
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring EFL Teachers' Perceptions Regarding ESP Instruction in Moroccan Vocational Institutes: OFPPT Midelt as a Case Study

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| ABSTRACT

The foundation for integrating English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in vocational institutes finds its root in the objective of enabling ESP learners to acquire the necessary skills related to the English language relevant to their professional fields. In this regard, this article boils down to the realm of ESP courses within Moroccan vocational training centres (OFPPT) focusing on the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by English instructors, with OFPPT Midelt serving as a case study. By adopting a case study research design, an investigation was designed to explore EFL teachers' perceptions and challenges regarding their ESP instruction within Moroccan vocational institutes. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data and were organized and analysed using NVivo software. The findings showed that Moroccan EFL teachers hold negative attitudes towards their ESP instruction for many reasons. The results also showed that the teachers' reported challenges are caused by the acute shortage of ESP related training opportunities. Accordingly, the study recommended that more training on ESP courses is highly demanded for the sake of enhancing learners' English proficiency and therefore facing the requirements and challenges related to the job market effectively.

| KEYWORDS

English for Specific Purposes, English as a Foreign Language, Needs Analysis, Office of Professional Training and Employment Promotion (OFPPT), English for Business Purposes.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Over the last four decades, vocational training centres in Morocco have experienced a real development and reformulation in terms of institutionalization and status. According to literature, the idea of creating special institutions for training professional skills in Morocco dates back to 1970s when decision makers in the country recognized the importance enabling unemployed young people in the country to learn and acquire the necessary skills expected by the job market and professional world. Using a public-private partnership approach, the Moroccan authorities have tried to produce skilled workers who are able to be integrated in the labour market easily and therefore run the Moroccan economy in an effective manner. Thus, the kingdom of Morocco has recently embarked on a comprehensive strategy of economic improvement with a clear commitment and decisions to modernize education and vocational training system in such training centres. One of these decisions was to emphasise the importance of English as a medium of instruction and ESP for the sake of equipping trainees with the necessary knowledge and skills required for understanding instructional information related to the trainee's target profession as well as developing an English competence for a better integration in the global market. Thus, the current scrutiny sheds much light on instructors' experiences, perceptions and challenges as far as ESP instruction is concerned, with OFPPT Midelt serving as a case study.

1.1 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in the sense that the findings are expected to serve the objective of understanding the role of ESP in the Moroccan vocational training institutes (OFPPT). The study also provides a real opportunity for ESP instructors to explore and reflect upon their perceptions and challenges regarding ESP courses. Additionally, the study paves the ground for the public authorities of such institutes (OFPPT) and decision makers to know more about Moroccan ESP instructors' perceptions as well as the possible obstacles that they encounter in such institutes in terms of pedagogical and training needs. Furthermore, policy developers and curriculum planners will become aware of what would be mandatory to hinder defection at the ESP course stages, addressing the motivating nature of ESP students. Therefore, curriculum revisions and reconsideration to modify and change the way learners learn, the way courses are planned, and the way policies related to ESP are implemented.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Clearing the Ground for ESP: Historical Background and Definition

The emergence of the term English for Specific Purposes (ESP) dates to 1960s with the appearance of the functional account of the learners' needs. Historically speaking, the development of the need for ESP as a discipline finds its basics in the acceleration of the oil crises in the early 1970s. Due to the massive flow in terms of the funds and the great desire of the western enterprise to govern the oil-rich countries, the demand for English suddenly become a big business. As a result, money and time constraints developed the need for cost-effective courses. Therefore, English has become accountable to the study of the wider world, paving the ground for ESP as a new linguistic field to appear in the field of education in the 1960s. In short, the development of ESP was due to three important factors: the expansion of the demand for English for the sake of satisfying particular needs, in addition to the developments and improvements in the field of linguistics in addition to the emergence of educational psychology. (Hutchinson & waters, 1987).

