

## AN OUTLOOK ON THE TEACHING OF BUSINESS ENGLISH FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE ALGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: TAHRI MOUHAMED UNIVERSITY AS CASE STUDY

**Gouabi Khadam**

Assistant Lecturer/ Salhi Ahmed University, Naama

**ALGERIA**

desert\_rosa82@yahoo.fr

### ABSTRACT

In order to ensure bridging the gap between the fieldworks' demands and the teaching outcomes, English for Specific Purposes courses stand in all of the Algerian universities and within its variant specialties and try to maintain the balance. The teaching of ESP in general and of Business English in particular for postgraduate business students presents a challenge for the ESP practitioners since they are pretended to provide both general knowledge of the language and specific Business English required to fulfill the different tasks the students are supposed to deal with in the academic spheres or the professional ones. Those practitioners, who are in reality general English teachers, are supposed to teach ESP learners' centeredness classes and to cover their growing needs of the language. However, this situation reveals a number of significant obstacles which enhance the teaching objectives from reaching its ends. Despite the fact that the review of literature related to Business English insisted on the professional demands which are beyond the linguistic circle to reach the specialized register, ESP classes are still twining with general language ones and deprived from meeting the doctorate students academic as well as professional desires. Therefore, the present study tries to shed some light on the teaching/learning situation and to draw a profile of the target needs of these researchers and then consider them while designing a suitable syllabus appropriate to their fields of interests.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes, Business English, teaching/learning situation, learners' centeredness.

### INTRODUCTION

The current study is done with the aim of investigating the teaching/learning situation in postgraduate education in one of the prominent specialties in the university level named Business and Economic fields. In most of the Algerian universities, if not all, these departments welcome every year a growing number of students who opt for following the ongoing process of globalization and who hope to gain a place in the global marketplace, hence, mastering the lingua franca of nowadays is a prerequisite to cope with the academic as well as the professional needs of the students.

Under the umbrella of globalization, communicative technologies reign almost all kinds of interactions within societies and undoubtedly English is the most frequent language because of the position it holds in the international scale, thus handling English means communicating effectively and then succeeding to fulfill the required demands of the academic and professional domains of interest of these doctorate students. English language proficiency, in this vain, is in the crossroad of the divergent students' interests such as educational

requisitions, commercial exchanges, business marketing and managements, most of the scientific research fields, trading, employment claims and so on.

Stapa (2005) states that in order to be up to date with nowadays exercises, one must be in touch with English, consequently, educational settings are asked to equip its students with the language, starting with English for general purposes to English for more specialized purposes. However, the outcomes of more than 10 years of learning the language in the Algerian educational system are still considered as insufficient and failed to meet the students growing needs of the language. This remarkable failure forms the starting point to carry out this research in order to spot the causes of the teaching/ learning outcomes deficiency and to suggest some remedies to the actual situation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### English for Specific Purposes and Business English

The world has embraced globalization and changes its economic bases to an open market, consequently, the need of unification of some elements such as the trade laws, the currency and of course the language, is a must and English for Specific Purposes ( hence forth ESP) starts to be highly demanded in the recent time. These growing demands for the language in the economic sphere were because English is: "...the primary language for doing international business." Estaban and Pérez Canado (2004:137) and which result in a reformulation of the educational curricula to provide more specialized courses. Strevens (1977) classify ESP as EAP; English for Academic Purposes and EOP; English for Occupational Purposes each of these divisions distinguishes itself from the other one in terms of the objectives required from studying it. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) however, re-classified ESP and divide it into three distinct classes: English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Social Sciences (ESS) and English for Business and Economics (EBE) each field ends in EAP and EOP, the later seems to be more concrete since it satisfy the academic as well as the occupational needs of its learners. Furthermore, according Hutchinson & Waters (1987) EBE ought to be further divided into other sub-categories depending on various uses of the economists and the businessmen. In addition to that, Dudley-Evans and John (1998) classified ESP as being divided to AEP and EOP, English for Professional Purposes (EPP) which is a sub-division of EOP contains English for Business Purposes (EBP) in one of its sub-groups. From all of these divisions and sub-divisions, scholars aim at providing a clear skeleton for those in need of ESP lectures so as to help them satisfying their wants from the language without being bordered with the deep sees of the language literature and helping them to become competent language users in their target settings as claimed by Hutchinson & Waters: "it is also likely that in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the student takes up or returns to job" (1987:16).

It is clearly noticed, then, that English in this case is not required only by businessmen who are interacting using it to do their commercial operations but it is also used by their students in their academic researches while analyzing authentic materials, performing oral presentations or reading documents in the target language as explained by Gore (2007).

