Needs Analysis and ESP Course Design:
A Case Study of the Institute of Nutrition, Food and Agro-food Technologies

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Abstract:

Needs analysis is the primary step for an effective ESP course design. The current work aims at analyzing the needs of Master 1 students for an ESP course from the perspectives of doctoral students and subject teachers at the institute of Nutrition, Food, and Agro-food Technologies (INATAA). To meet these targets, two questionnaires were administered, one for doctoral students and the other one for a sample of ten teachers at the institute of INATAA. The students' questionnaire aimed to investigate thfrencheir current experience with the English language and the problems they encounter, their attitudes towards the past ESP course and their suggestions for ameliorating the course vis a vis their current needs. The teachers' questionnaire was considered as a support to the students' questionnaire for the amelioration of the course. The findings reveal that the major language problems encountered are text comprehension, technical vocabulary, writing and speaking skills. Despite these problems, the students show a positive attitude towards the target ESP course. Some suggestions have been offered by these students as well as subject teachers for the amelioration of the course.

Keywords: Needs analysis; ESP; course design; problems; language skills

1. INTRODUCTION

English has been used as the global language after the radical development in the world's economy, science and technology as a result of the Second World War (WWII). The status of this language has more increased after the digital globalization and the creation of scientific databases that allow researchers from all over the world to share their research findings. Algerian researchers, therefore, feel the need to access high quality international journals and, accordingly, gain international recognition; however, English has become a barrier for them. Despite the efforts devoted to produce scientific papers in English, and in spite of the valuable research attempts and significant obtained results, the reviewers' comments stick on the poor quality of English rather than the good quality of work. These issues require a careful consideration of the teaching of English for scientific disciplines. English for Specific

purposes (in short ESP) is a branch in Teaching English as a foreign language, and has appeared as a result to satisfy these researchers' needs.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Despite the undeniable role English plays for Algerian researchers nowadays, achieving the required proficiency in this language is considered a challenge by most of university students. Students at the institute of INATAA seek to develop their proficiency in English to gain international recognition of their works; however, the use of this language is very limited in their studies. The reason is that most of the courses are presented in French and that English is only taught as a separate subject (ESP). Add to this, a very limited time is devoted for the teaching of this language. For example, ESP is designed just once in the Licence and once or twice in Master with a very limited time (only 21- 45 hours during the whole academic career).

In addition, the students come to a language class with different needs. For example, some need English only to pass their examination; some others feel the need to develop this language for using it in scientific research; others may need it to help them understand the subject matter; and still others need it for occupational purposes. Similarly, the large size of classes does not only involve different needs but also different ability and motivational levels. Grouping all the students in large classes for an English course neither allows for the satisfaction of these needs, nor for the practice of authentic language. As a consequence, this decreases the students' motivation and make them lose interest

and enthusiasm and, henceforth, form a negative attitude towards learning this language despite its importance in their academic and, probably, their professional career. The consideration of the students' needs is one step towards ensuring success in learning the foreign language as argued by (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

Other problems are related to the teacher training. Teachers teaching ESP are most of the time teachers of EFL and might not be trained in ESP as Bojovic (2007, p. 493) states "ESP teachers are not specialists in the field, but in teaching English, their subject is English for the profession but not the profession in English". These teachers may not khow to underline clear objectives, content and methodology. To this end, collaboration between subject teachers and ESP teachers is highly required for achieving the students' needs.

1.2. Aim of the Study

Despite the huge amount of the literature devoted to the explanation of the concept of needs analysis, research using needs analysis in ESP course design in the sector of food science and technology is rarely found in international as well as national contexts. Similarly, it has never been done in the university being studied. Therefore, this study may fill in some of the gaps in the research in the area of NA through an investigation of Master 1 students' needs at the Institute of Nutrition, Food and Agro food Technologies (INATAA) from two perspectives: doctoral students who have had a previous ESP instruction; and subject teachers at the same institute. Doctoral students are considered as a good source for

investigating the students' needs as they are believed to be more knowledgeable about these needs, especially that they are currently using English in their research careers, either by reading papers, or participating in international seminars where English is most used. Subject teachers' opinions are also assumed to aid in our needs analysis for the insightful suggestions proposed, especially in choosing content that goes with the students' interests and, hence, boost their motivation for the current ESP course. The aim behind analyzing the students' needs is to ameliorate the current ESP course, increase the students' motivation and ensure success in ESP instruction, as well as to raise the awareness of ESP teachers of different disciplines towards the students' current and target needs.

