

Translation-based task in an ESP classroom: Tlemcen University as a case study

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Suggested Citation

Fehaima, A. (2022). Translation-based task in an ESP classroom: Tlemcen University as a case study. *Contemporary Educational Researches Journal*. 12(4), 246-255. <https://doi.org/10.18844/cej.v12i4.8485>

Received from July 26, 2022; revised from September 29, 2022; accepted from Nvember 25, 2022.

Selection and peer-review under the responsibility of Deniz Ozcan, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Turkey.

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Abstract

Integrating translation in English for specific purposes (ESP) teaching and learning is a crucial issue since the last decade of the 20th century. This paper aims to analyse the role of translation as a helpful tool for ESP classes on the use of translation in ESP teaching and learning. Therefore, a case study is employed to describe the necessity of using translation in ESP classes, especially, for third-year computer science students at the University of Tlemcen. A mixed method was used; a questionnaire was administered to ESP teachers in the Department of Science and Technology, and classroom observation on third-year students of computer science was conducted. The results revealed that computer sciences students at the University of Tlemcen faced various hindrances when dealing with professional resources which are mainly at the level of content due to the nature of ESP courses they were exposed to during their studies.

Keywords: Computer science; ESP; ESP courses; students; translation.

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1. Introduction

Recently, much emphasis is being put on the teaching of the English language simply because the use of the English language as a '*worldwide language*' is not limited to a certain extent but goes beyond to reach the global scale to cope with the demands and challenges of globalisation as a process and respond positively to the requirements of our language users in both educational and occupational environments, a progressive tendency takes place in universities and academic institutions to the inclusion of *specialized* language. Therefore, English for specific purpose (ESP) learning is more than learning only a set of technical linguistic terms it is also about learning how to use English in a particular context with the implication of the needed skills and objectives of language learning (Kurmanayeva et al., 2021). Experiences make significant contributions to student learning in both practical and linguistic skill areas.

The use of English as a medium of foreign communication is constantly expanding (Nazim & Alzubi, 2022). This is especially relevant in the various fields where English is used as a working tool; ESPs arose as the United States remained the world's most powerful nation. Over the years, English has developed from a language for general communication to a language for science and technology; it has become the Lingua Franca. The growth of ESP resulted from the increased demand for learning English in different areas lead most countries, including Algeria to implement this new concept of language, especially at the university level.

In Algerian universities and many fields of studies, English is taught in different curricula at different departments where it is introduced as a compulsory module, this is the case for third-year students of computer sciences at the University of Tlemcen. These students are required to follow ESP courses depending on their fields of study and their needs as well. At the computer sciences department, most of the teachers' field of expertise is general English rather than ESPs; they are not ESP practitioners. Furthermore, the methods used to teach ESP are not authentic content of the professional settings, which might be a failure in terms of integrating academic English into the required professional tasks. For this reason, this study is an overview of how the research is conducted and presents the research questions along with proposing hypotheses to fit them. Moreover, it gives a thorough understanding of how third-year students in computer sciences have great difficulties understanding ESP courses in general, and ESP computing texts and terminologies in particular. Due to their low level of English, they use computer translation to decipher terminologies and documents (Fehaima, 2022). Translation, according to the present research, is deemed to be a solution to learners' problems. Certainly, the majority of students have a tough time comprehending and gaining the most benefit from ESP courses that are important to their needs.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1. Definition of ESP

As a trend of ELT teaching, ESP has established itself since the 1960s as one of the fundamental educational activities that place a central emphasis on the learners' language and content-based needs as well as their communicative abilities to function effectively in their specific discipline. ESP teaching is generally meant to impart a specific group of students with scientific, technical, business and social jargon following their needs and expectations from learning English or what has been expressed in Mackay and Mountford's (1978) words '*a utilitarian purpose*'.

