

**ESP vs. EGP in Algerian Secondary Education:
Promoting Specialty Language Continuum
in Academia**

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Summary:

Algerian secondary education plays a pivotal role in preparing learners for tertiary studies. First year secondary learners are oriented to two major streams: scientific and literary. Such learners' profile discrepancies, however, were not taken into consideration while designing secondary education English textbooks, which should, in theory, mirror the official syllabi and the tenets of the accredited approach. Thus, learners of different streams study the same textbook files putting into question the English for General Purposes (EGP) approach adopted by textbooks' designers. This study examines the effectiveness of both EGP and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approaches in promoting specialized language skills and facilitating a smooth transition from secondary education to academia. The study uses a student's questionnaire as a data collection tool. The study results confirm that secondary education learners will be oriented to different academic specialties which require specific English vocabularies and use, i.e., different exit profiles allowing them integrate high education smoothly. Therefore, the need for specialized secondary education English syllabi is of paramount importance.

Keywords: EGP Approach; ESP Approach; Secondary Education; Academia; Specialized English

1. INTRODUCTION

English has emerged as a global lingua franca, and its importance as a language of communication in various academic and professional domains cannot be overstated. EGP offers a comprehensive approach to English language instruction, focusing on general language skills and everyday communication. On the other hand, ESP tailors language instruction to meet the specific needs of learners in academic or professional fields providing

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targeted language skills for specific domains such as science, business, medicine, and engineering.

First year secondary learners are oriented to two common cores: scientific and literary. In their second and third years, learners are oriented toward six different streams according to their levels and interests. However, such learners' profile differences were not taken into consideration while designing secondary education English textbooks. One textbook is designed for all streams of the same level. Thus, learners of different streams study the same textbook units putting into question the traditional one-size-fits-all approach adopted by the textbooks' designers.

This study aims to explore and compare the effectiveness of EGP and ESP approaches in promoting a specialty language continuum in academia. The research will provide valuable insights for practitioner teachers, textbook writers, and decision makers to make informed decisions about English language instruction in Algerian secondary education.

2. Purpose of the Study

Secondary education plays a pivotal role in preparing learners for tertiary studies. As far as English as a foreign language is concerned, a gap has been spotted between what secondary learners are equipped with and the type of English they need in their future academic specialties. The idea that a language is a tool rather than a scientific discipline for many students of different academic disciplines leads to questioning the contents of the syllabi adopted in the secondary education level. Thus, the following research questions are addressed:

- a. To what extent does the EGP approach adopted in Algerian secondary education prepare learners for their specialized academic studies?
- b. Which English teaching/learning approach to adopt to bridge Algerian secondary education with tertiary education?
- c. How can the ESP approach replace the one-size-fits-all approach adopted in Algerian secondary education?

3. Literature Review

English language teaching (ELT) encompasses a diverse array of approaches, and within this landscape, two distinct paradigms emerge: EGP and ESP. These two approaches diverge significantly in their fundamental purposes and instructional strategies, ultimately catering to different learners' needs.

3.1 EGP Approach

EGP takes a more general approach to language instruction, focusing on providing learners with a foundation of English language skills that can be applied in everyday situations. EGP, as elucidated by Abbott, is an approach that appears to lack an immediate rationale referred to as "TENOR" which stands for "Teaching of English for No Obvious Reason" (1981, p.123). EGP courses aim generally at

developing linguistic competence of learners referred to by Basturkmen as "language usage (the underlying system of the language)" (2010, p.8).

Long points out that the EGP "one-size-approach" fails in equipping the language learners with specialized needs "in the varied domains in which they must operate" (2005, p.1). This can result in providing either too little or too much precision in language instruction, leading to potential disengagement among learners. Barnard and Zemach highlight the need for learners of very low proficiency level in English to have a course content mostly of "a general English type with emphasis on survival situations" (cited in Basturkmen 2010, p.3).

