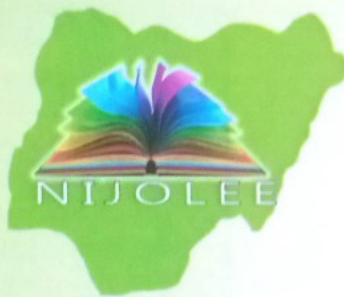


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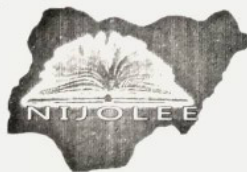
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### The mission and objectives of NIJOLEE are:

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- To provide a platform for discussing global trends, ideas, activities and practices that shape the teaching and learning of English as a second language.

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The journal welcomes articles in the area of literacy, literacy education, literature, language education and English as a second language and French as a foreign language. These areas have a wide coverage. Thus, a wide array of studies and reviews are required in these areas. The Journal encourages university academics, postgraduate students, research-based organizations, librarians, publishers, curriculum experts, and authors who have developed their own theories, research-based approaches, application based reports, and innovative solutions to the teaching and learning of English language and literacy education to make good use of this opportunity.

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**GENERAL ENGLISH AND ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC  
PURPOSE: AREAS OF CONVERGENCE AND  
DIVERGENCE AND THE CURRICULUM IMPLICATIONS**

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**Abstract**

*There are some qualities that make English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for General Purposes (EGP) similar. But these two terms should not be confused to mean the same thing. In this article, the authors took a look at the similarities and differences between the two terms, pointing out the curriculum implications. In doing so, the general scopes of each of their distinctive features were examined and discussed. ESP adopts learner-centred, context-oriented and adulthood-oriented approach by focusing on the multidimensional needs of the learners. EGP or General English (GE) on the other hand applies to language learning contexts where learners have no recognizable reason to learn the language. It refers generally to the English language education where emphasis is placed on the structural/grammatical elements of language to enable learners to pass examinations or fulfill other academic or work requirements. There is however a major point of convergence between General English and ESP in the fact that success is not only based on what one knows but also on how one communicates. Knowledge and technical know-how must be presented with an excellent standard of communication skills. Therefore, cooperation between both the ESP and EGP teachers to fulfil the ongoing needs of language learning and use language effectively.*

