Designing Tourism English Syllabi

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Abstract

English is very significant in the tourism sector. Thus, Algerian syllabus designers are keen to develop special courses in this field to better the level of tourism personnel and students by integrating English language courses specific to tourism purposes at the universities and tourism schools. This research attempts to explore the effectiveness of the current English language syllabus among second year licence students at the National Superior School of Tourism in Algiers, to explore the potential deficiencies, reform the existing syllabus, and enrich the linguistic field of tourism in Algeria. The research adopted multiple study tools and sources. The results revealed the absence of a constant syllabus. It is assumed that the lessons provided are not feasible. Thus, educational competencies priority should be reconsidered and the existing syllabus should be amended to meet the students' needs.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, English for Tourism Purposes, Needs Analysis, Syllabus Design

INTRODUCTION

Considered one of the largest industries in the world, tourism plays a significant role in the life of individuals and societies, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Statistics from the same body revealed that a tenth of the world GDP stems from tourism industry. Tourism offers one tenth of the world jobs, as well (UNWTO, 2022). Among many other criteria, the language used by employees plays an eminent role that contributes to the development of tourism. Algerian tourism students are expected to be future staff in their field. Their endear vour is to have good communicative skills and good command of English, which is the common language of international tourism. To that end, appropriate tourism English courses should be offered to the students. To design these courses, a needs analysis is to be conducted with them in order to detect their exact requirements.

The present paper is an attempt to design an English syllabus addressing the Algerian students of tourism in order to help them cope with their potential difficulties and overcome their probable linguistic obstacles when delivering services to foreign tourists. The paper contains five main sections, including this introduction. The second section reviews the literature of the major headings of the topic including: Tourism, English for Specific Purposes, English for Tourism Purposes, Needs Analysis, and Syllabus Design. The methodology section comes next where data collection sources and elements are presented, including participants (students and teachers) and instruments (questionnaire and interviews). Next section displays the findings of the study and discusses them; the last concludes the study.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Tourism

Tourism is a major source of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of many big economies in the world. In 1992, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) released the first estimations indicating that travel and tourism is one of the world's largest industries and a generator of quality jobs, according to Goeldner and Richie (2006). Edgell et al., (2008) claim that tourism is the most valuable industry in many communities and countries throughout the world. According to Theobald (2005), it had become the largest industry and largest employer in the world by 1992.

Jafari (2000) considers tourism as the study of man (the tourist) away from his usual habitat, of the touristic apparatus and networks responding to his various needs, and of the ordinary (where the tourist is coming from) and non-ordinary (where the tourist goes to) worlds and their dialectic relationships. Mitchell (2006) sees tourism as the temporary movement of people to places other than work or home, the activities undertaken during their stay, and the facilities created to meet their needs. Goeldner and Ritchie (2006) define tourism as the processes, activities, and outcomes arising from the relationships and the interactions among tourists, tourism suppliers, host governments, host communities, and surrounding environments that are involved in the attracting and hosting of visitors.

1.2. English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become among the most significant areas of teaching English as a foreign language since its official appearance in the early 1960's. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) ask a question: Why does this learner need to learn a foreign language? Their question set the ground for ESP courses giving learners' needs dominance on the ESP stage. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 19) define ESP as an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reason in learning. It is a learner-centered approach in teaching English as an additional language focusing on developing communicative competencies in a specific discipline. Robinson (1991: 3) bases the definition of ESP on two criteria:

- ESP is 'goal-directed', and
- its courses develop from a needs analysis which aims to specify what exactly students have to do through the medium of English, and they are constrained by a limited time period in which their objectives have to be achieved and are taught to adults in homogenous classes in terms of the work or specialist studies that the students are involved in.

Dudley-Evans (1997) considers ESP to have two types of characteristics, absolute and variable:

Table 1 *Characteristics of ESP*

Absolute	Variable
1. It meets specific needs of the learners.	1. It may be related to or designed for specific disciplines.
2. It makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves.	2. It may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English.
3. It is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.	3. It is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level.
	4. It is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.
	5. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems.

