An Online EST Course Through Stakeholders' Lenses in The University of Tlemcen, Algeria

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ABSTRACT: *Investigating the perspectives of stakeholders in an online EST course was the subject of this study. Asynchronous interviews were designed and delivered using Google Forms and completed by three subject matter experts and administrators of the Tlemcen University, Faculty of Technology, an EST teacher participated also. The sample composed of PhD's, Professors and Administrators with broad experience in teaching, research, publishing, industry and engineering faculty administration is deemed adequate for a qualitative study. Psychological factors and participation were deemed important factors to course success. The benefit from this technology can be achieved through technical expertise by incorporating diverse tools and resources. The challenges reported are mainly strength of connection and the necessity to adapt the courses to the current standards. Although favoring subject matter experts to deliver an EST course, a friendly collaborative atmosphere, already present, can help address the subjective course goals and include the learner in an inclusive Needs driven EST course.*

Introduction

Globalized ecosystems are emerging in every field instilling with them a new communication standard "that is marked by the dominance of the Anglo-American norm in the globalized academia is compounded by the traditionally privileged role of standard British and American English and the model position of the native speaker" (Chovanec, 2012, p. 7).

[8]

Therefore, "the teaching of English as an international language (EIL) cannot remain insulated and isolated from globalization's impact on the formation of individual identities of English language learners, teachers, and teacher educators around the world" (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 9).

The numbers are self-explanatory: "Investigation has determined that 85% of international associations operate by using official English, 85% of the scientific articles in the world are published in English, 80% of electronically gathered data is published in English, 70% of the semantic journals worldwide are written exclusively in English (Crystal, 1997).

The globalization of the professions and fields has motivated the need for special types of course, thus giving birth to the English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Strevens (1980) writes that "ESP entails the provision of English language instructions, however, devised to meet the learner's particular needs, related in themes and topics to designated occupations or areas of study; selective as to language content; when indicated, restricted as to the language skills included" (1980, p. 108). Holden writes similarly: "one of the more valuable aspects of ESP is that it has concentrated our minds on the ends which we seek to achieve" (1971, 11).

Much of the demand for ESP has come from scientists and technologists who need to learn English for a number of purposes connected with their specialization. It is natural, therefore, that English for Science and Technology (EST) should be an important aspect of ESP programs (Kennedy and Bolitho, 1990).

The ESP course seeks to develop working command of language increasing their access to information delivered by multinational organizations operating in the lingua franca, do research abroad or present it at international conferences (Davies, 2008).

In most universities English courses start at a false beginner level and the great majority of the students are in beginner, elementary and lower intermediate courses (Davies, 2008) which translates to "a substantial amount of time and energy required on the part of the teacher to provide an effective

course that meets the needs of learners at all levels" (McCormick & Jones, 1998).

When attempting cross collaborations "one of the hardest tasks of the ESP lecturer is dealing with a lack of formal schedule coordination. This is because the departmental priorities take precedence over the logic of scheduling English classes to coincide with immediate need (Brennan & van Naerssen, 1998). Bailey et al. stressed that "teachers themselves should make the decision ... as to whether or not to enter into a collaborative teaching arrangement" (1992).

Savas (2009), supporting this view, states: ESP teaching should be carried on by the collaboration of an EFL teacher with a content teacher. They can carry out ESP teaching scaffolding each other; the former provides the latter with methodology of language teaching while the latter makes the content meaningful, helping the EFL teacher learn content knowledge (p.399).

Bailey et al. (1992) suggests: "teachers should focus on goals rather than personalities to minimize power struggles. Recognizing one each-other's contributions and setting aside time for planning on a regular basis are two important factors related to the success of collaborative teaching".

The introduction of the online medium enables students to have access to courses via internet from any location and at any time. Harrison and Bergen (2000) state: "internet access is becoming more widespread and its capabilities for delivering multimedia lessons are improving daily; the Internet is becoming the vehicle of choice for distributing learning across distances" (p. 57).

The use of distance learning presents a challenge in the case of NA driven EST course since: "Evaluating outcomes, both in terms of assessing the learning process and evaluating learner satisfaction with the course, is a more complex process in an online classroom. It is further complicated by the orientation or requirements of the host institution for particular outcomes" (Rena and Pratt, 2018).

