

ESP Needs Analysis in Moroccan Higher Education: Business and Management Students as a Case Study

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Abstract: Needs analysis is an important tool for teachers of English for specific purposes (ESP) to identify their students' key language needs and to help them design effective courses. The main goal of this study is to demonstrate to the perusers, ESP teachers, students, curriculum designers and who are keen on the field of courses designing in general and ESP courses in particular, to show them the significance of the needs analysis process as the most important tool for data collection when ESP course designing is intended. The research was carried out in the first semester in the academic year 2022-2023. Questionnaires were the major data collection method used in this study. Data were collected from 234 undergraduate business and management students. The findings confirmed that these students have positive attitudes towards learning English language. Additionally, productive skills (speaking and writing) have been ranked as the skills that business students want to improve the most. The study also discovered that the students' needs are not being met by the current teaching materials, hoping that the results of this study would serve as the foundation for designing more feasible ESP teaching materials that would meet students' needs. Based on the obtained findings, a task-based approach was used to boost students' needs in the two skills by providing in-class presentations, report writing, participating in mock interviews, and taking part in public speaking competitions. More importantly, the research recommends that current pedagogies should be updated by embracing a learner-centered approach.

Keywords: Business and Management, Course Design, English Skills, ESP, Higher Education, Needs Analysis

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1. Introduction

The English language role is evolving as a result of globalization and advancements in communication; therefore it is necessary to alter the beliefs and policies around English instruction, especially when English serves as a lingua franca. English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) at the Moroccan university, and the courses are primarily for general purposes at the faculty of Arts and Humanities, where students can choose to study linguistics or literature. However, based on the growing recognition that courses in general English as well as traditional language instruction fall short of what business and management students need, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become one of the important approaches in English language teaching. Moreover, due to an increasingly internationalized workforce and the enormous use of English in the workplace, ESP has become important in English teaching in institutions of higher learning (Hyland, 2002)¹. Based on the circumstances in which English education occurs and the goals of learners, ESP has been roughly separated into two primary subfields: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP).

However, the most crucial and critical question is whether or not the ESP course is effective. Since ESP is student-task oriented, gauging its success heavily depends on gauging learners' attitudes, needs, lacks, goals and accomplishments. For this reason, this study is conducted in an effort to examine ESP needs analysis of Moroccan university students of the Business and management program at The National School of Business and Management (ENCG). This study was guided using four different questions:

¹Hyland, K. (2002). Specificity revisited: how far should we go now?. *English for Specific Purposes*, 21(4), 385-395.

- What are the attitudes of ENCG students toward English language learning?
- Does the language proficiency of ENCG-Beni Mellal students allow for the development of an advanced ESP?
- What English language skills do ENCG students struggle with?
- What English language skills do ENCG students mostly need?

The research's literature review illuminates the key developments in ESP needs analysis in higher education. It gives the needs analysis process a conceptual framework that will direct the research and help it address its objectives. Additionally, this paper debates the methodological approach adopted and analyses the results of the quantitative surveys aimed at examining English language needs, ESP in particular, of students belonging to the Business and management field.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. English for Specific Purposes

Due to the fact that English is the most widely used business language and that knowing it is practically a requirement for employment on a global scale, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes are offered to students in many EFL and/or ESL (English as a Second Language) countries. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987)², English for Specific Purposes is a learning/teaching environment that has two main branches:

- English for Academic Purposes (EAP)
- English for Occupational Purposes (EOP).

The term EOP generally refers to job related courses, and is likely to be highly technical or specific in nature such as English for technicians or businessmen. However, EAP refers to any English teaching setting that relates to a study purpose, and it is taught generally within educational institutions to students needing English for their academic courses (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998)³. According to Shing and Sim (2011)⁴, the growth of EAP is derived from the awareness of ESP practitioners that students at the tertiary level possess different learning needs and this cannot be fulfilled by teaching them the same type of English language. Citing Coffey (1984), Sager (1998) describes EAP as a student's need for quick and economical use of the English language to pursue a course of academic study⁵. Whereas for Wei and Flaitz (2005), EAP is like a key responsibility⁶ in assisting ESL students to develop the kind of English language proficiency that will lead to success in their academic endeavours.