2.2 Defining ESP

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the term English for specific purposes (ESP) as a sub-division in linguistics refers to an approach to learning and teaching language which takes the learner needs as a basis for designing courses. The two scholars point out that the foundation of all ESP syllabuses and programs find its roots in the "why" rather than the "what". In other words, ESP as a branch in linguistics focuses on conducting needs analysis (NA) for identifying learners' needs. Therefore, they conclude that ESP in its core is based on a learner-centred approach in which all decisions related to the content to be taught, and the teaching methodology are constructed based on the learner's needs and reasons for being engaged in a course.

Accordingly, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) point out that ESP courses designed for disciplines and professions like English for business, tourism and marketing are to be reflected in the way courses are taught. That is to say that both content and methodology in ESP should go hand in gloves with the learners' needs and the course objectives. In like manner, the idea that ESP isn't based on a structural theory of language, has pushed scholars to consider ESP as a sub-division within the global process of the English language teaching and learning (Larouz & kerouad, 2016). However, the focus in such a recent orientation of language teaching and learning has revolved around the question of methodology (Widdowson, 1983). In line with this, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out that ESP has given some very substantial ideas and insights into the field of language learning and teaching. Being it a learner centred approach to language teaching, has made needs analysis (NA) one of the basic precepts and pillars in the ESP process. The fact that ESP embodies a wide range of academic and occupational fields such as EBP, ETP, EMP has enabled ESP to be widely adopted in many institutions and vocational training centres including OFPPT.

2.3 Differences and Similarities Between ESP and EGP

2.3.1 Differences

As far as the differences between ESP and EGP are concerned, Widdowson (1983) highlights that as far as language teaching and learning is concerned in ESP, its objective is to enable learners to deal with clearly defined tasks in specific context effectively. He refers to this idea as "restrictive competence". He also points out that the idea of linking the course to learning needs of the learner and the main objective of the learning operation is a key factor in ESP. on the other hand, Widdowson states that the core in English for Specific Purposes (EGP) is to provide learners with a general knowledge or competence that enables them to respond to future general situation. Therefore, the idea of matching the course in EGP to the learning needs of the learners and the objective of the curriculum isn't clearly defined.

A further distinction between ESP and EGP as far as the content is concerned is that the content in ESP is clearly defined and is based on task based and process-oriented syllabuses. The content in EGP on the other hand is based on content-oriented syllabuses that are based on a structural theory of language (Nunan, 1988). Accordingly, Huckin in 1988 points out another difference between ESP and EGP based on their objectives. While ESP serves to meet the needs of the real-world problems, EGP tends to meet the needs of academic fields and domains.

As far as the nature of the approach adopted in both EGP and ESP is concerned, McDonough (1984) points out that research in EGP can be conducted regardless of any specific context related to the teaching and learning process. Whereas having an immediate reference to the context of the learning and teaching process is a key factor in conducting ESP research.

2.3.2 Similarities

Regarding the similarities between ESP and EGP, Morrow in 1980 states that in both ESP and EGP contexts, the learners use the same learning and communications strategies as well as the same language skills including reading, listening, function, writing and speaking.

Another similarity between ESP and EGP is related to what has been mentioned by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) about learner centredness. While ESP tends to adopt a learner centred approach in its learning and teaching process, it is unfair to assume that EGP is based on a teacher centred approach. With the development of the learning and teaching methods, CLT as a teaching method is mainly based on a learner centred approach and it is widely adopted in EGP contexts.

2.4 The Importance of Integrating ESP in the Moroccan Vocational Institutes

The Office of Professional Training and Employment Promotion known as (OFPPT) is a key governmental institution in Morocco. Its main objective is to provide vocational training across a wide range of domains including health care, renewable energies, handicraft, accountability, restoration etc. With a network of training centres throughout the regions of the country, the Office of Professional Training and Employment Promotion plays a vital role in tackling and addressing the professional skills gap as well as improving the employability among trainees in particular and Moroccan youth in general.