1.3. Research Questions:

This research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are doctoral students' attitudes towards the previous ESP course?
2. What are the problems encountered when dealing with English?
3. How can the course be ameliorated in stasfying Master 1 students needs in INATAA from the perspectives of doctoral students and subject teachers?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of ESP

ESP syllabus and materials are designed on the basis of the learners' needs (Munby, 1978). When it first appeared in the 1960s, ESP was associated with one type of learning that is related to academic contexts. Recent definitions associate it with learners' language needs in authentic situations like study or work. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), 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" (p.16). They distinguished between three categories of ESP: English for science and technology, English for business and economics, and English for social science. They further introduced two subcategories under each category: English for occupational purposes (EOP) and English for academic purposes (EAP). Cummins (2008) clarified the difference between EOP and EAP in that the aim of the former is achieving academic proficiency and the latter is developing interpersonal skills (i.e. communication with people). The distinction between these two types has resulted in the emergence of different types of English, e.g. English for Secretary studies , English for Economics, English for Technicians, and English for Medical Studies. ESP is also argued to be more related to adult learners and is more applied in higher or tertiary education (Duddley – Evans & ST John, 1998).

The course we intend to evaluate at the Institute of INATAA should reflect the scholars' notion of ESP; that is, the type of English to be taught is related to Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) English for science and technology (EST) (Kennedy & Bolitho, 1990), and the target to achieve is Hutchinson and Waters' academic purposes, as we aim to make our learners capable to read and write documents in scientific English. The students' needs with regard to content, skills as well as language

items will be investigated further in this paper for the sake of ameliorating the current course.

Language learners are observed to come to the language class with different skills, strategies, needs as well as different levels of motivation. The idea of designing specific language course that matches the learners' individual needs appeared, and language teaching shifted to the learner-centered approach. Since then, the use of needs analysis has become significant in ESP (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

English for specific purposes is different from general English in that the former is related to learners with no working experience, and the latter is related to those who already have business knowledge and skills before coming to the language classroom (Dudley-Evans &St. John, 1998)

2.2. Needs Analysis

The concept of needs analysis (NA) first appeared in the 1920s to refer to the needs of learners who learn English as a general language. An example is the needs and the motives for using the language for daily communication. The term gained a wide popularity after the spread of ESP programs in the mid 1970s and beginning of 1980s, to be, thereafter, considered as one of the fundamental stages in ESP course design (Munby, 1978). Nowadays, NA has become a prerequisite in foreign language program objectives. Accordingly, different conceptions of NA have been provided, and a variety of approaches have emerged to provide a description of the concept from different perspectives.

NA is viewed by Richards and Rogers (1986) as the process of identifying general and specific language needs that may appear in learning for the development of a language syllabus. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) add that NA encompass the necessities, lacks and wants that learners come to a language class with; they consider a course as inadequate if its objectives do not tackle these three elements. Brown (1995; as cited in Brown, 2009) argues that NA is a data-gathering tool used by curriculum designers to collect subjective and objective information for the development of a course that satisfies the requirements of students within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) consider NA as the first critical step in an ESP course that form the basis for curriculum design, material selection, methodology, assessment, and evaluation. The concept of needs assessment has also been used interchangeably by many scholars in the area of ESP (e.g. Brown, 2009; Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1998, etc.) to assess language learning needs of university students.

NA has, traditionally, been associated with the first stage of a course design. Analyzing the needs of learners has been considered as a significant starting point of a course design, since it determines the essence and the underlying reasons of the course; it also aids in choosing and prioritizing what learners need in the learning environment (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Recent views of NA associate it with the different phases of the

course development, claiming it to be a more cyclical process (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998); in other words, once learners' needs are identified, one can make decisions in adapting the course objectives, materials, the teaching and learning approach, and, later on, evaluation. Therefore, NA and material evaluation should go hand in hand: where the former determines the needs for learners, the latter helps in deciding to what extent the used materials, tests or the overall program meet these needs.