1.3. English for Tourism Purposes

The first comprehensive study on the language of tourism and its influence on the behaviour of people is Graham Dann's crucial work *The Language of Tourism* (1996); in which the author claims that the tourism industry exploits language to allure and control tourists and their experience of the destination. Dann (1996) argues that the language of tourism attempts to persuade, lure, woo and seduce

millions of human beings via many forms and convert them from potential into actual clients.

Durán Muñoz (2011) claims that tourism has a discourse of its own; it has recently started to be investigated from a linguistic perspective. The language of tourism is thus more than a metaphor. The author considers tourism language an element joining tourists and the places and cultures they visit. Agorni (2012) considers the language of tourism a form of cultural mediation translating cultural values and promoting the identity of specific communities and geographical areas. According to Sager, Dungworth and McDonald (1980), the language of tourism has successfully combined components drawn from everyday language together with specifically-devised elements referring to the most specialized concepts.

English is the mostly used language in international tourism (Zahedpisheh Abu bakar & Saffari, 2017). Quality tourism urges those in charge of delivering services to be competent in English. It is necessary to teach tourism employees the type of English language that helps them properly perform their duties. English for Tourism Purposes (ETP) is the branch of ESP that adopts its parental characteristics and offers courses specific to tourism and hospitality. ETP main goal is to prepare and engage competent and proficient front-line staff able to have a good command of English that serves their proper needs. Cravotta (1990) urges those in the field of tourism to be proficient in English to fulfil their responsibilities. Dann (2001) argues that the language used in tourism is special, and it uses a system of symbols based on conventional communicative activities and functions, such as, giving directions, and offering and requesting information.

1.4. Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is certainly the most significant feature of ESP. It is the foundation of any pedagogical work within an ESP context. It is the concrete manifestation that stimulates the quest for systematic investigation and discovery, and prompts efficient change and refinement making the learning/teaching process more manageable and evaluable. It addresses the goals of the syllabus and ensures the relevance and usefulness of its content. It examines the learners' knowledge and decides what they precisely need to know. Nunan (1988) states that needs analysis is a starting point of syllabus design. He argues that needs analysis comprises some "techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in syllabus design" (p. 30). Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p. 121) state that needs analysis is "the process of establishing the *what* and *how* of a course."

Bachman and Palmer (1996, p. 2) argue that "needs analysis, or needs assessment, involves the systematic gathering of specific information about the needs of the learners and the analysis of this information for purposes of language syllabus design." Needs analysis can be performed using several methods, as offered by Robinson (1991), including questionnaires and interviews, among others. These methods can be combined or conducted independently.

1.5. Syllabus Design

An ESP syllabus aims at equipping learners with certain English proficiency for a situation where the language is going to be used. Any decision made in

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designing language teaching syllabi should be attached to the learners' needs for learning English. Designing syllabi means making decisions about 1) what to teach and 2) in what order. Munby (1987) considers syllabus design as specifying the content to be taught and organizing it into appropriate learning units, including:

- progress from known to unknown,
- appropriate size of teaching units,
- a proper variety of activities,
- teachability, and
- creating a sense of purpose for students.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study mixed qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to deepen the investigation measures. Combining different methods and sources in collecting and analyzing data provides broader perspectives about the phenomenon under investigation, enriches and confirms the study findings, and promotes the research validity and reliability (Flick, 1992). This approach uses different instruments to collect data from different people to serve the same research work in order to compare the results obtained. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to thirty six second year licence students at the National Superior School of Tourism (NSST) in Algiers, and a semi-structured interview was conducted with two of their English teachers.

The study aims at answering the following questions:

1. Is there a specialized syllabus for tourism students?
2. What are the needs of the students, from their teachers' and their own perspectives?
3. Are the students satisfied with the English they learn?

