ENGLISH TEACHING SURVEY AMONG BIOLOGY STUDENTS: FACULTY OF SCIENCE, DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY DJILLALI LIABES UNIVERSITY

Meghit Boumediene Khaled
Faculty of Biotechnology and Biomolecular Sciences
University Putra Malaysia (UPM)
khaledmb@khaledmb.upm.edu.my

Mohamed Yamine Boulenouar
Faculty of Letters And Human Sciences
Department of Foreign Languages - English Section
University Djillali Liabes of Sidi-Bel-Abbes, Algeria
myBoulenouar@univ-sba.dz

ABSTRACT

For geopolitical and economic reasons, English has become the universal language of science and technology, a phenomenon which has been called "linguistic imperialism". However, the scientific and economic "rebirth" of Europe after World War II led to a growing claim for the introduction of a scientific multilingualism that would better fulfill the challenges faced by the European. The study was carried out in the Department of Biology of Djillali Liabes University of Sidi-Bel-Abbes during the academic year 2011-2012. The studied sample was composed of 456 biology students of different levels and belong to classical and LMD systems and 3 teachers. The current study allowed us to know the condition in which English is taught in Biology Department of Djillali Liabes University. The lack of ESP trained teachers and syllabus. English teaching does not reply the students’ needs and does not improve their level. English should be highly influential in Algeria's language educational policies and practices by introducing its learning since primary school.

Field of Research:  ESP, teaching, biology.

1. Introduction

The English language enjoys a great importance not just as an international but as a world language. It is spoken now by more than 508 million people ranking in the second place as far as the number of its speakers. No one can consider himself as part of this globalization if he does not master two things: English and computing. In most fields, almost every paper is published in English, and all conferences use English. The advantages of a single language are self-evident.

The situation chosen is English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the Department of Biology of Djillali Liabes University of Sidi-Bel-Abbes. Three elements will be described; English as a taught module, the teachers’ profiles and methods used. Finally, the learners; their needs and the difficulties they are facing during the learning process.

2. Education System in Algeria

Since the conception of the Ministry of Education in 1963 many reforms occurred. The first education reform was passed in 1971 introduced the nine-year basic education program. Further reforms in 1976 extended the period of compulsory education from 6 years to 10 years. In addition, education at every level is provided free to all and considered being the exclusive domain of the state. In 2004 the government passed an executive decree that amended the 1976 reforms and
explicitly allowed for the establishment of private institutions of education under well-defined regulations.

French is the only foreign language taught at the primary school. Students start learning French a first foreign language from the third year of primary education where English is not taught at all till the first year of Basic Education. It is taught for four years. New syllabus has been designed and new textbooks have been published. The new approach introduced is "Competency-Based Approach".

English is a compulsory subject in some Asian countries such as: Singapore and Philippines. In Malaysia, English has been used as a medium of instruction for teaching mathematics and science at primary levels in since 2003 the language. The same policy was also implemented by India and Pakistan who use English as an official language and introduce it to the children.

3. Study design

The study was carried out in the Department of Biology of Djillali Liabes University of Sidi-Bel-Abbes during the academic year 2011-2012. The studied sample was composed of 456 biology students of different levels and belong to classical and LMD systems and 3 teachers.

The study was basically designed as a survey using a questionnaire as a mean of data collection. It should be noticed that the aim of this survey was to identify the students’ English background, their needs and difficulties. In order to achieve these objectives we conducted a case-study which usually refers to a fairly intensive examination of a single unit such as a person, a small group of people, or a single company. Furthermore, it can enable the researcher to explore, unravel and understand problems, issues and relationships. It cannot, however, allow the researcher to generalize, that is, to argue that from one case-study the results, findings or theory developed apply to other similar case-studies.

The case-study method has five steps:

- State the objectives. What is the unit or study and what characteristics and process will direct the investigation?
- Design the approach. How will the unit be selected? What sources of data are available? What data collection method is used?
- Collect the data.
- Organize the information to form a coherent, well-integrated reconstruction of unit of study.
- Report the result and discuss their significance.

4. The studied population

The whole studied population was composed of 456 students (86 males and 370 females) of the Biology Department randomly selected.

Three teachers of the same department participated in the study.

5. Tools Analysis

Three methods were used:

- questionnaires;
- semi-structured interviews;
- observation of the courses.
The questionnaires were addressed to both students and teachers. The semi-structured interview was performed with the head of Biology Department on the purpose to add more useful information. Finally, the observation of the English session was beneficial since it allowed us to witness the progress of sessions.

6. Data Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Students’ Questionnaire

Three methods were used:

Table 3.1 Characteristics of the studied population (n=456)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>±SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to English</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students have been studying English for 7.9±1.85 years with a minimum period of 5 years (2 years at the middle school and 3 years at the high school) and maximum of 14 years (2 years or more at the middle school, 3 years or more at the high school and the rest during the university period).

The majority of the students qualify their level as average (≈60%) or poor (≈30%). The rest is either good or too bad. This portion needs more self-confidence and self-esteem to improve their English level since we observed that the whole studied students want to improve their English level.

