

An Exploration of the Quality of Business English Teaching in Algerian Higher Education: Case of Master1 Economics Students at Tlemcen University

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ABSTRACT: *In the modern era, learning English has become among the highly requested disciplines. However, ELT in Algerian higher education needs to be updated and promoted. Evidently, except for English departments, ELT in the remaining faculties is neglected and under-estimated. For instance, in the Economics department at Tlemcen University, English courses seem to be taught ineffectively. Also, they do not fulfill the learner's needs. The present study is an attempt to examine the quality of Business English courses delivered to Master1 Economics Students at Tlemcen University. Thus, its fundamental concern is to evaluate the effectiveness of these courses vis-à-vis ESP principles. In doing so, a set questionnaires have been given to both teachers and students in order to collect the needed data. It has been come up to the conclusion that these courses are taught haphazardly and teachers unsatisfactorily follow ESP teaching fundamentals. Consequently, they should be advanced and promoted.*

KEYWORDS: Business and Economic topics, ELT, Higher Education, ESP teaching, ESP course design, Needs analysis.

1. Introduction

In the recent globalized era, learning foreign languages has become a necessity. English, however, has got the status of the *lingua-franca* i.e. the shared language of communication among people from different cultures. ELT (English Language Teaching) has a set of fundamentals which differs from area to area. For instance, teaching the language skills is different from teaching literature. As a branch of ELT, ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is considered as one of the highly demanded

disciplines in academia. In this respect, in Algeria, the Ministry of Higher Education has adopted some new measures in order to promote ESP status.

Accordingly, Business English, as a major subdivision of ESP, has got a significance interest among scholars, worldwide. Nonetheless, Business English teaching in Algerian Higher Education has got less interest than the remaining ELT areas. For example, in Economics department at Tlemcen University, Business English teachers are operating in the dark, since they present them improperly. Therefore, throughout this study the researchers attempt to explore the quality of Business English courses that are taught to Master1 Economics students in order to provide practical remedies that will contribute to promote the proficiency of these courses.

2. Problem Statement

There is no doubt that teaching English for Specific Purposes in Algerian universities is facing problems of different levels. Among these problems is the misapplication of the basic teaching principles. Hence, the main problematic discussed in this study would be as follows: How effective are the business English courses which are delivered to Master1 Economics students at Tlemcen University?

3. Research Hypothesis

Business English courses delivered to Master1 students, at the Economics department at Tlemcen University, are likely to be taught inefficiently.

4. Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it sheds light on a very common problem in the field of teaching ESP in general and business English in particular. The importance of this current study is that it can be beneficial not only to business English teachers, but also to be used by the curricula developers and syllabi designers in Economics departments for the sake of enhancing business English teaching and learning.

5. Literature Review

In this part, some definitions will be given in order to fully understand some related concepts and clarifying the most common expressions which are used throughout the study.

5.1 ESP Defined

Since its emergence in the 1960's, ESP has been differently defined among scholars. As an approach, ESP has been differently defined among academics as cited by Anthony (1997):

Some people described ESP as simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified. Others, however, were more precise, describing it as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes. (p.p. 9-10).

Mackay and Mountford (1978) view that: "ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose."p.2. There point is that ESP learners should be taught English in a manner which enables them to read and understand books, magazines and newspapers written in English which are basically related to their field of specialty, or to use this specific English in their future profession.

Subsequently, Robinson (1991) indicates that students learn English language "not because they are interested in the English language or English culture as such but because they need English for study or work purposes".p.2.

In the same stream, according to Paltridge and Starfield (2013), English for specific purposes (ESP) refers to the" teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language where the goal of the learners is to use English in a particular domain"p.2. In their point, ESP is learnt and taught whether as a second or foreign language with the particularity of specific purpose i.e. there is a certain reason after studying English.

Accordingly, Basturkmen (2006) asserts that in an ESP context, "language is learnt 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"p.18.