Different models have emerged to provide an explanation of the concept of NA. The first model was referred to as "target situation analysis" (Munby,1978; Hutchison & Waters, 1987). Target situation analysis investigates the learners' needs and goals in the target situation. Munby's Communication Needs Processor model provides a sociolinguistic explanation of NA by highlighting the factors affecting learners' communicative needs. Nine components were identified by Munby (1978) to investigate the target situation of learners: **Participants,** by analyzing the learners' preferred languages, their mother tongue, the target language as well as their identity; **Purpose**, by defining the motivation towards learning the foreign language, whether occupational or academic purposes; **Setting**, by determining when and where learners prefer to learn the foreign language; **Interaction**, by selecting interactive activities that should be involved in the target language; **Instrumentality**, or the type of communication required; **Dialect**, or the learners preferred dialects; **Target**

competence level, or what productive and receptive skills learners intend to develop; and **Communicative key**, or how communication needs to be undertaken, e.g. formal or informal. Munby's model has thoroughly contributed to the field of ESP as the selection of the teaching materials depend on a systematic analysis of learners needs like their reasons of learning, time, place, activities involved, etc. However, it has been subject to much criticism. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) consider that the process of writing a profile for each student is time consuming. They add that this model focuses on the experimenter's viewpoint and neglects that of the learners.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) adapted a learner-and-learning model by expanding Munby's definition and adding the learners' learning needs. Their model of NA involves two factors: target situation analysis and learning needs analysis. They distinguished between the two concepts by linking the former concept with what learners are required to do in the target situation and the latter with what they need to do in order to learn. Hutchinson and Walters's model can be derived from necessities, lacks, and wants: while necessities refer to what learners have to know in order to function effectively in the target situation or their demands for an ESP course, lacks are considered as the gap between necessity and what the learner already knows, and wants mean what the learners actually want to learn or what they feel they need. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) model provided a learner-centered approach that involves internal and

external factors and is mainly concerned with deficiency analysis; however, it was also criticized for that it focuses on many skills and topics to be learned that learners may not want to learn (Basturkmen, 2013).

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) suggested another framework referred to as "pedagogic needs analysis" that encompasses three major areas: deficiency, strategy, and means analysis. While deficiency analysis is concerned with the distinction between the learners' current level (what they already know) and their target level (what they are supposed to know), Strategy analysis means the process of learning (different learners have different ways of learning); and Means analysis refers to the environmental factors in which the course will be run (e.g. the teacher, teaching method, students, and facilities). According to them, what works well in one situation may not work in another.

There is no single method for conducting needs analysis (Jordan, 1997). Robinson (1991) specified a variety of methods for needs assessment, such as questionnaires, interviews, tests, case studies, and authentic data collection. Adopting one of the methods depends mainly on the researcher's intentions and circumstances. The current work is based on the questionnaire method in the analysis of the students' needs. The advantage of this method is that it can collect huge data in a short time; it requires less effort in comparison to the tests or interviews. (Jordan, 1997).

3. Methodology
3.1. Participants

Our sample includes doctoral students at the institute of INATAA for the years 2019-2021. The total number of the students is 21; however, we have kept only those who have received the target ESP course in Master one. The number of the participants in this study is 12. Ten subject teachers were also involved. The teachers teach different subject matters in relation to the students' field.

3.2. Method

This research used the descriptive qualitative method of data collection. As the study aims at analyzing Master 1 students' needs and, accordingly, ameliorate the target ESP course. Two questionnaires were administered: one for doctoral students and one for subject teachers who may enlighten us with some useful suggestions for the amelioration of the course. The design of the questionnaires has taken Hutchinson and Walters' view of types of needs analysis (1987), through the consideration of the subjects' necessities, lacks, and wants.