### From English Language Teaching to the Teaching of ESP and BE

As stated before, studying English in all the academic settings and in all its levels is the result of the importance it holds when being the dominant language in the world and the vehicle of knowledge for the various scientific researches. This fact leads the pedagogues to transport English from out of the walls of human science institutions, to be included nearly in all the

tertiary curricula whatever the field is going to be. Teachers of the language ought to cope with this situation and then, had to become ESP practitioners rather than being simple general English teachers. Hutchinson et al (1987:160) claim that “teachers who have been trained for General English teaching or for the teaching of Literature may suddenly find themselves having to teach with texts that they know little or nothing about”. Therefore, the shift from lecturing generalities of the language to teaching scientific issues suitable to the growing needs of the learners, is not an easy task. Johns (1981) states that hinders that ESP tutors may face as quoted in Hutchinson et al when saying that “Low priority in timetabling; lack of personal/ professional contact with subject teachers; low status/ grade than subject teachers; isolation from other teachers of English doing similar work; lack of respect from the students.” All these kinds of problems present a real failure to the teaching of ESP and BE in the Algerian universities. Accordingly, Ewer (1983) has divided the pedagogical obstacles facing these teachers into five categories: attitudinal, conceptual, linguistic, methodological and organizational (quoted in McDonough (1984:134) ).

### **ESP and BE in the Algerian Universities**

Since after its independence in 1962, Algeria has integrated the teaching of English as a first foreign language in its educational system, the tertiary level, as well has opened its doors to this language and taught it as the main subject in the English departments and as English for Specific Purposes in all the other departments since all learners from all fields need it for either academic or professional requirements. The introduction of ESP in the Algerian universities dated to the early 1970's, at that time, its lectures were included in the curricula of the licence degree, but just after words, and because of some political considerations, these lectures were withdrawn and integrated in the postgraduate studies, i.e., Magister curriculum. Later on, and in the 1988, the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has created three ESP centers in the Algerian territory: in Oran, Algiers and Constantine. The installment of such centers provided a good opportunity for postgraduate students following their researches there to become ESP practitioners and to take in charge the teaching of ESP in the big universities in the country since those centers were supplied with the required pedagogical equipments by the British Council.

Nowadays, the implementation of ESP brings with it the birth to Business English in the departments of Business and Economics in all the Algerian universities, the introduction of such courses was with the aim of satisfying the specific needs of these students and to meet their growing demands of the module.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The present investigation tries to shed some light on the teaching of English for Specific Purposes in the Algerian universities and Tahri Mouhamed University in Béchar is taken as a case study. It is held with the aim of analyzing the postgraduate students' needs and to compare them with current teaching outcomes and then trying to provide some solutions in order to bridge the gap between the two ends. Consequently, the fundamental objectives behind carrying this humble research are put as follows:

- To expose ESP teaching situations in general and BE in particular in classes under study.
- To identify and analyse the postgraduate students' needs.
- To suggest some solutions for bridging the gap between the learners' needs and the teaching outcomes.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The main questions that were raised upon the heart of this investigation which was done to help the teachers to satisfy their students' needs are stated as follows:

- 1/ Are business English courses offered at the level of these departments appropriate to the needs of the doctorate students?
- 2/ What are the learners language needs and which kind of difficulties do they face when using this specific language?
- 3/ What types of BE lectures might suit these doctorate students' demands?

In order to propose answers to the aforementioned research questions, the following hypotheses were suggested:

- 1/ ESP teaching material in these departments may not be built upon the students' real needs.
- 2/ The postgraduate students should be well equipped with academic English before joining BE classes.
- 3/ The students are facing difficulties with productive skills namely speaking and writing in their specialized fields of interests.

### **Research Methods and Procedures**

The investigation in the domain of scientific and academic research depends in its failure or success on the procedures it embraces i.e., the data collection instruments as well as the sample of populations. The selection of these elements should be done carefully so as to suit the research objectives, to answer the research questions and to validate its hypothesis.

### **The Sample Population**

Any kind of educational research builds its grounds on a specific sample of population which will help the researcher to gain time and efforts, to obtain more reliable results and to reduce bias. Thus, the present investigation was conducted in Tahri Mouhamed University in Béchar, it involved eighteen (18) first year doctorate students from three different specialties: Business Intelligence and Management, Banks and Financial Institutions and Marketing and Strategic Managements; six students in each field. The criteria upon which the selection of these subjects were a matter of easiness of contact with these students who are well aware of the importance of studying BE and their motivation to interact with English is in an interesting degree.

The investigation invited two (02) teachers to participate in the collection of its data. However, the sample population was chosen not with the aim of generalizing the findings on a wider population but instead to shed some light on the teaching/ learning situation under study.