Globally speaking, according to the above-mentioned definitions, it might be noticed that, ESP is ‘goal-directed’ as described by Basturkmen (2006) *ibid*, i.e. it is an approach to language teaching which is based on learners' needs, goals and reasons for learning a language as stated by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) “ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reasons for learning”p.19.

5.2 Business English as a Branch OF ESP

Business English (BE) refers to the subdivision of ESP that concerns a specific category of learners, namely, business and economics students. In practice, BE teaching according to De Sylvie Donna (2000) in her book *Teach Business English* involves to “teaching English to adults working in business in a way or another or preparing to work in the field of business” p.2. Additionally, in terms of purpose, BE course according to the same scholar, aims at fulfilling the work-related needs of students. That is to say, conducting a needs assessment is really crucial in a BE context.

5.3 Needs Analysis

Needs analysis, henceforth NA, is an important component in ESP. Indeed, agreeing with one common definition of NA is not an easy task. This idea was supported by (Ritcherich, 1983) cited in West (1994), as he argued “the very concept of language needs has never been clearly defined and remains at best ambiguous” p.70. However, there were plenty of attempts to define the concept.

In their view to needs analysis, Richards and Platt (1992) state that NA is: “The process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners acquires a language and arranges the needs according to priorities” p.p. 242,243.

Additionally, Basturkmen (1998) goes a step further in his definition to NA. She claimed that “It is the identification of difficulties and standard situations by the observation of participants functioning in a target situation in conjunction with interviews and questionnaires”. p.1. In his view, through identifying the obstacles of the learners using different tools, their needs will be identified.

More recently, Xiao (2007) sees NA as “a systematic gathering of specific information about the language needs of learners and the analysis of this information for purpose of syllabus design” p.p 1,2. According to him, identifying and analyzing the needs is a significant step to syllabus design.

By and large, the notion of needs analysis in all learning situations, be it general English or ESP , has a vital role not only in designing syllabi but also in designing courses and selecting appropriate teaching materials.

5.4 ESP Course Design

By way of definition, “ESP courses are those where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner” as stated by Munby (1978) p.2. In the same vein, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) describe a course as “An integrated series of teaching-learning experiences, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge”p.65. In the light of these definitions, ESP courses should be effectively designed through analyzing the needs. In doing so, teachers should follow a set of steps and principles. Some specialists in the field have emphasized that in ESP the context is very important .For instance, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) argued that: “In ESP, any teaching activity, whether its aim is to teach language or skills, is presented in a context” p.11. In the same line of thought, Harding (2007) advised teachers and course designers that “the words students are learning should be the words they will actually need in their specialism.” p.53.

5.5 Qualities of ESP Teachers

In order to meet the learners’ needs, ESP teachers or “practitioners”, as some scholars called them, should have some skills and qualities. In her study, (Adnan Mohemmed, 2014), suggested a set of skills that ESP teachers should own. First of all, ESP teachers should have a general knowledge about the subject he/she teaches. Secondly, ESP teachers should belong to a team i.e. he/she should collaborate with other colleagues in order to benefit from their experiences. Also, they need to up-date their knowledge continuously through reading and learning all what is new in their field. Additionally, ESP teachers should have some

personal qualities such as flexibility, self –confidence, patience and communication skills. Moreover, the ESP teacher is a material provider, that is to say, he/she should choose and provide carefully the appropriate materials that fit the objective of the course. In the same vein, (Ibrayeva & Fuller, 2014) argued that in order to be effective, ESP courses should be taught by effective and well planned teaching strategies, in addition to a well relevant curriculum which is designed specifically according to students' needs.

In short, it might be stressed that ESP teachers are asked to work hard in order to get the suitable skills and qualities which enable them to successfully deliver their courses in a way that truly meets their learners' needs and expectations.

