

Teaching English for Business Purposes in Algerian Universities: The Case of Master I Economics Students at Ahmed Draia University –Adrar

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Abstract:

The world has witnessed an increasing emphasis on international communication and engagement with English-speaking countries and businesses. Many people worldwide aim to enhance their English proficiency and cater to specific objectives, especially for business purposes. Consequently, a rising demand for teaching English for Business Purposes (EBP) has emerged across non-English speaking countries, and Algeria is no exception. However, the status of teaching EBP in higher education remains undervalued, with English courses offered by most Algerian universities failing to consistently meet the learners' specific needs, except within English departments. The present study aims at exploring the status of EBP within the Department of Economics, Business and Management Sciences at Adrar University. In that vein, a survey questionnaire is delivered to Master 1 Economics students, complemented by an interview conducted with the teacher of English at the same department.

Keywords: Algerian universities; Business English; Course design; EBP; ESP teaching and learning.



1. INTRODUCTION

English has established itself as the dominant international language and is prominent worldwide. It serves as the primary means of communication between individuals from diverse cultural and societal communities. In that vein, using English has become of utmost importance across various fields and disciplines, particularly in the realms of science and technology, business, and social studies. In academia, the dominance of the English language in research publication has necessitated language proficiency for researchers aiming to disseminate their findings and interact

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with the international scientific community. The tech industry, as well, relies heavily on this language, as programming languages and documentation often standardized in English to facilitate global collaboration and innovation. Moreover, English serves as the de facto medium of communication in the business world, enabling cross-border trade, negotiations, and partnerships. It English has established its role as an indispensable medium for achieving success and sustainability in the global market. Accordingly, most countries have implemented this language in their educational systems encompassing different levels, and Algeria is no exception. More specifically, the current international business lingua franca has been implemented via general and specific courses in Algerian higher education. Thus, teaching English is now a global demand not only for academic purposes but also for business endeavours.

English language teaching has been a subject of interest due to its dominant status and position throughout the twentieth century. It has witnessed a tremendous demand from individuals whose first language is other than English. However, learning English as a foreign language is a multifaceted journey that involves much more than mere vocabulary acquisition and grammar rules. Moreover, this language is acquired for educational purposes and to engage in international communication, primarily driven by English role in trade and business. It primarily depends on the learner's readiness, attitudes, and purposes, which significantly influence their motivation, engagement, and ultimate success in mastering the English language (Bleila & Mostefaoui, 2023). In fact, individuals started to recognize the need to learn English to meet specific occupational objectives and address professional requirements. In that respect, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become a commanding area to suit the learners' needs on a global scale. ESP has significantly been supported, given its critical role in meeting the learners' needs by using English to enhance a specific study or career across the globe. Within this context, the Algerian Higher Education Ministry has implemented different criteria to support and promote ESP in universities.

One of the major sub-fields of ESP that has witnessed a tremendous demand among learners worldwide is English for Business Purposes (EBP) or, in other terms, Business English. Since English has become the primary medium for international business communication, people worldwide tend to use this language at their workplace. It has been adopted as a common language in their work environments to ensure collaboration and successful interaction in the global business arena. However, the status of Business

English in Algerian Higher Education has been a subject of limited exploration. It has yet to gain more focus compared to other approaches to English instruction. Therefore, the present study explores the status of this ESP subdivision in Algerian universities. Specifically, it focuses on Master 1 Economics students at the Department of Adrar University, serving as the sample population for the study. Hence, the primary objective of the paper is to examine the provision of Business English courses and provide insights into their teaching methodologies.

