.000

Table 3 summarizes the results. The construct validity of the questionnaire was examined through EFA. PCA extracted 7 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The results obtained from the Scree Test indicated that a four-factor solution might provide a more suitable grouping of the items in the questionnaire (Figure 1).

**Figure 1***The Scree Test*

Then the orthogonal rotation was inspected. The result of Varimax with Kaiser Normalization was a rotated component matrix. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4***Rotated Component Matrix*

Component			
1	2	3	4
2 = 0.648	7 = 0.553	20 = 0.473	1 = 0.627
3 = 0.847	8 = 0.677	21 = 0.951	5 = 0.455
4 = 0.436	9 = 0.608	22 = 0.927	13 = 0.377
6 = 0.498	10 = 0.794		
11 = 0.344	12 = 0.458		
14 = 0.675			
15 = 0.858			
16 = 0.798			
17 = 0.421			
18 = .511			
19 = 0.813			

The results indicated that the first factor consisted of 11 items, the second factor included 5 items, and factors 3 and 4 consisted of 3 items each. The total number of factors was 22. Finally, the items comprising each factor were analyzed and named as Content, Appearance, Perceived importance of English language, and Perceived Effect. Items representing each factor are displayed in Table 4.5, and the validated questionnaire is given in the Appendix.

**Table 5***Four Factors of the Test*

# Areas	Items	N of items	Percentage
Content	2,3,4,6,11,14,15,16,17,18,19	11	50
Appearance	7,8,9,10,12	5	22.7
The perceived importance of English language	20,21,22	3	13.6
Perceived Effect	1,5,13	3	13.6
Total		22	100

**5.3. Results of the Needs Analysis Questionnaire**

A number of 60 undergraduate students of Physical Education (30 males and 30 females), aged between 19 and 25, participated in the needs analysis procedure. 35.6 % reported they had taken

extracurricular English language classes. 74.9% of the participants had studied the book published by SAMT in their ESP classes.

## 6. Discussion and Implications

This study examined the linguistic and professional needs of Iranian undergraduate physical education students and critically evaluated the adequacy of existing ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses. The findings underscored that although the current ESP courses offer a foundational grasp of English, they inadequately address the students' academic and professional demands in today's increasingly globalized and interdisciplinary contexts. The study's insights suggest a pressing need for a more dynamic and targeted curriculum to align with students' evolving academic, professional, and global communication needs. The analysis of student needs was structured around four dimensions: content, appearance, perceived importance of English, and perceived effect. The data pointed to students' general dissatisfaction with the relevance, quality, and applicability of current ESP materials, which often fail to reflect the demands of their specialized field. These results emphasize the importance of reforming the curriculum to incorporate real-world applications of English and domain-specific language usage, preparing students for both local and international opportunities.

### 6.1. Research Question 1: What Are the Linguistic and Professional Needs of Physical Education Students?

The findings of this study revealed that Iranian physical education students prioritize reading comprehension as the most critical skill for their academic endeavors. Approximately 64% of students identified reading as essential for understanding technical manuals, research articles, and other specialized resources integral to their discipline. This emphasis aligns with the unique demands of sports science, where staying abreast of contemporary research and applying evidence-based practices are fundamental Wileman et al, (2024). In addition to reading, listening and speaking skills were deemed indispensable, particularly for international engagement. The professional opportunities available to physical education students, such as attending global conferences, presenting research, and networking with international colleagues, necessitate proficiency in oral communication Sundqvist and Uztosun (2024). Despite the critical importance of these skills, the study highlighted significant gaps in vocabulary acquisition (65.1%) and speaking fluency (66.1%) Al-Khresheh (2024). These deficiencies not only hinder students' ability to communicate effectively but also limit their participation in global academic and professional discourse. The results of this research align with previous studies, such as Eslami (2010), which underscored the role of English as a gateway to academic and professional advancement in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts. However, this study brings a novel perspective by emphasizing oral communication skills, a necessity driven by the globalized nature of sports science and the increasing demand for effective cross-cultural interactions. In this regard, it offers a unique contribution by highlighting the mismatch between existing ESP instruction and the specialized, communicative needs of students in this discipline.

#### 6.1.1. Implications for Curriculum Design

These findings suggest that a comprehensive revision of ESP courses is required. Specifically, the curriculum should integrate activities and materials designed to enhance reading comprehension while simultaneously addressing weaknesses in speaking and vocabulary acquisition. For example, incorporating authentic texts, such as peer-reviewed journal articles and technical manuals, alongside

interactive speaking activities, such as role-playing professional scenarios, could bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Additionally, leveraging task-based and communicative teaching methods tailored to the specific needs of physical education students can foster both academic and professional language proficiency Li (2024). Employing a multimodal approach—combining visual, auditory, and textual resources—can further enhance students' learning experiences and prepare them for diverse professional settings. This study highlights the pressing need for targeted interventions to address the linguistic and professional needs of Iranian undergraduate physical education students. By aligning ESP instruction with these needs, educational institutions can better equip students to navigate the academic and professional challenges of a globalized world Shanavas (2024). The emphasis on developing both reading comprehension and oral communication skills ensures that students are not only academically prepared but also professionally competent, enabling them to succeed in an increasingly interconnected and competitive environment.