6. Methodology

For the sake of gathering the needed data, a case study has been adopted at the Economics Department at Tlemcen University. Both qualitative and quantitative research instruments have been used in order to have several data sources that guarantee the cross-checking of the results, on the one hand, and build the validity of the research questions, on the other. Owing to this, data were collected through both learners' and teachers' questionnaires, as well as teachers' interview and the use of classroom observation. First of all, a questionnaire has been addressed to a sample of 100 Master1 students from various specialties. This questionnaire was delivered through "Google Forms" i.e. an online questionnaire. This questionnaire mainly aims at checking the students' perception in terms of needs, courses effectiveness, teacher's knowledge and teaching quality. Using the same channel, another questionnaire was addressed to a sample of 06 Business English teachers at Economics Department for the sake of obtaining the needed data. This questionnaire seeks to check the teachers' knowledge, skills and teaching techniques.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1 Results

This study was conducted to get answers to the primary question: How effective are the Business English courses which are delivered to

Master1 Economics students at Tlemcen University? The gathered data could be analyzed as follows:

- **Results of the Students' Questionnaire:**

In order to fulfill the objective of the study, this questionnaire was addressed to 100 Master 1 Economics Students at Tlemcen University during the first semester of the academic year of 2019-2020. This sample is deliberately chosen because it is mixture of young and adult students who are already professionals. Also, they belong to different fields of speciality.

➤ Question1: what is you field of study?

The selected sample is composed of students from different specialties as shown in Figure1.

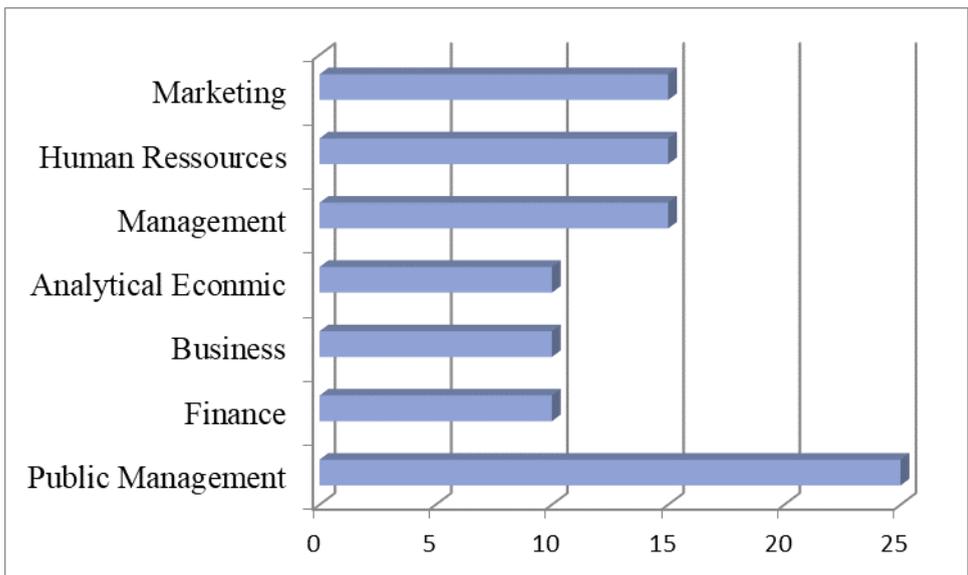


Figure1: Student's Specialty

At it is shown in the above bare chart, the participants are belonging to different fields of Economics, namely, Management, Public

Management, Business, Finance, Marketing, Analytical Economics and Human Resources. That means that those students have different teachers and thus different courses.

- Question2: do you find that English is important at University?
- Question3: Do you attend all the English sessions?

The majority of students (89.7 %) affirmed that English is an important discipline in higher education; meanwhile, the remaining ones (10.3 %) see that English is a secondary module and it is less important than the other modules (Figure2). In addition, the big part of learners confirmed that they attend all the English courses (75.9%), while the remaining ones (24.1 %) assure that they make absences due to many causes such as their job obligations (Figure3).

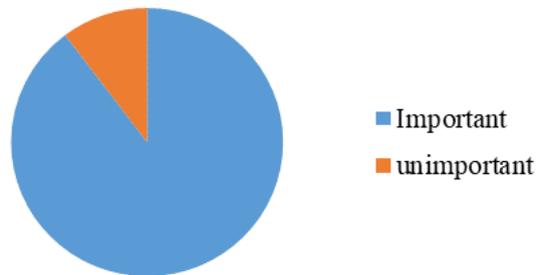


Figure2: students' perception towards English.