2.2. ESP and Needs Analysis

It is generally acknowledged that needs analysis is one of the distinctive hallmarks that are essential to ESP. It is generally referred to as a process for gathering data that will serve as a strong basis for designing and developing an ESP program that will be balanced and well-equipped and fulfil the needs of a specific community or group of students. Finding out WHO the learners are, what they already

²Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A learning-centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³Dudley-Evans, T. and St. John, M. J. (1998). *Developments of in English for Specific Purposes: A Multi-disciplinary Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴Shing, S. R. & Sim, T. S. (2011). EAP Needs Analysis in Higher Education: Significance and Future Direction. *English for Specific Purposes World*, 11 (33), 1–11

⁵Sager, J. C. (1998). In search of a foundation. *Terminology*, 5(1), 41-57. doi:10.1075/term.5.1.05sag

⁶Wei, Z., & Flaitz, J. (2005). Using Focus Group Methodology To Understand International Students' Academic Language Needs: A Comparison Of Perspectives. *TESL-EJ*, 8(4). <http://writing.berkeley.edu/TESL-EJ/ej32/a3.html>

know, and what they want from the course is the real purpose of conducting a students' need analysis experience.

Defining the students' needs, however, is a difficult task because the concept of need appears to be imprecise and ambiguous. In this regard, Hutchinson and Waters (ibid) divide needs into three classifications: necessities, wants and lacks. Necessities relate to the demands of the intended circumstances. 'What the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation' (p.55)⁷. In order to determine where to begin the teaching and learning process, lacks refer to the learner's current level of language proficiency. 'Necessities the learner lack' (p.56). Wants are related to what the learner hopes to get out of the language program 'what the learners want or feel they need' (p.57).

As a result, we ought to distinguish between objective and subjective needs analysis. Objective needs according to Brindley (1984) as cited by Nunan (1988) refers to information concerning facts about how learners will need to use the language in authentic communication scenarios in addition to their current level of language proficiency and language difficulties. Subjective needs refer to cognitive and effective factors that can impact on L2 acquisition such as, personality, confidence, attitudes, wants and expectations of the course (8)⁸.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Overview

A quantitative research approach was used in this study. According to Babbie, quantitative methods emphasize objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, or by manipulating pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques (Babbie, 2010),⁹. The research was conducted using a case study methodology, which entails an extensive perception through a variety of data sources, particularly evaluations that allow the researcher to create an analysis of a case, program, event, activity, and process.

3.2. Data Collection Technique and Instrument

In order to answer our research questions, we have employed a quantitative research approach. The data was gathered during the first week of classes when the students took a placement test and completed a questionnaire to assess their needs and English proficiency levels.

The questionnaire is divided into 3 sections: To create a profile of the sample, the first section addresses some demographic data. The questionnaire's second section looks into students' attitudes toward learning English language. The third part addresses the students' English learning needs. The placement test was designed to evaluate the students' command of three fundamental linguistic abilities: writing, vocabulary, and grammar. Multiple-choice tests were used to evaluate the first two. Students were required to write a brief paragraph describing themselves for their writing assignment.

3.3. Participants

Participants for this study were 234 students from the ENCG Beni Mellal, during the 2022-2023 academic years. They were in their first year. Their average age was 19 years old, 110 females and 124 males. It is important to note that only 156 out of the 234 participants responded to the study. Convenience sampling was used to choose the participants, as the researcher was also the teacher for the Business English courses.

⁷Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A learning-centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁸Nunan, D. (1988). *The learner-centered curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁹Babbie, E. (2010). *The Practice of Social Research*. 12th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage.

3.4. Data Analysis

All of the responses were subjected to a content analysis. The means and standard deviations for the rating questions were computed and presented in the figures. The responses were then carefully examined by the researcher, who then organized them into themes. In the textual analysis of the data, the percentages of participants for each theme were also calculated participants' best quotes (Guest 2012)¹⁰ were selected to provide more in-depth information to ultimately answer the research questions.

