

A Communication Based Approach to Teach Business English

المنهج التواصلي لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية للأعمال

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Abstract:

The world of Business has evidently chosen English as its language of communication, which is used to facilitate communication between people from different parts of the world. Subsequently, the need for communication-based courses urges ESP researchers to design and implement new methods, techniques and materials in order to achieve successful communication. However, instead of coping with this rapidly changing world, traditional views and theories are still adopted in Algerian universities, where communication skills are barely introduced in teaching business English. For this purpose, an action research was undertaken. Sample students are four (04) doctoral students of business from the University of Mostaganem. Triangulation of tools was used to cross check data, relying on both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The results indicated that teaching business English requires an emphasis on communication skills so that learning can be used properly in real life situations. This paper closes with highlighting intercultural and discourse competences in addition to linguistic competence as key elements for an appropriate language learning.

Keywords: ESP, Business English, Communicative Competence.

ملخص: من الواضح أن ميادين التجارة والأعمال قد اختارت اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة التواصل وهي اللغة المعمول بها للاقتصاد والأعمال والتي تستخدم لتسهيل التواصل بين الناس من مختلف أنحاء العالم. بالتالي، فإن الحاجة إلى المناهج القائمة على التواصل تحت الباحثين المختصين في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة على تصميم وتنفيذ أساليب وتقنيات ومواد جديدة لتحقيق تواصل ناجح. ومع ذلك، فبدلاً من التعامل مع هذا العالم السريع التغير، لا تزال الآراء والنظريات التقليدية تعتمد في الجامعات الجزائرية، وبالكاد يتم إدراج مهارات التواصل في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية. لهذا الغرض، أجري هذا البحث على عينة مكونة من أربعة (04) طلبة دكتوراه في مجال الاقتصاد من جامعة مستغانم. تم استخدام تثلث الأدوات لتحقق من البيانات، بالاعتماد على كل من تحليل البيانات الكمية والنوعية. أشارت النتائج إلى أن تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية للأعمال يتطلب التركيز على مهارات التواصل بحيث يمكن استخدام اللغة بشكل صحيح في مواقف الحياة الحقيقية. تحتتم هذه الورقة بتسليط الضوء على الكفاءات الثقافية والخطابية بالإضافة إلى الكفاءة اللغوية كمفتاح للتمكن من اللغة.

كلمات مفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة، اللغة الإنجليزية للأعمال، الكفاءة التواصلية

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INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on a research that explores the crucial role of communication in the teaching/learning of business English, since communication is becoming a vital component in a globalized world that establishes more and more connections between people from different parts of the world.

In fact, Communication is one of the skills that business English teacher should focus on because of its important role in day to day practices in addition to specific business practices such as (negotiating, presenting, making decisions,...etc.). Therefore, the role of the ESP teacher is to integrate a communication-based approach to teach Business English. Consequently, the critical issue we encounter among Algerian university students is a deficiency in communicating ideas. The

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same problem is faced particularly with students of business where communication skills are set to be crucial in their domain.

The main objective of this research is to shed light on the necessity to integrate communicative dimensions in teaching business English. From the assumption that teaching business English requires not only focusing on linguistic competence, but should explore other competences, this study seeks to answer the following questions;

- What type of skills do students of business need to develop to learn English?
- How can students of business develop their communicative competence?

In an attempt to answer the above questions, we hypothesize that;

- Teachers of English for Business Purposes (EBP) should focus on the communicative skills to improve English learning, mainly the productive communicative skills.
- Along with linguistic competence, students of business are required to enhance their intercultural and discourse competences in attempt to enhance their communicative competence.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 English for Business Purposes:

Internationalization of education, business and industry and corresponding learners' needs, have led to the development of ESP and, therefore, many definitions have emerged. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) considered ESP as "an approach to language teaching which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (p.16). Zhang (2013: 72) in the same way argues that "ESP is a goal-oriented and well targeted instruction system, which stresses the combination of English language learning and specific purposes of professional learning.". Moreover, Mackay & Mountford (1978) assert: "ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose."

Business English on the other hand is about teaching English to adults or university students working or preparing to work in a business context. Frendo (2005) defines Business English as: "... an umbrella term for a mixture of general everyday English, general business English, and ESP. it is not limited to words or phrases that only appear in some special business world." (Evan Frendo, 2005:07). He also considers Business English as a new type of English, a lingua franca that non-native speakers use in Business communication and which has developed and is developing to meet their needs.

