Towards a Multi Levelled Approach in ESP Course Design

for Algerian Economy Students

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss in a descriptive manner how the situation of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses in Algerian universities, namely at the university of Ammar thledji, Laghouat (the department of economics) and if it describes and reflects in a broader scope the aspirations of undergraduate students and reform policies that were taken to catch-up with the rapidly changing business world scene.

In a constant research for upgrade and development , this paper also tends to examine how Business English is introduced and what kind of course design approach is used In each ESP course so as to reach a better integration of the requirements of an adequate ESP course from Needs analysis , students , teachers , experts , practitioners , Present situation analysis (PSA) , Target situation Analysis (TSA), Learning situation analysis (LSA), Theoretical views of Language and learning .

The research describes in a qualitative manner the spheres of ESP teaching and teachers .

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1. Introduction

English is considered to be a "Lingua Franca" that is a language adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different. The status of the latter as an International Language has pushed an unprecedented wave of people required to learn English, which has resulted in an intensive demand for the teachers of English. However, the gradual economic globalization, among other political factors, has brought about the need to develop specified courses within English Language Teaching (ELT) that is, the teaching of ESP (English for Specific Purposes).

"In order to increase the visibility of research in higher education institutions," Bouzid wrote, *"and to open up to the international environment … it has been decided to set up a think-tank of specialists and administration officials to present proposals for promoting the use of English in teaching and research."* Correspondingly, a proposal by the Algerian minister of higher education to promote English as an official language of teaching and administration at the country's universities received positive reactions as the government wishes to boost the nation's ability to compete on an international level and what better alternative to French than English.

According to Robinson, (1991), 'English for a specific purpose is now a major activity around the world. It is a company engaged in education and training and practice and has taken up three main areas of knowledge: language, pedagogy and specific areas of interest for students.'

In this sense , English for specific purposes (ESP) usually refers to teaching the English language to university students (undergraduates) or employed staff with relevance and reference to the vocabulary and skills they need. As with any language taught for specific purposes, a given course of ESP will focus on one occupation or profession otherwise it would become English for General Purposes (EGP).

The scope of ESP encompasses areas like Technical English, Scientific English, English for medical professionals, English for waiters, English for tourism, Business English etc.

Francesco Pierini (University of Genova, Italy) states that *"When we use the expression Business English (BE) we refer to a very wide area of study and applications used mainly in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), concerning the use of English in the working environment. As such, it may require very versatile and complex linguistic and extra-linguistic skills, because it is used in many situations, in both oral and written interaction ".*

Business English in definition is controversial and paradoxical to many ESP teachers as it means different things to different people. For some, it focuses on vocabulary and topics used in the worlds of business, trade, finance, and international relations. For others it refers to the communication skills used in the workplace, and focuses on the language and skills needed for typical business

communicationsuchas presentations, negotiations, meetings, smalltalk,socializing, correspondence, report writing, and a systematic approach.

2.*The Research Problem*

Lately, ESP has gained lots of popularity at the level of PhD contests As the ministry has made it compulsory to every single field of expertise. The repercussions of such transition are evident in the sense that teachers today, need to update their savoir-faire vis-à-vis the methodology in selecting and adapting materials that are specific ,contextualized , relevant and eventually measurable. It is thought provoking to realize that the University of Ammar Thledji does not offer a master's degree in ESP. Thus , Trainee teachers are left to themselves to take charge as to the decision to develop ESP courses to students from different fields namely Economics .

Furthermore, Undergraduate and master students are given the opportunity to teach ESP without having any clue about the requirements of the position nor the course book that should be issued by the ministry of higher education. In terms of grading and evaluation, English module receives little attention if none. students realizing that such a module possesses the lowest coefficient gives the impression that it is marginalized and additional.

3.*Objectives of the Research*

This research seeks to

- review the situation of ESP teaching through an observation phase of the present situation.

- Sketch a roadmap to ESP course design approaches.

- Indicate the need for an adequate application of ESP as well as a training for novice teachers.

- Interpret results and recommendations to foster intake and meet needs and objectives of the rapidly changing economic scene.

