


A Review of Teaching English for Business Purposes in Morocco

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Abstract

This study reviews the existing literature on English for Specific Purposes (ESP), with a particular emphasis on Business English, within the Moroccan context. By analyzing the findings from various studies, this work aims to draw significant conclusions about the field of ESP and Business English. It highlights the notable challenges faced in the Moroccan higher education system, such as the prevailing perception of the dominance of French in the job market, which negatively impacts student motivation and leads to compromised teaching standards. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of a collaborative approach in curriculum development, advocating for the engagement of a broad range of stakeholders—educators, policymakers, industry representatives, and learners—to ensure ESP instruction is closely aligned with the requirements of the job market. Innovative teaching methodologies, like Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), are recommended to boost student engagement and improve language acquisition. The findings of this study aim to contribute valuable insights and offer practical recommendations to enhance the teaching and effectiveness of ESP in Morocco, particularly in the domain of business English, to better prepare students for the challenges of the global and digitalized marketplace.

Keywords: English for specific purposes, business English, Moroccan context, motivation

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Introduction

The incorporation of English into the Moroccan educational landscape dates back to the era of the protectorate. Significant shifts began in the 1970s when English language teaching transitioned towards a communicative approach, moving away from the grammar and translation-focused methods typical of the French system (Elouardaoui, 2024). This evolution in teaching methodologies reflects the language's growing status as a global lingua franca and the impact of technological advancements on educational practices. The imperative for English educators has been propelled by the language's dominant role in international communication and its critical function in the global marketplace, necessitating changes in beliefs and policies around English instruction in Morocco (EL Arbaoui, 2023a).

As English's role in Morocco evolved due to globalization and communication technology advancements, the significance of ESP and Business English escalated, with corporations increasingly requiring multilingual capabilities from their workforce (Fitria, 2019). Learning English for professional settings has thus become essential for securing quality employment and communicating effectively in the Moroccan labor market (Zaidoune and Chroqui, 2020). In response to these changes, Moroccan institutions have attempted to update their ESP programs to meet local employer needs and ensure academic learning impacts career success (Bouzidi, 2009). This paper delves into ESP, particularly focusing on business English within the Moroccan context, analyzing research findings to formulate recommendations for the advancement of ESP teaching in Morocco.

Objectives

This study addresses the challenges of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Moroccan higher education and proposes strategies to better align ESP with the job market demands. It highlights the issues of preference for French, lack of specialized training for teachers, oversized classes, and inadequate teaching methods. The study also calls for further research as to effective teaching methods, integration of digital skills, and continuous market analysis to update ESP curricula and needs analysis which naturally precedes any ESP program. These steps aim to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of ESP education, preparing Moroccan students for a competitive global economy.

ESP in Morocco

The ascendancy of English as the preeminent language in global business has become a necessity for international employment. This has underscored the importance of ESP courses in the worldwide context. Based on research efforts of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), ESP is distinctively designed to meet the English learning needs of individuals in specific professional or academic contexts, encompassing two primary sectors: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). EOP specifically targets job-related English instruction, focusing on specialized areas such as technical English or English for business professionals. Conversely, EAP is tailored to the academic needs of students, facilitating their pursuit of English proficiency for academic subjects, a necessity in higher education environments. The expansion of EAP reflects a recognition of the unique learning requirements of tertiary-level students, which are not adequately addressed by conventional English language teaching methods (Shing & Sim, 2011). This approach aims to equip students with the English skills necessary for effective and efficient academic communication, thereby supporting ESL students in achieving academic success and professional preparedness in their respective fields (Wei & Flaitz, 2005).

In the Moroccan public education system, English is introduced as a second language from the last year of middle school through high school, covering four years. Moreover, English has been recently integrated into the curricula of primary private schools. At the university level,

especially within English departments, English not only serves as a study subject but also as the primary medium of instruction. It is also a compulsory course across various disciplines in higher education, including business, agricultural engineering, industrial engineering, and architecture. A notable preference for English among Moroccan students has been documented (Amrous, 2020; Belhiah, 2020) with influences attributed to social factors (Getie, 2020), along with individual beliefs, political stances, or ethnic backgrounds (Bouziane, 2020).

