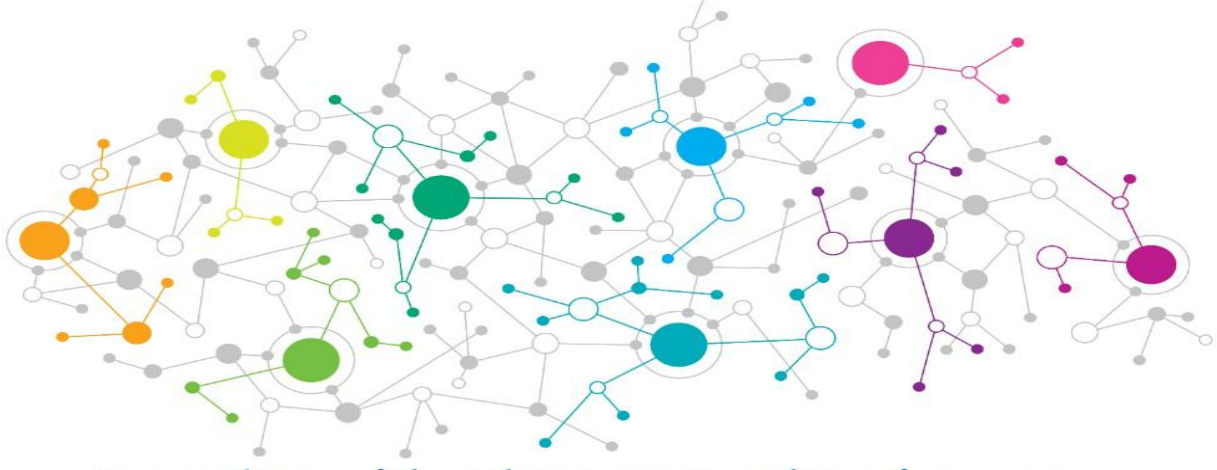




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Faculte des Lettres et Sciences Humaine

***INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGIES,  
EDUCATION ET COMMUNICATION  
I-TEC***



Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education,  
Research, and Innovation:

“Empowering Learners & Unlocking Their Full Potential”

|| April 08-09, 2025 || Oujda, Morocco ||

**Edited by**

**Isam Mrah**

**Edition:**

**Faculté Des Lettres et Sciences Humaines Université Mohammed  
Premier-Oujda**

**2025**

**ISSN : 2737-8195**

**ICERI 2025 Proceedings**

***Empowering Learners & Unlocking Their Potential***

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*Mohammed I University*

*Faculty of Letters & Human Sciences, Oujda, 2025*

**A Needs Analysis of Business English Students' Motivations and Skills:  
The Case of Moroccan Master Students at Abdelmalek Essaadi University**

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**Abstract**

This study investigates learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and their perceptions of language skills within an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) framework. A 30-item Likert-scale questionnaire was administered to 110 Master's students enrolled in Business English programs at the Faculty of Economics in Tangier and Tetouan. The findings indicate that learners are primarily driven by intrinsic motivation, and that speaking and listening are perceived as the most important language skills. The study outlines important implications, particularly regarding the integration of learners' language skill needs and motivation.

*Keywords:* needs analysis, business English, L2 motivation, language skills, curriculum design

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**Introduction**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has emerged as a fundamental pillar in the psycholinguistic approach of adult learning. Since the second half of the twentieth century, theories of learner-

centeredness have been regarded as an area worth investigating to improve the teaching-learning process in higher education (e.g. Knowles, 1980; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Paltridge & Starfield, 2013; Ushioda, 2020). Hence, the growing literature on gaining insights into the best educational practices of adult learning sharpens the need to integrate ESP as an important approach in higher education. The rationale for this study stems from two main factors. First, the pedagogical reform of Moroccan higher education calls for integrating English in technical and scientific institutions of higher education, which are considered as fertile ground to use ESP. Second, there is a constant need to develop new learning approaches that align with adult learning and the andragogical model in higher education.

The present paper aims at highlighting the impact of Needs Analysis (NA), as the central aspect of ESP, on learners' perception of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Moreover, it seeks to investigate the extrinsic and intrinsic motivations underlying students' goals. The paper is composed of five sections. It starts with the theoretical considerations of the ESP approach, particularly the borderline between ESP and EGP and the major dimensions surrounding the needs analysis environment. The second section highlights the adopted methodology of the study. Results and discussion are described in the third section. Additionally, the implications and limitations of the study are discussed in the last two sections.

