

**THE ROLE OF LEARNER AUTONOMY AND MOTIVATION IN ESP  
CLASSROOMS A CASE STUDY OF THE SUPERIOR  
SCHOOL OF APPLIED SCIENCES  
OF TLEMCCEN**

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**ABSTRACT**

ESP has become one of the most significant fields in higher institutions, as a matter of fact; English is learned for many reasons which are due to a large variety of professions which request the use of ESP. The need to use English for specific purposes specialities has many characteristics. One of the reasons for learning English is for science and technology which is the case for this research work. Therefore, autonomous learning and motivation are considered as key factors to make the students succeed to learn English for specific purposes more particularly for Science and Engineering. Therefore, The aim of this investigation is to introduce autonomous learning in ESP classrooms in order to improve the quality of learning ESP in the Superior School of Applied Sciences, in order to form good students in the field of Engineering particularly English for science and technology.

**KEYWORDS :** Algeria, ESP, Learner Autonomy & Motivation

**INTRODUCTION**

Over the last decades, the requirements for learning English for specific purposes have significantly raised the intention with the advent of globalization. Nowadays, universities and other higher institutions throughout Algeria have heavily invested in technology to support teaching and to enhance students' learning experience. However, a teaching of English is supposed to meet the needs of the learners in institutions such as the Superior School of Applied Sciences of Tlemcen (ESSAT) where English is taught for Science and Engineering. The main concern of this investigation is to introduce different techniques to have a successful learning of ESP, therefore, autonomous learning and motivation are considered as key factors to make the students of the Superior School succeed to learn English for specific purposes more particularly for Sciences and Engineering. Nonetheless, before dealing with autonomous learning, the researcher should take into consideration some factors that made ESP learners failed to learn. Among them, the investigator could deduce some lacunas in grammar and written expression, in addition to student's disinterest to learn English and thus, due to the importance or non-importance has given to this module at ESSAT. Therefore, the ESP teachers are confronted with many challenges while teaching English for science and engineering.

**Research Questions**

In order to find some solutions to these problems one can put forward the following research questions:

- How do students engage in learning tasks independently?

- What are the factors that affect their learning of ESP?
- To what extent, does motivation contribute to foster learner autonomy at the Superior School?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

English for specific purposes is defined as English which is taught to people whose first language is not English; however, they need to develop scientific, technical and some other vocabulary of the specialised field of studies.

Despite the fact that English for specific purposes has gained a particular status, specialists and researchers are aware of the considerable efforts that must be made further for the future of ESP. According to Hutchison and Waters (1987:9) refer to ESP as “approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reason for learning”.

## ENGLISH FOR ENGINEERING

Nowadays, more and more English courses are conducted in English for specific purposes, (ESP), which is defined as “the branch of English language education which focuses on training in specific domains of English to accomplish specific academic or workplace tasks” (Orr 2005:9).

According to Porcaro (2013:2); “The role of English in the field of science engineering, information technology, and business is ever increasing. Consequently, so too are the demands on ESP practitioners to serve the needs of students and professionals in these fields to conduct their studies, research, and business in English on an international scale”.

One of the main fields of ESP is EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and EST (English for science and technology) which is our main concern in this investigation since ESP is taught in the superior School.

## AUTONOMY AND MOTIVATION

Linguists are particularly interested in how to enhance learner autonomy and motivation in second/Foreign language learning and have attracted numerous researches especially in the field of teaching a foreign language. The relation between motivation and autonomy is considered as very complex; Humphreys& Chan (2002) insist on the role of motivation in enhancing autonomous learning. According to them, motivation is a key factor to influence students' ability for autonomy; therefore, teachers should focus on motivation before training their students to be more autonomous. It should be mentioned that other linguists believed that autonomy comes first as mentioned by Deci&Ryan (1985). Although, Dornyei argues “Motivating students is seen by teachers as one of the most serious sources of difficulty” (Dornyei: 2001). The most common point shared by approximately all the teachers is that they feel confused by students de-motivation. In other words; learners' motivation is highly connected to learner autonomy. Furthermore, Research has demonstrated that students' independence in learning depends largely on their motivation and is able to make important academic choices.

