

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA  
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH  
AHMED SALHI UNIVERSITY CENTER of NAAMA  
INSTITUTE OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES  
SECTION OF ENGLISH



**Exploring Challenges Faced by Students  
of Biology in Learning English  
Language:  
Case of ESP Courses at Tlemcen University**

*Dissertation submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages as a Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirement of the Degree of Masters in Linguistics*

**Presented by:**

Hicham MOKHTARI

**supervised by**

Dr. Anissa MBATA

**Board of Examiners**

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**Academic Year: 2019/2020**

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# DEDICATION

To my dearest parents for their support and to whom i am deeply indebted,

To my dear wife for her support and understanding,

To my lovely son,

To my dear brothers and sister who helped me a lot in keeping my spirit up,

I dedicate this work.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No work is done alone. We feel sometimes so lucky or maybe so blessed, when there seems to be much to do, along come friends and brothers like the ones to whom I say thanks.

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the various contributions that the following people have made in the creation of this dissertation.

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My special thanks are due to my dearest wife Dr. Asma KEBIRI for her sustained encouragement, valuable suggestions, timely assistance and all the sacrifice she made during the preparation of this work.

## ABSTRACT

Teaching English Language for Biology students is relatively a challenging task due to the nature of the courses that are perceived to be special and exhaustive for teachers and learners as well. Therefore, the purpose of this research work is to explore the problems faced by students of Biology in English language sessions. This research also aims at identifying the students' attitudes towards the lectures of English as being mainly General English (GE) and not purely English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In addition, the present research endeavors to shed light on a very crucial issue which is the syllabus suitability and intelligibility. Thus, data have been collected quantitatively and qualitatively through an interview in the department of Biology at Tlemcen University. The findings demonstrate that most of the students have negative attitudes towards the English language syllabus which seems to be ambiguous and diverse among EFL teachers of the same level. The results also reveal that the students need an ESP course according to their needs, so they will be able to succeed later in the academic or the professional stage.

# LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

EAP: English for Academic Purposes

EBE: English for Business and Economics

EEP: English for Educational Purposes

EFL: English as Foreign Language

EGP: English for General Purposes

EOP: English for Occupational Purposes

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

EST: English for Science and Technology

ESS: English for Social Sciences

GE: General English

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

TV: Television

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## General Introduction

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# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

It is a common knowledge that English language has become nowadays very important because of its international character and its widespread use as a way of communication. In Algeria, it is considered as the foreign language taught in many faculties such as Science, Engineering, Biology, Medicine and social sciences.

Accordingly, the ultimate objective of English for specific purposes (ESP) is to form students to be well prepared to use English in both academic and professional situations in accordance with their specialty. For this reason, teachers of ESP are required to select the appropriate syllabus-content for the students. Hence, Teachers cannot successfully teach ESP without knowing what the students in fact need in their field. Thus, university needs to implement ESP courses which prepare those learners of technical fields for future academic and professional stage. Applied linguists agree that ‘a needs analysis’ is the primary condition for effective and beneficial courses; since most of these lectures are not designed to provide general knowledge of the language to students; however, to prepare them to be successfully integrated in some specific environments.

In this case, this research focuses on the description of the English language syllabus used for second year master students at the department of Biology at Tlemcen University at the level of pedagogical tools and teaching setting. It explores the following research question:

**To which extent does the English language which is taught to the second year master students of biology fulfill their needs in the future workplace? And why?**

However, the objectives of this research can be summarized in the following points:

- Firstly, to unveil the reality about whether the students of Biology are taught an ESP or a General English curriculum instead.

## General Introduction

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- Secondly, to introduce to the reader the students' attitudes towards studying General English VS studying ESP.
- Thirdly, to investigate students' learning needs.

In order to cover the scope of the research, the researcher identified three different research questions:

1. Do teachers of English at the department of Biology teach ESP?
2. Do teachers of English at the department of Biology discuss the syllabus with the students?
3. What challenges do students of Biology encounter in English classes?

Related to the previously mentioned research questions, the following hypotheses have been proposed:

1. Teachers of English at the department of Biology teach General English (GE) instead of English for Specific Purposes (ESP).
2. Teachers of English at the department of Biology may hardly ever discuss the syllabus with their students.
3. Students of Biology may find difficulties in dealing with materials published in English, since the English they have learnt in the academic stage might not be beneficial.

The present research work is structured into two chapters. Chapter one explores the relevant literature in the area of ESP. Some definitions are given, followed by an overview about the English language situation in Algeria. At tertiary level, it is necessary to highlight the differences and major similarities between ESP and GE. Syllabus and course design have also been dealt with in this part of the dissertation with detailed information about needs analysis.

The second chapter describes both data collection and analysis procedures besides results which are undertaken via one interview given to second year masters students of Biology at the University of Tlemcen. The chapter presents also a description of the research participants, types and instruments, in addition to interpretation.

# First Chapter

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### **1.1. Introduction**

It is highly acknowledged that the teaching of English language has witnessed several evolutions throughout history. One of the most important cornerstones is the emergence of ESP after the Second World War. Since then, educators might mix in some contexts between English for specific purposes (ESP) and English for general purposes (EGP). Thus, the present chapter represents the theoretical background of this research work. An account of the basic related concepts has been presented including, but not limited to, the definition of ESP and its types, the difference between ESP and EGP, as well as Syllabus VS course design. Additionally, it introduces the significance of students' needs analysis in all the stages of teaching ESP.

### **1.2. English Situation in Algeria**

Algeria like all Maghreb countries has always been in relation to different foreign populations at different periods of the Algerian history; particularly the French and the Spanish colonization. Today, the Algerian dialect is influenced by the French and Spanish languages. The case of Spanish can be found in the west of the country, specifically Oran, which was occupied by Spain for more than three centuries. When it comes to the French language, it had the greatest influence on Algerians due to the colonization which lasted for more than 130 years. After the independence, the government started to restore the Algerian identity by implementing Arabic as an official language.

As far as the English language is concerned, there have been new developments which came across Algeria since the 1990's; because of the fast spread of English in the world and Algeria is no exception. From a social and an academic perspective, there are many reasons for the spread of English in Algeria, and one can see this now more than ever before. Algerian marketers, for example, prefer to attract customers with advertisements or products' labels that are written in English. This comes through the influence of the internet or the Middle Eastern satellite TV, where they use English in their commercials. Another important factor to be highlighted here is the huge contact

that individuals have with the English language due to the increasing use of social networks.