Business people do a variety of things with language (negotiate, telephone, deal, advertise, ect.), according to Frendo (2005) ; these are done in a specific business context and for specific business aims which are not limited to the words and language used. Business English users do not only need to know the words but also need the skills in order to do their job. Therefore, business English is used together with business communications skills.

2.2 Business Communication Skills

Because Business English is not only about language, but also about language use, it is very important to shed light on communicative competence. The concept that was elaborated by many scholars, starting by Dell Hymes in the 1960's who considers communicative competence as the learners' ability to understand and use the language appropriately to communicate in an authentic environment. Later on in the 70's Canal & Swain developed a model of the components of

communicative competence including grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competences. From the other hand, Frendo (2005) in his book *Teaching Business English* proposed a new model for business English teachers considering three competences, namely; linguistic competence, discourse competence and intercultural competence. Thus, teachers of business English need to consider the integration of communication dimensions in their teaching process.

Furthermore, communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach to language learning with an emphasis on the learners' ability to use the language in order to communicate in real life situations. Learners practice the language through interaction between each others and heir instructors inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, CLT considers the teacher as a facilitator rather than a holder of knowledge. according to Nunan (1999) "Communicative language teaching has brought the most significant change into the practice of English language teaching". That's why, many institutions have adopted this approach into their language teaching practices.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study was conducted within an action research; which is probably one of the purest forms of applied research. Action Research involves the application of the scientific method to everyday problems in the classroom. While this study seeks to explore the students' communicative needs, the objective of action research is to inspect whether the procedures adopted have facilitated the task for those persons involved in the study.

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis were provided through triangulation of research instruments. "The term triangulation refers to the generation of multiple perspectives on a phenomenon by using a variety of data sources, investigators, theories, or research methods with the purpose of corroborating an overall interpretation". (Quoted in Dörnyei 2007: 165).

3.2 Context

The present study has been conducted at AbdelhamidIbnBadis University of Mostaganem, in the faculty of Economics, Business and Management Sciences. The target of this research work was a Doctorate project entitled "economy, corporate finance and financial markets practices". The research took place during the academic year 2016-2017.

3.3 Participants

The participants in this study were four (04) first year doctoral students of "Economy, corporate finance and practices of financial studies" from the faculty of Economics, Business and Management Sciences at the University of Mostaganem. The four (04) students represents the whole group of the doctorate. Two (02) subject specialist teachers were involved in this study from the same university.

3.4 Instruments

Triangulations of tools was used as to guarantee collection of reliable data and meet the objective of this investigation. First, a structured interview took place with the subject specialist teachers that aimed at determining the type of communicative skills needed and the way they can be developed to serve the students' learning. Then, a pre-course test took place before the beginning of the course that aimed at identifying the student's level. The prominent instrument is the student's questionnaire which gave detailed data about the needs, lacks and wants of the students with regard of English language learning. At last, a post-course test was undertaken in order to measure students' progress and efficiency of the adapted course, which was based on communication dimensions.

4. Results

4.4 Teachers' interview

A structured interview with subject specialist teachers was undertaken in an attempt to answer the research questions. The aim of this tool is to orient the researcher toward the courses' content selection and to draw a clear profile of students. The interview consists of a set of items; they were organized from general to specific. The results are analysed in the section below.

Item one:

The first item asks about the exit profile of students and their future jobs so that the researcher makes a clear cut concerning the orientations of the course either occupational or academic. Here one teacher precised that students are future teacher researchers, while the other teacher expressed that students themselves cannot see clearly their future, for him they should be first engaged in companies so that they get really involved in business environment, he added; in terms of teaching and research, there is still a lot to be done!.

Item two:

From the moment, that the doctorate is said to be "academic" and English module serves academic purposes, the researcher was keen to know how the English course would help students to grasp the other modules. This question was supposed to guide the researcher in the courses' content selection. One teacher explained that since his module is about international political economy, so English would allow a better grasping of the notions tackled in his module. The other teacher claimed that the facilities that offers English to a wide range of documentation would serve her module.

Item three:

This item asks about the most needed skill among the four language skills. This question was meant to cross-check data, since the same question is to be given to students in the questionnaire.

