

25-november 2025

WHICH TEACHING APPROACHES ARE APPLICABLE IN UZBEKISTAN'S HIGHER EDUCATION: ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES OR CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION?

Ravshan Ergashevich Rikhsiyev

Lecturer, Department of English

University of World Economy and Diplomacy

rikhsiyev@uwed.uz

Abstract

Most local universities in Uzbekistan teach English as the main foreign language. However, language instruction at these institutions of higher learning varies depending on some factors such as institutional priorities or student needs. This article will explore the context of English teaching at local universities in Uzbekistan, and which approach is likely mostly effective to use in this context, ESP or CBI.

Key words: Higher Education, English for Specific Purposes, Content-Based Instruction

Introduction

All universities in Uzbekistan provide English language programs for their students as part of a larger trend in the nation's modernization and international involvement (*May, 2024*). These programs are normally designed to not only help the students use the language effectively as a communication tool but also serve

25-november 2025

as a cultural bridge in their professional lives. Nevertheless, the instructional approaches taken by universities vary across institutions. While some offer general English courses (CBI approach), others provide specialized English courses (ESP approach) for students. This raises a vital issue: which approach – ESP or CBI – is more effective in Uzbekistan's higher education context? In today's language teaching context, this remains a valid and pressing question that requires further exploration to identify appropriate evidence for the application of these approaches. Hence, this article argues that every university or institute of higher learning should adopt the approach that is well-suited to the academic and professional needs of its students.

Literature Review

In examining approaches to language teaching, it is essential to clarify the distinctions between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or Content-Based Instruction (CBI) models of teaching by considering how ESP is different from CBI, what their characteristics are and what happens in the ESP or CBI classroom.

ESP

ESP originated as “Languages for specific purposes” in England in the 1920s before evolving into its current form (*Johns and Price, 2014*). It is a teaching approach that focuses on the learner’s needs, purposes and reasons for learning the language. This approach equips the learners with the linguistic skills required for professional contexts such as diplomatic relations, business interactions and legal discussions (*Abdullahi, Umar and Abba, 2019*). According to ESP experts’ unified characteristics, ESP should be specifically tailored to the needs of the learner, related in content to disciplines, occupations and activities, and focused

25-november 2025

on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc. It is necessary to note that the ESP curricula be consistent with the sociocultural and discourse contexts that the learners will be exposed to. Moreover, some researchers also recommended that ESP teachers included real-life activities and authentic texts (e.g. job applications, work manuals, newspapers) during their teaching and learning process to maintain the instructional goals (*Johns & Price, 2014*).

Johns and Price (2014) pointed out ESP courses have become common among the students who wanted to pursue careers or studies in English-medium contexts and cited examples of some universities such as Hasan II University in Morocco, which offered ESP programs. Based on this information it can be deduced that ESP courses are usually designed for students who learn the language at universities for occupational purposes.

In 2020, a project of the British Council Uzbekistan titled ENSPIRE-U carried out by in partnership with the then Ministry of Higher and Specialized Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan developed the ESP curriculum for higher education in Uzbekistan. The Curriculum was developed by a team of specialists from different Uzbek universities across the country and international experts in alignment with national standards for language learning and Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning (CEFR 2001/2018) which stipulates that syllabuses be tailored to the specific needs of institutions and learners. They should also reflect the Curriculum in terms of rationale, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, content, teaching approach and assessment (*West et al., 2020*).

25-november 2025

While ESP emphasizes professional and occupational needs, the Content-based instruction takes a different approach by integrating language learning with subject matter content which is discussed in the following paragraph.

CBI

According to Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989, 2003 cited in Snow, 2014), CBI is an approach to teaching English through various subject matters which normally aims to prepare students for a specific occupation or profession. This teaching approach allows students to learn English in various contexts and via authentic texts. CBI is implemented in the L2 and foreign language classrooms using a variety of models, some of which can be seen as follows:

Table 1. Models of Content-Based Instruction (CBI)

Model	Description
Immersion	This is a content-driven model in which students learn other subjects in their foreign language. In this model, the expected outcome is the bilingualism of students and it envisages total immersion of FL use.
Sheltered model	As an alternative to traditional ESL classes, this model is suitable for L2 students whose language proficiency does not allow them to take regular content courses along with native English speakers. So it is considered as the content-driven instruction which stipulates to use particular instructional strategies and materials (visual aids, etc.).

25-november 2025

Adjunct model	This is an equally driven language and content model of instruction. It creates a room for language and content exposure to students at the same time. It brings ESL and subject teachers to collaborate to meet the needs of L2 students.
Theme-based model	This is language-driven model of teaching foreign language which aims to instruct selected topics or themes to students with diverse language backgrounds. It has Six T's Approach (Themes/Topics/Texts/Threads/Tasks/Transitions) necessary for teachers to deliver purposeful lessons with the right content resources and language learning activities.

Now, we will look at some strengths and challenges of CBI.

