

New Trends in Teaching English Language to Students of Economics

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Abstract

Since social and economic changes have taken place in our country after the advent of globalization, the demand for English language as an international language continues to increase and new demands on specialists in various fields of knowledge have increased too, and economists are no exception. The English language study plays a major role in forming professional qualities and practical skills of future economists. Teaching English for economic purposes requires the use of specific teaching methods and strategies. Therefore, the aim of the current research paper is to offer new trends and methodological innovations in teaching English language to students of economic departments. The paper reviews briefly different definitions of Teaching English for Specific Purposes and highlights the role of teachers in this field. Additionally, it discusses the students' English language needs for economic purposes. Furthermore, it explains how to design an appropriate course in English to students of Economics. Finally, it suggests innovative teaching methods and strategies that can help teachers in designing English language courses that best suit students of Economics.

Keywords: globalization, English for Specific Purposes, students' needs, Economics, teaching methods and strategies.

(JEL) Classification: A12

ملخص

نظرا للتغيرات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية التي حدثت في بلادنا في ظل العولمة، فإن الطلب على اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة دولية لا يزال في ازدياد كما ازداد الطلب على الاختصاصيين في مختلف مجالات المعرفة وكذا الاقتصاديين دون استثناء. حيث تلعب دراسة اللغة الإنجليزية دورا رئيسيا في تشكيل الصفات المهنية والمهارات العملية لاقتصادي المستقبل. إن تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض اقتصادية يتطلب استخدام طرق واستراتيجيات تدريس محددة. ولهذا فإن هذا البحث يهدف إلى تقديم اتجاهات جديدة وابتكارات منهجية في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لطلاب الأقسام الاقتصادية. حيث يستعرض البحث باختصار تعريفات مختلفة لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة كما يسلط الضوء على دور الأساتذة في هذا المجال. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإنه يناقش احتياجات الطلاب لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض اقتصادية، كما يوضح كيفية تصميم دروس مناسبة في اللغة الإنجليزية لطلاب الاقتصاد و يقترح أخيرا طرق واستراتيجيات حديثة للتدريس والتي يمكن أن تساعد المعلمين في تصميم هذه الدروس التي تناسب طلاب الاقتصاد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العولمة، تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة، احتياجات الطلاب، الاقتصاد، طرق وإستراتيجيات التدريس.

Introduction

After the advent of globalization process, the demand for English language as an international language continues to increase and expand throughout the world not only in countries where English serves as native language but also in other countries where it is used as second/foreign language. This increasing has resulted in the expansion of one particular aspect of English Language Teaching, namely the teaching of English for Specific Purposes, as Hutchinson & Waters (1987) stated: "As English became the accepted international language of technology and commerce, it created a new generation of learners who knew especially why they were learning a language". This relatively new aspect of English Language Teaching has its basis in an investigation of the purposes of the learners and the set of communicative needs arising from those purposes. These particular needs will guide teachers in designing different course materials, in choosing the kind of English to be taught, the topics and themes through which it will be taught, the skills and activities they will make use of. Consequently, the aim of this research paper is to offer new trends and methodological innovations in teaching English language to students of Economics.

1. English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) arose as a term in the 1960's as it became increasingly aware that general English courses frequently did not meet learners and employers' wants. It may be related to or designed for specific disciplines that are centered on language appropriate to specific activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre. According to Strevens (1980, pp. 108-109):

ESP entails the provision of English language instruction devised to meet the learners' particular needs related in themes and topics to designated occupation or areas of study, selective (i.e. not general) as to language content where indicated restricted as to the language skills included.

For Strevens (1988), ESP is in contrast with General English and has included more variable characteristics. According to this view, ESP is not only concerned with a specific discipline, but should be seen as an

“Approach” to teaching or an “Attitude of Mind” as stated by Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998). This is a similar conclusion to that made by Hutchinson et al. (1987, p. 47) who stated “ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning”.

However, numerous classifications and branches of ESP can be found in the literature. For Hutchinson & Waters (1987), ESP is broken down into three branches: English for Science and Technology (EST); English for Business and Economics (EBE); and English for Social Studies (ESS). Each of these areas is divided into two branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). The former is taught when English is needed for studies, whereas the second is taught because English is needed at work.