Bouhdiba (2006) claimed that learners of English had access to films, American and English songs, the British Council, and the Afro-American institute; all these helped students to practice English and master it. On a political level, because of the English international status in the world, policy makers, curriculum designers, and researchers try always to ensure the presence of English in the educational field. A typical example of this is the plan announced by the minister of higher education and scientific research Mr. Tayeb BOUZID to make English the primary language in Algerian Universities. He announced a survey which was answered by more than one million Algerians through the official website. The final results showed that 94.3% voted “yes” on the enhancing of the use of English, and only 5.7% voted “no”. He further added “in order to increase the visibility of research in higher education institutions and to open up to the international environment....it has been decided to set up a think-tank of specialists and administration officials to present proposals for promoting the use of English”<sup>1</sup>

### 1.3. ESP Definition

It is not an easy task to give a simple definition of what is called English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and it has proven to be so controversial to many researchers. However, it is important to begin with the main definitions given by the linguists who are concerned with ESP.

Basically, Mackay and Mountford stated that **“ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose”** (1978, p. 2). That is to say that English should be taught in order to achieve specific language skills by using real situations that allow students of ESP to use English in their future workplace, or to understand an English discourse related to their area of specialty. In the same line of thought, Robinson states that generally the students study English **“...not because**

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<sup>1</sup> ([www.universityworldnews.com](http://www.universityworldnews.com)).

**they are interested in the English language or culture as such, but because they need English for study or work purposes” (1991, p.2).**

According to Tuncay (2003, p.79), the term ESP refers to the situations of English-teaching where the range of the language being taught is specialized in different ways. On the other hand, Basturkmen (2006, p.18) states that in ESP **“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”**. In other words, ESP main objective is to help language learners to develop the skills they need to use them in a particular field of inquiry, job, or workplace. In the same vein, Anthony argued that **“Some people described ESP as simply being the teaching of English language for any purpose that could be specified. Others, however, were more precise describing it as the teaching of English used in academic studies or teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes” (1997, p. 9-10).**

Another remarkable definition is provided by Ken (2002, pp. 385-395) who indicates that:

**ESP ... involves developing new kinds of literacy, equipping students with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic and professional cultural contexts. Establishing exactly what are the specific language, skills, and genres of particular groups on which we need to base learning priorities may well be expensive, time consuming and skill-intensive. But it is this research which both makes our teaching effective and our practices professional, and we should not give these up easily.**

All these definitions can be considered as a common core, for the reason that they described ESP as teaching specific group of learners some specific skills and content of English in order to make them communicate effectively in different situations.

### 1.4. ESP VS EGP

There are numerous challenges associated with both teaching English for specific purposes and teaching English for general purposes. To understand this dilemma, there have been some questions that were risen for the sake of highlighting the differences and the similarities between them. Among those questions, one can list the following as examples:

- What are the major differences and the similarities between ESP and EGP?
- Do the students of both ESP and EGP share the same goals?
- Do teachers follow the same strategy in designing both ESP and EGP syllabus?
- What is the teaching approach instructors generally adopt in teaching ESP and EGP?

#### *A. Major Differences:*

In order to describe the differences between ESP and EGP, it is better to mention Widdowson (1983. p. 06) who points out that:

**ESP is essentially a training operation which seeks to provide learners with a restricted competence to enable them to cope with certain clearly-defined tasks. These tasks constitute the specific purposes which the ESP course is designed to meet. The course therefore, makes direct reference to eventual aims. GPE, on the other hand, is essentially an educational operation which seeks to provide learners with a general capacity to enable them to cope with undefined eventualities in the future. Here, since there are no definite aims which can determine course-design, there has to be resources to intervening objectives formulated by pedagogic theory. These objectives represent the potential for later realization and are, so to speak, the abstract projection of aims.**

In EGP, using a language outside the classroom can be one of the goals in order to manage the real world situation, such as being able to book a ticket or buy groceries. In other words, the focus here is on training since English is purposed to be used in certain vocational contexts. This means, learners of general English learn the language

to use it in everyday situation. Whereas, ESP learners are more likely to focus on the target situation, and all the lessons are presented to fulfill specific students' needs.

A further difference between ESP and EGP can be noticed in the way course design and materials are provided. In more details, when designing a course, the syllabus aims at building a restricted English competence by establishing a path where the learners will be able later to use a language. In other words, one can design a course that suits the learners' demanding needs.

Additionally, EGP aims at improving a general ability of language use and education. In this case, education is the main focus, and this creates a difficulty in selecting course content since it is really hard to predict the future needs of the learners and their motivations. However, for ESP, teachers need to focus on a specific portion of the language, i.e. the one that has close relationship with and an effect on their future professional life. In relation to this, needs analysis takes a great part in designing an ESP course. It is the main element that determines which language skill is useful for the learners, and it plays a great role to make teachers feel familiar with the students' objectives and interests; which consequently insight them with data for evaluation and accountability (as cited in Nunan, 1984).

Another different point between EGP and ESP can be highlighted here; which is the nature of the approach adopted. According to McDonough (1984), research in EGP can be done without immediate or direct reference to a particular context of learning and teaching. However, in ESP, research can be carried out from specific issues and situations. Moreover, in ESP context, students' needs are the most considerable feature that the teacher has to be aware of before the teaching process starts. On the contrary, in EGP, the teacher may have already prepared the materials to be available for him/her.

A further difference between ESP and EGP can be seen in something called "team teaching". This means that the teacher works in a team environment when teaching specific technical classes. For example, if an ESP teacher lacks any knowledge or information about Biology, it would be appropriate to ask assistance

from a faculty colleague who masters that field. The English teacher in this case can manage each student requirements.

### *B. Major Similarities:*

After all what has been said about the differences between ESP and EGP, there are still some similarities between them; especially in terms of methodology which has been applied in both ESP and EGP contexts. Authenticity, for example, is used in both situations. This has been illustrated by Larouz and kerouad (2016. P. 101) when they argued that **“It has usually been stressed that the use of authentic materials in language classes would serve learners needs and help them engage in the learning process”**.

Another aspect of the similarities between ESP and EGP is the fact they both have a relationship with the learning-centered approach. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 14) point out that **“we cannot simply assume that describing and exemplifying what people do with language would enable someone to learn it. A truly valid approach to ESP would be based on an understanding of the processes of language learning”**. In simple words, to be able to succeed in an ESP context, students need to have a minimum knowledge of EGP at the first place.

In order to sum up all what has been stated above about the differences and similarities between ESP and EGP, Hutchinson and waters (1987, p. 53) gave a simple answer **“In theory nothing, in practice a great deal”**.

## **1.5. Types of ESP**

To make any decision about what to teach, one should consider first the needs of the learners. Accordingly, teaching ESP may touch different areas. Thus, besides teaching students how to become competent users of the language, ESP is also meant to develop the students' understanding of the specific language used in a certain field. **“Today, the field covers all imaginable professions in which English is instrumental, from business and commerce to Biological science”** (Nouali, 2016. P.

27). Only this way, students of ESP would become ready for the challenges they will meet during their professional life.

When trying to make distinctions between the types of ESP, one main type appears in the existing literature under the name English for Occupational and Academic Purposes (EOP and EAP). However, some other researchers namely Carter, Robinson, Jordan as well as Hutchinson and Waters went further to specify other types namely English as a restricted language and English for specific topics.