However, criticism has been directed at EGP for its tendency to emphasize language elements without adequately considering learners' specific needs. EGP has always been described as an examination-based approach being related to, using cook's words, "the educational aims of the classroom itself" (2002, p.237).

3.2 ESP Approach

The ESP approach is rooted in the idea that language instruction should be tailored to meet the specific needs of learners in various academic or professional domains. Hutchinson and Waters define ESP as "the teaching of English for a specific purpose or for a specific discipline" (1987, p. 19).

ESP courses are designed to equip learners with the language skills and knowledge required to succeed in their chosen fields, such as science, technology, business, or medicine making of it, as put by Nunan, "an important subcomponent of language teaching, with its own approaches to curriculum development, materials design, pedagogy, testing and research" (2004, p. 7). As explained by Dudley-Evans and St John, the main preoccupation of ESP courses, contrary to traditional EGP trends, is "preparing learners to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their study or work situation" (1998, p. 1).

Hutchinson and Waters highlight the importance of "an awareness of the need" in ESP as a purpose-driven approach resulting in careful learner's needs analysis to identify learners' reasons for learning which include their objectives, wants, and lacks in addition to the intangible factors that are important in every learning target situation such as learner's learning style and preferences, interest, and motivation (1987, p.53-62). Hence, "ESP courses almost inevitably make use of texts and draw on descriptions of language use and communication from the target communities of practice and disciplines" (Basturkmen 2010, p.12).

3.3 EGP vs. ESP

Though they are highly interrelated sharing many characteristics, EGP and ESP approaches differ in terms of the principles underlying their target learners, course objectives, course design, methodology, and the different target situations for which learners are prepared to use English. Widdowson provides a clear-cut distinction between EGP and ESP emphasizing the latter's "training operation which seeks to provide learners with a restricted competence to enable them to cope with certain clearly-defined tasks." EGP, by contrast, is more "abstract" in its

real-life implementation being an “educational operation which seeks to provide learners with a general capacity to enable them to cope with undefined eventualities in the future” (1983, p.6).

Another crucial difference between EGP and ESP has to do with the target learner’s needs. “What distinguishes ESP from general English is not the *existence* of a need but rather an *awareness* of the need,” pointed out by Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.53). Thus, ESP courses are more able to address the unique and specific necessities for each individual learner contrary to the holistic EGP approach that gives less attention to such a characteristic.

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p.4) list three absolute characteristics of ESP among which is “the use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it [ESP] serves” making of ESP, in Nunan’s words, a “process-oriented” approach compared to the “product-oriented” approach of EGP. Such distinction is noticed in the different syllabi adopted in ESP (task-based, process-based, etc.) and EGP (structural, functional-notional, etc.) (1988, p.18-19).

In conclusion, the divergent approaches of ESP and EGP in ELT open up opportunities for catering to different learners’ needs. Offering a practical framework for delivering targeted and relevant language learning experiences, the ESP approach gives much importance to the target learners’ specific needs resulting in designing specific courses that cater for both real-life situations and individual learning differences compared to EGP’s broader scope. However, EGP represents the starting phase for all ELT situations setting the stage for honing the learners’ language skills at higher levels enabling them to use English effectively in their different academic and professional contexts. Therefore, the underlying question is determining a demarcation line between the EGP and ESP target school levels, i.e., setting up the starting and ending school levels for each approach to take place.

4. Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this study, a quantitative research design was employed. Secondary education English textbooks are overviewed to examine their contents designed for secondary education learners of different streams. The study also involves the investigation of 417 Algerian university students of different academic specialties using a closed-ended questionnaire to elicit their feedback on the efficiency of secondary EGP education in preparing them for their academic studies.

4.1 Secondary Education EGP Textbooks

After four years middle schooling, Algerian learners sit for the BEM examination to join secondary school. They are oriented for their first year secondary level according to their abilities to two main streams: Literary stream (L) and Scientific stream (S). For their second and third years, Literary stream learners are oriented to either Letters or Philosophy (LP) stream or Foreign

Languages (FL) stream while Scientific stream learners are oriented to four streams namely Management and Economy (ME), Experimental Sciences (ES), Mathematics (M), and Technical Mathematics (TM). Each secondary school level has a unique textbook with different files. Tables 1, 2, and 3 demonstrate the different secondary education textbook units studied by learners of different levels and streams.

