

**A Task-Based Syllabus for Business and Economics Students****المنهج القائم على المهام لطلاب الاعمال والاقتصاد****Ismahan Hayet MEGNAFI<sup>1</sup>**

Faculty of Letters and Languages, Department of English, Algeria, Tlemcen

ismahanmeg@gmail.com

ESPTLAB

**Radia BENMANSOUR- BENYELLES**

Faculty of Letters and Languages, Department of English, Algeria, Tlemcen,

benirad1971@yahoo.com

ESPTLAB

**Received 17/05/2020 Accepted 05/01/2022 Published online 15/04/2022****2020/05/15 القبول 2022/01/05 النشر على الخط 17/05/2020 تاريخ الوصول****Abstract:**

This research work aims at identifying the extent to which task-based course would answer English for Business and Economics (EBE) students' needs. The research involves a questionnaire addressed to students and a semi-structured interview with language teachers. The results obtained showed that EBE students need adequate syllabus to achieve their academic and professional duties. They need to develop all language skills. Moreover, the task-based syllabus provides tasks of different situations in their academic and professional careers to help them promote both accuracy and fluency. The main results showed that task-based syllabus would be appropriate for EBE learners. It promotes EBE students with related vocabulary activities and choosing the appropriate teaching materials that suit the proficiency level of learners.

**Keywords:** EBE learners; ESP context; Task-based syllabus; Teaching/learning process; Needs Analysis.

**ملخص:**

الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تحديد متطلبات طلبة الاعمال والاقتصاد في جامعة تلمسان قسم العلوم المالية والمحاسبة. كما يسلط البحث الضوء على المشاكل المحيطة بتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية وكذا تقديم بعض الحلول من خلال رسم برنامج دراسي واعداد محتوى يتوافق مع هذه العينة. يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحديد مدى استجابة الدورة التدريبية القائمة على المهام لاحتياجات طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية للأعمال والاقتصاد (EBE). يتضمن البحث استبياناً موجهاً للطلاب ومقابلة مع معلمي اللغة. أظهرت النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها أن طلاب EBE بحاجة إلى مناهج كافية لتحقيق واجباتهم الأكاديمية والمهنية. إنهم بحاجة إلى تطوير جميع المهارات اللغوية. علاوة على ذلك، يوفر المنهج القائم على المهام مهام المواقف المختلفة لمساعدتهم على تعزيز الدقة والطلاقة. أظهرت النتائج الرئيسية أن اللغة الإنجليزية مطلوبة في كل من الوظائف الأكاديمية والمهنية والمناهج الدراسية القائمة على المهام ستكون مناسبة لتعليمي EBE.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** طلاب EBE، اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة ESP، المنهج القائم على المهام، عملية التعليم والتدريس، تحليل تحديد الاحتياجات.

<sup>1</sup> - Corresponding author: **Ismahan Hayet MEGNAFI**

Email: ismahanmeg@gmail.com

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English has become the most prevailing language in the world and the linguistic engine that leads to a global economy, international communication, transportation, invention and technology. It results in a necessity among people to learn the target language. It has become the widely taught language worldwide regardless of its status. Many educational reforms have integrated it into their curricular to equip learners with the specific course under the prominent field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP, henceforth) Therefore, several ESP courses have been programmed at tertiary level in different departments like physics, computer sciences, political sciences, biology and economics.

This study is an attempt to help EBE students develop their knowledge that could satisfy their needs. It also gives some remedial solutions related to the design of an adequate syllabus. It leads to formulating the following research questions:

- What do EBE students need English for?
- What type of syllabus would be adequate and answer the needs of EBE students?

The above-mentioned research questions lead the investigator to formulate the following hypotheses:

- EBE students need English to exploit scientific documents, read content-specific vocabulary and literature and interact with foreign peers.
- The task-based syllabus is suitable to answer EBE students needs because it provides target tasks that illustrate different situations and EBE learners are likely to encounter in their academic and professional careers.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Definition of ESP

ESP is an approach to language teaching that provides learners with specific knowledge of English related to their field of study and needs. In this context, (Basturkmen,2006, p18) says that: "In ESP, language is learned not for its own sake or for the sake of gaining a general education, but to smooth the path to entry or greater linguistic efficiency in academic, professional or workplace environments."

Thus, the primary focus of ESP to help learners acquire specific knowledge and to deal with the various features of the language. It increases a purpose to develop linguistic competencies of learners who need English to perform their professional or academic studies.

A further definition offered by (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p19) state that ESP is an approach that is related to the reasons for learners to learn English. It does not require a particular methodology. It develops learners' competencies needed in a specific discipline.

Therefore, the economic supremacy of the US helped English to be used for scientific and economic publications. It has become the necessary medium of communication (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). The trend is referred to as ESP. It suits several teaching situations. It has many types.

### 2.2 Branches of ESP

ESP covers many types of branches. They differ according to the needs of learners. ESP has

got three main branches:

- English for Science and Technology (EST)
- English for Social Sciences (ESS)
- English for Business and Economy (EBE)

They are regrouped under two categories labelled as EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and EOP (English for Occupational Purposes).

### **2.3 Needs Identification Analysis in ESP**

Needs Identification Analysis (NIA, henceforth) is a major component in the ESP context. It represents the techniques, the procedures that language teachers rely on to design a syllabus (Nunan, 1988, p13). NIA is an essential tool to provide learners' insights into their actual use of the language. Language teachers need to address the needs of their learners carefully. They take into account their subjective needs (Dudley- Evans and St Johns, 1998). They help to increase students' motivation to learn the target language. NIA allows determining the objective to the course, to select the needed teaching materials and language skills that are suitable to their field of study. In this context, (Hemche, 2007, p15) states that: "...if you define the need, you define the content of the course." EBE students do not target all sides of the language. The task of course designers is to equip their learners with specific knowledge to fulfil their professional and academic purposes.

Therefore, there are various types of NIA. Target needs refer to what EBE learners need to do to be able to communicate effectively in the target situation. They are closest to the term objectives. Further divisions have been made to make a distinction between necessities, wants and lacks. Necessities determine the final objectives. They represent the occupational and academic requirements of the target situation. They mention what EBE learners have to know to function effectively in the target situation. Wants refer to personal aims of EBE learners. What they like to obtain from the course. They help to determine the content.

Lacks represent the proficiency level of EBE students. They describe their background. They refer to what learners lack to reach the rapid proficiency level. Lacks are what learners do not know or cannot do in the target language.

However, learning needs refer to the way EBE students will be able to shift from lacks to necessities. They provide insights into the learning situation, the proficiency level of EBE students and the teaching materials.

When language teachers identify their learners' needs, they can move to the next step of syllabus design. In this context, (Munby, 1978, p40) says that: "syllabus classification in ESP can only take place after the prior and necessary work has been done on needs."

### **2.4 English for Business and Economics**

The globalization process and the rapid change foster English to be an essential tool for all sciences. The required need is to develop Business English to increase effective trade relations. The scientific world increased since a large business literature is available written in English. Educationalists revealed that learning a target language has to be balanced as the acquisition of the mother tongue.

The content of the EBE course and methodology need to work along with EBE students from

non-native English speaking context. EBE teaching enlarges language skills, develops specific terminology. Thus, the intended learning outcomes allows EBE students to use the target language successfully.

EBE teaching methodologies are similar to any language teaching process. Various elements need to be considered as learners, their needs, the objectives of the course, motivation and attitudes towards learning. EBE learners are placed at the heart of the teaching process (Strevens, 1988).

Language teachers have a significant role in the teaching/learning process. They have to provide knowledge, facilitate the EBE students' learning. They are not allowed to be a resourceful authority (Kashani, 2007). They design the EBE syllabus and take into consideration the subject area of learners, the lexical, and the structures of the target language. Thus, EBE syllabus aims to permit learners following specific language skills, the content-specific vocabulary and to be able to communicate effectively in the target language.

### 2.5 Task-based Syllabus

The investigator has chosen task-based syllabus because it is based on complex and purposeful tasks. A learner-centred approach focuses on tasks as the unit of instruction. The task-based syllabus allows the use of real-life tasks. They engage EBE learners in goal-oriented communication, authentic and meaningful situations. Task-based syllabus promotes real communicative situations and allows EBE students to be autonomous learners.

Language teachers need to focus on four main criteria to design the EBE task-based syllabus. They are:

- ☐ Learner ability: the content of the syllabus focuses on the level of competence of students.
- ☐ Validity: the language has to be authentic.
- ☐ Significance: the content should be interesting and motivating (Harmer, 2007).

The researcher went through these phases to sequence the tasks for EBE students. The first phase refers to the identification of learners' lacks and deficiencies of EBE students and ordering them. The second phase requires the selection of EBE students' needs and their proficiency level. The last phase refers to the selection of appropriate learning tasks to meet EBE students' needs to address their lacks. The aim is to combine the language and content to design adequate tasks that help EBE students to overcome their deficiencies in learning the target language. The task-based syllabus is designed to meet EBE students' needs of the target language. The researcher selected relevant tasks by taking into account the complexity of the tasks and the proficiency level of students.

## 3. Results and discussion

The objective of this work is to investigate EBE students' needs and the relevance of task-based syllabus that would answer their needs. The researcher designed a questionnaire to EBE students and a semi-structured interview with language teachers to determine the objectives of the course and implement task-based syllabus.

### 3.1 Sources

### 3.2 Data Collection and Research Instruments

The investigator has used two research instruments; a questionnaire and an interview to collect data. Triangulation provides validity and reliability to the research results. In this context, (Richards, 2001, p 59) says that: “Many different sources of information should be sought (...)information could be obtained from the following sources: samples of students and writing, test data on students’ performance, reports by teachers on typical problems face, opinions of experts, information from students via interviews and questionnaires...”

Therefore, a questionnaire was addressed to EBE students and a semi-structured interview with language teachers at the University of Tlemcen.

A questionnaire is a helpful tool that enables the researcher to get reliable results. It is easy to prepare and analyzed in a short time. It helps to check the validity of the hypotheses. In this context, (Richerich and Chancerel, 1980, p59) assert that: “questionnaires are structured instruments for the collection of data which translate research hypotheses into questions.”

The investigator has piloted the questionnaire to ensure the clarity of the questions. It helped to make the necessary changes and to avoid confusion. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic to enable the EBE learners to understand and answer clearly.

As a second research instrument tool, the researcher has opted for a semi-structured interview. (Richards, 2001, p61) says that: “interviews allow for a more in-depth exploration of issues than it is possible with the questionnaire.”

There are different types of interviews. They differ from one type to another. They depend on the degree of formality. They range from unstructured to semi-structured to structured interview. The reason behind opting for a semi-structured interview to provide an opportunity for the researcher to move to further details.

### **3.2.1 EBE Students’ Profile**

Master students of Business and Economics are advanced learners in their learning concerning the use of the target language. They are more aware of their needs and the importance of English since they need to be ready to handle their learning process. The total number that has been chosen was forty-four students aged between twenty-one and twenty –eight years old at the Department of “Finance and Accounting” University of Tlemcen.

### **3.2.2 Language Teachers’ Profile**

The reasons for choosing language teachers to provide some pedagogical points concerning the relevance of task-based syllabus that answers the needs of EBE students. Therefore, seven language teachers who are in charge of teaching English were interviewed in this study.

### **3.3 EBE Students’ Questionnaire**

EBE students’ questionnaire enabled the researcher to determine the difficulties surrounding their learning process and helped to identify their needs. Besides, it helped in the design of task-based syllabus. The collected data confirmed partly the first hypothesis. It concerns improving speaking and reading skills. EBE students revealed that they need to develop the four language skills. They need to exploit scientific documents, read and write reports and e-mails. The following table 1 summarizes the main results:

| Listening | Speaking | Reading | Writing | Total |
|-----------|----------|---------|---------|-------|
| 08        | 15       | 13      | 08      | 44    |
| 18.18%    | 34.09    | 29.54%  | 18.18%  | 100%  |

**Table 1.** Language Skills' Classification

The data also revealed that EBE students encountered many deficiencies in learning the target language. This is the result of their non-frequent use of English outside the classroom setting. The materials were not available to help them acquire the English language. The time allocated to the learning of English is not sufficient to practice the language. EBE students' questionnaire confirmed that task-based course permits the integration of the four language skills and promotes both fluency and accuracy.

### 3.4 Language teachers' Interview

The objective of the semi-structured interview to mention the language teachers' perceptions about the relevance of task-based syllabus for EBE learners, the significance of the language skills and the factors that lead to effective language instruction in EBE context. The semi-structured interview was arranged with seven language teachers who teach in the Department of Finance and Accounting.

The results obtained from the semi-structured interview confirmed the first hypothesis concerning EBE students' needs. They reported that the four language skills have to be all developed together. The findings confirmed the second hypothesis concerning the elaboration of the task-based syllabus for EBE learners. Language teachers argued that the task-based syllabus best fits the teaching of ESP. They reported that it permits the integration of the four language skills. It promotes both fluency and accuracy. Language teachers suggested a collaboration with subject specialists since it is a beneficial step that leads to fruitful results.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The outcomes drawn from the questionnaire and the interview showed that both language teachers and EBE students are aware of the importance of the English language for Business and Economics. Needs identification analysis is a significant step in designing an ESP course. Thus, task-based syllabus proves to be suitable since it caters EBE students' needs and helps language teachers to establish appropriate teaching materials.

## 5. Bibliography:

- Basturkmen, H. (2006). Ideas and Options in English for Specific Purposes. Lawrence ERLBAUM Associated Publishers: London.
- Dudley- Evans, T. & M. St. Johns. (1998). Developments in ESP: A Multi-disciplinary Approach Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harmer, J. (2007). How to Teach English. (New edition). Essex: Pearson Education.
- Hemche, H. The Design of ESP Teaching Material for First-year Post-graduate Students of Physics: University of Abou Bakr Belkaid Tlemcen. Unpublished Magister Thesis: University of Tlemcen. Algeria. (2007).

- Hutchinson, T. and A. Waters. (1987). English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-Centered Approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kashani, S. (2007). Freire's Bottom-up Bridges Student Centeredness. Asian ESP Journal. Vol 5. Issue 1.
- Munby, J. (1978). Communicative Syllabus Design. Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1988). Syllabus Design. Oxford University Press.
- Richards, J.C (2001). Curriculum Developments in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richterich, R and J.L. Chancerel (1980). Identifying the Needs of Adults Learning a Foreign Language. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Strevens, P. (1988). The Learner and the Teacher of ESP. ESP in the classroom: Practice and evaluation. Chamberlain and Baumgardner. Vol. 6, pp 39-44.

## 6. Appendices

### 6.1 Language teachers' Interview:

#### Rubric One: Language Teachers' Profile

- What is your degree?
- What is your status?
- How long have you been teaching English?
- What is your experience in EBE?
- Did you carry any training to teach EBS?

#### Rubric Two: NIA and Syllabus Design

- What is the time allotted to teach English per-week?
- Do you think the time allotted is sufficient? Why?
- Do you carry any teaching material designed for EBE students? If yes, specify.
- What kind of teaching material do you use? Why?
- Do you think that task-based syllabus fits best EBE students? Why?
- On which skill do you focus more (1=most / 4= less)
  - Listening
  - Speaking
  - Reading
  - Writing
- Do your students need English for?
  - Understanding the terminology
  - Taking part in oral presentations
  - Attending international conferences
  - Negotiating with foreigners
  - Writing reports

- What kind of syllabus could help EBE students?

Structural syllabus based on grammar

- Content-based syllabus
- Functional notional syllabus
- Skill-based syllabus
- Situational syllabus
- Task-based syllabus

Why?

Rubric Three: Teaching Instruction Problems

- What are the obstacles faced you?
- Do you collaborate with subject specialists? How?
- Do you think that collaboration brings fruitful results? Justify.

Rubric Four: Suggestions

- What are the suggestions that you provide to make English course relevant to the EBE context?

## 6.2 EBE Students' Questionnaire

Rubric One: EBE Students' Information Background

- How long have you been studying English at university?
- How do you consider the English course?
- Very important
- Important
- Less important
- What is your level in English?
- Good
- Average
- Weak

Rubric Two: EBE students' Needs

- Does the English course satisfy your needs?
- Yes
- No
- How?
- Do you need English to:
- Read documents, articles
- Take part in oral discussions
- Understand native speakers
- Meet and negotiate with foreigners
- Attend international conferences
- Write reports, e-mails
- What is the most important skill to answer your needs? (1= most / 4= less)
- Listening

- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing
- What type of teaching materials would help you in learning English?
- Reading texts
- PowerPoint presentations
- Worksheets
- Dialogues
- Tasks and activities

Rubric Three: Deficiencies of the learning process

- Which skill do you consider as difficult?
- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing
- What are the obstacles that you face in your learning of English?
  
- What do you suggest to make the English course more effective?