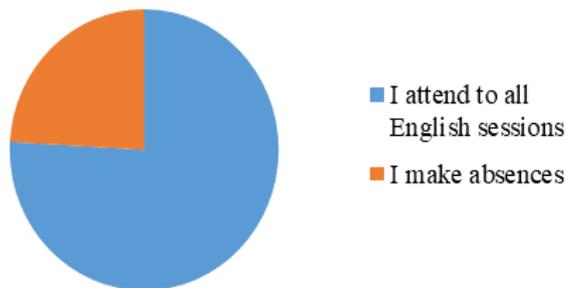


Figure3: Students' attendance.

- Question4: Do English teachers have knowledge in your field of study?
- Question5: Are English courses related to your field of study?

The big portion of participants (51.7%) declared that their teachers lacks the technical know-how related to their specialty, this, undoubtedly, negatively affects the quality of their courses. The remaining portions saw that their teachers have somehow that knowledge (41.4%), while only a tiny portion (6.9%) affirmed that their teachers possess this needed knowledge (Figure4). With regard to the fifth question, the participants' answers were as follows: (44.8 %) affirmed that they are related, (57.7 %) say “somehow” and (3.4%) answer with “no” (Figure5).

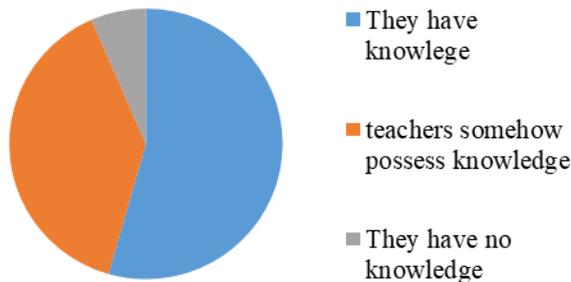


Figure 4: Teachers' knowledge in the field of study

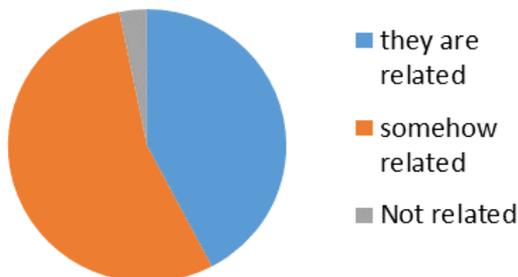


Figure 5: Relationship course-field of study

- Question 6: Do teachers conduct a Needs Analysis?
- Question 7: If your answer is Yes, How do they do it?

Regarding the occurrence of needs analysis process, only (20%) of the participants answer positively. The remaining two portions' answers were respectively: (35.2%) said that they do it sometimes and (44.8%) replied negatively (Figure6).

With reference to the needs' analysis process, (44.8 %) of the participants asserted that they do it orally, however, the rest (55.2%) affirmed that it is written (Figure7).

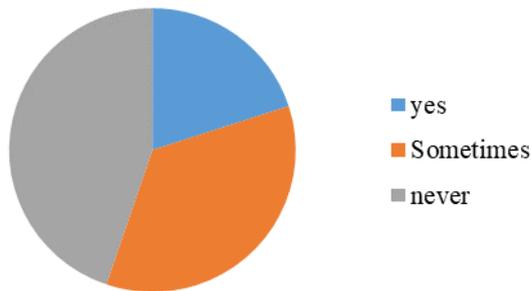


Figure 6: Needs Analysis Occurrence

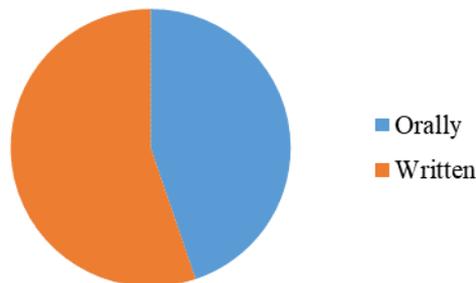


Figure7: Needs Analysis Process

➤ Question 8: Do teachers use audio-visual aids?

