

ESP and Business English for Postgraduate Students in the Department of Economics, Tahri Mohamed University, Bechar, Algeria

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Abstract

To bridge the gap between the ongoing demands of the fieldwork and the outcomes of the actual teaching, all the Algerian universities, with all the kinds of specialties they provide, embrace the learning of English for more specialized purposes and try to deliver curricula that maintain the balance between the two sides. The teaching of such a technical language for the postgraduate students presents a challenge for ESP practitioners since they are asked to submit an overall knowledge of the language alongside particular business English needed to accomplish a variety of tasks that are required from the students in the academic spheres or the professional settings. Most of these ESP practitioners are general language teachers and are asked to cover the growing needs of their learners in their fields of specialty. However, this current teaching situation reveals several serious obstacles which prevent the teaching outcomes from reaching their goals. Even though most of the literature review devoted to Business English teaching focused on the professional demands to maintain the specialized registers, the current investigations show that the presented ESP sessions are still twining with general English ones and deprived of reaching the postgraduate students' academic as well as professional desires. Moreover, the study uses a case study of eighteen first year doctorate students at Tahri Mohamed university, Bechar, Algeria to investigate the research. The data collected was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively through a delivered questionnaire and a semi-structured interview given to the teacher so as to present his views about the teaching situation. The analysis of the collected data allowed the researcher to claim that the ESP courses presented in these classes are not satisfactory since they do not meet the learners requirements and thus, suggest a number of interesting recommendations that may help in the improvement of the teaching/learning situations. As a result, the current study is done with the purpose to shed light on the teaching/learning situation and then providing a profile of the specific target needs of these researchers, which helps while designing a suitable syllabus appropriate to their special fields of interest.

Keywords: Business English, English for Specific Purposes, learners' centeredness, syllabus design

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Introduction

Regarded as the international language of communication, English realizes different goals for different people, students, and workers. Its high status encourages several scientists and researchers to learn English in order to have access to and get various documents and references produced in English. The accessibility to a large body of scientific literature in English aids researchers in retrieving information from different sources, which may be helpful for them to enlarge their fields of study and update their research.

Being consistent with the most recent developments necessitates efficient and professional access to information available in English; Algeria, like the other mounting nations, has integrated English into its educational system. The teaching of the English language is adopted at university in different branches as English for specialization such as in Biology, Engineering, Exact Sciences, and Economics. The domain corresponds to situations where the learner has particular scientific reasons to study English. The learned language is a set of appropriate words and expressions which can fit the specific needs of learners in different contexts. It is referred to as English for Specific Purposes or ESP.

To contribute to national and international scientific growth, it is necessary to acquire and obtain academic discourse to exchange information through, for instance, conferences and publishing articles. Thus, learning English is very important for academic research of graduate and post-graduate learners who wish to follow scientific development.

The Algerian universities and Tahri Mouhamed University, with no exception, include English teaching in all its faculties, in our case, the departments of Economics. It has been observed that English language skills are needed in organisms like Sonatrach, tourism agencies and banks, and many economic enterprises.

Moreover, it has been noted that although students were exposed to the English language for an extended period, they still lack the ability to elicit appropriate information from documents. ESP students are supposed to receive completed general courses of English, and since it is integrated into the curriculum, they acquire essential knowledge within their “licence” and engineering degrees; however, subjects ‘specialists continue to consider the teaching situation to be negative since it does not meet the students’ real needs.

The current study is realized to shed some light on the teaching of English for Specific Purposes in Algerian Universities taking the University of Tahri Mouhamed in Béchar as a case study. Moreover, the investigation tries to analyze the postgraduate students’ requirements and fit them with the current teaching outcomes and, by the end, try to provide some suggestions and recommendations so as to bridge the gap between the two ends. Thus, the principle objectives behind doing this humble research are stated as follows:

- To investigate the ESP teaching situations in general and that of Business English in particular within the classes under study.
- To specify and analyze the students’ different requirements.
- To present some suggestions and recommendations so as to balance the students’ needs and the teaching outcomes.

The present research focuses on providing the suitable data that helps in designing an appropriate ESP syllabus for the students at the Department of Economics at the university of Bechar through raising the following research questions:

1) To which extent is the degree of adequacy between the actual teaching material and the needs, lacks and wants of these students?

2) What can be done to further assist business students to develop the kinds of skills they will require to operate appropriately?

To respond the above mentioned research questions, the study extracts some literature related to the subject to formulate an idea about the specific teaching needed by the these specific classes. After this, it identifies and analyses the learners' language needs and wants to finally allow the researcher to present some suggestions and recommendations that may improve the current teaching/ learning situation and thus meet the students wants from joining such classes.