A key concept in ESP teaching is to teach those students the bit of English they need related to their field of specialisation such as science, engineering and medicine. In this respect, Kennedy and Bolitho (1984, p. 02) write: Given a learner or a group of learners with the specific purpose of learning English, it would seem logical in a learner-centred approach to base a course on that purpose and the needs of the learners in his situation. To put it a step further, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) extend the definition of ESP, categorising it as an approach to language teaching which is not different from general language courses and teaching methodology. It addresses the following basic questions, ESP is a 'Why does this learner need to learn a foreign language' Where is

the learning to take place? And what does the learner need to learn? '*Goal-directed*'; aims at providing learners with the linguistic features of subject-specific discipline. Moreover, she adds that it strives to develop the competencies required to help them function effectively in their discourse communities. To sum up, all the above definitions share the view that ESP is language teaching which is fundamentally based on the teaching of English required by the learners to be active participants in their field of study or working environment.

1.1.2. Translation in ESP context

Translation and the use of the mother tongue (L1) were relegated to the periphery of language teaching until the Grammar Translation system was widely recognised as outdated and ineffective. However, in recent years, an increasing number of theorists and professionals in the field of language learning have argued for the use of L1 and translation, citing a variety of compelling reasons. Though much of the critique of the Grammar Translation system was warranted in terms of how it was applied a century ago, all of the philosophies and methodologies established since then have inevitably made their imprint on English teaching today. Depending on their experience in the classroom and the type of learners, many teachers assume that the use of translation in class today may result in a completely different experience than what the Grammar Translation method used to be (Hammoudi, 2021).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, several researchers have pointed out the advantages of using translation in foreign language teaching. Leonardi (2009), for instance, draws on Malmkjaer (1998, as cited in Leonardi, 2009, p. 143) and maintains that 'Translation is more and more frequently evaluated as a positive form of interference aimed at enriching rather than harming learners' competence and performance skills. The use of translation in language classes might, of course, have some limitations but also benefits should be explored and taken into consideration'. Marinov (2016, p. 229) points to the development of the post-communicative cognitive paradigm and promising prospects for translation in the ESP context. As regards ESP teaching and learning, any course has to be based on specific learner needs (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 2012, p. 4). These specific needs define a selection of materials and teaching/learning methods. Marinov (2016, p. 227) maintains that 'Translation is an activity or a strategy naturally employed by both language teachers and learners.

Accordingly, despite some possible limitations, its potential should be studied and exploited since it could help language learners gain a deeper understanding of what they do when they move between the two languages and thus indicate the areas that might need improvement'. Importantly, teaching ESP and employing translation as a method of teaching and learning does not require ESP learners' in-depth knowledge of translation theory as it is required of translation students. As noted by Witte (2009, as cited in Kic-Drgas, 2014, p. 258), 'It is not essential to be an expert in translation and translation theory to use translation in class'. But translation activities used for learning ESP and the use of L1 can contribute to facilitating comprehension of specialised materials in the ESP classroom and improve learners' skills (Avand, 2009, p. 45).

1.2. Conceptual background

Therefore, this research is a plea for the use of translation as a teaching method in an ESP class by highlighting its advantages, as revealed by recent research in the field. Translation as a teaching method was associated for a long time with the Grammar Translation method and fell from grace sometime in the mid-20th century, where it remained until recently. Despite this marginalisation, in EFL, many teachers have been quietly using both L1 (mother tongue) for explanations and translation as a supplemental teaching method. Its value has been reasserted by numerous recent theorists and their research. They have demonstrated repeatedly, as this paper will attest, that translation exercises have undisputed value if used pertinently and efficiently, and if prepared with specific goals in mind. Thus, for several years now, translation has regained its legitimate place in the teaching of

English and has re-emerged as a useful tool in this endeavour. In ESPs, its usefulness is even more appreciated, as this paper will propose.

ESP classes for computer science students make them in a constant struggle to practice their linguistic knowledge in non-theoretical conditions that require the use of English. Consequently, their ability to be practically proficient is limited, whereas, task construction in ESPs classrooms is a balance between content and language learning, along with an obvious discourse purpose. Furthermore, the notion behind the translation method goes along with objectives in settings where the language is taught with a specific purpose such as ESP classrooms. It is vital to point out that such pedagogical utterances as the translation method can have a positive impact on the learning pace and student's motivation.