## **1. Literature Review**

ESP has emerged to serve the needs of adult learners to make the learning outcome more purposeful. That is to say, college learners choose different academic disciplines, which require careful planning of the type of English that serve their envisaged goals. Paltridge and Starfield (2013) argue that the major goal of ESP is to enable learners use English in a particular domain. This goal-oriented dimension brings to the fore fundamental ideas of course design, assessment and teaching methods.

However, it is crucial to realize the differences existing between ESP and EGP before delving into what shapes ESP. While EGP places a great emphasis on the general linguistic knowledge, ESP focuses on the specific needs of the discipline being studied. In this regards, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) distinguish between target needs and learning needs. While the former refers of what learners need to master at the end of the course, the latter describes what learners need to do to reach the required knowledge and skills. They highlight that the target needs could be analyzed based on three major elements: 'necessities', 'lacks' and 'wants'. 'Necessities' are the requirements of the target situation. 'Lacks' refer to the gap between current knowledge and the

target outcome. ‘Wants’ are the subjective needs of learners or the desired methods, content...that learners wish to get. Furthermore, all the grammar, vocabulary and language aspects of EGP are predetermined in the program unlike ESP that engages actively learners in curriculum design.

Concerning teaching methodology, the starting point of ESP is needs analysis as it brings together the learner needs and learning needs. Both needs are taken into account with the linguistics requirements of the course, and the perceptions of learners of the preferred, say, learning styles, materials, activities and language skills. Basturkmen (2014), for instance, points out that needs analysis is what helps learners stay connected with the future objective.

In light of the growing interest in ESP, Flowerdew (2013) highlights two major trends influencing its future. First, *Technologization* given the central position of IT tools, the development of new online environments such as distance learning. Much emphasis then is oriented toward integrating effective teaching methods, online assessment, classroom management, learner motivation vis-à-vis the virtual world (VW) and so forth. Second, *Transnationalization*, which revolves around the pivotal role of global mobility and the interconnectedness of today’s globalized world. For example, the increase of mobile exchange programs has brought numerous partnerships in higher education institutions, bringing new opportunities of running ESP programs in multicultural environments.

All in all, although ESP has occupied the attention of many researchers and practitioners in the last few decades, constant investigations into the best practices of ESP, especially within the development of new trends in the ELT landscape, remains of paramount importance. Running ESP programs presupposes the availability of many resources, involving in-house<sup>1</sup> materials, human resources and cultural aspects.

## **2. Methodology**

Given the embryonic stage of ESP implementation in Moroccan higher education, this study adopts an exploratory research design to investigate the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of Moroccan MA business students and their perceptions of language skills. The choice of this design allows for gathering information on phenomena that are not well-developed.

### *2.1. Setting and participants*

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<sup>1</sup> The availability of teaching resources designed for a specific course and particular group of learners

This study was conducted at the Faculty of Economics in Tangier and Tetouan, Abdelmalek Essaadi University. Interestingly, both Faculties offer a variety of programs following the latest reform of Moroccan higher education, which aims at satisfying the needs of the socio-economic characteristics of the region.

The participants consisted of 110 Master's students enrolled in two programs: *Artificial Intelligence in Economics* and *Entrepreneurship and E-Commerce*. These students were selected given the importance of business English in their MA program, which made it a fertile ground for an ESP study. 60% of the participants were females and 40% were males, with a level of proficiency ranging from B1 to B2.

### *2.2.Procedure*

For the sake of gathering solid data on students' motivations and perceptions of the four language skills, a five-point Likert scale questionnaire was used as the major data collection instrument. The questionnaire consisted of structured items rated on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Items were categorized into internal and external motivation factors and the perceived relevance of Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening skills.

Before embarking on the final distribution of the questionnaire, the latter underwent a pilot study with a smaller number of students (10) to ensure clarity, reliability, and relevance of the items. In this respect, minor adjustments were made particularly for language clarity. The final version was then distributed in printed form during scheduled class hours to ensure high engagement. It is worth mentioning that data collection took place over a period of two weeks. All questionnaires were collected and checked for completeness before being entered into SPSS<sup>2</sup> for analysis.