2. ESP teachers

In an attempt to answer the question of “who is the ESP teacher?” Strevens (1978, p. 41) suggests “almost always he or she is a teacher of General English who has unexpectedly found him/herself required to teach students with special needs. Most authors agree that the ESP teachers’ works involve much more than teaching. Dudley and Evans and St. John (1998) prefer the term *practitioner* as this definition refers seems to be more detailed and complete. Ellis and Johnson (1984) underlines the fact that the ESP teacher should be seen as an expert in presenting and explaining the language and in taking care of the learners language problems.

In fact, in ESP, the teacher plays different roles. As a teacher, he needs to have a considerable flexibility, be willing to listen to learners, take the interest in the discipline or professional activities the students are involved in, prepare students to communicate in a foreign language, and to take some risks in their teaching as indicated in Bojovic 2006. As teaching is shifting rapidly nowadays towards self-directed learning or student-oriented learning, teachers should be familiar with the modern technology and the new methodological approaches.

As a course designer and material provider, ESP teachers need to assess the effectiveness of the teaching materials used whether it is published or self-produced. With reference to a particular classroom experience, the design of the course shall be prepared. The levels of

attainment are described for each of the skills areas (listening, speaking, reading and writing). As a researcher, ESP teachers need to be in touch with the research. Teachers carrying out the needs analysis, designing a course, or writing teaching materials need to be capable of incorporating the finding of the research. As a collaborator, ESP teachers have to gather information about the subject syllabus in an academic context through the cooperation with the subject teachers. And finally, ESP teachers have also to play the role as evaluators.

3. Needs Analysis for Students of Economics

In an attempt to answer the question of *why* learners should learn English and *how* they should learn English, West used for the first time the term “*analysis of needs*” in India in the 1920s (West, 1994, p. 1). Dudley Evans and St. John (1998, p. 122) claimed that needs analysis (NA) is not specific to language teaching, nor to ESP, but pointed out that “needs analysis is the corner stone of ESP and leads to a very focused course” (1998, p. 122).

NA is a complex process which has to take into account what Hutchinson & Waters (1987, pp. 54-63) define as “target needs”, what learners need to do in the target situation-i.e. language use, and “learning needs”, what learners need to do in order to learn-i.e. language learning. In a more modern view, “target needs” and “learning needs”-i.e. objective needs- should not only be taken into account but also learners’ subjective needs-i.e. their affective needs, such as their interests, wishes, expectations and preferences (Nunan 1988).

Information about learners’ needs can be gathered through different media (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 58) such as: surveys, questionnaires, interviews, attitude scales, intelligence tests, language tests, job analyses, content analyses, statistical analyses, observation, data collection, or informal consultation with sponsors, learners and others.

In the context of learning economics in English, students may have different reasons, different personalities and ways of relating to and working with other people, different skills, aptitudes and abilities, different topics they find interesting, different learning styles, different previous learning experiences, different speeds of working and

learning. Students are also far more selective. For instance, they generally dislike role-plays and made-up stories, probably because of their practicality and life experience. Although they claim they would like to drill and do grammar exercises, they do not enjoy these activities. Another important aspect of their way of studying is that they generally avoid doing homework or any other additional tasks that might help them to consolidate economics structures and vocabulary as pointed out by Daniela (2014).

Nevertheless, activities of listening and speaking spontaneously are among their preferences. Motivation is an important part of learning. Students, contrary to young learners who can study for the sake of a good grade or other indirect rewards, put forth sustained efforts for some other goals than the immediate enjoyment of the activity itself. Internal and external factors that promote learners' reasons for learning are challenges and promotions at work, requirements for English literacy, overseas assignments and trips, workshops and conferences in English, welcoming foreign visitors, professional differentiation and specialization, e-communication. Moreover, students have distinct, individual reasons for being in an economics class and learning English. Teachers teach better if they know more about all those reasons.

From all these, it becomes clear why needs analysis is critical for effective curriculum design. If NA is conducted well, this will result in heightened knowledge of what the proper teaching goals are, the right textbooks to use, and the more effective teaching methods. In fact, NA should normally be the starting point to any English course either general or specific. Furthermore, NA should not only be considered as a pre-stage for the design of language courses; in fact, it is an "on-going process" (White 1998, p. 91) and, as evaluation, it can be used to design, improve and implement language programs.

