

Developing Reflective Learning in ESP

تطوير التعلم التأملي في اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة

Ismahan Hayet MEGNAFI * اسمهان حياة مقنافي ismahanmeg@gmail.com	English Language and Education	ESP Teaching Laboratory / Faculty of Letters and Languages / University of Tlemcen / Algeria.
Radia Benmensour Benyelles راضية بن منصور بن يلس benirad1971@yahoo.com	ESP and Didactics.	ESP Teaching Laboratory / Faculty of Letters and Languages / University of Tlemcen / Algeria.
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Abstract:

This study aims at exploring students' readiness to handle their learning process, and the relevance of task-based course in developing reflection. The researcher conducted action research in the Faculty of Economics, Business and Management Sciences, Tlemcen University. The focus was on Master students of Business and Economics. This study has relied on two research instruments: teachers' interview and classroom observation to obtain reliable data. The findings revealed that EBE learners were passive and they did not show any reflection. Instructional- based strategies promote reflective learning and they are effective in enhancing the teaching/ learning process.

Keywords: EBE Learners, English for Specific Purposes, Instruction based strategies, Reflective Learning, Task-based course.

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى استكشاف استعداد الطلاب للتعامل مع عملية التعلم الخاصة بهم. حيث أجرى الباحث بحثا علميا في كلية العلوم الاقتصادية والتجارية وعلوم التسيير بجامعة تلمسان. فقد كان التركيز على طلبة الماجستير كعينة دراسة، تخصص علوم المالية والمحاسبة، اعتمد فيها على اداتين للبحث. مقابلة للمعلمين والملاحظة الصفية من أجل الحصول على بيانات دقيقة وموثوقة. تم تحليل النتائج كميا ونوعيا وكشفت ان المتعلمين سلبيين ولم يبدووا أي تعلم تأملي أو انعكاسي. كما أكدت النتائج دور استراتيجيات التدريس لتعزيز التعلم التأملي لما لها من دور فعال في عملية التدريس والتعلم.

كلمات مفتاحية: المتعلمين، اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة؛ الاستراتيجيات القائمة على التعلم الانعكاسي؛ التعلم التأملي؛ الدورة القائمة على المهام.

* - Corresponding author: ismahanmeg@gmail.com.

1- Introduction:

Every person around the world needs to develop his proficiency level and to communicate using the target language which is English. Researchers have attempted to look for the factors that may affect the teaching/learning process. EBE (English for Business and Economics) students still find difficulties on the way to understand, assess, and monitor their learning process. Language teachers attempted to look for relevant teaching strategies that foster the learning activity. Accordingly, many reforms have influenced several courses and syllabuses, as well as a set of approaches and methods that have been adopted at the Algerian educational system. A dominant trend has been applied along with the Algerian classes. In other words, formalist classes placed teachers and instructors to be transmitters of knowledge, and the students are passive and just receive the information and do not actively participate. This study is an attempt to investigate the effect of the task-based approach on the learning outcomes. It is devoted to improving the learners' abilities to develop their reflective learning. It helps EBE learners to develop a significant vocabulary related to the field of business and economics. It helps language teachers to adopt adequate strategies to foster reflective learning of students.

Research Questions:

The following research questions are asked to meet the objectives of the research work:

- 1- To what extent are EBE learners reflective?
- 2- What are the appropriate teaching strategies that enhance reflective learning in a task-based course?

Research Hypotheses:

The above-mentioned research questions lead to suggest the following hypotheses:

- 1- EBE learners are not able to take charge of their learning and they are not reflective learners.
- 2- The instructional-based strategies are relevant and seem to be adequate since they foster reflection.

2. Development:

a. Reflection as a lifelong learning process:

Language teachers try to match and construct the learning experiences of their students. They believe that the learning process is interrelated to previous knowledge and experiences. Thus, it requires reflection that encourages students to foster their growth. They can get access to control their lifelong learning. It links the experience from various sources related to real situations and educational context.