The purpose of this article is twofold. The first part is a presentation of the latest research regarding the use of L1 in the classroom and the issue of translation employed as a learning technique, with a review of the relevant literature. The second part refers specifically to ESP and the particularities of this branch of EFL, offering a few suggestions for types of translation activities and ways in which they can be useful in such classes. The aim is to bring evidence that translation is neither old nor obsolete, but a valid teaching method that helps learners by consolidating difficult grammar issues, clarifying confusing aspects, enriching vocabulary and generally improving their knowledge of English.

1.3. Purpose of study

The aim of conducting this study is to show the importance of using translation in a particular setting like an ESP classroom with assigning strong attention to third-year computer science students. Since the mentioned method supports the use of language as means through which a subject matter is studied, hence, accentuates the practical significance of ideas. It also aims to investigate the possible implications of using translation in the ESP setting and by adapting the suggested method learning a foreign language would be purposeful and introduces the perception of reality into education. This research paper attempts to determine how the use of translation would promote and improve comprehension skills as far as computer science students are concerned. The following research questions are investigated to learn more about this subject:

RQ1. How can translation help to facilitate learning and grasp computing terms?

RQ2. How can the use of translation help in motivating students towards learning English?

2. Materials and method

This research is conducted within the descriptive case study research design which allows a researcher to explore data in depth within a specific context. In most circumstances, a case study technique chooses a small geographical region or a small number of persons to analyse. Case studies, in their true sense, address contemporary real-life phenomena via extensive contextual examination of a small number of occurrences or conditions, as well as their relationships. Musavengan and Muzeza (2021) define the case study research method 'as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used'. Therefore, this study has taken place in the faculty of sciences; it was based on a case study where a mixed-method approach has been adopted. Thus, the focus has been put on both qualitative and quantitative methods. In this sense, Troin et al. (2021) examine the similarities and complementarities between qualitative and quantitative research. From their point of view, the knowledge generated by each approach and the measurement methods of each approach are complementary (Troin et al., 2021). They also suggest that each approach can inform and assist the other approach. It is also said that qualitative research produces knowledge that emphasises process, extrapolation, understanding and illumination and quantitative research produces knowledge that focuses on outcomes, generalisations, predictions and casual explanations. This mixed-method approach is characterised

by its ability to increase concurrent and construct the validity of the research questions. It also permits the researcher to reduce prejudice.

2.1. Data collection instrument

Therefore, for the sake of gathering reliable data, the researcher has recourse to the use of the two following research instruments:

- Questionnaire
- Classroom observation

Due to the type of present research, the first step used for collecting the data has been done through a teachers questionnaire. The second step refers to classroom observation to: elicit useful information about the participant's experiences; obtain practical knowledge of the interviewees' opinions or impressions

2.2. Participants

Richards (2001, p. 58) writes 'Sampling involves asking a partial of the potential population instead of the total population and seeks to create a sample that is representative'. Therefore, the selected sample was students of third-year computer science who are interested in the research since they are the centre of the investigation; the majority of them had difficulty working with supplied software. Furthermore, their teachers are concerned with the study because of their professional teaching career; they are language instructors who have been assigned to teach ESP courses despite having no or lack of professional training. Ten ESP teachers from the same department are chosen at random as a sample. The purpose of selecting them is to understand their point of view because their teaching profession is linked to the academic level of the students, which helps in having a precise image of the target situation.

2.3. Procedure

Any research project needs a strategy for gathering data. The questionnaire was chosen for this investigation. The questionnaire is a good method since it allows the researcher to ask questions and obtain responses without having to speak with individuals from the selected sample. In addition to the questionnaire, the researcher chose to rely on another tool; class observation. A structured or casual observation of teaching in a classroom or other learning setting is referred to as classroom observation. Classroom observations are frequently used to offer teachers constructive critical feedback aimed at improving their classroom management and teaching skills. They are typically done by fellow teachers, administrators or instructional experts. Observation is the methodical documentation of the events, behaviours and artefacts of a social setting. Many researchers have used observation as a data collection strategy to examine a sample or items in natural settings or naturally occurring scenarios. It is a major technique that helps the researcher notice significant characteristics and document changes occurring in a particular context. It has been effective in research in a variety of fields of study, including education, sociology and other social science disciplines. Therefore, for the sake of gathering reliable data, the researcher has recourse to the use of the two following research instruments: teachers' questionnaire; classroom observation.

