# An Investigation into ESP Teachers' and Students' Needs and Difficulties at Medea University, Algeria

تحقيق في احتياجات وصعوبات أساتذة وطلاب الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة (ESP) في جامعة المدية، الجزائر

## Une enquête sur les besoins et les difficultés des enseignants et des étudiants de l'ESP à l'université de Médéa, Algérie

**Doct. Amro Makhlouf**

Algiers 2 University, LIRADDI Laboratory, Algeria

**Dr. Samira Arar**

Algiers 2 University, LIRADDI Laboratory, Algeria

**ملخص**

اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة هو أحد المناهج التعليمية للغة يهدف إلى تلبية احتياجات ومتطلبات المتعلمين. لذلك، يعد تحليل الاحتياجات مفيدًا جدًا لتحديد المتطلبات الأساسية للمتعلمين وتحديد المجالات التي يفتقرون فيها إلى المهارات اللازمة. تبحث هذه الدراسة في احتياجات وصعوبات المعلمين والطلاب الجزائريين في قسمي العلوم والتكنولوجيا في جامعة يحيى فارس بالمدية. كما تكشف هذه الدراسة عن أهم آراء وتصورات المعلمين حول المناهج التدريسية، أهم المشاكل التدريسية وكذا الاستراتيجيات المطبقة لمساعدة الطلاب. تم استخدام مقابلة جماعية مركزة لتلبية أهداف البحث. ولقد كشفت النتائج عن معلومات هامة حول احتياجات المعلمين والطلاب بالإضافة إلى أهم التحديات التي يواجهونها أثناء تخطيط المناهج والمواد، بالإضافة إلى تخطيط الدروس وممارسة التدريس داخل القسم. أوضحت الدراسة أهمية التكوين المتواصل لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة وضرورة فهم أفضل لاحتياجات الطلاب في المناهج المستخدمة على المستوى الجامعي في الجزائر.

**الكلمات الدالة:** اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة؛ تحليل الاحتياجات؛ صعوبات؛ تكوين المعلمين؛ تصميم الدرس.

**Abstract**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an approach to language that aims to meet the needs and demands of learners. Therefore, needs analysis is very useful for identifying learners' key requirements and determine the areas in which they are lacking skills. This study investigates Algerian ESP teachers' and students' needs and difficulties in the Sciences and Technology Departments at Yahia Fares University, Medea. It targets teachers' perceptions about their teaching

approaches, the main problems encountered in the ESP course, and the strategies implemented to help ESP students. To this end, a focus group interview was used to meet the research aims. The findings of this research revealed insightful information on teachers' and students' needs as well as their encountered challenges, as an input to syllabus and materials planning, as well as to lesson planning and classroom instruction practice. The study demonstrated the importance of teacher training and the understanding of students' needs in ESP syllabus at university level in Algeria.

**Keywords:** English for specific purposes; needs analysis; difficulties; teacher training; course design.

### Résumé

L'anglais à des fins spécifiques (ESP) est une approche de la langue qui vise à répondre aux besoins et aux demandes des apprenants. Par conséquent, l'analyse des besoins est très utile pour identifier les principales exigences des apprenants et déterminer les domaines dans lesquels ils manquent de compétences. Cette étude examine les besoins et les difficultés des enseignants et des étudiants Algériens de l'ESP dans les départements des sciences et technologies de l'Université Yahia Fares, Médéa. Elle cible les perceptions des enseignants sur leurs approches pédagogiques, les principaux problèmes rencontrés dans le cours de l'ESP ainsi que les stratégies mises en œuvre pour aider les étudiants en ESP. Pour cet objectif, un entretien de groupe de discussion a été utilisé pour répondre aux objectifs de la recherche. Les résultats de cette recherche ont révélé des informations pertinentes sur les besoins des enseignants et des étudiants ainsi que sur les défis rencontrés, ce qui contribuera à la planification des programmes et des contenus, ainsi qu'à la planification des cours et aux pratiques des enseignements en classe. L'étude a démontré l'importance de la formation des enseignants et la compréhension des besoins des étudiants dans le programme de l'ESP au niveau universitaire en Algérie.

**Mots-clés:** L'anglais à des fins spécifiques; analyse des besoins; difficultés; formation des enseignants; conception de cours.

