




La revue *Aleph. langues, médias et sociétés* est approuvée par ERIHPLUS. Elle est classée à la catégorie B.

Business English Teaching at The Ceil Centre -Tlemcen University: From Theory to Practice

تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية للأعمال في مركز سيل بجامعة تلمسان : من النظرية إلى التطبيق

L'enseignement de l'anglais des affaires au Centre Ceil de l'Université de Tlemcen : De la théorie à la pratique

Faiza Haddam Bouabdallah, Fadia Benahmed et Wafa Belmokhtar - U. Tlemcen

	Soumission	Publication numérique	Publication Asjp
	10-04- 2023	15-05-2023	25-10-2023

Éditeur : Edile (Edition et diffusion de l'écrit scientifique)

Dépôt légal : 6109-2014

Edition numérique : <https://aleph.edinum.org>

Date de publication : 15 mai 2023

ISSN : 2437-1076

(Edition ASJP) : <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/PresentationRevue/226>

Date de publication : 25 octobre 2023

Pagination : 237-255

ISSN : 2437-0274

Référence électronique

Hadam Bouabdallah Faiza, Benahmed Fadia et Belmokhtar Wafa_Business English Teaching at The Ceil Centre -Tlemcen University: From Theory to Practice», [Aleph \[En ligne\]. 2023. URL : https://aleph.edinum.org/9600](https://aleph.edinum.org/9600)

Référence papier

Hadam Bouabdallah Faiza, Benahmed Fadia et Belmokhtar Wafa_Business English Teaching at The Ceil Centre -Tlemcen University: From Theory to Practices», *Aleph*, 10 (4-2) | 2023, pp. 237-255.

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FAIZA HADDAM BOUABDALLAH, FADIA BENAHEM ET WAFI BELMOKHTAR
ABOU BEKR BELKAID TLEMCCEN UNIVERSITY

Introduction

The spread of globalisation and the undeniable prevalent status of English brought a new approach known as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) into many foreign countries, including Algeria. In this respect, many Algerian educational institutions are incorporating ESP programmes into their curricula in order to adhere to the high demand for new exciting courses. Additionally, they aim to reach a broader range of learners looking to use English for functional purposes. However, the issue of differentiating between ESP and GE courses is still noticed among many Algerian ESP teachers. Furthermore, courses are designed to focus more on providing factual knowledge to learners and therefore neglecting some of the practical components of ESP.

Moreover, as ESP is about training and practice, some teachers seem unable to handle the dual focus on knowledge and application. Thus, this research attempts to explore the difficulties the BE teacher encounters in balancing theory and practice in the classroom. Furthermore, this research work could contribute to a better teaching/learning process in ESP classrooms at CEIL centre by answering the following questions : How is Business English taught at CEIL centre ? To what extent is the EBP course helpful for learners' future careers ? To what extent is the course design appropriate for learners' needs ?

1. General framework of the research

1.1. ESP Theories

The importance of English has expanded the field of teaching. Hence, applying English in all educational systems became a paramount necessity, especially at the university level. Consequently, there was a great demand for English language courses designed to meet the needs and shortcomings of various university majors (social sciences, biology, medicine, etc.), as Başturkmen (2006 :18) claims that :

“in ESP, language is learned, not for its own sake or for the sake of gaining a general education, but to smooth the path to linguistic efficiency in academic, professional or workplace environments”.

This goal-oriented approach is achieved via teaching a particular type of English known as English for Specific Purposes or, for short (ESP).

As reported by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP was not a “planned and coherent movement”, but it came to light due to various factors that have operated globally. The notion of ESP was lately defined by Hyland (2002 :385) as below :

“ESP’s distinctive approach to language teaching is based on the identification of the specific language features, discourse practices and communicative skills of target situation, also on teaching practices that recognise the particular subject-matter needs and expertise of the learner.”

This means that language is used to achieve specific functional purposes ; hence, an essential aspect of language is not the language itself but communication.