4. Designing a Course in English to Students of Economics

When designing a course in ESP, specialists such as Ellis and Johnson (1994) suggest a few specific steps to consider, in contrast to General English courses, such as:

- Needs analysis: what do students need to know in order to face the requirements of their future job environment?

- Assessment of level: using written tests, we can see what level of language students have at the beginning of the course.
- Syllabus: set courses, like the ones taught in colleges, should have fixed objectives and syllabus.
- Course objectives: should be defined in relation to the needs analysis findings; in the case of pre-experience learners they can be worded in terms of their course of study or in terms of required language improvement (command of structures, functions etc.)
- Time: in the case of college language training, time is limited so the course should be structured according to the duration (number of weeks, semesters etc.).
- Learner expectations: in the case of ESP, learners are likely to be more goal-orientated and to expect success.
- Evaluation of progress: written or oral examination, dependent on particular circumstances.

In analysing course design issues in any teaching and learning context, it is generally an accepted fact that the process of matching aim and method is not simply a mechanistic one, of finding out what is the aim and then finding an appropriate method to achieve it. In the process of performing a needs analysis a vast amount of information is usually collected. It is a difficult task to decide what may or may not prove to be relevant clues towards the choice of methods and materials to be used.

Researchers have discussed criteria for lectures design in terms of: length, assessment, goals, teacher's role, focus, course-content, course materials, and student characteristics. Concerns surrounding course design could be listed in the form of question such as:

- Should the English course in economics be intensive or extensive?
- Should the learners' performance be assessed or non-assessed?
- Should the course deal with immediate needs or with delayed needs?
- Should the role of the teacher be that of the provider of knowledge and activities, or as facilitator of activities arising from students' expressed wants?
- Should the course have a broad focus or a narrow one?
- Should the course be pre-study or pre-experience or run parallel with the study or experience?
- Should the materials be common-core or specific to learners' study or work?
- Should the group taking the course be homogenous or heterogeneous?

However, designing an appropriate course in English that suits students of economics can be very challenging, as teachers are often faced with various complexities and problems. The solution is to perform an appropriate analysis of the students' needs. If a group of students' language needs can be accurately specified, then this identification can be used to determine the content of a language programme that will meet these needs.

In defining the objectives of the language teaching content for students of economics, Allen and Widdowson as cited in Mackay (1978) pointed out that "English teaching has been called upon to provide students with the basic ability to use the language to receive, and (to a lesser degree) to convey information associated with their specialist studies. Thereafter, teachers are likely to contribute in the selection and the sequencing of the teaching content. Study skills- reading, speaking, listening, writing will be the core component of this content.

Therefore, in teaching students' specific ESP skills, their basic English four language skills should also be enhanced in addition to other aspects of the language such as vocabulary and grammar that should also be taught. Nowadays, content-based instruction is widely used. The necessity of "the integration of content learning with language teaching" has been pointed out since the 1990s. This has in view the simultaneous study of language and subject matter, a necessity that has become the basis of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) one of the most frequently sought after professional course for all domains (Stan, 2013).

5. Innovative Methods and Strategies in Teaching English to Students of Economics

One of the important goals in learning a foreign language is to develop the skill of listening comprehension. For an effective comprehension in listening, Dudley-Evans and St. Johns (1998, p. 102) reports Richards' list of micro-skills (1983): Identify the purpose and scope of monologue; Identify the topic of lecture and follow topic development; Recognize the role of discourse markers; Recognize key lexical items related to subject/topic; Deduce meanings of words from context and; Recognize function of intonation to signal information structure (for example pitch, volume, pace, key).

To achieve fluency/accuracy competences, intensive and extensive listening must be practiced through listening of authentic discourse. This

can be achieved by providing teachers with effective materials, as the use of the language lab which must be put in practice by the faculty. Its use will give students, not only, the opportunity to listen native speech, but to improve and reinforce certain areas in which students are experiencing some difficulties, such as pronunciation and listening comprehension. Moreover, teachers have to be able to create a good learning environment based on activities that will include increased opportunities for students to interact in English through pair work, group work, simulations or presentations.

However, listening activities often prove to be time-consuming. After listening to some passage, most of the students usually make complaints about all being too fast. Or different students recall the passage differently. Moreover, they often misinterpret the recorded information and claim that they have definitely heard it. The best approach in this case is to lengthen pauses during the listening activity, according to the scheme listening – pause – listening – pause etc. These pauses give students the ‘thinking time’ they need to process information. At first students might need longer pauses after a brief listening, but gradually they will develop the ability to process longer passages without any pauses and get the information right.