4.Methodology

The purpose of the present study is to explore the scopes of teaching ESP in the department of economics . The focused group discussion was conducted with six ESP teachers at Ammar thledji in order to know their pre-requisites vis a vis teaching specialized courses.

4.1 Instruments:

As part of the pilot study, the focus group discussion with teachers aimed to investigate teachers views on the implementation of a variety of approaches to teach ESP and whether the current teaching practices are seen as effective and insightful. In addition, the primary focus of the research was directed towards teachers because it is pretty obvious that their methodological conducts affects heavily the reach of the objectives.

4.2 Analysis of Teachers' Interview

4.2.1 Have you ever been trained to teach ESP ?

None of the respondents had a formal training in ESP course design as they all said that they were recruited because they had a license or a master degree in English didactics, literature or civilization.

4.2.2 Have you ever conducted a needs analysis?

Most respondents said they asked students about their fields in an attempt to understand the scopes and horizons of teaching a specific variety of the English course while others said that they were given a canvas that included grammatical notions that should be incorporated in lesson planning.

4.2.3 Do you think that teaching ESP is exclusively about teaching a specific thematic genre of English ?

Teachers all seem to agree on that topics and reading passages should be contextualized to learners' fields and there must be a fixed syllabus given by the administration so as to facilitate teaching for the recently appointed teachers.

4.2.4 Do you think that the way you teach English raises students' motivation and interest?

Teachers confirmed that learners intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were at risk as they simply felt that courses courses couldn't cater for individual differences and desires. Such a

confirmation holds the fact that conducting a needs analysis before designing a course is out of a huge importance. Furthermore, the educational setting and the importance of the course are also affecting variables.

4.3 Sketching the road map

The focus group discussion confirmed the purpose of this study. we may deduce that the methodological readiness is not taken as a priority in teaching ESP. Furthermore, Teachers in-service training were not offered at any time of the course period. In fact, English specialized courses merely focused on grammatical notions that resulted in a poor students performance, poor results and a low

level of motivation. therefore, It is important to note that this study will attempt to set a methodological guideline that helps teachers to design courses that reach the resirable exit students profile.

4.4 Needs Analysis in ESP

Reliable and learner-centered educational curricula and syllabi should be planned and implemented by taking learners' needs, wants and lacks into account (Richards, 2001, p.51). Needs Analysis can be defined as the 'procedures used to collect information about learners' needs. Needs Analysis is employed to find out what learners know, what they can do and what they need to learn or do, and to what extent this addresses their wants as well. Carrying out needs analysis in a foreign language classroom is a prerequisite to examine, if the syllabus or the course addresses the students' needs, to detect what language skills they need to improve, and to collect information about difficulties or problems that they might have.

4.4.1 Conducting Needs Analysis

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) ensures designing courses to meet learners' needs. Two vital devices of determining the needs are target needs and learning needs. The term target needs refers to what learners need to do in the target situation while needs consist of three components- necessities, lacks, and wants.

Needs analysis is at the very heart of ESP as it represents the first and the most fundamental process in designing a course that tends to provide raw data about the genres , functions and skills that are necessary to draw the goals and objectives of the teaching learning process. In Addition, the equation is evident that if needs are clear, the learning aims can be expressed more easily and the language course can become insightful. The selection of tasks and materials can also be based on the results of the analysis. Knowing the decision makers'

needs can also be valuable in determining the standard of achievement in the assessment and evaluation process.

4.4.2 Considerations in Needs analysis

There are certain questions to raise when it comes to examining learners needs. Hence, ESP teachers need to design a questionnaire or a pilot study so as to broaden the scopes of the study.

1.Why introducing ESP? academically / vocationally / both / other reasons (e.g. exam preparation)

2. In what areas of the language will the student use the language?

Medium: speaking, writing, reading, etc.

Channel: telephone, face to face, emails

Types of discourse: academic research, lectures, random conversations, technical manuals and catalogues.