Due to the paramount necessity to apply English in all educational systems, especially at the university level, there was a tremendous demand for ESP courses. Subsequently, obscurity appeared to English subject specialists in differentiating between the two dichotomies ESP and General English (GE). Unlike GE, ESP focuses on language in context rather than language structure and grammar. Additionally, GE learners attempt to achieve fluency in English to use it in daily life conversations ; however, ESP learners require a limited range of verbal repertoire to execute educational and professional functions.

Furthermore, ESP practitioners are aware of the critical role of analysing learners’ needs, lacks, and wants and designing courses that fit those needs. In the early 1960s, ESP course design became one of the eminent fields of teaching English as a foreign language. It is the foundation of a vast set of interrelated processes incorporating a merged range of experiences in teaching-learning procedures, such as curriculum designs and available materials. On the other hand, the process known as Needs Analysis (NA), also called Needs Assessment, is the keystone of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The term “Needs Analysis” was introduced by Michael West in the 1920s as an endeavour to conduct an investigation concerning the reasons behind learning English. In the initial phases of ESP (the 1960s

and early 1970s), the NA process evaluated learners' communicative needs and techniques for attaining predefined teaching objectives. Furthermore, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p. 125) determined the concept of Needs Analysis as "professional information about the learners : The tasks and activities learners are/will be using English for [...] target situation analysis and objective Needs". Consequently, the aim of this process can be determined by one fundamental question : What is the learner's purpose in learning English ?

1.2. ESP Status in Algeria

ESP today gains a great deal of interest since English is vital as a global language, and there is an increasing demand for this language to fit specific needs in various fields of specialism, such as Science and Technology, Medicine and Business. Hence, ESP expanded to different non-English speaking countries worldwide to help learners fulfil said needs. Among these countries is Algeria, where some Algerian educational institutions, in the private and public sectors, are slowly but surely including ESP programmes into their curricula nationwide. Since English in Algeria is mentioned in the Algerian National Charter (1976 :33) as :

"A means to facilitate constant communication with the world, access modern sciences and technologies and encourage creativity in its universal dimensions."

Furthermore, many Algerian workplaces and corporations operate internationally, which leads them to require a certain level of English from their workers. Whether it is needed for communicating with foreign business people or attending meetings, seminars and conferences, considerable prominence is placed on using English for specific professional purposes.

1.3. The Status of Business English (BA) in Algeria

Whether they need it for Medicine, Technology, Engineering or Business, many Algerians seek different ESP courses in private and public educational institutions to learn specific vocabulary and terminology for international communication. Business English, which is part of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) mainly and ESP broadly, includes courses that help learners such as Algerian Business workers achieve effective cosmopolitan Business communication and attend and host meetings, seminars and conferences. With that being said, it is preferable for BE instructors, who are often referred to as trainers, to have some form of business background or knowledge and research on how corporations are organised in order for the focus to be on the use of English in Business contexts.

More and more companies, mostly private ones, are looking to hire workers who master the English language, spoken and written. Increasingly, today's youth speak English and are motivated by it enough to look for jobs where they could use it ; these jobs could range from commercial jobs and corporate manager positions to entrepreneurship. Offering English for Business and Economy classes at universities, private schools, and institutions, in addition to language centres teaching business courses and workshops, allowed teaching ESP to emerge in the country and made it progressively admired and opted for.

1.4. CEIL centre at Tlemcen University

Business English (BE) courses have been progressively introduced by some educational institutions and language centres, namely the one under exploration. CEIL, labeled as Centre d'Enseignement Intensif de Langue, is one of the common services of Aboubakr Belkaid Tlemcen University. It was created as a result of IGLAEIL (short for Institut de la Généralisation de la Langue Arabe et l'Enseignement Intensif des Langues), with activities ranging from providing foreign languages education to specialised English and French courses designed for specific purposes to fit the learners' needs and wants such as "Translation, Tourism, and Business and Management". The latter course is the one under investigation. It is one semester long, with three consecutive hours per week devoted to it, and the classroom size differs each time ; during this research, twenty students were present. It should be pointed out that this course's instructor is not a subject specialist, nor did she go through any training by the administration. Thus, the teacher is challenged to bridge the gap between theory and practice in the EBP classroom.