The purpose behind the choice of a questionnaire as a data collection method is the key features that portray it even though it has several controversial features and disadvantages. The questionnaire is regarded as a list of survey questions submitted to a selected sample of respondents and designed to extract specific information related to the research. It serves four major purposes: (1) to collect the relevant data, (2) to make data comparable and manageable to analysis, (3) to decrease bias in asking and formulating questions and (4) to make questions fitting and diverse.

Moreover, a common perspective amongst scholars is that the questionnaire is an instrument used to gather and record data about a specific issue including a list of questions. For achieving this purpose, the questionnaire can be fulfilled in one of the two next basic ways: (a) with

the absence of a researcher i.e., the respondents answer the questionnaire with no reference or help of the researcher; (b) with the presence of the researcher. The latter is referred to as an interview (structured, semi-structured or unstructured). This does not imply that the presence of the researcher while respondents answer the questionnaire is not allowed.

3. Results

After gathering the necessary information, the data has to be analysed through the use of analytical and logical techniques. Finally, concluding based on the results obtained.

3.1. Teachers' questionnaire analysis

This questionnaire explores the teachers' point of view about the delivery course in which a variety of questions were asked. It aims to identify the teachers' knowledge about teaching methods and their attitudes toward using translation in their ESP classroom.

3.1.1. Q1. Are you provided with any guidance or specific curriculum?

ESP teachers stated that the department does not provide them with any specific curriculum to follow, although, the students seem to have very specific needs to be fulfilled. For this reason, teachers try to provide general linguistic knowledge about basic aspects. According to them; there is no specific syllabus or curriculum or any kind of guidance. ESP teachers confirmed that they analyse their learners' needs, and see what may be difficult for them, as they have to know the prior knowledge of the students to enable them to approach the specific needs and design a suitable curriculum that covers their learners' needs in classes.

3.1.2. Q2. Among the four skills, which one is most used in your class?

The use of the skills differs from one teacher to another depending on the needs of their learners' need. According to the result obtained among the four skills used while teaching writing; the majority of ESP teachers argue that writing is quite crucial as a productive skill. It demonstrates an area of defeat for the majority of learners in both EGP and ESP settings.

3.1.3. Q3. Do you use translation in your ESP class?

The majority have a certain experience in teaching English, which has a positive impact on the teaching field that allows them to use a translation that they find appropriate to the learning situation. Almost teachers used translation which is common to use when teaching a language within a specific area of study, in a local context, and for some, it is useful when it comes to special settings. The interviewed teachers affirmed that if only used adequately, translation is helpful to motivate the learners; it gives a sense of reality to the learning experience. Furthermore, according to some teachers' translation depends on the way it is used and whether it fits the specific meaning that it would be applied to; also, it depends on the type of goals to fulfil. In other words, a translation could help students achieve remarkable progress in both language learning and specific academic learning.

3.1.4. Q4. Do you think that the content used in class may cover the learners' needs? And to what extent the selected method is helpful for learners' professional careers?

The majority of teachers agreed on the fact that the suitable content in the ESP context would be the content that is most significant to the students either on their academic or occupational level. The suitable ESP content in any context should be extracted from the student's needs, so that can connect the content of the course provided and the learners' needs. Most of the teachers also agreed that regarding the specific content, they had no professional teaching training, and they were not ESP practitioners; on the other hand, there is no collaboration between them and the subject specialists who are more knowledgeable in the academic area as well. The common course to cover the different learners' needs; constantly translating ideas rather than producing them in English, and the poor knowledge about the specific subject matter. All this seems to have an impact on learners'

achievements and motivation. They try to deliver some of the common basics and give the students strategies that they could use to enhance their knowledge later on in their careers.