Problems related to online education

From a Psychological perspective, Craig Brod, sees that the online medium is "diminishing and altering our sense of self and of others,

creating new barriers to what we long for: intimacy, continuity, and community" (Shaffer and Anundsen, 1993, p. 133). Issues related to social presence are often reported in the online context which were less relevant in traditional classroom. The deprivation of the social cues that are necessary fro communication adds to the complexity (Pratt, 1996)

This psychological distress might result in the participation of students in the class activities where instructors pay attention to which students are posting and which are not. According to Harasim and others (1996) the problem is as follows: "A potential benefit of learning networks is that each student can participate equally in class discussions and activities; however, each student may not put in the same volume or quality of material. Differences based on student interest, ability, availability, or other considerations affect the upper and lower levels of participation. . . . some students may dominate or others refuse to participate" (p. 228).

For institutions & instructors, ''the shift to online distance learning continues to pose enormous challenges ... Some faculty members still believe that the online classroom is no different from the traditional one — that the approaches that work face-to-face will work when learners are separated from them and from each other by time and distance'' (Rena and Pratt, 2018)

Linda Harasim and her colleagues (1996), discussing the online classroom state: "The change in the concept of time that an instructor spends with students will present an even bigger challenge for the administrator. The time and effort an instructor expend becomes a linear function of the number of students in a class. Administrators can no longer economize on educational effort by increasing class size. The instructor can no longer adapt to class size by allowing less time for individual interaction with the students" (p. 232).

Brookfield and Preskill (2005) the instructor should take the opportunity to model good discussion and monitoring skills. In the same vein one means of ensuring that participants work together, is to establish participation guidelines at the outset. This still may not solve the problem of unequal participation, however.

Resources in distance learning

The problem that arises, then, is the allocation of resources, both tangible and intangible. The tangible resources are the hard-costs such as hardware, software, and faculty salaries, technical support, securing and maintenance of the system, items that have a specific cost attached and can be clearly budgeted. The intangible resources are elements such as training and support. Most of these costs are hidden from student view but are very real to university administrators, and they need somehow to be accounted for in budgets for online programs. (Pratt, Meyer, 2006)

Support and training:

(Wolcott & Haderlie, 1997) reports that teachers are more motivated to instruct in virtual classroom when this is included as part of their teaching schedule and not as an add-on and when they are compensated accordingly. The study states: "The amount of work required, together with the time involved to adapt instruction for distance delivery and to learn new skills associated with the technology, posed significant barriers to participation when added to an already heavy workload" (p. 15).

The teachers allegedly voiced a number of questions and concerns regarding the logistics of the online delivery, professional development, support, and obstacles."(Ringle & Updegrove, 1998).

Harrison and Bergen (2000) stressed that development consideration should also include training in course management, delivery systems, and the use of techniques in designing an effective online course.

Teacher roles in distance learning

The time spent in an online class is considerable compared to traditional classroom. Additional tasks such as online teaching, receiving and responding to emails, researching new knowledge to assist the development and revision of courses, learning the software, facilitation of the classroom and grading students work (Meyer, 2006). Administration The instructor in an online course is also the course administrator, who

posts a syllabus for the course, including assignments and some initial guidelines for the group to discuss and adopt or adapt. The instructor then gently facilitates the flow of the course and evaluates the outcomes (Pratt,1996).

Collins and Berge (1996) offered a categorization of the tasks and functions of the online teacher." A pedagogical function that revolves around educational facilitation. A social function, which we have described in relationship to the development of social presence and the online learning community, is the promotion of the friendly social environment essential to online learning. A managerial function involves norms in agenda setting, pacing, objective setting, rulemaking, and decision making. A technical function depends on the instructor first becoming comfortable and proficient with the technology used and then being able to transfer that level of comfort to the learners".

Materials

Properly aligning material to the online setup is challenging and time consuming for ESP instructors. Newmark (1971), I am suggesting that the "extensive" side of the extensive intensive reading debate is correct, that students profit more from reading for meaning, and reading great quantities of material, than from decoding difficult paragraphs, and that students gain more from participating in conversations, many conversations, than from focused listening comprehension exercises.

Methodology

The population

We administered Interviews designed specifically for the case of the University of Tlemcen EST course evaluation during the virtual teaching due to the pandemic outbreak in 2020. The faculty of Technology, with 3 subject matter experts and administrators and one EST teacher agreed and responded to our survey. The sample is composed of PhD's and Professors, who have a publication record, 10+ years subject matter expertise, experiences abroad and experiences in the industry. Coming from a rich background with administrative duties, the sample is

considered valuable for a qualitative research instrument such as interviews.

The respondents rather than simply taking the fourth-set meaning of the survey, would attempt decoding the questions as they are filling them in. This is considered since the intellectual levels of the participants is considerably higher than the average. Variances are thus due to idiosyncratic differences between respondents. The generalization of the findings is constrained due to the single institution sample that we employed.