Due to technological advance, teaching has been promoted. However, students' answers were surprising. Only (24.1%) affirmed that their teachers use the audio-visual aids during their courses. The other respondents (41.4 %) denied and the remaining ones (34.5%) said that they occasionally use them (Figure8).

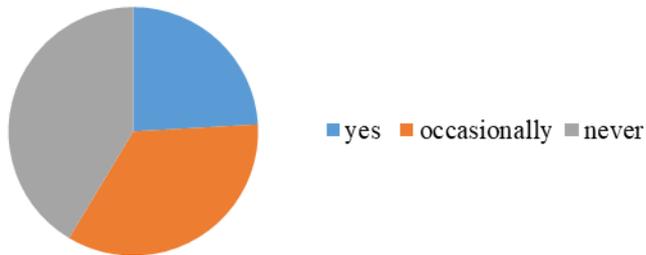


Figure 8: Teachers' use of audio-visual aids.

➤ Question 9: Do you find that the weekly allotted time of the English module is sufficient?

Generally, the big part (93.10%) respondents agree about the insufficiency of the allotted time while the rest (6.90%) see that it is enough (Figure9).

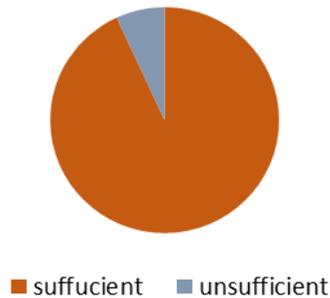


Figure9: Allotted time sufficiency

- Question 10: Do you find that the coefficient of the module is appropriate?

Generally, there is equilibrium among the respondents. While (55.2%) declared that it is appropriate, the rest (44.8%) agreed about the inappropriateness of the English module coefficient (Figure10).



Figure10: coefficient appropriateness

Question 11: what are your expectations from the English module?

Here, the learners' expectations were multiple. Some of them want to improve their communicative skills, others want to enrich their business terminology and those who need to learn how to write great paragraphs and essays, to name a few.

➤ Question 12: Do the presented courses meet your expectations?

Since learners' expectations are various, the English courses could not fully meet them. In this respect, a segment of (17.2 %) saw that they meet their expectations. On the contrary, the remaining two segments' replied as follows: (69%) perceived that they partly meet their assumptions; the rest (13.8%) affirmed that they do not meet them (Figure11).

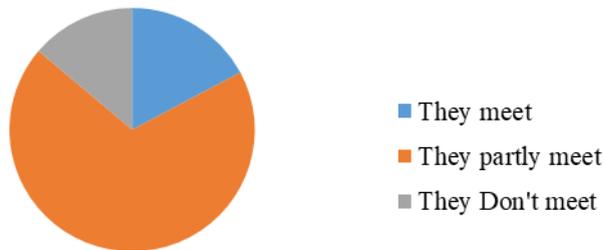


Figure11: Students' perception about whether the presented courses meet their expectations

The remaining questions were addressed to check learners' weaknesses as well as their needs and some suggestions to promote the Business English Courses.

• **Results of the Teachers' Questionnaire:**

A questionnaire was addressed to six (06) Business English teachers who teach in the Economics Department at Tlemcen University. Through this questionnaire, the researchers seek to get some needed information concerning the teachers' profile, their teaching techniques as well as their application of the ESP teaching principles.

The responses are summarized in the following table (Table1).

	Gender	Age	Degree	Specialty	Teaching experience	Teaching Experience at University	Teaching Experience at Economics Department
Respondan1	Male	35	Master	Literature & civilization	3 years	3 years	3 years
Respondan2	Male	37	Master	Linguistics	2 years	1 year	1 year
Respondan3	Female	23	Master	Didactics	4 Months	4 Months	4 Months
Respondan4	Female	26	Master	Literature and civilization	3 years	3 years	3 years
Respondan5	Female	25	Master	Didactics	1 year	1 year	1 year
Respondan6	Female	27	Master	Literature & civilization	5years	5 year	5 year

Table1: Teachers' Profiles.