### *2.3.Data analysis*

The data analysis process involved both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to get insights into the underlying patterns of students' motivation and perception of the four language skills. The descriptive statistics part, it summarized the frequencies and percentages of students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of ESP, and the overall trends in their preferences of the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. The inferential statistics part, specifically the Chi-square test, was applied to examine associations between gender and

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<sup>2</sup> A popular software to gather data for both descriptive and inferential statistics. It stands for Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

motivation, and gender and language skills. The Chi-square test was chosen because of its efficiency for analyzing relationships between gender, as a nominal variable, and the language skills, as ordinal variables.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Concerning the motivational dimension, it turned out that learners had direct focus on intrinsic motivation. The top-rated motivation, for instance, is “To boost my knowledge in various areas (17.3%)”, which indicates that learners are driven by the desire for intellectual growth and cross-disciplinary access through English (see table 1). Another important practical goal is “To do academic research (11.1%)”, which indicates that learners see the language as a tool to achieve practical and academic benefits.

Additionally, there are some other important reasons that lie in some cultural and social goals. For example, “to learn international languages (12.8%” reflects a clear tendency to interact and connect with speakers of the target language and their culture. Similarly, another integrative motivation is to “learn international languages (14.0%)” implies learners’ interest in investing in global communication and cultural capital.

**Table 1:**  
*Motivations vs-à-vis Learning English*

		Percentage	Valid Percentage	Accumulated Percentage
Valid	To boost my knowledge in various areas (e.g. science, business...)	17,3	17,3	17,3
	To do academic research	11,1	11,1	28,4
	To learn international languages	14,0	14,0	42,4
	To enhance my creativity	7,3	7,3	49,8
	To understand and experience new cultures/perspectives	12,8	12,8	62,6
	To have a well-paid job	6,4	6,4	69,0
	To impress others	1,4	1,4	70,4
	To have working opportunities abroad	12,1	12,1	82,5
	To have a good social status	7,1	7,1	89,6
	To have chances of getting promoted quickly in my career	10,4	10,4	100,0
	Total	100,0	100,0	

Concerning the correlation between gender and motivation, the results revealed that the difference is not significant 0.6 (table 2). Therefore, the gender dimension is not an important indicator of the motivations that males and females prefer.

**Table 2:***Gender & Motivation*

	Chi-Square Tests		
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6,900 <sup>a</sup>	9	,648
Likelihood Ratio	7,099	9	,627
Linear-by-Linear Association	2,779	1	,095
N of Valid Cases	422		

a. 2 cells (10,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2,55.

Concerning the perception of the four language skills, it was revealed that productive skills overscored receptive ones. Overall, 81% of respondents consider productive skills either “important” or “extremely important” (table3). The present result suggests that learners are performance-oriented and are aware of the central position of these skills, especially speaking skills. The students are precisely in favor of delivering effective presentations, communicate persuasively in meeting and respond professionally via emails.

Only four respondents (0.4%) viewed productive skills as “not important at all”. This low percentage confirms the universal shift in learner awareness that sees language education as a tool for active participation instead of being a passive knowledge.

Zaidoune and Chroqui’ (2020) study showed similar results in terms of prioritizing speaking skills as the most important ones over the other macro-skills. It is worth mentioning that the study was conducted in a similar context (Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences-Hassan I University). Also, Akharjjam’s (2019) study on the needs analysis of learners at Mohammadia School of Engineers in Rabat concluded that speaking has received the highest percentages given students’ motivations to participate actively in debates and discussions of their specialty.

**Table 3:***Perception of the productive skills*

		Productive skills			
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valide	Extremely important	431	39,2	39,3	39,3
	Important	492	44,7	44,8	84,1
	Neutral	137	12,5	12,5	96,5
	Slightly important	34	3,1	3,1	99,6
	Not important at all	4	,4	,4	100,0
	Total	1098	99,8	100,0	
Manquant	Système	2	,2		
Total		1100	100,0		

Compared to productive skills, receptive skills were less emphasized among the respondents (28.6; see table 4). However, the response distribution still reveals a favorable view toward receptive skills, especially listening skills. This reflects an awareness of the importance of these skills in acquiring the envisaged language knowledge effectively. It also implies that learners like listening-based content to sharpen their linguistic repertoire.

Interestingly, many students have shown a “Neutral” perspective which suggests a need for more professional awareness about the role of receptive in their academic and professional profile. As a result, workshops and training sessions can help bridge the knowledge gap and shift neutral attitudes toward greater appreciation of these fundamental skills. Akhajjam (2020) in this vein points out that one of the major issues that many ESP courses face in Morocco is the lack of training and the appropriate resources to provide high-quality courses.