2. Research Methodology

This investigation targets the EBP situation at CEIL centre, drawing on an exploratory case study methodology by choosing a sample population that includes twenty students from different educational and professional environments, a BE teacher and two staff members. Moreover, Mixed-Method Research was adopted to collect both qualitative and quantitative data via three instruments ; an observation of the teaching environment at the centre's EBP course for the sake of inspecting the teacher's role and to observe the learners and the learning atmosphere (Present Situation Analysis –PSA), a questionnaire for the students to analyse their needs and draw conclusions about the course design ; along with interviews held with one ESP teacher and two administrators that aim at identifying the teaching

process as well as to know more about the external and internal matters of CEIL centre (Target Situation Analysis –TSA). The triangulation of data method was used to obtain more valid and reliable data.

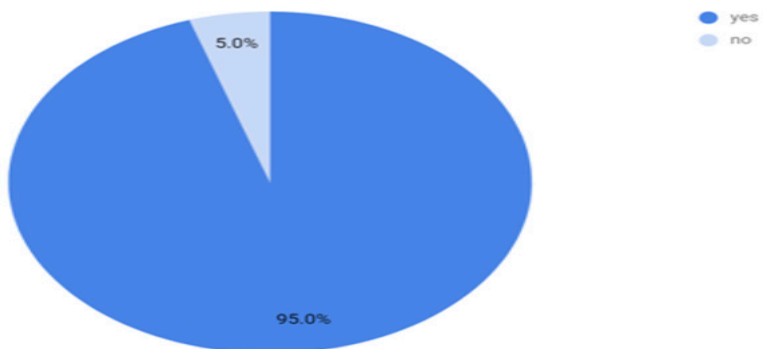
3. Discussion and Interpretation of the Main Results

3.1. Presentation and analysis of results

This section of the paper focuses on interpreting and discussing the main research findings which emerged from the research instruments. The first hypothesis claims that the course manages the theoretical and viable components of EBP. This theory was validated after observing the BE teacher and classroom for several hours ; however, some difficulties were noticed in the balance between theory and practice. Contrastingly, the second hypothesis, which states that this training course qualifies learners for professional work in Business, was rejected after interviewing the BE teacher, the centre's coordinator, and the former director. The results uncovered that the course needed to offer the learners the necessary experience to acquire business positions. Additionally, the course certificates needed more credibility for foreign companies.

The final research hypothesis infers that the business and management teacher considers the learners' needs when conducting a course design to fit those needs. As NA and course design are paramount to ESP, questionnaires were handed to 20 BE learners to determine the appropriateness of the course for their needs. When asked whether the course fits their needs, 95 % of the students supported the claim.

Figure 1. Students Need English

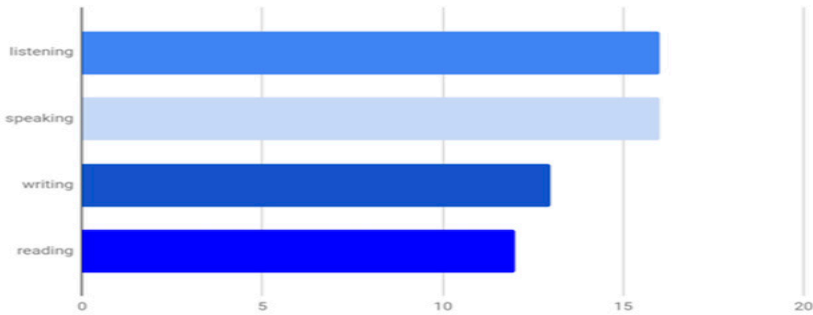


The above figure proves that almost all students, i.e., 95 % asserted that they need English in their fields of study or occupation. Only 5 % stated otherwise, claiming that learning English is a personal interest.

The present situation analysis (PSA) enabled the researchers to collect data based on the student’s current learning conditions, covering the classroom environment, course timing used materials and the different activities and skills they deal with.