The doctoral students' questionnaire involved eighteen items grouped into six sections to gather data on the students' experience with their past ESP course and their current experience with the English language. The first section involves four questions to gather general information on the students: whether they practice English outside the university and how, whether they make efforts to improve this language, and the teachers' recommendations of using it. The second section includes six questions that investigate the students' experience with the past ESP course: whether or not they attended it, their

attitudes towards the course and reflecting their needs, and their attitudes towards the course and developing the different language skills, the time allocated of the course; and their attitudes towards English in general. The third section involves one question to investigate the students' language proficiency in the different skills. The fourth section encompassed two items that evaluate the relative importance of language skills for the subjects, and the need for these skills in their doctoral career. The fifth section involved four items that deal with the candidates' past and current experience with English for scientific research and the problems encountered: reading and writing scientific papers, problems encountered, participating in international seminars, and problems encountered. The sixth section was dedicated to suggestions for the course amelioration from the perspective of these students who had the same ESP instruction and who are currently engaged in scientific research.

The teachers' questionnaire involved thirteen items grouped into three sections to evaluate the usefulness of the target ESP course and receive insightful suggestions for its amelioration. The first section included seven items that investigate the integration of English in the curriculum; for example, the number of English courses from Licence until Master 2; beliefs of integrating English in the curriculum; whether ESP is imposed by higher authorities; teachers' awareness of the concept of ESP; and ESP course design for the three different levels (Licence, Master 1, Master2). The second section includes five items that assess the teachers' beliefs about the students' needs of an ESP course; for example, the students' needs in relation to their specialty, the skills that should be focused on, the time allocation; the selection of the content that goes with the students interests, as well as the type of activities that would motivate the students to learn. The third section is an open question requesting the teachers to add any suggestions for the amelioration of the current ESP course.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Findings of the Doctoral Students' Questionnaire

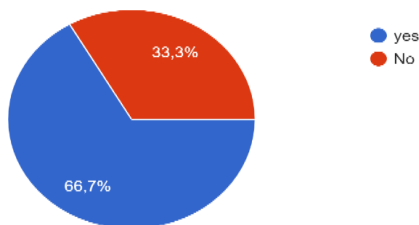### Item 1: Do you practice English outside the university?

Figure 1. Practicing English Outside the University

This item investigates the use of English outside the university. The findings show that the majority of the subjects (66.7%) do practice English.

When asked "how", half of the sample (50%) admitted that they practice it through reading articles; other answers include: private schools (16%), watching TV (16%), surfing on the net (8%), and using mobile applications (25%). In the third item, most of the participants (83.3%) confirmed that they make efforts to improve their English. Findings to the last question *'do your subject teachers recommend to read in English'* show that the majority of the answers (83.3%) were positive. The results of this section do confirm the importance of English in the doctoral level. It is required in reading or writing papers, in participating in seminars or workshops, etc,. These findings would encourage Master 1 students to improve their language for the important role it plays in future studies.

In order to investigate the subjects' past experience with the target ESP course, they were first asked whether they attended the course; the majority of the participants answered positively. The findings to the next item show that half of the sample (50%) do show a positive attitude towards this course. One would assume that the other half of the sample may have other needs which will be investigated later in the section.

To what extent did the English courses satisfy your needs in your field of study?
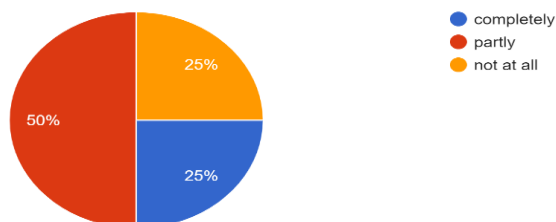12 réponses

- completely
- partly
- not at all

Figure 2. The Extent of ESP Course in Satisfying the Students' Needs

When questioned about their attitudes towards the course, most of the answers show a positive attitude ranging from partly satisfied (50%) to completely satisfied (25%). This confirms that the course answers the requirement of Master 1 students and, hence, satisfies their needs.

