

Innovative Curriculum Design for Applied English Courses in Physical Education Programs: A Project-Based Approach in the Era of Society 5.0

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Abstract. This research explores a curriculum innovation in Applied English designed for undergraduate students in the Department of Physical Education and Health at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Indonesia. The conventional grammar-based approach was restructured into an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) model that incorporates project-based learning (PBL), authentic materials, and soft skills integration. Using a qualitative case study method, data were obtained through syllabus analysis, classroom observations, student-produced video projects, and semi-structured interviews with both students and instructors. Findings show notable improvement in students' oral communication, especially in mastering sports-related vocabulary for refereeing, jury duties, and coaching. In addition, the curriculum strengthened critical soft skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication. The relevance of the course content to students' prospective professions also increased engagement and motivation. Instructors observed a more dynamic classroom atmosphere and greater language retention. Overall, this study contributes to ESP by proposing an interdisciplinary curriculum model that links language instruction with vocational identity and the demands of Society 5.0. The results hold important pedagogical implications for curriculum developers, ESP practitioners, and higher education institutions seeking to enhance employability and domain-specific communication skills among non-English majors.

1 Introduction

At many Indonesian universities, particularly in non-language departments, English instruction is still dominated by traditional grammar-translation methods. In fields such as Physical Education and Health, this approach offers little relevance to students' professional trajectories. The emphasis on grammar, divorced from authentic use,

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restricts the development of practical communication skills required in the workplace. Consequently, a clear mismatch exists between the competencies taught and the demands of the profession.

The need for curriculum reform has been acknowledged in national education policy. Indonesian Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System mandates English learning from junior secondary through tertiary levels as part of general education. Similarly, MoE Decree No. 232/U/2000 establishes English as a compulsory subject in higher education. However, these regulations do not articulate how English should be contextualized for professional purposes, thereby creating a curricular gap that remains unresolved [1].

In the context of Society 5.0, higher education institutions are expected to prepare graduates who are not only academically proficient but also globally literate, adaptive to change, and capable of functioning effectively in technology-driven environments [2]. This paradigm emphasizes that university graduates should be equipped with multidimensional competencies, combining disciplinary knowledge, digital literacy, and intercultural communication skills. For students of Physical Education, English proficiency is particularly crucial as their prospective careers increasingly demand active participation in international arenas. They may serve as referees in global sporting events, work as sport journalists covering competitions worldwide, or pursue professional certifications as fitness instructors that require mastery of English terminology and communication protocols. Without adequate preparation, these students risk being excluded from opportunities in transnational sports industries where English has become the *lingua franca*.

This study was designed to address these challenges by developing and evaluating a curriculum innovation specifically tailored to the needs of Physical Education and Health students. The proposed model is grounded in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) principles and supported by task-based pedagogy, ensuring that language learning is closely tied to the authentic tasks students will encounter in their professions. At its core, the curriculum aims to bridge the gap between academic language instruction and real-world application, positioning English not as an abstract academic requirement but as a practical tool for professional advancement.

Conducted at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, the study seeks to answer a central question: How can a General English course be effectively redesigned to meet the communicative demands of students in Sports and Health Education? The innovation introduced situates English within the professional practices of sports, enabling learners to simulate authentic roles—such as officiating matches, delivering coaching instructions, or reporting game events—while using relevant linguistic structures and domain-specific vocabulary. By embedding these professional contexts into the learning process, the curriculum provides students with opportunities to practice English in realistic scenarios, thereby enhancing both their communicative competence and vocational identity. This approach underscores the belief that language education, when contextualized within students' disciplinary fields, becomes more meaningful, engaging, and sustainable over time.

2 Literature Review

2.1 English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is defined as an approach to English language teaching that emphasizes mastery of vocabulary, skills, and genres directly connected to learners' specific disciplinary or professional contexts. Unlike General English, ESP focuses on the communicative practices that learners are most likely to encounter in their academic or occupational domains. Historically, ESP emerged in the 1960s as a response to the growing global demand for English in scientific, academic, and professional communities [3]. Since then, ESP has developed into a major branch of applied linguistics, underpinned by the recognition that English should not be delivered as a uniform, one-size-fits-all subject, but rather as a flexible and context-responsive pedagogy that aligns with the goals of particular learner groups [4].

