

## Challenges in English for specific purposes: Economics students with speaking deficiencies

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### Abstract

This research work is to investigate the status of English for specific purposes (ESP) course with first-year Master students of Economics in their development of ESP speaking skills and to study the factors that hinder students' success. Data were obtained through classroom observation. This research tool allowed to analyse students' difficulties in the area of speaking. The results revealed that students need to be exposed more to speaking and since teachers of English are not ESP teachers, they need to collaborate more with subject specialists and proceed to needs analysis as far as the learners are concerned. Hence, some recommendations and tips are provided so as to boost the students' learning process.

**Keywords:** Collaboration, English for specific purposes, language teachers, needs analysis, subject specialists.

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## 1. Introduction

The English language has imposed itself as a major means of communication around the world and in every field. It is a language shared by a large proportion of people in the world and this is why the increasing interest in English emphasises the need of using English in Algeria for the sake of giving to the business sectors, a scientific and technical orientation due to the process of globalisation, and the development of science and technology.

The English language has developed from general English (GE) to English for specific purposes (ESP). The former is supposed to be acquired, first, to know the basic elements and rules of the language, whereas the latter is acquired later for anyone who wants to specialise in any scientific or specific field. Thus, it is no longer the English already known, but a new one with its specific vocabulary and structure; therefore, some learners may encounter obstacles in dealing with the language. Thus, the pedagogy professionals of language should not stick to one approach but should alter their own methods to teach the foreign language by combining the most relevant aspects of different approaches (Kunene & Mthethwa, 2020) mainly in the speaking skill where learners need to be encouraged and motivated. From this perspective, the teaching of ESP faces many challenges to make learners develop their skills: ESP teachers should be aware and find remedies to make the ESP classroom an enjoyable place to learn where learners come by motivation not because they are obliged to. As a result, one key element in ESP is taking learners' needs into account through negotiation allowing learners to participate in the choice of materials and activities.

From this perspective the following research questions arise:

- What are the teaching deficiencies that hinder successful teaching/learning?
- What are the ingredients that should be accounted for a consistent speaking ESP teaching?
- We may draw the following hypotheses:
- Teaching/learning may reach success if language teachers collaborate with subject specialists;
- To reach a successful speaking ESP teaching, teachers should proceed to needs analysis and encourage learners to speak.

This paper analyses student difficulties with ESP speaking skills in economics and proposes adequate remedies.

## 2. Speaking as a language skill

Speaking is ranked second of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. When speaking, we tend to produce language going out; that is why speaking is called a “productive” skill.

### 2.1. Types of speaking

Two basic types of speaking can be distinguished by experts: informal and formal speaking. The former includes speaking with family members, close friends and co-workers. One may feel relaxed in such situations. The latter requires another type of language: while speaking with unfamiliar people, higher ranked ones such as a boss, one may feel nervous and incapable to speak properly and has to be aware of manners and body language.

### 2.2. The value of speaking

Speaking is vital to improving other language skills. It is assumed that ‘the more our students speak, the more they become familiar with the vocabulary, idioms, sentence patterns, organisation flow, and cultural assumptions of native speakers of the language’ (Yavas Celik & Yavus, 2020).

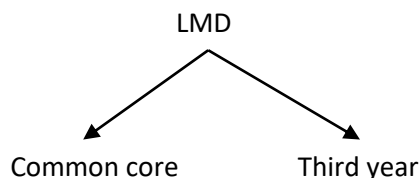
Particularly, it is assumed that listening plays a great deal to improve any one’s speaking. The relationship between the two skills is apparent in various teaching–learning contexts. A learner who is good at listening is likely to have a chance when it comes to speaking. Once mastering the listening skill, learners are able to speak the language in a better way; however, for learners to speak better, they have to learn to listen.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research design

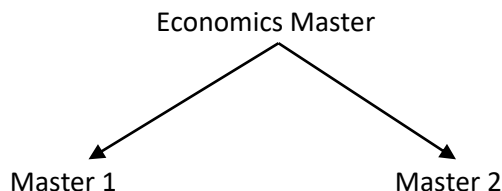
The present study has been conducted in the Department of Economics at the University of Mascara. The purpose behind this investigation is to describe the ESP course as far as the speaking skill is concerned to enhance, enrich and develop knowledge and language proficiency of those ESP postgraduate students taking into consideration their language skills in general and their speaking skills in particular. It thus uses a case study from the ESP course to depict learners’ linguistic needs. Since the researcher intended to have a specific vision about a real-life phenomenon facing teachers in their context, i.e., the reasons why ESP students experienced difficulties when asked to speak, the case study method was chosen. The researchers wanted to have close contact with students to make it possible for them to elicit information about the situation and problems the students faced, and to use their experience of the course, the students and the context to interpret the phenomena under investigation.