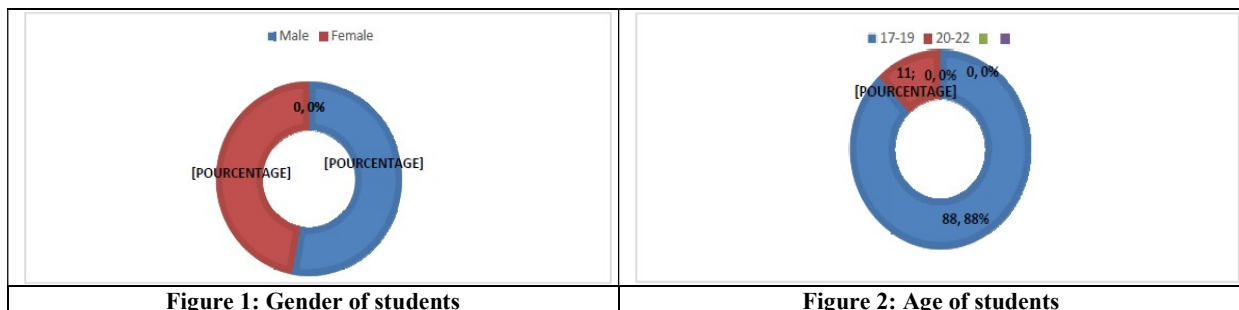
4. Results

4.1. Students' Background Information

The purpose of questions 1 and 2 in the questionnaire was to create a profile of the sample; their age and gender, respectively.

Question (1): what is your gender?

The participants' gender is depicted in figure 1. The population of the study is comprised of 234 first year ENCG students. 124 (52.9%) of them were male students, while 110 (47%) were female students. This demonstrates unequivocally that males outnumber females.



Question (2): what is your age?

Figure 2 shows that the age of the participants was between 17 and 22. The average age was 19.5. They are then mature and aware of their needs and interests.

Question (3): When do you use English?

According to the results of the percentage analysis displayed in figure 3, students primarily use English for academic purposes, and the classroom setting is where they can have more opportunities to use the foreign language. They hardly found the chance to use English outside of the classroom. Some participants agreed that if you speak English to a Moroccan, he might interpret it as a display of your language skills.

Students mentioned chatting and playing computer-games as their most common activities. Other activities included watching television, speaking with family, reading articles on the internet and listening to songs. Students did not read outside their study area as much as one might expect.

4.2. Students' level of proficiency

Question (4): what do you think your level of English is?

As indicated in the table below, Students were asked about their level of English and for this 18% of the participants said that they need to greatly strengthen their poor English, 32% replied that their

¹⁰Guest G, MacQueen K, Namey E. (2012). *Applied Thematic Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

English isn't terrible, but they still have a lot to learn., 47% declared that despite the fact that their English is good, there is still room for improvement and a small minority at (3%) considered their English is near native speaker and they don't think they need to develop it further. When students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses they can make adjustment, adaptation, improvement, and change in their work or performance to best meet the assessment criteria (Earl & Katz, 2006)¹¹.

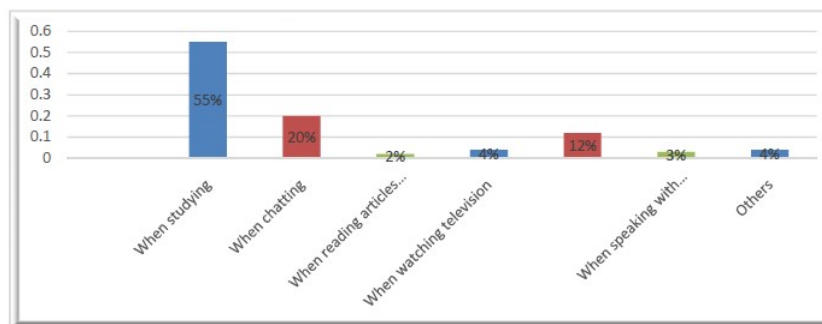


Figure 3: The frequency of activities carried in English

Statements	I need to greatly strengthen my poor English.	My English isn't terrible, but I still have a lot to learn.	Despite the fact that my English is good, there is still room for improvement.	I don't believe I need to improve my English any further because it's close to native speaker level.
% of respondents	18%	32%	47%	03%

Table 1: Students level of English

Question (5): How often does the following happen to you?

The fifth question can support the previous one in giving a clear idea about the problems facing the ENCG students while learning English language. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that most students lack proficiency in the English language, particularly in understanding songs and movies without translation or in reading books in English.