Within the OFPPT framework and perspective, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses are fundamental and vital to the vocational training curriculum and its objectives in general, offering trainees with the opportunity to develop and boost their English language proficiency in a way that goes hand in hand with the specific requirements of their chosen professions. ESP courses undoubtedly aim to bridge the gap between the trainees' academic learning and real-world workplace communication, ultimately enhancing their readiness for a better and successful integration in the job market (OECD, 2019).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Study Design

The current study adopts a qualitative case study approach for the sake of boiling down to ESP instructors' experiences, perceptions and challenges concerning ESP courses in Moroccan vocational institutes, with a specific emphasis on OFPPT Midelt as a case study. According to literature, the case study design not only allows the research to gain an in-depth investigation of the issue under study but also it offers rich and valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of instructors within its natural context (Ary et al., 2006). In this context, the researcher is expected to gain significant understandings of how EFL teachers perceive their ESP experiences from a Moroccan perspective.

3.2 Sampling

As far as the participants in this study are concerned, the researcher tended to include ESP instructors who teach ESP courses at OFPPT Midelt. In like manner, purposive sampling is adopted to ensure that participants possess not only diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds but also experiences, as well as perspectives relevant to the subject of the research. More precisely, the researcher interviewed six ESP instructors for the sake of achieving data saturation.

3.3 Research Problem

Despite the growing interest of the body of literature and research on ESP teaching worldwide, little attention is paid to research specifically focused on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses in Moroccan vocational training institutes such as OFPPT. By exploring the perceptions and challenges of instructors as far as the context of the study is concerned, valuable and important insights for reconsidering the learning process of ESP as well as improving the quality and relevance of ESP courses within OFPPT in addition to boosting the overall vocational training experience, will be taken into consideration. Hence, this scrutiny aims at contributing to the existing body of literature through informing policy and decision makers as well as practitioners in the domain of vocational education and professional training to reconsider and rectify their interventions and contributions regarding ESP syllabuses.

3.4 Research Objectives

Given all the promises, the imperative need for improving the quality of ESP courses, the need for better understanding ESP instructors' perceptions as well as the desire of providing practical solutions, this study aims at exploring the perceptions of English instructors within Moroccan vocational training institutes regarding their perceptions and challenges regarding their ESP instruction.

3.5 Research Questions

This study revolves around two main questions. First, how do Moroccan ESP instructors perceive their ESP instruction within vocational institutes? Second, what are the challenges faced by ESP instructors' Moroccan vocational institutes (OFPPT)?

3.6 Data Collection

As far as the data collection step is regarded in this study, the researcher adopted semi-structured interview for collecting data from the respondents. Interviews with close-ended and open-ended questions were conducted with ESP instructors for gaining deep insights into their perceptions, experiences, and challenges in teaching ESP at OFPPT Midelt. According to Silverman (2000), semi-structured interviews allow the research to gain more flexibility while guaranteeing that the key issues of the topic are covered and dealt with.

3.7 Data Analysis

In terms of the data analysis procedure adopted in this study for analysing the data. It was made clear that the researcher has chosen to use thematic analysis as a data analysis procedure for identifying not only frequent patterns and themes, but also the insights relevant to the research questions. Accordingly, Boyatzis in 1998 states that thematic analysis focuses on the analysis of categories and presents themes or patterns that are related to the data in accordance.

As this qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews with six participants who were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring diversity among the participants' responses was the researcher's main objective. As theoretical saturation was achieved thanks to the process of collecting data, NVivo software was used to analyse the data collected. Thematic analysis was conducted after that, to identify key themes and patterns emerged and serve the purpose of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