The methods:

Qualitative research employs a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings and aims to help researchers to organize and describe subjective data in a systematic way (Glesne and Peshkin 1992). In our study qualitative data is gathered through interviews.

The survey comes as a qualitative measure in mixed methods study pinpointing EST course evaluation at the University of Tlemcen. The use of multiple sources supports the quantitative validation of the findings. The survey was delivered asynchronously using the 'Google Forms' tool during the lockdown in 2020. Anonymity of the respondent is maintained and results are discussed summarily.

Researchers have used qualitative methods for many reasons, for instance Creswell (1998) says:" the nature of the research question often starts with a how or a what; the topic needs to be explored (variables cannot be easily identified); there is a need to present a detailed view of the topic; there is a need to study individuals in their natural setting. sufficient time and resources are needed for extensive data collection in the field and detailed data analysis of "text" information; audiences are receptive to qualitative research, and there is a need to emphasize the researcher's role as an active learner who can tell the story from the participants' view, rather than an "expert" who passes judgment on participants.

Results and findings

An EST Teacher:

Q1: what are the most important ELT skills that you find as useful in teaching English for engineering students and that proved valuable and suitable for you -justify your answer please-.

Answer 1:

A True Relationship with Students: The relationship between me and my students is the most important aspect difference in teaching English.

Understanding of a Learner's Cultural Background: I openly welcome learners and accepts the cultural differences and this can help with an easier acceptance by the University environment.

Training in ELT Techniques and Approaches: Using available resources, from those free on YouTube to organizations like TEFL. Grasping the Individual Needs of my Learners.

Encouraging English Conversations & Involvement Outside the Classroom: I encourage my students to actively engage outside the classroom in extracurricular or community activities to cultivate friendships and interests which help with broadening language acquisition.

Q2: What is made relevant and what is not in the virtual setting?

What are the most important ELT skills that you find as useful in this setting and proved valuable and

suitable for you, can you justify your answer please

Answer 2:

Tech Skills: Because classes are taught through the internet, online teachers must be tech savvy and comfortable with the modern online means and technology.

Teach Creatively In a digital learning milieu, teachers who think outside of the box and prioritize inventive thinking are better suited to help learners succeed.

Welcoming: Online learning may be new to a lot of students, thus constructing trust is the key.

Accessible: A great part of an online teacher's task is to be available when learners have a question or need support.

Proactive Feedback: Regular and constant feedback turn out to be even more significant in a virtual classroom.

Encouraging: I make every interaction a positive experience, even from a distance setting.

Adaptable: I often need to think quickly whenever plans don't go as planned.

I Teach with Passion: In virtual classes, my students feel my enthusiasm for the subject matter through every live online lesson and interaction.

Q3: How to use ELT skills to address specific needs of engineering students?

How do you involve prior ELT knowledge in this setting? Based on your ELT background, and the EST skill needed: Are they enough or do you have any suggestions for the new setting?

Answer 3:

Incorporating technology usage in my language teaching class, technology make my teaching lessons more student centered. Technology based teaching helps enhance high order thinking skills and learner autonomy.

videotapes, internet, digital cameras video cameras, and e-mails, commercial software help my learners to leave their cocoons, shed their fear, acquainted themselves with software and increase self-confidence.

Q4: What do your learners need?

Their needs in terms of Language skills, Syllabus Content, The methodology, Communicative needs?

Answer 4:

My learners need effective knowledge of English, merely knowing vocabulary and rules of grammar and pronunciation. My learners need to be capable to employ the language appropriately in any social milieu.

Thus, a meaningful communication supports language learning and my classroom activities need to concentrate on the learner's authentic needs to communicate information and ideas. Pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary are, obviously, important elements of effective communication

The stakeholders: Subject Matter Experts and Administration:

The First Stakeholder:

Q1: How do you perceive your collaboration with English language teachers?

For example, are you involved into setting their course expected outcomes, the department main considerations, is there any follow up with the course from your current position ...

Answer 1:

Yes. I follow up on new engineering teachers a lot but not in English

Q2: How did you approach the adoption of distance-learning?

Were there any specific cs to the new tools that you are using currently that impacted your course?

Answer 2:

In my course, I don't use a prepared presentation but I use paint a lot as a board to do my live course. I intend to buy a graphics tablet

Q3: Your evaluation of the strategy (the initiation, the implementation, the current practices, limitations, university administration, others…)

Answer 3:

For my assessment, I find that our system needs to be changed completely. I no longer have faith in the free teacher because it is an intellectual scam

Q4: From your experience, who should teach at UT the English courses; the content teachers or the EFL teacher? *-justify please-*.