These findings presented an initial profile description of the students in terms of their English language learning, strengths and weaknesses, skills, lacks, and needs.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral agree	Strongly agree
I can modify my speech to fit my audience.	08%	40%	45%	07%
I naturally incorporate relevant cultural and historical allusions into my speech	75%	04%	12%	09%
Most people can understand my pronunciation	03%	06%	44%	47%
I have the ability to begin and end conversations	27%	30%	31%	12%
When the teacher speaks, I can comprehend everything.	43%	18%	18%	21%
Without translation, I can understand songs and movies.	42%	34%	14%	10%
I am able to decode unfamiliar words from context	03%	17%	27%	53%
I can understand the main points in text I read	02%	10%	36%	52%
I can read English-language books	51%	25%	14%	10%
I can express my own ideas in writing	15%	28%	31%	26%

Table 2: Language skills students' self- assessment

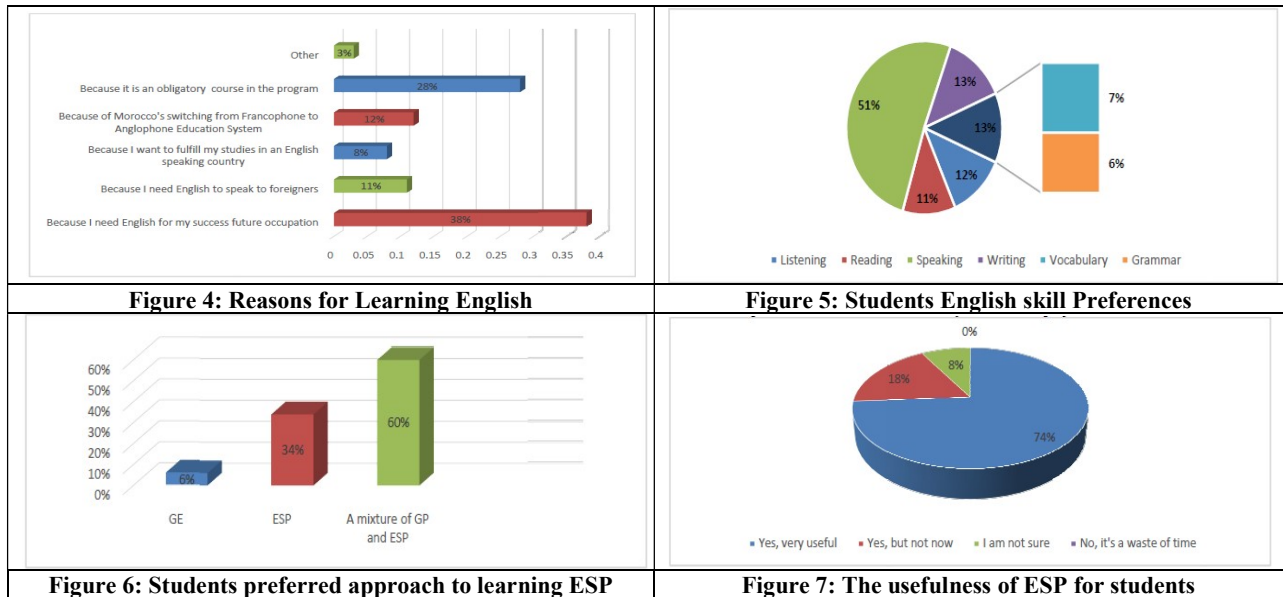
¹¹Earl, L., & Katz, S. (2006). *Leading in a Data Rich Work*. Thousand oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

4.3. Students' attitudes towards the learning of English as a foreign language

Question (6): Why do you need to study English?

Based on the survey conducted, this question asks about the purpose of students learning English. Figure 4 demonstrates that the majority of respondents 38% believe that learning English will help them succeed in their future careers, it is followed by 28% of the students who said that they are learning English because it is an obligatory course in the program, and 12% showed that they are aware of Morocco's switching from Francophone to Anglophone Education System, 12% believed that it is an important instrument to communicate with foreigners. And 8% of the respondents are learning English because they want to fulfil their studies in an English speaking country. Based on the results, it is clear that the students are learning English for their academic context, which has recently been taught in the ESP class, and that they anticipate that learning English will help them have a successful future career. They have also recognized the future global development from the current situation. Nevertheless, they acknowledge that one of the most crucial skills for finding a job is English.

