



Research Article

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Received: 12 April 2024 / Accepted: 26 June 2024 / Published: 8 July 2024

Employing Digital Tools in Esp, a Need Analysis for Bussines English Course Design

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36941/mjss-2024-0035>

Abstract

The occurrence of pandemics showed the world the importance of integrating technology in daily life. In education, this necessity was even more crucial as whole education systems switched to remote learning almost overnight. It was also a time when many teaching/learning platforms saw birth or were even developed further. This paper aims at investigating the students' perceptions about digital tools they deem necessary (and feel comfortable) to be included in a Business English course conducted at the Agricultural University of Tirana, the department of Economics and Rural Development Policies. Through quantitative and qualitative data gathered, the students perceived present needs and target needs in English language communications were identified. Additionally, the research methods collected sufficient data on the preferred digital tools to be used in classroom and outside, in order for the students to be more motivated in language acquisition and skill development. The study concluded that the student were skilled users of digital tools due to remote learning during pandemics and were aware of the BE topics and language skill they needed to possess in their future workplace, thus ensuring input for a successful BE course design.

Keywords: ESP course design, digital integration, Business English, needs analysis

1. Introduction

By definition, technology integration in education is understood as the use of technology to enhance and support student learning experience and the educational environment. By making use of digital tools in ESP classes, the classroom instruction may be supported by creating opportunities for students to complete assignments on the computer rather than with the conventional pencil and paper. Utilizing various types of digital tools in the classroom creates learners who are more actively engaged in performing tasks and achieving learning objectives.

According to a study carried out by Open Colleges in Australia (Infographic, n/d) the top three reasons why teachers use technology in the classroom pointed out that a rough estimate of 76% use new digital tools cater to different learning styles, additionally, 75% of them attribute the use to the boosting of student motivation, while 76% are confident that new digital tools in education improve the resource material used traditionally.

With the rapid change of technology and labor market, education in general, and ESP courses in

this particular case, are expected to go through a transformation where new learning environments are expected to be highly flexible, incentive to communicative skills. Previous research show that using digital tools in language learning have resulted successful in encouraging independent learning, enhance student's interaction and keep the students more engaged, it helps students with different learning styles, etc. Furthermore, the students may practice new learning techniques through several educational mobile apps, online quizzes, vocabulary building games and tests, it can help with homework assignments, grading online etc.

2. Business English (BE) versus General English (GE)

Classes in Business English, as a part of English for Specific Purposes (Paltridge and Starfield (2013), aim to cover an array of communicative skills which are encountered in everyday workplace setting. Some examples of Business English classes are 'Speaking in a meeting', 'Negotiating', 'Talking on the phone', while the vocabulary and dialogue is focused on scenarios such as e-commerce, negotiating deals, giving presentations, speaking in a meeting, talking on the phone, and so on. The peculiarity of BE syllabus is that it includes all aspects of the business world, such as economics, finance and accounting, employment, marketing, taxes, insurances, entrepreneurship, etc. The task required in the workplace using English as a medium of communication revolve around writing a job advertisement, conducting interviews, making a deal, inquiring after a job , writing a resume or curriculum vitae (CV), making a phone call, writing formal letters, pitching a business plan, holding a meeting, and giving a presentation.

General English courses encompass all areas of English, for all situations. They tend to focus more on the day to day conversation and involve the use of vocabulary and grammar.

The table below by Hutchinsons and Waters provides a clear picture of the ramifications of the English Language Teaching, further divided in three main areas of English Teaching and English for Specific purposes stems from English as a Foreign Language.

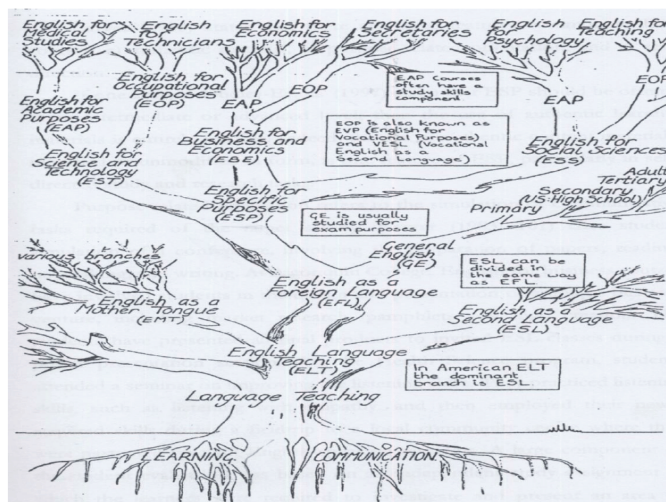


Figure 1: ELT tree (Hutchinsons and Waters 1987, p17)

3. New Digital devices in ESP Courses

According to many scholars, ESP revolves around the students' needs and desires for language and communication. (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), and in the courses of Business English particularly, the

use of digital tools is deemed useful in achieving the target communication skills and language competence as well as enhancing the students' enthusiasm and motivation. Thus, giving and overview of the most used devices in the support of interactive participation in a successful teaching and learning ESP environment is of utmost importance.

