THE LANGUAGE-RELATED TASKS BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND THE BUSINESS WORKPLACE

المهام المتعلقة باللغة بين الجامعة ومكان العمل التجاري

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Abstract:

The present study aims at investigating the cause of the gap existing between the university and the professional settings. ESP is introduced in different specialties in the Algerian universities. However, in the workplace, university degree holders encounter difficulties to accomplish Language-related tasks. The study was conducted in a private language school in a class of eight (08) adult learners receiving intensive instruction in Business English. The learners are 02 businessmen and 06 sales managers in private companies. A questionnaire was used as a data gathering tool to detect their motives to have such courses. Results reveal that their resort to ESP sessions in private schools is due to their failure to exploit their prior language knowledge to solve practical problems in the workplace especially problems related to business correspondence. Results led to the construction of pedagogical implications that highlight the importance of ESP and languages for specific purposes in general in equipping the present university students, the future workers, with the required language skills that will satisfy the professional settings' needs. Recommendations focus on the necessity of having qualified and well trained ESP teachers at the Department

of Economy and Management besides building a continuum between universities and the professional settings.

key words: Business correspondence; E-mailing; ESP; Professional Settings

ملخص باللغة العربية:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على سبب الفجوة القائمة بين الجامعة و المحيط المهني. يتم تقديم دروس الانجليزية المتخصصة في تخصصات مختلفة في الجامعات الجزائرية ومع ذلك يواجه حاملو الشهادات الجامعية في مكان العمل صعوبات في إنجاز المهام المتعلقة باللغة . أجريت الدراسة في مدرسة لغات خاصة في فصل دراسي مكون من ثمانية (08) متعلمين بالغين يتلقون تعليما مكثفا في اللغة الإنجليزية للأعمال التجارية. المتعلمون هم 02 من رجال الأعمال و 06 مديري المبيعات في الشركات الخاصة. تم استخدام استبيان كأداة لجمع البيانات للكشف عن دوافعهم للحصول على مثل هذه الدورات. تكشف النتائج أن لجوئهم إلى دورات اللغة الإنجليزية المتخصصة في المدارس الخاصة يرجع إلى فشلهم في استغلال معرفتهم اللغوية السابقة لحل المشاكل العملية في مكان العمل وخاصة المشاكل المتعلقة بالمراسلات التجارية. أدت النتائج إلى بناء الآثار التربوية التي تسلط الضوء على أهمية الإنجليزية المتخصصة ولغات التخصص بشكل عام في تزويد طلاب الجامعة الحاليين الذين سوف يكونون مهنيين مستقبلا، بالمهارات اللغوية المطلوبة التي تلبي احتياجات المحيط المهني. تركز التوصيات على ضرورة وجود معلمين مؤهلين ومدربين تدريباً جيداً للغة الإنجليزية المتخصصة في قسم الاقتصاد والإدارة إلى جانب بناء شكل من التواصل والاستمرارية بين الجامعات والمحيط المهني.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المراسلات التجارية ؛ البريد الإلكتروني ؛ اللغة الإنجليزية المتخصصة ؛ المحيط المهني.

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I- Introduction :

A big number of import and export companies are situated in El-Oued. Therefore, many companies' owners, businessmen, representatives, sales managers are becoming much more interested in English to conduct

business with international companies. Most of the time, they need English for business correspondence; sometimes they need English for telephone conversations and direct interviews. Nowadays most of the business correspondence is conducted in the form of e-mailing because of the speed and the low cost. Even though e-mailers hold university degrees in commerce, marketing, economy and management and other business related fields, they find it difficult to write effective e-mails. In most of the time they resort to the help of interpreting offices or to teachers of English to correct their first drafts or even to write for them. An increased demand for ESP courses in private schools is noticed. In the workplace, people encounter difficulties to accomplish Language- related tasks. They fail to exploit their previous language knowledge in professional settings. There is a severe gap between what is taught in the academic settings and what is encountered in the real life work. Starting from this research problem, the following research questions are formulated.

- What are the reasons for the increased demand for ESP business courses in private language schools?
- What are the reasons of the gap existing between the English taught at the university and the workplace language –related activities?
-What solutions can be suggested to make the university an active factor in enhancing the economic growth?
- How can we build a continuum between the university and the professional setting?

I.1. Definition of ESP

The term ESP is generally represented as "English for Specific Purposes", which emphasizes on the students' purposes and refers to the whole range of language resources (Robinson, 1980).There are a number of definitions that describe ESP and , to some extent, these definitions are different. Munby (1978) defines ESP in relation to the ESP courses based on the analysis of the students' language needs, from this angle, he defines ESP as follows: "Those where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner, rather than by non-learner centered criteria such as the teacher' s or institution' s predetermined preference for general English or for treating English as part of general education" (p. 2).