Within the field of sports and physical education, ESP plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between classroom instruction and real-world communicative demands. Learners in this discipline often face unique language situations that cannot be adequately addressed through generic grammar-based curricula. As Anthony [5] highlights, effective ESP must begin with a rigorous needs analysis to identify learners' communicative requirements and then design instructional materials and tasks that reflect those needs. For instance, students preparing for professional roles in physical education and sports may require targeted lessons on delivering pre-game briefings in English, interpreting international refereeing regulations, or explaining safety and injury management protocols to athletes from diverse linguistic backgrounds. These forms of communication are not only practical but essential for functioning in global sporting contexts.

Unfortunately, such elements are rarely included in conventional General English courses, which tend to emphasize abstract grammar and decontextualized reading comprehension. As a result, students often graduate with limited ability to perform the communicative tasks that their profession requires. By embedding authentic, discipline-specific scenarios into the curriculum, ESP offers a meaningful pathway to professional readiness, ensuring that students in sports and physical education acquire the language tools necessary to engage confidently in international sporting events, coaching exchanges, and collaborative training environments.

A distinctive feature of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is its reliance on authentic materials derived directly from the target domain, which enriches the learning process and enhances student motivation. By engaging with materials that mirror actual professional contexts—such as refereeing manuals, tournament guidelines, coaching scripts, or sports journalism reports—students perceive language learning as purposeful and directly applicable to their future careers. This approach contrasts sharply with decontextualized textbook exercises that often fail to capture the communicative realities of the workplace. As Paltridge and Starfield argue, one of the central principles of ESP lies in the notion of “language learning in context,” where instruction is inseparable from the situational demands in which learners will eventually operate [6].

In the case of sports and physical education, contextualized instruction becomes particularly crucial. Preparing students to become referees, coaches, or trainers requires

more than grammatical accuracy; it necessitates familiarity with the precise discourse, terminology, and communicative strategies used in professional practice. For example, students should be exposed to the discourse of officiating matches, including standardized announcements, decision-making expressions, and interaction with players or audiences. Similarly, they must practice the language of managing training sessions, which involves giving instructions, motivating athletes, explaining drills, and addressing safety concerns in English. By situating language instruction within these authentic tasks, ESP not only builds linguistic competence but also cultivates professional confidence, ensuring that learners are ready to transfer classroom knowledge into real-life sporting environments.

2.2 Project-Based Learning in ESP

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is recognized as an instructional approach that engages students in investigating authentic problems and challenges, thereby fostering deeper and more meaningful learning. Within the framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), PBL offers a powerful platform for learners to simulate professional tasks while simultaneously strengthening their linguistic abilities. Unlike conventional methods that often prioritize rote memorization of vocabulary lists or repetitive grammar drills, PBL situates language use within purposeful, task-based activities. This orientation encourages learners to collaborate with peers, conduct independent research, solve real-world problems, and present outcomes in the target language, making the process both interactive and professionally relevant.

In the context of sports education, PBL creates opportunities for students to integrate their disciplinary expertise with English communication skills. Typical activities may include designing and recording a video demonstration of sports terminology applied in actual practice, organizing and presenting a mock press conference in English, or performing role-play as referees during competitive matches. These performance-based tasks provide students with an arena to develop speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills while reinforcing the acquisition of domain-specific vocabulary and discourse patterns. Furthermore, such projects immerse learners in realistic professional scenarios that mirror their future roles, thereby increasing motivation, enhancing retention, and strengthening the transferability of classroom knowledge into field practice.

In the context of sports education, Project-Based Learning (PBL) can be operationalized through a variety of practical activities that closely mirror authentic professional practices. For example, students may be tasked with producing a video that demonstrates the correct use of sports terminology, preparing and delivering a mock press conference in English, or role-playing as referees during simulated matches. Such activities not only sharpen speaking and listening abilities but also immerse learners in the use of specialized vocabulary, thereby strengthening the professional relevance of their language learning [7]. These projects situate English within real-life performance contexts, enabling students to apply language skills dynamically rather than treating them as abstract classroom exercises.