In Morocco, ESP is predominantly featured in the curricula of private higher education institutions rather than in the English departments of public universities. The inclination towards vocational and practical course offerings in such institutions stems from their aim to fulfill the immediate needs of the job market, thus requiring specialized language instruction (Elouardaoui, 2024). While business English is a core element of many English departments in Moroccan universities, ESP does not enjoy a prominent status within the wider academic scheme. A discernible trend is the ambivalence of professors at public universities towards ESP courses, often assigning these courses to junior faculty members. This practice reflects a perception of ESP as a secondary, supplementary aspect of the curriculum, rather than a fundamental, integral element of language education (Ouakrime, 2016).

Teaching ESP

Indeed, the increasing importance of ESP underscores the need for specialized and tailored instructional methods for specific fields such as business, tourism, or healthcare, demanding courses that address unique learner needs. The ESP courses importantly incorporate practical techniques such as role-playing and problem-solving to enhance real-world relevance. Grammar and vocabulary instruction remain integral but are approached contextually, promoting inductive learning and greater student engagement (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Johns & Price-Machado, 2001). According to Alsamadani (2017), Al-Kadi (2016, 2018), and Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the teaching of ESP should concentrate on the specific linguistic needs and skill gaps of learners within their respective fields. This shift from a mere linguistic focus to the development of communication skills tailored to specific contexts underscores the complexity of identifying the precise needs of students (Al-Kadi, 2018). Hutchinson and Waters tackled this challenge by segregating needs into three categories: necessities, which are the essential requirements for effective function in the target context; lacks, representing the learner's current level of language proficiency as a baseline for instruction; and wants, reflecting the learner's objectives and perceived needs from the language program (Al-Kadi, 2016, 2018). A nuanced understanding of needs facilitates a more targeted and effective approach to ESP instruction, particularly in the realm of business English, where the demands are as diverse as they are dynamic.

Bouzidi (2009) found a major gap in English teaching materials for Morocco's hospitality sector, recommending the addition of specific topics, authentic dialogues, and role-plays to boost oral skills. Additionally, despite the clear need, few teachers use these supplemental materials, emphasizing the need for educators to collect and analyze industry feedback to align textbooks with professional language needs. Furthering this discussion, Farmati (2022) explored the perspectives of Moroccan third-year university students, who are not majoring in languages, towards the learning of English, with a focus on ESP. The investigation revealed a predominantly positive disposition towards English learning among the students, attributed to its perceived relevance to career progression, cultural interest, social interactions, and the intrinsic joy of language acquisition. These findings prompted several actionable recommendations, including early incorporation of ESP courses into university curricula, extending beyond the current practice of offering them solely in the initial phase of the third academic year. Such an adjustment could significantly deepen students' understanding and enhance their English proficiency relevant to their specific fields. Additionally, ESP instructors are encouraged to tap into the motivational currents among students by integrating practical language tasks that

resonate with their career aspirations and interests, thereby fostering a more engaging and pragmatically oriented learning environment. This strategic focus on real-life applications of English is envisioned to better equip students for their imminent professional challenges.