In this vein, Race maintains that: "the act of reflecting is one which causes us to make sense of what we have learnt, why we learnt it, and how that particular increment of learning took place"(Race,2006). This means that learners are required to be engaged in their developmental learning, which is viewed as a structured process. It promotes reflective thinking, achievement and performance. However, promoting reflective learning is not always an easy task. Further deficiencies may emerge and they could become an obstacle. Language teachers are wondering about the way to incorporate reflective learning in their methods and approaches. The way reflection could be dealt with implicitly or explicitly. The nature of supported tools and teaching materials that foster reflection.

Therefore, developmental learning requires the development of knowledge, competencies, skills, attitudes, and even behaviour through developing experiences. In this context, Honey and Mumford view that the learning process may occur when students show that they know something new in which they do not know it before. They could do better things, they could not do it before. The developmental learning process has several advantages. It is suitable because it emphasizes on the immediate environment. It focuses on students' understanding. It puts the process of learning into real practice (Honey and Mumford, 1996).

b. Developing Reflection through task-based approach:

In an ESP context, Tamkin et.al identify four phases in which students rely on to develop their reflection and their learning: analysing the learning situation and identifying the needs. Setting the goals and objectives. Planning the action and expecting the outcomes. Implementing the reflective process (Tamkin et. al, 1995).To meet the required needs of EBE students and to develop their reflection, a task-based course is suggested to be relevant. It monitors the knowledge and develops the learning experience of learners. That approach gains popularity in the 20th century among researchers and educationalists. The term 'task' in task-based course refers to activities in which teachers carried out within the classroom practice. Nunan in this respect focuses on the classroom. The task involves learners to manipulate the content of language rather than the form. It requires interaction. The task-based course allows EBE students to provide control over their use of the language. It develops the learning experiences and selecting what is appropriate and relevant (Harmer, 1989). It allows being exposed to the target language. Simply, it is considered as a motivational approach.

Task-based course or task-based instruction requires the use of authentic language and materials. In this context, Leaver and Willis reveal that target tasks are adequate because they provide learners with real-life situations and the natural mechanisms of the language Leaver and Willis, 2004). The tasks are determined first by initiating the goals. Planning and implementing tasks.

The settings where and when the task takes place (inside or outside the classroom). Providing adequate input refers to the knowledge and the content of the course (Nunan, 2004).

c. Instructional based strategies to Foster Reflection:

Instruction-based strategies help EBE students to become strategic and independent reflective learners. To accomplish tasks in a task-based course, EBE learners are in need to develop their strategies in learning through instructions. Successful strategic students are a type of learners who follow a step by step the teaching instruction. They select adequate materials. They guide their practice to be independent learners. They transfer their competencies according to the situations of learning. They link their experiences into real-life situations. They rely on previous experiences. They self- correct and self- monitor their learning process as well as assess their learning. Language teachers are aware of the benefits of instruction-based strategy in developing reflective learning among EBE students. It fosters learners to carry out reflective thinking. It allows collaborative work and advocates risk-taking. It allows feedback and assessment. It builds a constructive knowledge for learners to share and reflect into their learning process.

The task-based course requires the use of a set of instructional strategies summarized as follow:

- 1- Cooperative Learning: organizes the classroom tasks into social experiences. Students collectively accomplish a set of tasks to achieve their goals and objectives. Cooperative learning leads the students to successful learning and creativity (Ross and Smyth, 1995). The researchers state that incorporating cooperative learning may develop interdependence, interaction, group skills, and group processing.
- 2- Group Discussion: involves a group of students to bring up ideas and knowledge by providing comments and solving problems. In this vein, Tuckman identifies five main phases in-group discussion: the forming stage to establish rules. The storming stage to control the whole group. The norming stage to share goals. The performing stage to perform tasks. The adjuring stage to complete tasks (Tuckman, 1965).
- 3- Portfolio Development: is a personalized document of learners' mastery of specific content. An inclusive portfolio involves a recording of specific information. The selection of the portfolio focuses on achieving the goals and objectives of a given knowledge (Huba and Freed, 2000).

EBE classroom tasks develop the learning activity and task-based approach has been introduced to engage EBE students to use intensive energy while performing tasks. They enhance the interaction among students and their peers. As a result of that, the task-based approach relied on the use of task and instruction as basic elements in determining the goals, methodology and assessment.