As Table1 showcases, the majority of teachers are novice newly Master graduated who are specialized in different specialism without a long experience.

➤ Question 1: What specialty do you teach?

The objective of this question was mainly to recognize the learners' field. In this regard, they teach various Master Fields, namely, Public Management, Finance and Accounting, Management, Qualitative Economics, International Business and Human Resource Management.

➤ Question 2: Do you conduct a needs' analysis?

As a response, two (02) teachers assert that they always assess their learners' needs. The rest four (04) teachers affirmed that they do not conduct it.

➤ Question 3: If yes, how do you do it?

The teachers, who answer positively, declared that they do it through both written questionnaires and direct verbal questions.

➤ Question 4: If yes, what are the main learners' needs?

According to the teachers' responses, it has been revealed that the learners' needs are multiple. For instance, one teacher stated that they are both academic and professional. The other teacher responded with a little

detail as she replied as follows *“From what I could notice EBE learners need English to exploit the readily available articles and books that are composed in English and of course which are related to their field because it's taken for granted that the terminology of economics is almost all in English”*.

➤ Question 5: On which bases do you plan your courses?

Some teachers replied simply that they plan their courses according to the learners' needs. Others stated that they vary their courses between general English courses such as grammar topics and business and economics like topics. Also, some of them affirmed that they are given a ready-made programme to be followed.

➤ Question 6: Do you use the audio visual aids?

Half of the participants i.e. three of them (03) have replied positively while the rest answered negatively.

➤ Question 7: What teaching Materials do you use?

As teaching materials, the respondents use several supports such as handouts, board, data-show projector, loud speakers and listening videos.

➤ Question 8: Are your tasks and activities in a related context to the learners' field of study?

All the participants confirmed that there tasks and activities are in relation to the learners' specialty.

➤ Question 9: How do you assess your learners' understanding?

Teachers use various assessment techniques. According to them, in order to check their students' understanding, they ask for feed-back, they ask direct questions and make tests.

➤ Question 10: are your learners motivated to learn English?

With regards to the learners' motivation, of the participants see that their learners are partly motivated while the others asserted the lack of motivation among their learners.

➤ Question 11: How do you teach Business Vocabulary?

Since teaching business vocabulary is crucial, teachers use different approaches such as translation, direct approach, using texts and using idioms.

- Question 12: What are the topics that you have taught this semester?

The answers were multiple as summarized in the table below.

Table 2: Teaching Topics.

	Topic
Teacher1	Intro to Economics, The concept of production, division of labor, the economic activity
Teacher2	Business presentations, meetings , paragraph and essay writing
Teacher3	Financing, market, economic transactions, company's assets and liabilities, bankruptcy, how to become a good businessman
Teacher4	Economics, bit coin.
Teacher5	Finance and accounting, Balance sheet. , Stocks and bonds. , Production. , Organization.
Teacher6	Public service, Banking, Principles of Audit.

- Question 13: Is there an official syllabus to follow?

Among the six participants, only two who asserted that they have been given syllabus to follow while the rest four said that there is no syllabus.

- Question 14: What are the main obstacles and difficulties in teaching Business English?

There is no doubt that English teachers everywhere face difficulties. However, teaching specialized English is somehow particular. Generally, there was a consensus among the participants for the following difficulties and hindrances: the lack of motivation; module schedule is inappropriate; absences; the use of the mother tongue; low level and low coefficient.

- Question15: What do you suggest to enhance ESP Teaching in General and Business English teaching in particular?

Concerning the recommendations, they were multiple. In their view, Business English courses could be promoted through giving it more importance by enhancing the coefficient, teachers' training, raising the allotted time and recruiting the qualified teachers.

