

Investigating the Teaching of English at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria

Hassina Bouchareb

ENS Bouzareah-Algeria

Hassinasamiha@gmail.com

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Abstract:

The present study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program for teaching English at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria. The study investigates the perceptions of 168 trainees participating in the program in the city of Algiers. In order to achieve the aims of the study, the researcher used one Likert's 5-scale format questionnaire that was administered to the trainees.

This questionnaire consisted of 25 items grouped in 5 domains which aimed to evaluate different aspects of the ESP training program, namely its 'aims and objectives', 'the trainers', 'the training materials', 'evaluation and assessment techniques' and 'aids and facilities' provided for the learners by these institutes.

The results of the study have shown that the trainees expressed a great dissatisfaction with all aspects of the training program regardless to their qualification (High school or beyond).

The study recommends more studies that investigate teaching ESP in Algeria in more areas and giving more attention to the learners' needs.

Key words: ESP, Vocational Training, Trainees Needs

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Vocational Training and Apprenticeship in Algeria has opened a number of vocational institutes in order to give opportunities to school leavers to start a new career by providing them with vocational training in different areas such as management, graphic arts, and agriculture... etc. In these institutes the trainees are exposed to specialized training in a number of disciplines including vocational English training.

However, the teaching of English in many of these Vocational Institutes in the country often receives very little attention. As a result, many of the trainees graduate from these institutes with even greater demand to the language which is gaining more and more importance in Algeria as well as in the international job market.

In fact, many of the vocational English training or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs in these institutes have many shortcomings which are the result of the current practices and policies concerning teaching English. Some examples of these are the number of teaching hours allocated for the subject, the English training materials, the lack of modern technologies and facilities for teaching, and even the lack of qualified teachers who, in many cases, received general English training rather than ESP where they have to deal with technical language and understand new vocabulary which they may not be familiar with such as accounting terms, commerce terms...etc.

In the light of these facts about the program, the present study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program for teaching English at the Institutes of Vocational

Training in Algeria in terms of the aims and objectives of the program, the different needs of trainees such as the materials used, the methods of teaching implemented, the assessment techniques and aids and facilities provided.

The importance of the current study lies in the fact that it provides in-depth information about the ESP program in the Institutes of Vocational Training in the country. This investigation, in fact, provides important information about current situation of ESP teaching in Algerian IVT by showing its weaknesses, and attempt to give suggestions and recommendations to ameliorate this situation, and strengthen the positive aspects of it, besides the fact that a very limited number of studies on the field are made in the country.

In this context the study attempts to answer the following **main question**:

- How do the English language trainees evaluate the ESP Program at the Vocational Institutes?

The Study also attempts to test the following **hypothesis** related to the research question:

1. There are no statistically significant differences (at the level of $\infty \leq .05$) between the trainees' perceptions of the ESP training program that can be attributed to their qualification.

2. Literature review:

ESP established roots thanks to pioneers such as Hutchinson and Water (1987), Dudley-Evans (1998) and Robinson (1991) among others, who gave different definitions and perceptions of ESP which varied from one period to another; Hutchinson and Waters (1987:18) defined ESP as being an *approach* rather than a *product* by which they mean that ESP does not involve a particular kind of language, teaching materials or methodology. They suggest that the basic question of ESP is: - why does the learner need to learn a foreign language? The answer to this question relates to the learners, the language required and the learning context and thus establishes the primacy of needs in ESP. They showed the difference between ESP and GE by saying: "*in theory nothing, in practice a great deal*"(1987: 53).

To define ESP, Strevens' (1988) makes a distinction between four '*absolute characteristics*' and '*two variable characteristics*'. The absolute characteristics are:

- ESP is designed to meet specified needs of the learner,
- It is related in content (that is in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities,
- Centered on language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis discourse, semantics and so on, and analyses of the discourse
- In contrast with 'general English'

The variable characteristics are that ESP:

- May be restricted as to the learning skills to be learned (for example reading only),
- May not be taught according to any pre-ordained methodology

Dudley-Evans (1998) suggested a larger version of ESP in terms of 'absolute' and 'variable' characteristics:

A. *Absolute Characteristics*

- ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners
- ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves.
- ESP is centred on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

B. *Variable Characteristics*

- ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines
- ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English
- ESP 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
- ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.
- Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems

2.1- General English VS ESP:

After defining ESP, the difference between ESP and General English appears to be quite clear. Nevertheless we find different opinions about them;

Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 53) showed this difference by saying: "*in theory nothing, in practice a great deal*". According to their view, GE and ESP share the same principles of language teaching, having effective and efficient learning as a main objective. The main difference between GE and ESP lies in *the awareness of a need*. ESP learners are current or future specialists, who need English for their specific area, and who are aware of their need; they know what exactly they need English for. They know what ESP course should offer them (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

However, Widdowson (1983) distinguishes between: Learning purpose and Language use. For him general purpose of English is no less specific and purposeful than ESP. What distinguishes them is the way in which purpose is defined, and the manner of its implementation. Based on this definition there are two interpretations from learning purpose; one might be regarded as objective- oriented learning and the other as aim-oriented one. In ESP Specification of objective is equivalent to aim that is a training operation and deals with development of restricted competence. Whereas, in GPE Specification of objective is not equivalent to aim but it leads to aim that is an educational operation and deals with development of general capacity.

Basturkmen (2005) rejects the idea of the difference existing between GE and ESP. She claims that there is no General English and Specific English for her all English is specific:

Her idea agrees to a great extent with that of Bloor and Bloor (1986:28) who asserted that English is learnt from different varieties, but it is the use of language in certain situations and participants which makes it specific.

3- Research Methodology

The present study is classified as descriptive survey which collects data through field investigation. The purpose of such data collection is mainly to answer the research question concerning the population and sample. In this survey, the researcher evaluated the ESP training program at the Vocational Institutes in Algeria for the purpose of identifying the training needs of the learners of English in these institutes.

3.1 Population and Sample

The population of the study represents all the vocational institutes in Algeria. However, the study is limited to the institutes available in Algiers. The number of these institutes is nine. I used cluster sampling system, where four institutes were selected among the nine. From these institutes, I randomly selected 168 trainees out of 2125 in the four institutes studying different disciplines. These trainees were males and females whose qualifications range between high school and beyond (Baccalaureate or university degree sometimes) Table (1) below shows the details of sample.

No.	Name of Vocational Institute	Sex			Qualification		
		Male	Female	Total	High School	Beyond High School	Total
1	Graphic Arts and Printing Institute	28	14	42	18	24	42
2	Management Institute	20	22	42	28	14	42
3	Refrigeration Institute	38	4	42	30	12	42
4	Electronic Institute	21	21	42	36	6	42
	Total	107	61	168	112	56	168

Table (1): Sample of ESL Trainees in the Vocational Institutes

3.2. Instruments of the study:

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching English in the vocational training program and measure the training needs of the trainees, I implemented a questionnaire; for the trainees.

This questionnaire is in two parts. The first part provides personal information about trainees, and the second provides a number of items that aim at evaluating the program. The questionnaire used Likert's five-scale format and consisted twenty-two items in the five domains as follows:

- Aims and Objectives of the Training Program: Items (1 - 5)
- ESP Training Materials: Items (6 - 9)
- The Trainers: Items (10 - 14)
- Evaluation and Assessment of the trainees: Items (15 - 18)
- Aids, Facilities and Technology: Items (19 - 22)

3.3 Validity of the instrument

In order to ensure validity of the instrument I consulted a number of educators and ESP teaching specialists about the study instruments by requesting them to suggest new items, delete any of the items or modify them. The jury suggested minor changes in the form of some items of the questionnaire, though they did not add or delete any of the items in the five domains.

3.4 Reliability of the instrument

Reliability of the instrument is tested by employing Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of internal consistency of the questionnaire. The results of this test have shown high reliability where all the items grouped together for the trainees' questionnaire the value of Alpha was (0.88).

The details of this test are in the following table:

Domain	Items in the Questionnaire	Categories	Cronbach Coefficient Alpha
Trainees' Questionnaire	Items: (1 - 5)	Aims of the Program	0.89
	Items: (6 - 9)	Training Materials	0.71
	Items: (10 - 14)	The Trainers	0.83
	Items: (15 - 18)	Evaluation of the Trainees	0.69
	Items: (19 - 22)	Aids, Facilities and Technology	0.84
	Items: (1 - 22)	All the Items together	0.88

Table (2): Results of the Reliability Coefficient Alpha for the Trainees' Questionnaire

As can be seen in table (3), Alpha coefficient scores were high for most of the categories which indicates that the the questionnaire were reliable and their results could be trusted from a statistical point of view.

3.5 Data Collection

The data of the study was collected from the trainees involved by means of questionnaire during the second semester of the academic year (2018 -2019). I was able to collect this data by visiting these institutes and meeting the people involved personally in these institutes and explaining any items that may not be clear to them. There was high return rate of the questionnaire for the trainees because I had to monitor the data collection myself. No questionnaires were omitted among those distributed to the trainees as I had to check all the questionnaires carefully before collecting any of them from the people involved.

3.6 Design of the Study and Statistical Analysis

I used mainly quantitative methods in this study. The data was collected from the trainees involved by means of a questionnaire. The data was analyzed by using SPSS v.16.0 where a number measures and tests were used such as means, standard deviations and T-test for two independent samples and One-Way Anova test.

4. The Results and Discussion:

The data analysis of the questionnaire was conducted by using SPSS 16.0. The statistics computed in the study were the means, frequencies, standard deviations and T-test for two independent samples.

I employed Likert's five-scale format where the statements used are assumed to have the following values:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Somewhat agree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

However, these values will be graded into three levels as follows:

3.68 – 5	2.34 - 3.67	1- 2.33
High (No need)	Average (Average Need)	Low (Great need)

4.1- The Result of the study Related to the Research Question:

(What are the Trainees' perceptions of the ESP training program at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria?)

To answer this question, means and standard deviations of the trainees' responses to the items in the trainees' questionnaires were analyzed. Table (4) and chart (1) show the details of the data analysis.

No.	Domain	Items	N	Means	Std. Dev	Level of Need
1	Aims of the Program	1 - 5	168	2.73	0.92	Average
2	Training Materials	6 - 9	168	2.49	0.70	Average
3	The Trainers	10 - 14	168	3.01	0.73	Average
4	Evaluation of the Trainees	15-18	168	3.03	0.81	Average
5	Aids, Facilities and Technology	19-22	168	2.22	1.00	Low
	The Program	1-22	168	2.69	0.60	Average

Table (3): The Trainees' Perceptions of the ESP Training program at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria

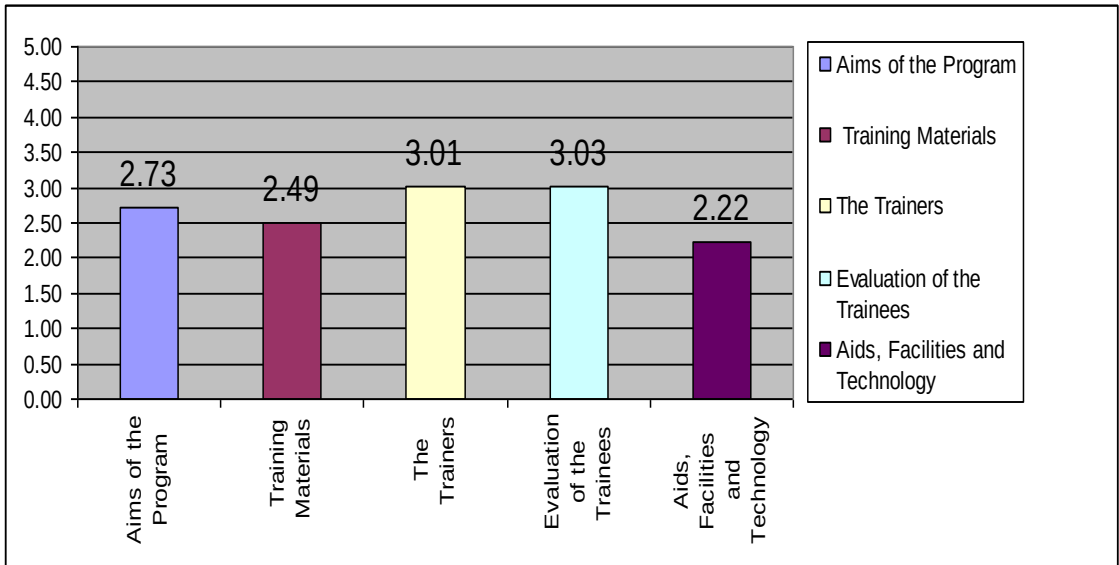


Fig (1): The Trainees' Perceptions of the ESP Training Program at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria

The above table and chart show the results of the trainees' responses to the questionnaire in the five domains. As can be seen in the table and chart, the trainees' rating of their needs was clearly 'average' in most of the domains. The highest means were given to 'the evaluation of the trainees' and 'the trainers' ($M = 3.03$) and ($M = 3.1$) respectively. The lowest rating, on the other hand was given to 'training materials' and 'aids and facilities'. Their means were ($M = 2.24$) and ($M = 2.22$) respectively. In general it seems that the students rating of the program was relatively low whereas no items were highly rated among the five domains.

The details of the results of the trainees' responses for each domain are presented in tables (5, 6, 7, 8 and 9).

No.	Competencies	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Level
1	The vocational English training program provides me with the basic technical vocabulary I need in my field of study	168	3.15	0.97	Average
2	The vocational English training program enables me to read and understand authentic texts in my field of study.	168	2.77	1.10	Average
3	The vocational English program enables me to understand authentic listening texts in my field of study such as T.V programs or lectures...etc.	168	2.75	1.14	Average
4	The vocational English program enables to express myself in writing about my field of study.	168	2.67	1.12	Average
5	The vocational English program enables me to express myself clearly when I talked about topics related to my field of my study.	168	2.30	1.20	Low

Table (4): The Trainees' Perceptions of the Aims and Objectives of the ESP Training Program at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria

Table (5) shows the details of the trainees' responses to the *first* category, '*aims and objectives*' of the ESP Training Program at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria (items: 1 - 5) in descending order. This table shows that most trainees are not satisfied with the '*aims and objectives of the ESP program*' as most of them gave low scores to the five items; four of them were '*average*' and the fifth was '*low*'. The highest of these was '*providing learners with the basic technical vocabulary they need in the field of study*' (M= 3.15) and the lowest was '*enabling the learners to express themselves clearly when they talked about topics related to the field of study*' (M= 2.3).

No.	Competencies	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Level
6	The training materials provided in the in the vocational English program can be easily obtained by all the students.	168	2.73	0.95	Average
7	The training materials provided in the in the vocational English program are relevant to my field of study.	168	2.72	0.90	Average
8	The training materials provided in the in the vocational English program are appropriate to my level of English.	168	2.35	1.0	Average
9	The training materials provided in the in the vocational English program are clear, interesting and nicely printed.	168	2.17	1.01	Low

Table (5): The Trainees' Perceptions of the Training Materials of the ESP Training Program at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria

The above table shows the trainees' perceptions of the *second* domain which is '*the training materials*' of the ESP training program, (items: 6 – 9) in descending order. As can be seen in the table the trainees were also not satisfied with the training materials provided for them as they gave three items representing this domain 'average' scores and one a low score. These scores, in fact, ranged between 2.73 given to '*the materials provided in the in the vocational English program can be easily obtained by all the students.*' And the lowest (M= 2, 17) was given to '*the training materials provided in the in the vocational English program are clear, interesting and nicely printed.*'

No.	Competencies	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Level
10	The trainers are aware of the students' individual differences and needs and adapt their teaching accordingly	178	3.29	1.20	Average
11	The trainers in the vocational English program talk to us in English most of the time in a simple and clear way.	178	3.27	0.93	Average
12	The trainers in the vocational English program provide us good knowledge of the subject we study in English such as that related to accounting, management,...etc.	178	3.07	0.87	Average
13	The trainers in the vocational English program use effective teaching techniques that help us understand the lessons more easily.	178	2.70	0.79	Average
14	The trainers in the vocational English program are clear about their objectives and the steps of their lessons, and deal with any teaching problem successfully.	178	2.70	0.87	Average

Table (6): The Trainees' Perceptions of Trainers in the ESP Training Program at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria

Table (7) shows the details of the trainees' responses to the *third* category, '*training*' represented by '*the trainers*' of the ESP Training Program at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria (items: 10 - 14) in descending order. This table shows that most trainees are not very much satisfied with the training of the ESP as many of them gave 'average' scores to the five items, with the highest score given to '*the trainers are aware of the students' individual differences and needs and adapt their teaching accordingly*' (M = 3.29) and the lowest score given to '*the trainers in the vocational English program are clear about their objectives and the steps of their lessons, and deal with any teaching problem successfully*' (M = 2.70).

No.	Competencies	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Level
15	The trainers in the vocational English program provide summative assessment to all the trainees at the end of the program.	178	3.58	1.73	Average
16	The trainers in the vocational English program provide continuous assessment and give useful feedback about our progress during the lessons.	178	2.90	1.40	Average
17	The tests provided in the vocational English program are suitable to levels of all the trainees.	178	2.83	1.06	Average
18	The tests provided in the vocational English program reflect what we need and what we are actually learning in the program	178	2.81	1.19	Average

Table (7): The Trainees' Perceptions of the Evaluation of the Trainees in the ESP Training Program at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria

Table (8) shows the details of the trainees' responses to the *fourth* category, '*evaluation and assessment*' of the ESP Training Program at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria (items: 15 - 18) in descending order. This table shows that the trainees are not satisfied with the '*assessment and evaluation*' implemented at the ESP training program as many of them gave average scores to the four items with '*The trainers in the vocational English program provide summative assessment to all the trainees at the end of the program*' (M = 3.58) being the highest, and '*the tests provided in the vocational English program reflect what we need and what we are actually learning in the program*' (M = 2.81) being the lowest.

No.	Competencies	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Level
19	The training rooms in our institute are adequate and the number of students in a room is appropriate.	178	2.99	1.21	Average
20	The training rooms in our institute are equipped with basic facilities such as comfortable desks, and modern aids such as smart boards, projectors...etc.	178	2.14	1.18	Low
21	The trainers use modern technology in their lessons such as computers, videos, tape-recorders...etc.	178	2.10	1.39	Low
22	The institutes provides the trainees with the learning resources they need such dictionaries, reference books, audio materials and audio-visual materials...etc.	178	1.63	1.05	Low

Table (8): The Trainees' Perceptions of the Aids, Facilities and Technology Provided in the ESP Training Program at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria

Table (9) shows the details of the trainees' responses to the *fifth* category, '*aids, facilities and technology*' provided for the trainees in the ESP training program at the Institutes of Vocational Training in Algeria (items: 19 - 22) in descending order. This table shows that the trainees are not satisfied with the 'training of the ESP as many of them gave very low scores to three items out of four, with the highest score given to '*the training rooms in the institute are adequate and the number of students in each room is appropriate*' ($M = 2.99$) and the lowest score to '*providing the trainees with all the learning resources they need such dictionaries, reference books, audio materials, and audio-visual materials...etc.*' ($M = 1.63$).

4.2- A summary of the Results:

This study attempted to evaluate the training needs of the trainees in the Vocational Institutes considering the trainees perception. The study evaluated different aspects of the ESP training program, namely its aims and objectives, the trainers, the training materials, evaluation and assessment techniques and aids and facilities provided for the learners. The results of the study have shown the following:

- The trainees' showed a great dissatisfaction with all aspects of the training programs.

The results of the survey have shown that the trainees were dissatisfied with the training program.

For example, the results of question one have shown that the trainees are completely dissatisfied with the program, regardless to their qualification, in the five areas, though they were even less satisfied with the aids and facilities provided as they gave this domain the lowest rating. However, in their rating, the trainees did not blame their teachers so much for the shortcomings of the program as they gave them relatively higher rating in areas such as 'the trainers' and 'evaluation techniques' which are supposed to be the trainers' responsibility in the first place. However the trainees were, in general, more critical about certain items such as those related to 'enabling them to express themselves clearly when they talk about topics related to their field of study' and those related to *'The training rooms in the institute where I study are equipped with basic facilities such as comfortable desks, and modern aids (i.e. smart boards, projectors...etc.)'* and *'the use modern technology in teaching such as computers, videos, tape-recorders...etc and use it in many of their lessons.'*

Moreover, the results of the study show clearly that the ESP program implemented in the vocational institutes in Algeria must be thoroughly reviewed, and mainly in a number of areas as indicated by the trainees as appeared in the overall rating of the program at the end.

5. Suggestions and recommendations:

- Conduct more studies on the evaluation of ESP training programs in other areas of the country.
- conduct more studies on ESP taking the different aspects of the program into consideration (such as: material, goals, the different aid and technologic material, teacher training)
- Conduct more studies on ESP that include more disciplines and specializations in other institutes of vocational training.
- EFL teachers should increase their knowledge of vocational language in general
- The MVTA should be aware of the trainees' needs; this should also be prior before developing any ESP program.
- The ESP courses should not be considered as a single project or selected to be taught for one or two semesters, but they should be well organized a long term curriculum
- The socio-cultural environment and the political and economic situation of the Algerian society should be taken into consideration in the design of ESP programs.
- Materials, aids and technological facilities should be available in the different IVT in Algeria to allow the trainees to better improve their English.

6. Conclusion

The situation of teaching ESP in the IVT in Algeria has received very little attention by the people concerned (syllabus designers, MVTA, trainers, trainees,...). The present study was conducted as a way to investigate the effectiveness of the training program for teaching English at the IVT in Algeria in terms of the aims and objectives of the program, the different needs of the trainees such as the materials used, the methods of teaching implemented, the assessment techniques and aids and facilities provided.

The results obtained from this study showed that the trainees' rating of the program was relatively low whereas no items were highly rated among the five domains. It also showed that the value of (P) was greater than (.05) which indicated that there were no significant difference between the trainees perceptions of their training needs in the program that can be attributed to their qualification (High School and More than High School)

In general the results of the survey have shown that the trainees were dissatisfied with the training program in generally

To conclude, we can say that the training program for teaching English at the IVT in Algeria should be thoroughly reviewed in some areas as shown by the trainees.

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