Table 1. First year secondary education EGP textbook units

Textbook Units		Streams	
		L	S
	Technology and Innovation	X	X
	Exploring the Past	X	X
	Our findings show: Conduction a Survey	X	X
	Eureka: Invention Profile	X	X
	Back to nature: Designing a Consumer's Guide	X	X

As demonstrated in table 1, first year secondary EGP textbook includes topics related to science, history, media, inventions, and environment. First year learners of both streams study the same 5 topics: Technology and Innovation, Exploring the Past, Our Findings Show, Eureka, and Back to Nature. Such topic selection shared by both streams entails questioning the exit profiles for both categories of learners having, in theory, different language proficiency levels and being oriented for their next year into different literary, scientific, and management streams. Additionally, it should be noted that literary stream learners have four 1-hour sessions a week compared to scientific stream learners who sit for three 1-hour sessions a week putting into question time management by teachers for both streams studying the same topics for different allotted time.

Table 2. Second year secondary education EGP textbook units.

Textbook Units		Streams					
		P	L	E	S		M
	Lifestyles						
	Peace and Conflict Resolution						
	World resources and Sustainable Development						
	Science and Experiments						
	Literature and the Media						
	Disasters and Solidarity						
	Technology and the Arts						
	Management and Efficiency						

Table 2 shows that second year secondary EGP textbook includes different topics related to society, world peace, environment, science, literature, and

management. Second year LP and FL learners share the same textbook units with an extra unit for FL learners (Science and Experiments): Lifestyles, Peace and Conflict Resolution, World Resources and Sustainable Development, Disasters and Solidarity, and Technology and the Arts. Second year ES, M, and TM study the same four textbook units: Peace and Conflict Resolution, World Resources and Sustainable Development, Science and Experiments, and Disasters and Solidarity. Second year ME learners share three textbook units of the scientific streams and a fourth different one: Peace and conflict Resolution, World Resources and Sustainable Development, Disasters and Solidarity, and Management and Efficiency.

Table 3. Third year secondary education EGP textbook units.

Textbook Units	Streams					
	P	L	E	S		M
Ancient Civilizations						
Ethics in Business: Fighting Fraud and Corruption						
Education in the World: Comparing Educational Systems						
Advertising: Consumers and Safety						
Astronomy and the Solar System						
Feelings and Emotions.						

Table 3 illustrates that third year secondary EGP textbook includes a variety of topics dealing with history, business, education, advertising, astronomy, and human affective states. Second year LP and FL learners study the same four textbook units: Ancient Civilizations, Ethics in Business, Education in the World, and Feelings and Emotions. Third year ME, NS, M, and TM learners are taught the same four textbook units: Ethics in Business, Advertising, Astronomy and the Solar System, and Feelings and Emotions. All secondary third year streams share two textbook units: Ethics in Business and Feelings and Emotions.

4.2 Study Data

Students from different Algerian universities and academic fields participated in this study responding to a 2-part closed-ended questionnaire items. The first questionnaire part aims at collecting data on the study participants related to their university levels, academic specialties, and their secondary education streams. The second questionnaire part includes a checklist of six Likert scale items to investigate the efficiency of the one-size-fits-all approach adopted in designing secondary education EGP syllabi in preparing the target learners for their academic studies.

4.2.1 Study Participants' Profile

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants of diverse backgrounds and experiences. The selection was based on three main criteria. First, the three university Licence levels are represented. Second, participants represent the four main academic fields of different specialties. Third, participants' educational background in relation to their secondary EGP education. Tables 4, 5, and 6 provide information on the study participants' profile.

Table 4. Study participants' university levels.