### **Research Methodology**

In order to collect data about BE teaching situation and the postgraduate business learners' needs and the difficulties faced by both of the teachers and the learners in the classrooms, the researcher chose the case study in two departments: Commerce and Economics. This data collection instrument is highly acknowledged since it visualizes the situation under study especially in the domain of educational research, Cohen et al., (2008) claimed that it provides "... a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theory or principles."

With the aim of enriching the data sources, a diversification of the instruments is more than necessary, consequently, an administered questionnaire was handed to the students so as to check their wants, needs and lacks when dealing with the language. Additionally, the points

of views of the teachers about the teaching outcomes were obtained through a semi-structured interview.

## RESULTS

### Findings and Interpretations

The results obtained from the two research instruments are systematically discussed and analyzed. It can be generally claimed that the obtained results showed that most of the students were unsatisfied with the ESP courses presented in their classes since they confirmed that these courses did not satisfy their needs. These negative teaching outcomes may result from two obvious facts: the learners' wants were not clearly drawn before designing the syllabus and the other reason is that the language teachers did not benefit from any training sessions to teach ESP and BE, both of the two teachers declared that they suffer from a remarkable lack of the target language terminology. The importance that the English language has as being the language of the globalized world is the general agreement of all the participants in this research, hence, its proficiency differs from one student to another depending on a number of factors such as the previous language backgrounds. The results of the students' questionnaire revealed that 75% of them consider their language abilities as being in an intermediate level while the rest (20%) show their language deficiency when ensuring that they have a beginner level.

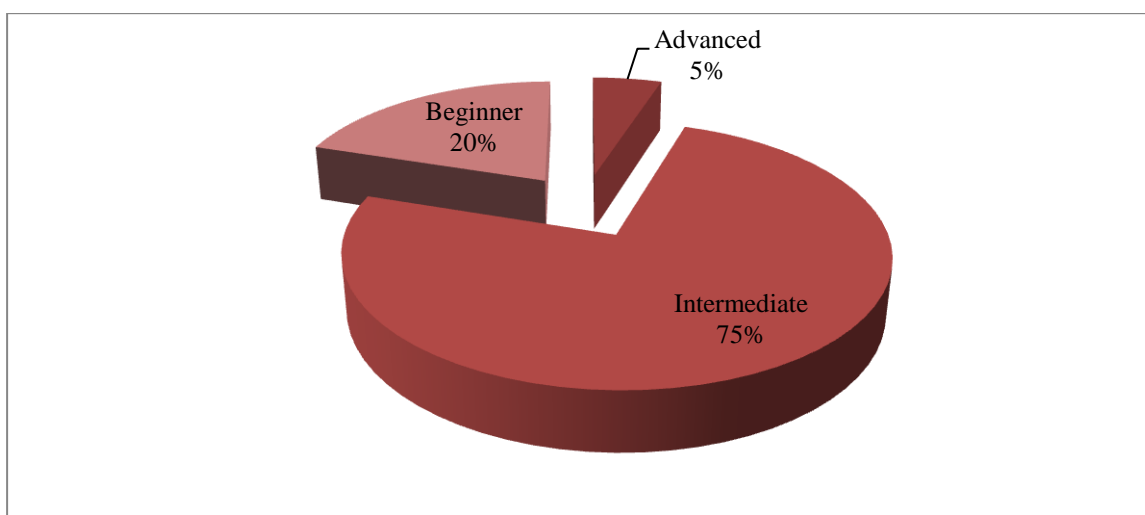


Diagram 1. Learners' Language Proficiency

Students are using English for Academic Purposes in their classes but with different purposes, each of them hoped to maintain the language to fulfill specific objectives. The main purpose behind using English in the classes are classified according to its importance for the students, they are presented as follows:

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%

Table 1 Objectives Behind Learning English

Surprisingly, all the students agreed on the importance of maintaining the English language to pass their exams. Despite the fact that these students are postgraduate doctorate candidate, taking part in conferences is still not the objective behind using English for these young researchers. Since they were interested in participating in scientific manifestations, their needs for the language skills were not with an equal importance, the speaking and listening skills were considered as the most useful ones, according to them. The diagram that follows sum up the rates of the four skills in accordance to their importance:

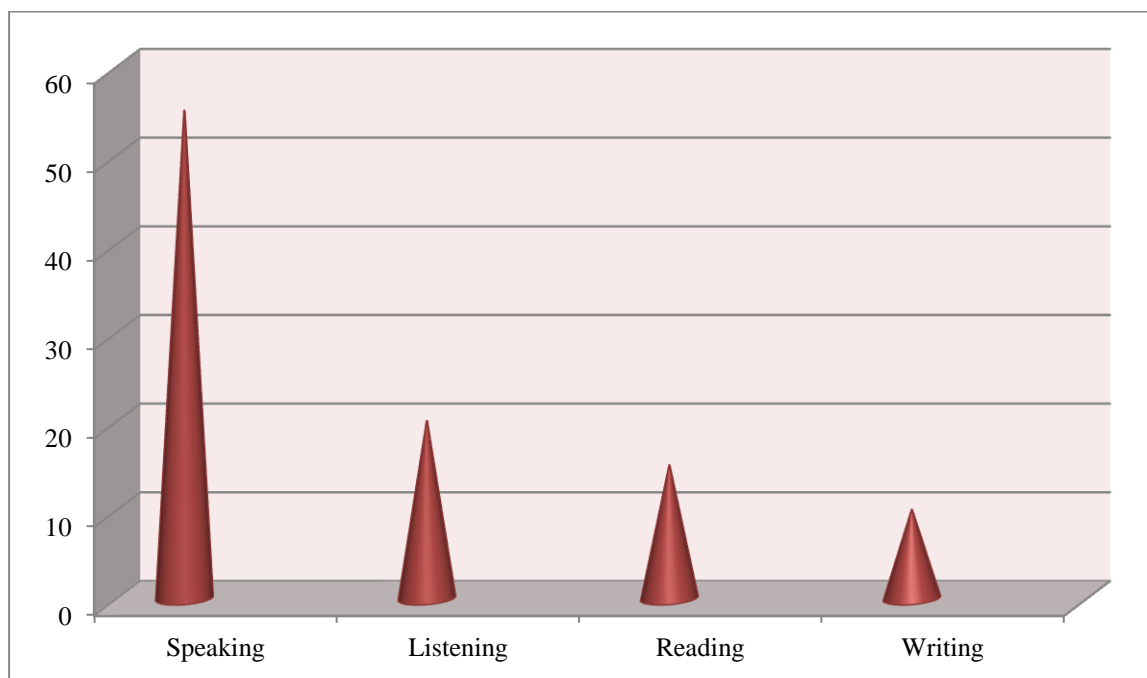


Diagram 2. The Language Skills

Still, both of the students and the teachers faced a number of constraints when being in the ESP classes, some are related to the weak language background of the students and some were born because of the lack of training of the teachers and others were the consequences of the lack of the teaching materials, here are some of them:

- An intermediate language level of most of the students.
- Lack of motivation among the students since ESP sessions are not fundamental.
- Lack of practice, English is used only in classrooms.
- Passive learners as the teacher always centered the classroom and then there is less interaction between the students and their teachers.
- Teachers transformed ESP classes to GE ones and they focused on using authentic material to reach linguistic objectives and ignore the transfer of information.

One crucial element that characterizes ESP course design is the skill based approach. Despite the fact that the four language skills are inseparable but in the case of business and economic classes, students need more the speaking and listening skills more than the others either for their academic or professional lives. For this reason, the selection of the teaching material should be very careful so as to meet the specific needs of the students.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present investigation was carried out with the purpose to identify and analyze the teaching/ learning situation in postgraduate classes in the departments of Commerce and

Economics in the University of Béchar. The data of this study was collected through two different instruments and its results were analyzed and discussed to show that the teaching outcomes were not satisfactory and that the refinement of the teaching-learning situation must be done in a manner that bridges the gap between the pedagogical inputs and the learners' real needs by implementing a skill-based approach into the BE courses.

The fact that ESP classes in general are learners' centered ones created considerable teaching problems in the success of reaching its objectives, thus, the pedagogical reforms as well as the administrative considerations should be put into practice in order to maintain the balance between the learners' needs and requirements and the teaching outcomes.

## REFERENCES

### Books

- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Dudley-Evans, T. and M.J. St. JOHN. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: Multi-disciplinary Approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gore, S (2007). *English for Marketing and Advertising*. Oxford (GBR); New York; Paris: OUP. Oxford University Press.
- Hutchinson, T & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge University Press.
- McDonough, J. (1984). *ESP in Perspective: A Practical Guide*. London: Collins ELT.
- Robinson, P. (1980). *English for Specific Purposes. The Present Position*. Pergamon Press.
- Robinson, P. (1991). *ESP Today: A Practitioner's Guide*. Prentice Hall International.

### Journals

- Esteban, A. & Pérez Cañado, M.L. (2004). Making the case method work in teaching Business English: a case study. *English for Specific Purposes*, 23(2), 137-161.
- Strevens, P. (1977). Special Purpose Language Learning. A Perspective Survey article *language Teaching and Applied Linguistics Abstracts*, 10, 145-16.

### Website

- STAPA, S. H. & JAIS, I. R. M., (2005). *A Survey of Writing Needs and Expectations of Hotel Management and Tourism Students, English for Specific Purposes World*, 1 (9) (4). Retrieved from: [http://www.esp-world.info/Articles\\_9/issue\\_9.htm](http://www.esp-world.info/Articles_9/issue_9.htm).