Challenges

Given the linguistic map in Morocco, English, being the second language in the country, is taught as general English and ESP. The execution of ESP teaching encounters a myriad of challenges, significantly impacting the effectiveness of these specialized courses. According to Elouardaoui (2024), a principal issue is the generally mediocre English proficiency among students, which discourages instructors from delving into the complexities of specialized ESP areas. This challenge is intensified by the varying degrees of English proficiency present in a classroom, complicating efforts to maintain a consistent teaching pace and effectively engage the entire student body. Reporting on a specific case of ESP teaching, Elouardaoui (2024) highlighted the dilemma where the need to pause to explain basic English terms and the endeavor to involve as many students as possible collectively impede the educational process. A pervasive lack of interest and motivation among students, even within their areas of specialization, complicates matters further. The struggle to remember technical definitions and follow the progressive nature of lessons reflects this disinterest. This attitude partly stems from the belief that specialized English knowledge lacks critical value in the Moroccan job market, which primarily operates in French, rendering high English proficiency unnecessary for graduates. Consequently, the minority of students displaying genuine interest in the material typically consists of those considering opportunities abroad, highlighting the challenges inherent in teaching ESP within Morocco.

Elimadi (2024) further elucidates the challenges faced in ESP classes, which range from a scarcity of qualified instructors capable of delivering effective ESP courses to difficulties in aligning the curriculum with the student's specific needs. This scenario necessitates educators who are not only adept in English but also deeply knowledgeable about the curriculum objectives and the specialized needs of their students. Issues such as pronunciation challenges with foreign vocabulary suggest the utility of ESP-focused dictionaries to support learning. While collaboration proves beneficial in EAP settings, EOP classes often struggle with fostering a collaborative learning environment, indicating a need for instructors to encourage more interactive and cooperative learning modalities.

The materials utilized in ESP courses frequently lack a diverse range of practical tasks, and the content is more topic-focused rather than problem-oriented. This observation underscores the necessity to refresh course materials and pivot towards problem-based learning to better align with educational goals (Al-kadi, 2018). ESP instructors are prompted to adopt a research-driven approach to continuously assess and meet the evolving needs of their students and the curriculum. Furthermore, the collaboration between ESP teachers and subject matter experts is essential to ensure that the curriculum achieves its educational objectives, and the integration of technology in ESP courses can offer students practical opportunities to apply their language skills in professional contexts.

However, the deployment of ESP teaching is further complicated by the absence of specialized training for educators, many of whom lack a comprehensive understanding of the specialized terminology essential for ESP instruction. This challenge is magnified by issues such as large class sizes and narrowly focused exams, which collectively diminish the quality of ESP instruction (Elimadi, 2024). Additionally, the diverse levels of language proficiency among students, combined with a generally passive learning attitude, significantly obstruct classroom engagement and interaction, underscoring the multifaceted challenges facing ESP education in Morocco.

English for business in Morocco

The trajectory of language instruction has significantly shifted to meet the demands of an increasingly-globalized professional environment. White (2007) underscores this transformation, highlighting the growing need for language teaching that addresses the real-world requirements of a connected business landscape. This evolution is further evidenced by Johnson (2009), who points out the rise of English for Business Purposes (EBP) as a crucial development stemming from the expanding nexus between business operations and technological progress. Such a shift underscores the broader movement towards ESP, aimed at fulfilling the precise linguistic needs of learners across various domains, including technical, scientific, and business fields.

This focus on ESP, as noted by Yeught (2016) and Flowerdew (1998), signifies a departure from traditional language teaching areas, venturing into specialized fields such as law, engineering, and notably, business. ESP's evolution from a concentration on technical and scientific English to encompassing EBP is a testament to its adaptability in catering to the specialized requirements of learners, thereby equipping them for success in a global professional arena (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

EBP, a specific segment of ESP, is designed to serve the linguistic needs of the business sector by emphasizing practical, task-oriented learning utilizing authentic materials. The growth of EBP, enriched by the integration of e-business practices propelled by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), aims to prepare professionals for a digital and global business environment. This preparation emphasizes industry-specific language, cross-disciplinary knowledge, and digital fluency (Bhatia & Bremner, 2012; Moomal & Masrom, 2015; Ringler, 1997; Taylor & Murphy, 2004).

In the context of a globally interconnected marketplace, the significance of Business English has escalated, with companies increasingly valuing multilingual staff (Fitria, 2019). Rajapakse (2019) accentuates the indispensable role of Business English in the contemporary global business sphere, whereas Galová (2007) posits that professionals' success hinges on their proficiency in navigating linguistic and cultural barriers through pertinent language skills and competencies.