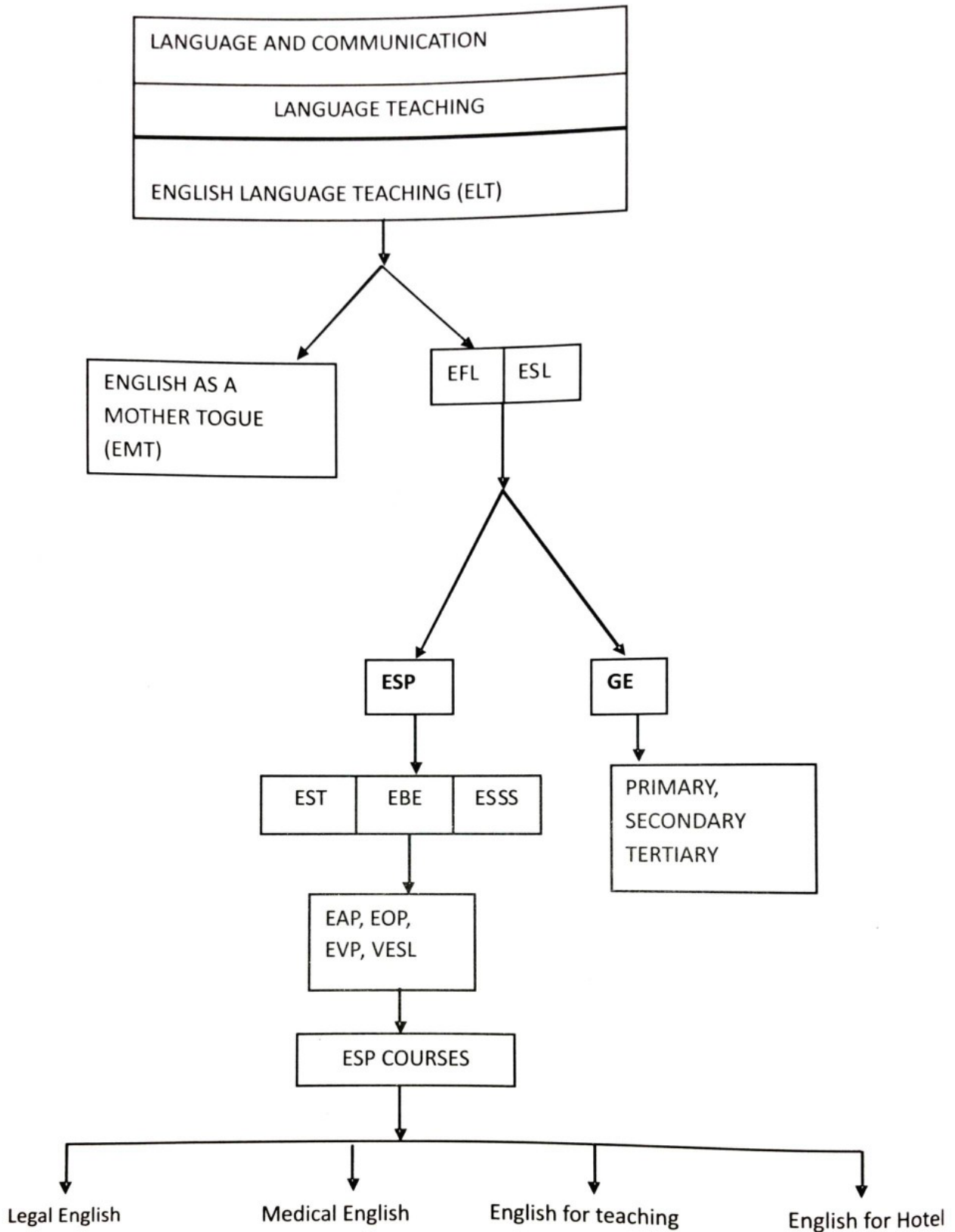
**Keywords:** ESP, EGP, communication, needs analysis

## Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) can be viewed and carried out under two broad branches namely, teaching English as Mother tongue (EMT) and teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The former is mostly applicable to teaching English as a first or mother tongue to indigenous speakers of English language in environments such as the United Kingdom, etc. EMT may also be applicable in a situation where a non-indigenous child is exposed to English as the first language by virtue of his/ her parents being residents in such an environment. The latter is applicable to Niger, Dahomey, etc., where English is taught as a foreign language in addition to French that is the second language. The second arm of the branch is ESL, which means teaching English as a second language as obtained in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, etc. In this situation, other languages such as French, Chinese, and Arabic

are taught as foreign languages. The two branches of English as a foreign language (EFL) also gave rise to teaching English for Specific Purpose (ESP) and General English language teaching (GE). ESP gave rise to different programmes such as EST, English for Science and Technology, English for Business and Economics (EBE), English for Social Sciences (ESS), etc. or different careers such as English for Academic Purpose (EAP), English for Occupational Purpose (EOP), English for Vocational Purpose (EVP). The programmes and careers in ESP gave rise to courses such as Legal English, Medical English, English for Hotel, English for teaching (language education) etc. The General English language programme (GE) is the general English teaching in schools and colleges that teaches the four language skills, among others. The information above is illustrated in the tree of ESP below

Fig. 1: The Tree of ELT (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987)





### ESP and GEP: Areas of Convergence

As shown in Fig. 1 above, ELT and GE are primarily concerned with communication and learning and are important for students in order to attain various skills to move confidently in the modern world. Widdowson (1993) as cited in Mohammad (N.D), the distinction between ESP and GE is in the way one defines and implements the learning purpose. While ESP is objective-oriented learning where the specification of object corresponds to the aim, GE on the other hand is aim-oriented which does not require the specification of objective to aim i.e. an educational operation dealing with the development of general capacity. The limitations of GE gave rise to the emergence of ESP. General English has been widely criticized for its inability to bring students to the required competence in language which match their educational level (Dayal, 2005; Allen & Widdowson, 1979; Gatehouse, 2001; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). As its name suggests, GE is taught for no obvious reasons (Nwoke, 1997) hence students do not understand the basis for studying it. Nor do students have the motivation to learn it. Allen and Widdowson (1979, p.123) assert:

The general English instruction which is provided in secondary schools has in most cases proved to be inadequate as a preparation for use which students are required to make of the language when they enter higher education.