Empirical studies further confirm that PBL enhances language acquisition outcomes. Learners engaged in project-oriented tasks demonstrate stronger vocabulary retention and significantly improved communicative competence when compared with peers

taught through conventional grammar-based instruction. Beyond linguistic gains, the use of digital technologies in PBL—such as video recording, editing applications, and collaborative online platforms—broadens the scope of learning by equipping students with critical 21st-century competencies. These include digital literacy, teamwork in virtual environments, and multimodal communication skills, all of which are increasingly valued in both academic and professional domains.

The integration of such technologies is especially relevant in the era of Society 5.0, where graduates are expected to merge domain-specific expertise with technological adaptability. For students of sports and physical education, this means not only mastering the English terminology of refereeing, coaching, or sports journalism but also acquiring the ability to communicate effectively through digital media and online collaborative tools. Embedding these elements into ESP instruction ensures that students are better prepared to thrive in globalized, technology-driven sporting environments.

2.3 Curriculum Innovation and Soft Skills

Curriculum innovation can be understood as the process of revising, adapting, or creating new educational frameworks that are responsive to the evolving demands of learners, industries, and society at large. Within higher education, such innovation requires not only the renewal of content but also the systematic integration of transferable competencies—commonly referred to as soft skills—into the learning design. These include critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, which have been identified as fundamental skills for 21st-century graduates across all fields of study. As emphasized by Tadeu et al., curriculum reform should not be restricted to achieving cognitive learning outcomes; it must also cultivate holistic competencies that mirror the complex expectations of contemporary professional life [8].

For students in Physical Education, soft skills are not peripheral but central to their professional development. A referee, for example, is frequently required to make rapid and objective decisions during high-pressure moments, demonstrating advanced critical thinking and situational judgment. Similarly, a coach is expected to design and implement innovative training programs that require creativity and adaptability, while simultaneously fostering teamwork and clear communication with athletes, staff, and other stakeholders. These professional scenarios illustrate that without the cultivation of soft skills, domain-specific knowledge alone is insufficient for success.

Embedding these competencies within the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum provides a strategic pathway to ensure that language instruction directly aligns with professional expectations. Activities such as simulating international sporting events, conducting mock interviews, and practicing live commentary not only enhance language proficiency but also demand that students exercise leadership, collaborative problem-solving, and effective communication. In this way, language learning becomes a vehicle for soft skill development, while simultaneously reinforcing domain-specific knowledge. Such integration aligns with the competencies highlighted by the World Economic Forum (2023), which underscores the increasing need for graduates who can combine technical expertise with adaptive, creative, and communicative abilities to remain competitive in global labor markets.

Recent international frameworks, such as the European Union’s Digital Competence Framework for Educators (DigCompEdu) and UNESCO’s Education for Sustainable Development Goals, emphasize the importance of integrating domain-specific knowledge with transversal skills to prepare learners for the complexities of modern professional life. These frameworks highlight that expertise in a given discipline must be complemented by broader competencies—including digital literacy, intercultural awareness, collaboration, and adaptability—so that graduates are capable of thriving in rapidly changing social and technological environments.

In line with these global perspectives, the curriculum innovation introduced in this study combines the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) with structured opportunities for soft skill development. The approach embeds authentic performance tasks, collaborative group projects, and field-based practice into the learning process, allowing students to engage with language in meaningful, profession-oriented contexts. Through these activities, learners are not only exposed to specialized sports-related vocabulary but also challenged to exercise creativity, problem-solving, teamwork, and communication in simulated professional scenarios. By merging linguistic objectives with transversal competencies, the curriculum ensures that Physical Education majors graduate with both domain-relevant communicative competence and the professional readiness required in the era of Society 5.0

3 Research Methods

This research employed a qualitative case study design, which is particularly suitable for investigating educational innovations within their natural contexts. As Yin explains, case study methodology enables an in-depth and holistic exploration of complex phenomena, especially when the boundaries between the intervention and its environment are not clearly defined [9]. Given that the aim of this study was to analyze the implementation and impact of a curriculum innovation in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within a specific institutional setting—Universitas Negeri Gorontalo—the qualitative case study approach was deemed most appropriate.