David Carter (1983) for example identifies three types of ESP: English as a restricted language, EAP and EOP, and English for specific topics.

### **1.5.1. English as a Restricted Language**

Perhaps the best example of this type is the language used by air-traffic controllers or by waiters. Mackay and Mountford (1978) see that the language used by the tourist, the waiter, or the air-traffic controller could be regarded as limited and used situationally due to the ‘special’ required repertoire. In other words, they will not be effective communicators in a novel situation outside the vocational environment.

### **1.5.2. English for Academic and Occupational Purposes**

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) divided this type into three branches: English for Science and Technology (EST); English for Business and Economics (EBE); and English for Social Studies (ESS). Each of these subject areas is further divided into two branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Technicians are considered as an (EOP) for the EST branch; whereas, (EAP) for the EST branch is the English for Medical Studies.

Hutchinson and Waters clarified the difference between (EAP) and (EOP) when saying that **“People can work and study simultaneously; it is also likely that in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be**

**used later when the student takes up, or return to a job”** (as cited in Nouali,2016. P.51)

### **1.5.3. English for Specific Topics**

According to Carter (1983), English for Specific Topics is concerned with English for future need. For example, scientists need to master English for postgraduate reading studies, writing articles, and attending conferences.

## **1.6. ESP Syllabus Design**

The question of ‘what is meant by a syllabus’ might be seen as unnecessary for many teachers. In fact, a syllabus is a file or a document that shows what will or should be learnt.

Syllabus design relies essentially on a call about the "units" of classroom activity, and also the "sequences" which they are to be performed. The syllabus therefore, is the formulization of the content to be learned in a domain of behavior or knowledge. Later "it will arrange this content in a succession of interim objectives". (Widdowson, 1990. P.127). The learning content in this case goes through different stages before it gets its final destination in the learner's mind.

### **1.6.1. The Evaluation Syllabus**

As it has been said previously, syllabus can be defined as a statement of what is to be learnt. This is the most familiar kind of syllabus since the ministries or other regulating authorities are responsible for handing down the document. The aim in this stage is to clarify what the successful learner will know at the end of the course? In fact, success and failure will be evaluated under the umbrella of evaluation syllabus. It is a reflection of the nature of language, linguistic performance and official assumption.

**1.6.2. The Organisational Syllabus**

After listing what have been learnt, the order in which it is to be learnt also takes an important part in a syllabus, and this is what is called an organisational syllabus. Indeed, evaluation syllabus and organizational syllabus complete each other to achieve this stage, for instance, the order of the years of learning such as what to learn in the first year, the second year and so on. Yet, they are different from each other, since the organizational syllabus carries assumptions about the nature of learning and language. This is because organizing the items of a syllabus requires taking into account factors depending on a view of how people learn. The organisational syllabus can often be found in the contents page of textbooks. This type of syllabus is considered to be as an answer that most people would think of when the question "what is a syllabus?" is asked.

**1.6.3. The Materials Syllabus**

The two previous types of syllabus might be regarded as pure. They provide us with the description of what is to be learnt and some indications of the items that should be learnt in an order. Yet, the question about how learning will be achieved is not mentioned in both syllabuses.

The materials writer is usually the first who interprets the syllabus, and this can be found in the third kind "the materials syllabus". In this type, more assumptions about the language, language learning and language use are added by the author. Therefore, he/she focuses on some important factors like the appearance of a language in contexts, the skills integration, types and numbers of exercises which might be spent on any language aspect. All these factors have a great impact on whether and how well something is learnt.

**1.6.4. The Teacher Syllabus**

Usually the teacher is the second stage of interpretation. It is universally acknowledged that a great number of students in the world learn languages through the teacher. Thus, the teacher syllabus exists (Breen, 1984). The teacher has a vital

influence, as the materials writer, on the intensity, clarity, and frequency of any item. As a result, this will affect the learners' received image. However, the learning degree can be affected by different reasons. One of them is the inexperienced teacher who would finish an activity in two minutes instead of twenty minutes.

### 1.7. Syllabus VS Curriculum

Indeed, there is a big confusion that has been created when it comes to the understanding of the terms syllabus and curriculum, not only in the definition, but also in their use. Basically, specificity is what characterizes the syllabus as well as its application. In other words, the syllabus should give details about all what should be included, for whom and by whom.

On the other hand, Dubin and Olshtain (as cited in Berardo 2007, p. 11) view that:

**The terms “curriculum” and “program” are used interchangeably ....to describe the broadest possible contexts in which planning for language instruction takes place. A “syllabus”, on the other hand, is a more circumscribed document, usually one which has been prepared for a particular group of learners. In some places, the term syllabus and a course outline mean the same thing, although recently the term syllabus has taken on a special meaning concerning the specification of language content alone**

Before going further in the details of what syllabus design is, or what curriculum design is, it is necessary to make a clear view about the differences between them. Both terms are linked in most occasions and for some there is a little difference. For example, in North America, the two terms are used interchangeably, which creates even more confusion.

Curriculum can be defined as the overall set of objectives and goals, and all what is included is the content, processes, means and resources of evaluation used. On the other hand, the syllabus is a part of the context and the overall plan of an ongoing curriculum.

There are many researchers who make a distinction between syllabus and curriculum. Yalden (1983) compares the syllabus to a 'blue-print', and the plan

according to him is converted 'into a reality of classroom interactions'. (Yalden, 1983. P.19). Nunan (1988), on the other hand, views that the two are different but at the same time they are being subordinate. According to him, there are three phases which occur in curriculum: planning, implementation and evaluation. Whereas, syllabus focuses on gathering and selecting the material, and the content. In other words, syllabus is a 'subcomponent' of curriculum.

There is a clearer distinction between the two terms given by White in which he describes syllabus as **“The content or subject matter of an individual subject, whereas ‘curriculum’ refers to the totality of content to be taught and aims to be realized within one school or educational system”** (as cited in Berardo, 2007. P. 12). Therefore, syllabus has many different meanings to different people. However, it should not focus only on specification of language content, but on the close meaning of the word “language”.

### **1.8. ESP Course Design**

As it has been previously mentioned, ESP is a language teaching approach and it aims to meet a particular learner's needs. In other words, the ESP teacher is the one who does much of the work in designing appropriate courses for different groups of learners. However, in the life of the General English teacher, course design plays a minor part; since the courses are usually prepared traditionally through textbooks. Therefore, the ESP teacher considers course design as a substantial part of the workload.

When designing a course, it is important to ask some questions in order to provide a logical basis for the subsequent processes of classroom teaching, evaluation, and writing materials. These questions are general and specific, also theoretical and practical. The basic questions one needs to know are:

What is the reason that the student needs to learn?

Who is going to be involved in this process?

What are the student's needs in order to have an effective learning?

What are the learning theories to be used in the course?