Against this background, experts recommend a "shift of the focus of attention from the grammatical to the communicative properties of language" (Allen & Widdowson, 1979, p.124) where language learning is considered not only in terms of its structures (grammar and vocabulary), but also in terms of the communicative functions that it performs (Littlewood, 1981, p.x), defined as those courses "where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by a prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner" (Munby, 1978, p.2). ESP was conceived to help learners use English language as a means of communication in real life situation. Thus, ESP is considered "relevant to students' purposes for coming into the school" (Onjewu & Maisamari, 1997, p.145). It is the type of English that clearly answers the question: Why do the learners need the language? (Nwoke, 199, p.157). A further

important distinction between ESP and general English is that ESP aims to increase learners' skills and confidence in the use of English as a second language.

In an ESP course, language is used as a service rather than a subject with emphasis on the needs of the learners while GE covers the teaching of all the language skills. One of the most important features of ESP in relation to General English is that of the status of English courses being subjects of their own right to a service industry for other specialists. ESP always focuses on *needs analysis, text analysis* and the training of learners to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their academic or professional situation and can broadly be divided into two kinds: English for occupational/vocational/professional purpose (EOP/EVE/EPP) and English for academic purpose (EAP) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1989). Needs analysis is a central and distinguishing feature of ESP and communicative language teaching. It is to ESP and communicative language teaching what a hub is to a wheel. A needs analysis refers to an exercise requiring the language teacher/ESP practitioner to determine students' learning needs as well as target situation needs through a self-reporting questionnaire, an interview, survey etc. The needs of learners according to McDonough (1984, p.31) refer to "...what learners will have to do in their professions, jobs or particular academic disciplines." These are "specified in terms of the end product (writing examination answers, attending conferences, and so on), not in terms of what teachers and learners have to do to reach that stage." It is the general belief of the ESP advocates that learners have a reason for learning; and learners' reason constitutes the pivot on which ESP rotates. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.19) sums up by saying it is "an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method, are based on the learner's reason for learning."

It is well known that ESP is a branch of English Language Teaching (ELT) which lends itself to a number of activities, movements and subjects carried out predominantly in English across the world (Stevens, 1977). In ESP, learners learn language for occupational or for the purpose of furthering their studies. This means

that learners learn English for a particular career, profession or specialization such as Politics, Engineering, Medicine, Law, Agriculture, Banking, etc. or for boosting their effectiveness in the workplace or in a business generally. Carter (1983) opines that ESP as a course is concerned with turning learners into users of the language while General English refers to the time in which the use of English was on peak with the aim of promoting its usage as an official or second language. GE aims to achieve a high standard of everyday English communication skills. It covers the four main skills of: *listening*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing*. The following are the characteristics of General English as outlined by Muhammad (nd):

It is a free time task;

- It has more freedom as compared to the ESP course;
- It offers a soothing environment;
- It uses literary texts to produce effectual skills in students;
- It permits learners to acquire and improve general writing skills. It is therefore language in seclusion while ESP is language in context;

Muhammad (N.d) itemized the characteristics of ESP as follows:

- It is based on language of requirement; inspiration related to job
- It has particular use of vocabulary
- It is often used for e-commerce or business communication purposes
- It taught with the help of presentation and negotiation
- It uses different tactics to accomplish its target.

Hutchinson and Waters (1989) state that ESP unlike the General English (GE) is not a matter of teaching specialized varieties of English; not a matter of science words and grammar for scientists; not different from any other kind of language teaching but concerns what people do with the language and the range of knowledge and abilities that enable them to do it. Ike (2000) opines that English does not only have regional, social and functional varieties but also has varieties for specific purposes. ESP is also compared to works of literature which transcend the bounds of general English and remains

essentially standard and mutually intelligible despite the influences of technical or specialized terminologies peculiar to professions.

### ESP and GPE: Areas of Divergence

The major difference between ESP and GE is that, while the former is content specific, the latter is based on general English language teaching as obtained in primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.