The present enrolled programmes at the LMD system are organised through 2 years of common core; then the third year represents the following different disciplines shown in Figure 1:



**Figure 1. LMD specialisations in the department of economics**

Our concern in this research is the Economics master. As far as the Master branches are concerned, they are shown in Figure 2:



**Figure 2. Master economics specialisations in the Department of Economics**

Table 1 shows the the time allocated to the master students.

<b>Table 1. Time allotted for teaching English in economics master</b>		
<b>Years</b>	<b>1st year master</b>	<b>2nd year master</b>
Time allotted/per week	1 hour 30 minutes	1 hour 30 minutes

The teaching of this module is divided into two semesters. The first one deals with courses about Economics through texts and activities. In the second semester, these students have to deal with the

practical side by presenting research work. Consequently, they possess some concepts about the field of Economics because learning English is important for scientific and business purposes.

### **3.2. Participants**

The students engaged in our investigation sessions received a bachelor's degree in Economics. Their learning career lasted for 3 years.

There were 18 postgraduate students from a total of 45, among whom 13 were boys and 5 were girls. To obtain a complete sample is not that easy, despite it being a small sample, Holloway and Wheeler (2002, p. 128) affirm 'sample size does not influence the quality of the study'; therefore, our sample chosen randomly. The participants were all postgraduate students. No special criteria in terms of race, sex and age range were applied.

### **3.3. Data collection (classroom observation)**

This type of research method deals with teachers and learners classroom practices. It is an important component in any scientific investigation, considered a procedure which permits one to know many things about the area under study, to see the world of the subject group in its natural environment and contributes to collect truthful information.

According to Yin (1993, p. 22), observation in case studies is the sole tool that permits to see things as they occur naturally in their context and to have an accurate picture of the situation, especially when we aim to get information about the interaction of individuals, he claims:

'Observations are another important source of information in case studies. This is especially true in case studies involving classrooms or schools because the interaction of individuals cannot be understood without observation'.

As our aim is directly observing the subject group, to know more about the students' attitudes and proficiency level and its progress during the ESP course, in addition to seeing the interactions that take place between the different participants, classroom observation was then a very appropriate means to collect this type of data, as supported by Van Lier (1988):

### **3.4. Length of observation**

Since one cannot get a full impression of the teaching/learning practices from a single lecture and in order to get a broad overview of the situation under study, it was important for the researcher to negotiate this method which is used in order to observe the students' difficulties in the teaching skills, and which type of skills teachers focus on when teaching English for these learners. Classroom observation allows one to observe teacher–learner interaction in different forms of activities through which there is some interaction between teacher and learner.

With the changing understanding of aptitude in recent years, language learning aptitude began to be compared to other individual differences (Yavas Celik & Yavuz, 2020). Since learners do not have the same level, this observation is also concerned with the difficulties that learners encounter in using English in the classroom, so as to provide some suggestions to urge students to speak the English language during the course. Thus, in the present study, participant observation is used as data collection instruments to observe the informants in real world context to be able to design instructions according to learners' aptitude to increase success.

The ESP course is offered in the Department of Economics once a week every Thursday and lasts 1 hour and a half, i.e., from 13.00 to 14.30 hours. The course began in November 2018 and was due to end in June 2019; it was therefore programmed for two semesters. The teacher is a young man who holds a 'licenciate' degree and is a postgraduate student specialised in English.

In our case-study, the classroom observation started in 10 January 2019 and finished on 12 March 2019 (2 months). The reason behind selecting this method of data gathering was its objectivity.

This step was taken to deal with the problem in an empirical way, i.e., observing as the main step in any scientific study; that is why the investigators felt the need to visit the class of the sample to be able to witness and describe the performance of both collaborators, the teacher and the students, in order to gather the exact data and therefore provide the best solutions for the target situation. During the observation task, we tried to shed light on the following aspects:

- Course conduct and content;
- Teacher–students interaction;
- Students’ attitudes and motivation;
- Students’ proficiency level and its progress.

Thus, observation in this research is used more as a scientific tool to report the classroom situation. We opted for classroom observation as it is a qualitative method is used to analyse what has been observed. Figure 3 shows the data collection methods which are used in this research:

Qualitative Data ===== Classroom Observation

**Figure 3. Methods of data collection and data analysis used in this research**

#### 4. Results and discussions

There are various problems that this research work is attempting to solve as far as the deficiencies hindering ESP success while dealing with speaking, which are as follows:

\*Concerning students, they seem frustrated when asked to speak. They may have information in their domain but cannot express it in the English language and even do not try to express themselves as they are afraid to make mistakes. It was noticed that they lack self-confidence and need to be encouraged and motivated to speak.