## Introduction

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes is generally considered as an independent discipline within English Language Teaching (ELT). It has developed its own methodology, and its research clearly draws on research from various disciplines in addition to applied linguistics (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). ESP is a term that refers to teaching or studying English for a particular career or for business in general. It looks at the purpose for which the student needs to learn English, for occupational or for study purposes. This study discusses research into the quality of teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) with the focus on Algerian ESP teachers and

students' needs and difficulties in the Sciences and Technology Departments at Yahia Fares University, Medea. It aims at scrutinizing teachers' perceptions of the current ESP teaching/learning, identifying teachers' and students' needs and difficulties, and suggesting solutions to ESP problems in Algerian universities. It also seeks for helping curriculum designers to create and develop more appropriate ESP course syllabus and thus ensure successful implementation of ESP courses. The main questions that were addressed in the present research with reference to Medea University context as follow:

- What are ESP teachers' perceptions about ESP teaching/learning, in Medea University?
- What are ESP teachers' and students' needs?
- What difficulties are facing ESP teachers and students?
- What solutions could be suggested to alleviate problems in ESP teaching/learning?

To this aim, a small-scale exploratory study has been conducted through a focus group interview. The current research emphasizes that learning English for specific purposes should be based on needs analysis approach. That is to say, designing a course that helps to meet ESP teachers and learners' needs is a very crucial prerequisite in curriculum designing. Moreover, it stresses the importance of teacher training in ESP contexts that seems to be an area of neglect in Algerian universities.

## 1. Literature Review

English for Specific Purposes or ESP is an approach to the teaching of English designed for scientific, technological, economic and academic purposes. It has developed in various ways and at different speeds around the world before its emergence (Mayo, 1998). ESP has gained considerable importance because it offers a functional objective for teaching/learning English and helps coping with the changing role English plays at national and international levels. Therefore, it has become necessary to reconsider the academic and professional roles of ESP by shedding light on the importance of ESP, the significance of needs analysis to ESP course design, and the call for appropriate teacher training.

### 1.1 ESP Definition and importance

There are various definitions of ESP. For instance, Coffey (1985) posits that ESP is "a quick and economical use of the English language to pursue a course of academic study (EAP) or effectiveness in paid employment (EOP)" (p.79). Put differently, it refers to teaching English to university students or people already in employment for academic purposes or for a particular profession. Besides, Johns and Price-Machada (2001) say that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a movement based on the proposition that all language teaching should be tailored to the specific learning and language use needs of identified groups of students — and also sensitive to the sociocultural contexts in which these students will be using English. (p.43)

In other words, an ESP course should be designed to suit the learners' needs in the workplace. Moreover, ESP teachers should *identify* a real-life situation for the vocabulary and structures in order to conduct a successful ESP class. ESP is important in the sense that it focuses on developing linguistic competence in the students' specific disciplines such as economics, medicine, tourism, etc. Moreover, it improves the relevance of what the students are learning and looks at the purpose for which the students need to learn English, i.e. for occupational or for study purposes. In this respect, Vasconcelos and Balula (2019) state that "ESP courses are designed to meet specific needs of the learners, with reference to the particular vocabulary and register they require." (p.183). This implies that ESP has developed in response to learners' specific needs in academic or professional settings. Therefore, the identification of needs (needs analysis) is a prerequisite for both ESP teachers and course designers.

In short, ESP is an approach to EFL teaching/learning that benefits both academic and professional purposes, but it is primarily based on an effective needs analysis.

### 1.2 Needs analysis defined

Needs analysis was introduced in the mid-1970s as curriculum designers came to see learners' goals as the driving force behind ESP. It is the process of establishing *what* and *how* of a course (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998). It is a very crucial step in the development of a curriculum that is being started from scratch for a completely new program (Brown, 1995).

The term "needs analysis" has different definitions. Brown (1995) defines it as "the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective

information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation" (p. 36). Moreover, Richards and Schmidt (2013) state that needs analysis is "the process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners acquires a language and arranges the needs according to priorities." (p.389). Both definitions stress the idea that needs analysis is a structured, organized process of identifying the requirements of a particular group of students and their instructor(s) or other stakeholders through the collection of the necessary data. Needs analysis in this case aims at creating curricula that are more effective and make the learning process more productive. Besides, Nunan (1988), needs analysis refers to "the techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in a syllabus design." (p.13). That is to say, instructional coordinators gather information about the learners in order to be able to know the reason for which the language is supposed to be used in a specific situation with certain people to an acceptable level of proficiency.