In order to answer all these basic questions, the researcher has to investigate some considerable areas namely: needs analysis and learning theories. To clarify more, one should clarify the ESP course design and the relationship with other factors in this figure:

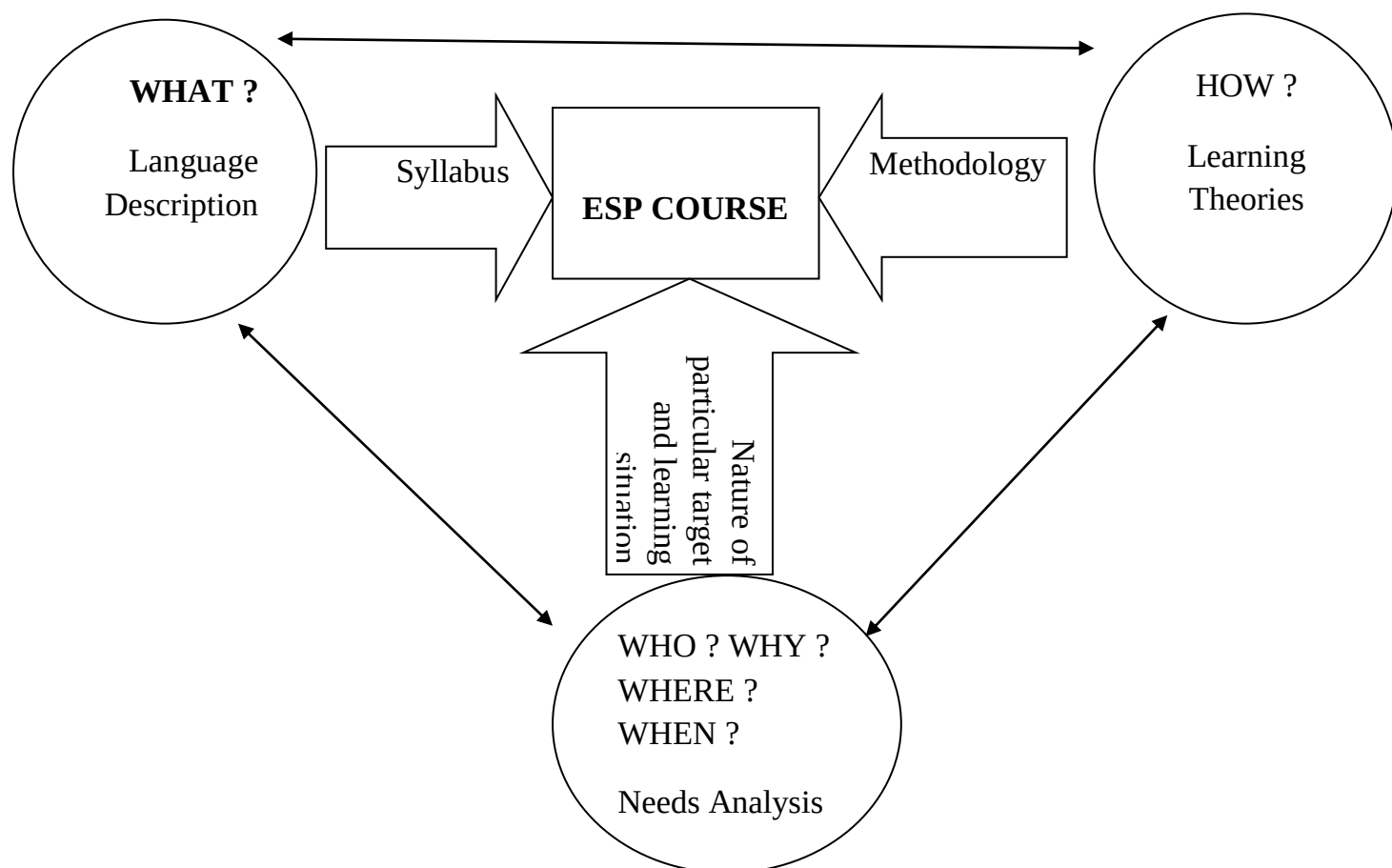


**Figure 1.1:** Factors Affecting ESP Course Design

(Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 22)

After completing the needs analysis, and reviewing the theoretical models of learning, it is high time to consider the next step which is the course design. Thus, it is important to know that defining the learners' needs does not mean that it is easy to design a course. However, teachers need to interpret sensitively the data gathered.

### 1.9. Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is considered to be one of the key steps of ESP. The teacher designs what should be in a course and how materials could be presented according to the learners' needs. It is about the process of establishing the idea of whether the teaching and the materials have been carried out effectively or not. In other words, thinking about what to ask, and how data can be analysed even before one begins. Needs have been discussed by different scholars as being subjective and objective, perceived and felt, target situation/goal-oriented and learning process-oriented and conduct-oriented.

According to Hutchinson (1991, p. 54), there are two types of needs: target needs and learning needs. The target needs **"...[mean] what the learner needs to do in the target situation"**. However, the learning needs represent **"...what [the learner] needs to do in order to learn"**. To put it differently, target needs is a global term which has a number of important fields that will fulfill the ESP need itself. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) view that there are three types of target needs: Necessities, lacks, and wants.

- **Necessities:** lately, needs analysis pays a great attention to necessities or objective needs ; which are linguistic features and functions required in a specific context. The main objective of these analyses is to identify what the priorities are. As an example, the situation that should be selected in order to help the learner to function effectively.
- **Lacks:** lacks are a type of needs which can be considered as gaps between target proficiency and existing proficiency. Lacks can be identified by analyzing what learners can do, and match those skills with the ones needed in the field; so that the practitioners of ESP can decide which necessities the learners lack.
- **Wants:** In simple words, wants are what the learners want to learn, and they are usually tapped through questionnaires and interviews. It is not necessarily that the learners' wants are the learners' real needs. However, they can function

effectively in the target situation. The following figure summarizes what has been stated above:

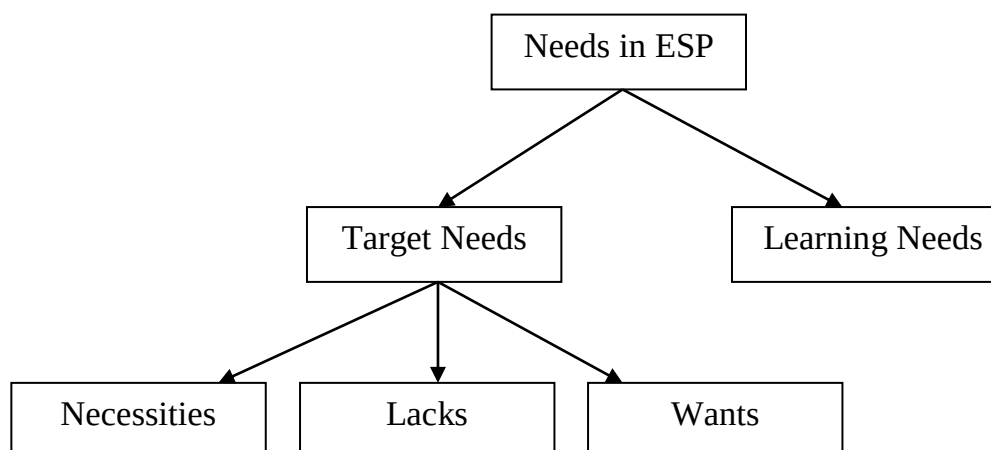


**Figure 1.2:** Types of Needs in ESP

After considering the needs in terms of target situation needs, now it is time to answer the question ‘what are the abilities and knowledge that the learners will acquire in order to be able to perform to the degree of competence in the target situation?’.