\*Concerning teachers, the department employs teachers who have been trained in GE and are not specialists in the field, i.e., they are far from being subject specialists. They find themselves teaching in a field which is not theirs, as ‘strangers in a home land area’, and are not experienced in teaching ESP as well.

Although they do their best to teach the language, they sometimes find it difficult to master or even understand some particular concepts. In terms of subject contents, the learners often know more than them since it is their field.

The problem is that no predetermined objectives are defined in the teaching of ESP and students’ needs are somehow not totally taken into account. As a result, the students fail in their attempt to acquire the basic knowledge of both the English language and Economics in which they are specialising. Each year, 25% of first-year students pass in the English component in Semester One and 32% in Semester Two.

\*Concerning the modules of Speciality only 23% pass. Concerning learners, they have acquired a particular GE, and they find themselves dealing with a completely different English. Now, it is no more the language that they know, but the specific one.

#### 5. Conclusion and recommendations

All in all, we tried to shed light on some features so as to give a helping hand to the Department of Economics teachers. It was thus suggested that to be successful, they should design a syllabus which is not only negotiated between language and content teachers but through discussion with the students so that teachers can know which activities to include.

Needs analysis is the basis of ESP and leads to a much focused course. Practitioners must check for relevant articles, looking for ESP teaching materials, contacting colleagues who might have experience and collaboration between language and content-based teachers. After determining the language needs of learners, the next step is to decide on the content of the syllabus. Content can be specified through a series of checklists that deal with communicative functions, discourse skills and study skills. Having decided on what to teach, the next step is to decide on an appropriate strategy. Some recommendations are provided, such as motivating learners mainly through Information Communication Technology (ICT) including Skype, video tapes, CD and cassettes, and then using self-directed (SDT) learning as a strategy to allow learners to work by their own. To reach success in ESP teaching through an interdisciplinary way, teachers should follow some requirements such as to perform most of the key roles of the ESP practitioner in their teaching to motivate learners. We also focused on the fact that collaboration is a key element for teacher development since it enhances the quality of teaching. Furthermore, both types of teachers can not only benefit from each other, but also facilitate learning and make the classroom an enjoyable place to learn.

Among the recommendations that seem easier and near to be reached is by designing an appropriate syllabus where SDT learning, motivation and use of ICT are included.

### **5.1. Syllabus design**

Thus, taking into account the views suggested below, we have proposed a syllabus, hoping to give a helping hand to the Master Economics Department. The points below are some examples taken from the syllabus we have designed recently and which contains more activities and suggestions and which we could summarise as follows. We have then suggested a syllabus that integrates teacher-directed content-based instruction and student-centred task-based instruction. The aim is to create a more authentic learning setting by applying various interactive techniques in the speaking learning skills focusing on students' needs after negotiation with them.

Speaking fluency can be considered the first device the ESP teacher needs to develop among his students. For this end, fluency according to Graham (2004) should include the ability to:

- Use language spontaneously;
- Listen and comprehend spontaneously;
- Respond spontaneously.

Compensation for any lack in any of the above-mentioned points includes the following:

Since the aim is to make learners express themselves freely, to help them see first they have developed their capacities and to say what they want to mean then to invent new meanings. The teacher can illustrate a picture about a story to be dealt with later. Students observe the picture then in small groups, they start speaking/telling about it. It will be challenging when one student disagrees with another. The teacher can also present the student with a problem to solve since problem-solving is an important feature in ESP etc. In small groups, learners discuss possible solutions which they present to the class for comparison. The teacher is a facilitator and encourages students to be active in language practice. Many authors among them Robinson share the view that 'Authenticity is a key concept in ESP courses' (Basturkmen, 2006; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Kennedy, 1984; Robinson, 1991).

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p. 28) moved a step forward where they define authenticity as follows:

'Authenticity lies in the nature of the interaction between the reader (or hearer) and the text. Part of the process of needs analysis is finding out exactly how learners use different sources so that activities in the ESP class can reflect what happens in real life'.

## **5.2. SDT learning**

First of all, learners need to be SDT to better improve. It is essential to teach learners how visual information works: how to comprehend and how to work with it; incorporating visual literacy such as maps, diagrams, tables, graphs, charts in a curriculum would be a challenge. It would be great to encourage students to discuss/speak in pairs and groups. Some educators may view diagrams, pictures and charts as nice add-on tools for students who are visual thinkers. The teachers can support the students' autonomy by reducing the teachers' control, holding the students accountable and responsible for their own learning and giving the students the freedom of choice over the classroom activities and materials that meet the students' needs.