Answer 4:

This is a relevant question. If we are going to consider it as an important tool for improving the level, then we should better let the technical teachers do the lessons.

The Second Stakeholder:

Q1: How do you perceive your collaboration with English language teachers?

For example, are you involved into setting their course expected outcomes, the department main considerations, is there any follow up with the course from your current position ...

Answer 1:

Very good knowing that all documentation of technology field is in English

Q2: How did you approach the adoption of distance-learning?

Were there any specific cs to the new tools that you are using currently that impacted your course?

Answer 2:

It is a good idea except for experimental courses

Q3: Your evaluation of the strategy (the initiation, the implementation, the current practices, limitations, university administration, others…)

Answer 3:

The strategy aimed needs some supplementary tools like strength connection of internet

Q4: From your experience, who should teach at UT the English courses; the content teachers or the EFL teacher? *-justify please-*.

Answer 4:

I prefer content teacher since they know exactly what students need in English courses

The Third Stakeholder:

Q1: How do you perceive your collaboration with English language teachers?

For example, are you involved into setting their course expected outcomes, the department main considerations, is there any follow up with the course from your current position ...

Answer 1:

When they are recruited, we explain them the aim and the outcomes of English courses for engineering students as proposed by the ministry

Q2: How did you approach the adoption of distance-learning?

Were there any specifics to the new tools that you are using currently that impacted your course?

Answer 2:

At the beginning, I prepared my lectures in video form and published them via YouTube. Now, I'm using the platform "Microsoft Teams", lectures are given online, the interaction is much better.

Q3: Your evaluation of the strategy (the initiation, the implementation, the current practices, limitations, university administration, others…)

Answer 3:

A major effort had been made by the ministry, the rector and the faculty from the beginning. Several scenarios were proposed depending on the state. Hybrid education mode adopted is a very good solution, unfortunately the ground is not yet favorable.

Q4: How can we adopt an English course at UT to suite the preferences of the learners?

We need to reconsider the relation of technical language teaching to the UT student with what convene their preferences (I mean the omission of old teaching practices)? How might we approach this?

Answer 4:

I think that the best way is to give English course for a small group (max 15 students per group). It is important to pay attention to learners talk.

Discussions

The research results revealed a consistent pattern that highlights some of the recurring issues in the literature.

From an EST course perspective, the cultural and environmental background are of major importance during an EST course, more so when delivered virtually. The online tools seem to help the teacher in his practice, while helping students get confidence and shed their fears. Technical expertise in software and tools is deemed crucial and thus any lack thereof would affect the feasibility of the course. Affective factors are deemed important as they help support and involve students. Proactive teaching and feedback to learners gain increased importance in the new setting.

For the subject matter experts and administrators' collaboration with EST teachers is framed by ministerial texts defining scope and course objective administratively. On a course basis, the subject matter experts are regularly acquainted and involved with EST teachers in terms of content and course outline.

Nevertheless, the engineering teachers shared similar view when agreeing that an EST course should be delivered by subject matter teachers. They claimed that it should serve better to help increase subject matters involvement with the language while also serving better the target needs of the learners based on their experience. The needs analysis and proper EST course design requires additional skills and thus building on the collaborative atmosphere, employing EST teachers' expertise to help formulate the course and assess it -if not deliver it-, would be far better than relying on subjective judgement of learner's target needs which might be broadly diverse. They also believe that an EST course delivered to small groups would be more efficient in addressing their needs.

When questioned about the virtual classroom setting, the belief was that technology was a positive experience and that a change was necessary to meet the era we live in. Many challenges emerged as technology infrastructures namely internet bandwidth hindered the possibility of employing hybrid course setting where experimental sessions are held in classroom instead of online.

When delivering online courses the engineering teachers used either prearranged video course that enabled freedom to interact during the class time, or interactively using technology tools such as tablets and paint to explain and draw live simulating a whiteboard.

Conclusion

The global perspective of our participant is favourable for the use of technology in classroom specifically for teaching EST courses. Taking advantage of additional freely available tools and resources can multiply the benefit of the platform and increase the potential of the classes to reach learning objectives.

A broader range of factors influence the online course delivery, technology expertise, technology infrastructure and psychological factors which must be accounted for to reap the benefit of the technology.

As recurring in the literature, the engineering teachers believed that the ESP course ought to be taught by subject matter experts. Meanwhile, a

favourable collaboration ground appears to be available and can be fostered to employ the needs analysis techniques to shape the EST course at the University of Tlemcen.

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