### **6.2. Research Question 2: How Effective Are Existing ESP Courses?**

The results reveal limited effectiveness of existing ESP courses. Only 26.8% of students expressed satisfaction with their ESP textbooks, citing outdated content, a lack of contextual relevance, and insufficient integration of practical skills. While instructors prioritized reading and writing, students reported a pressing need for listening and speaking skills, signaling a mismatch between teaching practices and learner expectations. These findings align partially with Hyland's (2019) work, which emphasized the need for task-based, context-specific materials in ESP education. However, the stark dissatisfaction with practical skill integration highlights a critical gap not fully addressed in prior studies. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasized that ESP courses should reflect learners' specific needs, a principle that seems insufficiently applied in the current curriculum.

This study critically examined the effectiveness of existing ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses for Iranian undergraduate physical education students. The results revealed a significant gap between the current curriculum's offerings and the students' linguistic and professional requirements. While these courses provide a foundational understanding of English, their limited contextual relevance, outdated materials, and insufficient emphasis on practical skills render them largely ineffective in meeting students' academic and career-oriented goals in line with Wileman et al, (2024); also, Zhou and Pan (2024). The students' dissatisfaction, with only 26.8% expressing contentment with their ESP textbooks, underscores the urgent need for reform. Key issues cited include outdated content, lack of contextual alignment with the field of physical education, and the inadequate integration of listening and speaking activities. These findings suggest that the current instructional approach fails to adapt to the rapidly evolving demands of globalized academic and professional environments, a concern consistently raised in ESP literature.

### **6.3. Research Question 3: How effective are existing ESP courses?**

The results indicate that the current ESP courses fall significantly short of fulfilling their intended purpose. A notable misalignment exists between the curriculum design and the needs of physical education students. While instructors tend to emphasize reading and writing, students highlight a critical demand for listening and speaking skills. This mismatch between teaching practices and learner expectations limits the practical applicability of the knowledge acquired and hinders students' readiness for international engagement Ghanbaripour et al, (2024). The findings resonate partially with Hyland's (2019) assertion that task-based and context-specific materials are integral to effective ESP instruction.

However, this study identifies a deeper, systemic issue: the limited focus on integrating practical skills into the curriculum. Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) foundational principle that ESP courses must directly reflect learners' specific needs appears insufficiently operationalized in the existing framework. The current curriculum's emphasis on traditional language components, while valuable, does not address the dynamic and communicative nature of professional settings in physical education.

#### **6.4. Implications for ESP Curriculum Improvement**

To enhance the effectiveness of ESP courses, it is essential to adopt a more student-centered and context-driven approach. Curriculum designers should prioritize updating materials to reflect contemporary advancements in sports science and ensure that course content aligns with real-world applications. This includes incorporating domain-specific vocabulary, authentic listening materials, and activities that simulate professional scenarios, such as international conference participation and collaboration in multicultural environments. Furthermore, integrating task-based and communicative teaching methodologies can bridge the gap between academic preparation and practical skill development. For instance, creating modules focused on role-playing, discussions, and case studies relevant to sports and physical education can provide students with the hands-on experience needed for their future careers. Blended learning approaches, leveraging digital platforms to supplement classroom instruction, can also enhance students' exposure to diverse linguistic contexts. Instructors must also undergo professional development to align their teaching practices with students' needs. Training workshops emphasizing innovative pedagogical approaches and the use of modern ESP tools can equip teachers with the skills to create more engaging and effective learning experiences.

The study underscores the limited effectiveness of existing ESP courses in addressing the linguistic and professional needs of physical education students. The significant mismatch between teaching practices and learner expectations calls for a comprehensive overhaul of the curriculum. By adopting a needs-based, context-specific approach and integrating practical skills into the curriculum, educational institutions can ensure that ESP courses not only prepare students academically but also equip them for success in their professional endeavors. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on ESP education, emphasizing the importance of evolving instructional practices to meet the demands of a rapidly globalizing world.

This study highlights the pressing need for improvements in the design and implementation of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses to align them more effectively with the academic and professional needs of undergraduate physical education students. The findings emphasize that existing ESP curricula fail to meet the dynamic demands of the field, necessitating a comprehensive overhaul to enhance relevance, applicability, and student engagement. The proposed recommendations for aligning ESP courses with students' needs reflect a holistic approach, integrating both traditional language teaching principles and modern pedagogical innovations. These suggestions aim to address the identified gaps in content relevance, skill integration, and instructional methods, ultimately ensuring that ESP courses prepare students for the evolving globalized professional environment of physical education and sports science.