According to the collected answers the majority of the students think that they can improve their level through private schools. Some of them believe that they can achieve this objective using internet training courses. Other group managed to go so far as to get a new “Bac” in order to register at the department of English. The rest they do not have a fix idea.

Furthermore, 70% of the students stated that they were confronted to situations where they were obliged to use English, such as:

- participating and speaking during English sessions;
- reading articles in English;
- making researches on the net;
- writing the dissertation in English;
- watching documentaries or movies on TV;
- traveling to Anglo-Saxon countries;
- speaking to foreign people.

It should be mentioned that the two thirds of the students have never traveled to an Anglo-Saxon country. However, the rest did. Not mastering a language can constitute a real handicap for students who want to visit or continue their studies in the English-speaking or Anglo-Saxon countries. The rest answered negatively.

About 75% of the students do rarely their research on the Net in English. Only 15% use English as a language of research of data. The rest never do. 70% of our students find that results obtained after making a search on the Net are less interesting. This brings to say that even some of the students who try to use English as a language of research on the Net, they do not do it appropriately. The rest (33%), who stated the opposite, are indeed satisfied. According to their curriculum, 80% of the
students answered that English is Useful. 10% said that is Essential. However 3% believe that English is useless.

Concerning language skills, speaking is the most important skill for 42% of our students, followed by listening (≈35%) then reading (20%). However, only 5% believe that writing is not more important than the other skills. The most difficult skill for the majority (≈80%) of the investigated students was speaking. The other skills had the same ratio. These results showed the lack of teaching speaking among our students.

The majority of the students said that they attend English classes because they are either compulsory or interesting. Few of them said that English classes are pleasant. Some students feel that English classes are boring. 45% of the students are partially satisfied about the English classes. 40% are totally dissatisfied, and the rest are pleased.

For biology students, focus on Scientific English is more essential than any other feature. Unfortunately, 30% agree that their tutor teach them literary English. 48%, however, think that the English taught is scientific. The rest don’t know or confused.

More than the two thirds of the students stated that one hour and half a week is not enough for graduate and postgraduate students to learn and to study English. Furthermore, they suggested considering English module as an annual one not biannual.

6.2 Teachers’ Questionnaire

Through the analysis of the questionnaire we found that:

- 100% of the teachers have a “licence” degree, no one has Master or Doctorate;
- 2/3 (66%) don’t have an ESP training;
- 100% don’t have English syllabus to follow;
- 100% believe that 1h30 a week (English module) is not enough;
- 100% request well equipped laboratories, videos, internet, etc.

According to our results, 66% of the teachers are teaching English module in the department for more than 5 years. The teaching staff seems to be inexperienced. All teachers are part-time teachers at Biology department. This status is generally demotivating teachers than full-time ones. Furthermore 66% have no knowledge about biology field. We found that the majority of the English teachers in the Biology department (2/3) do not have an ESP training which. Only one teacher is trained in ESP.

Concerning the time allocated to English module, teachers share the same point of view as students. One hour and half is not sufficient. Furthermore, two thirds of interviewed teachers do not use audio-visual instruments to facilitate leaning and to make it more interesting.

The whole asked teachers use either French or Arabic to explain or to translate some words of ideas.

Speaking is the most difficult task for their students who can understand easily or read. The reason for what their evaluation could not be done other than the written form.

Two thirds of the investigated teachers don’t collaborate with subject specialists from the department.

All teachers agree that the English module should be attributed a high coefficient more time allocated and taught annually. As a result, student will be more aware, motivated and make more
efforts. A unified syllabus is the other suggested solution dealing with the students’ needs. The use of audio-visual materials plays an important role in improving the teaching quality.

7. Courses’ assessment

Courses are given in small classes or in amphitheaters depending on the class size. For lectures given in amphitheaters it was difficult for the teachers to manage. Students are either, introverted, anxious, and passive or active and motivated.

8. Conclusion

The current study allowed us to know the condition in which English is taught in Biology Department of Djillali Liabes University. The lack of ESP trained teachers and syllabus. English teaching does not reply the students’ needs and does not improve their level.

It should be reminded that in the process of learning, there are numerous things that play a significant role towards making it a smooth, pleasurable and constructive process. First of all, the teachers are those who set the tone for a great learning environment. However, a lot depends on the way the learners face the lessons and overall, learning. To begin with, a learner must seriously take into consideration that learning is a great commitment. Most of the times, it requires hard work in order for it to be a successful procedure. Secondly, learners must understand what kind of learner they are: are they visual, aural, and kinesthetic? This can be encouraged by the teachers. Not everyone learns in the same way.

Learning will become much easier and naturally, more pleasant for them. Plus, they will help their teachers enormously, as the latter will be able to adapt their lessons to their learners’ needs and special traits.

One of the main assumptions of ESP is that teaching materials should enable learners to acquire the variety of language and skills they will need in typical situations they meet in their professional life.

Acknowledgement

This paper is under scholarship of the university.

References