1. What pre-requisites does the learner possess? Beginner, intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced.

2. Who will the learner use the language with? Native speakers or non-native Level of knowledge of receiver: expert, non-expert.

Relationship: colleague, teacher, customer, superior, subordinate

3. What kind of setting will the language be used in? office, lecture, hotel, workshop, presentations, research , online video-conferences.

4. At what pace intervals will the language be used? frequently, Always, rarely.

4.5 Determination of Goals and Objectives of the Course

The goals and the objectives can be drawn from the results of the needs analysis. Since ESP mainly deals with adult learners preparing for the work place, the goals and the objectives should relate to those needs accordingly.

5. Course Design

The next step to be followed is sketching the content; that is choosing and analyzing the necessary content relevant to the needs analysis and objectives. Reilly (1988, in Xeno dohidis, 2006) gives some practical guidelines to content choice and design. According to Relly, we need to:

• Define what the students should be able to do as exactly and realistically as possible, as a result of instruction.

• grade the courses in order of importance and comprehension according to the desired outcomes

• Evaluate available resources and match them with the course;

• translate decisions into actual teaching units. In this stage, we need to identify language function and language expression related to the specific field.

5.1 Materials Development and Design

According to Graves (1996), in order to select materials, the following issues should be taken into account:

• **Appropriateness of the materials**, so that the students will feel at ease. This means that the material will be relevant to their interests and language level.

• **Applicability**, the material should be tailored to the students" capabilities and the course should not prove too be out of reach for them. Choosing materials may mean development of new material, collection of various materials or adaptation of existing ones.

The source of materials can be:

a. From published materials (textbooks, journals, magazines)

b. From real speech (lecturers, hotel communication, seminars)

c. Specially written

d. Simplified and adapted from public materials or instances of real speech.

5.2 Content Organization

Course selection and arrangement is important since it provides the teacher and the students with a clear idea of what will be taught (Xenodohidis, 2006). In addition, Xenodohidis mentioned two principles under lying the concept of sequencing material; building and recycling. Building can follow the process of the simple to the more complex, from concrete to more open ended. Another way of sequencing materials is the cyclical approach where the teacher introduces a cycle of activities following a consistent sequence. In a matrix approach, the teacher works with some activities and as time passes, decides which ones suit the best (Graves, 1996, in Xenodohidis, 2006).

5.3 Evaluation and Assessment

The final stage in ESP course design is concerned with evaluating the results of implementing the previous stages. Hence, it is indispensable for both ESP teachers and learners to determine whether their aims and objectives were attained or not. Dudley -Evans and St. John (1998, p.13) define evaluation as "a process which starts with the specification of what information to be collected and which ends with the production of changes in the present activities or future ones." In fact, evaluation stage attempts to reveal the learners' progress and to what extent the course was effective. Moreover, it can detect the aspects that were not successfully covered in the learning situation. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) propose two levels of evaluation mainly: "learners' assessment" and "course evaluation".

6. Approaches to Course Design :

This approach is known as Task-Based Approach (TBA).Task based approach to language teaching is a recent view which is based on the findings of linguists and psychologists. This approach is against traditional approaches such as PPP(presentation, practice, production) model of teaching (Foster, 1999, in Songhori, 2006). Task based syllabus which is the corner stone of TBA is defined by Richards, et.al. (1991, in Songhori,2006) as: "a syllabus which is organized around tasks, rather than in grammar or vocabulary. Hutchinson and Waters (1987:65) identify three main approaches to ESP course design: language-centered, learning-centered and skills-centered.