To answer this question, one should consider the second type of needs analysis, which is referred to as learning needs. It is, then, required to look closer at what happens in the target situation needs analysis. Any designer of ESP courses can wonder about “what does the learner need to know in order to be an effective communicator in the target situation?”. However, there are some functions that the analysis cannot do, which are the ways how the learner learnt the language skills, items, and strategies that he or she uses (Smith, 1984). In other words, the ESP process does not focus only on knowing or doing, but also on learning. Yet, it is an incomplete ESP process to design a course based only on the target objective, but in fact, it should be planned in terms of the needs, potential and constraints of the learning situation. As a result, there will be a useful analysis of learner needs.

To sum up all what has been said earlier about the target needs and the learning needs, one can say that there are possible reasons for the learners to be well motivated in their work or in the subject lesson, but they can be also totally confused or turned off by encountering the same ESP classroom material. Needs analysis, therefore, remains very important. It is, in fact, a vital tool in the hands of teachers. Still, relying only on it will not be very effective. Therefore, we need to also draw on other partners namely decision makers, ESP teachers and specialized discipline tutors.

### **1.10. Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the different definitions of ESP and addressed the key differences and similarities between ESP and EGP. Then, it has examined the possible issues in ESP syllabus and course design with a detailed analysis of learning and target needs. Thus, the successful investigation of the needs of the learners helps to establish a good syllabus design. In addition, in this chapter, the researcher has examined the distinguishing aspects of curriculum and syllabus in order to clarify the confusion that many teachers have when these terms are introduced, not only in terms of definition, but also in their use. This chapter represents the theoretical part of this research. However, the next chapter presents a methodological framework in order to introduce the study case.

## Second Chapter

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### 2.1. Introduction

After defining the basic concepts needed for this research, this chapter deals with the research design and the research findings. Thus, it is dedicated to both the data collection and the data analysis phases. The chapter presents a full description of the research participants. Besides, an account of the type of research and the selected research instrument was introduced. At the end of the chapter, the researcher deals with the data analysis and interpretation:-

### 2.2. Defining the Case Study

In order to provide a simple, yet a clear definition, one would consider defining first what the word ‘Case’ means. A ‘case’ can refer to different things including people, institutions, study programmes and others. What is basically required to define a case is that it should represent a single entity. Accordingly, **“The Case study –as the term suggests- is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case”** (Dornyei, 2007, p. 151).

The case study has gained and continues to show a great significance in the field of research methodology since its emergence in the 1970s. In this respect, Dornyei (2007, p. 155) added that **“The case study is an excellent method for obtaining a thick description of a complex social issue embedded within a cultural context”**; since it offers at the end of the research a comprehensive understanding of the situation being studied.

As far as the notions of population and sample population are concerned, there is no clear cut answer to the question about whether case studies are meant for larger or smaller groups of participants. It is important, then, to remember what McDonough and McDonough said when they mentioned that **“Case studies can range from large- to small- scale, though it is particularly at the more ‘micro’ end of the spectrum that they are arguably most appropriate for teacher-generated research”**(1997, p. 203).

Though case studies can be done in many areas such as teaching and learning languages, it is most likely to be found in social and human sciences. Whatever the aim of the research is, in conducting a case study, the investigator may collect both qualitative and quantitative data, and may depend on various research tools including questionnaires, interviews, and coded observations. The decision is basically made taking into consideration whether the researcher wants to obtain at the end more numerical or more qualitative data; also, whether the researcher is dealing with large or small groups of participants. In this respect, Cohen and Manion prefer observational methods to be present **“at the heart of every case study”** (as cited in McDonough & McDonough, 1997. P. 208). On the other side, Stake argues that the interview is **“The main road to multiple realities”** (as cited in McDonough & McDonough, 1997. P. 208). Related to what has been stated before, the investigator opted for an interview to collect data for the present study.

### 2.3. The Sample Population

In any research, selecting participants is considered to be an important phase. To define the sample population, Dornyei (2007, p. 96) stated that it **“... is the group of participants whom the researcher actually examines in an empirical investigation and the population is the group of people whom the study is about”**. In addition to that, researchers in the field have provided so many explanations regarding the size of the sample. The first idea to consider here is that there is no pre-determined number of participants. The correct number depends generally on the following factors:

- ✓ The purpose of the study, and
- ✓ The research method selected, i.e., qualitative or quantitative methods since the former requires more participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).

Another important detail that researchers should keep in mind, when selecting their participants, is the sampling strategy. Thus, they may select either the probability or the non-probability sample. In simple words, probability samples are the ones selected based on chance, i.e. every person of the population has a chance to be selected for a certain study. However, for non-probability samples, there is a clear reason behind a certain choice (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). As far as the researcher opted for an interview with master 2 students of biology, then the sample strategy is a non-probability one.

In order to critically study the content of the English lessons presented to students of biology, the researcher has chosen the department of biology at the University of Tlemcen to be the research setting. It is important to consider the fact that students of biology were at the first place students in a scientific stream in the high school. For example, students who were enrolled in a literary class do not have this major as an option. There is another element which is responsible for the selection of students of biology; it is, in fact, the number of students that each department is capable of receiving at the beginning of the academic year.

After being accepted at the department of biology, students are supposed to study for three years to get the licence degree; which is given the name “bachelor of arts” in other countries. After that, the majority of students get accepted to join the two-year masters’ class. However, not all of them have the chance to become a PhD student. This depends on a variety of factors; including but not limited to, their rank along the previous five years as well as how well they perform in the selection contest.

For the current research, the investigator has chosen to work with second year master students of biology. Their ages range between 20 and 30 years old and they are all Arabic native speakers.

#### 2.4. Data Collection: Methods and Procedures

Literature in the field of methodology provides a comprehensive comparison between the quantitative and the qualitative research; though in reality, they complement each other to access better results. On the one hand, Dornyei (2007, p.32) stated that **“The single most important feature of quantitative research is, naturally, that is centered around numbers”**. Thus, most researchers favor the quantitative approach if they intend to:

- Avoid bias
- Have more reliable results, and
- Make generalizations at the end of the research.

On the other hand, other researchers would go for a qualitative approach if they:

- Intend to unveil the reasons behind a certain phenomenon
- Seek to obtain rich data
- Have found a small sample to conduct the study with.

