

Challenges met in Designing ESP Courses Case of a Business English Class

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Abstract:

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an approach to language teaching. It is goal-directed and based on learners' needs, which implies designing courses that meet the students' needs and objectives behind learning English. For designing ESP courses, many elements come into play besides needs identification and analysis and learning theories, namely learning objectives, syllabus design, materials selection, teaching methodology and assessment. To this end, teachers select suitable theories of learning. Then they move to the practical aspect which is needs analysis. However, in some Algerian universities and many ESP contexts, it is not possible to identify and analyse learners' needs because of many factors. The aim of this paper is to describe the ESP situation in the Faculty of Economics, Management and Commerce at the University of Ghardaia and the challenges met in ESP course design in Accounting and Finance department in the same faculty.

Keywords:

ESP, course design, business English, needs analysis, materials, assessment

Introduction:

ESP, English for Specific Purposes, is an approach to language teaching, and is goal-directed¹. As any English course, the ESP course should be designed so as to fulfill specific assigned objectives. As a matter of fact, ESP teachers are required to design courses that are appropriate for various groups. To do that, they need to ask general, specific, theoretical and practical questions. Some of the latter can be answered by research, and others will rely more on intuition and experience of the teacher. The ESP teachers describe the language using different ideas, either explicitly or implicitly. They select theories of learning that suit those ideas. Then, they move to the practical aspect which is needs analysis that is divided into target needs (what the learner needs to do in the target situation) and learning needs (what the learner needs to do in order to learn) that should be distinguished. So what does an ESP course design include? This question should be preceded by reviewing ESP definition, growth, and branches and "course design" then it focuses on "ESP course design".

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1. ESP Definition

ESP stands for English for Specific Purposes. ESP is learner-centred and goal-directed, i.e. it is an approach to language teaching based on learners' goals and reasons for learning a language.

- Hutchinson and Waters ²stated that, "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reasons for learning". In this context, learners learn English in order to be able to read textbooks written in English that are relevant to their field of study, or to use English in work place.
- Robinson (1991) states students learn English because they need it for study or for work purposes but not because they are interested in the English language or English culture.³
- Basturkmen (2006) asserts that in ESP, "language is learnt not for its own sake or for the sake of gaining a general education, but to smooth the path to entry or greater linguistic efficiency in academic, professional or workplace environments"⁴
- Mackay and Mountford argue that "ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose."⁵

From above, ESP has come to fulfill learners' needs for studying English either for study or for work purposes.

2. Growth of ESP

ESP has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching since 1960's. Its development is reflected in the increasing number of ESP courses offered all over the world. Hutchinson and Waters stated that⁶, "ESP was not a planned and coherent movement, but rather a phenomenon that grew out of a number of converging trends."

In Hutchinson and Waters (ibid), the growth of ESP then was brought about due to a number of important factors :

- a. The end of the Second World War brought new perspectives and changes in scientific, technical and economic activity at an international level. These changes resulted in the creation of a world unified, dominated by two major forces: technology and commerce. To meet the demands of these forces, "English was at the right place at the right time"⁷.
- b. The Demands of a Brave New World predicted by an age of enormous changes in all spheres of life: scientific, technical and economic on an international level. These changes required a "restricted repertoire" Mackay and Mountford (1978) selected from the whole language that meets the learners' needs within a well defined context.
- c. A revolution in linguistics has led to a shift from presenting the language as a set of forms and defining the features of language usage to discovering the ways in which language is actually used in real communication. The idea was to design language courses that suit different and specific contexts since language varies from one situation to another.
- d. New developments in educational psychology contributed in the growth of ESP by emphasising the central role of learners, their motivations and needs from the language course; therefore, this orientation led to designing specific courses that better meet the learners' needs.

All the above factors contributed to the emergence of ESP as the most active branch in Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

3. Branches of ESP

ESP is divided into two main types: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

According to Kennedy and Bolitho (1984), EAP is taught '*generally within educational institutions to students needing English in their studies*'⁸ such as the academic study of Finance, Business, Economics, and the like, whereas EOP '*in a situation in which learners need to use English as part of their work on profession*'⁹ such as the case of practising doctors. EAP is sub-divided into English for (Academic) Science and Technology, English for (Academic) Legal Purposes, English for (Academic) Medical Purposes and English for (Academic) Management, Finance and Economics¹⁰. Nonetheless, argues that EAP is "too hard for students with limited English proficiency"¹¹ and that these learners should have preparatory classes for understanding general English first.