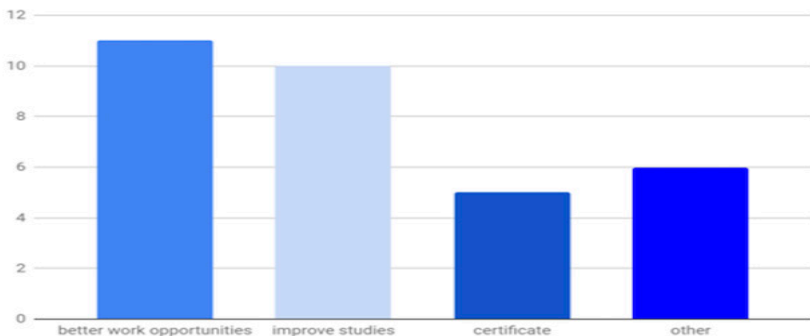
Most of the respondents were satisfied with the overall organisation of the class timing and space ; they were also very active in debating and participating in several workshops the teacher organised. When questioned about which of the four skills the students dealt with in class, listening and speaking were the superior skills, then came writing, then reading. The coming figure highlights the results mentioned above :

Figure 2. Learning Skills



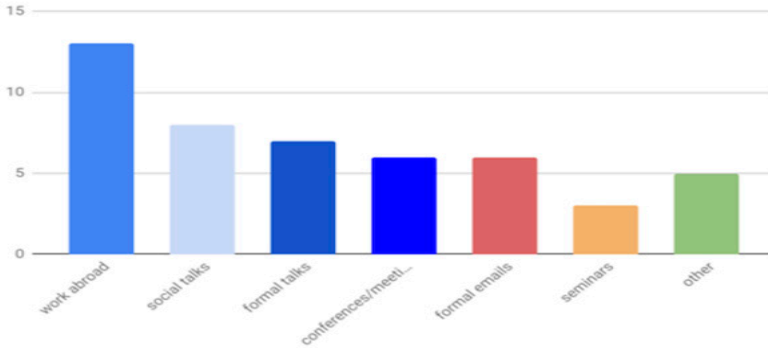
Through analysing the target situation (TSA), the investigators could detect the learners’ needs and necessities that would help said learners function efficiently in the target situation.

Figure 3. Students’ Objectives



The third figure shows that the main objective behind taking the course was finding better work opportunities, while the second prominent objective was improving the students' studies. Obtaining the course certificate was the objective followed right after other unspecified objectives.

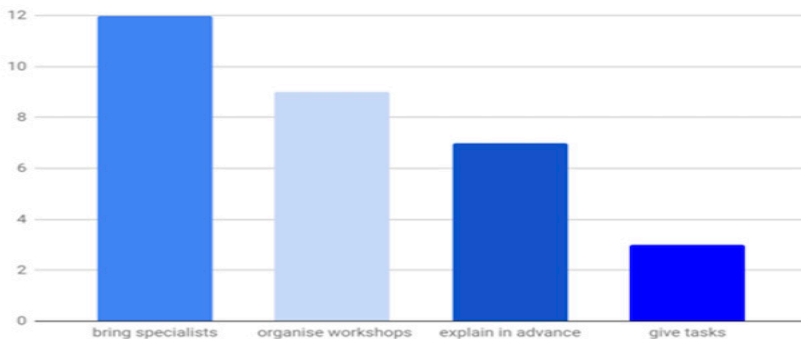
Figure 4. Students Need of English



The above figure reveals that most informants stated that English helps them work abroad. Some respondents reported that they acquired English to partake in social talks or deliver formal ones. In contrast, fewer students asserted that learning English allowed them to attend seminars, conferences and meetings, though the remaining respondents claimed they needed English for other unlisted reasons.

While most subjects confirmed that they needed their teacher to bring business specialists to the classroom, some stated they needed to be given problems to solve in workshops. Others wanted to be supplied with knowledge in advance, yet only a few students claimed they wanted tasks to solve. (Figure 5)

Figure 5. Students' Perceived Needs



These principal figures reveal that the students seemed to be aware of their needs, lacks, wants and necessities. Therefore, their answers affirm the appropriateness of the course. Hence, the top results aforementioned from the situation analysis confirm the last hypothesis.