6.1 Language-centered courses are characterized by a direct connection between the target situation and the content of the ESP course. It usually starts from the identification of the linguistic features of the target situation in order to describe the students' needs and to create a syllabus and evaluation procedures after the course materials are designed. Without declining the obvious positive aspects of the language-centered approach to course design yet it had been proven to be significantly less adequate to cater for:

• The only aspect in relationship to which the learner is taken into consideration is the identification of the target situation;

• The assumption that the systematic analysis and presentation of linguistic data characterizing a certain type of specialized discourse will produce systematic learning in the learner. (Bastrurkmen, 2010:59)

• The language centered analysis of target situation data is only at the surface level. It reveals very

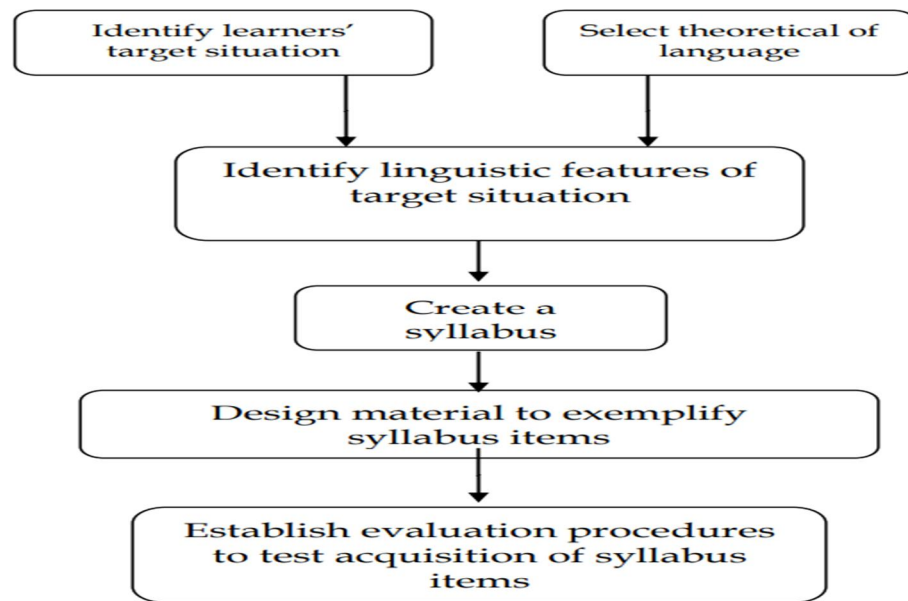little about the competence that underlies the performance.

Figure 1: Language-centered approach

6.2 The learning-centered approach to Course Design

This approach starts from the assumption that the learner is the most important factor in the learning process, or to put it differently, it is based on the principle that learning is totally determined by the learner who uses his knowledge and skills to process new information. This type of approach takes into account more complex factors, such as the principle that learning is not just a mental process, but a process of negotiation between individuals and society, in which both the target situation and the learner's level of linguistic competence influence the features of the course. We believe it is important to discuss Hutchinson and Waters (1987:72)' distinction between the learning-centred and learner –centered approaches. They prefer the concept of learning-centered course design in order to suggest that this type of approach is focused and tailored on students needs.
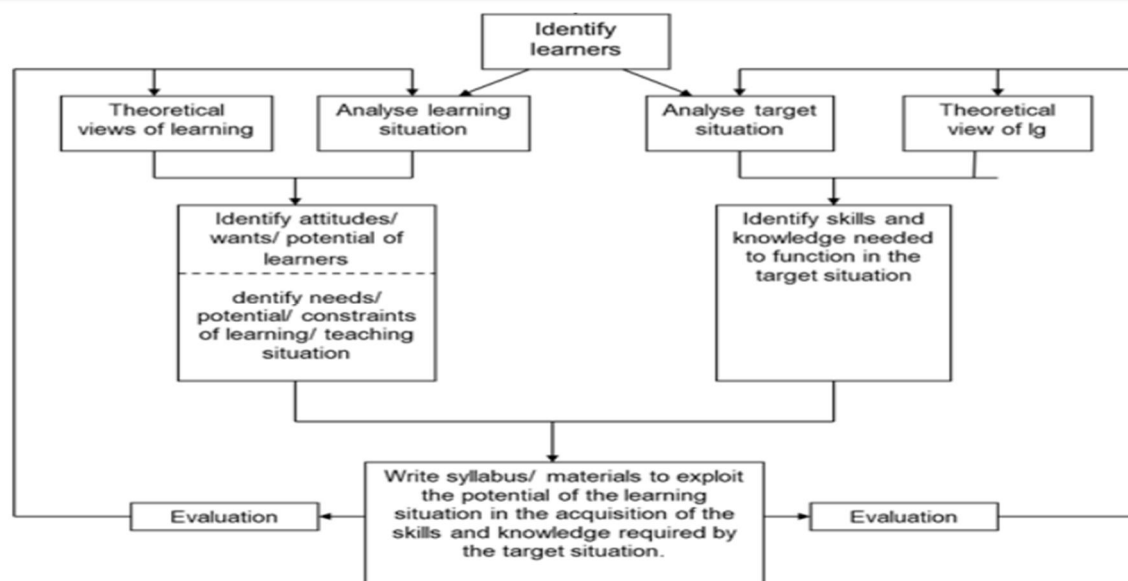
Figure 2: Learning-centered approach