EOP is devoted for work purposes, not academic ones¹². It includes English for Medical Purposes (English for Medical Purposes and English for Business Purposes) and English for Vocational Purposes (Pre-Vocational English and Vocational English). It is argued by Dudley-Evans¹³ that EOP is related to '*professional purposes in administration, medicine, law and business, and vocational purposes for non-professionals in work or pre-work situations*'¹⁴.

On the other hand, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) say that there is no clear-cut distinction between EAP and EOP because people can work and study at the same time: "This is, of course, not a clear-cut distinction: people can work and study simultaneously; 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, a job"¹⁵.

4. ESP vs EGP

Though ESP is based on needs of the learner, uses a specific methodology and is considered with the teaching grammar, the language skills, and the like, it is distinguished from EGP (English for General Purposes), also called general English (GE), in many points.

ESP is different from EGP. *First*, since, in most cases, ESP learners are adult learners, they bring with them their prior experience which integrates but complements the use of English. *Second*, ESP courses are based on a needs analysis of the learners since, as mentioned earlier, adult learners are aware of the purposes of taking a course. *Third*, ESP courses may focus on one or a few aspects of language, say, grammar, reading skill, etc., whereas EGP deals with all of them: grammar, vocabulary, phonology, and the four language skills. *Fourth*, ESP teaching courses are limited to a short period of time rather than EGP ones which last a number of years (seven years in Algerian schools, from the middle up to the secondary schools). *Fifth*, The specific contexts in which English is taught imply a specialised vocabulary as in Accounting, Computer Science, Biology, and the like, resulting in many genres and registers. In fact, English is taught in contexts known by the learners. That is, it is embedded in their subject area, which facilitates the use of what they learn in their studies or work.

5. The Development of ESP

ESP has witnessed five main phases of development: register analysis, rhetorical or discourse analysis, target situation analysis, skills-centred approach, and learning-centred approach.

5.1. The First Phase: *Register Analysis*

The main motive behind register analyses was to make the ESP course more relevant to learners' needs. The aim was, then, to produce a syllabus which gives importance to the language forms students would meet rather than to forms they would not. Specialists in the field stressed that the ESP course should give priority to language forms, as compound nouns, passives, etc.

5.2. The Second Phase: *Rhetorical or Discourse Analysis*

The second stage in ESP development focused on the level above the sentence. This is called rhetorical or discourse analysis where the focus was on understanding how sentences were combined in discourse to produce meaning.

5.3. The Third Phase: *Target Situation Analysis*

In this stage, the aim was to link language analysis to learners' reasons for learning.

5.4. The Fourth Phase: *Skills and Strategies*

The main idea in the skills-centred approach was that the focus should be below the surface; that is, on the underlying interpretive strategies, which permits the learner to deal successfully with the surface forms.

5.5. The Fifth Phase: *A learning-Centred Approach*

The concern is not with language use, but rather with language learning, for a significant ESP approach must be based on an understanding of the processes of language learning.

In this section, we shall focus on ESP course design in a business English class. To this end, we shall first begin with defining "course" and "course design".

6. Course Design in a Business English Class

Hutchinson and Waters have defined a course as "An integrated series of teaching-learning experiences, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge."¹⁶

A course design refers to the planning and structuring of a course for achieving the needed goals. It is the outcome of a number of elements: the result of the needs analysis, the course designer's approach to syllabus and methodology, and existing materials.¹⁷

7. ESP Course Design

Munby defines ESP courses as "Those where the syllabus and the materials are determined by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner."¹⁸ Again, this stresses the importance of the identification of learners' needs which is the basis for any ESP course. Thus, the ESP course takes into consideration not only the subject area of learners, but also the lexical, semantic and structural aspects of the language characteristics of that specialised area.

The ESP courses are to prepare the learners in accordance with specific skills and vocabulary needed in their own field in order to be able to communicate effectively in the target situation. Basturkmen confirms this fact by saying that "ESP courses are narrower in focus than ELT courses"¹⁹. To achieve these aims, a number of parameters have to be taken into consideration, namely:

- identification and analysis of needs
- syllabus design

- the learning objectives
- teaching methodology
- materials selection and development and
- assessment

The question that should be asked is as follows: Are ESP courses designed following what has been aforementioned ?

The following section is going to provide an answer to this question.

8. ESP Teaching in a Business Context

It is not a surprise to tell that teaching in ESP contexts as in the Accounting and Finance Department is challenging. It is challenging mainly in the Pandemic era because :

- There is no official course nor a specific syllabus.
- The majority of teachers are part-time teachers and are not trained in ESP teaching.
- It is difficult to administer a needs analysis questionnaire or survey, for students have only one session per three weeks and for only one semester as is the case of Third Year Licence in all Economics specialities.
- Distant learning in the two weeks is not really effective as it is devoted to only sharing written documents and videos links, and students rarely interact.
- As mentioned previously, teachers, mainly the experienced ones rely more on their experience as teachers and their intuition in designing relevant courses.