Literature Review

English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes or Special Purposes appeared as it is known today in the early 1960s as a result of the failure of general English courses to meet the growing needs of its learners whose demands of the language in their fields of interest cannot be ignored.

ESP has developed gradually to be an essential area of interest for all those who are concerned with the various types of activities required by their disciplines. The enormous variations of the learners' fields of interest necessitate higher linguistic competencies with a rich vocabulary repertoire, among which technical and scientific language are suitable to these fields of study. In the same vein, Basturkmen said: "language is learnt not for its own sake or for the sake of gaining general education, but to smooth the path to entry or greater linguistic efficiency in academic, professional or workplace environments". This exhibits the influential role of ESP in helping the learners to build up the required competencies needed in their academic as well as workplace sphere.

A great deal could be written about the origins of ESP. According to Hutchinson & Waters (1987:6), three common reasons led to the appearance of ESP:

- The growing requirements of the New World after World War II.
- A revolution in linguistics.
- The focus is on the learner.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) explained that two historical periods played an important role in the creation of ESP: the end of World War II and the Oil Crisis in the 70s. Likewise, with the end of the II World War, there has been a novel expansion in several domains such as science, technology, and economy all over the world:

"an age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in Specific, ,technical, and, economic activity on an international scale. For various reasons, most notably the economic power of the United States in the post-war world, the role of international language fell to English." (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p 6)

As a result of what has been stated earlier, there should be a lingua franca of the modern time, and obviously, English was given this honorable status. This status was strongly supported by the economic power of the United States during the post-World War era. Furthermore, the Oil crises that happened in the early 1970s precipitated Western money and knowledge towards the oil-rich countries and, along with it the English language. Consequently, the teaching of this language attested an intense pressure as the number of its demanders was growing day after day. English nowadays turned to become the subject of interest of different people all over the world out the language teachers.

ESP and Business English

The rapid growth brought by globalization helps develop ESP, and Business English has been part of that growth. ESP in Strevens' classification (1977) is split into occupational and educational segments.

Occupational language is also split into three sections: pre-experience, simultaneous and post-experience. These different aspects of language need are relevant to Business English since business students are learning the language related to the field of their work, i.e., pre-experience, and those who are already doing the job are likely to be interested in post-experience aspect.

Business English courses can be used similarly to ESP courses, since they can embrace both general practices with appropriate lexis and grammar for business communication. Johnson assumed that "Business English is much broader than other varieties of ESP because of the number of different purposes for which it is taught." (Johnson, 1993, p 201).

ESP Course

Throughout the 1970s, the history of English language teaching has turned out from Art to science and from EGP to ESP, and then language teaching researchers involved themselves in course design since the number of ESP learners became numerous. As a result, most of the learners, together with the teacher, start struggling with large classes, slim course books, limited contact hours, and poor language outcomes.

Successful teaching of the language evidently requires a selection and an arrangement of the teaching items and materials depending on many criteria such as: a prior definition of the objectives, proficiency level to be developed, learners' needs and lacks, duration of the training and so on. Thus, the syllabus is considered an instrument by which the teacher, together with the syllabus designer (if not the same person), work hard to achieve a degree of fit between the needs and the aims of the ESP learners. (Mumby, 1978,p2)

Nevertheless, there is a general agreement among most ESP practitioners that all ESP courses are designed with the aim to provide the specific skills together with special vocabulary required by the learners in accordance with their fields of interest: thus, the tutors should know how to integrate the content learning along with the language teaching to assure positive outcomes and then a number of variables should be taken into consideration in any kind of ESP teaching operations.

ESP in Algeria

Within Algerian universities, the teaching of English is generally taking place in the English department as well as in some specific departments such as Exact Sciences, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Computer Science, Economics and Commerce, Sociology, and so on. (Miliani, 1993,p115)

The teaching of English in these departments seems to be inadequate because of a lot of factors. These factors generate a disadvantageous situation for both the teaching and the learning of English for specific purposes, some of which can be stated as follows:

- The teacher himself/themselves is not well trained for the teaching of scientific and technical English.
- A void of two years of English teaching at the university level.
- The heterogeneity of the students' level.

- The lack of teaching hours allotted to the English subject.
- The inexistence of a syllabus as well as materials needed for the teaching of specific English.

All these negative aspects help in one way or another in the degradation of the teaching as well as the learning situation of the target language i.e., English.