## **5.3. Motivation**

In addition to that, motivating learners is an art: a student in a foreign language class is seeing and noting. Motivation plays a vital role in education especially in foreign language learning. It is the will and the desire to work towards a goal and to reach an objective.

'The effort, want (desire) and affect associated with learning a second language' (Gardner, 1991, p. 147).

That is to say when someone wants to learn a language, he/she should make efforts to reach his purpose not keep on wishing without practice; so the two elements (effort and want) are necessary to learn a language.

'A state of cognitive and emotional arousal which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal or goals' (William & Burdner, 1997, p. 120).

In order to increase learners' motivation, the teacher should take the above needs into account.

To conclude this part, teachers were reminded that learners' motivation is greatly affected by overlapping factors, internal one such as teacher, method, success, attitude, curiosity, confidence and external factors, for example: teacher, parents, peer, feedback and learning environment.

The teacher could provide both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, depending on his personality, character and his nature; therefore in the way he treats his students and his students treat him.

He would not be a good teacher unless he could know about teaching and learning in general and has a successful strategy that would make his students alerted and motivated all the time. This could be achieved through:

- Varying topics and tasks (a wide range of different types of topics that interest learners mainly those learners whose interest is only grades; by doing so, the teacher will encourage both instrumental and integrative motivation).
- Introducing games (games are an important part of teacher's equipment. They provide challenge, and learners will practice vocabulary, grammar etc., and their motivation is increased).
- Entertainment creates pleasant atmosphere which can be teacher-produced (jokes, stories, anecdotes, songs, or recorded movies, video clips, TV documentaries etc.). This will make the class lively to cut off the routine of every day class and will make learners familiar with the topic under discussion.
- Role playing requires students to imagine a situation and can enhance their motivation, although some students may find such activities intimidating at first.

- Visual aids offer a refreshing change of routine in the classroom. The learner is affected by the sociocultural environment in which the film is set. Thus, the selection of the film should be very careful by taking students' interest into account).
- Personalisation makes learners more likely to be interested in tasks or topics that have to do with them, their own point of view, experiences and suggestions.

In brief, we could sum it up by focusing on the idea that since learners are affected by the teacher, his behaviour and personality, motivating them could be a challenging task, but if the teacher takes into account the above activities, he may get a lively class with motivated students who bear in mind that English has a vital role to play in their lives.

Learning a lot of unfamiliar words.

Consequently, he or she must use creative thinking skills to put together sentences using unfamiliar vocabulary words. Foreign language students also improve their thinking skills by comparing the words they are learning with words of their native language.

Moreover, another tip leading to success is to have language teachers work hand-in-hand with subject specialists. This is what we call collaboration. They can consult each other, discuss and decide about what is suitable for learners. Teachers have to proceed to needs' analysis by negotiating with learners to know about what they lack and need to be able to design a syllabus and courses.

#### **5.4. Including ICTs**

The use of visual aids helps learners to recognise essential ideas and locating this latter in specific contexts. In this vein, Bongolan (2005, p. 02) wrote: 'visuals make both the language and the content more accessible to students'.

In this vein, the best way to improve approaches to the learning/teaching is to use new technologies: the fast development of new media technologies (such as VCD, DVD, DTV, MP5, PlayStations, Visual Presenter, PowerPoint, Internet and Intranet) has begun to usher in new approaches to classroom management. The teachers have to learn to adapt themselves to this new revolution in media technologies with reference to the designing and teaching of cultural studies course.

Using ICTs (multimedia) in the classroom provides students with a useful interactive means of self-study and self-evaluation. Planning and successfully implementing SDT learning with technology is likely to produce motivation. Thus, learners are eager to learn and are autonomous. Multimedia can be a powerful tool for adult education. When used effectively, it can captivate an audience, emotions, maintain attention and contextualise scenario-based learning. But creating and producing quality content also has a number of drawbacks in terms of cost, learning curves and copyright laws. Integrating multimedia into curricula can have a tremendous impact on the learning process.

Students enjoy learning through multimedia systems, computers and even multimedia laboratories if available. The use of the mobile version of Twitter has a positive impact on improving written expression (Montaner, 2020); therefore, while using ICT the teacher should take advantage from this opportunity to teach and encourage participants to become autonomous learners.

Using technology in the classroom is in accordance with SDT learning because it allows each student to work at his or her own pace and gives more them freedom over choosing the material of interest. Furthermore, it motivates the learners, engages them in learning and helps them to be autonomous.



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