After detailed discussion, Robinson defines ESP course by stating that: "An ESP course is purposeful and is aimed at the successful performance of occupational or educational roles. It is based on a rigorous analysis of students' needs and should be tailor-made" (1980: 13).

The two definitions stress on learners' needs since learners represent the most important element in the process of teaching ESP, and insist on the specific purposes of the learners if courses are intended to be as close as possible to the students' target situation.

The interpretation of the expression "learner need" deals with two different aspects of needs referring to (1) what the learner needs to do with the language once he or she has learned it; it is a goal-oriented definition of needs related to 'terminal behavior', the ends of learning; (2) what the learner needs to do to actually acquire the language, this is a process-oriented definition of needs relates to 'transitional behavior', the means of learning. In ESP, the ends of learning are as important as the means (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Mc Donough, 1984; Robinson, 1991). Accordingly, ESP is meant "the teaching of English, not as an end in itself, but as an essential means to a clearly identifiable goal" (Mackay 1987: 29).

According to Hutchinson and Waters, ESP by definition is "an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reason for learning" (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 19).

In the same context, Douglas (2000) focused on the integration of both language skills and language components for teaching/learning and testing the target specific language ability of a learner. A teacher needs to comply with his/her learners' needs but again the language basic components and skills must be involved whatever the needs of the learners are. He maintains that "Specialized languages usually refer to the specific discourse used by professionals and specialists to communicate and transfer information and knowledge. There are as many specialized languages as there are professions. This what has usually been known as language for specific purposes or when applied to English, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), i.e., the special discourse used in specific settings by people sharing common purposes" (p. 2).

I.2. Subcategories of ESP

It is worth mentioning at this stage that ESP is a sort of an umbrella term which includes many other branches in English Language Teaching (ELT).

ESP has traditionally been divided into two main branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991; Strevens, 1988) and within the framework of each of these, many other subdivisions have come into existence such as Business English

(BE) which is the central type that takes much space and discussion in this research work due to the nature of this study.

I.2.1. English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is a movement within the framework of ESP which emerged in the 1970s. It was in 1974 when the term EAP was used for the first time.

In this context, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998: 34) mention that "EAP refers to any English teaching that relates to study purposes". It is concerned with those communication skills in English which are required for study purposes in formal education system.

Additionally, , Kennedy et al (1984: 4) state that: "EAP is taught generally within educational institutions to students reading English in their studies". The EAP course may cover the teaching of specific skills such as: analyzing experiments, reading texts, writing reports and so forth for students at university level.

I.2.2. English for Occupational Purposes (EOP)

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) refers to the English which is used or learnt in the domain of professional purposes, e.g., for practising doctors, engineers, business people, administration, banking, etc.

Kennedy et al (1984: 4) argue that: "EOP is taught in a situation in which learners need to use English as part of their work profession".

Another definition of EOP is provided by Dudley-Evans et al (1998: 7) in the following terms: "The term EOP refers to English that is not for academic purposes, it includes professional purposes in administration, medicine, law and business and vocational purposes for non-professionals in work or pre-study work".

I.3. ESP Practice in Algeria

In Algeria, English is taught as a second foreign language after French. Algeria enjoys a "linguistic plurality" (or diversity). The teaching of English as a foreign language in Algeria is inspired by the national policy that sees its interests in the language that enjoys strong existence and importance worldwide.

The Algerian recent educational policies have given great importance to foreign languages and has encouraged their use, English in particular which has benefited from the Algerian economic interests in the fields of petroleum and natural gas. Thus, Algerian students have been given opportunities to study for higher levels (tertiary level) and to conduct researches in different fields including business and economy.

Algeria today stresses the importance of English in higher studies at university level. Some universities in Algeria offer ESP/EAP courses to equip the undergraduate as well as postgraduate students in terms of specific needs of English language. But, in fact there are rare ESP/EAP courses in

postgraduate studies based upon the language needs analysis in the universities of the country.

Additionally, in the Algerian context, the need for ESP teachers is rapidly growing but ESP theory and applications have been lacking training centers for language required by the English language teachers. Also, there are few university programs aimed at specifically training teachers for ESP situations. Thus, there is a lack of trained ESP professionals who can fill such positions.

ESP in tertiary education in Algeria today must be practiced from both global and local viewpoints. While there is a need to be aware of global developments in ESP, there is also a need to adapt the applications to the local situations.