2. 1. Participants

Thirty six second year licence tourism students and two teachers of English language at NSST participated in the current study. The rationale behind choosing second year students as participants in the study lied in their having been exposed to a full school academic programme during their first year (2020-2021) while the duration of their programme is three years.

2.2. Data Collection

The process of gathering data is the first phase of the study. It serves to collect raw information from the participants of the study in order to be examined, compared and evaluated. The data was gathered from different sources, including students and teachers, using different tools, questionnaire and interviews.

2.2.1. Questionnaire

Semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix A) was administered to the students and the answers were analysed mostly quantitatively. The main aim was to arrive at a sample that would best serve the purpose and objectives of the study. The main

concern was to identify the learners' needs and the proposed training practices and materials in order to provide suitable outputs of trainings and facilities. The questionnaire contained four sections including the students' personal information; their level, weaknesses, and linguistic performance; their attitudes and perceptions about the current learning situation, the existing English programme, and ETP materials used in the programme; and their needs, lacks, and preferences.

2.2.2. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews (Appendix B) were conducted with the English teachers at NSST, most of their content would be treated qualitatively. The interviews with school teachers were designed to get in-depth information about the needs and the language expectations of the students in order to design an ESP syllabus helping them cope with their future occupations as front line worker in the domain of tourism. The aim of the interviews was to get the respondents' perceptions in what concerns the English language skills needed by the learners to be taken into consideration while the researcher tends to design an ESP programme for the learners of tourism.

The present researcher developed a list of semi-structured open-ended questions. The main concern of the researcher was the process of implementing the programme and the factors influencing it, the situation of the English language in the current syllabus of the school, the existing English syllabus and its relation with the domain of the specialty, the classroom activities, the students' English language level, difficulties and needs, and the skills mostly needed by the learners. Another aspect of conducting the interviews was to obtain more information regarding the type of the materials provided, and the areas of difficulty teachers may face while offering English instructions.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the empirical investigation including the data gathered from the questionnaire delivered to the students and the interviews with their teachers.

3. 1. Questionnaire

There were 22 female representing around 60%, and 14 male students, nearly 40%, whose ages ranged between 19 and 20 years old.

When asked about their proficiency level concerning grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading and writing, the majority of the respondents seemed to have a level ranging from good 44% to acceptable 33% in what concerns reading; 11% of them said they were very good in reading and the remaining 11% said that their level was weak. The students' level in pronunciation was acceptable for 47% of them; 36% of them said they were good at it; and 17% said that they were weak at pronunciation. Vocabulary appeared to be acceptable for 44% of them, good for 28%, and weak for the other 28%. 50% of them said that they were weak in grammar. 28% said that their level was acceptable; and 22% of them said that their grammar was good. 56% students said that they had an acceptable

level at listening; 16% were good at it; and 28% were weak. Writing was among the weakest skills for the students. 16% of them said they were very weak at writing; 22% said that they had a weak level; 50% of them said that their level was acceptable; and 11% said that they were good at it. Speaking was the weakest skill according to the results of the survey. 16% said that they were very weak at speaking; 33% said that their level was weak; 33% of them said they had an acceptable level; and 16% with a good level. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 2 *Students' Proficiency Level*

	Very good	Good	Acceptable	Weak	Very weak
Grammar		22%	28%	50%	
Vocabulary		28%	44%	28%	
Pronunciation		36%	47%	17%	
Listening		16%	56%	28%	
Speaking		16%	33%	33%	16%
Reading	11%	44%	33%	11%	
Writing		11%	50%	22%	16%

Students were asked then to rank listening, speaking, reading, and writing according to their degrees of difficulty. Table 4 below summarizes the results as follows: around 42% of them considered writing the most difficult skill; 36% went for speaking; nearly 17% for listening; and only 6% considered reading the most difficult skill.

When asked about the content of the current English course, 33% said that the course contained tourism English, and 67% of them considered the course a combination of specialized English, ETP, and general English GE.