In sum, there are different types of needs that the ESP practitioners should consider, and two questions should be raised while designing a course: "what does the learner need? And how can he learn?"

### 1.3  Types of needs

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identified two types of needs: Target needs and learning needs.

#### 1.3.1  Target needs

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identified three types of target needs: necessities, lacks and wants.

 –**Necessities** are what the learners have to know in order to function effectively in the target situations. We can gather information about necessities by observing the target situations and analyzing the constituent parts of them.

 –**Lacks** are the gap between the existing proficiency and the target proficiency of learners. They refer to what the learners already know and what they are deficient in, i.e., what they ignore or cannot perform in English.

–**Wants** are what the learners feel they need to gain from the language course. These needs are very personal; therefore, they are often referred to as 'subjective'. These wants may conflict with necessities perceived by employers and cause a de-stabilizing effect on motivation. Therefore, ESP course designer or practitioners must find solutions to accommodate them.

### 1.3.2  Learning needs

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) assert that learning needs refer to the variety of tools used by learners to achieve their target needs starting with realizing their lacks. Put differently, learning needs symbolize learners' journey from the starting point (lacks) to the destination (necessities). They involve an answer to the questions: How are we going to the destination? Are learners motivated? Are they bored? Are the teaching materials and methods suitable?

Therefore, curriculum designers need to identify learners' needs according to their learning situation and their current level of knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, instructional coordinators should also consider teachers' needs when designing an ESP course.

### 1.4  ESP course needs

Kennedy (1983) stated that the foundation of an effective ESP course should closely matches teachers' needs. Such a course should cover "course needs" and "teaching needs".

### 1.4.1  Course Needs

Kennedy (1983) asserted that a list of purposes (study skills) should be identified prior to the design of a course. It should also be made in accordance with the needs of native and nonnative speakers of English. Furthermore, a study skills approach was proposed involving the following aspects:

–A general aim for the course (succeeding on the course).
–A set of purposes (the skills required to achieve the general aim).
– Facilitating access to the particular variety of English language associated with the subject discipline (English language teaching and applied linguistics). (p.76).

However, Kennedy (1983) noted that both nonnative and native speakers find a difficulty with subject specific lexis in the initial stages of the course.

Thus, nonnative speakers may require more assistance at this stage also with common-core lexical items compared to native speakers. This aspect refers to course needs. The second aspect is related to teaching needs.

### 1.4.2  Teaching Needs

Kennedy (1983) argued that teaching needs "reflect the role of the course participant as teacher and predict the skills that the teacher will need after the course but in which he may need to be trained." (p.76). He suggested a list of teaching activities that the teacher needs to perform via the use of the language specialist (i.e. linguist or terminologist) and skills.

- Selecting and evaluating material.
- Preparing lessons with and without the use of teachers' notes.
- Supplementing textbook exercises and designing own materials.
- Conducting a lesson.
- Setting and marking exercises (tests and examinations). (p.77)

Nonetheless, it should be clarified that these tasks are not appropriate for all situations. If we consider the example of second suggested activity, Kennedy (1983) claimed that no language problem could arise if the notes are written in the teachers' mother tongue. However, a language problem can present itself and become more complex when the notes are written in English and the teacher has poor reading skills or the conceptual content is high. Therefore, the teachers' guiding notes have to be compatible with the trainees' characteristics. Therefore, the integration of skills, activities, and subject content is more than necessary when designing teacher- training courses.

## 2.  Roles of ESP Teachers

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) have distinguished five key roles of an ESP practitioner as a teacher, course designer and materials provider, collaborator, researcher and evaluator. These roles make an ESP practitioner less similar to a General English teacher.

- **The ESP practitioner as a teacher:** The methodology applied by an ESP practitioner is different from the one of a General English teacher. This is that the ESP teacher is not the 'primary knower' of the material. In ESP contexts, students are believed to know more than the teacher. ESP teaching approach is known to be learner-centered where learners'

needs and goals are of supreme value. Therefore, ESP practitioners are believed to be the organizers of the classroom who should have clear objectives and a good understanding of the carrier content of the teaching material. Most importantly, ESP teachers need to be flexible, ready to listen to students, and ready to take risks in their teaching.