University Level (Licence)		N	%
a.	First Year	287	68.82
b.	Second Year	71	17.03
c.	Third Year	59	14.15
Total		417	100

Table 4 shows that 417 students from the three university Licence levels participated in the study. The majority of them (68.82%) are first year students, 17.03% are studying for their second year, and 14.15% are third year students.

Table 5. Study participants' academic fields.

Academic Field		N	%
a.	Human and social sciences	253	60.67
b.	Natural and life sciences	73	17.5
c.	Exact sciences	65	15.59
d.	Engineering sciences	26	6.24
Total		417	100

Table 5 demonstrates that the study informants are from different academic fields. The majority of them (60.67%) are studying specialties in the field of human and social sciences, 17,5% are natural and life sciences' students, 15.59% are exact sciences' students, and 6.24% of the informants are registered in engineering sciences specialties.

Table 6. Study participants' secondary education streams.

Secondary Education Stream		N	%
a.	Letters and Philosophy	123	29.5
b.	Foreign Languages	91	21.82
c.	Management and Economy	39	9.35
d.	Experimental Sciences	118	28.3
e.	Mathematics	27	6.47
f.	Technical Mathematics	19	4.56
Total		417	100

Table 6 shows that the study respondents were registered in different secondary education streams namely: Letters and Philosophy (29.5%), Foreign

Languages (21.82%), Management and Economy (9.35%), Experimental Sciences (28.3%), Mathematics (6.47%), and Technical Mathematics (4.56%).

4.2.2 Checklist Analysis

Study participants' responses to the six-item Likert scale are analysed to better understand whether secondary EGP education adequately prepared them for their academic studies. The first two checklist items investigate the relevance of topics and vocabulary of secondary EGP education to the participants' academic specialties. The last four checklist items examine the efficiency of secondary education EGP listening, speaking, reading, and writing classes in improving the study participants' four language skills for their academic studies.

➤ **Checklist item 1:** The topics covered in your secondary education English courses are relevant to your academic specialties.

Figure 1. Participants' responses on the relevance of secondary education EGP topics to their academic studies.

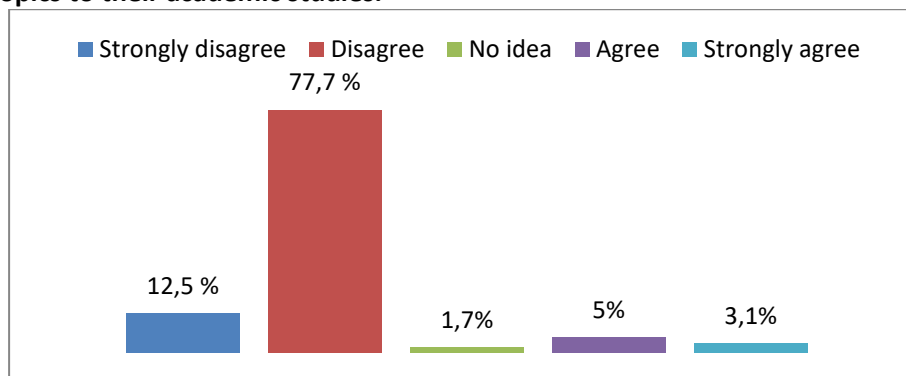


Figure 1 demonstrates that the great majority of respondents (90%) think that the topics covered in their secondary EGP education are not relevant to their academic specialties. An overview of secondary education EGP topics confirms their broad scope contrary to what the investigated participants have as specialized texts for their different academic specialties.

➤ **Checklist item 2:** The vocabulary learned in your secondary education English classes has been beneficial for your academic studies.

Figure 2. Participants’ responses on the relevance of secondary education EGP vocabulary to their academic fields’ specialized vocabularies.