6.3 skills-centered approach to Course Design

This approach focuses on the development of skills, competencies and strategies that are presumably used in the workplace and may be reproduced in real life, the latter is based on the theoretical hypothesis that underling any language behavior there are certain skills and strategies, which the learner uses in order to produce or comprehend discourse (Creswell, 2003:124). Besides, there is a pragmatic basis for the skills-centred approach derived from an important distinction made by Widdowson (1981: 257) between goal-oriented courses and process-oriented courses. The skills-centered approach to course design views language in terms of how the mind of the learner processes it rather than as an entity in itself and approaches the learner as a user of language rather than as a learner of language.
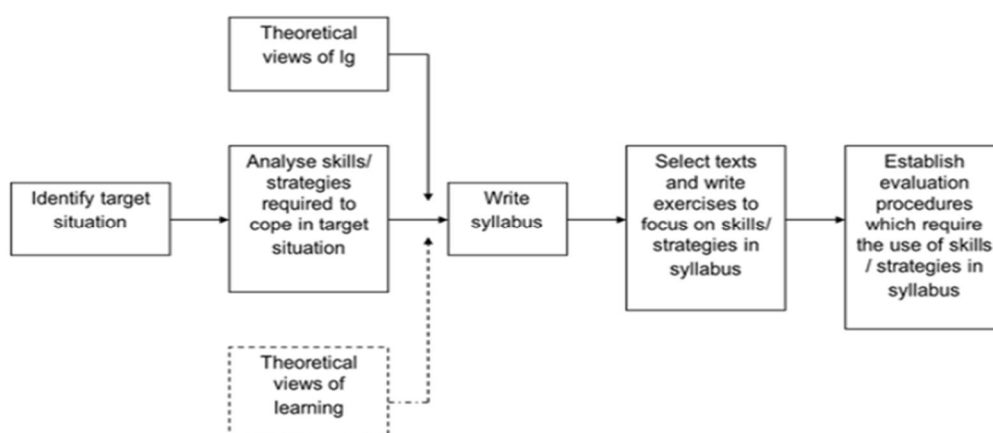

Figure 3: Skills-centered approach

6.4 The Multi-Levelled Approach to Course Design

Researchers in the field have sought to look for a methodology by which teachers teach less and learners learn more proving that current problems in the field of ESP are results of faulty teaching that does not necessarily and exclusively meet the requirements of the course objectives.