## **6.5. Research Question 3: What Improvements Can Be Made to Align ESP Courses with Students' Needs?**

### ***6.5.1. Modernized Content***

One of the central improvements involves updating course materials to reflect advancements in sports science and physical education. Current ESP textbooks often contain outdated information, which undermines their relevance. Modernized content must incorporate the latest developments, research findings, and terminology specific to the discipline. This ensures students engage with materials that mirror the realities of their field and professional aspirations.

### ***6.5.2. Integrated Skill Development***

A significant shortcoming of current ESP courses is their disproportionate emphasis on reading and writing, while neglecting listening and speaking skills. Students require a balanced development of all language skills, particularly oral communication, to participate effectively in international conferences, workshops, and collaborative professional environments. Task-based and project-based activities, such as group presentations, debates, and simulated professional scenarios, can facilitate integrated skill acquisition and foster practical communication competencies.

### ***6.5.3. Vocabulary and Grammar Instruction***

The findings also highlight students' challenges with vocabulary acquisition and grammatical accuracy. To address these issues, targeted modules should be developed, incorporating interactive tools like corpus-based resources. These tools enable students to explore authentic language use, providing insights into collocations, patterns, and contextual appropriateness. Additionally, integrating vocabulary-building activities into tasks that mirror real-world applications can enhance both retention and usability.

### ***6.5.4. Utilization of Multimedia Resources***

Leveraging digital platforms and multimedia resources can significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. Gamified learning, interactive videos, and online discussion forums create dynamic learning environments that cater to diverse learning styles. These resources not only foster motivation but also provide students with opportunities to practice language skills in authentic and engaging contexts.

### ***6.5.5. Instructor Training***

Teachers play a pivotal role in the success of ESP courses. Equipping instructors with modern methodologies and tools is crucial for fostering balanced skill development. Professional development programs should focus on innovative pedagogical approaches, such as flipped classrooms, collaborative learning, and technology-enhanced instruction. This ensures that instructors are well-prepared to meet students' linguistic and professional needs effectively.

These recommendations align with Ferris's (1998) assertion that context-specific needs analysis is essential for effective ESP instruction. However, this study builds on Ferris's framework by emphasizing the integration of digital tools and innovative methodologies, which reflect the growing importance of technology in language education. Additionally, the focus on modernizing content and incorporating task-based activities resonates with Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) foundational principles of ESP course design.

### **6.5.6. Implications for Curriculum Development**

To implement these improvements effectively, collaboration between curriculum designers, subject matter experts, and language instructors is essential. A dynamic curriculum that evolves with advancements in sports science and language education will ensure that students are equipped with the skills and knowledge required for academic and professional success. Furthermore, integrating feedback mechanisms, such as regular needs assessments, can help maintain the curriculum's relevance and effectiveness over time. The study underscores the critical need for a holistic redesign of ESP courses for physical education students. By modernizing content, balancing skill development, addressing linguistic challenges, leveraging multimedia resources, and enhancing instructor training, ESP programs can be transformed into dynamic, contextually relevant, and impactful learning experiences. These recommendations not only address the identified gaps but also contribute to the broader discourse on ESP education by emphasizing innovation, adaptability, and student-centered approaches.

### **6.6. Comparison with Previous Studies**

This study builds on and extends the existing literature by drawing parallels with prior research while also highlighting critical distinctions that enrich the discourse in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education. This study corroborates findings from Eslami (2010) and Hyland (2019) regarding the essential role of reading comprehension and English proficiency for academic and professional growth in specific fields. Similar to these studies, our research emphasizes that linguistic competence, particularly in understanding academic texts, is indispensable for learners aiming to excel in their specialized disciplines. These results confirm the broader applicability of well-designed ESP programs across diverse educational and cultural contexts.

Moreover, the findings align with Flowerdew and Peacock (2001), who underscored the importance of addressing learners' needs through tailored curricula. Like previous research, this study identifies critical gaps in current teaching practices and materials, advocating for a shift toward a more learner-centered approach. In this regard, the study's insights resonate with Benesch (2001), emphasizing the integration of professional realities into ESP course design to enhance learner engagement and relevance. Unlike much of the earlier research that predominantly emphasized reading and writing skills (e.g., Basturkmen, 2010), this study places a stronger emphasis on oral communication skills, particularly speaking and listening. The prioritization of these skills reflects the evolving global demands on professionals, especially in fields like sports science, where international collaboration is increasingly prevalent. This distinction underscores a crucial shift in ESP research toward addressing the communicative demands of a globalized workforce.