- **The ESP practitioner as a course-designer and materials provider:** The ESP practitioners have to plan the course they teach and provide the materials for it. They are required to choose suitable published material or even writing material where nothing suitable exists. They also need to assess the effectiveness of the teaching material used on the course.

- **The ESP practitioner as researcher:** ESP teachers generally need to be able to carry out research to understand the discourse of the texts that students use. They need to observe the situations in which students use the identified skills, and analyse samples of the identified texts. They need to be confident that they know what is involved in skills such as written communication.

- **The ESP practitioner as collaborator:** The ESP practitioner must first work closely with field specialists. This cooperation might have three possibilities. First, it may involve specific collaboration so that there is some integration between specialist studies or activities and the language. Alternatively, it might involve the ESP practitioner closely collaborating with the learners, who will generally be more familiar with the specialized content of materials than the teacher. Third, a specialist checks and comments on the content of teaching materials that the ESP teacher has prepared.

- **The ESP practitioner as evaluator:** The ESP practitioner is often involved in various types of evaluation, including both the testing of students and the evaluation of courses and teaching materials. Tests are conducted to assess whether students have the requisite language and skills to undertake a particular academic course or career.

Nevertheless, teacher training is very crucial for ESP courses in order to improve teachers' competencies and meet learners' needs (Ziani, 2018; Bracaj 2014). In this regard, Widdowson (1983) assert that the ESP teachers' work involves much more than transmitting knowledge to learners. He draws a

clear line between training and education. According to him, the former requires the boosting of specific skills and the recognition of certain information while the latter aims at developing a general capacity to cope with a wide range of needs. That is why, he stresses that ESP courses are more concerned with training.

### 2.1.  ESP Teacher Training

Training is the process of acquiring specific skills to perform a job better (Jucious, 1963). It helps people to become qualified and proficient in doing some jobs (Dahama, 1979). Researchers have proposed different procedures for designing an effective ESP teacher-training course. Ewer (1983), for instance, suggested the combination of two types of teacher training. The first type is "seminar-workshop", or "courselet", which generally lasts from five to ten days. This type of training is viewed as a way of introducing the concepts of ESP to the school and university teachers.

The second type of training is staff attachment whereby ESP practitioners visit each other institutions and spend some time usually fifteen days _ attending classes, examining materials and resources, visiting other ESP institutions in the area, making useful contacts, and above all, asking questions and discussing problems.

In the same regard, Kennedy (1983) claimed that ESP teacher-training course should mainly be related to the role of language in that training. According to him, ESP programs designers should apply the answers to three main questions: (a) what variety of (English) language does the learner require; (b) what is the purpose for which the language is required; (c) and, hence, how specific is the language required. Dudley-Evans (1998) asserted that ESP training should concentrate on a set of procedures such as setting up courses, carrying out text analysis and evaluating teaching materials.

Most importantly, the needs analysis in ESP training should be extended to include the context for which the students are prepared, such as "deficiency analysis, language audits, means analysis, and genre analysis". Furthermore, he posited that genre analysis is a crucial part of LSP teaching since it provides non-native speakers with the necessary linguistic tools to cope with the tasks required of them. Another important part is needs analysis that is an initial stage to identify the target needs for the development of syllabus and teaching materials.

### 3. Methodology

The current study is a small-scale investigation. It uses a qualitative method to describe and interpret the collected data. It demonstrates the participants' opinions about ESP learning and teaching needs, teacher training, and ESP learners' needs and difficulties. In fact, it reports ESP teachers' perceptions concerning ESP teaching/learning needs and difficulties at Medea University, Algeria. Finally, it sheds light on the participants' proposals in order to give answers to the designed research questions.

The informants of this study were 07 ESP teachers from Science and Technology Departments at Medea University. Four of them are PhD holders and the other three participants hold a Magister degree. Their teaching experience ranges from one to 10 years.

A group focus interview was used to collect the necessary data for this research (see appendix). It contains fifteen questions. It is divided into two sections. The first section consists of eleven questions. It aimed at gathering in-depth information about ESP teachers' qualities, ESP teacher training, ESP course plan, ESP teaching methods, time allocated to ESP courses, ESP teachers/students' needs, problems, and solutions. The second section comprises four questions. It seeks to know the main difficulties encountered by ESP students at Medea University, according to teachers' views and teaching experience.