I. 4. Business English (BE)

Taking into account the current trends and concerns in teaching Business English, it is important to stress the following point: Business English is taught to a wide range of professional people and people in full-time education preparing for a business career. One of the questions which is often debated among the BE teachers is: "Are we teaching language or skills?"

Business English course focuses on such areas as telephoning, business writing, presentations, meetings, negotiations. These areas are also addressed as management skills training (usually in the mother tongue), where behavioral strategies and techniques play an important role. There are certain aspects of skills' training which are better addressed in the first language and which can be taught without attention to language being used. E.g. body language .In such areas as telephoning ,business correspondence, presentations, meetings, negotiations, it is difficult or indeed impossible to focus on language without some considerations to the skills involved.

The overall objective of Business English course is to improve performance. This objective can be achieved successfully if we find a balance in how much time we devote to input and output. With traditional teaching in Business English, students find themselves with long lists of phrases: gambits and formulae which are supposed to help them to develop skills through learning by heart the appropriate vocabulary.

I.4.1. Business Communication

Business communication is divided into two broad types: the external communication and the internal communication.

I.4.1.1. The External Communication

The external communication is also called the inter-organizational communication. It is the communication conducted externally.ie. which occurs between an organization and governmental agencies, other

organizations, customers, clients and public. The media employed in this type of communication can be written media like letters, reports, proposals or visual media like posters, advertisements video tapes or electronic media like faxes, telephones, e-mails, telexes. The communication might also be through teleconferences, face-to-face meetings, panel discussions, or presentations or exhibitions.

I.4.1.2.The Internal Communication

The Internal Communication is also called the intra-organizational communication is the one conducted internally. i.e. within the same company. It enables the organization to maintain appropriate communication with its branches, staff and employees.

1.4.2. Types of Business Communication

Business Communication can also fall into one of the seven types below:

- In-Person Communication: communicating with people with face-to face format. Here the communicators must master the skills of both verbal and non- verbal communication.
- Telephone: communicators must master the right skill set for telephone conversations.
- E-mail: it is widely used because of its convenience, efficiency, effectiveness and low cost. E-mails can be sent, and received, from computers, smart phones, and personal digital assistants, or PDAs.
- Fax: fax machines can be used to exchange important business documents.
- Video Conferencing: it enables the communication from various locations through a real-time video and audio system. It minimizes the travel time and expenses by virtually attending meetings through video technology.
- Letter Writing: letters can be written or mailed to employees, clients, customers, broad members and shareholders.
- Indirect Communication: Memos, policies and procedures and other internal publications often constitute the Indirect Business Communication

1.5. The Business E-mail

E-mailing for business purposes is different from e-mailing for maintaining social relations. The business e-mail is an official document that is recorded, stored, archived and that can be retrieved at any time. Nowadays, it is a very important medium of communication among business institutions due to its efficiency, speed and lower costs.

1.5.1 Types of Business E-mails

Business e-mails are there to achieve different communicative goals that fulfill different business needs. The most important ones are:

- Requesting and giving information.
- Making arrangements.

- Negotiating
- Making a complaint, an invoice, a quotation, an order or an inquiry.
- Discussing a discount, a credit, delivery time, terms and payment, a guarantee, a warranty, or a transport costs.

1.5.2. Importance of E-mailing in the Business Communication

E-mailing disposes many advantages that make it the best medium of business communication nowadays. E-mail messages reduce traditional bureaucracy and communication costs. It proved to be the best medium for exchanging information. It reaches people all over the world at any time.

II– Methods and Materials:

-Data Gathering Tool

To conduct this research, a questionnaire is used as a data gathering tool. The questionnaire is designed in three parts :

Part A

The first part of this questionnaire asks for the demographic and background information of the respondents on their gender, academic degree and recent position (job).

Part B

The second part of the questionnaire (Part B) concerns the participants' English language needs in conducting their work. This part comprises four items of English-language needs in the work context. The participants are asked to indicate the level of importance of each item which represents their English language needs in conducting their work. The four levels of importance used in the questionnaire are: "very important", "moderately important", "slightly important", and "not important". Each level of importance is accorded with a number, (1 stands for very important), (2 for moderately important), (3 for slightly important), and (4 for not important). The participants are requested to circle the numbers listed in front of each item to indicate the level of importance of each of them.

Part C

This part of the questionnaire is designed to provide data whether the ESP business course provided in the private school is efficient to be equipped with the necessary genres encountered in their work; the participants are asked to circle one answer among four listed as follows: (a lot, somehow, a little, not efficient at all). Additionally, the respondents are asked if the prior university English knowledge is satisfactory to conduct language – related tasks in professional business settings.