**Table 4:**

*Perception of the receptive skills*

		<b>Receptive skills</b>			
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Extremely important	315	<b>28,6</b>	28,6	28,6
	Important	497	45,2	45,2	73,8
	Neutral	219	19,9	19,9	93,7
	Slightly important	56	5,1	5,1	98,8
	Not important at all	13	1,2	1,2	100,0
	Total	1100	100,0	100,0	

However, it turned out that the difference between males and females in perceiving these language skills is statistically significant 0.001 (see table 5). In other words, this indicates that there is a statistically significant association between gender and perceptions of language skills. This result calls for the need to conduct a qualitative study to go deeply into what shapes these differences between males and females. Additionally, the gender aspect is another crucial dimension in the analysis of ESP contexts. This might include differences in the topics and discussions that are included in the program, and/or analyzing more deeply some common points that are perceived by both males and females with the same degree of interest.

**Table 5:**

*Gender vis-à-vis perception of language skills*

<b>Chi-Square Tests</b>			
	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18,152 <sup>a</sup>	4	<b>,001</b>
Likelihood Ratio	18,258	4	,001
Linear-by-Linear Association	,191	1	,662
N of Valid Cases	2198		

a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7,99.

#### **4. Implications**

The findings of this study provide a fertile ground to highlight a number of implications. First, intrinsic motivations outweighing extrinsic ones suggest that the internal aspects of learners must be deeply taken into account when teaching business English. This goes hand in hand with Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, which stresses that learners perform better when driven by internal goals, such as professional development and communicative competence. Professors should therefore focus on activities that are connected with learners' objectives, especially those underlying their full potential to benefit from the ESP course.

Second, the preference of speaking and listening over reading and writing reflects an awareness of the central position of the oral skills in today's changing market. In the same vein, Zaidoune and Chroqui (2020) point out that speaking skills were prioritized among learners over other skills. Accordingly, the status quo presupposes a syllabus prioritizing auditory materials, incorporating methods such as Project-based learning (TBL) and Communicative language teaching (CLT). In Li's (2014) study, which investigated the preferred ways of boosting the students' business English, it was summarized that practical English such as internship is given an immense priority. These methods provide authentic learning environments where learners receive and produce language in real-work contexts.

Third, the dominance of auditory learning styles implies that learners would be more active in activities involving dialogues, discussions, and debates than those of silent mode such as reading. However, the diversity of learning styles should not be completely overlooked given that students display different styles and differences.

Last, the results also obtained revealed that the difference between males and females in their perception of language skills is significant. Consequently, allowing tasks that promote gender differences may enhance the experience of learners.

#### **5. Limitations of the Study**

One of the major limitations of the study is the lack of using multiple resources of data analysis. Triangulation allows an in-depth of interpreting the results and gathering evidence from various resources. Added to this is the challenge of gathering data from a subjective resource, which might be affected by response bias, self-perception inaccuracies, or social desirability effects (Dörnyei, 2007). Objective performance, however, may fail in gathering subtle details of the data given the personal choices underlying students' choices. Thus, bringing both subjective and objective measurements may lead to a good understanding of the needs analysis process.

Another significant limitation lies the potential of generalizing the findings. That is to say, variables like job market requirements and cultural background may affect how learners perceive their needs. The universality of ESP then is restricted based on many contextual variables.

## **Conclusion**

The dynamic nature of ESP necessitates a constant effort to bridge the gap between pedagogical practices and the evolving needs of learners. This gap requires a careful analysis of students' favored learning styles, materials, techniques and the specific needs of the target objective, or what Hutchinson and Waters (1987) call Target Situation Analysis (TSA). This paper focuses specifically on the subjective side, highlighting students' motivations and their perception of the four language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. The results obtained showed that intrinsic motivation is the driven force behind students' objectives, and speaking skills are perceived as the most important among the remaining macro-skills of the English language.

However, it is crucial to point out that the success of any ESP course is subject to the availability of many logistical and human resources such as digital tools, in-house materials and continuous professional development of both professors and learners. Each context then represents a unique ground of many potentials and challenges concomitantly.

A pivotal concept in this endeavor Kumaravadivelu's (2006) principle of particularity, which stresses the importance of designing teaching strategies that are grounded in the socio-cultural, institutional, and learner-specific contexts in which ESP instruction takes place. In contrast to eclecticism or one-single method, the pedagogy of particularity calls for a locally sensitive and contextually relevant approach that recognizes the heterogeneity of ESP settings, whether in business, medicine, engineering or other professional domains.

As a result, the current and future challenge of ESP lies in its capacity to remain responsive to learner needs, taking into account the evolving tools of technology and the emergence of new distance learning environments. In other words, only through such an integrated and reflexive approach can ESP teaching maintain its relevance and efficacy in a rapidly changing global and professional landscape.

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