The definition of digital encompasses an array of resources in compliance with courses, needs and skills acquired. The use of technology in language education has gone through significant changes during the years, starting from Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in 1980s, and then developing further into Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL).

In the present, teaching methodology focuses almost entirely on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Web 2.0 labeling and more specifically on the use of online platforms or Internet of Things (IoT): watching live broadcasting, chatting, browsing, exploring, and other social media activities. These activities circle around virtual meeting while communicative situations such as videoconferences, playing word games, translating, and using chatgpt.

Furthermore, since 2000, there has been an occurrence of major technological development in the forms of: (a) Learning Management Systems (LMSs) such as Moodle, Blackboard, Canvas Google Classroom, and so on. The number of LMS users worldwide is estimated to be around 73.8 million people, while in 2024, the L&D market is expected to bring in roughly \$12.48 billion in revenue. (b) Website and Technology of wiki as Drupal and WordPress; (c) Storage and Cloud Services like iCloud, OneDrive, Box, Google Drive, Dropbox; (4) Mobile Tools and Apps: tablets media players and smartphones; (d) Software of Collaborative Productivity tools such as Zoom, Webex, Google Docs; (e) Multimedia sharing like YouTube, and (f) Social Media including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn (Robinson et al., 2019).

4. The Importance of Digital Devices in ESP Courses

It has become common knowledge that new technology-integrated systems are part and parcel of the educational system especially in the field of language acquisition. By enabling blended learning and virtual classrooms among other, they encourage active participation in class, contribute to the teaching and learning process and helps students to boost their academic skills. Furthermore, they have been proven to urge motivation, independent learning, critical thinking, pair work and groupwork.

a) *classes accessible to all, everywhere*: Many learning platforms cater to the needs of learners by making language classes accessible for everyone regardless of the learner's location. Mobile Apps which came in handy immensely during pandemics learners can get hold of many resources in order to improve their pronunciation, look up words, practice grammar etc. The possibility to reach larger audiences, independent of their geographical location, constitutes the most stimulating aspect of using modern technology in language acquisition.

b) *promote critical thinking*: the use of technology stimulates you brain and critical thinking through online games, quizzes, riddles, puzzles and simulations. These activities require the learner's use of the analytical, inductive and deductive skills. In addition, artificial intelligence by providing the possibility of virtual reality and augmented reality, or artificial intelligence face the learner with situations that require the use of decision-making, problem-solving, analyzing, evaluating and improvising skills. According to Guilloteaux and Darnyei, (2008) critical thinking and motivation are closely related and they go hand in hand in many ways.

c) *encourage interactive participation*: Digital tools have been accused wrongly of the possibility of isolating the learner. On the contrary, technology facilitates interactivity by allowing learners to communicate with each other easily in relation to classes and materials thus enabling mastering language skills. They can upload assignment, watch video lectures more than once, form networks or study groups online.

Research has repeatedly demonstrated that students learn better when they are fully engaged, and that hands-on learning enhanced by new technologies is the best way to engage them..

5. The Study

The method of research used for this paper was the questionnaire administered to the students by means of a google form. The google form collected both quantitative and qualitative data to develop enough understanding on the experience and needs of the use of digital tools and learning platforms in the context of language acquisition in business English setting. The questionnaire was administered to one hundred and fifty students from the department of Economy and Rural Development Policies and Agribusiness Management, Faculty of Economy and Agribusiness, Agricultural University of Tirana who take business English classes as a mandatory subject during the first year of Bachelor degree. The questionnaire was administered at the end of the first term in order to upgrade the course syllabus for the second term.