The collected data was described qualitatively. A thematic analysis was used to analyze it. The researcher examined the collected data and identified two common themes: ESP Teachers needs and difficulties and ESP Students' needs and difficulties.

### 4.   Data Analysis and Discussion

The collected data was discussed and interpreted according to the following rubrics:
  −ESP Teachers needs and difficulties.
  − ESP Students' needs and difficulties.
  −Suggested solutions

#### 4.1.   ESP Teachers needs and difficulties

▪ **Experience in Teaching English**

The collected data revealed that the respondents' teaching experience ranges from one to ten years. The interview was administered to ESP teachers of

varying teaching experiences in order to gather information from different types of informants: novice and experienced. Teachers' answers to the first question demonstrated that most of them are experienced ESP teachers and thus their responses have certain credibility than those of novice teachers. Five out of seven participants have a teaching experience of more than five years. Their answers reflected their good understanding of the interview questions as well as their awareness of the situation of ESP teaching and learning in Algeria. More specifically, the collected data give insights into ESP teaching and learning at Medea University.

- **ESP Teachers Qualities**

When asked to mention the qualities of ESP teachers. Four respondents argued that ESP teachers should be well versed in the various ESP areas. This means that ESP practitioners should show a good mastery of ESP terminologies and their applications in different academic fields. Put differently, they considered terminology skills as the primary focus in ESP course as they help students communicate fluently in a job-related real situation. Therefore, ESP practitioners should possess certain knowledge about the students' discipline. That would help the ESP teachers to design the course and provide materials related to that particular discipline. In this respect, Dudley-Evans (1993) mention that teaching a basic ESP class requires ESP practitioners to have some kind of understanding of the content for the presentation and practice of relevant semi-technical language and grammatical points. Respondents' answers confirm that this quality is the main criterion that distinguishes an ESP teacher from a General English teacher.

Three respondents stressed the importance of using effective strategies and approaches in ESP teaching. This implies that the use of teaching strategies is a desirable activity in the ESP teaching process because it helps students become full participating members of the discourse community. One of the participants argued that an ESP teacher should be

> "*Equipped with sufficient cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-cultural teaching strategies in order to accomplish a successful ESP teaching experience*".

A second participant added that

> "*Analytical skills (a subtype of cognitive skills) help ESP teachers conduct information needs analysis*".

While another participant assumed that,

> "An *ESP teacher should be flexible at changing the teaching learning strategies in what goes in accordance with the learning environment*. In addition, *he should be more focused on his learners' needs and wants.*

That is to say, ESP practitioners should use multiple strategies to support the teaching and learning process. A good ESP teacher is the one who uses a variety of cognitive and metacognitive strategies such as asking students to reflect on their experience, boost their problem-solving skills, help them explore and understand how ideas are connected, and encourage them to monitor and evaluate their own performance. Actually, these skill sets help ESP practitioners identify all the information necessary for fulfilling certain objectives. This supports Dudley-Evans and St. John's claim (1998) that asserts "*ESP teachers need to be flexible, be ready to listen to students, and to take risks in their teaching*."

Furthermore, one respondent claimed that computer literacy and net savviness are essential for ESP teaching as they*:*

> "*Enable ESP teachers make online research and design effective courses.*" Three respondents reported that motivation and creativity are crucial qualities of ESP teachers. In this respect, Bracaj (2014) stressed that it is preferable to choose motivated teachers who show great willingness to teach ESP in order to conduct successful ESP classes. Besides, teaching creatively makes learning more interesting, exciting and effective, and motivation fosters students' creativity and critical thinking. Only one participant mentioned that ESP practitioners should have a professional training to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for coping with the wide range of needs in ESP settings.

### ▪ ESP Teacher Training

Though all respondents agree on the fact that training is essential for ESP teachers, only one participant declared to have had training. This confirms that training is an area of neglect in ESP teaching and learning in Algeria. This is due to the higher priority given to materials design rather than teacher-training programs (Kennedy, 1983). Along similar lines, Ziani (2018) referred to Algerian ESP teachers training as underestimated overhaul. She claimed that the lack of training for Algerian ESP teachers has affected the students' attitudes towards learning the target language. She concluded that training has become more than a necessity for teachers in

order to enhance the quality of ESP teaching and learning in Algerian universities.