The issue of developing speaking skills in English for students of economics is particularly difficult. The major reason is that oral and listening skills are interrelated: the better listening comprehension, the better speaking skills. That is why they should be developed simultaneously. Competence in speaking skills is also hard to develop as factors like emotions, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitude, motivation, uneasiness, self-doubt or frustration come into play, making the teachers’ task even more difficult.

Teachers dealing with students must remember that all adults are always concerned with how they might be judged by their peers. ‘They are very cautious about making errors in what they say, for making errors would be a public display of ignorance, which would be an obvious occasion of ‘losing face’...’ (Shumin, 1997). This sensitivity to making mistakes is the explanation for their inability to speak without hesitation. Consequently, the teachers’ efforts should be directed towards encouraging students to speak out their minds on all aspects of covered materials and persuading them that making mistakes is a natural process of learning economics in a foreign language.

In speaking, the students might be interviewed individually or in pairs, asking them informally for advice about what would be useful to work on during the future lessons or showing the intended course-book or materials for the lecture and discuss them together in order to select the most appropriate ones. Or teachers might collect oral feedback comments about the course at the end of the lessons. Through observing, the teacher sets the students tasks to do in class. This will allow him/her to observe them working, speaking, and using the language. The teacher will be able to diagnose the students' language or skills problems and discover more about what they need.

Reading an economics text in English might be challenging too. Many students easily give up doing it, as they feel they do not know all the words and need the dictionary all the time. They usually classify the activity of reading as time-consuming and boring. Teachers might find useful to make their students enjoy this activity by providing them with the following tips: decide on why the students have to read the text; find the right place to read; survey the text in order to find out how long it is, if there is a table of contents or a conclusion; if there are any unfamiliar words look them up in a good online dictionary; read headings and diagrams; during reading, try to summarize the main idea of each paragraph and if there are no subheadings, create their own; make some bullet point notes as they proceed through the text; if there is a conclusion at the end of one chapter, read it first.

Haicha-Abdat (2013) suggests that students of economics should have opportunities to read different types of text structures e.g. narrative, expository, descriptive, contrastive ... and so forth; texts should be of interest to the struggling readers; and should be at the learners' instructional or low frustration level, moreover, it should contain some highlighted key vocabulary, headings clues, and other supporting details that complement the text whereby to facilitate comprehension, and help the learners predict what will be read.

Jordan (1997, p. 146) points out Fry's suggestion (1963) to improve students reading speed and comprehension to note the time they take to read and answer comprehension questions in words per minute and to record the information in a progress chart. Most methodologists have agreed on the following types of reading: *skimming*, *scanning*, *extensive reading* and *intensive reading*. Stan (2013) adds that extensive reading can improve not only learners' reading comprehension but also learners' writing skills. Also, extensive online reading can help students to display

a confident attitude toward reading and can also enhance learners' autonomy, independence, and reading interest.

Teaching writing in academic settings has the purpose to prepare students for academic writing tasks. These tasks vary very much from writing short answers in exams to writing dissertations and theses. Of course, accurate grammar, punctuation and language use form important components of an EAP writing class. Summarizing and paraphrasing are important aspects of academic writing. Summary writing is related to reading in the way that academic reading involves often taking-notes or making-notes of what has been read. Paraphrasing, on the other hand, involves using one's own style, words and structures when expressing another one's idea. This somehow difficult, but essential skill aims at teaching students how to integrate opinions and ideas from external sources.

Students may be assessed through writing, speaking or observing. In writing, the students might be asked to fill in a questionnaire (e.g. about their work, interests, previous study, etc.); take a language test, write a paragraph about topics set by the teacher, write a letter/e-mail to the teacher. Before taking up any of these activities, the teacher should indicate his/her students the main steps to follow when writing in English: write a short outline, write an introductory paragraph, write a topic sentence for each paragraph, follow the topic sentence with supporting details, and write a conclusion.

In terms of vocabulary, it is important to distinguish between two types of vocabulary: technical and semi-technical vocabulary. The first category is referred to as *semi-technical vocabulary*. It is used in general English, but has a higher frequency of occurrence in scientific and technical description. The second category, however, is referred to as *technical vocabulary*, which changes meaning depending on the disciplines in which it is used. As far as teaching of vocabulary is concerned, Dudley- Evans and St. John (1998, p. 83) suggest the teaching of the first category in ESP/EAP context.