Then they were asked about the content of the existing English course. 28% said it was very interesting, and 72% considered it interesting.

The next question was about their perception of the current English language programme. 14% of them said they were very satisfied with the programme; 58% of them found it satisfactory; and 28% of them, said that it was quite satisfactory.

When asked about the aspects of English they would recommend to have priority in the ETP class (They were allowed to have multiple choices from the list.), speaking was given a striking majority representing 94%. Listening and writing got a good consideration of 83% each; grammar 67%; vocabulary 44%; and reading ranked last with 28%.

CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to analyze the needs of Algerian tourism students in order to design a suitable English syllabus that meets their expectations. The findings of the study revealed that the current syllabus did not properly meet the students' needs. It lacked unity of reference and neglected some important aspects of the language which seemed much needed to the students, namely writing and speaking. The results showed that there was no clear syllabus for the school to

adopt as teachers varied their sources in the teaching process and used different references not specific to tourism and hospitality domain offering no specific course to the students. Analyzing the students' needs helped the present researcher gain in-depth insights into the students' precise requirements and necessities. Identifying the learners' needs is a major step towards designing a syllabus that meets their aspirations.

The study results revealed some shortage aspects within the existing syllabus that should be given reconsideration and remedy in the target syllabus. Skill acquirement should be addressed in the newly set syllabus. The decision upon the skill priority should be based on the study results; writing and speaking, for instance, should be prioritized. Much more time should be allotted to the English course in order for the instructors to achieve their objectives. The study significance lies in providing a well-grounded foundation to design an appropriate syllabus carefully tailored to meet the Algerian tourism students' needs and bridge the prevailing gaps. It gives them the ability to skilfully engage in communication within their own English speaking domain and have good command of the language. The study final outcome will be beneficial to teachers, as well; it provides adequate guidelines to maintain the course cohesion; attain the skill, integration, acquirement, and balance; and achieve the course objectives, final goals, and desired ends.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

Put a tick (✔) or fill in with what is appropriate.
SECTION - I: Students' Personal Information

Gender: Male (   )
Female (   )

Age: …… years old

SECTION - II: Students' Level, Weaknesses, and Linguistic Performance

1- What is your English proficiency level in the following language areas? Put a tick (✔) where appropriate, please.

	very good	good	acceptable	weak	very weak
grammar					
vocabulary					
pronunciation					
listening					
speaking					
reading					
writing					

2- Which of the following skills do find difficult?
Rank them, please, from 1 to 4 according to their degree of difficulty. (1: most difficult, 2: difficult, 3: less difficult, 4: least difficult)

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing

SECTION - III: Current Learning Situation, English Programme, and ETP Materials

1.

What does the current English course chiefly teach you?
a. Tourism English (   )
b. General English (   )
c. Both (   )

2. How do you find the content of your English language course?
Very interesting   Interesting   Boring   Do not know

3. How do you find the current English language programme?

- Very satisfactory
- Satisfactory
- Quite satisfactory
- Not satisfactory

4. How do you find the existing English course which you are studying in the school?

     (a) Very useful ( )
     (b) Useful ( )
     (c) Fairly useful ( )
     (d) Not useful ( )

5. Rate the benefits of the English course in relation to the following language skills:

     (a) Listening (....... %)
     (b) Speaking (....... %)
     (c) Reading (....... %)
     (d) Writing (....... %)

SECTION-IV: Students' Needs and Preferences

6. Which aspects of English language would you recommend to focus on in the ETP course? You can choose more than one item.

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing
- Grammar
- Vocabulary

APPENDIX B
Interview

1. How do you find the students' level in English?
2. Do you focus more on improving
   Listening and speaking skills   Reading and writing skills   Vocabulary and grammar Other (explain)
3. Is there any official syllabus or textbook for students?
4. According to you what are the lacks of students in English?
5. How do you find the contents of your present English courses?
6. Do you think that the time allotted to the English course is sufficient to reach your objectives?

TO QUOTE THE AUTTHOR :

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