Despite the relevant importance English has in the field of business, it is still low ranked in the Algerian educational system at universities. The students consider it as an additional subject even if it is a compulsory module. They are aware that such a language is of great importance to fulfil their target needs, but they still deal with it less seriously than the other ‘main’ subjects included in the curriculum.

Method

In the domain of scientific and academic research, the success or the failure of the investigations depends on the followed procedures as well as on the data collection tools and the suitability of the target sample population. These research elements should be selected carefully and appropriately so as to set the research questions and validate the proposed hypotheses.

To collect data about the teaching/learning situation, the students’ needs, and the different difficulties faced by both the teachers and the learners in the realization of the teaching goals, the researcher opted for the case study as a research method. The latter is highly acknowledged since it exposes the case under investigation, especially in the field of educational research. Cohen et al., (2008) said that it provides: “...a unique example of real people in a real situation, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theory or principles.” (p128)

Participants

Research investigation cannot succeed without an appropriate choice of the sample population since the results obtained from the studies applied to it will meet the overall objectives of the research and then generalized to the whole population; for this reason, the process of sampling may be defined as “selecting a group of subjects for a study in such a way that the individuals represent the larger group from which they were selected” (Gay, 1987, p 101). Dörnyei (2007, p 96), in his words explains the notion of sample as: “the group of participants whom the researcher actually examines in an impractical investigation.” He adds that the word population refers to: “the group of people whom the study is about.” (p96)

The case study was carried out in the department of Economics of Tahri Mouhamed University, Bechar, Algeria, during the academic year of 2019-2020. The study sample was composed of eighteen first-year doctorate students from three different specialties : Management, Finance ,and Marketing. Moreover, the study invited the only teacher to participate in the collection of its data, not with the aim to generalize the findings but instead to expose the real teaching/learning situation under study.

Research Instruments

With the purpose to enrich the data sources, the researcher opts for a diversification of the instruments: thus, an administered questionnaire which is consisted of two different types of questions; close-ended questions which require the “yes” or “no” answer from the informants and multiple-choice questions with a proposed list of responses that need to be selected by the

respondents; was handed out to point out the students' needs and lacks when dealing with the language. Moreover, the teacher was asked to give his views about the teaching situation through a semi-structured interview.

Findings

After passing through different stages of data collection using a number of instruments, the researcher starts analyzing the data gathered from the students' questionnaire, the teacher's interview, and the teaching/learning setting observations.

It can generally be said that the obtained results showed that the ESP courses presented in these classes are not satisfactory since they do not meet the students' requirements: thus, the teaching outcomes are considered to be insufficient due to a number of factors: the unclear learners' wants, the designed syllabus which is not drawn in accordance to the students' actual requirements and finally to the absence of some training sessions for the teacher showing them how to teach ESP and BE. Another remarkable remark is that all the participants in the research agreed on the importance of mastering the English language in both academic and professional settings. Still, the degree of proficiency in the language differs from one learner to another because of a number of factors such as the previous knowledge of the language and the interactivity with the matters dealt with. The analysis of the students' questionnaire exhibits that 75% of them have an intermediate level of the language while the 20% of them consider their language proficiency as being at a beginner level.