2. Literature Review

ESP has existed as an English Language Teaching (ELT) discipline for more than six decades, although its precise delineation has remained a topic of ongoing scholarly discourse. Given the diverse range of professional and academic contexts, many researchers have provided different descriptions of ESP that highlight various aspects and perspectives, emphasizing its purpose, methodology, and target learners. According to Mackay and Mountford (1978), ESP is “a restricted repertoire of words and expressions selected from the whole language because that restricted repertoire covers every requirement within a well-defined context, task or vocation” (p.4). McDonough (1984) offers an alternative definition, characterizing ESP as a method of language teaching that encompasses a variety of focuses, emphases, and priorities. In addition, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) consider ESP as an approach to language teaching in which decisions about the content and method are centred on the learners’ aim for learning. Thus, the primary focus of ESP centres on the objectives underlying a learner’s learning of English rather than its nature.

ESP has also been differently defined among scholars, being an approach to language teaching. According to Robinson (1991), students learn this language “not because they are interested in the English language or English culture as such but because they need English for study or work purposes” (p.2). For instance, people who want to exchange goods and services internationally need to use a specific type of English that allows them to communicate in this situation. Anthony (1997) defines ESP as follows:

Some people described ESP as simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified. Others, however, were more precise, describing it as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes. (pp. 9-10)

The discipline is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for various purposes. Learners, in that respect, are taught the type of English that enables them to perform and communicate in a specific situation. Dudley-Evans and St Johns (1998, as cited in Basturkmen, 2010) add that ESP focuses on identifying the specific times, places, and reasons learners need English language proficiency for academic or professional purposes. Thus, the use of English in an ESP context varies based on the learners' needs.

ESP has two main sub-divisions, English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The former is designed to meet the language needs of individuals in professional or vocational settings. It focuses on developing English language skills and knowledge relevant to specific occupational fields or industries. EAP, conversely, aims to prepare learners for academic settings, particularly in higher education institutions. It focuses on developing the language proficiency necessary for academic study and research and emphasizes language skills such as academic reading, writing essays or research papers. One of the main subbranches of EOP is English for Business Purposes (EBP) or Business English. According to Simpson (2011),

English for business Purposes (EBP), also known as Business English, became an independent area of study in the early 1990s, primarily as a consequence of the globalization of trade and commerce, which made it necessary for business people to move out their home grounds and operate across territorial, linguistic, cultural as well as socio-political boundaries. (p.26)

In its simplest term, EBP refers to the use of the English language to communicate in a business context. It is used by several people engaging in trade and commerce-related affairs to exchange information on an international scale. EBP promotes communication and understanding between business professionals from different linguistic backgrounds, facilitating global business transactions and interactions. This specialized use of English focuses on language skills and terminology relevant to various business fields, such as finance, marketing, negotiations, and international relations. According to Frendo (2005), "Business English is communication with other people within specific context" (p.1). However, this type of English varies from one business discipline to another. For instance, the English used by office managers differs from that used in grocery services. Each EBP context

has specific vocabulary, expressions, and communication styles tailored to the specific requirements and expectations of the respective settings.

ESP involves several professional areas, where EBP takes a central place. Within such a specialized framework, EBP courses are tailored to meet the communicative needs of learners engaging in the global marketplace, where English serves as a lingua franca for international trade, negotiations, and corporate communications. According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), EBP is further divided into English for General Business Purposes (EGBP) and English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP). As the present study sheds light on the type of ESP taught in universities, EGBP is the subfield that concerns teaching Business English to university students. It is devoted to pre-experienced students who need to prepare for a future business career (Ellis & Johnson, 1994) and need more experience in a business context (Frendo, 2005). EGBP course is much similar to General English (GE) course as it includes tasks to improve accuracy and fluency in the four skills. However, this course differs from the GE one in terms of materials related to business settings. Thus, EGBP has been criticized for providing insufficient information for real-life business situations.

The second EBP subbranch is ESBP, and it is taught to job-experienced learners with business knowledge and skills. In that vein, ESBP learners bring this knowledge and skills to the classroom and put them into practice. According to Ellis and Johnson (1994), the ESBP course concerns “the practical use of language is more important than theoretical knowledge about language” (p. 6). It emphasises teaching learners how to effectively use English in real-life business situations rather than delving extensively into the linguistic theories of the language. Furthermore, the ESBP course usually involves a small group of learners, about six to eight students, while senior staff generally opt for individual tuition. Thus, this subfield to EBP cannot be taught in universities as learners are supposed to tackle Business English as separate module for the first time and have no or little prior knowledge in this context. It is also unlikely to be taught in higher education since the number of students is usually more than the expected number of an ESBP course.

