

## ESP TEACHING IN ALGERIA AN OBSERVATION ON BIOLOGY LMD STUDENTS

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**Abstract.** *This paper represents an observational study about ESP teaching in Algeria. It endeavours to show the English language position in the country, its value and necessity especially in scientific departments (the case of Environmental Sciences Department). It also deals with some variations of ESP. At last, it suggests some of the strategies that can be beneficial for ESP learners to learn the target language.*

**Key words:** *ESP, LMD Biology student, Assessment and Evaluation, Games*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching a foreign language, more particularly English, has and will still be the main concern of a number of researchers, linguist, as well as teachers. All of them have accentuated on the relevance of the English language teaching, more particularly ESP (English for Specific Purposes) area. Because English could be used in different extents and purposes such as technical and scientific ones, researchers have long attempted to provide clear and useful ways and paths to be followed while teaching it. As far as Algeria is concerned, ESP is still ambiguous for some tutors and need to be more explored. Some teachers do perceive both ESP teaching and learning as a strange and an audacious task. Hence, a wide range of questions are usually highlighted: what is meant by ESP?, and, what kind of steps an ESP teacher may adapt while teaching English for scientific purposes?

### 2. DEFINITION OF ESP

ESP in its simplest words refers to the teaching/learning of English for specific purposes. Researchers, even teachers, do usually regard ESP area as being one of the most prominent areas in EFL teaching/learning the language.

### 3. POSITION OF EST IN ALGERIA

EST (teaching and learning English for scientific and technological purposes) is another ESP genre that is widely used and needed in almost all scientific, technical and technological faculties, mainly in Algeria.

Growing beliefs about ESP teaching/learning have recently been overspread among all ESP teachers. Most of them find that ESP teaching is not an easy task since tutors have to deal with a wide range of steps and to respond to several questions such as: is EST teaching/learning different from technical or even scientific teaching? What is to be taught and how? What about the students' learning goals, do they differ from each other? Is there any remarkable distinction between learners motivation extent? All the above questions should be considered as the starting focal point for any EST/ESP teacher.

It is really important to note that literary Arabic is the official language in Algeria. It is spoken by nearly 72% of people. It represents an important part in all schools and institutions. Then, French is also a part of the standard school curriculum, and is widely understood by nearly 50 % of the population; it is the most widely studied foreign language in the country, and a majority of Algerians can understand and speak it, though it is usually not spoken in daily life.

As far as the English language is concerned, only because of its status as a global lingua franca, it is taught from the first year of middle school till the third year in high school. In universities, the status of the English language varies from one specialty to another: sometimes it is regarded as a compulsory module, whereas in other fields it is just an additional one. Yet, only a tiny number of Algerians speak English, most of them being younger people.

Then, because English is usually seen as the first language of sciences and technologies, and is mostly used in all parts of the world, the Algerian government saw it necessary to teach that language from an early stage. In some faculties, English is of paramount importance and greatly needed.

#### 4. THE LMD SYSTEM IN BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT

In a systemic approach, the LMD stands for a new educational system "Licence, Master and Doctorate" that has been adapted in Algeria in the recent years. It is based on three referenced levels: Licence, Master and Doctorate levels. The Licence level contains three years to get a Bachelor Art of Degree. In order to pass to the Master degree, students should possess some credits, to be able to continue their studies for two years. For the Doctorate Level, students are bound to sit for a written contest; if they succeed, they will be able to process their studies for five years. This can be explained as follow:

- Bachelor Art of Degree: Bac + three years.
- Master Degree: Bac + 5 years.
- Doctorate Degree: Bac + 10 years.

#### 5. EST IN THE ALGERIAN BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT

Regarding Biology LMD system, Algerian students, although having an average level of vocabulary, they are not capable of understanding English and particularly the teacher's spoken language easily, but at least averagely. They are motivated and willing the target language because of their big awareness about the English language status and its relevance in all scientific fields and particularly in the Biology field.

In addition, despite the English language module is taken only once per week and its coefficient is "1", the absent students regret their absences trying to justify them to the

teacher, a fact that cannot be found in all the other fields. This simply shows the extent of LMD Biology's students' seriousness.

#### 6. LEARNERS' NEEDS ANALYSIS

As Richards, Platt J., and Platt H. (1992, pp. 242 & 243) state that needs analysis is 'the process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities'. In its easiest sense, learners' needs or needs analysis stand for the general to topics/subjects area that learners are required to learn about.

That is, right from the starting point, the teacher's primary concern should be his/her learners' needs in order to be able to elaborate a good and efficient syllabus, as Simpson and Ure said in 1994: 'It is not possible... to meet pupils' every need, ...but it ought to be possible to respond to those needs which are substantially common'. Thus, exploring learners' needs could be simply done through a survey questionnaire that will give the students the ability or the desire to express themselves freely. Another simple tactic that could be used is to ask students about general topics that interest them in their field. This way, such subjects could be added to the programme, the fact which will certainly lead students to be interested in those lectures as their needs have been taken into account.

#### 7. EST COURSE PRESENTATION

During the lecture, silence governs the complete class; while the teacher is explaining they are exclusively focused on him/her, trying to grasp the pulp of the lecture. As a matter of fact, multilingualism is used in class; the use of multilingualism in sessions permits students to better understand the target language. It has always been said that the target language should be studied and understood without translating it to another language. This could be right in some extent for French or other language learners. In what concerns ESP Algerian LMD learners, it could not be fully applied. Students could grasp half of the lecture told in English, what would happen for the rest of the course?, so the teacher found himself obliged to translate all that was ambiguous for the students either in French or in Arabic since these two languages are the most dominant in Algeria.