The critical role of English extends into the financial domain, particularly in crafting reports that align with the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), illustrating English's paramount importance in finance, a sector where rapid access to information is vital, with the majority of such information predominantly available in English. Additionally, key updates on economic developments are mainly disseminated through English-language publications (Chernysh & Syvak, 2019). As the global lingua franca, English is instrumental in facilitating international communication, thereby playing a pivotal role in the mechanics of globalization (Mahmoud, 2018; Annayat, 2016). This global interplay continuously reshapes societal structures, further cementing the indispensability of English proficiency in the contemporary world (Pandey, 2018).

Understanding the multifaceted nature of learners' needs is pivotal in the design and implementation of effective ESP programs, particularly within the domain of EBP. Differentiating between objective and subjective needs in a needs analysis is essential for this understanding (Al-Kadi, 2016). The objective needs to encapsulate factual data regarding learners' requirements for language use in actual communication contexts, their present language capabilities, and any linguistic obstacles they confront, as outlined by Nunan (1988). Conversely, subjective needs encompass cognitive and emotional aspects that influence second language acquisition, including factors like personality, confidence, attitudes, desires, and expectations from the course, as detailed by Babbie (2010).

In Morocco, empirical research focusing on the ESP needs of business students has been relatively scant, with previous studies primarily targeting fields such as engineering and

technology (Dahbi, 2017; Maharaj, 2019). Zaidoune and Chroqui (2020) delved into this underexplored area by examining the language learning needs of second-year Master's degree students in Economics and Management at Hassan 1st University in Settat. Their findings reveal a strong preference among Moroccan learners for developing productive and communicative skills in English, with a notable emphasis on enhancing their ability to produce language. Moreover, the research indicates a clear expectation among students to utilize English predominantly for communicative purposes.

Similarly, El Arbaoui (2023a) evaluated the English language requirements of undergraduate students at ENCG Beni Mellal, uncovering their positive disposition towards English Language Teaching (ELT) owing to its critical relevance in the fields of business and management. This study also points out the challenges students face with productive learning skills. Emphasizing the importance of a tailored needs analysis for ESP programs in Moroccan universities and business schools, the findings advocate for courses that are more closely aligned with student's academic and professional aspirations. The research champions the need for engaging course content, encouraging active student participation, and deploying innovative teaching methodologies to foster learner autonomy and cater to the specific interests and needs of students. While these insights are invaluable for informing curriculum development and teaching strategies, their application is confined to the specific contexts of the studies, suggesting a broader scope of research is necessary across different educational settings to inform more generalized ESP teaching practices.

EL Arbaoui's (2023b) additional research into the effectiveness and perceptions of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in bolstering the speaking skills of business students highlights the positive impact of TBLT in speaking classes. Conducted at The National School of Business and Management Beni Mellal, involving 234 ESL learners and 14 university professors from Sultan Moulay Sliman University, the study reveals that task-based activities significantly enhance student involvement, provide more opportunities for speaking, lessen anxiety, and increase enjoyment in learning. Such activities promote realistic language interaction, nurturing independent learning competencies and student motivation. The findings underline the efficacy of incorporating task-based learning in English classrooms, enhancing active engagement and collaborative learning among students with diverse abilities. These outcomes suggest that a task-based approach, when combined with authentic speaking exercises, can markedly refine teaching strategies and student achievements in language education, pointing to its potential value in ESP contexts, especially within business English instruction.