An integration of the previously mentioned approaches namely language-centered learning, skills-centered leaning and learning-centered approach. It is based on the belief that if all approaches are considered and combined together throughout lesson planning and syllabus design. Students on the other end wouldn't find difficulty in maximizing their needs and aspirations vis-à-vis their future endeavors either academically or vocationally.
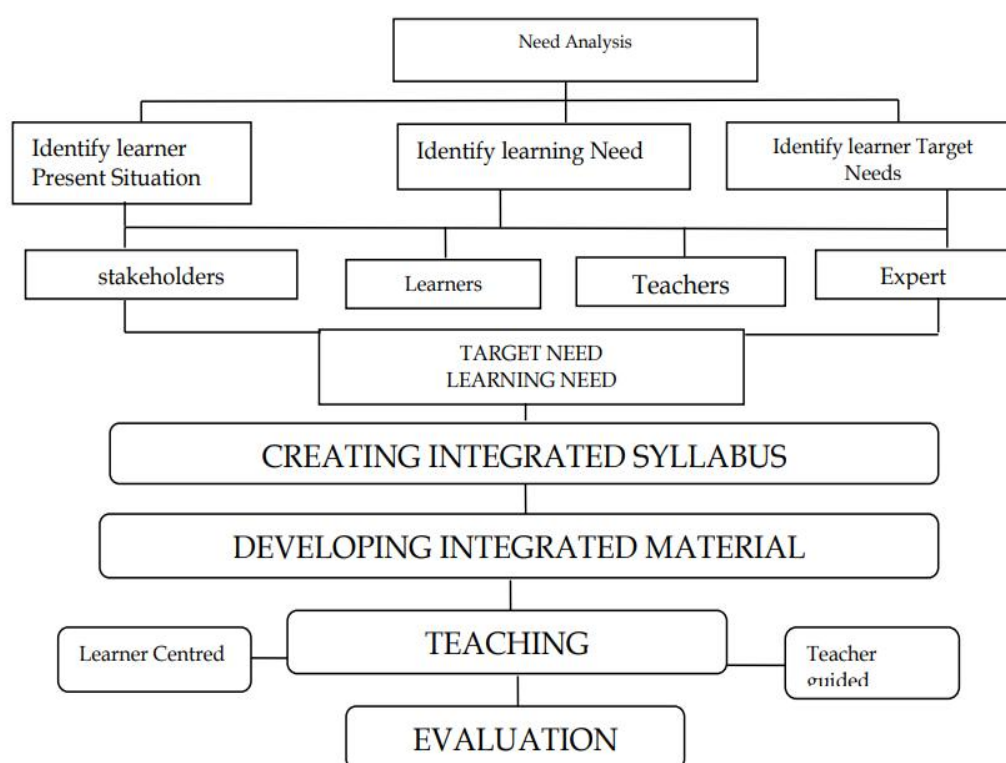

Figure 4: The multi-levelled Approach

Conclusion

In conclusion, the eclectic use of a variety approaches in the design of an ESP course is an obligation in teaching specialized courses today as it highlights the importance of linguistic, functional and situational language. Moreover, a better understanding of how the mind of the learner operates and processes instead of thinking of him as a human with lacks while the ultimate objective remains to activate learners' consciousness to achieve progress along the course.

Ultimately, course design is about looking at the current situation and thinking of a future situation once the learner achieves course objectives. The incorporation of three elements: PSA (present situation. analysis), TSA (target situation analysis), and LSA (learning situation analysis), as well as sources of students, teachers, practitioners and experts. The three components of need analysis are integrated in the analysis. ESP course, assume to have several different approaches: language-centered, skill-centered and learning-centered. For example, if we are trying to design an ESP course using a Learning Based approach, this will mean that what is accomplished is fully decided by the learner, although the selection and grading of lessons is fully decided by the teachers. In this sense , we need to understand which approach we want to apply to this course and how this course should designed , planned and evaluated.

All in all, the pilot study was considered very insightful. From the focused group discussion with teachers, we may deduce that the inclusion of a professional training in ESP course design provides teachers with an opportunity to have a full grasp of the nature of learning and how to maximize the learnability of English in the time span offered.

Through the interview, teachers showed great enthusiasm towards In-service trainings as it has been thought that coping with the personal needs of learners would increase motivation to learn. In fact, motivation should be one of the major areas of research in the field of course. Additionally, part-time teachers considered that the learning and professional growth strategies acquired throughout this kind of trainings would be very valuable for their future careers.

To conclude, the study has proved to be very valuable, and worthwhile despite the short span of time. While, the philosophy of integration and implementation of these approaches, the solutions and proposals discussed in this paper should be under consideration and further research. Hopefully, the effort the research claims will facilitate learning and make it a more effective and enjoyable experience. Only time and further experimentation will provide answers to the questions that inevitably arise in the rapidly changing world. In this sense, this paper is only a first approach to be further discussed by further study and application in the near future.

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