All in all, the investigators conducted an exploratory case study through which they collected data using three instruments (classroom observation, structured interviews and a questionnaire) then they analysed the results obtained. In this regard, two of the hypotheses put forward were validated while one was rejected. Accordingly, the first hypothesis was confirmed on the basis that the business course covers practical and factual knowledge of EBP inclining more towards the latter. Based on the points which arose during this research, the second hypothesis was rejected revealing that the course does not offer enough experience for learners and the certificates offered by CEIL centre need more credibility so that students can get suitable job opportunities. Nonetheless, the third hypothesis was confirmed on the basis that the Business and Management teacher takes the learners' needs into consideration when conducting a course design to fit those needs ; it was also apparent that students seemed aware of their necessities, lacks and wants.

3.2. Suggestions and Recommendations

In light of what has been stated throughout this work, some suggestions and recommendations were assembled to contribute to a better teaching/learning process in ESP classrooms within CEIL centre, as shown below.

ESP teachers should divide the EBP course into theory and practice and cooperate with language teachers to ensure more than a superficial knowledge of the subject. Additionally, additional materials, such as audio-visual ones, should be used in the EBP classroom to ensure delivering the best outcomes for course design.

Concerning the administration, it is suggested to bring business specialists and take the learners on business field trips. Furthermore, the EBP course should be divided into English for General Business Purposes (beginner and intermediate levels) and English for Specific Business Purposes (advanced level). Moreover, administrations should prioritise arranging pre-service and in-service ESP training for teachers to ensure efficient NA and course design.

Regarding EBP learners, developing basic language skills before joining the Business course would be best. They should also be autonomous by doing additional research and projects on different topics in their fields of study to assist their learning process. Additionally, they should be more engaged in classroom debates and workshops, which is crucial in Business.

Conclusion

Nowadays, due to globalisation, geographical and linguistic differences are no longer an obstacle for individuals to communicate through the lingua franca that is English. In this respect, a relatively new approach emerged to allow the use of this global language in all fields of life such as Medicine, Science and Technology and Engineering. This approach is known worldwide as English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP expanded to many non-native speaking countries including Algeria for the sake of answering learners' demands of functional English courses. An especially important scope which allows global communication among organisations and establishments is Business and Economics. For this reason, learners increasingly seek English for Business Purposes (EBP) courses for applying English to their work-related settings. As ESP is essentially about training and practice, this research was an attempt to explore the difficulties of maintaining theory and practice equivalence in the EBP classroom.

The final findings have highlighted some of the difficulties EBP teachers face in balancing theory and practice in the Business and Management classroom. Additionally, the present investigation submitted suggestions and recommendations for EBP teachers, learners, and administrative staff to promote and ensure a better teaching/learning process in ESP classrooms at CEIL centre.

ESP as an approach emerged and expanded to many foreign countries, including Algeria, to answer learners' demands for functional English courses. As ESP concerns training and practice, this paper explores the difficulties of maintaining theory and practice equivalence in the EBP classroom. It ultimately contributes to the current studies surrounding ESP in the Algerian context. It aims at drawing closer attention towards the BE learning/teaching situation, notably at CEIL centre and overall at Algerian educational institutions. In fact, the discoveries that the researchers encountered through this case study allowed some suggestions and recommendations to be assembled for the sake of EBP teachers, learners as well as the educational administrations. Additionally, this investigation revealed that ESP in Algeria remains a work in progress. Indeed, many ESP teachers need pre-service and in-service training that would qualify them for course design, NA process and practical work-related activities.