To this end, teachers can do the following :

- They can guess the students' level from the beginning by asking simple questions, then complex ones.
- They can detect whether students are connected with the module through asking about what they have already seen as content.
- They can check whether the students are interested in the course or not through observing their behaviours.
- They can locate the weaknesses and strengths of the students.

This information is going to lead the teacher to design a course that fits the students, taking into account that many students are not aware of why having English in their specialities.

9. Designing a Business English Course

In designing a business English course, many elements should come into play. We shall focus on them one by one.

9.1. The Learning Objectives

Behind each business English course, there are objectives. These objectives are based on information gathered during a needs analysis. For example, and depending on the level of students, teachers may set the following objectives :

- Improving business letter writing
- Learning to write memos, emails, curriculum vitae, etc.
- Learning specialised vocabulary
- Improving reading comprehension

- Summarising written texts in paragraphs and/or in graphic organisers
- Learning some useful bussiness expressions

Those objectives are further divided into a number of aims. These aims when achieved, they lead gradually to fulfill the set objectives.

In our case, no course has been suggested or sponsored. It is the teacher's initiative to design a course and rely on available published courses in order to achieve the set objectives.

9.2. Needs' Analysis and Identification

Needs analysis is essential in any ESP course design. The awareness of the need for learning English is an important characteristic that distinguishes ESP course from any other general English course. To this end, Hutchinson and Waters mention that, "What distinguishes ESP from general English is not the existence of a need as such but rather an awareness of the need."²⁰ In fact, the acknowledgment of the importance of needs analysis as a crucial characteristic in ESP course design since the learner is at the heart of any ESP teaching programme. To this end, needs analysis in ESP teaching provides course designers with core information that assist them in designing courses and programmes and the required teaching materials. It is also crucial to mention that needs analysis is central to ESP, for ESP students do not target all aspects of the English language. In this case, ESP course designers should equip those students with only the knowledge of English they need in the target situation.

The process of needs identification can be done through needs analysis questionnaires, surveys, and even through discussions and questions on the part of the teacher. To this end and according to the situation explained above, the teacher relies on his intuition and experience and the questions and discussions in class in the first encounter with students.

9.3. Syllabus Design

Any course should include a syllabus that is designed based on needs analysis. A syllabus is "a document which says what will (or at least what should) be learnt"²¹. There are many types of syllabi depending on the most important aspect of language learning. It should be noted that one of the main purposes of a syllabus "is to break down the mass of knowledge to be learnt into manageable units"²², and this breakdown is to be broken down based on certain criteria.

9.4. The Teaching Methodology

Any course relies on a learning theory. To this end, teachers can select any theory that fulfills the course objectives; nevertheless, they can make use of the eclectic approach in that they can select tasks and activities that are based on a behaviouristic principle such as memorising or repeating new language or rules, and others on the cognitive code such as teaching reading comprehension strategies. They can also rely on the mentalistic view in asking students to build new sentences following a sample. Teachers should also motivate and encourage students during this journey.

9.5. Materials Selection and Development

Concerning the materials, there exist many ready-made materials in the market such as coursebooks of Market Leader series and others which are very useful. Teachers can select a variety of texts and activities from the different levels of these series. Even if these are not always available in libraries, there are many options. The teacher can develop his/her own materials; he/she can also rely on the internet to design his/her courses.

➤ **Coursebooks**

There are many coursebooks that can help business English teachers. Of course, teachers can select what really fits their learners' needs and the courses' objectives. Moreover, as Frendo (2005) argues, most coursebooks are professional, and include a comprehensive teacher's guide and resources, supplementary materials, audio resources, etc. Examples of coursebooks are the ones entitled Market Leader Business English (2011), in company 3.0 ESP series (2010), Pearson Longman Vocational English series (2012), etc., which are very useful and allow teachers to select a variety of materials of different levels.

➤ **Authentic vs Adapted Materials**

Selecting authentic or adapted or artificial materials such as written texts depends on the learners' linguistic level. Teachers can also write the texts and activities if they have enough knowledge of the speciality. At the beginning, it is advisable to begin with adapted, simple texts, lessons and activities. Teachers may use authentic texts such as the ones of Financial Times with First year Master students when these students show improvement in analysing texts. It should be noted that the cultural aspect must be taken into consideration; that is, teachers should select what is culturally suitable to their learners in terms of content, mainly, for ESP texts, for example, are written with the native speaker in mind.