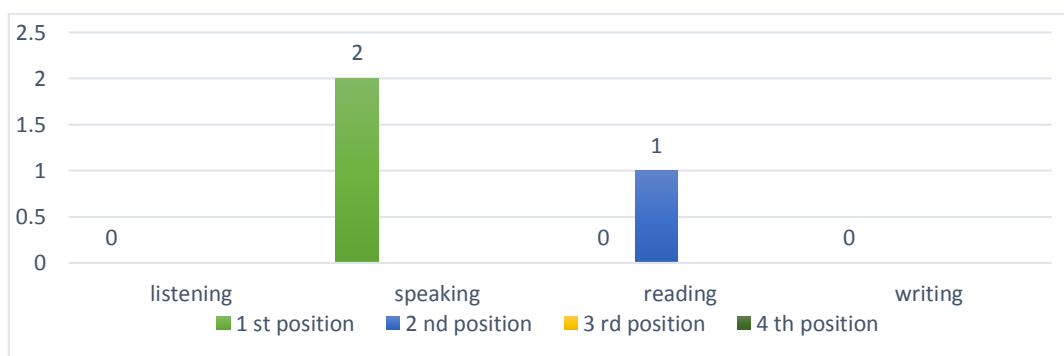


Figure 01: classification of the four skills

As the graph demonstrates, the two participants state the importance of the speaking skill for students since they are supposed to use the oral language in both occupational settings and academic ones. In the second position comes reading, this might refer to the students' needs to read books and papers in their research process. This question was meant to cross check data, indeed it is noticed that students and teachers report the same results regarding this question.

Item four:

This item puts finger on the communicative competence by asking teachers to classify the three components of this latter according to E.Frendo model discussed earlier in literature review, namely; linguistic competence, discourse competence and intercultural competence.

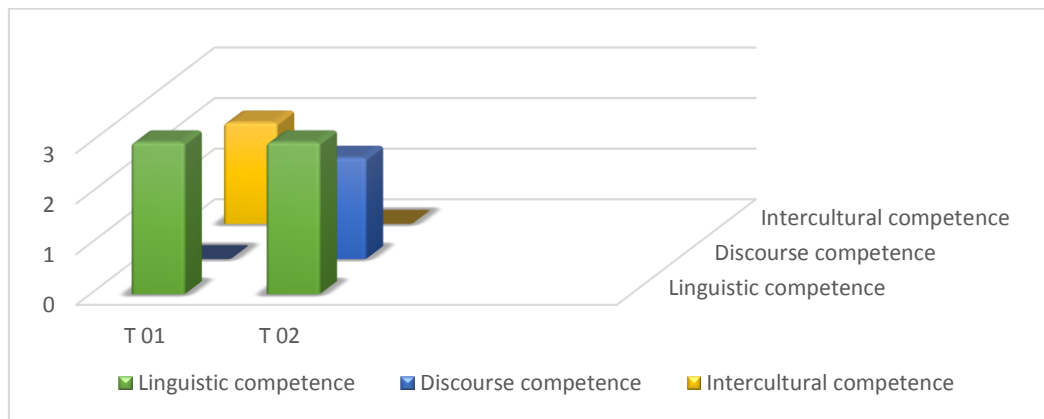


Figure 02: communicative competence

The graph demonstrates an agreement upon the place of linguistic competence as being the most important in language learning, while a divergence concerning discourse and intercultural competences.

Item five:

The last item asks teachers whether a communication based course would satisfy business learner’s needs and help them develop their communicative skills. Obviously, both teachers confirm that a communication based course would best suits business learners and equip them with the appropriate skills to fulfill both occupational and academic purposes.

4.3Pre-course test

This research study used a pre-test as a first step before the beginning of the course in order to identify the level of students, as it is supposed to help the researcher to answer the first research question about the type of communicative skills needed. at the same time this test was a kind of an ice-break as it allowed the teacher to refresh students’ memory who did not receive any English course since many years.

Table one (01)reports the students’ total scores of the pre-course test with the scores of the different sections of the test, so that to show students’ level in different skills. The means are supposed to give a birds’ eye view of the students’ level.

STUDENTS	Grammar scores /10	Written expression scores /10	Spoken interaction scores /10	Total test scores /30
1	2,5	5	5	12,5
2	1,5	2	4	7,5
3	3	5	5	13
4	1	0	1	2
Mean	2,0000	3,0000	3,7500	8,75

Table 01 : students’ scores of the pre-course test

The next table gives detailed data concerning the pre-test by using standard deviation (SD) formula, the table show again the means, SD and the maximum and minimum values as well.