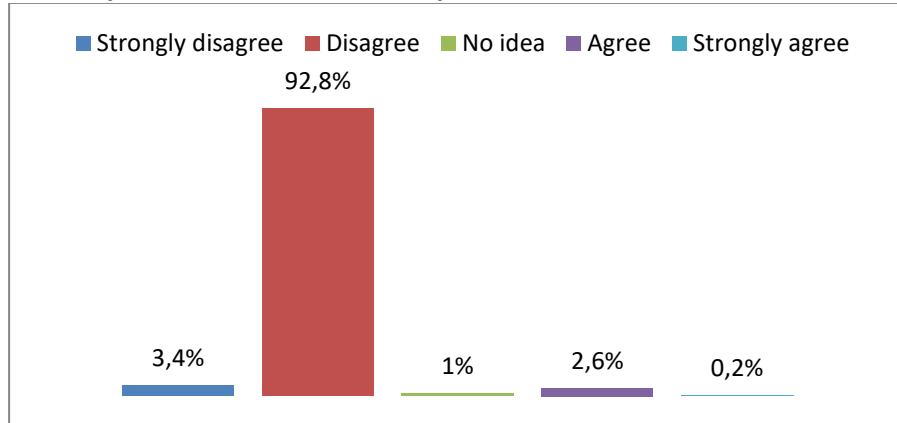


Figure 2 shows that more than 95% of the respondents believe that the EGP vocabulary learned in their secondary education classes has not been beneficial for their academic studies. The general vocabulary load in secondary education EGP textbooks doesn't help in preparing students for the different academic disciplines which make use of specialized vocabularies.

➤ **Checklist item 3:** Secondary education English listening classes improved your ability to participate in class discussions at university.

Figure 3. Participants’ responses on the efficiency of secondary education EGP listening classes in improving their listening skill at university.

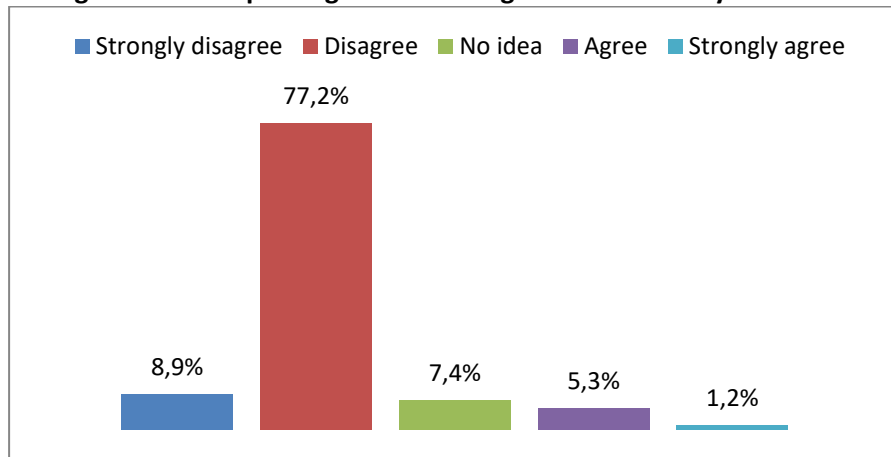


Figure 3 illustrates clearly that nearly 90% of the study respondents think that secondary education EGP listening classes did not improve their ability to participate in class discussions at university. Students’ engagement in class discussions is hampered by their inability to understand the specialized vocabulary which they were not exposed to having EGP listening classes in their secondary education.

➤ **Checklist item 4:** The speaking exercises in your secondary education English classes improved your presentation ability at university.

Figure 4. Participants' responses on the efficiency of secondary education EGP speaking classes in improving their academic presentation ability.