Another significant departure from earlier works lies in the integration of technology as a solution to persistent challenges in ESP education. While Godwin-Jones (2018) highlighted the potential of technology in language learning, this study provides actionable insights into the use of AI-driven tools, gamified content, and multimedia resources to bridge gaps in traditional textbook-based approaches. The emphasis on personalized and interactive learning paths represents a forward-looking perspective not extensively explored in earlier studies. Additionally, this study's geographic and disciplinary focus sets it apart. While previous research has often centered on business, medical, or engineering students, this study targets physical education students in Iran, a relatively underexplored demographic in ESP research. By addressing their specific linguistic and professional needs, the study fills a critical gap and offers insights that are both context-specific and globally relevant.

### **6.6.1. Theoretical and Practical Contributions**

This study extends the theoretical discourse by proposing a validated needs analysis framework that is adaptable across different ESP contexts. Unlike earlier frameworks that may have lacked specificity or adaptability, the one introduced here bridges the gap between theoretical constructs and practical applications. Furthermore, this study's focus on cross-skill integration and the interplay between linguistic and professional competencies advances the understanding of curriculum design in ESP. On a practical level, the study's recommendations for curriculum designers, educators, and policymakers provide a roadmap for addressing the identified gaps. For instance, the emphasis on culturally relevant materials and technology-enhanced teaching strategies distinguishes this work from prior research and offers tangible solutions for contemporary ESP challenges.

### **6.6.2. Addressing the Evolving Needs of Learners**

The increasing globalization of professional disciplines has heightened the importance of intercultural communication skills in ESP education. This study's findings highlight a critical need for curricula that not only foster linguistic proficiency but also prepare students to navigate diverse cultural and professional contexts. While earlier studies (e.g., Richards & Rodgers, 2014) have touched on intercultural competence, this study's focus on integrating such training into ESP courses for physical education students represents a novel contribution to the field. In summary, while this study aligns with and builds on prior research in several key areas, it also introduces innovative perspectives that address emerging trends and challenges in ESP education. These contributions underscore the importance of continually adapting ESP curricula to meet the dynamic needs of learners and their professional environments.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study has provided a comprehensive exploration of the linguistic and professional needs of Iranian undergraduate physical education students, critically assessed the effectiveness of existing ESP courses, and proposed actionable strategies for curriculum improvement. The findings underscore the importance of aligning ESP curricula with the evolving academic and professional demands of learners in an increasingly globalized context. The research revealed significant gaps in the current ESP offerings, including outdated materials, insufficient focus on oral communication, and a lack of integration between language skills and practical applications. These deficiencies underscore the need for a paradigm shift in ESP course design, one that prioritizes learner-centered, contextually relevant, and technologically enhanced approaches.

A particularly noteworthy contribution of this study is the emphasis on oral communication skills—listening and speaking—which emerged as critical for the professional success of physical education students. This finding not only highlights the evolving needs of learners but also distinguishes this research from earlier studies that predominantly focused on reading and writing skills. The incorporation of task-based and project-oriented learning strategies, alongside advanced digital tools, offers a promising path forward for addressing these gaps. The study's theoretical contributions include the validation of a multidimensional needs analysis framework that can serve as a valuable tool for curriculum designers and researchers across diverse ESP contexts. By integrating learner needs with professional competencies, the framework bridges the gap between academic preparation and workplace demands.

From a practical perspective, the study offers several targeted recommendations for stakeholders:

- Curriculum Designers: Develop modernized, skill-integrated materials that reflect both local and global professional practices.
- Educators: Adopt interactive teaching methodologies and leverage technology to enhance engagement and effectiveness.
- Policy Makers: Support ongoing professional development for instructors to ensure alignment between teaching practices and learner needs.

The study also highlights the critical role of intercultural communication in ESP education, particularly in fields like sports science that necessitate international collaboration. Integrating these skills into the curriculum could further enhance learners' readiness to thrive in global professional environments. While the findings are robust, the study acknowledges several limitations, including its geographic focus and sample size, which may restrict the generalizability of the results. Future research could address these limitations by conducting cross-cultural comparisons, exploring the integration of AI in ESP instruction, and examining the longitudinal impacts of redesigned curricula. Ultimately, this research serves as a call to action for a collaborative and innovative approach to ESP curriculum design. By fostering partnerships among educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers, the ESP field can better equip learners with the linguistic and professional competencies required in a globalized workforce. The insights provided here not only contribute to the broader discourse on ESP education but also lay the groundwork for transformative changes in curriculum development, ensuring that learners are prepared to meet the dynamic challenges of their disciplines.

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### **Authors' Contributions**

All authors have conducted the study, collected data, analyzed and interpreted the data, and written up the manuscript.

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### **Competing Interests**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

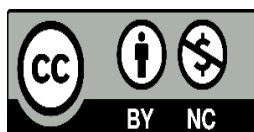
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