➤ **Types of Business English Materials**

In the main, teachers can begin their courses with conversations on business contexts and through audios if possible, and introduce some of the famous business expressions, followed by practice. They can also teach some grammar. For example, they can revise indefinite and definite articles and plural nouns. They can also do activities like “*Reorder the words to get meaningful sentences*” or “*Fill in the gaps with words*”... In the following sessions, teachers can introduce written texts of an acceptable length and that include simple sentences and economic terms. Teachers can teach students some comprehension strategies that help them comprehend texts. They can also teach them how to summarise texts in graphic organisers ... It all depends on the set objectives. Actually, the business English publications such as Market Leader series that include a variety of simplified text types that suit the students. These range from CVs, reports, informal and formal emails up to business letters. Also, English for Banking and Finance series (2012) which is part of Pearson Longman Vocational English series includes a number of topics and texts that suit those learners in terms of grammatical structures and vocabulary. There are other publications such as “in company 3.0” (Pegg, 2017), “Accounting and Finance Market Leader”²³, “English for International Banking and Finance”²⁴, Upper Intermediate Market Leader.²⁵

➤ **Examples of Business English Activities**

Reading:

INVESTING YOUR MONEY

Investment means using money to buy something (an asset) with the aim of making a profit by selling that asset at a higher price some time in the future. There are many different types of investments. Some people put their money in art, stamps, or collectibles. Other people invest in shares and become part owners of a company. Not only can they make a profit by selling those shares at a higher price than they paid for them, but they can receive a dividend – a share of the profits which the company gives to its shareholders every year. People often ask about the difference between *savings* and *investments*. Sometimes the two terms appear interchangeable, but there is a big difference. Quite simply, investment involves some kind of capital risk. There is no

guarantee that you will make a profit. In fact, the price of your assets may fall and you may not even get back your capital, the money you put in. Some banks call their savings accounts ‘investment accounts’, but this is misleading. The only risk of savings accounts is that inflation will reduce the value of the money you put in them. There is no risk of losing your capital.²⁶

The teacher can exploit the above text in achieving many purposes. He can train the students to use reading comprehension strategies²⁷ such as previewing, predicting, activating background knowledge, using text structure awareness, etc. He can also train them to summarise the text in a paragraph or a graphic organiser.

Grabe and Stoller²⁸, for example, suggested the following activities for academic purposes:

- Identifying the sentences that convey the main ideas of texts
- Examining headings and subheadings in a text and then deciding what each section is about
- Adding information to a partially completed outline until all key supporting ideas are included
- Underlining transition phrases and, when they signal major sections of the text, describing what the next section covers
- Explaining what a set of pronouns refers to in prior text
- Examining an inaccurate outline and adjusting it so that it is correct
- Reorganizing a scrambled paragraph and discussing textual clues used for decisions
- Creating headings for a set of paragraphs in the text, giving a label to each, and discussing the function each paragraph.
- Identifying clues that indicate major patterns of organization (e.g., cause-effect, comparison-contrast, analysis).

Listening and Speaking:

In the same series, there are CDs that include audios such as conversations between employees and customers. The teacher selects some of them, and asks the students to complete them or to match speaker 1 and 2 to sentences (a-c), for example. An example of a listening activity from Rosenberg²⁹:

-Listen to two telephone conversations and match speakers 1 and 2 to sentences a-c. There is one extra sentence.

- a) This customer has a question about interest.
- b) This customer wants to invest in a company.
- c) This customer needs a mortgage.

Grammar:

Besides, there are many grammar lessons and activities that foster the knowledge of tenses. Here is an example from Rogers³⁰:

-Rewrite the sentences using the verbs in brackets.

1. We are going to visit the trade fair. (plan)
.....
2. We are sure we will make a profit within three years. (expect)
.....
3. We are going to launch a new product range next summer. (intend)
.....

4. We will beat our competitors before long. (hope)

.....

Vocabulary:

Vocabulary activities are very important in business English. Here is an example from Helm³¹:

-Match these words from the article (1-6) with their meanings (a-f).

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Broke | a) without buying other businesses |
| 2. (to grow) organically | b) bankrupt |
| 3. Liquidity | c) size |
| 4. Breakneck | d) bank |
| 5. Lender | e) cash |
| 6. Scale | f) extremely fast |

Writing:

There are many types of writing activities, depending on the students' level. Here is an example from Lansford³²:

-Your manager at work has asked if you can recommend your English course to other employees. Write an informal report (140-160) describing the English course you have just completed.