Another difference is on the purpose of learning English and the focus on language learning. Lorenzo (2005) opines that ESP students have some acquaintance with English and are learning the language in order to communicate a set of professional skills and to perform particular job-related functions. Lorenzo emphasizes that ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures. It can however be argued that grammar still plays an important and necessary part in an ESP course. It covers subjects varying from accounting or computer science to tourism and business management. In that regard it can be stressed that the focal point of ESP is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real world (or wishes), instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners. Lorenzo stresses that ESP is usually delivered to mostly adult students who have had knowledge of the fundamental aspects of the language and are either in work related setting (EOP) or have the motivation for higher learning in their areas of specialization. Hutchinson and Waters (1992) consider ESP to be an approach and not a product. They opine that there is no particular kind of language or methodology nor does it consist of a particular type of teaching material. This corroborates Coffey's (1985) view that ESP makes quick and economic use of the English language to pursue a course of academic study as in EAP or to achieve effectiveness in paid employment as in EOP.

General English according to Wright (1992) is concerned with everyday life which exposes the learner to linguistic items relating to universal topics. Some of these "universal topics are socializing, shopping, travelling, eating out, telephoning friends etc. This is seen in the numerous course books used in schools to teach

General English. A specific English course may contain material pertaining to a GE course but according to Wright (1992) "when we reach the stage at which any topic constitutes an individual's profession, it becomes crucial that he has mastery of the specialized language pertaining to it" and this is where ESP comes in. Mitchell & Myles (2004) opines that ESP programmes are content-based, task-based and integrative which provide cooperative learning. This allows manageable groups of students to work together to accomplish meaningful tasks thereby facilitating cognitive and socio-cultural development.

ESP unlike GE, is for the people who already have some background in English mastery and the purpose is to set a 'professional skill' such as speaking, writing and presentation skills in typical job-related situations as well as evaluation and assessment procedure in certain job function. Theoretically, ESP is a "dependent subject of study" linked to a particular area: vocational, academic, professional (Allen & Widdowson, 1974). Even though some experts do not really consider a sharp difference between ESP and General English, at least they agree that the practical outcome of the learning and the vocabulary used in learning are different.

ESP can be seen as a special and specific edition of GE that incorporates practical linguistic skills to enable students' successful performance of professional tasks. It provides basic knowledge and skills of English at a school level where the occupation/profession and higher educational orientation of the students are not properly defined.

English for General Purposes as it is sometimes called is essentially the English language education in junior and senior secondary schools. Learners are introduced to the sounds and symbols of English, as well as to the lexical/grammatical/rhetorical elements that translate into spoken and written discourse. There is no particular situation targeted in this kind of language learning. Rather, one can say that it focuses on applications in general situations such as appropriate dialogue with restaurant staff, bank tellers, post office clerks, telephone operators, English language teachers, party guests as well as lessons on how to read and write the English

typically found in text books, newspapers, magazine etc. General English curriculum also includes aspects of the second language.

Moreover, ESP students are usually adults who already have some acquaintance with English and are learning the language in order to communicate a set of professional skills and to perform particular job-related functions. An ESP programme is built as an assessment of purposes, needs and the functions for which English is required. Belcher (2006) opines that with "ESP, problems are unique to specific learners in specific contexts and thus must be carefully delineated and tailored to fit instruction". Mohan (1986) maintains that ESP courses focus on preparing learners "for chosen communicative environment" p 59. According him, more and more individuals, usually adults, have highly specific academic and professional reasons for seeking to improve their language skills and this calls for 'English' for special. Supporting Mohan's view, Robinson (1991) states that students study English not because they are interested in English language (or English language culture) as such but because they need English for study or work purposes and therefore are just motivated to learn the English language.

In addition, there is specified time for an ESP course. ESP has specified objectives for adult learners which relates to the time available for them to learn the course. In some countries, English and content subjects are taught together; it could be language and work training at the same time or English for students in tertiary institutions who must have had training in General English. Popescu (2010) opines that the age of general English learners varies from children to adults and the GE courses are responsible for the general language acquisition and for the vast majority of learners, are extremely useful. GE helps learners to cope with any subject matter course and gives the ability to generate more language. Furthermore, the entire duration for students in the GE programme is far longer than the time taken for ESP courses.