- **The Study:**

The objective of this work is to investigate language teachers and EBE students' perceptions of reflective learning and the relevance of instruction-based strategies in a task-based course. The researchers used random sampling to gain reliable data and to generalise the research results.

- **The Description of the Local Environment**

Algeria launched many reforms to develop English language teaching at university. However, many ESP courses and syllabuses at the University of Tlemcen are not giving their anticipated goals and objectives. EBE learners are still over-reliant on their language teachers. Most EBE classes at the University of Tlemcen are still adopting classical practices. This study is an attempt to explore to which theory meets practice in the Algerian EBE classes.

The Faculty of Business, Economics and Management at Tlemcen University considers the teaching of English as a language unit for two semesters. EBE learners in the Department of Finance and Accounting are provided with English lessons at the beginning of their first year of the academic year. The crux of the problem defines the teaching of EBE because it is assigned to untrained language teachers who do not explore the ESP context, the relevant course and teaching strategies that are adequate to the proficiency level of EBE students. Regarding the course content lacks and various topics. Besides, EBE students are not motivated and considered as reflective to learn the English course and this is due to low interaction with the target language.

- **The Sample Population**

The investigator carried out this research with different research instruments. The objective of using multiple sources to ensure the reliability and the validity of data. The sample of respondents was chosen from a larger population via the use of sample techniques. The informants consisted of forty-four (44) Master one students who were randomly selected in the Department of Finance and Accounting at Tlemcen University and seven language teachers. The researchers selected a probability sampling technique. All the respondents of the whole population have the same choice of being selected. They were randomly chosen to make data more accurate and generalizable. The medium of instruction of Business studies in Algeria is Arabic. They studied English for four years at the tertiary level. Besides, seven language teachers who hold different degrees in the English language were participants in the study.

- **Language Teachers' Profile:**

The reasons behind choosing language teachers to provide some pedagogical points concerning the relevance of instruction-based strategy in developing reflective learning. In addition to that, the extent to which reflective practice may be helpful to develop students' consciousness, reflection and awareness. Therefore, seven language teachers who are in charge of teaching English were

interviewed in this study. They were both males and females in the Department of Finance and Accounting at the University of Tlemcen where classroom observation was conducted. They were randomly selected. They vary in their degrees and they are in charge of teaching EBE students. The choice of seven language teachers stems from the belief that they are aware of the importance of reflective learning and the introduction of teaching strategies in the EBE context. On the other hand, learners are still beginners to be autonomous and reflective. Thus, they still need greater support from their instructors.

○ **EBE Students' Profile:**

Master students of Business and Economics are advanced learners in their learning concerning the use of the target language. They are more aware of their needs and the importance of reflection since they need to be ready to handle their learning process. The total number that has been chosen was forty-four students aged between twenty-one and twenty-eight years old at the Department of "Finance and Accounting" University of Tlemcen, Algeria. A sample of forty-four learners was selected. They represent the whole population.

○ **Data Collection Procedure**

The process of data collection focuses on EBE students' perceptions and teachers' attitudes about the task-based course and the relevance of instructional-based strategies in developing learners' reflection. The investigators followed the process of needs analysis to expose the target and learning needs of EBE students in the business context. They designed a classroom observation to master one EBE students to identify their readiness to handle their learning process. The interview was addressed to seven language teachers to identify the teaching strategies designed for EBE learners to highlight their importance in developing the teaching/learning process.

A triangulation of the research methods allows reaching both qualitative and quantitative data. They provide generalizability and reliability of the research results. The research instruments selected in this work are interview and classroom observation.

3. Results and Discussion:

● **Teachers' Interview Results Analysis:**

The findings obtained from the interview of language teachers (100%) showed that they were aware of the adequate use of task-based language course because it answers the needs of learners. The following table 1 represents the findings:

	AF	RF %
Yes	07	100%
No	00	0%

Table 1. Teachers' Awareness about Task-Based Course

They considered EBE learners as passive and they failed to handle their learning process. However, the task-based course places them in real-life situations where they find themselves solving problems. Tasks as homework, cooperative work, and interactive tasks can shift EBE students from theory to practice and integrating them in real situations. The majority of the respondents stated that teaching strategies help EBE students to increase their reflective thinking since they knew how to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Table 2 below represents the results:

	AF	RF %
Homework	05	71.4%
Cooperative Work	07	100%
Interactive Tasks	06	85.7%

Table2. Reflective Tasks

The results obtained from the interview confirmed the second hypothesis concerning the relevance of instructional-based strategies in developing EBE students' reflection and the elaboration of the task-based syllabus. Language teachers argued that the task-based course would answer the EBE students' needs. It permits the integration of the four language skills. Instructional strategies allow the involvement of EBE students. Language teachers argued that task-based course guides the learners to a systematic reflection with cooperative learning, portfolios, discussions, writing journals and independent study. EBE students may describe their learning process when they are engaged to various tasks, record their contribution, discuss their thoughts and feelings and place their experience into a lifelong learning process. The following table 3 summarizes the main data obtained from the interview:

	AF	RF %
Cooperative Learning	05	71.4%
Portfolios	06	85.7%
Group Discussions	05	71.4%
Independent Study	06	85.5%
Writing Journals	07	100%

Table3. The Integration of Instructional-Based Strategies

The task-based course integrates EBE learners to share responsibility because it allows both success and mistakes. It monitors learners' performance regularly. The language teachers argued that instructional-based strategies develop EBE students' plans and timeline. They encourage them to communicate effectively in the target situation. The role of teachers was, then, to guide their learners and determine the needs to be carefully addressed in the context. They need to perceive why their

learning is significant and the way it will benefit their learning process. Learners need to design their outcomes to consider how they can interact and reflect to address their needs.

Language teachers seemed that they were familiar with the notion of reflective learning since they were aware of its usefulness in the teaching/learning process. However, introducing reflection in the language classroom did not seem to be an easy task. Fostering reflective learning in EBE classes is not only based on teachers' perceptions and their roles, but it also relies on pedagogical matters as training programs, project works, techniques and strategies. The findings obtained showed many shortcomings in teachers' training (Samoud, 2008). There is a mismatch between preparing language teachers and the pedagogical methods used in the classroom. The majority of language teachers argued that the notion of reflective learning is not practically introduced in EBE classes. They claimed that reflection should be dealt with at the tertiary level to prepare EBE learners; however, they are still over-relying on their teachers and wait to spoon-feed them. As a result, instructional-based strategies will serve to develop reflective learning in the language classroom. They improve self-awareness, motivation and willingness to make EBE learners take charge of their learning process.

Language teachers have suggested some pedagogical implications in an ESP context to make a shift from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred approach. They provided the following:

- ✓ Learners' assessment may focus on their needs.
- ✓ Language teachers may rely on formative, informal, feedback to guide the learning process.
- ✓ Language teachers may allow EBE students to assess their learning process.
- ✓ Reflective writing, portfolios, group discussions may lead EBE students to be autonomous learners and reflective.

● Classroom Observation Results Analysis:

The objective behind selecting classroom observation to see whether instructional based strategies are used by language teachers in EBE classroom to help their learners become strategic, independent learners, and to evaluate their readiness to become reflective learners to accomplish various tasks and meet their learning goals. The following table (1) represents EBE students' engagements in their learning process through the use of instructional-based strategies:

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Selecting appropriate tasks inside the classroom			100%		
			44		
Engaging learners outside			100%		

classroom activities					
			44		
Identifying learners' difficulties while dealing with tasks.			54,54%	45,45%	
			24	20	
Allowing diversity in groups			54%	45%	
			24	20	
Sharing their own experience and negotiate with their mates.			45 %	45%	9 %
			20	20	4
Establishing rules for classroom management.		100%			
		44			
Modelling collaborative skills and behavioural expectations			45%	45%	
			20	20	
Evaluating cooperative learning and receiving feedback and reinforcement.				72.27%	22.72%
				34	10
Establishing rules for discussions and brainstorming ideas			38.63%	22.72%	38.63%
			17	10	17
Documenting tasks and accomplishments in portfolios		34.09%	34.09%	22.72%	9.09%
		15	15	10	4
Monitoring actions and plans			38.63%	29.54%	31.81%
			17	13	14
Assessing personal growth			38.63%	29.54%	31.81%
			17	13	14

Table 1. EBE Students' Engagements in Language learning

The majority of EBE learners (100%) were engaged in tasks related to their field of study, and the teacher engaged them in outside tasks to develop their ability in learning the target language. The selected tasks allowed the integration of the four language skills. However, EBE learners are engaged in written tasks rather than communicative or listening tasks. During each task, the language teacher identified EBE learners' weaknesses and deficiencies (54%) while accomplishing tasks. The difficulties are mainly related to grammar, spelling mistakes and pronunciation.