Sections	Grammar score /10	Written expression score /10	Spoken interaction score /10	Total /30
Mean	2,0000	3,0000	3,7500	8,7500
SD	0,91287	2,44949	1,89297	5,255347
Minimum	1,00	0,00	1,00	2,00
Maximum	3,00	5,00	5,00	13,00

Table 02: students' scores of the pre-course test using SD

The table indicates that the mean is about 8, 50 out of 30 the thing that represents a low level of students who have been studying English for at least five years in elementary and secondary school, though we should also consider the fact that they have not been studying it for at least three years. The best score is of the spoken interaction, though this latter still very low and students show difficulty in using the simple language. The lowest score describes the grammar section and the written task reflects a deficiency in writing and a shortage in handling cross cultural situations.

4.3 Students' questionnaire

The questionnaire aims at collecting students' views about their needs, lacks and wants. Since we are dealing with an ESP course, it is very important to consider the learners' expectations from the course.

Question one: *How would you evaluate your level of English before your entry to the university?*

Question two: *How would you evaluate your level of english after your entry to the university?*

The first two (02) items of the questionnaire ask students to evaluate their actual level of English and their level before entry to university. Because we assume that students' level of English deteriorate at university level because not only the time allocated to english module which is reduced, but also the absence of the module in several years of their curriculum.

Level of english	Student 01	Student 02	Student 03	Student 04
Before entrance to university	Elementary	Intermediate	Elementary	Beginner
After entrance to university	Elementary	Elementary	Elementary	Beginner

Table 03: students' perceptions about their level before and after entrance to university

As the table shows, three students among four declared sustaining the same level before and after university studies. Only one of them admitted the deterioration of her level after university

studies. Here two explanations are possible, either our assumption might be wrong, or students might be subjective about their levels' evaluation and not being able to position themselves adequately.

Question three: *English is required in business studies because it is the language:*

This question tries to investigate the students' views about the reasons for learning English in their field of studies. It is meant as well to cross check data with the teachers' interview where the same idea was tackled.

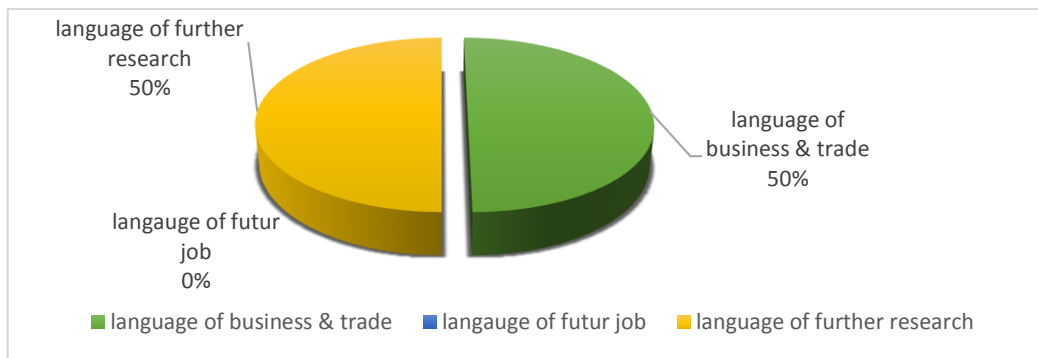


Figure 04: areas where English is needed in business studies

Results show that two students think that they study English because it is the language of trade and business, whereas the two other students proclaim English as the language for research. However, no one of them opted for English as the language of future job. Students do not think that one day they will need English in the working world. Or they do not see themselves but university teachers, here we can go back to and the teacher who claimed that students should be first trained in the business environment before they become able to join university teaching and research.

Question four: *Which Business English skills would you like to improve?*

The aim behind this question is to classify the four skills according to their importance in the learners' views.

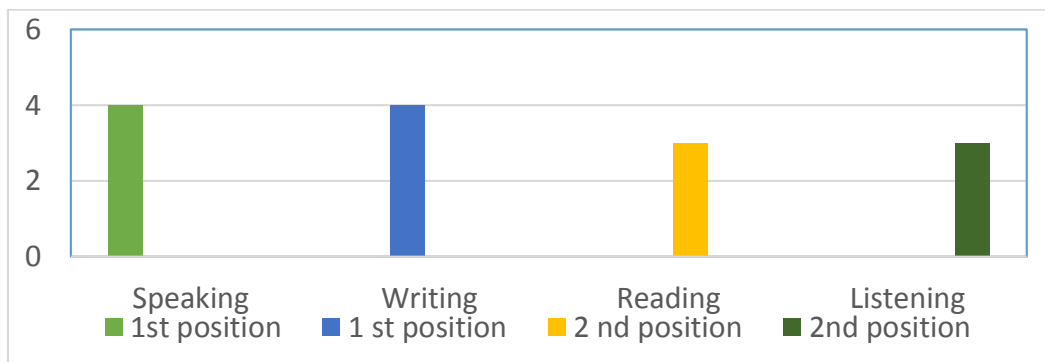


Figure 04: classification of the four skills

The graph shows an agreement between all students about the need for speaking and writing in first position and place listening and reading in second position. This fact explains the need of productive communication skills to fulfill both academic and occupational purposes. However, any language learning requires developing the four skills.