6



Question (7): What skills do you like to be more emphasized in the class?

Figure 5 effectively demonstrates how much the students need to develop their productive skills. Over half of the students wish to ameliorate the speaking skill while 13% wish to improve their writing skills. Reading and listening were equally important receptive skills to be improved, followed by vocabulary 7% and grammar 6%.

The questionnaire also included additional information beyond that shown in figure 5, an open-ended question to examine the students' need to improve other skills other than the formerly aforesaid ones. The majority of students acknowledged the need for proper integration of all four skills in order to improve academic achievement.

Question (8): Do you prefer to take your course in EGP, ESP, or a combination of the two?

34% of the students preferred ESP over EGP because it is harder to choose the course material in the latter due to the uncertainty surrounding the students' future English language requirements. However, ESP is based heavily on an evaluation of objectives or needs and the function for

which English is needed. but the majority of the respondents 60% preferred a combination of the two learning methodologies because ESP can be seen as a particular and specific edition of EGP, which offers the fundamental knowledge and abilities of the English language. The main objective of introducing ESP is to provide students with the English language competencies they will need to meet communication challenges in real-world situations in their future careers.

Question (9): Do you believe that ESP will be helpful to you?

Figure 7 shows that most students believe that taking an ESP course will be very helpful for them in improving their general language skills, while 18 % believed that ESP is useful but not now and a minor proportion at only (8%) is not sure. An open-ended question was included in the survey. Other reasons why ESP might be helpful comprise the following: 1. To be well-equipped for current and upcoming study and specialization. 2. To reduce the time and effort invested in learning about business topics. 3. To advance because ESP will simplify the definition and understanding of complex technical jargon. 4. To enhance language abilities for academic purposes. 5. To prepare me for my intended career. 6. To make customer communication easier for multinational corporations. 7. To enhance oral presentations, which are necessary for business projects. 8. To understand business articles.



Question 10: do you agree that English material you have right now is suitable with your major?

In light of the current environment, Question 10 asks students if they feel confident using their most recent material. This also aims to assess the material used. Although most students (68%) agree and (15%) strongly agree that the material used is appropriate for their majors, 17% of students disagree. It shows that there should be some improvements and further development for the perfection of the ESP material.

The lack of a textbook is one of the current ESP issues for business classes. As a result, the students suggested that there should be a particular English textbook for business and management. They do emphasize that appropriate and precise materials are the backings for the syllabus.

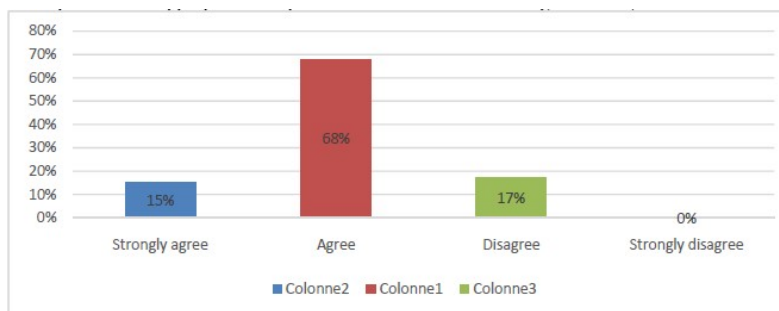


Figure 8: The suitability of English material

Question 11: how do you prefer to do the ESP class activities?

The preference of the students for work forms to be applied in ESP classes is shown in the table below. The majority of the students believe that watching movies, playing games, working on projects, and giving presentations are the best ways to practice ESP. Role-playing exercises and class discussions are ranked second (47%) for effectiveness. The traditional method of instruction, in which the teacher explains and corrects the students' errors in exercises, is preferred at (46%). Undoubtedly, students do not view analysing language patterns and trying to work with new words on their own as the most productive way to practice ESP.