Did the teaching method used by your teacher help you to acquire the necessary level of:
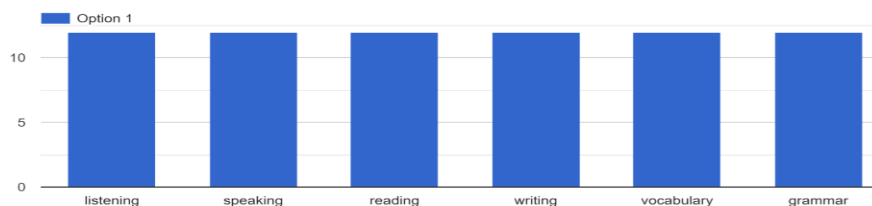
Figure 3. The Skills the Teacher's Method Develops in ESP Course

The question investigates which skill (s) the teacher's method in the previous ESP course develops the most. All the students' answers opted for all the skills equally: reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary and grammar. These answers show that the target ESP course carefully considers the practice of the four skills in addition to vocabulary and grammar.

When the participants were asked to judge whether the time allocated in the previous ESP course was sufficient, almost all the answers were negative (83.3%), indicating the lack of time dedicated for the course in order to satisfy their needs and develop their proficiency. These findings, hence, call upon a reconsideration of the time allocation of ESP course for improving learning outcomes.

When asking the students about their attitudes towards learning English in general, the majority of the subjects (50% of the sample) show a positive attitude, indicating that it is important in their studies

Describe your language proficiency from very weak proficiency (1) to very proficient (5)
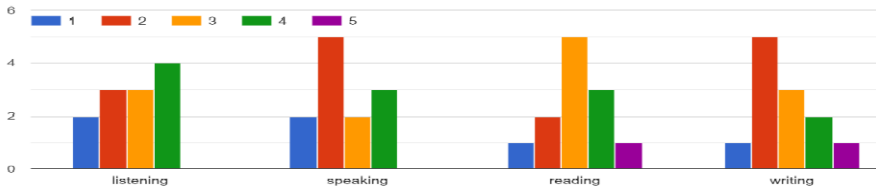

Figure 4. Students' Proficiency in the Different Language Skills

Regarding the students' proficiency, the findings show that the majority of the participants (25%) have high listening proficiency; weak speaking and writing proficiency (41.66%), and average reading proficiency (41.66%). In order words, the findings indicate that their proficiency ranges from average to high in receptive skills (reading and listening), yet it is weak in productive skills (writing and speaking). The students' perception of their proficiency in productive skills reveals that they face difficulties when it comes to writing or speaking in English. These findings highlight the importance of the consideration of these skills in the target ESP course.

In order to investigate the relative importance of the different language skills for doctoral students and the need of these skills in their research career, the participants were first asked to select which skill they view most important for them in doctoral studies. The findings to this item are displayed in the following diagram:

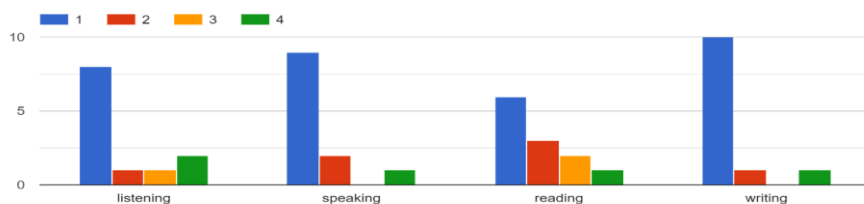Indicate the relative importance of each skill to you (1 = most to 4 = least)

Figure 5. The Importance of Language Skills according to the Students

The findings prove that all of the subjects identified the four skills but in varying degrees. For example, writing was viewed most important by 83.33%; speaking by 75%, listening by (66.66%), and reading by (50%). The participants were, then, asked to rank these skills according to their current needs. The findings are displayed in the following diagram:

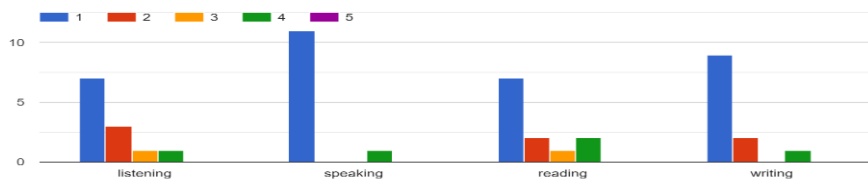Rank the language skills you need the most in the future (from 1: very important to 5 least important)

Figure 6. Language Skills Needed for the Students

Answers to this question confirm those of the previous one: speaking was ranked the first by 91.66% of the participants, writing was ranked the second by (75%), listening and reading were ranked the third (58.33%). These answers add evidence of the importance of writing and speaking when engaging in scientific research.