▪ **The Essential Components of an ESP Course Plan**

The respondents had different suggestions when interviewed about the components of an effective ESP course plan. The first respondent stated that

> *"The first important part in ESP course plan is the identification of learners' needs and goals. Then, the selection and production of materials that fit with the designed course. Finally, the evaluation of the acquired knowledge in order to know to what extent the course is effective and whether learners have grasped its content or not."*

The second respondent explained that the central components for laying an effective ESP course plan are four.

> "First, *the teaching objectives should be aligned with students' learning expectations, styles, needs, and proficiency levels. Second, the teaching content is to be in correspondence with meeting the envisaged objectives as well as in convergence with developing the four learning skills. Third, the type of knowledge subject to develop is procedural knowledge (how to use effectively the acquired learning inputs in real communicative situations). Forth, the implemented teaching methods should be picked in relation with the taught content."*

The third respondent posited that the first component of an effective ESP course plan is the identification of learners' needs and their proficiency level. He also stressed on the necessity of considering 'context' when conducting an ESP course. The forth respondent asserted that an effective ESP course should take into account the following: needs analysis, time management, and assessment activities. The fifth respondent mentioned that the focus should be on the "content" for designing an effective ESP course. According to him, ESP teachers should carefully select the materials needed for understanding content such as assigned readings, video recordings, exams, and so on. The sixth respondent reported that ESP practitioners should focus on teaching concepts and key terms; in addition, they should use diagnostic tests in order to spot out learners' strengths and weaknesses. The seventh respondent affirmed that teachers' qualities constitute the cornerstone for effective ESP course plan. He explained that a motivated and a well-trained ESP teacher is the key factor of a successful ESP course.

Consequently, most respondents emphasized that needs analysis is the first step in an ESP course because it helps teachers identify their learners' needs and determine the areas in which they are lacking skills. The second step is the selection of the appropriate teaching materials that are adequate with the learners' needs and objectives. The third step is the evaluation of the students acquired knowledge through assessment activities. Finally, factors such as 'context' should also be taken into consideration when designing courses for ESP students.

- **Pedagogies, Methods and Approaches Implemented in ESP Classroom**

According to one participant, there is no specific ESP pedagogy to implement in the classroom, since it changes in accordance to learners' needs and interests. Five respondents stated that they use a curriculum related to the students' major. In other words, they teach students topics that are related to their field of study using texts and articles. They claimed that such pedagogy boosts students' reading and academic writing skills as well as it enlarges students' vocabularies. In such case, the focus on grammar is not the main concern of ESP practitioner, but learners' grammatical skills could be triggered via classroom activities. Another respondent mentioned that he uses a needs analysis-based curriculum. His method of teaching includes specific career-focused courses that use subject-specific materials. The aim behind such strategy is to make students focus on the courses specific to their academic major by fitting the required general education coursework to each student's exact academic requirements. That is, such courses equip students with the necessary skills to be "employment ready" upon graduation. Moreover, he added that he mixes up between top-down and bottom-up activities. This implies that students are trained to use background knowledge to make sense of what they acquire in classroom. Moreover, students are taught to decode language through parsing single sounds and words, with less use of background knowledge.

As for the preferred teaching approach, four respondents claimed to prefer student-centered approach for various reasons. One participant affirmed that ESP is mainly a learner-centered approach to teaching English which focuses on developing students' communicative competence in a specific discipline. Otherwise speaking, students *should* embrace a more active and collaborative role in the process of learning. In such case, the teacher is but a guide. The second participant mentioned that she prefers student-centered

method as it provides a room for students to take a hand over their own learning and, thereby, exploring their competences regarding learning a given subject. This might result in nurturing their mental, psychological and social curiosity by transposing the number of learning inputs into real life-learning situations. The third participant assumed that he favored the student-centered approach, as it is more motivating and engaging for learners. The forth participant stated that the student-centered approach is more desirable when teaching ESP courses because it makes students more engaged in learning, helps them acquire new skills, and develops their different competences. This agrees with Dudley-Evans and St. John's view (1998) that says the ESP teacher is not the 'primary knower' of the material. In ESP contexts, students are believed to know more than the teacher.

Two respondents posited that they prefer teacher-centered approach in which teachers take an active role delivering information while the students' main role is to receive the information provided by their instructors. They justified their choice by stating that teacher centered-approach is more appropriate than other approaches when taking into consideration Algerian students' low level of English proficiency, large class size, and lack of instructional materials in ESP classrooms. They said such a method minimizes the teachers' concern that students may be missing key material; most importantly, students always know where to focus their attention. One respondent said that he prefers to use a teacher-centered approach when instructing undergraduate students because the majority of them tend to be passive and less concerned with active learning.  However, he admitted using both approaches when teaching graduate students.