Work formats that students prefer to practice in ESP classes	Very Effective	Effective	Not very Effective	Not Effective
My teacher corrects my errors when I complete exercises and explains new concepts.	46%	38%	14%	2%
examining language patterns and attempting to use new words on my own.	21%	36%	36%	7%
role-playing conversations and class discussions.	47%	29%	14%	10%
Movies/games/projects/presentations	78%	14%	5%	3%

Table 3: Students' preferable forms of work in ESP classes

5. Discussion of Findings

The study was conducted to examine ESP needs analysis of Moroccan university students at The National School of Business and Management (ENCG) and to learn whether the available English language material meets their needs. The results have shown that the students of ESP for Business and management class view learning English as a crucial component of both their formal education as well as their future career. The ability to communicate in English can help business students gain access to the job market in Morocco and abroad. Also, reading business documents in English is crucial for those who want to continue their studies, and it is important for those who want to apply for scholarships to pursue PhD programs in other countries. Students were also asked to rate their perceived level of language proficiency, and nearly all of them stated that their level was either good or average for almost all language skills and components. To identify students' lacks, it is important to note that only a small percentage of students claimed to be extremely proficient in speaking or writing. As a result, when creating and instructing the ESP course, the ESP teacher should pay more attention to these two productive skills by emphasizing more on classroom presentations, writing reports, participating in workshops, and public speaking activities, among other things.

Various perspectives were noted by the respondents in regards to the English language needs of business and management students. The results indicated that most students, though to varying degrees of importance, want to improve all facets of language. However, the majority of students rank speaking and writing as the most crucial areas for improvement, followed by the receptive skills of reading and listening, vocabulary, and grammar. This assertion goes against some ESP teachers' ideas, which hold that business students should focus first on developing their language awareness in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and the four skills. They should then focus on language skills that will be useful in their future careers, such as writing a resume and cover letter and learning business jargon that is widely used at work.

When it comes to the learning preferences of business students, the results showed that group discussions, presentations, and projects are the students' top choices for English learning strategies, followed by group work and visual aids. This can be explained by the fact that students wish to strengthen their speaking and writing abilities, which are their areas of weakness, as revealed by the results of the current study. It's interesting to note that students appear to favour task- and project-based methods of English teaching and learning. Those are considered among the major communicative approaches that enhance the learner autonomy and language competence of the students. Reimer (2002)¹²

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

¹²Reimer, B. (2002). Exploring diversity in rural Canada. In Measuring Rural Diversity Conference Proceedings November 21-21, 2002. Washington, D.C.: *Economic Research Service*. Retrieved 10/02/13, from <http://srdc.msstate.edu/measuring/reimer.pdf>.

The goal of the current study was to examine the ENCG students' English language requirements. The results of the questionnaires indicate that business and management students have very positive attitudes toward ELT. This is a result of their academic and professional need for the English language, which is now the dominant business language. However, these students felt that they had trouble with some learning skills, particularly productive ones.

These findings might have some pedagogical implications for ESP programs generally in Moroccan universities and for Business and Management schools specifically. One of the major implications of this study is that ESP teachers should carry out a needs analysis process so they can create a course and consider the changing needs, wants, and deficiencies of their students. Additionally, teachers ought to put more emphasis on subject matter that is relevant to the students' chosen fields of study when creating ESP courses. In other words, the texts, topics, and assignments should be accurate and pertinent to the students' area of study. In addition, it is advised that students speak up in class and be more engaged throughout the lesson. Instead of complaining that the subject is uninteresting or unimportant, they should assume responsibility for their own education. This works in tandem with the instructor, who needs to come up with inspiring ways to start the lecture. To better meet the needs and interests of the students, the teaching methodology must also be reviewed. To encourage learner autonomy, more communicative tasks including debates, group discussions, role-plays, and project-based activities should be implemented.

From this study, it is clear that the use of a needs analysis aids in providing teachers with a clear understanding of their students' needs, wants, and lacks. This is crucial for discovering a better understanding of the techniques and strategies they can use to increase the learners' benefit from the ESP course.

Despite the fact that this study produced a number of important findings, these findings and conclusions are exclusive to a specific school in a certain location and circumstance. The outcomes may differ in other areas and conditions. It is suggested that further studies of needs analysis for different scopes should be more debated.

Finally, as a recommendation for future research, the results of this study could be used to create a suitable course syllabus or to create a textbook for Moroccan business and management students. Moreover, the findings can also inspire future researchers to carry out a thorough assessment of the English courses provided in Moroccan business schools with the goal of creating a standardized curriculum or syllabus.

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