The study was conducted in the Department of Physical Education and Health, where English is offered as a general university requirement (Mata Kuliah Umum, MKU). Participants consisted of 112 second-year undergraduate students enrolled in the Applied English course during the 2024–2025 academic year. In addition, two lecturers from the Faculty of Sports Science, one from Universitas Negeri Gorontalo and one from Universitas Negeri Makassar, were involved in validating the disciplinary relevance of the sports-related content. Lecturer from UNM to provide data from UNM as a comparison of the implementation of these general subjects. A purposeful sampling strategy was applied to ensure that participants were directly engaged in the revised curriculum. Ethical approval was obtained from the university’s research ethics committee, and all participants provided informed consent with assurances of confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Data were collected from four primary sources to ensure triangulation and reliability. First, the revised syllabus (RPS) was analyzed with attention to its learning objectives, integration of ESP principles, and task design. Second, classroom observations were

conducted across 12 sessions using an adapted observation protocol, focusing on student engagement, task authenticity, use of English, and application of sports-related vocabulary. Third, student-produced video projects—both midterm and final—were examined to assess language use, pronunciation, creativity, and alignment with professional scenarios. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both students and instructors to gather reflective insights on the strengths, challenges, and perceived benefits of the curriculum.

The data analysis process followed thematic analysis procedures as outlined by Braun and Clarke [10]. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and student outputs were coded inductively, and recurring patterns were categorized according to the research questions: (1) effectiveness of ESP integration, (2) enhancement of communicative competence, and (3) development of soft skills. Student video projects were further evaluated using a rubric encompassing five dimensions: vocabulary accuracy, pronunciation, content relevance, creativity, and task completion. Ratings were conducted by the course instructor and an independent rater to ensure inter-rater reliability. To enhance trustworthiness, member-checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants, while peer debriefing and reflexivity were employed to minimize researcher bias.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 *Enhanced Speaking Competence in Refereeing, Jury, and Coaching Contexts*

One of the most significant findings of this study is the notable improvement in students' oral communication, particularly in contexts directly related to refereeing, jury responsibilities, and coaching. Before the curriculum reform, students reported minimal exposure to domain-specific terminology and expressed low confidence when using English in spoken interactions. However, after participating in the revised program, they demonstrated clear progress in fluency, lexical accuracy, and contextual appropriateness. These improvements were observed during classroom activities, role-play simulations, and especially in student-produced video projects.

Students engaged in referee simulations showed increasing mastery of essential officiating vocabulary such as “service over,” “foul,” “point,” “play,” and “game.” Their ability to articulate these terms in video assessments reflected not only accurate usage but also contextually appropriate delivery. Furthermore, they displayed enhanced intonation and pronunciation, indicating growth in prosodic awareness that is critical for assertive communication in officiating scenarios. This was evident in sports such as badminton, table tennis, and other game-based activities where English was applied to real-time decision-making and match communication.

In addition to technical vocabulary, students developed the ability to use descriptive language for announcing matches, introducing players, giving orders, reporting scores, and declaring winners. For instance, when simulating match openings, learners confidently introduced athletes with expressions such as “Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to today's match...” followed by scoring announcements consistent with authentic refereeing discourse. Such activities align with Flowerdew and Miller's

assertion that authentic speaking tasks are more effective in fostering professional fluency compared to decontextualized classroom drills [11].

The refereeing practice also revealed broader vocabulary acquisition as students were trained to manage entire match sequences—from setting up inter-class tournaments, introducing players, officiating in English, to delivering final announcements of match results. Students additionally engaged with English-language videos of professional referees, recording and analyzing key expressions used throughout a match, including opening remarks, score calls, and victory declarations. Corrective feedback from instructors was gradually reduced as students became more independent in leading these exercises, demonstrating growing autonomy. This finding echoes Basturkmen and Shackelford's conclusion that ESP-oriented training modules create situated learning environments where language and professional skills develop in tandem [12].