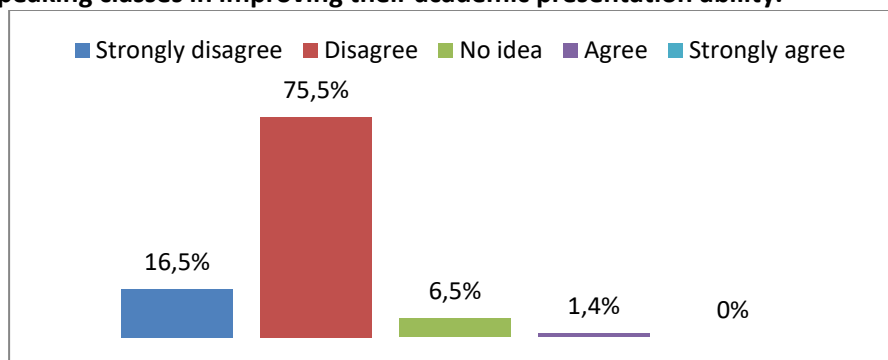


Figure 4 shows that of the study participants responded the majority negatively to the fourth checklist item confirming that the EGP speaking exercises in their secondary education classes did not improve their presentation ability for their academic studies. University students are required in most scientific and literary disciplines to present their research works in class. Such a challenging task requires from the students to be equipped with both specialized vocabularies and presentation skills.

➤ **Checklist item 5:** Secondary education English reading classes helped you in understanding academic reading materials.

Figure 5. Participants' responses on the efficiency of secondary EGP reading classes in improving their academic reading skill.

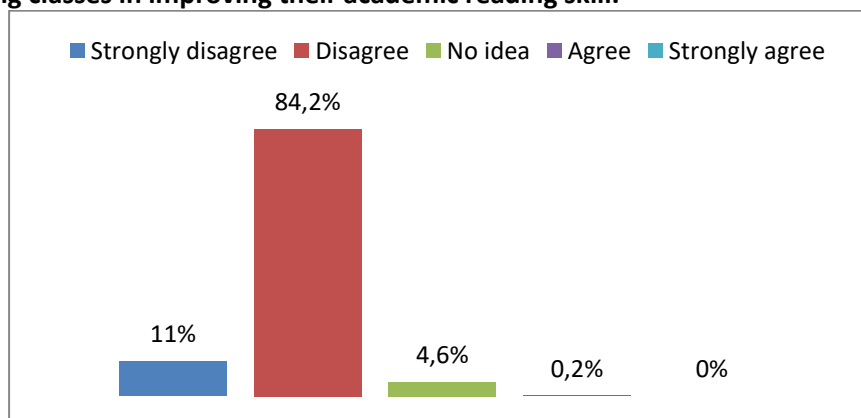


Figure 5 reveals that 95% of the informants think that secondary education EGP reading classes did not help improving their understanding of academic reading materials. EGP reading texts that learners have in their secondary education do not help fostering their academic reading of specialized texts of

different academic disciplines.

➤ **Checklist item 6:** Secondary education English writing classes adequately prepared you for academic writing (essays, research papers, etc.).

Figure 6. Participants' responses on the efficiency of secondary education EGP writing classes in improving their academic writing.

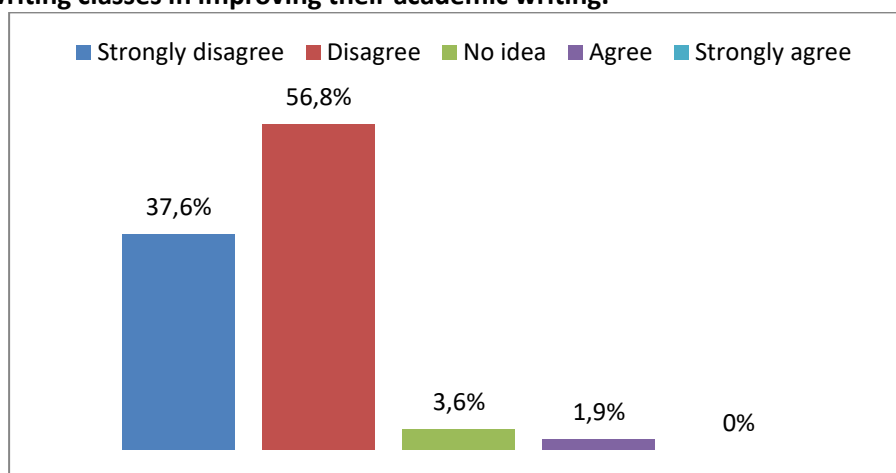


Figure 6 illustrates that nearly 95% of the respondents think that secondary education EGP writing classes did not adequately prepare them for academic writing. Writing academic texts such as essays and research papers in correct specialized English is of a paramount importance for university students. Such academic prerequisite could not be attained with the EGP writing tasks secondary learners are engaged in which do not, in most cases, prepare learners for specialized academic writing.