3.1.5. Q5. Based on your professional experience, do you think that the objectives of the ESP course design should be reformulated and what particular recommendations would you suggest for overcoming the difficulties of the learners?

The majority of teachers confirmed that the ESP course objectives should be reformulated; they claimed that a well-designed course enables students to achieve their learning objectives if done properly. They also mentioned that the appropriate formulation of the ESP course should include the language and the content, which means that, the course objectives need to be explicitly illustrated in the curriculum outcome. Formulating these objectives from students' perspectives will provide a solid base for examining the learning outcome and determining the course's effectiveness. For the practical suggestions and recommendations, they provided to overcome the difficulties they encounter. They suggest reading about their technical field in the English language, avoiding thinking in the mother tongue, and writing in English though it seems difficult for the student but they should try, to develop the habit of autonomy and doing research, group work, asking for what they want specifically, to be guided by the teacher better on what to include in the courses with the use of translation.

3.2. Classroom observation analysis

A classroom observation is held at the faculty of sciences at the University of Tlemcen, where the researcher attended the ESP course with third-year students aiming at describing the difficulties encountered by students of computer sciences to help enhance, enrich and develop their knowledge and language proficiency, in hope to make the ESP courses of a real value. The classroom observation is about students' motivation and teachers' attitudes toward the ESP course.

The observation is conducted during the first semester with 40 students of third-year sciences. The researcher's objectives were at looking for the student's motivation and attitude towards the overall evaluation of content and the use of translation in their courses, how teachers deal with the ESP course and what kind of technique they use to deliver the lecture during eight sessions of observation.

In the first session of the observation, the teacher started the lecture by warming up to refresh their memories, the student's interaction with the lecture was not really at that level, the teacher has given them a printed text with questions that seems to be scientific texts. Some of the students participated and accomplished the given activities and others were not interested and did not answer questions, they were not interested in the lecture at all.

After, the researcher joins the lecture again. The teacher started the session by writing some sentences on the board, it was a grammar lesson, and he distributed a printed paper that had the rules on it, then he starts explaining the lesson. After that, the teacher asked students to construct similar sentences as an activity, however, most of the students did not do the activity. Concerning the activities provided by the teacher, it seems that they were not the kind of activities they need, and expressed their dissatisfaction with the teacher's method.

From all sessions, the researchers observed that the teacher did not have a guided syllabus to follow nor any guidance, the used materials were not authentic for the majority, did not give an experience of a real context of the target language, and did not orient the lectures towards the learners' specific needs. Generally speaking, most of the students had no motivation in the course because of their lack of interest in the content. The classroom observation results confirm the hypothesis (Figure 1).

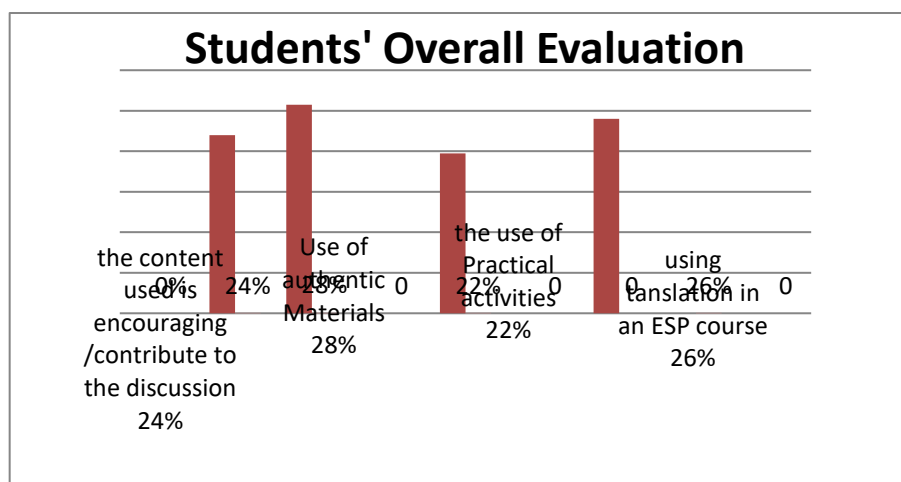


Figure 1
Students' Overall Evaluation

4. Discussion

The results obtained affirm that the students need more practical activities. For them, the language is a means by which they can access a lot of professional resources within their field of specialty. Moreover, the inadequate content of the ESP course is a major problem that prevents students from achieving their academic goals (Kovacs, 2020).