The fifth section investigates the participants' past and current experience with English for scientific research and the problems encountered. The subjects were first asked whether they have read papers in English. Answers to this question are displayed in the following figure:

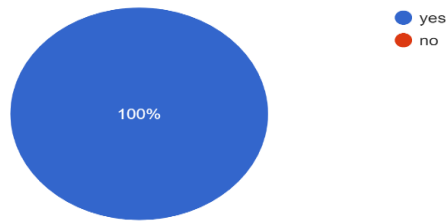Have you read any paper in English before?
12 réponses

- yes
- no

100%

Figure 7. Students' Experience with Papers Written in English

Findings to this item demonstrate that all the participants answered positively, which shows that reading in English is inevitable when enrolled in doctoral studies. When asked about the problems encountered, the common problems raised are vocabulary and comprehension. These findings would, hence, recommend intensive reading activities for the target ESP course to develop proficiency and get over comprehension as well as vocabulary deficiencies. The next question investigates whether the participants have written papers in English. Answers to this question are displayed in the following figure:

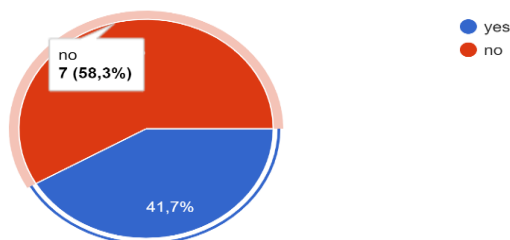Have you produced anything in English (e.g. seminars) before?
12 réponses

- yes
- no

no
7 (58,3%)

41,7%

Figure 8. Students' Experience with Writing Papers in English

The findings of this question show that many participants (41.7%) answered positively while the majority 58.3% provided a negative answer. We would attribute the act of not writing in English in the doctorate to the students' lack of proficiency. These students may feel, one day, the need to write in English to gain international recognition. A similar question was asked to investigate whether the candidates have participated in any scientific event in English. More than half of the sample (58.3%) answered positively. Concerning the enquiry about the problems encountered, the most common ones are related to language like speaking, writing, vocabulary and pronunciation. These findings confirm that lack of

proficiency will lead to facing many problems when being engaged in scientific activities in English. These results recommend intensifying the practice on these skills to develop proficiency and get over these problems.

A final question asked the participants about what would be added to the course to ameliorate it and satisfy the students' needs. The following suggestions were offered: putting focus on pronunciation; speaking with native speakers; discussing/ analyzing scientific articles; teaching the subject matters in English instead of French; Increasing the time devoted for English; Creating a club at the institute for the practice of English. The suggestions related to the course will be considered for its amelioration.

4.2. Findings of the Teachers' Questionnaire

'How many English courses are there in the program of nutritional studies and food science?'

The findings of this question show that English is integrated once in the Licence, and once (Food Quality Management specialty in Master 1; and Food Technologies, Human Nutrition specialty in Master 2) or twice (e.g. Food biotechnology) in Master.

'Why did you include English in your program in Master 1/Master 2/L3?'

The teachers' answers to this question stress the importance of this language in science in general and scientific research in particular. According to the teachers' answers, English is also used in scientific events where the students will be engaged in in the doctorate like seminars and conferences and article writing.

'How do you think will ESP help in achieving this program?'

The findings of this question reflect the teachers' beliefs that English will help in the comprehension of scientific productions, like articles, and in developing the skills required in scientific research like speaking, writing, reading and listening. These findings are similar to those of the students' questionnairs where the role of English in scientific research was claimed to be of paramount importance.

'Have you had any curriculum for teaching ESP course from the higher authorities (i.e. the ministry)?'