Indeed, **“The issue is not whether to use one form or another but rather how these might work together to foster the development of theory”** (as cited in Dornyei, 2007, p. 43). For this reason, researchers nowadays opt for a better option which is triangulation or the mixed methods research. This helps in:

- Overcoming the limitations of the Monomethod research
- Strengthening the results
- Helping researchers to understand the studied phenomena whatever their field of study or preferred approach is (Dornyei, 2007)

In this respect, Gorard and Taylor stated that **“...both approaches have strengths, and that even greater strength can come from their appropriate combination”** (2004, p. 1).

As far as the selection of the research instruments is concerned, the investigator should take into consideration some important criteria, among which:

- The type of research
- The research topic, and
- The research participants.

Considering the discussion about the multi-method approach presented above, it is worth reiterating that triangulation means “...**the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspects of human behavior**” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 14). Accordingly, the researcher in the present study decided to work with both a questionnaire administered to second year master students of biology and an interview dedicated to PhD students at the same department. However, with all the circumstances of the pandemic, the researcher did not have any chance to meet all the selected participants, and thus this research was based finally on an interview done with second year master students (see section 2.7).

### 2.5. The Interview

Whether used as an initial data collection tool or for triangulation purposes, the interview has gained so much interest in the field of research methodology. It is the number one preferred tool if the researcher intends to have a sort of natural conversation with the participant. In a similar vein, Cannell and Kahn added that the interview is “**a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation**” (as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 269). The result might be, then, a rich and diverse data that may help in covering a lot of aspects in the scope of research (Kebiri, 2013).

In an attempt to compare interviews with questionnaires, Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) mentioned some interesting differences, though they seem to have a lot in common. The following table summarizes the main characteristics of each research instrument.

**Table 2.1:** Interviews Vs Questionnaires

| Questionnaires                                                                                | Interviews                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participants may answer questions freely without any embarrassment in front of the researcher | Interviewees have direct contact with the researcher                                                                                |
| Participants may skip open-ended questions as they require more time and reflexion            | It allows more discussions when dealing with open-ended questions                                                                   |
| The data is more or less limited as far as it is a type of individual-material interaction    | The data is more or less richer as far as the researcher may consider other aspects such as the individual differences and the tone |

There are, indeed, three types of interviews that any researcher may consider before preparing an interview. These are the structured, the semi-structured, and the unstructured interviews. These categories are specified based on:

- How formal the interview is, and
- How much control the interviewer wants to have over the interviewee (Kebiri, 2018).

The Structured Interview “...**shares many similarities with qualitative written questionnaires...**” (Dornyei, 2007, p. 134). They are done with respect to a pre-set structure that the interviewer has to respect during the interview. This is mainly because the researcher has a pre-determined objective (Dornyei, 2007).

The semi-structured interview is also characterized by a pre-preparation of a list of questions. However, the case is different here as far as the researcher is able to change the order of questions, elaborate questions, add or omit questions, and provide more explanations to the interviewee in case of ambiguity. Dornyei stated that **“In applied linguistic research, most interviews conducted belong to the ‘semi-structured interview’ type, which offers a compromise between the two extremes”** (2007, p.136). As a result, it is probably the most favored type of interview among the three (Nunan, 1992).

In the case of an unstructured interview, the researcher is not supposed to have any pre-set questions. However, a general idea is given about the topic and the interviewee just gives his/her own point of view. Cohen, Manion & Morrison, in this line of thought, explained that **“...the unstructured interview is an open situation, having greater flexibility and freedom”** (2000, p. 273). The participant, then, is given more freedom; as opposed to the two previous types of the interview.

As far as the current interview is concerned, the researcher designed it to include 14 questions; mainly 10 close-ended and 4 open-ended questions. In fact, this pre-determination is made for the sake of guiding both the interviewee and the interviewer along the whole conversation. However, the researcher decided in advance to keep it a semi-structured one. This is because:

- ✓ The semi-structured interview is mostly favored among researchers, and
- ✓ The interviewed participants are not fully competent users of the English language. Thus, the researcher needs to intervene to explain or reword the questions when needed.

As Dornyei (2007, p. 137) proposed, **“The first few questions...are particularly important in an interview,...because they set the tone and create initial rapport”**. Thus, for this interview, the researcher decided to ask the participants about past facts which will be directly and easily answered. This concerns the first questions about their age, their level, and the amount of their previous English lectures at the

department of biology. Starting from the second question, the researcher moved to the content questions for the sake of checking:

- ✓ Their knowledge about ESP
- ✓ The significance of English to their careers
- ✓ Their attitudes about their current level of English, and
- ✓ The way English lectures and exams are presented to them.

This interview has been recorded since “...if we want to use the content of a semi-structured or unstructured interview as research data, we need to record it – taking notes is simply not enough as we are unlikely to be able to catch all the details...” (Dornyei, 2007. p. 139). However, because it was literally impossible to meet the participants during the period of the pandemic, the researcher decided to record the interview relying on the zoom application. It took around 10 to 12 minutes to conduct the interview with each participant and the data gathered were checked and analysed at a later stage of this research.

## **2.6. Data Analysis and Interpretation**

When it comes to data analysis, researchers may opt for one option, i.e. qualitative or quantitative data analysis, depending on the type of research, the research instruments used, the number of participants, and so many other variables. Researchers can opt even for both procedures if they intend to have a research with a mixed-method characteristic. It is widely acknowledged that quantitative data analysis relies basically on mathematical procedures. With the help of the computer, researchers can analyse hundreds of collected data with few clicks. However, qualitative data analysis demands more reflection and reviewing of the participants’ answers. It comes in the form of words and the researcher is supposed to extract the hidden meaning. As far as this research is concerned, the researcher made use of an interview composed of 14 questions; both open-ended and close-ended questions. Thus, the analysis took the form of both qualitative and quantitative ones; using both numbers and words to summarize the data collected.