### Role of Motivation in ESP Classrooms

In ESP classroom it is essential to establish a motivating classroom environment where students could learn effectively as cited by Dornyei (2001:48); “Motivational teaching practice needs to be established in order to create an effective learning environment”. A way of establishing and maintaining motivation for students is by giving them the opportunity to be more goal-oriented. In an average class, students do not always understand or accept why they are

performing a particular learning activity, so it is the teacher’s responsibility to set realistic and clear objectives and to ensure that the students understand them. Once the main aspects of creating initial student motivation have been identified, it is possible to generate or select a variety of specific classroom techniques to promote a specific proportion of motivation. The ESP approach enhances the relevance of what the students are learning and enables them to use the English they know, therefore, such interest contributes greatly to practice their learning and exchange with other learners. It is essential to keep students motivated to learn in the ESP classroom and that by clarifying the purpose of the lecture and the activities they are dealing with.

**METHODS**

The study was conducted at the Superior School of Applied Sciences of Tlemcen especially at the Department of Social Sciences where the researcher could collect considerable information for his/her investigation. The collection of data consists of four parts; the first one is the classroom observation followed by interview and questionnaire administrated to the second- year students at the Department of Social sciences at the ESSAT. The participants are four groups of students; each group contains twenty -five students.

In order to explore the ways in which instruction with learner autonomy support can help students develop the motivation to learn English in ESP classrooms, a significant research incorporating quantitative, as well as the qualitative analysis, was designed. The general structure of the study is summarised as follows; (table 1)

**Table 1: Research Design, Data Collection**

Teaching Project	Interview	Questionnaire	Observation
Pilot study to ensure data collection methods, teaching, questions	Interviewing four students; one from each group	Open and close-ended questions	Observation of Four groups including twenty- five students per class

**Instruments**

The collection of data consists of three parts; the first one is the classroom observation followed by interview and questionnaire administrated to the second- year students at the Department of Social sciences at ESSAT of Tlemcen.

**Participants**

The participants are four groups of students; each group contains twenty -five students, however, not all the group assist to the English lecture, the number of students who attended in ESP classrooms is only twenty. For those students, four were chosen to make the interview. The criteria for selecting the participants of the interview were first; their willingness to participate in the research study and their availability, then they should present a portrait of an autonomous student of ESSA of Tlemcen. Of course, the teachers were asked to participate in an interview about this investigation.

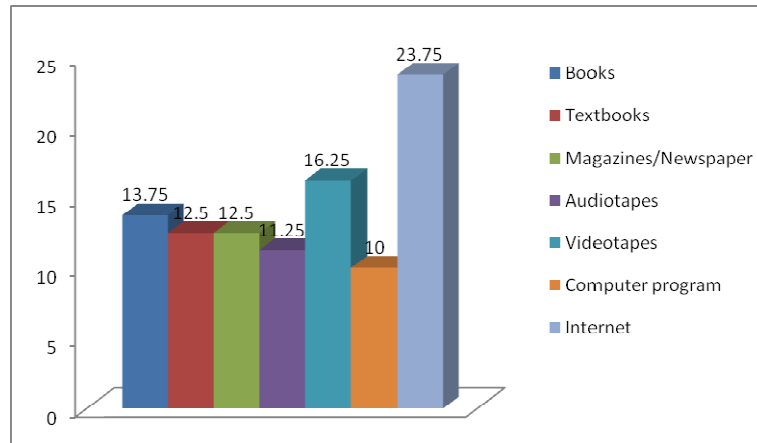
As previously mentioned, the aim of this study is to explore how learner autonomy-focused instruction can help students develop the motivation to learn English in Algerian Superior Schools and to provide a rich description of the ESP classrooms.

**DISCUSSIONS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS**

Evaluation of ESP student’s level and course objective in the Superior School is a complex task that requires from the investigator clearness and objectivity. From the analysis of the questionnaire, we can conclude that research on learner

autonomy and motivation in ESP classrooms have different standpoints but they all have several important elements in common.