GE and ESP diverge not only in the nature of the learner, but also in the aim of classroom instruction. While in GE all four language skills; listening, reading, speaking and writing are stressed equally, ESP has always

focused on needs analysis, text analysis, and the training of learners to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their academic or professional situations (Dudley-Evans & St John 1998). Carter (1983) believes that self-direction is important in ESP in the sense that ESP courses are concerned with turning learners into users of the language. Thus, ESP plays an integral role in communicative language teaching. Students approach the study of English through a field that is already known and relevant to them. This means that they are able to use what they learn in the ESP classroom right away in their work and studies. The ESP approach enhances the relevance of what the students are learning and enables them to use the English they know to learn even more English, since their interest in their field will motivate them to interact with speakers and texts. An ESP programme might, for example, emphasize the development of reading skills in students who are preparing for graduate work in business administration; or might promote the development of spoken skills in students who are studying English in order to become receptionists. However, various ideas and teaching methods can be transferred to the classes of ESP from the classes of GE and vice versa, giving the learner the opportunity to acquire better skills in the language.

ESP curriculum is rather different from that of GE. In ESP curriculum, the objective or goal is more to the practical aspect i.e., applying language in a job-specific-related-situation. The curriculum contains the following aspects:

- a. Specific task, vocabulary, and language in context
- b. The starting point based on the learners' background knowledge
- c. Operational, communicative and notional syllabus
- d. Learner-centredness

ESP combines subject-matter and English language teaching. Such a combination is highly motivating because students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their main field of study, whether it be accounting, business management, economics, computer science or tourism. Being able to use the vocabulary and structures that they learn in a meaningful context reinforces what is taught and

increases their motivation. The students' abilities in their subject-matter fields, in turn, improve their ability to acquire English. Subject-matter knowledge gives them the context they need to understand the English of the classroom. In the ESP class, students are shown how the subject-matter content is expressed in English through access to specific vocabularies of learners' companies/industries and functional areas as well as understand how to employ such vocabularies in specific business situation; use appropriate style and tone for their professional disciplines to convert technical knowledge into compelling presentations and reports.

General English is sometimes called TENOR- the Teaching of English for No Obvious Reason (Abbot, 1981 in Mohammad, N.d). This applies to those English language learning contexts where learners have no recognizable reason to learn the language. It refers to the English language education at school levels where the students are made familiar with the structural/grammatical elements of English language to pass the examinations (Hutchison & Waters, 1987).

Furthermore, material writing is one of the most characteristic features of ESP in practice, in contrast to GE teaching, a large amount of the ESP teacher's time may be taken up in writing materials (Hutchinson, T & Waters, A. (1987). This is among other reasons due to the fact that a teacher or institution may wish to provide teaching materials that will fit the specific subject area of particular learners as such materials may not be available commercially. This means that much of the work done by ESP teachers is concerned with designing appropriate courses for various groups of learners. Thus, in a GE course, design plays a minor role in the life of the GE teacher; courses are determined by either tradition, choice of textbook or ministerial decree; for ESP teacher, course design is often a substantial and important part of the workload.

The difference between ESP and GE notwithstanding, it could be argued that the question of needs analysis which seems very vital in ESP has recently been the starting point of GE. All courses are based on one perceived need or the other and this has necessitated the emergence of English in the school timetable in the first place

them to acquire a second field of expertise in the needed areas such as engineering, law, medicine or horticulture.

Furthermore, ESP practitioner has to perform more roles as compared to GE teachers. There is need to train more ELT teachers for ESP as there are huge varieties of courses and contexts.

In addition, in ESP classroom there are older students than in GE classes, teachers should therefore avoid asserting absolute authority in such situations and try to adopt an informal style to teach and encourage students' participation in classroom activities.

The ESP teacher is basically involved in what can be termed a training operation of equipping the learners with a restricted competence to cope with defined tasks while the GE teacher is involved in an educational operation of equipping learners with a general capacity to cope with undefined eventualities in future. Therefore, the both ESP and GE teacher should be skillful and well trained to enable them to meet the needs and aspirations of the students so as to produce fruitful results.

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