During the 1960s and 1970s, specific vocabulary was the only feature distinguishing Business English from General English. At that time, Business English textbooks offered the target vocabulary in a written text or dialogue dealing with a particular topic, such as banking, and activities focused on understanding questions about the text and vocabulary drills. However, these textbooks neglected the learners' prior knowledge and did not focus on using

such vocabulary in real-life situations. Consequently, more emphasis on developing communication, speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills within a business context started to take place during the 1980s. Thus, Business English teaching became more practical, attempting to enhance the learners' business presentation practices, negotiating strategies, and meeting skills.

Similar to ESP teaching, teaching EBP requires subject matter awareness and English language teaching skills. The teacher at this level needs to adopt and adapt Business English teaching skills and strategies. In that regard, the course aims to make learners understand and use the language in a particular context for business career opportunities. According to Ellis and Johnson (1994), the following steps must be taken into consideration when designing a Business English course:

- **Needs analysis:** What do students need to know to face the requirements of their future job environment?
- **Assessment of level:** Using written tests to see the language learners' level at the beginning of the course.
- **Syllabus:** Setting courses should have a fixed objective and syllabus.
- **Course objectives:** They should be defined with the needs analysis findings. For pre-experienced learners, the course objectives regarding their course of study or required language progress can be identified.
- **Time:** The course should be structured based on the duration.
- **Learner expectations:** Business English learners are usually expected to be more goal-oriented.
- **Evaluation of progress:** The exams are usually written or oral.

3. Methodology

The present study combines quantitative and qualitative methods of research, i.e., a mixed method, to gather the needed data. The researcher aims to present actual results derived from research instruments in terms of numbers and statistical results. Within this context, a quantitative approach is suitable for this study. As it also aims to identify the teachers and learners' attitudes towards the trends of teaching ESP, namely EBP, in Algerian universities, the qualitative approach is appropriate for this mixed-methods research. Owing to this, a survey questionnaire was administered to Master 1 Economics students, along with an interview with an ESP teacher from the Department of Economics, Business, and Management Sciences at Ahmed Draia University of Adrar.

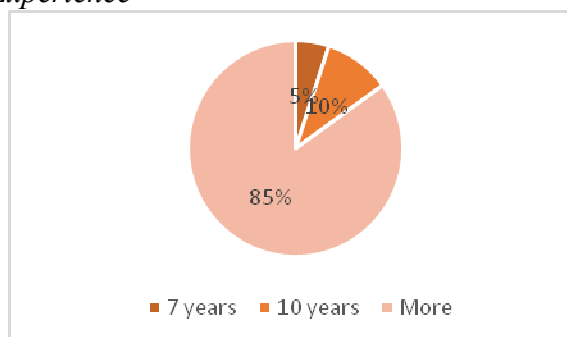
The participants in the study are divided into Economics students and a teacher specializing in ESP. In data collection vein, the first method targeted fifty Economics students. In this effort, half of the participants were approached in person during one of the major's primary modules, as the majority had not attended the English language course that week. The other half of the sample was reached through a post on the Master 1 students' official Facebook group. In that regard, an e-questionnaire was distributed via a Google Forms link, with the researcher emphasizing that only students who had missed the class are kindly invited to fill-in the form. Additionally, the second method entailed a face-to-face interview with an ESP teacher from the same department. The teacher, being a former colleague, facilitated the researcher's ability to schedule the interview at ease. It is critical to note the English language sessions offered by the department last for an hour and a half each week, serving as one of the supporting modules in the curriculum.