Being preoccupied with the task of finding an effective method of teaching students economic terms, an idea that interactive teaching can be a proper mechanism for students' vocabulary development has been put forward. Arends (2000) highlights such interactive aspects of teaching: presentation, direct instruction, concept teaching, cooperative learning, problem-based instruction, and classroom discussion. Eltanskaya et al. (2017) prove that interactive teaching, which presupposes using role plays,

solving specific problems (case studies), doing simulations, having discussions, has been considered like co-teaching, in which a teacher and a student are equal partners in the educational process.

Ariana (n.d) insists that using modern multimedia helps to provide interactive cooperation, constant communication of students and allows the teachers to lead students' work aimed at mastering a foreign language. Besides, interacting with foreign speaking partners through multimedia (chats, emails, etc.), students acquire the experience in cross-cultural competence, which is essential in the modern globalized economy. Interaction in the classroom can be established and stimulated if the teacher creates "friendly relationships and supportive atmosphere, in which students feel free to communicate using the target language" (Seifu & Gebru, 2012).

The specialized materials of ESP -here for economics- exist either on the Internet or on CD-ROM: numerous economic atlases, encyclopedias, textbooks, programs that should be studied not only for the economic information, but also for the economic terminology. English teachers ought to settle some research papers: case studies, scientific articles, summaries, book presentations so as to activate, refresh and improve the vocabulary useful for economics students. Translations from and into English prove to be a resourceful exercise because students find themselves forced to use specialized dictionaries or encyclopedias.

Generally speaking, students need to be presented lists of journals in English, newspapers, magazines, as well as dictionaries and encyclopedias available on the Internet, to be accustomed to use search engines – *Google, Yahoo, Alta Vista*- so as to be able to permanently get in touch with the needed specialized information as well as with English language (Ariana, n.d).

Even if grammar is not the first concern when teaching ESP, it should not, however, be neglected; a weak grammatical level will interfere with the four language skills. In fact, its teaching depends on the learners' level and the teaching purpose (for accuracy or fluency). Dudley-Evans and St. John, (1998, p. 75) listed the key grammatical forms to be taught in ESP/EAP. They are: *verbs and tense, voice, modals, articles, nominalization and logical connectors*. In addition to the general knowledge of the language, teachers should equip their students with specific structures needed to understand, and produce economics discourse. These grammatical structures inventory can take the following form:

- Verbs to describe change (rise, fall, increase, decrease ...)
- Adjectives to describe change (slight, slow, gradual ...)
- Adverbs to describe change (slightly, slowly, gradually...)
- Comparatives and superlatives. (more than, the mostthan)
- Expressing causality (because, because of, since, as...)
- Expressing result (so, thus, therefore, as a result...)
- Expressing future possibilities (three types of IF)
- Tenses/Modal verbs (must, have to, should, could, can, would, will)
- Word formation (prefixes, affixes and suffixes)

The teaching of grammar in ESP/EAP has to go beyond the sentence-level practice. Students with the help of their teachers have to be aware about the using of specific grammatical forms in specific contexts. The teaching of grammar may be either introduced directly within the programme in class, or integrated in relation to the specific use of language. In the discipline of economics, for instance, concepts like, cause and effect, or quantity have to be mastered.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, it is the English language teachers' task and duty to make methodological decisions about the course aims, the teaching techniques, the type of activities and the methods of assessment. Despite the different teaching methods available, many language teachers nowadays are eclectic i.e. they do not follow one single method. Over the years, they develop a personal methodology, built from their own selection of what they consider to be the best and most appropriate of what they have learnt about. Students who approach the learning process with a wide range of strategies have more options available for meeting expectations. Increased student awareness of different learning styles builds multiple perspectives, which help students to better understand others and to be prepared to work within their learning community.

Every individual student has his or her own specific purpose for learning Economics in English. A needs analysis is an essential starting point in teaching students, as teachers cannot really address a student's specific needs unless they are absolutely clear about what they are. A successful English language course for students in Economics is one that is learner-centred, based on authenticity, and that helps to fulfil the students' needs – both target and learning – in order to fully provide a

learning experience that can sustain the students once they practice and apply what they have learned in their respective career choices.

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