Concerning the students' motivation, the majority of students are aware of their specific needs as they give impotence to writing and reading as needed skills. Therefore, teachers should assess the student's needs which makes courses' content vague which prevents. Concerning the suitable course for the students; translation can provide the students with comprehensible learning activities resulting in more achievement in linguistic and content areas, as well as higher language learning proficiency (Tayyebi, 2021).

To sum up, ESP teachers should concentrate more on the ESP course content for language teaching that meets their learners' needs, and encourage students' language development at the first level this may also motivate the students when the content is relevant and interesting. Therefore, the ESP courses should be more practical and designed according to the student's area of interest (Jahangard, 2021).

5. Conclusion

It is worth mentioning to point out the obstacles and objections encountered during the study process. Because of the worldwide pandemic 'COVID 19' collecting data is a challenging task; some restrictions like shelter-in-place orders limit the researcher from accessing resources and affect the scientific research process. The fact of keeping social distancing, the researcher opted for a questionnaire. The number of units of analysis employed in the study is crucial to the results. Normally it requires a larger sample size to make sure the representation of the sample is accurate and considered representative of groups of individuals to whom results are generalised or transferred.

These limitations should be considered as an opening window for further allowing action researchers to concentrate on the outcomes of integrating the translation method in teaching ESP, with the use of questionnaires as a testing tool, rather than the only one, since questionnaires do not disclose all of the data relevant to the learners' development; thus, classroom observation/teacher interviews may be a suitable way to cross-check the findings. In terms of prospective studies arising from this current analysis, the following question could be of considerable importance in future research: How do ESP teachers deal with the necessity to implement translation strategies hand in hand with other teaching strategies for learners of ESPs?

Therefore, integrating translation as a tool may be challenging and a complex attempt because of the hard task of keeping up progress, motivation and control. Therefore, before using translation in ESP classrooms, it is inevitable to take into consideration the objectives of the course, the local context and circumstances to which teachers and learners are exposed, and the student's needs. Before using any teaching approach or methods, ESP teachers need to analyse the learners' needs, as well as analysing their language level, this helps determine the adequate topics, tasks and overall course objectives.

In terms of authentic material, teachers can access various resources with a wide range of materials that enable them to explore real language along with their students. On the other hand, it is important to choose suitable activities to enhance communicative and language skills, as well as the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). Finally, adding aspects of a specific area of study helps the teacher provide relevant content to make language learning meaningful and motivating for the students.

Some pedagogical recommendations are suggested for ESP teachers and ELT staff to help the learners develop their language level to meet their academic and vocational needs and to ensure that the teaching process is effective, the following suggestions should be taken into consideration: ESP teachers Make use of technology as it might facilitate their job because, using technology in a scientific field, will help in illustrating ideas by using images, graphs, figures, etc. However, ESP teachers play an important role in using ICT for teaching and as guides and facilitators when providing background material and guiding principles for research. They need to monitor the process, particularly for adult students, who tend to browse the web, rather than follow the search plans. They are also needed in helping students to differentiate reliable sources from unreliable ones, and make sense of the huge number of information that may overwhelm them. Try to understand the learners' needs and thus develop courses accordingly. However, they should have a deep perception of the available methodologies which set the guidelines for the process of course design; otherwise, courses may take other directions. Among the responsibilities of ELT staff is to guide their ESP teachers. The letters aim to ensure a good quality of both ESP teaching and learning by making sure the ICT facilities are available for both teachers and learners means providing them with the needed logistics. The motive behind the use of information and communication technology in ESP classrooms is to develop more student-centred learning settings. Consequently, create a motivating atmosphere to learn and to teach.

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