In addition to that, 54% of EBE learners created diverse groups. They allowed themselves to learn from each member of the group and assigned several roles. 45% of them shared their learning experience and negotiated their ideas with their peers. However, 9% of the whole sample did not take charge of their responsibility and were passive. When assigning tasks, the teacher established rules for classroom management such as forming groups quietly and quickly, providing peers' assessment, treating students with respect and help. Consequently, 45% of EBE learners listened to each other permitted their peers to speak and completed tasks within the allotted time. The task of language teacher was, then, to monitor the groups, to ensure that his learners were aware of their roles.

However, 72.27% of learners did not receive feedback and reinforcement and did not evaluate cooperative learning groups. EBE learners (38.63%) established rules for discussions such as no interruption is made, all learners have the right to pass and think before answering. They accepted ideas without value judgement. They recorded every single word or phrase to make ideas run out and waited for the time limit to over.

Furthermore, the language teacher focused on the use of portfolios because they evaluate students' thoughts. They measure reflection, autonomous learning, and motivation. 34.09% of learners carried out their portfolios to document all the tasks and accomplishments. Learners could monitor their actions and plans. However, 31.81% of them could not use portfolios effectively, assess their learning process, and determine their strengths and weaknesses and thus, they could not assess their personal growth.

The results showed that EBE students were still relying on their teachers and this confirmed partly the first hypothesis, which means that EBE learners are still relying on their teachers to spoon-feed them. However, language teachers are looking for appropriate strategies to make learners able to handle their learning and take charge of it. EBE learners showed readiness, to some extent, to learn effectively in the target situation.

Most ESP classrooms still working on teacher-centeredness, and traditional transmission of knowledge. Therefore, it was the task of instructors to engage their students in inside and outside

activities, to take part in selecting suitable tasks to be motivated to learn. EBE learners faced difficulty in determining the lacks in their learning process. They did not know how to share their knowledge and experiences inside the classroom. They lacked the way to work collaboratively. They wanted to handle their learning process but they lacked effective strategies that could help them perform several tasks.

Language teachers need to enhance their learners by developing their reflection. In this vein, most teachers need to develop their reflective practice to develop students' learning (Barnett and Coate, 2005). Teachers need to engage themselves in reflective processes to promote reflective learning and lifelong experiences. The experience is important to develop the process of learning among students. It also improves their skills, capacities, techniques, as implicit elements for reflective learning (Barnett, 1997). A set of techniques may enhance reflective learning in a task-based: First, turn-taking: all students need to be heard. Second, acute listening: creating suitable conditions in collective manners. Then, respect the views: managing situations where students take place while performing their tasks. Genuine openness: to make learners feel at ease, and self-confidence. Other techniques may develop reflective learning such as keeping procedures and principles to reach valuable data. Emphasizing on mental context and environment. Differentiating in tasks and activities. Focusing on assessment and feedback as a process during the whole learning activity (Harvey and Knight, 1996).

4. Conclusion:

This study contributed to the current studies surrounding reflection and ESP. It has an important role in shaping the educational system. Reflective learning as a learning process promotes the use of skills, techniques, strategies, styles, competencies, experiences to challenge the situations that may encounter EBE students. Whether it would be academic or professional careers. EBE students need to be active learners, responsible, as well as autonomous. On the other hand, language teachers are required to set up some instructional strategies to trigger the knowledge of their students. The teaching/ learning process fails just because instructors spoon-feed their learners and do not create an atmosphere where learners are engaged in relevant tasks. In addition to that, teachers have no more the ability to abandon their classical practices. They need to reflect in their classes to foster the learning process of EBE students.

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