According to the teachers' answers, ESP course is designed at the level of the institute and it is a total responsibility of the teacher of English to choose the content and the teaching activities. This might be problematic as teachers of English may not underline clear objectives, content and methodology that go with the learners' needs, which will affect the effectiveness of the ESP course as indicated by Hutchinson and Waters (1987).

'What do you think your students need from English in relation to their program?'

For the sake of ameliorating the course to satisfy the students' needs, the teachers were asked what should be emphasized in the course of ESP to help the students in their training. Most of the answers stress the role of technical vocabulary as it aids in comprehension; the problem that most of doctorate candidates raise when dealing with scientific articles.

This issue can be dealt with through dealing with a number of scientific articles in relation to the discipline, analyzing the keywords, an translating them.

'What skill should be emphasized?'

The findings of this question show that all the skills were identified by all the teachers equally: listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. These answers go hand in hand with the previous questionnaire, in that all the skills should be considered in the course to enhance them.

'Do you think the time allocated for learning English is sufficient for achieving the students' needs?'

With regard to this question, most of the teachers (66.7%) believe that the time is not sufficient for the English course. Neither the teachers, nor the doctorate students agree on the sufficiency of the time for satisfying Master 1 students' needs. These results call upon the reconsideration of the time by higher authorities, for example increasing the time to four hours per week for ESP course (66 hours per year instead).

'What kind of texts that go with the learners' interests?'

The teachers were asked about the type of documents for a better teaching of ESP. They have proposed teaching through scientific texts and articles in relation to food science. The same suggestion was offered by doctoral students. This indicates that articles and scientific texts are more likely to bring interest and get the students more involved in the classroom during the course.

In the next question, the teachers were asked to choose between the activities they feel more useful to the students. All the proposed activities were considered helpful: texts, articles, videos, grammar lessons, translation of scientific words, and making presentations. These activities will, hence, be reconsidered in the target course.

The teachers were invited to provide more suggestions for the amelioration of the course. One interesting proposition is making oral presentations of topics of interest in relation to the specialty where the students will search for information, present it in front of their classmates and raise debate. Another suggestion is making Vivas in English to encourage the use of this language and its learning.

4.3. Interpretation of the findings

Our doctoral students show a positive attitude towards the target ESP course, which indicates that it may satisfy Master 1 students needs and would, hence, be useful in their doctoral career. Despite this, the majority of the subjects show a weak proficiency in the productive skills, i.e. speaking and writing, (41,66%). Similarly, when asked to rank the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), the same productive skills were ranked the first by the majority of the subjects, representing 91.66% and 75% of the answers, respectively. These skills seem to play a vital role in the PhD as they are very practiced when intending to publish research works internationally. Therefore, the study calls upon a reconsideration of these skills in the target course. When

questioning about the problems encountered in the PhD, the very skills (writing and speaking) were also identified by the majority of the subjects in addition to other language problems like vocabulary, comprehension as well as pronunciation. These problems do affect the students' proficiency when engaging in scientific language practices. The number of suggestions offered by the subjects go hand in hand with the results obtained; in other words, pronunciation, speaking, reading are identified among these suggestions. These findings would, hence, recommend intensifying the practice on these skills to increase the students' proficiency and get over these problems.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, NA and ESP curriculum development for students of scientific and technical disciplines is still in its infancy in Algeria with very limited research works published on the area. As a result of the rapid shift to English in Algerian universities these recent years, the present research work has come to fill in some of the gaps in relation to NA and ESP course design through an investigation of Master 1 students' needs from the perspective of doctoral students and subject teachers at the institute of INATAA, university of Frères Mentouri Constantine 1. NA results have guided us in the evaluation of the current ESP course, and accordingly, its amelioration. After the consideration of the above interpretation , some insightful recommendations are offered:

● Extending the time for ESP instruction to allow for more practice of the different language skills.

● Making group presentations based on reading and analysis of scientific articles in the field and raising debate. This will allow for the acquisition of much technical vocabulary, practice all the language skills and bring interest to the classroom.

● Center on the teaching of pronunciation, through listening to authentic videos in the field and teachers' interference to correct the students' spelling while reading or while making oral presentations.

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