3.1. Students' Questionnaire

In collecting the students' questionnaires, the researcher received forty (40) responded questionnaires out of the total number, fifty (50), with six papers being left empty and four Google Forms sheets not answered. The questionnaire comprises ten questions with sub-questions, including experience, level, and attitude towards learning English. In addition, it includes some specific questions about the type of English they learn, namely Business English. The questionnaire also involves questions on ESP course expectations and the learners' needs.

Figure 1

English Learning Experience

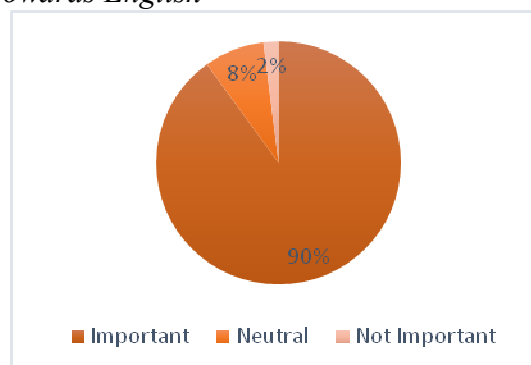


In response to the first question about how long learners have been studying English in general, the majority (85%) responded that they have been studying English for more than ten years. Other respondents (10%)

claim that they have spent ten years in English learning, while only 5% of the participants have studied this language for seven years.

Figure 2

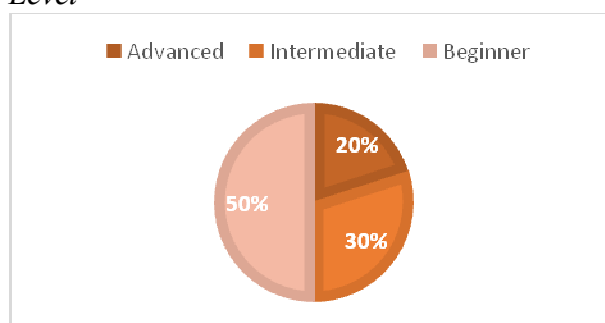
Learners Attitudes Towards English



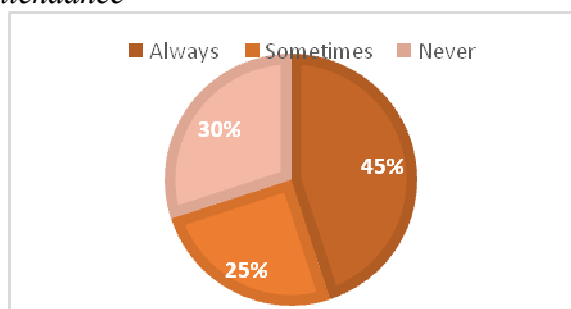
The second question aims to investigate the learners' attitudes towards learning English, which is a crucial factor in their levels of objective setting. In that respect, most of the participants (90%) state that English is important to learn. Besides, only 2% of students claim that it is not an important subject to implement in higher education. However, 8% of the respondents choose to be neutral, not providing their opinions in this regard.

Figure 3

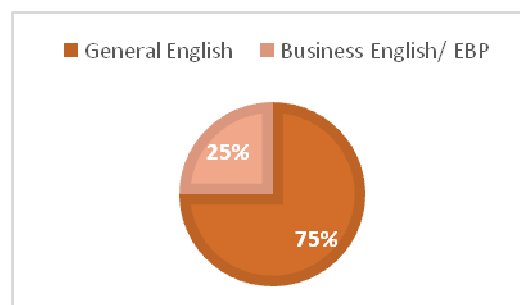
Students' English Level



With respect to the third question, the purpose of the latter is to explore the learners' levels in English. Such an assessment was based on the diagnostic test set by the teacher at the beginning of the course. In that, half of the respondents claim that they have not yet reached a good level in this language, with 50% of students selecting the choice "beginner". Moreover, 30% of students argue that they have an intermediate level in English. The last and least category states that they developed an advanced level of English.