▪ **Technology and ESP Learning**
Six respondents out of seven said that they use technology to boost their students' engagement in ESP classes. They use computers, data projectors, power points, and videos. They suggested that the effective use of technology in ESP classrooms can increase students' engagement as it encourages active learning. Besides, it helps teachers improve their lesson plans, and facilitate personalized learning through creating blended learning environments and bringing new models for learning and teaching to ESP classrooms.

▪ **Problems in Teaching ESP**
According to the participants, the main problems that an ESP teacher faces are:

- Problems related to the development of curriculum, syllabus, and teaching methods such as the lack of a unified curriculum.
- The lack of sufficient knowledge about ESP learners' disciplines and thus teachers fail to meet the learners' needs.
- The lack of proper needs analysis. That is, teachers are incapable to cater for students' diversified learning style, proficiency level and intelligence scale.
- The lack of training and workshops for ESP practitioners.
- The lack of resources (instructional materials) in ESP classrooms.
- Most students have a limited English proficiency or vary in their English competencies.
- Large class size.
- The lack of sufficient time in which to conduct ESP courses adequately.

In brief, the main problems faced by ESP teachers at Medea University are: the lack of knowledge on students' field of study, the lack of training, the lack of proper needs analysis, the lack of sufficient time, large classes, and learners' limited English proficiency.

### 4.2. ESP Students' needs and difficulties

▪ **ESP Students' Needs**

The informants claimed that both ESP teachers and ESP course designers must consider learners needs as a vital part of the teaching-learning process. That is, ESP teachers should be aware of the necessary learners' requirements that enable them to function effectively in the classroom. They mentioned that ESP students' needs are the following:

- The ESP students need to have a good command over spoken and written English language.
- The ESP students need to communicate with both teachers and classmates through English language.
- The ESP syllabi should be more learner centered for successful ESP learning.
- The ESP students need to be motivated through the use of teaching materials which encourage active and independent learning.

- The ESP students need to improve their English skills by using technology.
- The ESP students must update their knowledge by collecting resources from the Internet.
- The ESP students need to attend seminars and workshops on newly topics related to their field of study.
- The ESP students need to learn in smaller groups for better academic performance.
- The ESP students need to extend their ESP classes time.

▪ **Difficulties Encountered by ESP students, according to Teachers' Experience**

The informants thought that the main difficulties faced by ESP learners are:

- The use of inappropriate curriculum that is not always based on learners' specific needs.
- Learners' unintelligibility of all learnt concepts and notions and, thereby, feeling defeated and consumed by the subject being taught.
- Learners may also face a difficulty when dealing with some ambiguous concepts. One word can be with more than one meaning.
- The lack of resource materials for ESP students.
- The lack of motivation and engagement.
- The lack of confidence in expressing, interacting, and talking in English.
- Mother tongue influence.
- The focus on the grades rather than learning.
- The inconvenience of the implemented training for some learners due to their different personalities (such as introverts vs. extroverts) as well as for their limited or excessive mental capacities.
- Large class size. The bigger the size of the class is, the more chaotic the ESP class is. The overloaded class-size provokes time management problem in face of learners' heterogeneous (distinct mental, psychological and social) attributes and, hence causes teachers' physical and psychological energy exhaustion. Moreover, large class size

prevents instructors from adopting new approaches that are more effective.

−Limited class time.

### 4.3. Suggested Solutions

The research findings suggested a number of solutions to ESP learning problems. The first is the need of professional training for ESP practitioners. Indeed, all the participants showed positive attitudes towards the necessity of training in ESP classrooms. Therefore, ESP training programs, workshops, seminars and conferences should be encouraged to improve ESP teaching learning in Algerian universities, bearing in mind that interacting and cooperating with other ESP practitioners and institutes could be very helpful. In this context, Boudersa (2018) suggested that training teachers in ESP has a central factor in preparing English teachers for the profession of ESP teaching.

It is only through effective training programs provided by professional ESP experts and specific-field practitioners that success in teaching and learning can be achieved in any ESP classroom situation. In addition, Bouguebs (2018) mentioned that Algerian ESP teachers require additional knowledge and skills to cope within new teaching settings through a professional ESP teacher training.