The rapid evolution of technology and the ascendancy of the digital domain have birthed a specialized vocabulary within the sphere of electronic business (e-business), which encompasses the application of the internet and networking technologies to optimize business operations (Combe, 2012). In today's tech-savvy business environment, mastering e-business terminology is deemed essential for professionals to adeptly navigate the contemporary, digitally oriented business landscape (Chan & Mirza, 2004). The initial efforts to educate on e-business terms date back to the late 20th century, a transformative era for business practices catalyzed by the internet's emergence. This period witnessed academic institutions integrating e-business concepts into their curricular offerings, laying the groundwork for bridging the gap between traditional commerce and digital e-commerce methodologies (Coltman et al., 2001). Initial educational endeavors were mainly concentrated on basic internet-related terminology, facilitating a smoother transition to digital commerce practices (Hanna, 2023; Pritchett et al., 2002).

The internet technologies advanced, so did the complexity and scope of the e-business lexicon, prompting higher education institutions to offer specialized courses in digital marketing, e-commerce strategies, data analytics, and cybersecurity (Asbari, 2023; Shaltoni, 2016). These courses went beyond mere terminological instruction to provide hands-on learning experiences, illustrating the practical implementation of digital business theories. By embedding

technology and digital platforms into their course designs, these academic programs aimed to keep students updated with the latest e-business terminology, tools, and practices, preparing them for the evolving demands of the digital business world (Faal, 2020).

The integration of e-business terminology into EBP courses has been recognized as crucial in equipping students with the linguistic skills needed to thrive in the digital business milieu. The role of ICTs in augmenting the effectiveness of teaching these concepts is emphasized, along with the pivotal role of e-commerce in shaping the competitive landscape and fostering economic growth within the digital economy (Hendricks & Mwapwele, 2024). However, challenges, especially in emerging markets like Morocco, impede the adoption of e-commerce, with concerns related to internet infrastructure and the trustworthiness and security of online transactions being notable obstacles.

Addressing the shift towards a digital economy, Moroccan higher education has adapted by offering specialized curricula in e-commerce, digital marketing, data analytics, and cybersecurity. These efforts aim to prepare graduates for participation in the digital marketplace, aiming to surmount economic challenges and bolster Morocco's competitive stance on the global stage through a digitally proficient workforce. Despite facing challenges such as the necessity for improved digital infrastructure and conducive policies, the strategic emphasis on these areas reflects a commitment to overcoming these hurdles (Bouziane & Elaasri, 2019; Stinou et al., 2023). To further strengthen the impact of e-business education, Moroccan higher education is called upon to enhance the incorporation of e-business terms in EBP courses, leveraging ICTs to improve student learning outcomes. This approach acknowledges the current impediments while underscoring the need for ongoing research, stakeholder engagement, and collaboration to refine and expand the reach of e-business education in the region (Ennouari and Houssaini, 2024).

Discussion

The review of literature about ESP within the Moroccan educational landscape highlights several challenges. A key obstacle is the diminished student interest in English language acquisition because of the prevailing belief that French holds greater utility in the Moroccan job market. This not only dampens student motivation but also impacts the enthusiasm and pedagogical standards of instructors, given the disparate levels of English proficiency among learners. The scenario exacerbates the challenges instructors face, including a lack of specialized training for teachers, who often find it difficult to navigate the specialized terminology required for effective ESP instruction. These challenges are compounded by large class sizes and examination formats that narrowly focus on specific topics, thus detracting from the quality of ESP education as outlined by Elimadi (2024). Additionally, assigning ESP teaching duties to less experienced faculty members further devalues its importance, despite its critical role in vocational preparation (Elouardaoui, 2024).

The gap between ESP teaching materials in Morocco and the real-world demands of the job market represents another significant challenge. Bouzidi (2009) advocates for a meticulous three-step process to ensure ESP textbooks are aligned with labor market needs, particularly in the hospitality industry. This process involves a detailed needs analysis of both employers and employees, critical evaluation of existing textbooks to pinpoint deficiencies, and the subsequent refinement of materials to better meet learners' specific linguistic requirements. Elouardaoui (2024) and Ouakrime (2016) both emphasize the need to redefine and reorganize English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education in Morocco. They suggest that teaching materials should be closely aligned with the actual needs of the students, determined through collaborative efforts involving teachers, decision-makers, and future employers. Specifically, Ouakrime highlighted the importance of centering the redefinition of ESP around the students, considering their English proficiency, motivation, and professional goals as key to effective teaching.