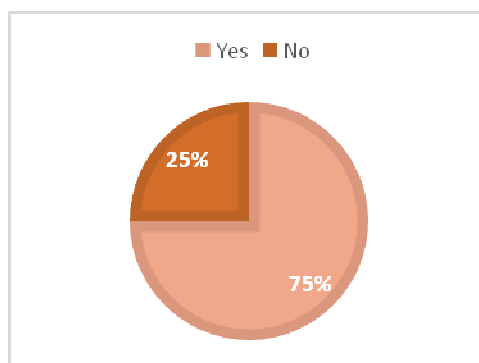
Figure 4*English Sessions Attendance*

The next question concerns learners' attendance at English sessions within the first semester. In that regard, most students confirm that they always attend this module's classes, with 45% out of the entire research sample. However, 30% of them claim that they have never attended English sessions within the previous semester. In addition, only 25% argue that they sometimes attend English courses at the Department of Economics.

Figure 5*Types of English*

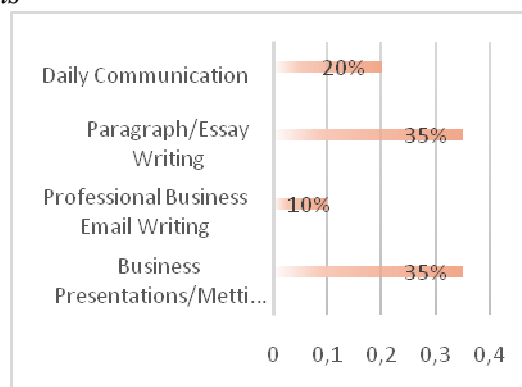
The present question aims at exploring the students' perspectives about which type of English they think they have studied in the previous semester. Most of them claim that they have been taught English related to basic vocabulary and grammar rules. Accordingly, 75% of the respondents choose the option 'General English'. In contrast, the rest of the learners claim that they have been studying field-related English, viz., English for Business Purposes. In that regard, they have chosen the 'Business English' option (25%).

Figure 6*English Teacher's Subject Expertise*



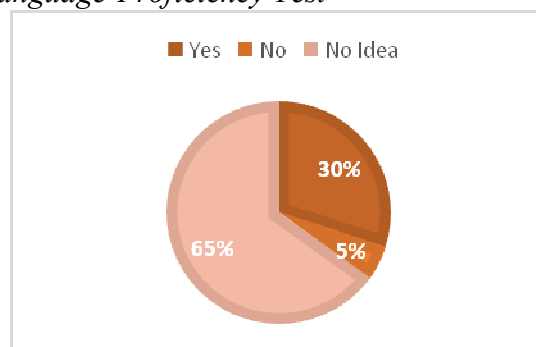
It is also crucial to know whether the learners consider their teacher of English as a subject-expert. The subject matter knowledge does not literally mean that the teacher should cover everything about English; rather, it means being able to deliver the lessons based on the field of study and learners' needs. As illustrated in Figure 6, the majority of the participants (75%) see that their teacher is a subject-expert while only 25% of them do not feel that s/he is suitable for this position.

Figure 7
English-use Situations

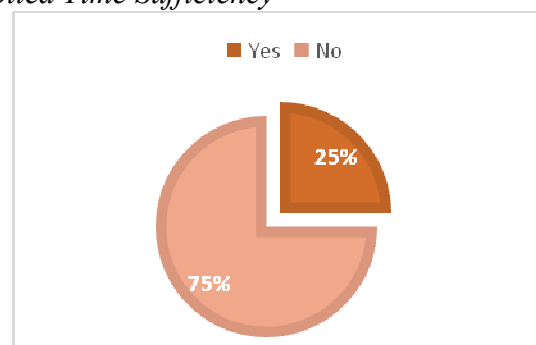


The following question reveals that 45%, 18 out of 40 student claims that they can use the types of English vocabulary and grammar to write paragraphs and essays related to the field. 35% of the learners use the latter to participate in business presentations and meetings. Moreover, only 20% of the participants argue that they use vocabulary and grammar in daily conversations. However, none of the respondents uses English in writing professional business emails.

Figure 8

First Session ESP Language-Proficiency Test

ESP teachers usually need to make a first-session language proficiency test that identifies what learners know and can do with language to support their learning and to address and analyse their specific needs. As shown in Figure 8, 65% of students have no idea about this test because they did not attend the first session. While 30% of them claim that they have taken the language proficiency test of English, only 5% of the learners assert that they have chosen not to take such a test.

Figure 9*English Module Allotted Time Sufficiency*

As the allotted time of English courses is only one session a week, this question's purpose is to measure the students' satisfaction towards the timetable. In that respect, the majority find one session a week not enough to take English courses. In contrast, 25% are satisfied with the present timetable.

Figure 10*English Module's Coefficient Appropriateness*

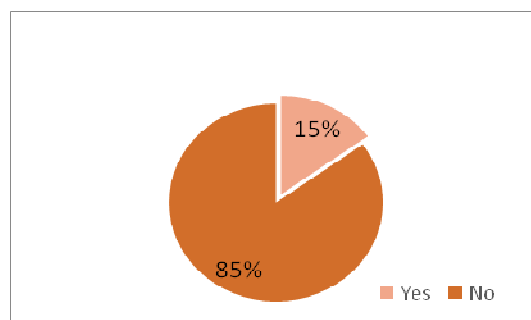
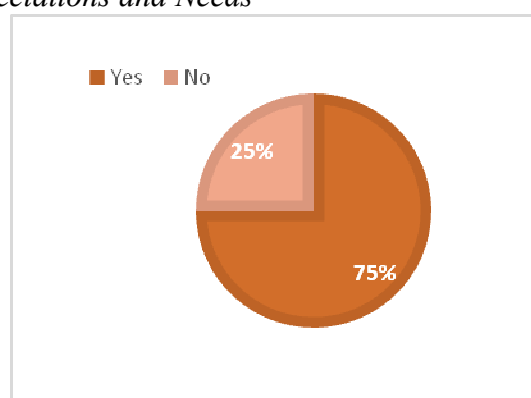


Figure 10 shows that 34 out of 40 Economics student find the coefficient of English as a module not enough. Within this context, 85% of them have selected the choice 'No' regarding the ninth question. By contrast, 6 of them (15%) are satisfied with the current coefficient of English.

Figure 11

English Course Expectations and Needs



The last question concerns the students' expectations and needs met by the English course. As Figure 11 shows, the majority claim that the present English course meet their expectations and needs, with 75% of them choosing 'Yes'. The remaining 25% of the participantsexpressed their dissatisfaction with this kind of course, whichdoes not meet their needs and expectations.

3.2. Teacher's Interview

Within the scope of the present research, one educational EBP practitioner was interviewed about course design for Business English and adeptness in addressing the diverse learning needs of students within the classroom setting. The participant, an ESP teacher within the department, possesses a master's degree in Didactics of English. In addition, the teacher contributes more than four years of specialized expertise in ESP instruction.

Question 1: What type of English do you teach? And which type of course do you design?

The type of English instructors use in an ESL/EFL classroom largely depends on their teaching settings. Within this context, the interviewee confirms her commitment to EBP and highlights that the designed courses are tailored to the ESP context. These courses aim to enhance learners' English language skills while focusing on specialised vocabulary related to the business world and its various contexts and environments.

Question 2: Have you received any training before teaching ESP?

In reference to the second question, the teacher states that she has undergone an ESP training workshop that specifically covered teaching Business English. The teacher also confirms that she has studied ESP as one of the primary modules throughout university studies.

Question 3: Do you ask your learners about the objectives they want to achieve through their learning?

The interviewee asserts that she asks the learners about their targeted learning expectation through direct questioning. Additionally, the teacher claims that she assesses the students' improvement and progress indirectly by considering their prior knowledge as a reference point.

Question 4: Which types of method have you used to identify your learners' needs?

With regard to the fourth question, the teacher asserts that she does not use a specific method to identify the learners' needs; rather, the methods vary with each course, task or activity.

Question 5: Are your learners usually motivated to learn Business English?

The interviewee states that the majority of students are usually motivated to learn Business English. Furthermore, she emphasises that most students show a willingness and eagerness to acquire proficiency in EBP.

Question 6: Do you think engaging learners in the learning process enhances their motivation?

Regarding the sixth question, the teacher claims that involving learners in the learning process improves their focus and motivates them to engage in higher-level critical thinking, especially when they participate in the course design, activities, and tasks.

Question 7: Do you think that the time allotted to teaching EBP is sufficient?

The teacher insists that dedicating only one hoursession per week to teaching Business English is insufficient. She argues that English has become indispensable for effective communication and success in the modern

business world. Consequently, the limited time allotted is not sufficient to keep pace with the ever-evolving dynamics of international business.

Question 8: Do you think your EBP courses meet the learners' expectations and needs?

In response to this question, the teacher is confident that her EBP course adequately fulfils the learners' expectations and requirements, as it is primarily tailored and designed to align with their specific needs.

Question 9: What are some challenges you meet while teaching EBP in general?

One of the most significant challenges the teacher faces during teaching EBP is the existence of various learners' competencies in English, especially in a large classroom. Furthermore, the interviewee contends that there are instances when the course fails to meet the learners' needs, decreasing their motivation to learn. Another barrier in teaching EBP is the students' integration of the first language, often leading to losing attention, wasting time, and failing to achieve the intended learning objectives.

Question 10: What is your perspective on teaching EBP in Algeria, in specific, and ESP, in general?

The teacher has been less optimistic in answering the last question. She argues that teaching ESP has not received the relevant status in Algerian higher education in research and application. The interviewee further emphasises that Algeria should allocate increased attention to and investment on ESP, addressing both academic and occupational requirements. As for the EBP context, she believes that it cannot be implemented to fulfil the learners' needs effectively without encouraging research and application in the latter, viz, ESP.

4. Interpretation of the Findings

4.1. Students' Questionnaire

The students' questionnaire is divided into two main parts. The first part involves the students' experience, level, and attitude towards English. This background information about the learners is crucial for the present study as it has equipped the researcher with information about the current English level of the respondents. On the one hand, the obtained results show that the majority have more than ten years of experience learning this language, through which they developed a positive attitude towards English, claiming that it is essential in higher education. However, the results reveal that most of the respondents have a low level of English. This circumstance might account for the relatively diminished emphasis on English language

instruction in Algerian universities, except for the departments of English and Translation. In addition, the students' negative attitudes in certain departments to learn English can often be traced back to their anxiety about learning a foreign language or discomfort with the learning process. Students' anxiety typically stems from the fear of public speaking, worries over grammatical mistakes, pronunciation difficulties, and the inability to express thoughts spontaneously. Besides, certain teaching methods may fail to engage students or make them feel at ease in the classroom setting, contributing to the development of a negative attitude towards learning English.

The second part of the learners' questionnaire, on the other hand, concerns the type of English course students receive, its use and application. It is also designed to explore whether the ESP course devoted to Economics students is relevant to their academic field needs and meets their expectations. In that respect, most of the participants affirm that they engage in EBP contexts during their studies, which signifies that the courses they undertake are tailored to Business English relevant to their respective fields. This suggests that the students' learning experiences are specifically developed to cater to their professional needs and align with the principles of ESP instruction. Besides, learners admit their teachers are subject experts, focusing on the field's high-level proficiency. These subject experts create a conducive learning environment where learners can acquire language skills directly applicable to real-world business scenarios. According to the majority, the situations where students use this type of English include business presentations and meetings and writing paragraphs and essays related to their specialization. Such situations enable students to convey complex concepts, negotiate deals, and understand diverse perspectives within a global business environment. Thus, the practical application of Business English enhances learners' ability to communicate effectively and confidently within their professional domains, ultimately contributing to their career success and ensuring their work is accessible to an international audience.

The participants in the present study put forth arguments regarding the allocation of time and the coefficient of EBP compared to other modules. They express concerns that some departments still perceive English as a supplementary subject rather than recognizing its significance as an international language of business and commerce. In fact, many faculties prioritise subject-specific knowledge and skills over language proficiency, under the assumption that practical expertise is more critical than language

skills for learners' future careers. Additionally, only a limited number of participants report having undergone a pre-language proficiency test to assess their level of Business English, implying that teachers have conducted a needs analysis to determine their learners' English language experience and set the targets. Such a process helps in setting realistic expectations and in creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment where each student's individual learning path is acknowledged and fostered. Furthermore, the final inquiry in this section revolves around the students' course expectations and needs. As a result, most participants claim that the EBP course not only meets their expectations but also caters effectively to their learning needs. A flexible, learner-centered approach to course design, combined with a variety of up-to-date teaching materials that cater to diverse learning styles, and personalized feedback, helps students explore their interests and sharpen their skills. Thus, the questionnaire's findings suggest that there is an actual growing recognition of the importance of EBP. Still, there remains a need to enhance its prominence and integration within academic curricula to fully leverage its benefits for learners pursuing business-related fields.

4.2. Teacher's Interview

The following findings have been drawn from the teacher's interview:

- EBP is the type of ESP taught for Master 1 Economics students, which is concerned with teaching Business English grammar and vocabulary knowledge for economics contexts.
- ESP training and prior field knowledge help the teacher acquire the necessary skills and competencies to teach Business English.
- It is crucial to know the students' objectives they want to achieve through the course by asking them directly or using indirect methods such as a questionnaire or a test. Accordingly, the teacher uses different teaching methods based on the course objectives and the learners' needs.
- Engaging learners in the learning process promotes their motivation and makes them more interested in learning Business English.
- Time allotted to teaching Business English and the coefficient of the latter could be among the critical factors that make students interested in learning.
- Teachers usually find it challenging to deal with multiple competencies and learning styles in a large classroom, especially with time limits and unmotivated learners.

- Business English teaching should be promoted and implemented in Algerian universities, with an urgent emphasis on designing courses that help learners become competent in their future careers and thrive and survive in the business world.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study revealed several findings about EBP teaching and learning at Algerian universities with reference to Master 1 students of Economics at Ahmed Draia University. It can be noticed that EBP, in general, is still in its infancy and needs to gain more status in higher education. This might be due to putting more emphasis on General English courses as the main target of English language teaching rather than Business English. Besides, Master 1 students encounter a significant demand for enhancing their English language proficiency to adequately fulfil the requirements of their future academic and professional pursuits. In this context, offering these learners a tailored ESP course that effectively addresses their learning needs within a business-oriented environment becomes imperative and highly recommended. Furthermore, incorporating EBP practice sessions, encompassing activities like simulated role-playing of business scenarios, delivering business presentations, and participating in conferences, becomes crucial for students to apply the acquired knowledge and skills effectively. Thus, there is a need to improve EBP teaching/learning and shed light on language practice in business situations.

Based on the above-stated findings, the study ends up with some recommendations to simplify ESP/EBP teaching at different non-English departments in the Algerian higher education institutions:

- Collaboration among ESP practitioners and subject specialists should be promoted to provide an effective framework that guides ESP teachers in Algerian universities.
- EBP courses should be designed to develop the student's communicative and intercultural competence instead of targeting lexico-grammatical points.
- EBP courses should be learner-centred, emphasizing on the practical side that puts learners in an actual business situation.
- An EBP teacher needs to teach in a business-like mode and set business-like situations that motivate learners and keep them engaged throughout the course.
- Algerian universities should focus on and allocate more time to teaching Business English.

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