Question five: *Your difficulties in English are related to: speaking, reading, writing, listening.*

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This item tries to identify learners' lacks. The question asks about the difficulties that students encounter regarding the four skills. Results reports that three (03) students put speaking and writing in first position as being the most difficult skills and think that reading and listening are easier. It should be noted that the two difficult skills according to them are productive communication skills (writing, speaking). Therefore, this question gives a clear idea about the lacks of students so that necessary readjustments are to be taken into account. It is worth mentioning that in the previous question all students agree upon the importance of communicative skills, namely; writing and speaking.

Questionnaire six: *Do you want to study English because you would like to? :*

Since the questionnaire aims at identifying learners needs, this question is supposed to reflect what students expect from the English course.

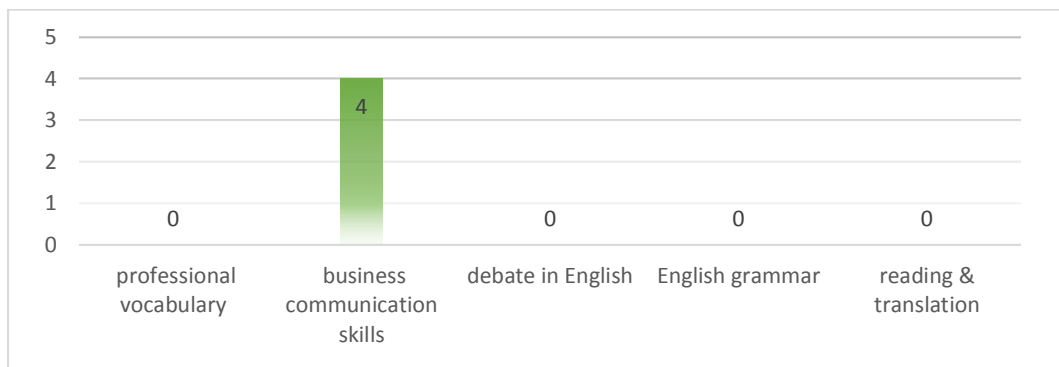


Figure 05: *students' reasons behind learning English*

The graph demonstrates the desire of all students to master communication, the fact that reflects an awareness about the importance of communication skills mainly within the field of business. This is strongly linked to their shortage in communication and to their awareness about the importance of this skill.

Question seven: *How do you think you will be able to develop your communicative competence?*

Based on the model of Evan Frenedo of communicative competence, this question tries to investigate the competence that is likely supposed to boost effective communication.

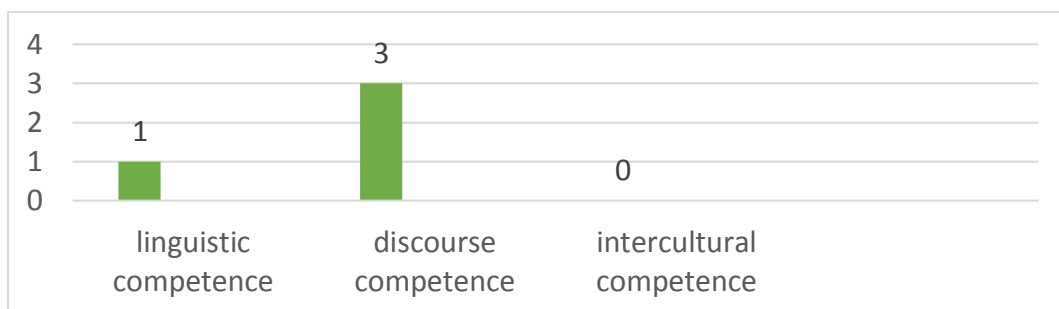


Figure 06: *the importance of the components of communication*

The graph indicates that 03 students think discourse competence help them communicate better, this is may be due to the explanation that was given about discourse competence as it helps in interactions, negotiations, presentations, meetings. (Frenedo2005) Therefore students are aware of the need for communication to perform business functions. However, they seem to neglect the

intercultural competence that helps avoiding mis-understandings and clashes between multinational business associates

4.4 Post-course test

The post-course test took place at the end of the academic year, after we have finished the courses' syllabus. It aimed at assessing the students' progress. The test was set for one hour and a half, it contained three sections; grammar, written and speaking sections.