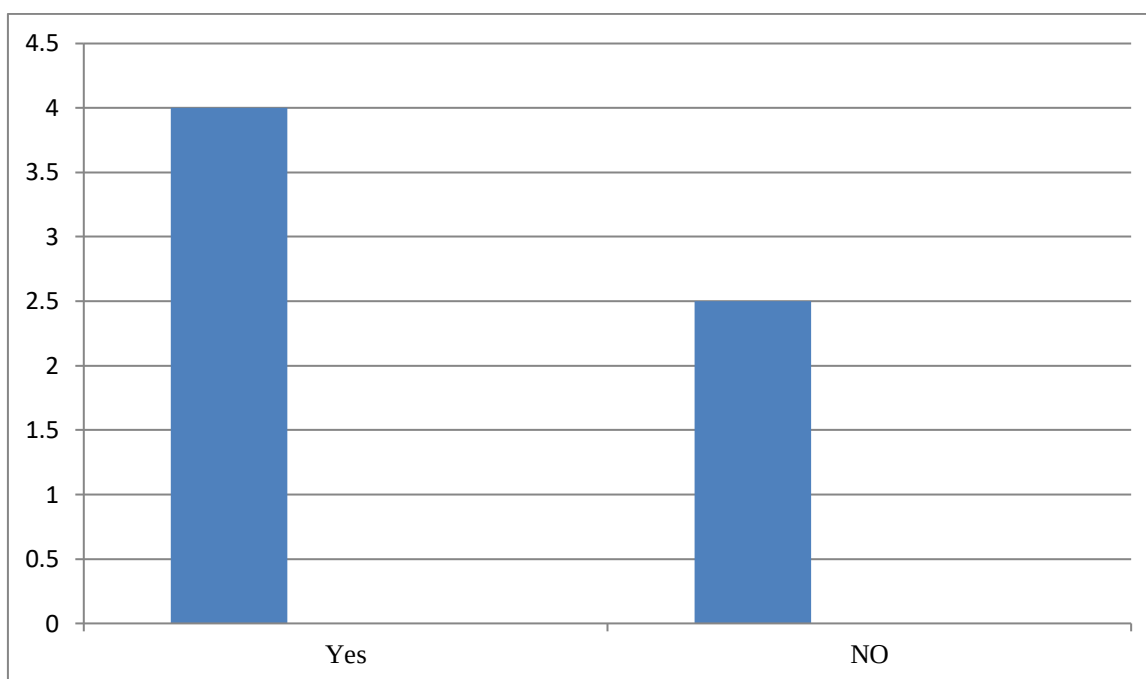
The first question has been asked in order to determine how many hours are dedicated to English lessons at the department of biology. All students answered that they study English for one hour and a half. However, students had different answers when they have been asked about what English skills they are good at. The following table illustrates their answers:

**Table 2.2:** Students' Answers to Question Two

|           | S 1 | S 2 | S 3 | S 4 | S 5 | S 6 | S 7 |
|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Listening | *   | *   | *   | *   | *   |     |     |
| Speaking  |     |     | *   |     |     |     |     |
| Reading   | *   | *   |     | *   | *   | *   | *   |
| Writing   | *   | *   |     |     |     | *   |     |

The table above shows that there is no single student who considers him/herself good at the four skills. However, the most repeated answers were basically listening and reading. This means that these students feel more comfortable with understanding rather than producing the language. When being asked about the reason, two of them mentioned that they watch a lot of movies and listen to a lot of songs in English. However, the other students explained their weakness by saying that they do not have the opportunity to practice English in Algeria; mainly because their mother tongue is Arabic and the second language is French.

As far as question three is concerned, the researcher asked students whether they know what English for specific purposes means. Four students answered 'yes' and the rest seemed to have no idea about the term. The following bar-graph represents the results:

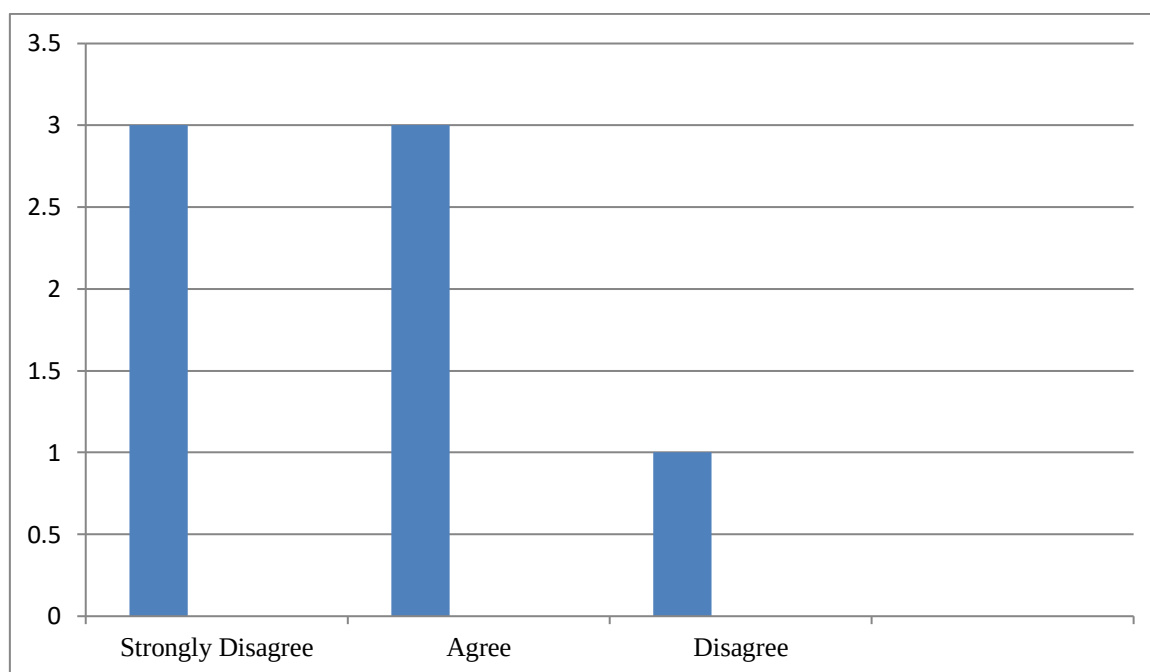


Bar-graph 2.1: Students' Familiarity with the term "English for specific purposes"

When being asked about whether the literature of their field of study is published in French or in English, four students said that it is in English, two students said that they find publications in French, and one student said that both French and English are used to publish books or articles in the field of biology.

The fifth question is related to the previous one since it speaks about the difficulty of dealing with the material published in English. Five students said that they find it difficult; one student said that it is very difficult and the other remaining student said that he/she finds it easy to read books or articles that are published in English.

Students' responses to the following question demonstrated that their teachers of English do not discuss the English syllabus with them at the beginning of the year. However, when being asked about whether they find their English syllabus beneficial, their responses were not exactly the same. The following bar-graph summarizes their answers:



Bar-Graph 2.2: The Usefulness of the English syllabus

Students have been asked to justify their answers and most of them said that they do not find the syllabus of English beneficial or useful simply because it has nothing to do with their field of research. One student said that he/she finds it useful just to develop their speaking skill.

The eighth question was made in an attempt to know whether teachers of English translate the field related vocabulary to their students, and most of the students' answers were negative. Only two students stated that sometimes their teachers translate the new words from English to French.

The researcher wanted also to know how the university helps in introducing the English language to students of biology. All students agreed that the university does not provide any facilities except books in the library. On the other hand, their responses to question number ten demonstrated that not all of the students study articles written in English with their teachers.

The next question was about the content presented to students of biology in English lectures. Students used different words to explain the process, but most of their answers turned around the idea that, in addition to grammar, teachers ask them to

write abstracts of articles in English, and that they do not find this helpful. One student said “I wish to see some improvement in this point”.