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Abstract

As a direct consequence of world globalisation, English has become highly required in several fields to meet occupational and academic purposes. Moreover, teaching English as a foreign language became prevalent, and demand for implementing ESP courses for particular career needs arose. Hence, this work was an endeavour to investigate the difficulties encountered by ESP teachers in Business English courses, particularly in the case of balancing theory and practice in the classroom. For the present research work, the investigators opted for an exploratory case study research at CEIL centre of Tlemcen University. Data were collected via structured interviews with a business teacher and two staff members, a student questionnaire and a classroom observation. Data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The primary findings from the present investigation were interpreted and discussed in detail. Thus, it was reached that although the teacher considered the learners' needs when designing the courses to meet those needs, various difficulties were encountered concerning the balance

between theory and practice in BE courses. This was mainly because the centre needs to offer a sufficient experience to qualify learners for appropriate positions. At the end of the research, the researchers provided a set of recommendations and suggestions as an attempt to eventually contribute to the current studies surrounding ESP in the Algerian context in general and CEIL centre in particular.

Keywords

Business English, Course Design, English for Occupational Purposes, Needs Analysis

مستخلص

كان هذا العمل محاولة لتحقيق في الصعوبات التي يواجهها معلمو ESP في دورات اللغة الإنجليزية للأعمال، لا سيما في حالة الموازنة بين النظرية والتطبيق في الفصل الدراسي. بالنسبة للعمل البحثي الحالي، اختار الباحثون دراسة حالة استكشافية في مركز CEIL التابع لجامعة تلمسان. تم جمع البيانات من خلال مقابلات منظمة مع مدرس أعمال واثنين من الموظفين واستبيان الطالب وملاحظة الفصل. تم تحليل البيانات من الناحيتين الكمية والنوعية. تم تفسير النتائج الأولية من هذا التحقيق ومناقشتها بالتفصيل. وبالتالي، تم التوصل إلى أنه على الرغم من أن المعلم أخذ في الاعتبار احتياجات المتعلمين عند تصميم الدورات لتلبية تلك الاحتياجات، فقد تمت مواجهة صعوبات مختلفة فيما يتعلق بالتوازن بين النظرية والتطبيق في دورات BE. ويرجع ذلك أساساً إلى أن المركز يحتاج إلى تقديم خبرة كافية لتأهيل المتعلمين للوظائف المناسبة.

كلمات مفتاحية

اللغة الإنجليزية للأعمال، تصميم الدورة، اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض المهنية، تحليل الاحتياجات

Résumé

Conséquence directe de la mondialisation mondiale, l'anglais est devenu très demandé dans plusieurs domaines pour répondre à des objectifs professionnels et académiques. De plus, l'enseignement de l'anglais comme langue étrangère est devenu monnaie courante et la demande de mise en œuvre de cours d'Anglais à objectifs spécifiques pour des besoins professionnels particuliers est devenu plus que nécessaire. Par conséquent, cette recherche a permis d'enquêter sur les difficultés rencontrées par les enseignants d'Anglais à objectifs spécifiques dans les cours d'anglais des affaires, en particulier dans le cas de l'équilibre entre théorie et pratique en classe. Pour le présent travail de recherche, les chercheurs ont opté pour une étude de cas exploratoire au centre CEIL de l'Université de Tlemcen. Les données ont été collectées via des entretiens structurés avec un enseignant spécialiste dans le domaine

des affaires et deux membres du personnel, un questionnaire destiné aux étudiants et une observation en classe. Les données ont été analysées à la fois quantitativement et qualitativement. Les principaux résultats de la présente enquête ont été interprétés et discutés en détail. Ainsi, il a été constaté que bien que l'enseignant ait pris en compte les besoins des apprenants lors de la conception des cours pour répondre à leurs besoins, diverses difficultés ont été rencontrées concernant l'équilibre entre la théorie et la pratique dans les cours de l'Anglais des affaires. Cela était principalement dû au fait que le centre n'offre pas suffisamment d'expérience aux apprenants qualifiés pour obtenir les postes appropriés. À la fin de la recherche, les chercheurs ont fourni un ensemble de recommandations et de suggestions dans le but de contribuer éventuellement aux études actuelles entourant l'Anglais à objectif spécifiques dans le contexte algérien en général et au centre CEIL en particulier.

Mots-clés

Anglais des affaires, conception de cours, anglais professionnel, analyse des besoins