4.3 Discussion

The study results confirm that the EGP approach adopted in Algerian secondary education have limitations in the context of Algerian academic settings. EGP secondary courses fail in equipping the target learners with specialized vocabulary limiting their academic scope in understanding their specialized texts' contents. The secondary education one-size-fits-all EGP syllabi also fail in improving the learners' engagement in academic specialized discussions as well as in fostering their academic presentation skills. Reading and writing specialized texts has been also investigated in this study putting into question the inefficient secondary education EGP reading and writing activities which had no significant positive effect on the investigated participants' academic specialized reading and writing skills.

No one can deny the fact that EGP courses provide a solid foundation in English language skills allowing learners to communicate effectively in various everyday situations. However, ESP courses offer the advantage of tailored language instruction that prepares secondary education learners for academic and

professional success in their specific academic fields.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of considering the needs and goals of learners in Algerian secondary education when designing English language syllabi. Both ESP and EGP approaches have their advantages and limitations, and the choice between them should be driven by the needs and goals of Algerian secondary education learners. By considering the findings from diverse educational contexts, Algerian educators and policymakers can make informed decisions about English language syllabus design, fostering a specialty language continuum that prepares students for success in higher academic pursuits and future professional careers. A balanced approach that integrates the strengths of both EGP and ESP appears to be most promising in achieving this goal.

Secondary education learners will be oriented to different academic specialties which require specific English vocabularies and use, i.e., different exit profiles allowing them integrate higher education smoothly. Therefore, the need for specialized secondary education English syllabi is of paramount importance. A variety of textbooks should be conceived to cater for each and every stream profile endowing learners with necessary English language bases that ease studies continuation in their future academic areas of specialization. Such ESP approach, contrary to EGP approach, in designing secondary education English textbooks would provide learners with materials compatible with their levels and interests. It would also bridge the gap between secondary and academic English syllabi of different specialties to smooth the transition from secondary to tertiary education and facilitate students' academic studies and research works.

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Appendix: Students' Questionnaire

Dear student,

We would like to ask you to help us by responding to the following questionnaire items concerning the efficiency of your secondary general English education on your academic studies. This is not a test so there are no "right" or "wrong" responses and you don't even have to write your name on it. Please give your answers sincerely as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation.

Thank you very much for your help.

b- Second year

c- Third year

2. Academic field

a- Human and social sciences (law, languages, psychology, etc.)

b- Natural and life sciences (biology, medical sciences, agronomy, etc.)

c- Exact sciences (chemistry, mathematics, physics, etc)

d- Engineering sciences (architecture, electrical engineering, etc.)

3. Secondary education stream

a- Letters and philosophy

b- Foreign languages

c- Management and economy

d- Natural sciences

e- Mathematics

f- Technical mathematics

❖ **Part Two: Checklist**

➤ Respond to the items by ticking **ONE** of the choices **1, 2, 3, 4** or **5** which stand for the following:

1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= no idea; 4= agree; 5= strongly agree

Checklist Items	Options				
1. The topics covered in your secondary education English courses are relevant to your academic specialties.					
2. The vocabulary learned in your secondary education English classes has been beneficial for your academic studies.					
3. Secondary education English listening classes improved your ability to participate in class discussions at university.					
4. The speaking exercises in your secondary education English classes improved your presentation ability at university.					
5. Secondary education English reading classes helped you in understanding academic reading materials.					
6. Secondary English writing classes adequately prepared you for academic writing (essays, research papers, etc.).					