Moreover, the training context offered students an opportunity to apply their English learning in real-world practice. When officiating inter-class sports events, students not only used the correct terminology but also learned to adapt their speech to varying contexts, including addressing players, audiences, and co-officials. The integration of sports-related vocabulary into match officiation ensured that learners were simultaneously practicing linguistic and professional competencies. This synergy between language and physical skill development reflects the dual focus advocated by ESP scholars who emphasize the inseparability of communication and domain expertise.

Overall, the curriculum innovation significantly expanded students' capacity to use English within specialized sporting roles. Their ability to manage referee discourse, perform jury-related functions, and communicate as coaches indicates a shift from passive learners of English grammar to active users of language in authentic, profession-oriented settings. This development not only validates the relevance of ESP to Physical Education but also supports broader pedagogical perspectives that highlight the need for contextualized, practice-based language instruction in higher education.

4.2 Integration of Soft Skills through ESP Tasks

Beyond the evident improvement in domain-specific speaking competence, another crucial outcome of the curriculum innovation is its success in fostering essential soft skills. The redesigned English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course was deliberately structured to nurture critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication—competencies that are increasingly recognized as indispensable for professional readiness. In this way, the course went beyond traditional language instruction and positioned English learning as a medium for holistic development.

Video-based assignments, which were central to the curriculum, required students not only to memorize vocabulary but also to design authentic and meaningful scenarios. For example, groups of students created mock matches, coaching demonstrations, and simulated injury-management sessions, all conducted in English. These tasks demanded higher-order thinking, such as problem-solving, situational analysis, and creative adaptation of language to specific professional contexts. Through these performance-based projects, learners practiced language as a tool for action, not merely as an academic subject.

Collaboration was another significant dimension embedded within the course. Students were organized into small project groups where they divided responsibilities, negotiated roles, and co-organized activities. In conducting match officiating simulations, they had to learn the appropriate wording and expressions, engage in peer discussions, and provide mutual feedback. These interactions helped cultivate teamwork and social communication skills, reinforcing Hyland's observation that ESP learning environments can serve as spaces for developing learner autonomy and agency [13].

Creativity was consistently visible in the way students designed their projects. Many went beyond minimum requirements by incorporating innovative elements such as using multimedia effects in videos, experimenting with intonation to imitate professional referees, or constructing original commentaries during simulated matches. This experimentation illustrates the situated learning model advocated by Lave and Wenger, in which students acquire knowledge through active participation in real-world practices [14].

The assessment rubric itself was designed to reinforce soft skills. In addition to measuring linguistic accuracy, it included explicit criteria for evaluating innovation, teamwork, and clarity of delivery. Interviews with instructors confirmed that students who had previously been passive or hesitant became more confident in leading role-plays and project presentations. Such transformations highlight the power of a well-structured ESP curriculum to reshape not only linguistic competence but also learners' attitudes, confidence, and willingness to engage. Richards similarly notes that performance-based instruction can foster a more comprehensive learner profile, integrating both linguistic and non-linguistic growth [15].

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that embedding soft skills within ESP tasks produces outcomes that extend beyond language learning. By participating in collaborative, creative, and professionally situated activities, Physical Education students developed transferable competencies that are critical for their future roles as referees, coaches, or sports professionals. The ability to make quick decisions, collaborate effectively, and communicate across contexts underscores the value of curriculum innovations that merge ESP with holistic skill development.

4.3 Perceptions of Students and Instructors

Perceptions gathered from both students and instructors revealed that the curriculum innovation was highly effective in enhancing the relevance and engagement of English learning within the sports education context. Most students reported that learning English through authentic, sport-related scenarios made the lessons more meaningful and enjoyable compared to previous experiences with grammar-focused instruction. They emphasized that the use of practical tasks—such as mock refereeing, coaching simulations, and video-based assignments—aligned directly with their aspirations to become referees, coaches, or sports instructors. For many, these activities transformed English from an abstract academic requirement into a professional tool that could empower their future careers.