Table 2. Strengths and Challenges of CBI

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of more interesting and motivating language learning experience • Student-centeredness, focus on students' academic/vocational objectives, interests, needs • Achievement of twofold outcomes: improved language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of ESL/EFL teacher roles • Difficulty in finding content suitable for lower level students • Designing of reliable, valid, and fair assessment tools

25-november 2025

proficiency and content
knowledge

Context: Uzbekistan's Higher Education

To reflect the current situation of English teaching process,in the following table we will take a look at a sample of four syllabuses obtained personally from the local state universities and from their websites:

Table 3. Comparison of Local University Syllabuses

No	University	Program level (BA/MA), year of study and discipline	Year	Focus (ESP/CBI/ General English)	Alignment with CEFR	Assessment
1	Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature	BA Year 1 Uzbek Language and Literatur e	2021-2022	CBI	CEFR-aligned	Course completion assessment (Exam)

25-november 2025

2	University of World Economy and Diplomacy	BA Year 2 Political Science	2023-2024	ESP	CEFR-aligned	Continuous Assessment and Final Exam
3	Uzbek State World Languages University	MA Year 1 Linguistics	2020-2021	ESP	CEFR-aligned	Formative and Summative Assessment (Written work)
4	Tashkent State University of Law	BA Year 1 Law	2024-2025	ESP	CEFR-aligned	Continuous Assessment and Final Exam

This table compares syllabuses across four local Uzbek government-owned universities revealing both commonalities and differences in English language teaching models. Despite the dominance of ESP, particularly in disciplines such as political science, linguistics, and law, CBI is also present, as seen in the Uzbek Language and Literature program which provides exposure to subject content. All syllabuses show alignment with CEFR, reflecting adherence to international standards. Needless to say that assessment practices vary considerably, ranging from single end-of-course exams to continuous and formative evaluations. This variation seems to highlight the lack of a unified national framework for English teaching and assessment, despite ministerial efforts to institutionalize ESP, and

25-november 2025

proposes that universities adapt their syllabuses in accordance with disciplinary needs and institutional priorities.

Overall, the literature under review reveals that both ESP and CBI approaches are effective methods of teaching English incorporated into English language teaching programs at both local and global levels where their adoption varies according to the specific needs of academic settings. Whilst ESP has been officially institutionalized in Uzbekistan within a ministerial initiative, there is a need for further research to examine how ESP Curriculum is implemented and adapted throughout different universities in the country and a unified language policy to standardize assessment.

Discussion

The question of whether ESP or CBI should be adopted in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Uzbekistan remains a controversial issue. The development of the ESP Curriculum, with guiding principles for English syllabuses at HEIs, demonstrates that the ESP approach is presently prioritized for teaching English to university students, reflecting its alignment with national policy initiatives and occupational needs.

Concurrently, the potential advantages of CBI should not be overlooked in the Uzbek higher education context. Unlike ESP, which is primarily focused on equipping learners with English skills needed for specific disciplines, CBI integrates language learning with subject matter content, fostering linguistic proficiency and academic knowledge with a focus on communication competence. This focus could be particularly beneficial for students in disciplines

25-november 2025

where English is increasingly utilized as a medium of instruction, such as economics, business, international relations, or law. In addition, CBI's emphasis on authentic texts and meaningful context engagement may enhance student motivation and provide opportunities for communicative abilities development beyond career-related domains. However, this necessitates for teachers to be proficient in both language and the content knowledge and poses challenges for the design of valid and reliable assessment tools. As there is no current policy in Uzbekistan that dictates or suggests what approach should be taken to teach English at universities, both approaches can be successfully applied on the basis of teaching and learning context needs despite their strengths and limitations.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the distinctions between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Content-Based Instruction (CBI) in relation to English language teaching at the Uzbek HEIs. The findings show that while both teaching models are effective in improving language learning, they are adopted differently depending on institutional and disciplinary needs. ESP has been formally institutionalized via a large-scale project upon the ministerial initiative with the consultancy support of the British Council and is widely applied in disciplines, reflecting its alignment with occupational and academic requirements. This indicates its recognition at the specialist level in Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, CBI, which also offers valuable opportunities for content-integrated language learning, is limited in its application in the context of higher education, though this cannot be fully confirmed without empirical evidence supported by reliable research. The analysis of syllabuses states the absence of a unified national framework for English teaching and evaluation which suggests that HEIs can adapt their

25-november 2025

syllabuses independently, but it may lead to uneven student outcomes across institutions. Therefore, further broader research is necessary to investigate how ESP curriculum is implemented in practice and to explore the role and effectiveness of CBI in teaching English within the higher education community of Uzbekistan.

References

- Abdullahi, M.Y., Umar, M.B. and Abba, A. (2019) ‘English for Specific Purposes (ESP): A better approach for teaching English to students of science and technology’, *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 24(7, Ser. 7), pp. 15–19. Available at: www.iosrjournals.org (Accessed: 5 November 2025).
- Brooks, M. and Sandkamp, J. (n.d.) ‘The essentials of designing and creating content-based curriculum: Recommendations for future CELE curriculum development’, pp. 39–46.
- Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D.M. and Snow, M.A. (2014) *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. 4th edn. Boston, MA: Heinle ELT.
- Johns, A.M. and Price, M. (2014) ‘English for Specific Purposes: An international research perspective’, in Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D.M. and Snow, M.A. (eds.) *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. 4th edn. Boston, MA: Heinle ELT, pp. 181–201.
- Master, P. (1997) ‘Content-based instruction vs. ESP’, *TESOL Matters*, 7(6), p. 10.

25-november 2025

May, K. (2024) *English language in Uzbekistan: Current status & growth 2025.*

Global Visa Corp, 25 November. Available at:

<https://www.globalvisacorp.com/blog/uzbekistan/english-as-a-foreign-language-in-uzbekistan> (Accessed: 5 November 2025).

Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature (2021) *English language syllabus, Year 1 (Bachelor programme)*. Available at: https://www.tsuull.uz/sites/default/files/1_english_language_1course.pdf (Accessed: 15 November 2025).

West, R., Stanford, J., Irgasheva, S., Khan, S. and Vakhidova, N. (2020) *ESP curriculum for higher education in Uzbekistan*. ENSPIRE-U Project. Tashkent: British Council Uzbekistan and Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan.