ESP Needs Analysis of Business Students in Morocco:
Case Study of the Faculty of Economics, Social Sciences and Law
Hassan I University

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Abstract

Learning languages for the workplace has been taken for granted as a requirement for obtaining quality employment. In a globally connected world, Business English is becoming increasingly important as more and more companies are mandating English as the common corporate language. It is highly required in order to join, communicate and compete in the international market where English is predominant. Students need specific English language practices to communicate effectively in professional settings. This study investigates English language needs of Economics and Management second year Master’s degree at the Faculty of Economics, Social Sciences and Law- Hassan 1st University of Settat. To this end, a questionnaire has been administered to 123 students. The findings point out that the students are interested in the four language skills but want to improve their productive skills in particular. The results also show that they expect to need English for communication.

Keywords: ESP, Needs Analysis, Business English, communication, Higher education
1. Introduction

Learning languages for the workplace has been taken for granted as a requirement for obtaining quality employment. In a globally connected world, Business English is becoming increasingly important as more and more companies need their staff to be multi-lingual (Fitria, 2019). It is highly required in order to join, communicate and compete in the international market. Learning Business English can no longer be underestimated in the age of the new global business market (Rajapakse, 2019). According to Galova (2007), the success of the professionals and specialists is conditional on their ability to manage language and cultural barriers, i.e. on the language skills and competences with respect to their professional areas.

To achieve this goal, students need specific English language practices to communicate effectively in professional settings. Thus, teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is seen as a separate activity within English language teaching (ELT). Tica, Palurović and Firat (2015, pp. 484) affirm that ESP must be seen as one of the branches of English as a foreign language (EFL)/English as a second language (ESL), which are themselves the main branches of ELT/general English (GE). ESP aims at satisfying the specific needs of the learners. It focuses on the language, skills and genres appropriate to the specific activities the learners need to carry out in English. Business English (BE) is the most current growing area of ESP. It depends on and employs elements common to all fields of ESP, such as syllabus design, needs analysis, course design, etc.

Needs analysis is a vital asset for teachers of ESP to identify their learners’ key requirements or needs and determine the areas in which they are lacking skills (Alsamadani, 2017). According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the approach to ESP should be based on the learner's needs in their respective specialized subjects. ESP teaching should be based on the principles of effective learning and teaching language for general purposes. They state that in the past, the teaching of ESP was primarily concerned with the linguistic aspects of the language. Now, it has shifted towards developing communication skills, and learning is very much directed by specific learner's needs for mastering the language (pp. 18- 19).

Many studies have been conducted to analyse the needs of ESP learners in different fields and in different countries. Mitra (2014) emphasizes the significant role of need analysis in teaching ESP for nursing. Boroujeni and Fard (2013) examine the needs of ESP for Iranian first-year students of Educational Administration. Chatsungnoen (2015) explores the English language needs of students and relevant stakeholders for an (ESP) programme for food science and technology students at Agriculture University in Thailand. To the best of our knowledge, there have been few empirical investigations regarding business students in the Moroccan context. In Morocco, many studies have investigated the needs of either engineering students at National Schools of Applied Sciences (Dahbi, 2017) or undergraduate students at Higher Schools of Technology (Mahraj, 2019).

2. Needs Analysis of English for Business and Economics

Needs Analysis (NA) has a crucial role in designing and carrying out any language courses in general and ESP in particular. Brown (2001:35 as cited in Dulul and Ali, 2017) defines NA as “The activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students.” NA is crucial
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for language course design. It gathers information on the situation in which a language will be used, whom it will be used with, the objectives and purposes for which the language is needed, the type of communication that will be used, and the level of proficiency that will be required (Richards et al., 1992: 242-243). It is considered to be an ongoing process of gathering information about the learners’ needs.

Many studies have investigated NA in different fields and different countries. As mentioned earlier, Mitra (2014) emphasizes the significant role of needs analysis in teaching ESP for nursing. Boroujeni and Fard (2013) examine the needs of ESP for Iranian first-year students of Educational Administration. Chatsungnoen (2015) explores the English language needs of students and relevant stakeholders for an (ESP) programme for Food Science and Technology students at the Agriculture University in Thailand. Mognhode and Woldemariam (2015) investigate the English language needs of Business students at Adama Science and Technology University-Ethiopia.

The current study deals with Business English NA. It is now recognized that “…English has become the primary language for doing international business” (Esteban & Pérez Cañado, 2004: 137). In China for instance, Business English is viewed as a major or discipline; over 30 universities and colleges have been approved by the Ministry of Education to set up Business English as a major since 2007 (Li, 2014). English for Business and Economics (EBE) learners are adults working in business or preparing to work in the field of Business or/and Economics. The teaching/learning of EBE process is job-related and its results (Target Situation) impact directly the business outcome. Robinson (1991: 2) states that students generally study English “not because they are interested in the English language or English culture as such, but because they need English for study or work purposes”.

Richey (2004) states that the core Business area functions, speaking and writing skills are usually included in BE: The core Business area functions: general Management, Administration, Marketing, Finance/Accountancy, Human Resources/personnel. Speaking skills: socializing, telephoning, presentations, negotiations, meetings. Writing skills: emails, letters, faxes, memos, reports, minutes, announcements, notices. EBE teaching focuses more on register (formal vs. informal), using more polite and conditional forms and appropriate lexis than grammar (basic rules) as long as it targets effective and efficient communication. Lessons are based on communication-oriented activities.

Using the survey method, Mognhode and Woldemariam (2015) analyze English language needs of Business students at Adama Science and Technology University in Ethiopia. They focus on investigating the appropriateness of the current English course for students’ writing needs, academic writing needs of the target groups and the writing difficulties students face. The results of their study point out that the students identified their own perceived writing needs, the target groups indicated their writing difficulties in specific tasks and the English course lays less emphasis on the students’ writing needs.

There have been a few empirical investigations regarding Business English in the Moroccan context. For instance, Midoul (2012) conducts a NA research at ENSAM in Meknes. The study targets 120 third year engineering students. EL Hiani (2016) conducts a study on the
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Impact of NA on ESP courses at Mohammadia School of Engineers in Rabat. The researcher used participatory Needs Analysis and testing to investigate the needs of first year electrical engineering students. Most of these studies focused mainly on English for engineering as part of English for Science and Technology. Ait Hattani (2019) analyses the needs of 30 undergraduate Renewable Energy engineering students at the Higher School of Technology in Fes during the first semester of the academic year 2018-2019. The study findings confirm that the participating students show high favorable attitudes towards English language for both their personal and professional careers. The results indicate that the students have difficulties with English language productive skills (namely speaking and writing).

Recently, Saadallah (2020) has aimed at revealing whether Business English, taught in Moroccan vocational schools, is useful at work. Accordingly, a mixed-method study was adopted to demystify the importance of designing the content of Business English courses based on the learners' future professional background and on the analysis drawn from target situations and learners’ needs.

Business English NA is considered to be a prerequisite in any course design, otherwise the effort of English teachers would lack focus and the learners will be disappointed by their achievements once they join the workplace. It is an important tool for course designers. They can focus on specific language skills, forms, and functions in ESP courses based on the obtained information of learners’ needs. Globalization and the rapid economic development have greatly promoted the need for business English. Many NA have been conducted worldwide, but only a few of them have been interested in Business English, and less in the Moroccan context.

3. Statement of the problem

Business and Economics MA students need to study Business English since they need English in the workplace sooner or later. This research investigates the teaching and learning of English in Masters’ programme at Hassan 1st of Settat. It focuses on the Business and Economic English needs at the Faculty of Economics, Social Sciences and Law (FESSL). The faculty was founded in 1997. It includes many departments among which the department of Economics and the department of Management. The department of Economics offers two vocational masters and the department of Management offers four vocational masters.

Vocational masters, in general, are designed to provide students with knowledge and methods applied to different problems in different management and economic fields. In a competitive job market, students should develop skills that enable them to be outstanding. These vocational masters aim at providing students with foundational skills necessary to get a job and be successful afterwards. It is worth noticing that a good level in English is a competitive advantage for the job seeker. Thus, the targeted population is 2nd year MA students.

Since 2013, Masters’ programmes syllabi in Morocco were modified to fit to the new reform requirements (e.g. reducing the hours of teaching per module). One of the evident consequences of this reform is that the teaching of the compulsory subjects (Management and Economics) was privileged over language teaching. For the two years of their study, the MA students do not have an English course. Instead, they might study some subjects in English. The professors in charge are non-specialists in EFL. They do not consider students’ Business English needs since it is not the aim of their teaching. Moreover, they come from different
Business and Economics areas; yet they are not trained to teach students with Business or professional needs using English. That is the case of the Quaid-e-Awam University in Pakistan for teaching English in the Engineering programme. One of the main problems that Quaid-e-Awam University has to face in conducting a NA for its learners is that teachers of the engineering programmes come from different engineering fields and thus remain unprepared to teach students with engineering or professional needs in terms of the English language (Channa et al., 2013).

4. Research questions
The objective of the present research is to investigate the English language needs of second year MA students at the department of Economics and the department of Management at the FESSL, Hassan 1st University of Settat. It aims at examining their problems in using English in their studies, skills they highly need, and their target needs. Based on this objective, these research questions are formulated:
What are the Business English needs of Economics and Management MA students?
What skills do they need to improve?
What are their target needs?
The focus of this research is on how students perceive their needs since no tests are conducted to identify their real needs.

5. Methodology
The present study uses a questionnaire and informal interviews for collecting survey data. The informal interviews are conducted with different streams responsible for gathering general information about the MAs and directly related to teaching procedures. The designed questionnaire aims at investigating students’ perception towards their Business English needs, at identifying their English strengths and weaknesses, and the skills they believe the job market mostly requires.

The questionnaire has been inspired from the survey conducted by Mahraj (2019). It includes two main sections: general information and English performance. The first one is related to the students’ background, their biographical information, fields of study, and previous language learning experience and current proficiency in the target language. The second section focuses on their present target skills. This section includes other questions related to the reasons behind learning English including what language skills they prefer to master.

The questionnaire has been inspired from the questions suggested by Hutchinson and Waters’s (1987) model and the survey conducted by Mahraj (2019). It contains two main sections. The first section aims at collecting general information about the students’ names, age, gender, mother tongue, and stream. The second section addresses the students’ present and target needs. Different questions are asked to gather information about their present needs (such as whether they need English for their field of study or not, how long they have been studying English for, and to what extent they have to use English in the courses they have been studying in their degree programme).

The study was carried out in February 2020. We visited the two departments and met some of the students in order to ask about their availability and willingness to take part in this research and to clarify any issues they might have. For piloting purposes, the NA questionnaire was administered to 3 students, randomly chosen from different MAs, in order to check the clarity
of the different questions presented in the questionnaire. Later on, the NA questionnaire was administered to the targeted population via Google form. Data was collected as from 10 March to 30 April 2020. The gathered data showed that only 73 MA students out of 123 answered the questionnaire.

6. Findings and discussion
The first section of the questionnaire addresses information about the profile of the participants. As mentioned earlier the students belong to the department of Economics and the department of Management: Management Control MA, Decision Engineering MA, Marketing and Commercial Actions, Finance and Management MA, and Human Resource Management MA (figure 1).

![Figure 1: Distribution of the students according to their MA](image)

The above-mentioned students are supposed to be the most interested in the EBE; they should be aware of their needs and aware of the job market needs. Regarding their gender, only 35% are female students while 55% are male students.

Concerning their age, 8% are between 20-22, 37% are 23-25 years old, and 28% are over 25 years. Based on the discussions carried out with the students of the Decision Engineering MA, we have found out that the majority of the students enrolled in the Decision Engineering MA are studying and working at the same time. This might explain why over a quarter of the participants (28%) are over 25 years old. They have decided to finish their studies to maximize their chances of getting better jobs. In the light of the above information, we can conclude that they are aware of their language (English) needs and aware of the job market requirements.

Results also show that none of the students is an English native speaker. All of them have studied English as a part of their curriculum (compulsory course).
The results show that the majority of the students (53%) have been studying English for less than 4 years. Only 8% of the targeted population have studied English for more than 11 years (figure 2).

The main difference observed in terms of the number of years of English courses taken by the students can be explained by the process of the selection of MA students. The candidates, BA students, do not belong to the same university and/or have not followed the same training; some students have stated that they studied English at high school. Others have reported that they were taking English courses during their BA studies at university or in private language centers.

a. Present Needs Analysis of the target population

When asked whether they like their English classes, almost all the respondents, except one who thinks that English “is difficult to pronounce”, have responded positively and mentioned a number of reasons why they find their English classes interesting.
A majority of almost 60% of the participants affirm that they need English only for communication. They are motivated to study English for many reasons. One can easily observe that the “I need it for communication” is recurrent for the majority of the answers. This indicates again that the students are aware of their needs of learning English, and gives an idea about their present needs. Their motivation is mainly instrumental; they are keen on enhancing their professional careers. Apart from their intrinsic motivation, their answers reveal that they like English because they like their teacher of English. Similarly, Mognhode and Woldemariam (2015) point out that Business students at Adama Science and Technology University are also motivated to learn English for instrumental reasons. Their results show that “the majority of the respondents rated ‘most preferred’ for writing on topics related to business. They also preferred to learn vocabulary related to their field of study” (Mognhode and Woldemariam, 2015:185). All of these responses imply that the students are interested in and want to learn language skills related to their fields (Business).

The level of English perceived by the students is intermediate. Figure 4 illustrates that the respondents generally think that they have an average or intermediate level for listening comprehension (71%), reading comprehension (64%), speaking (67%), writing (59%), vocabulary (71%), and grammar (59%).
Having an intermediate level might be explained by the extra-activities that the students practice outside the class, such as watching movies and listening to songs in English. The low level observed for some students regarding some English skills reveal that they have to improve their skills; for instance, while about a third of the respondents (32%) have poor grammar, a little over a quarter of them (26%) have weak writing skills and less than a quarter (23%) show a low level of speaking. This may be due to the frequency of difficulties they have with these language skills as shown in figure 5.

The results illustrate that the respondents have frequent difficulties with productive skills: writing (14%) and speaking (18%). Almost a third of them (32%) “often” face difficulties for the same for writing, and over a third (36%) for speaking. These findings confirm the results of the previous question, and reveal that the students are aware of their difficulties towards the language skills, mainly productive skills. This can be explained by the fact that the courses taught at the university, either EFL courses or content based subjects taught in English do not focus on these two skills, and consequently the students are not given the opportunity to practice writing or speaking. In comparison to Business students at Adama Science and Technology University, Moghode and Woldemariam (2015) have found that the students are
aware of their lacks, but they have limitations only in performing specific tasks in English i.e. writing.

b. Target Needs Analysis of the targeted population

In order to analyse their target needs, the participants have been asked about the skills that they are expected to use the most during the course of their study. The results are illustrated in figure 6.

Over a third of the respondents (36%) have stated that the listening skill is the most expected to be used. Almost 30% of the participants think that they “sometimes” are expected to use the four skills. The results show that between 21% and 36% of the respondents consider that the four skills are required during the course of their study. Less than 3% of the participants expect “never” to use the four skills.

Focusing on their future needs, the participants were asked about some specific skills they would like to improve. The results are illustrated in figure 7 below.
A majority of about two thirds of the respondents (63%) would like to improve group communication. Likewise, most of them (60%) want to boost their CV and Email writing. The sub-skills they want to improve vary from productive to receptive skills. More specifically, over a half of them (53%) are keen to improve presentation skills, 52% would like to be able to listen to native speakers with more confidence and 51% would like to develop their ability to read faster. It is worth noticing that there is not abig difference in terms of what the students are willing to improve. All the subskills record a percentage above 40. Mognhode and Woldemariam (2015) point out that the students wanted to improve almost all the language skills (writing, reading and speaking). They were not satisfied with the English course taught. In fact, the English course taught was not designed based on the students’ needs analysis.

The findings of the present study show that the students of the department of Management and the department of Economics are aware of their needs of EBE. They have a moderate level in all the language skills, grammar and vocabulary. Their present needs are productive skills. The analysis of the present situation reveals that just under a third (30%) of the respondents are facing difficulties related to the productive skills: writing and speaking. Regarding their target needs, they want to improve their receptive and productive skills.

7. Conclusion
The objective of the present study is to explore EBE needs of Management and Economics MA students at the FESSL at Hassan I University of Settat. The objective of the questionnaire is to gather a set of information about the students’ NA, the main difficulties the students are facing, the skills they want to improve, and their target needs as well. The target population is the second year MA students of the departments of Economics and of Management. The findings show that the students are aware of their lacks (productive skills). They are interested in the four language skills, but want to improve writing and speaking, in particular. The results also revealed that they expect to need English for communication.

However, this study has some limitations in that it is an exploratory case study. Thus, the findings may not be generalized to other populations in other settings. The findings are
restricted to a small number of students and to two departments. Moreover, the targeted population has neither a compulsory Business English course nor a specialized English teacher for EBE teaching. In order to determine the present needs, no assessments of proficiency using tests have been conducted. It has relied on data gathered from the targeted population using only a questionnaire, and the findings are based on the students’ perceptions.

Based on the findings and the limitations of the present study, a number of new avenues could be explored in future research studies. First and foremost, other factors should be taken into consideration, including mainly the learning environment. In other words, means analysis, which is considered by Rahman (2015) to be an adjunct to needs analysis, directs the environment in which the course will be run, in terms of the teaching methods and materials, classroom management, students’ facilities, etc. Therefore, analyzing different students’ needs and the learning environment will definitely give more insights to both teachers and course designers. Moreover, it is worth noticing that ESP, in general, is carried out by non-specialist English teachers. Conducting training sessions for the benefit of those teachers, according to the subject matter of different streams, would bridge the gap between the students’ needs, the language teacher, the specialist subject teacher, and the job requirements. Finally, the Moroccan educational system should reconsider the role of English as a language of teaching different subjects in Business schools. It should be more valued and be upgraded to the status of one of the core subjects instead of classifying it as a second-rate subject.

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