6. The Findings

a) Students level of English

The student perceived competence of English resulted to be mainly intermediate, 72 %, while 5% perceived their level of English to be upper intermediate. The rest 23 %, thought their level of English competency was pre-intermediate. The result of the questionnaire are promising since it is paramount for any course of ESP that student possess at least intermediate skills in English language.

b) Students perceived need to improve skills

When asked to pick two skills out of the four (listening, speaking, reading and writing) , the majority of the students responded that the skills they needed to improve were speaking and writing with respectively 82% and 79 %. From the experience, these results were predictable considering the fact that students often hesitate when speaking situation are involved in classwork and it has been evident during the first term that they lack writing skills. Another factor that might have contributed to them selecting speaking as a skill they need to improve might be the idea that spoken English might be needed more in future employment communicative situations.

c) Business English topics considered important for future employment

According to the prominent scholar, Hutchinson and Waters (Hutchinson & Waters, 1985) ESP (and therefore BE too) is an approach to language teaching in which the subject content are based on the learners' needs and interest. The questionnaire revealed that the BE topics considered important to master for future employment by the student were writing a CV, preparing for a job interview, mastering BE terminology, writing emails and cover letters. These topics ranged form 80 to 100 percent. While preparing for a meeting, job adverts, developing negotiating skills and vocabulary, and buzzwords and jargon resulted les preferred by the respondents.



Figure 2. Business topics

It is worth mentioning the choice of need for BE terminology almost unanimously by the students. This goes in tune with the traditional belief that BE and ESP courses in general consist mainly in teaching a set of technical vocabulary used frequently in communicative situations within a profession. The data obtained from the questionnaire are valuable input to design the content of future BE courses

d) *Experience using digital tools*

Integration of digital tools in BE may prove useful in various aspect of language teaching. For example tools like Google Drive could be used to facilitate group work and group assignment or making use of Padlet to practice new vocabulary. In addition, Microsoft OneNote is an useful tool to practice speaking and listening, Simple English Wikipedia is suitable for students who might struggle with reading while Google Translate is considered to be the free go to choice for translation. Also the employ of whiteboard apps like Explain Everything to create group activities. Podcasts on the other hand might find a place in boosting listening and speaking skills mostly. Although in their nascent phase, AI-Based learning tools are making their way into language learning and teaching. Apps such as Knowjj that help students learn vocabulary or Quillbot that may used for translation and ChatGPT posseses instructions to learn languages.

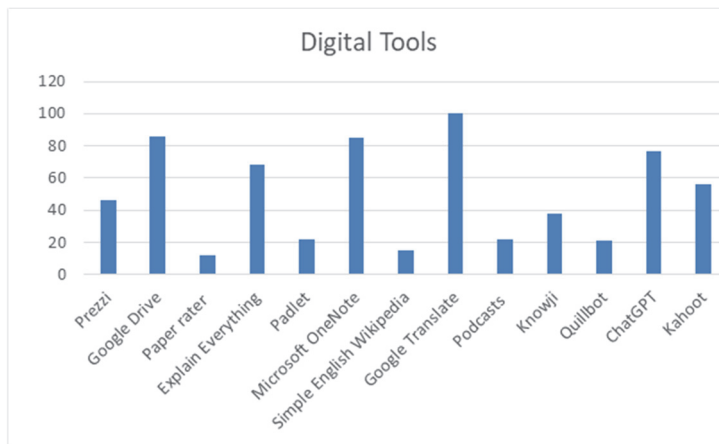


Figure 3. Digital Tools

The data from the questionnaire pointed out a considerable gap in the experience students have in using the digital tools. Almost all students used Google Translate to look up the Albanian equivalent of the words encountered in BE textbooks. The use of google drive, Microsoft Onenote, ChatGPT and Kahoot resulted with considerable high rate of usage.

The satisfactory results of the experience in the use of digital tool is a promising start in the integration of digital devices in BE courses. These results come as a consequence of the remote teaching during the pre-university years due to Covid19 pandemics

e) *The use of electronic devices*

The students (97 per cent of the) declared that the first and most frequent electronic device they utilize to assist them in studying BE was the smartphones. This device resulted as the sharing information medium such as e-books and lectures mostly used by students for In addition to using the smartphone for learning purposes, the students stated that social networks, playing games and online shopping occupied a substantial place in their daily use of smartphones. Laptops were less frequently used, or occasionally for assignments or presentations.

7. Conclusion

The survey administered to the students of the first year of the Bachelor degree at the faculty of Economy and Agribusiness, Agriculture University of Tirana, Albania provided a valuable input in designing an Business English course tailored to the target needs of the learners for language and communication in English. The outcome pointed out that the students possess intermediate level of proficiency in English language which is an important steppingstone to the acquisition of BE. In addition, students were aware of the content they needed to master and the topics of BE that they might use in the future workplace as well as the language skill they lacked and needed to master.

As a result of the remote teaching in the time of the pandemics, students revealed a good command in the use of digital devices, some of them considered paramount in vocabulary acquisition and translation, therefore, giving the lecturer a good starting point in BE course design and successful course delivery

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