The second is the need of collaboration between ESP teachers and curriculum specialists in designing suitable syllabi and courses. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) assumed that the ESP practitioners should keep in touch with other counterparts in different institutions as well as the subject specialists in order to strengthen and develop their ESP teaching skills.

The third is the persistent modulation of the course plan in accordance with students' needs.  In this regard, Mede, Koparan, and Atay (2017) found that learners studying in ESP programs have specific language needs. These needs should be taken into consideration while designing the program. Otherwise speaking, such programs should be student centered and should draw on the learners' professional engagement with the subject matter of the course.

The long-term involvement of students with their specialized domain will give ESP programs a clear instrumental value and will serve basis for the development of new program. Likewise, Mačianskienė and Bijeikienė (2018) claimed that ESP teaching could be highly improved through a more

learner-centered approach which takes learner specific needs into account. Furthermore, ESP courses should be based on a range of active learning and teaching materials integrating independent, pair and group work in real and virtual learning environments.

The forth is the integration of technology in ESP classrooms as it makes ESP teaching easier. Moreover, it helps teachers track students' progress. Most importantly, it increases students' engagement. Fifth, there should be a provision of the necessary teaching materials to boost learning productivity. Sixth, the class size should be reduced for a better understanding of the needs of each student. Seventh, the time of ESP classes should be extended to strengthen and enrich students' learning.

Finally, Algerian students' interest in English should be raised through the use of some strategies such as connecting what they are taught to real life.

The results also proposed a number of strategies to help support ESP learners such as:

- The use of an eclectic approach in which teachers are able to switch between methods and techniques to keep learners attached and focused with the presentation of the course.
- The use of reading materials in order to stimulate students' imagination and enrich their knowledge.
- The use of oral presentations in order to assess students' knowledge, understanding and reasoned arguments, and their ability to communicate them clearly.
- Encouraging memorization to remove memory constraints in learning and help students remembering new words, grammar, and sentence structures, make connections between them, and use them in contextual situations.
- The use of dictionaries to explain difficult terms. Translation can help teachers reduce students' anxiety and enhance their motivation to learn L2. Moreover, it can help instructors assess whether students comprehension is correct.
- The use of jigsaw activities to encourage cooperative learning among students. In addition, they help students improve their communication, and problem-solving skills.

- The use of multiple-choice questions (MCQs) to assess students learning and support learners' engagement in higher levels of cognitive reasoning such as application or synthesis of knowledge.
- The use of information gap activities to inspire students' critical thinking skills and foster their intrinsic motivation.
- The use of crossword puzzle to enlarge students' vocabulary and teach them how to spell items correctly.
- The use of team work activities.
- The use of videos, as they enable teachers to motivate students with real life language input, and enhance their production skills. Further, they enable them to have full control over learning i.e. beginning, ending and reviewing of the video and the attached learning that occur by watching that particular video.
- The use of specific career-focused language.
- The use of analogy (to instance the concepts) to reduce the difficulty of the concepts.
- Providing positive feedback to learner' errors.
- Incorporating the learners into the learning process by putting them into real-life learning experience (trigger critical thinking, eliciting information, defying them with problem-solving learning situations).
- Encouraging and promoting practice.
- The use of an intermediary language (Arabic) when necessary.

## Conclusion

The current study investigated ESP teachers and learners' needs and difficulties in Medea University, using a focus group interview. The results showed that English for Specific Purposes is an approach to English learning that targets the current and future needs of learners focusing on the necessary language skills through general or discipline specific learning methodologies. The fact that learners know specifically why they are learning a language is a great advantage on teaching-learning process. The findings also revealed that needs analysis is the cornerstone of designing an effective syllabus for English Specific Purposes as it improves students' academic performance in target situations. Moreover, the obtained results indicated that there is an urgent need for ESP teacher training in Algerian universities. Professional training is very crucial for ESP courses in order to

improve teachers' competencies and meet learners' needs. Similarly, the finding showed that ESP course syllabi neglect learners' needs. Therefore, ESP instructional coordinators should take thoughtful decisions in terms of teachers' training and curricula in addition to the involvement of learning needs in the process of course design. The informants equally suggested a number of solutions that could alleviate most ESP teachers and students' problems.

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