The table reports the students' total scores of the post-course test. In addition to the scores of the different sections of the test and the means of the scores.

STUDENTS	Grammar /15	Writing /15	Speaking /20	Total /50
1	12	13	18	43
2	6,5	11,5	19	37
3	5,25	7	16	28,25
4	3,5	5	9	17,5
Mean	6,8125	9,1250	15,5000	31,4375

Table 04: students' scores of the post-course test

The next table gives detailed data concerning the post-test by using standard deviation (SD)

STUDENTS	Grammar /15	Writing /15	Speaking /20	Total /50
Mean	6,8125	9,1250	15,5000	31,4375
SD	3,67069	4,50925	3,75000	11,92994
Minimum	3,50	9,00	5,00	17,50
Maximum	12,00	19,00	13,00	44,00

formula, the table show again the means, SD and the maximum and minimum values as well.

Table 05: students' scores of the post-course test using SD

The above tables give a thorough description of the scores obtained from the post-test. As the table shows; The mean is about more than 30 out of 50. this score represents an average level. The highest score is of the speaking section, this is an evidence that the focus was on communication skills as claimed by all the stakeholders before the beginning of the course. The lowest score concerns the grammar section, students seem to still having problems with grammar. Results show an average level in the written expression with a mean of about 9 out of 15.

5. Discussion

The first research question was meant to identify the type of skills that students of business need to develop. Results drawn from the different research tools engaged in this study, namely; interviews; questionnaire and tests, showed that business' students are required to develop their

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communication skills, because business is a field which encompasses people from all over the world. Both subjects' specialist teachers confirmed the first hypothesis, which assumes that communication skills are crucial in an English for Business purposes (EBP) course. One teacher even used the word vital to express his agreement with this statement. They stated speaking as the most important language skill when they were asked to classify the four language skills, same responses were given by students where all of them selected speaking as the most important skill in their questionnaires. These results do not only confirm the researchers' hypothesis but also orient the course to a communicative approach since speaking is a key skill in communication.

The second research question investigates how communicative competence can be developed. From the moment, that the researcher assumes that communicative competence includes linguistic, discourse and intercultural competences (Freud's model), she tried to promote the idea and to check the teachers and students' views in both teachers' interview and students' questionnaire. Teachers emphasized linguistic competence as the basis of any language learning, and students stated discourse competence because it serves business functions. All results of the students' questionnaire indicated the need for communication in all its types (written or spoken). In the same vein teachers think that English module is supposed to enable students with not only the language of communication (English) but with all the language functions that this language requires (communication skills).

The main results of the teachers' interview oriented the researcher toward the implementation of a communication-based course as an attempt to enhance students' communicative competence. Teachers supported the researchers' aims as she planned to approach the course from a communicative prospect. From the other hand, students' lacks, needs and wants identified in the questionnaire confirmed the necessity for such an approach.

Pre-course and post-course tests were meant to measure students' progress. Results of the post-course are the best evidence of students' progress. Students by the end of the course feel themselves more comfortable in using the language in comparison to the beginning of the course. Students show an important evolution since the mean of students' scores was about 8,50 out of 30 in the pre-course test, while it increased to about 31.50 out of 50 in the post-course test.

6. CONCLUSION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses are supposed to meet the required language needs of the students. However, such an aim can be difficult to achieve if the students' needs are not well identified and addressed, which poses major challenges to ESP teachers. It is high time that ESP practitioners invest on communication-based courses so that students will be able to use the language learned in real life situations.

The objective of this study was to identify the competences that are supposed to enhance business students' learning. One can say that the productive communication skills should be focused on when dealing with an ESP course for business students. English is the language of communication for economy and business, therefore productive communication is the key for a successful one.

Furthermore, it is now evident that learning process does not only include linguistic competence, but rather necessitate other competencies such as intercultural competence and discourse competence.

In accordance with our findings. We think that ESP teachers in Algeria should integrate communicative dimensions to their teaching process. Teachers of Business English in particular are supposed to promote communication-based approaches in order to transfer the global communication skills that all business students should be aware of their importance.

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