As far as the first question of this study is concerned, the results obtained from the respondents show that the majority of English instructors Regarding ESP instruction within the vocational institutes in Midelt hold negative perceptions toward their experience with ESP instruction. As a matter of fact, "To be honest with you, I only depend on my EGP knowledge for teaching ESP courses. I have been teaching English here for more than 4 years, and I haven't received any training related to how to teach ESP courses" a respondent declared. "My classes belong to different domain such as renewable energies, carpentry, accountability, and restauration. However, due to the lack of materials and ESP knowledge, I teach them the same content related to baccalaureate syllabuses, though some of my students have already got their baccalaureate degrees" a respondent added. Another participant states "Believe me, I try to do my best to teach ESP related courses to my trainees. However, due to the lack of support and the remarks I got from previous teachers, its hard to teach ESP courses in here". The study may reveal a range of perceptions among instructors regarding ESP instruction at OFPPT Midelt. On the other hand, instructors who view ESP courses as effective for trainees regarding their future careers as well as providing the necessary and relevant industry-specific language skills declare that lack of teaching materials such as data projector and ESP related textbooks are their biggest challenges. General speaking, these findings are in agreement with Basturkmen (2010) research. She highlights that the reason why teachers hold negative attitudes towards ESP instruction are related to the idea that they face challenges in adapting to the content of ESP courses to the leaners' special needs the objectives the ESP programs. Similarly, Belcher (2009) in his book "English for Specific Purposes in Theory and Practice" mentions that teachers may hold negative attitudes towards ESP instruction due to idea that they may lack confidence in many areas related to ESP branches.

As far as the question related to the challenges faced by ESP instructors at OFPPT Midelt regarding ESP courses, the findings of the study show that English instructors are faced by several challenges in teaching ESP courses. These challenges include limited access to updated materials and resources as a respondent declared "My biggest challenge for me is the lack of materials and resources". Other respondents state that they find difficulties in with teaching and integrating specific content into language instruction as well as dealing with various proficiency levels among trainees. Others added that there are also some challenges related to institutional obstacles within the OFPPT framework.

From the forgoing, one can deduce that ESP instructors in vocational training centres lack professional development opportunities and training related to ESP content and methodology. Additionally, the fact that some instructors depend on their EGP knowledge to teach ESP courses is questionable. The reason why most of them depend on their EGP knowledge is due to the fact that the majority of them are high school teachers. These results in fact are in accordance with Hutchinson & Waters (1987) research who found that among the challenges teachers face in ESP instruction are lack of teachers' professional development and training. In the same way, Farhady (2005) highlights the idea that insufficient and inadequate training and the lack of professional development opportunities are the main challenges faced by ESP teachers.

5. Implications and Recommendations

Overall, the findings as well as the discussion of this research provide rich and valuable insights into how ESP courses are delivered by instructors as well as the perceptions and challenges of those instructors involved in ESP instruction at OFPPT Midelt. ultimately,

contributing to the objectives of the research conducted in addition to the ongoing efforts for developing and improving ESP courses in Moroccan vocational institutes. Therefore, the following implications and recommendations should be considered:

- The findings of the study have implications for the improvement and reconsideration as well as the revision of the ESP curricula in general within Moroccan vocational institutes.
- Insights gained from the results enlighten and inform ESP curriculum designers about the need of providing support, guidance as well as updating ESP course content.
- The current study highlights the idea of the imperative need for professional development, training and soft skills for instructors involved in the process of ESP instruction.
- Policy development is also targeted by the study findings within the OFPPT and other vocational training institutions in Morocco via providing institutional support.

6. Research Limitations

As far as the limitations of this study are concerned, adopting a critical analysis approach to the study have uncovered the following boundaries:

- The adoption of a different approach such as quantitative or mixed methods approaches might yield deep and more valuable insight.
- The small number of the participants affects the generalization of the data gained.
- Adopting a case study design is a limitation in itself. Therefore, Widening the scope of the study might yield different perspectives and the challenges might change from one context to another.
- The shortage of literature available on this area of study stood as the researchers' main challenge in this regard.

7. Conclusion

ESP instruction in Moroccan vocational institutes including OFPPT Midelt plays a vital and crucial role in preparing and enabling learners for successful integration in the job market and career development. By exploring instructors' experiences, perceptions and challenges towards the way ESP courses are dealt with in such institutes, we gain valuable insights into the dynamics of ESP instruction within the OFPPT framework. However, Addressing the challenges that ESP instructors face such as updating the teaching and learning materials, providing training and professional development opportunities are crucial for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of ESP courses, eventually allowing and empowering trainees to respond effectively to the challenges that the job market demands as far as their English proficiency and soft skills are concerned.

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