In the context of Business English for Specific Purposes in Morocco, there is a noticeable scarcity of empirical research focusing on the linguistic needs of business students, with previous investigations largely centered on engineering and technological fields (Dahbi, 2017; Mahraj, 2019). Zaidoune and Chroqui (2020) identify a pronounced preference among Economics and Management Master's students for productive and communicative skills, emphasizing the necessity of English for effective communication. El Arbaoui (2023a) sheds light on the positive attitudes of ENCG undergraduates toward English Language Teaching, noting its significance in business despite obstacles related to productive skills. The study calls for ESP courses that are precisely tailored to the specialized needs of students' fields, promoting active engagement and the implementation of innovative teaching methods. TBLT has been highlighted for its potential to increase student participation and alleviate anxiety, with suggestions for its wider application in language teaching to boost effectiveness (El Arbaoui, 2023b).

The intersection of English language teaching with the evolving digital business landscape is of paramount importance. The critical role of e-business terminology in EBP courses is emphasized as vital for furnishing students with the linguistic competencies required in a digital business environment, with ICTs significantly enhancing teaching efficacy (Hendricks & Mwapwele, 2024). Despite efforts to align Moroccan higher education with the demands of the digital economy through specialized programs, challenges persist, including inadequate digital infrastructure and concerns regarding online transaction security (Bouziane & Elaasri, 2019; Ezzaouia & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2020; Li et al., 2023; Singh, 2011; Stinou et al., 2023). Ennouari and Houssaini (2024) called for a focus on e-business terminology in EBP courses through ICTs to ameliorate student learning outcomes. They advocated for expanded research and collaborative efforts among stakeholders to address the prevailing challenges and enhance Morocco's global competitiveness through education.

Overall, the cornerstone of effective ESP instruction in Morocco lies in understanding and fostering student motivation that prompts educators to rigorously analyze specialized materials and tailor their teaching strategies to align with curriculum objectives. Following Ouakrime's (2016) assertion, the current framework for ESP instruction in Morocco demands a strategic reevaluation to ensure that teaching resources align precisely with student needs. The formulation of relevant curricula should adopt a collaborative methodology, engaging educators, policymakers, future employers, and crucially, the students themselves, whose needs, proficiency levels, and motivations, shaped by their prospective professional endeavors, must be central to curriculum design. This pivot towards a learner-centric approach is vital for the success of ESP programs. Moreover, the perception of ESP teaching, particularly in the private sector, as a secondary, albeit lucrative, undertaking for educators needs reevaluation. There's a call for ESP teachers to frequently collaborate, discuss, and refine the curriculum to cultivate skills that are indispensable for the student's future professional lives. An organized exchange of insights regarding students' English proficiency is also crucial for developing informed and effective syllabi, tackling the multifaceted demands of ESP education in Morocco with a comprehensive and forward-looking strategy.

Conclusion

In summarizing the state of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within Moroccan higher education, it is evident that the sector faces multiple challenges that impede its effectiveness, despite its critical role in preparing students for the professional world. These challenges include a preference for French over English, varied learner proficiency levels that result in lowered instructional standards, a lack of specialized training for ESP educators, and the use of less experienced instructors for ESP courses, which diminishes its stature. To address these issues, further research is recommended to explore innovative pedagogical strategies, such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and to examine the impact of digital competencies integrated into the curriculum. Future research should also explore industry engagement in curriculum

development to ensure that ESP programs meet the real-world needs of both employers and employees. Additionally, future studies should consider the development of targeted training programs for ESP teachers and the potential benefits of smaller class sizes and revised exam formats that better reflect the real-world demands of the job market. This research will help refine ESP approaches and contribute significantly to enhancing the quality and relevance of ESP education in Morocco.

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