Include this information:

- number and length of lessons
- number of people in the group
- course book topics
- exercises and activities

In short, there exist a wide range of tasks and activities, and the teacher's duty is to select the most appropriate ones, taking into account the students' level and the cultural aspect of materials.

9.6. Assessment

There is an intimate relationship between teaching and testing, but they are not the same³³. The teaching process should be directed towards building up the learners' ability and confidence in using English for effective communication. When the teacher is intending to develop fluency, it is very important that learners should not feel that they are being tested all the time³⁴, for this behaviour does not allow them to achieve fluency.

Most teaching should not be seen as a test by the learners' performance and progress and your own teaching constantly. Nonetheless, testing is just part of assessment. As a matter of fact, assessment includes besides tests class participation, progress tests, homework, and projects. Teachers can assess the progress and improvement of their students according to what is happening in class and through oral and written tests. Of course, tests should include what students have seen and done during the course and should adhere to the criteria of assessment: validity and reliability.

Conclusion:

Though there is no official syllabus nor clear objectives for the English course in business English departments like Accounting and Finance, teachers can design courses using and relying on their intuitions and experience and on the available coursebooks in the market. And even if the sessions are not numerous, teachers can do the minimum with their

students. Once the teacher sets clear objectives, they can design their courses accordingly. Another challenge is the students with linguistic deficiency that should be encouraged and motivated by the teachers. They can show the minimum of interest and involvement by taking part in the different tasks and activities.

Footnotes:

- ¹: Hutchinson, T & Waters, A. English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach. A learning-centred approach. p 19
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- ⁴ - Basturkmen, H. (2006). Ideas and options in ESP. Mahwah, New Jersey- London. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. p. 18
- ⁵ - Mackay, R & Mountford, A. (1978). English for specific purposes a case study approach. London. Longman Group Ltd. p. 2
- ⁶ - Hutchinson, T & Waters, A. English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach. p. 6
- ⁷ - Crystal, D. (1997). English as a global language. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p. 13
- ⁸ Kennedy, C. & Bolitho, R. (1984). English for specific purposes. London and Basingstoke. Mac Millan Publishers Limited. p. 4
- ⁹ Kennedy, C. & Bolitho, R. English for specific purposes. p. 4
- ¹⁰ -Dudley-Evans, T & St John, M. (1998). Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- ¹¹ -Hyland, K. (2006). English for academic purposes: An advanced resource book. USA. Routledge. p. 10
- ¹² Hyland, K. English for academic purposes: An advanced resource book. p. 10
- ¹³ Hyland, K. English for academic purposes: An advanced resource book. p. 10
- ¹⁴ - Dudley-Evans, T & St John, M. Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach. p. 7
- ¹⁵ -Hutchinson, T & Waters, A. English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach, p. 16.
- ¹⁶ -Hutchinson, T & Waters, A. English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach. p. 65
- ¹⁷ -Robinson, (1991). ESP today. Herefordshire. Prentice Hall International Ltd. p. 91.
- ¹⁸ -Munby, J. (1978). Communicative syllabus design. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p. 2
- ¹⁹ -Basturkmen, H. (2010). Developing courses in English for specific purposes. New York. Palgrave MacMillan. p. 3
- ²⁰ -Hutchinson, T & Waters, A. English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach. p53.
- ²¹ Hutchinson, T & Waters, A. English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach. P80.
- ²² Hutchinson, T & Waters, A. (1987). English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. P85.
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- ²⁶ -Richey, R. (2012). English for banking and finance vocational English course book. David Bonamy. England. Pearson Education Limited. p. 36
- ²⁷ -Grabe, W. (2009). Reading in a second language: moving from theory to practice. Card A. Chapelle and Susan Hunstan. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- ²⁸ -Grabe, W & Stoller, F. Reading for academic purposes. In Marianne Celce- Murcia. Teaching English as foreign or second language. p. 194
- ²⁹ -Richey, R. English for banking and finance vocational English course book. David Bonamy p. 7
- ³⁰ -Rogers, J. (2012). Pre-intermediate market leader business English practice file. England. Pearson Education Limited. p. 37
- ³¹ -Helm, S. Accounting and finance. England. p. 30

³² -Lansford, L. (2012). *Pre-intermediate market leader business English test file*. England. Pearson Education Limited. p. 36

³³ -Davies, P & Pearse, E. (2000). *Success in English teaching*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 169

³⁴ -Davies, P & Pearse, E. *Success in English teaching*. p.170

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