Participants

The participants of this study are eight (08) adult learners receiving intensive instruction of Business English in a private language school in El-Oued for a period of two months; (02) businessmen and 06 sales managers.

The table below provides detailed information about the population of the study.

Table II.1 Population of the study

Academic degree	Recent position(job)	Number	Gender
University degree	Sales managers in private companies	06	Male
Third year secondary school	Companies owners (businessmen)	02	Male

III- Results and discussion :

Many business e-mailers who are university degree holders find it difficult to conduct the business correspondence in an effective way to satisfy the written business communication needs. This is why they resort to private language schools to ensure adequate ESP courses to help them accomplish the English language related tasks in companies.

100% of the respondents have reported that their previous English language was unsatisfactory and didn't meet their present needs at work. Moreover they argued that they haven't been taught the required genres for business earlier and they see that the ESP course taught at the university was not relevant to their professional needs. All the respondents asserted that the tasks, activities, and examples in the course presented at the university are not related to their academic and professional needs. Only two of them declared that their teachers gave them space to express their lacks and wants. All the participants have reported that they encountered different difficulties while conducting their business correspondence. These difficulties are mainly related to writing well- constructed business e-mails that satisfy the business correspondence needs in terms of form and content as well as failure to perform adequately other tasks that are based on the English language as in telephone conversations. They also are unable to accomplish certain written business genres such as writing reports or ordinary letters.

All the respondents argued that the ESP course can help them develop their business correspondence skills because it is a focused course. All of them also expressed their complete satisfaction about the ESP courses provided in the private school and they consider it as a successful

experience that provided them with accurate and concrete results in a shorter time.

The results reveal that there is a gap between the university and the real world of work. The new worker finds it difficult to exploit his previous language knowledge in conducting business-related tasks such as e-mailing and telephone conversations. This led to the resort to other alternatives such as having ESP courses in private language schools. The reason is that the students of commerce receive general English instead of having real ESP courses at the university. Results come to answer the research questions previously mentioned.

Results led to the construction of pedagogical implications that highlight the importance of ESP and languages for specific purposes in general in equipping the present university students, the future workers, with the required language skills that will satisfy the professional settings' needs. Recommendations focus on the necessity of having qualified and well trained ESP teachers at the university. Business students in ESP classes can also be equipped with a special syllabus that aims at acquiring capacities in writing business e-mails that can also benefit students of English for Business Communication as well as English for E-mail Communication in the workplace.

IV- Conclusion:

The results of this study show that the type of business English language course offered to the university students is not helpful in the professional settings. This is why most of them resort to learn real business English in private language schools. The present study helps in the rethinking of the ESP teaching at the university. The Algerian university should have a preparatory role to assist the students to conduct their English language business activities adequately.

ESP course should meet the needs of adult learners for academic and/or professional purposes. Designing an appropriate ESP course that suits target groups in an academic or professional setting is not an easy task for course designers and ESP practitioners. The present study attempts to bridge the gap existing between the university and the professional settings.

The findings of the study are useful for the ESP course designers, teachers, and researchers in the field from the following angles: first, it provides contributions to teachers and syllabus designers to envisage the possible deficient or forgotten skill areas of the English course offered. Second, it raises the awareness of needs analysis for ESP courses so that different needs analysis would be carried out. Finally, it helps syllabus and

curriculum developers and designers to be aware of the students' needs and thereby respond to such needs during the preparation of textbooks and programs pertinent to the students' academic and professional life.

In this concern, some fundamental aspects should be considered to propose the ESP English course(s) framework. First, a comprehensive ESP needs analysis focusing on a number of tasks and skills for academic and professional purposes should be conducted. Then, goals and objectives should be formulated. Subsequently, the content of the course based on the results of language needs analysis should be determined and constructed. One should note that, the ESP course is not considered as a final product that remains unchanged. Course development should be viewed as an on-going- process. It can be revised and modified through course evaluation and needs analysis.

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- Appendix

Main Questions of the Questionnaire

1-How do you evaluate your previous university language knowledge of English?

2- Have you been taught the required genres for business ?

3- What kinds of difficulties encountered when conducting your business correspondence?

4- Do your teachers give you space to express your lacks and wants?

 5- Are the tasks, activities, and examples in the course related to your academic and professional needs?

6- Was the ESP course taught at the university relevant to your professional needs?

7- To what extent does the ESP course help you develop your business correspondence skills?

8- How do you evaluate the ESP courses in the private school?