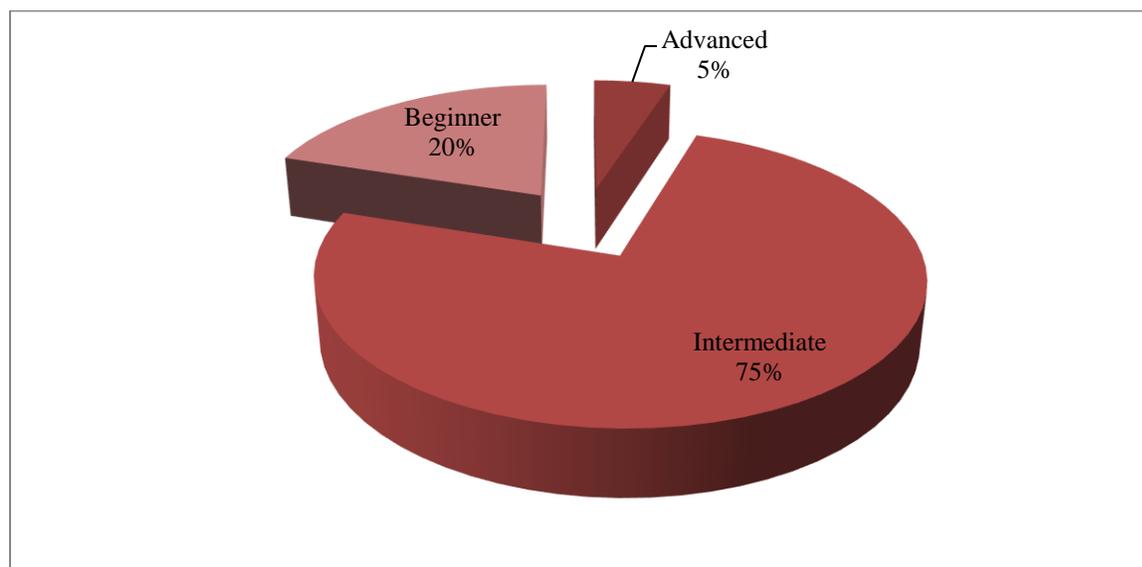


Figure 1. Learners' language proficiency

In addition to what has been stated, the interviewed students said that they deal with English for Academic Purposes when realizing their research during their classes, but each of them aims at using it to fulfill some specific personal purposes: their suggestions were organized in the following table which shows the different preferences of the students.

Table 1 *Students preferences*

Purposes of Using English	N° of Students	Percentages
Reading extended articles in their fields	02	11%
Participating in national and international conferences	12	60%
Taking parts in oral interactions	09	50%
Succeeding in examinations	18	100%
Writing articles	06	30%

The respondents answers exhibit a diversification of purposes from using the target language in their academic sphere, 60% study the language to participate in conferences, 50% opt to take part in oral interactions but still all of them, the 100% study it to pass the examinations.

Moreover, the research spotted some light on the importance of maintaining the four language skills of these young learners. Their answers vary in accordance with their preferences; the listening and speaking skills seem to be the most needed skills among the others since these researchers opted to participate in different scientific manifestations.

To sum up, the general analysis of the gathered data reveals that both the students and their teacher face a number of constraints during the ESP classes. They are summarized as follows:

- Most of the students have just an intermediate level of the language.
- The students lack the practice of the language since English is used mainly in classes.
- One hour and a half per week are not enough to satisfy the various needs of all the students.
- The lack of ESP training for teachers; ESP teachers are part-time general English teachers.
- There is no collaboration between the ESP teachers and the subject specialists from the departments.
- There are no teaching materials provided to the teachers to guide them.

To provide answers to the two research questions, the researcher focused on the needs analysis of the students which undergo the target needs extracted from their lacks and requirements. Thus, their needs were identified and analysed so as to check the degree of adequacy between them and the provided teaching. Unfortunately, the inadequacy of the existed ESP teaching and the real needs of the target situation creates a remarkable gap between the two sides as a result, the teaching of ESP in general and of business English in particular should be reviewed. Moreover, ESP courses, not only in the university under study but in most of the Algerian universities are not taught in the universal norms. Furthermore, the obtained results showed that the teaching of ESP in the Algerian universities failed to satisfy the requirements of its learners because of a number of factors such as the administrative constraints, the lack of the suitable teaching materials, the lack of cooperation between the ESP tutors and the subject matter specialists, the timing allocated to the ESP modules and the poor language knowledge of the students.

Suggestions and Recommendations

In fact, there is an actual necessity to build a suitable pedagogical framework that modifies the foreign language policy within globalization requirements. The university has to create new

strategies and new ways of thinking. This challenge has to be developed by a strong educational institution since it is regarded as an influential force in the socio-economic development of the country. In sum, the language policy should take into consideration the creation of opportunities for the development of such a field.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has to provide the essential efforts of improving such a primordial part of the EFL policy because of its precious contribution to socio-economic development. However, it is always difficult to convince students to change their attitudes towards foreign language learning. Moreover, in a region that is worth future research, one may wonder about the task of teachers, and the social and political participation in improving learners' motivation. Answering these types of questions will help to change the vision towards foreign language teaching.

In fact, there is a true necessity to build a suitable pedagogical framework that modifies the foreign language policy within globalization requirements. The university has to create new strategies and new ways of thinking. This challenge has to be developed by a strong educational institution since it is regarded as an influential force in the socioeconomic development of the country. In sum, the language policy should take into consideration the creation of opportunities for the development of such a field.

Conclusion

The present research work was done with the aim of identifying and analyzing the teaching/learning situation for post-graduate students in the departments of Commerce and Economics at the University of Bechar. The data collected and analyzed showed that there is a big gap between the teaching outcomes and the learners' real needs; for this reason, a serious refinement of the current teaching/learning situation should be done by the ESP practitioners together with the matters specialists of the target fields. Additionally, a number of administrative considerations should be reviewed, such as the provided syllabi, the allocated time and the available teaching materials, so as to ameliorate the teaching outcomes and satisfy the learners' needs.

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