Question thirteen was about the content of English exams at the department of biology. The following table was made for the sake of summarizing their answers:

Table 2.3: The Content of English Exams at the Department of Biology

|                                                               | S 1 | S 2 | S 3 | S 4 | S 5 | S 6 | S 7 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Grammar Activities                                            |     |     |     | *   |     | *   |     |
| Translating texts that are related to biology                 |     |     |     |     | *   |     |     |
| Translating texts that are not related to biology             |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Reading Comprehension (Texts that are related to biology)     | *   | *   | *   |     | *   | *   | *   |
| Reading Comprehension (Texts that are not related to biology) |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |

The last question of the interview was about what ideas students can suggest to enhance English language learning. Most of their answers turned around the following ideas:

- Giving more importance to English
- Specify more sessions per week to study English as subject.
- Study more articles in English as it is an essential part of their studies at the department of biology

### Data Interpretation

All what has been stated in the previous section is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative ways of dealing with the data gathered through the students' interview. However, it still does not link the obtained results with the previously stated research hypotheses. Accordingly, the present section is made for the purpose of confirming or disconfirming the research hypotheses.

To put it differently, students' answers to the interview questions showed that most of them are not satisfied with the fact that they study English for only one hour and half a week, and they wish to see an upgrade when it comes to the time allocated for English lectures at the department of Biology. In addition to that, they wish also to see a change concerning the content presented to them; since most of what they do with teachers of English turns around translating texts or mini lectures of grammar, neglecting to a great extent what they really need in their major, i.e. reading and understanding the literature of biology that is published in English. This summary of the previously obtained data directs the researcher to confirm the first hypothesis which says that teachers of English do not teach ESP at the department of Biology. Rather, they opt for a mixture of content related basically to general English. It is also fair to confirm the second hypothesis which speaks about the fact that students of biology encounter several problems with English as far as the content is not fully satisfying and useful.

### **2.7. Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of the study is that, unfortunately, this research has been conducted with only seven students. In other circumstances, this would be certainly unacceptable. However, during this time of the pandemic (Coronavirus), the researcher could not deal with a larger group of participants because of the quarantine which lasted over four months. All that the researcher could do was to post on facebook pages and network that this research which is being conducted needs help and data. After that, only seven students reacted and accepted to do a video call with the researcher. This issue was also a huge obstacle when analyzing the data gathered. Dealing with only seven students is for sure never enough to make any generalizations, and thus, this research might not be really representative in terms of data sufficiency but mostly accepted in terms of methodology suitability. Accordingly, further studies in the field are highly recommended to better identify the reasons behind the problems encountered by students of biology in English courses.

### **2.8. Conclusion**

This chapter has been put to describe the process of data collection starting with identifying the sample population and the research instrument. After that, the analysis of the data collected has been tackled. The researcher opted for both qualitative and quantitative analysis for a better comprehension of the studied phenomenon. Through their answers, students have summarized the challenges they continuously face when dealing with English at the department of Biology. After the analysis of students' answers to the interview, the researcher could confirm the previously set hypotheses. Also, a summary of the study limitations has been presented at the end of the chapter.

## General Conclusion

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### GENERAL CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that teaching languages is an extremely important matter for the development of societies. It is also clear that every learner of English language has his/her own learning objectives. Some of them seek to improve their English level, some others learn to communicate with foreigners, and others use English to work in special fields. The central common point between all of them is that English is used according to certain situations or special purposes.

The field of second language teaching and learning has observed a great deal of excitement and activity during the few past decades. Recently, there has been a growing awareness among people to distinguish between English for specific purposes (ESP) and English for General purposes (EGP). As a result, this has necessarily led to a corresponding increase in attention on syllabus and course design to provide appropriate teaching programmes.

In order to communicate effectively in English language, it is important to prepare the students of other specialties rather than English at the university level, through specific courses- content. The latter is based on specific syllabus that outlines the content and the sequence of a specific language programme.

As a matter of fact, ESP is more problematic and complicated than its counterpart (EGP) in education. In the present study, the results have revealed that students agreed on that ESP courses should have positive effects on students' educational stage and professional one as well.

Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of the syllabus through the demonstration of its significance as a fundamental pedagogical tool by which designing an appropriate syllabus seems to be considerably effective in language teaching mainly in an ESP context.

## General Conclusion

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Moreover, the most significant conclusions drawn from the qualitative and quantitative analysis show that there is no single student who considers him/herself good at the four skills at once, but basically listening and reading only. Besides, the majority of students find difficulties in dealing with the material published in English what might creates a hindrance to progress in their field of study. This research has revealed students' choice and perceptions in order to be included in a new ESP course. There are also other factors which are taken into account like students' level and interest.

ESP is a complex enterprise not only in the Algerian context but also worldwide. Therefore, this research work might be a good start to open many doors for other further research which will contribute to understand ESP and enhance administration and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research officials with effective propositions. Furthermore, the findings of the present research might be valuable if it will be extended to other departments in the faculty.

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## Student's Interview

The given interview is a part of a research which aims at describing the English language situation at the department of Biology. You are kindly requested to answer the following questions through putting a tick ( x ) in the appropriate answer and justify if it is necessary.

-----

Age:

Level:

1. How many hours per week do you study English?

-----  
-----

2. Would you specify which language skills are you good at?

You can tick more than one answer

Listening ☐ Reading ☐

Speaking ☐ Writing ☐

why?-----  
-----  
-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

3. Do you know what ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES is?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, would you provide a short explanation?

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

4. Is most of the field-related literature published in?

French ☐

Arabic ☐

English ☐

Other ☐

5. How do you find dealing with books and articles that are published in English?  
(Tick just one box)

Very easy ☐

Easy ☐

Difficult ☐

Very difficult ☐

6. At the beginning of the semester, does your teacher of English discuss the syllabus with you?

Yes ☐

No ☐

7. The syllabus of English is beneficial and useful

Strongly agree ☐

agree ☐

disagree strongly ☐

disagree ☐

Why? -----  
-----  
-----

8. Does your teacher of English opt for translating the field related vocabulary?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If yes, please tick the appropriate box below. You can tick more than one.

- From English to French ☐

- From French to English ☐

- From Arabic to English ☐

- From English to Arabic ☐

9. Does the University provide any facilities for you to learn English?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If yes, please tick the right box. You can tick more than one.

- Books ☐

- Labs ☐

- Data show ☐

10. Have you ever studied articles related to the field of Biology with your teacher of English?

Yes ☐

No ☐

11. Would you describe the content of the English lessons that you generally have with your teacher of English?

-----  
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12. What types of tasks or activities are generally involved during your English lessons?

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13. Are your English tests and exams generally about (you can tick more than one answer )

- Grammar activities ☐

- Translating texts that are related to Biology ☐

- Translating texts that are not related to Biology ☐

- Reading comprehension( texts related to the field of Biology) ☐

- Reading comprehension (texts not related to the field of Biology) ☐

14. What do you suggest to enhance English language learning in your field of study?

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*Thank you for your collaboration*