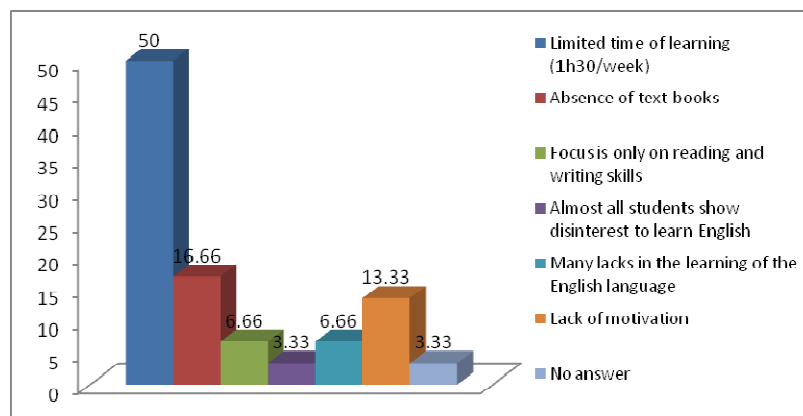
The first point is to deal with students ability to engage in learning tasks independently; it is demonstrated in the following figure (1) that independent students prefer to use some tools to learn ESP. such as the internet which widely used under different forms.



**Figure 1: Tools Used to Learn ESP through autonomous learning**

The results illustrate that the number of the students implicated with autonomous learning in ESP classrooms prefer to use the internet with 23.75% followed by 16.25% who prefer the movies/TV then 13.75% with books and the same percentage with textbooks. After that, we can find 6.66% who use audiotapes and only 3.33% who prefer to use the computer program. The results in the table above indicate the students’ favorite tools while introducing learner autonomy in the ESP classroom.

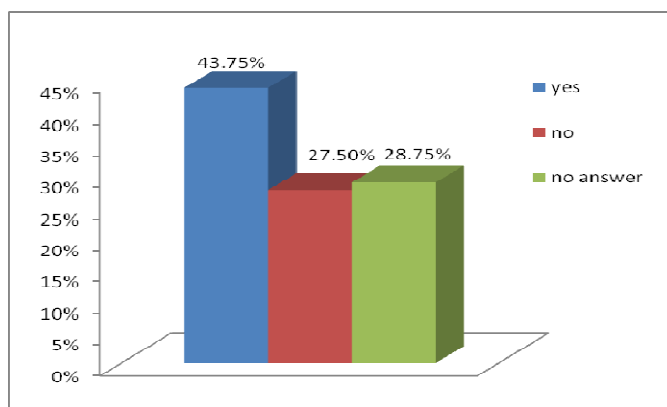
The second research question includes factors that affect students learning ESP. As mentioned before, students studied English for eight or nine years, the number of years is normally sufficient to learn a foreign language, however, after the beginning of the ESP lectures, the weaknesses of the students in English are plenty and their level is not satisfactory at all. The students reproach that among the major negative effects to learn ESP is concerned with not sufficient time to learn English; it means that they have only one hour and a half per week which is considered as not enough to learn.



**Figure 2: Factors that Affect Learning of ESP**

The findings in figure 1 indicate that 50% of the students' learning is affected by the limited time of the English module, in other words, one hour and a half per week is not sufficient to improve their weaknesses or to make them perform in the four skills especially speaking and writing, followed by 16.66% and 13.33% of the students who mentioned that their learning is not achieved because of the absence of textbooks and lack of motivation. The other 6.66% of the students are affected by many lacks of the English language followed by 3.33% of the learners who showed disinterest in learning English.

The third point is to deal with the importance of motivation in promoting learner autonomy at the Superior School. Therefore the results indicate that motivation has an important role in learning either a second or a foreign language.



**Figure 3: Improvement of Motivation (Introducing Autonomous Learning)**

The results illustrate that the students' motivation has increased significantly with 44%, however, 27.5% declared are not motivated more than that. We should underline that 28.75% do not give any answer to this question which is considered as an important score.

The analysis of the teachers' interview allows us to collect necessary data about teaching English for engineering and highlight difficulties encountered by the students while learning. In this case, the questions might be direct and clear so that the teachers could provide the investigator with some remarks and analysis of the situation in ESP classrooms and in this way they could determine the importance of independent learning to improve the student level.

We can notice from the answers given by the teachers of Superior School that students are not very motivated to learn English and according to them, is due to the low coefficient and interest are given to this module at the ESSAT. Also, the majority of the students do not have a good level in English and this is because of their low level especially in speaking as shown in the below table as mentioned by some of the teachers. According to the learners, the speaking skill is not sufficiently used, however, the majority of the students preferred to give importance to this skill in order to speak English. (Table 2)

**Table 2: Preferences for the Four skills**

Skills	Ranks
Listening	17
Speaking	18
Reading	12
Writing	13

This table Shows noticeable findings in the classification of the four skills where speaking is placed first just followed by listening in the second place. The writing skill is classified third while the writing occupies the last position. Obviously, this indicates that the students have developed a particular confidence in three skills namely reading, speaking and listening; but this is not the case for the writing skill.

According to teachers' remarks to foster learner autonomy, they suggest to help the students by awakening them of the importance English should have in their present studies and future ones, in addition to the role played by the teacher at the ESP classrooms, according to them, teacher might be a monitor as well as a facilitator, perhaps by acting so, it may help the students to improve their learning.

The student's interview was added to students' questionnaire in order to reinforce the investigation; it is useful in such a study because it allows the investigator to capture the perspectives and opinions of the participants. The students were interviewed individually at the end of the English lecture of course after obtaining their agreement; the interviews were prepared in advance under, written form. The interviews were semi-structured, consisting of pre-written major questions as well as additional questions asked during the interviews.

**Table 3: Students' interview**

Participants	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D
Wilaya	SidiBelabbes	Boumerdes	Djelfa	Setif
Years of study	9	8	8	8
Gender	Girl	Boy	Boy	Girl
Marks obtained in the exams	17	18	18	18

From the table 3, we can notice that the answers were clear and precise; therefore; this study tries to highlight the ways in which autonomy is demonstrated or facilitated. Thus, the analysis of this interview is based on four dimensions:

- Student motivation toward learning English
- Different approaches used by the students in order to learn English
- Tools used to learn English
- Difficulties encountered in the learning process

## **REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The present research contributes to developing autonomous learning within the Superior School of Applied Sciences of Tlemcen which is considered as a promising institution as its students are the 'elite' of the engineering learner, Therefore, this study investigated in the field of learner autonomy and motivation where these two characteristics are considered as important for a successful learning of ESP.

Further research is clearly needed in the field of learner autonomy where pedagogical implications should take place and search for the adequate solutions in the future. This study has several limitations, first, it should be noted that the Algerian context where the English language is taught displays many characteristics. First, the majority of the students who entered the Superior School have a low level in English except for some students who are very bright; they have many deficiencies especially in grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, it is difficult for the teacher to move forward in the English lessons. Secondly, the majority of the students show disinterest to learn ESP because as future engineers they give priority

to technical modules as mathematics, physics, and chemistry.

The obvious implication of this research is to provide teachers with training to teach ESP students. This involves making the teacher more competent in the field of ESP and then could adopt some motivational strategies to enhance students' motivation to learn, but also embedding these in more generally motivating teaching approaches to take into consideration the students' desire for more interesting lessons. In this sense, independent learning could be introduced in ESP classrooms for more positive results as it is shown with some autonomous students in the school who demonstrate their ability to learn by relying on themselves with a good level in English and to have a very good mark.

It should be noticed that these 'autonomous learners' have the same learning conditions as the other students; however; they show a great interest towards learning English.

The results found in this investigation show that students' failure to learn ESP is due first to the lack of motivation. For instance; these students are interested in technical modules and give less priority to English.

Secondly; most of the students' failure to learn ESP is due to their low level in English, particularly in grammar and vocabulary.

The third point deals with strategies and approaches; for instance; most of the learners do not know which strategy should be used for a successful learning. Further researches are needed in the field of ESP in order to find some solutions and introduce autonomous learning for successful students. As a response to the problems encountered, some suggestions could be proposed by the investigator as:

To develop some activities at the beginning of the year of the English sessions where the teacher could;

- Discuss different strategies
- Deal with English deficiencies of each student (as there are small groups)
- Propose some activities to improve these weaknesses
- Expect students' needs
- Motivate the students to learn English by dealing with its importance

## CONCLUSIONS

Teaching ESP for engineering students is a complex task that requires from the teachers some experiences and to know how to make lectures interesting and most importantly to introduce the basics of grammar and technical words and terms. This project was motivated by a desire within the ESSAT institution to promote learner autonomy more effectively to get motivated students with effective results in ESP. It is hoped that the present investigation would help to enhance students' motivation by promoting autonomous learning within the Superior School of as well as to develop the teaching/learning situation and to find some remedies in the teaching of English for engineering.

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