7.2 Discussion of the Results

This study aims at examining the quality of Business English lectures in the Economics department at the University of Tlemcen. After analyzing the different collected data, a set of results has been found.

To begin with, as seen in the literature review, the process of needs' analysis and assessment is one of the pillars in any ESP context. At Economics department at Tlemcen University, as stated above, it has been noticed that this ESP basic is not appropriately applied and even if it is applied, it is done wrongly.

Secondly, as seen earlier, BE teachers are mostly newly Master graduated who are specialized in other specialties such as linguistics or literature. Hence, they lack knowledge in the field of business and economics. Moreover, it has been perceived that there is a lack of motivation and interest among students. This is due to both the low coefficient of the English module on the one hand, and the teachers' incompetence and lack of experience on the other.

Also, the big majority of learners affirmed that the allotted time of the English module is not enough to fully meet the learners' needs and expectations. Furthermore, it has been revealed that only some teachers use the audio-visual aids while delivering their courses which affects the understanding and effectiveness of these courses.

Additionally, it has been recognized the inexistence of neither official syllabus nor curriculum to follow. This led to the haphazard selection of topics and courses that could be out of the learners' expectations and needs.

At last but not least, it has been observed the lack of coordination among both teachers of English each other's on the one side and English teachers with the subject matter ones, on the other side. This idea of co-teaching is supported by (Huang, 2013) in which he argued that co-teaching courses can help in expanding learners' access to resources and getting expertise through the invitation of filed experts.

In short, due to the findings, one can say that the above mentioned hypothesis is acceptable and Business English courses are unsatisfactorily delivered.

8. Recommendations

In order to get rid of the ineffectiveness in Business English teaching not only at Economics department at Tlemcen university but also in all ESP courses throughout the universities, there are some practical suggestions to be applied.

To start with, business English teaching could not be promoted unless by giving it more importance. This significance could take many images. For instance, the Ministry of Higher Education could give instructions to heighten the coefficient of the Business English module, on the one side, and doubling the number of the weekly sessions, on the other side.

Also, as BE teachers play a major role in promoting this discipline, there should be a policy of teachers' training. This training could be whether through adopting specialized schools or self-training by the teachers themselves through intensive reading and regularly updating their knowledge in the field of business and economics. In the same vein , there should be mechanisms of recruitment within ESP teachers through hiring competent teachers who are not only specialized in the field but also have experience in ESP teaching.

Additionally, as a cornerstone and the hallmark of any BE courses, all the teachers must have the technical know-how for identification and analyzing the difference learners' needs. It goes without saying that without a clear and well conducted needs' analysis, teachers will operate in the dark. As a result, random delivery of courses with poor quality and, most importantly, they don't meet the learners' expectations.

Moreover, in order to ensure being official and identical, universities must design and develop official syllabi and curricula. By doing so, the courses become official and mutual within the same department and that helps teachers designing their courses, on the one hand, and facilitate the control and investigation by the authorities on the other.

In addition, teachers, especially, novice ones should coordinate with more experimental colleagues and subject matter teachers. This

coordination helps teachers getting advice and guidance, on the one side, and let them be in touch with the needed topics on the other side.

One of the new effective tools that positively affect the teaching quality is the appropriate use of technology. Using technology has become one of the necessities nowadays. Among the positive impacts of using technology in Business English teaching is that it creates a suitable teaching atmosphere where concentration is raised and wasted time is avoided.

9. Conclusion

To sum up what has been discussed, the objective of the present study was to assess the effectiveness of Business English courses at Economics Department of Tlemcen University. To this end, it might be said that even if there are some motivational findings, these courses are partly ineffective. This is due to several interrelated causes. Undoubtedly, by using the appropriate approaches that meets the learners' needs as well as selecting carefully the skillful and more experienced teachers and giving more significance to their training, Business English teaching in this department would be promoted and advanced in a satisfactory way. In the future occasions, the researchers indented to deeply assess the learners' needs in order to design courses and syllabi as well as contributing in the curriculum development on this department.

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