

FROM GENERAL ENGLISH TEACHER TO ESP PRACTITIONER: KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract. This article explores the transition from teaching General English (GE) to becoming an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) practitioner, highlighting the significant changes in roles, responsibilities, and required skills. It delves into the unique challenges faced by ESP teachers and provides practical strategies for coping with these challenges, including continuous professional development, collaboration with industry experts, and adopting needs-based teaching methodologies. Emphasizing the importance of lifelong learning and adaptability, the piece underscores the rewarding opportunities available to educators in ESP. The work serves as a valuable resource for GE teachers considering or undergoing the shift to ESP, offering insights into how they can effectively meet the linguistic and professional needs of their students.

Keywords: General English (GE), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), language teaching, curriculum design, professional development, needs analysis, assessment strategies, specialized language skills, cultural sensitivity, lifelong learning, ESP challenges, professional communication, teacher transition.

Introduction. The shift from teaching General English (GE) to becoming an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) practitioner marks a significant transformation in the roles and responsibilities of a language teacher (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). ESP requires not only advanced linguistic skills but also a deep understanding of

specific industries, professions, or fields (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Unlike GE, where the focus is primarily on general communication skills, ESP involves developing language proficiency tailored to a professional context. This shift presents both rewarding opportunities and complex challenges for educators (Anthony, 2018). Below, we explore these in detail.

General English teachers often focus on the broad aspects of language, aiming to improve students' fluency and communication in diverse contexts. However, in ESP, teachers must often transition into subject-matter facilitators, requiring knowledge in specialized domains like law, medicine, or business (Basturkmen, 2010). This shift can lead to a significant change in a teacher's professional identity, as ESP practitioners often take on dual roles as language instructors and advisors in specific fields.

Challenge: To succeed in ESP, a GE teacher needs to develop confidence in their new role, which can be daunting without background knowledge in the specialized field (Anthony, 2018). This requires a mindset shift and a dedication to continuous learning.

Coping Strategy:

- **Collaborate with Experts:** Partnering with professionals in the target field can help bridge knowledge gaps and build confidence. For example, law students' instructors can work with legal experts to create relevant materials and scenarios.
- **Professional Development:** Attend specialized workshops, webinars, or courses in the specific field to acquire foundational knowledge.

Unlike in GE teaching, where topics are often broad and varied, ESP practitioners must familiarize themselves with the terminology, concepts, and work practices relevant to their students' professional fields. For example, teaching English to law students demands a solid understanding of legal terminology, case law, and courtroom procedures, while teaching English for business may require knowledge

of economic principles, marketing strategies, and corporate communication (Basturkmen, 2010).

Challenge: Bridging the knowledge gap in a field-specific context can be time-consuming and intellectually demanding. Many GE teachers find it challenging to develop a sufficient level of understanding in these areas while managing their teaching responsibilities (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Engaging with industry professionals, accessing online courses, and reading field-specific materials are essential but resource-intensive solutions.

Coping Strategy:

- **Self-Learning Resources:** Use MOOCs, industry-specific textbooks, and podcasts to acquire terminology and concepts.
- **Field Visits and Observations:** Spend time observing professionals at work to understand real-life applications of the language.
- **Peer Networks:** Join ESP teacher forums or social media groups to share knowledge and teaching resources.

In General English, teachers usually have access to established curricula and materials. ESP, however, often requires custom-designed lessons tailored to the exact needs of the students (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). An ESP curriculum should address not only language skills but also industry-specific scenarios, problem-solving skills, and often simulation-based tasks (e.g., mock trials, patient interactions, or business negotiations).

Challenge: Designing an effective ESP curriculum is highly complex and requires substantial planning. Teachers need to analyze students' specific language needs, industry expectations, and the target audience's skill gaps. As a result, GE teachers transitioning to ESP must become adept in needs analysis, material development, and ongoing curriculum adaptation (Basturkmen, 2010).

Coping Strategy:

- Needs Analysis: Conduct surveys or interviews to understand the specific requirements of your students.
- Adapt Existing Materials: Use existing GE materials as a base, modifying them to include industry-specific scenarios and tasks.
- Continuous Feedback: Regularly seek input from students and adjust the curriculum to meet evolving needs.

Assessing language skills in ESP requires a different approach than GE. In GE, proficiency is often gauged through general tests in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In contrast, ESP assessment strategies need to focus on how well students can communicate in realistic, job-related situations (Anthony, 2018). For example, evaluating a healthcare worker's ability to explain medical procedures in English is different from assessing everyday conversational fluency.

Challenge: Designing assessments that accurately reflect the linguistic and communicative demands of a particular profession is challenging. ESP teachers must create assessments that measure both language proficiency and the application of that language within industry-specific contexts. This often requires extensive collaboration with subject matter experts (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

Coping Strategy:

- Task-Based Assessments: Design evaluations that mimic real-world tasks, such as role-playing a business negotiation or presenting a legal argument.
- Collaborate with Field Experts: Consult professionals to ensure the assessments reflect industry expectations.
- Rubrics: Develop clear, detailed rubrics that balance language proficiency and task performance.

Since ESP often involves working with professionals from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, ESP practitioners must be adept at handling cultural nuances in both language and professional etiquette. Teaching English to a group of international legal professionals, for instance, necessitates understanding the legal

and cultural nuances that may influence communication styles and expectations (Basturkmen, 2010).

Challenge: Cultural sensitivity is crucial in ESP, and it requires teachers to adjust their approach to respect students' professional and cultural values. This requires ongoing professional development in intercultural communication and cultural competency, as well as a deep understanding of students' professional contexts (Anthony, 2018).

Coping Strategy:

- **Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Engage in courses or workshops on intercultural communication.
- **Open Dialogue:** Encourage students to share their cultural expectations and norms to foster mutual understanding.

ESP practitioners are often required to engage in continuous learning, both to keep up with advances in language teaching methodologies and to stay informed about trends in their students' professional fields (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). This may mean attending specialized workshops, reading industry-related literature, or even collaborating with professionals in the field to enhance authenticity in instruction.

Challenge: The commitment to lifelong learning can be both financially and intellectually demanding. GE teachers transitioning to ESP must be prepared to dedicate time and resources to develop both professionally and academically to remain effective and credible (Basturkmen, 2010).

Coping Strategy:

- **Time Management:** Dedicate specific hours weekly for professional development.
- **Institutional Support:** Advocate for access to funded training programs or collaboration opportunities within the institution.

- Peer Mentorship: Pair with experienced ESP practitioners for guidance and resource sharing.

Conclusion. Transitioning from General English to ESP is a rewarding but challenging pathway. It requires teachers to expand their skills and adapt to the unique linguistic demands of specific industries. By committing to continuous learning and seeking opportunities for collaboration with field professionals, former GE teachers can find success in ESP. Although this shift may be demanding, it enables language educators to play a crucial role in helping professionals communicate effectively in English within their fields, contributing to global collaboration and professional growth.

Ultimately, the journey from GE to ESP allows teachers to develop an in-depth understanding of language and its application in specialized contexts, making a meaningful impact in the careers and lives of their students.

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