#### 8. EST COURSE PRESENTATION

Actually, there is a wide variety of ESP ideas for teaching. As far as EST Algerian learners are concerned, it could be a step forward to start with the exploration of a scientific text that is related to their fields; students may discover all the general terms that are related to a précised theme given, then look out for their definitions.

In addition to some questions about the text for assessing to what extent the text was clear and also for creating a kind of debate with students that would initiate them to practice the target language freely. Then, a little bit of grammar would also be useful to enable students to reestablish the basic functioning of words and sentences, as well as the

written expressions through which learners may improve their written skill. That is, tutors may provide learners with the common paragraphs types and the various ways to write them step by step.

As the proverb says 'variety is the spice of life', so, it is a part of teacher's job to vary in the kinds of activities and tasks they give to their students. ESP teaching is not an easy task, therefore, teachers should well select the different tasks that correspond to students' level and through which student can grasp the meaning of the lecture clearly.

One thing should be noted that tasks should be classified gradually from the easiest to hardest. It is really important that teachers should not stick to specific activities and repetition because this way, they will soon or later feel that they are strangled and there is no way to creation and variation. So, it is always worth adding some new tasks and trying new ways and applying them, in order to ameliorate the lecture's quality as well as the teaching level.

#### 9. INTRODUCTION OF GAMES AND GROUP WORK

Additionally, games could be really helpful for English learners, especially beginners. Teachers can improve their learner's language and even change their view about it while implementing games in class; students will be really interested, especially if they are nonnative speakers. There are simple games, like:

- Scrabble that helps them create words or that could be based on some words that they did assimilate during the lectures.
- Reordering the sentences permit students to make use of the already learnt grammar.
- Guessing at synonyms and antonyms.

The Group work theory is widely known and used because of its multi-advantages. All TEFL teachers agree that the implementation of group work allows student not only to exchange knowledge and impart information but also to speak and use the target language and to keep focused on the task or project given, and nothing else. Groups of 4-5 tend to balance well the needs for diversity, productivity, active participation, and cohesion as Gross Davis 1993 said: "The less skillful the group members, the smaller the groups should be".

Some say that group work permits students/gives them the ability to speak the target language, yet, in the case of ESP students, it is not really apparent. That is to say, although group work allows them to keep focused, they speak and discuss only in their natural language - Arabic dialect and rarely French. We can simply ask ourselves why? The simplest reason is that students are not used to speak in a foreign language especially English in an Arabic country such as Algeria even if they would like to. Then, since they do not have enough vocabulary in their spoken language, they feel shy.

#### 10. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

On the same stream, it is also necessary in foreign languages teaching to assess and evaluate students. Assessment and evaluation procedures should correspond with curriculum objectives. In addition, they should be sensitive to the developmental characteristics of early adolescents. Researchers have distinguished three sorts of assessment, diagnostic assessment that occurs at the beginning of the year/or activity identifies students' learning abilities and needs, as well as their motivational and interest levels regarding specific topics and activities.

Then, formative assessment that focuses on the processes and products of learning. It is continuous and is planned to inform the teacher of the student's progress toward the curriculum objectives. This type of assessment provides teachers with information for continuous feedback to students, and guides their daily instructional decisions and adaptations.

Lastly, there is summative assessment which most often appears at the end of a unit of instruction and at the year end when students are required to demonstrate their achievements of the curriculum objectives for reporting purposes. The main purposes of summative evaluation are to determine knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that have developed over a period of time, to summarize students' progress.

Therefore, continuous assessment is vital for ESP learners. First, when assessing students, teachers should know very well the objective behind it; learners' assessments objective should be set on before taking any step. Then, the results obtained will be interpreted and analyzed in order to have an idea about students' level and weakness. At the end of the year or the semester, it is really relevant to prepare for a general conclusion about all that concerns students' competency.

To put it clear, teachers can simply prepare a kind of questionnaire dedicated for students which include some questions about the methodology used while teaching, the tasks done, and the vocabulary given, and the most important thing is the programme selected. On one hand, students will be indirectly incorporated in both the teaching and the learning process. On the other hand, teachers will not have only a great opportunity to judge themselves and all their efforts done, but will also have a wide range of learners' opinions and views which will contribute in the elaboration of the English module's programme that will lead educators to creating another syllabus or at least to do some modifications on it.

#### 11. SOME FEATURES TO BE ADOPTED TO ATTRACT BIOLOGY STUDENTS' ATTENTION

Alternatively, as English is not the prime language in Algeria, tutors should be really qualified to teach ESP. They should have some specific features that will invoke students' attention. First the love of both the target language and the teaching career; if teachers do consider their job only as a way of getting money, then, it will not be beneficial either for them or for the students, because simply, the whole objective is not to impart knowledge and information with students but instead to gain money and to better/improve their lives, which is an inefficient starting point.

Next, teachers should be confident and faithful and really courageous to face all the students. In other words, educators should not feel embarrassed or shy in front of their students, this could be considered as a general rule for all teaching kinds, yet, teaching a foreign language is a special case. Teachers should have enough confidence in themselves and faith on their capabilities and capacities because all teachers' qualities have a great impact on learners, and can leave an indelible print in their minds. To point out, making mistakes is not a crime.

To put it simply, if teachers do actually make mistakes, it is natural since firstly everybody makes mistakes and even native speakers of that target language do make mistakes. As Albert Einstein said 'a person who never made a mistake never tried anything new', so, it is not an offense if tutors make mistakes, in such cases, it would be really useful to know how to turn that situation into an acceptable form of fun.

## 12. CONCLUSION

To conclude with, the most crucial point in any foreign language teaching and more particularly ESP area is that if any Algerian teachers are to be good and qualified, then, creativity and novelty should be the prime objective on their minds.

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