Students further noted that applying English in real-life simulations helped them overcome anxiety and build confidence. For example, when asked to role-play as referees

in mock matches, they discovered that their knowledge of sports rules could be effectively communicated in English, which in turn fostered a sense of achievement and motivation. Instructors' perspectives were equally supportive of the new curriculum. They reported that students demonstrated increased participation and willingness to take risks in using English, even in situations that involved complex terminology or real-time decision-making. Grammar, which had previously been taught in isolation, became more accessible when applied directly to the field through authentic tasks. The inclusion of video projects was particularly appreciated by instructors, as it allowed students to demonstrate creativity while providing a tangible record of performance that could be assessed objectively. This reflects that multimodal tasks in ESP instruction enrich language production and offer more comprehensive evidence of student learning.

Instructors also highlighted the broader benefits of the curriculum, noting that it promoted not only linguistic growth but also essential non-linguistic skills such as leadership, teamwork, and empathy. Furthermore, the innovation appeared to shift classroom dynamics significantly: students who were previously passive or reluctant to engage became more involved, particularly when assigned leadership roles in refereeing or group projects.

Importantly, the shift in student attitudes was not only behavioral but also cultural. English, once viewed as a difficult academic hurdle, came to be recognized as an empowering resource for professional identity and career advancement. This transformation supports the idea that motivation and identity are critical factors in sustaining persistence within ESP learning environments.

Finally, both students and instructors emphasized the importance of maintaining interdisciplinary collaboration between English lecturers and sports educators. Jointly designing the curriculum, developing learning modules, and aligning assessment criteria were identified as key contributors to the success of the innovation. This suggests the transdisciplinary models in ESP, which enrich learning experiences by integrating expertise across fields. Instructors further suggested that future developments could include real-time interpretation during international tournaments and ESP practicum courses in collaboration with local sports organizations.

5 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that curriculum innovation in General English courses, when grounded in the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and project-based learning (PBL), can significantly enhance both linguistic competence and professional readiness among students of Physical Education and Health. By restructuring English instruction from a grammar-oriented model into a context-specific and practice-driven framework, the program effectively bridged the gap between academic coursework and the real-world communicative demands of sports professions.

The findings revealed marked improvements in students' speaking skills, particularly in using sports-specific vocabulary relevant to refereeing, jury duties, and coaching. These linguistic gains were accompanied by the development of essential soft skills—including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication—which were embedded through performance tasks, group projects, and video-based assignments.

Students reported higher levels of motivation and engagement, largely because the course content was directly applicable to their future professional contexts. Instructors similarly noted that classroom environments became more dynamic, interactive, and conducive to meaningful learning.

Beyond linguistic achievement, the curriculum also fostered a shift in attitudes: students began to perceive English not as an abstract academic requirement, but as a professional tool for empowerment and employability. This transformation underscores the importance of contextualized, interdisciplinary approaches in ESP curriculum design, particularly in preparing graduates for the challenges of Society 5.0, where domain expertise must be combined with global communication skills and technological literacy.

The study contributes to the broader field of ESP by offering an innovative model of interdisciplinary curriculum design that aligns language learning with vocational identity. For curriculum developers, the findings provide evidence that authentic, field-based tasks are critical for enhancing both communicative competence and holistic learner development. For ESP practitioners, the results highlight the value of integrating PBL and digital technologies into instruction to promote professional fluency and autonomy. For higher education institutions, the study suggests that curriculum innovation is essential not only for improving employability outcomes but also for ensuring that non-English majors are equipped with domain-specific communicative competence.

Future research could expand upon this work by exploring longitudinal outcomes of ESP-based curriculum reforms, particularly how graduates apply these competencies in professional sports contexts beyond the university setting. Additionally, cross-institutional collaborations may further validate the scalability and adaptability of this model across diverse educational environments.

In conclusion, the integration of ESP, PBL, and soft skills development into the General English curriculum has proven to be an effective strategy for equipping Physical Education students with the linguistic, cognitive, and professional competencies required in the era of Society 5.0. This approach ensures that language education becomes a transformative tool for personal growth, career advancement, and global participation in the field of sports and health.

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