

Business Professionals' Communicative Needs at El Eulma Business District: an Evidence-Based Verdict

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Abstract

In this paper, it is aimed to identify the linguistic and the communicative needs of the business professional at Dubai business district in El Eulma. For this reason, a hypothesis was formulated to claim that the main reason behind learning English is for business sake and thus social survival is eliminated. Data were gathered via questionnaires and interviews and findings have revealed that there is no significance difference between the two samples means, i.e. business English is as equal in importance as general English and thus the hypothesis was refuted. Suggestions for further research in addition to recommendations about course design components have concluded this paper.

Key Words

English for specific purposes, English for social purposes, English for business, course design.

تعلم اللغة الانجليزية بهدف ادارة الاعمال أو البقاء الاجتماعي : ما
يبحث عنه رجال الاعمال من اجل بلوغ محطة الوصول

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تحديد الاحتياجات اللغوية والتواصلية لرجال الأعمال في منطقة الأعمال بدبي في العلية. لهذا السبب ، تمت صياغة فرضية للدعاء بأن السبب الرئيسي وراء تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية هو من أجل العمل وبالتالي يتم اقضاء البقاء الاجتماعي. تم جمع البيانات من خلال الاستبيانات والمقابلات وأظهرت النتائج أنه لا يوجد فرق دلالة بين الوصيلتين في العينة،

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أي أن اللغة الإنجليزية للأعمال متساوية في الأهمية مثل اللغة الإنجليزية العامة وبالتالي تم دحض الفرضيات. اختتمت هذه الورقة باقتراحات لمزيد من البحث بالإضافة إلى توصيات حول مكونات تصميم المقرر

1. Introduction

Growing as a well-known city of commerce, El Eulma in Algeria has become a town that looks like the Emirates' Dubai –for so its business district is called- as far as the huge commercial dealings are concerned. English for shop owners (businessmen) has become a must. Dealing and negotiating with suppliers, writing emails, participating in international conferences, attending fairs and making bank transactions are all in need of a necessary verbal behaviour, English language. The fact which urged those traders to rush towards learning English for business purposes in language schools. The access to government schools is, by no means, possible simply because traders are private organisms and do not have the right to enrol in public schools for business English belonging to Ministry of Education simply because they are all adults.

1.2. What English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Is

The status of English as an international language which is essential in almost every area of activity is deeply rooted in the history of the world starting at the end of the Second World War which brought with it an “[...] age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale; for various reasons, most notably the economic power of the United States in the post-war world, the role [of international language] fell to English” Hutchinson and Waters (1987,p.6). Another reason of this language expanded importance was the Oil Crisis of the early

1970s which resulted in Western money and knowledge flowing into the oil-rich countries. The language of this knowledge became English.

It is worth mentioning here that the most significant event that made a remarkable turning point is the *linguistics revolution*. In other words, while traditional linguistics put a great emphasis on the language structure, a revolution broke out to focus on the language used as a means of communication not as an end itself. The general effect of all this development was to exert pressure on the language teaching profession to deliver the required goods. Whereas English had previously decided its own destiny, it now became subject to the wishes, needs and demands of people other than language teachers (ibid, p.7). In addition to the demands of a brave new world and a revolution in linguistics, the focus on the learners and their needs became paramount because general English courses no longer met learners' needs and wants.

The case of our study falls within this spectrum, business people at the El- Eulma business district struggle to learn English in order to expand their business beyond the national level. The following section explains thoroughly the problem faced which mainly shapes the research problem.

2. Problem at Issue

Pulling from my own experience as an ESP teacher of El Eulma businessmen for a couple of years in a language school, I noticed that they were struggling to communicate effectively in the target situations and they were very keen to learn “how to speak” method usually found in commercial books. Yet, all their trials were in vein; and this pushed them to join ESP classes. However, what and how to teach was a big question mark because no background was available and a research idea flashed upon my mind.

Furthermore, it sounds sensible that businessmen learn English for business survival and would not be surprising that business English is the main objective to attain. However, business people have come to show interest in English for social survival, that is, they manifested a great interest in learning the language for use in hotels, shopping, restaurants and even when playing billiard. Given these data, the vision became blurry about the exact needs of the research subjects, and thus the situation required a search for fine details to make evidence-based decisions.

2.1. Hypothesis Formulation

Though the number business shops in Dubai district exceed 1000, it was opted for a method that may enable us to limit the number and get the optimal results. It was decided to divide the existing shops into activities and there were about 100 different activities.

We could only select 83 respondents that represented 83 field activity which was drawn from the listing obtained from the National Trade Register Department (NTRD) (Le Centre National de Registre de Commerce, in French). A table of random numbers was used to locate the initial sampling point. Businessmen would join English class in order to learn English for business purposes.

And then the following hypotheses are formulated

$H_0: \mu \text{ Business Purposes} \geq \mu \text{ Social Survival}$

Whereas the alternative hypothesis would go for the claim that English for business reasons may be less in importance than general English.

$H_1: \mu \text{ Business Purposes} < \mu \text{ Social Survival}$

In order to test the hypotheses we are attempting to calculate one tailed t test that compares the two means of one sample.

3. Methodology

The nature of this study is exploratory which entails a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures as far as primary data is concerned. The student-survey questionnaire, a self-developed instrument, was divided into four parts. Whereas the open-ended interview protocol consists of eight questions followed by probes.

3.1. Data Acquisition

The methodology followed in this study consists of data collection via questionnaire and interview. Information about business professionals was obtained from the National Trade Register Department (NTRD) –both software and hard copies-.

3.1.1. The Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire was handed to 83 trade professionals at their shops. It contained 11 questions that targeted the obtaining of information under several sections: contact information, population identity and occupation, education background and proficiency in English, participants' needs of using English, participants' levels in the target situation and the skills they desire to improve the most. (See appendix A).

While touring Dubai business district, we met with the respondents to hand them the questionnaire and explain the purpose. 15 respondents showed readiness to respond on the spot and questionnaires were taken back on the same day, whereas it took more than 4 days for the remaining participants to return them.

3.1.2. Interview Sampling

According to Flick (2008, p.80) for interviews, sampling is oriented to find the right people- those who have made the experience relevant for the study. Sampling in most cases is purposeful; random or formal sampling is rather the exception.

In this study, the sample of participants was selected randomly the same day on which questionnaires were taken back from the subjects. Actually, thirty two (32) participants out of 83 consented, that is, (38.55%). Those who welcomed the participation were asked for business cards in order to arrange an appointment which suits both sides. The researcher, afterwards, sent emails to some participants and rang up others so as to set up a meeting that suits the agenda of the interviewees. In the end, a convenient time was scheduled for all the interviewees.

Although the sample size was quite small, it would, however, provide a sufficient number of cases. The researcher halted interviews once the responses had become quite similar and any additional cases would typically add minimal new information. Interview questions for this research did not substantially differ from those of the questionnaire (see appendix B). The interview protocol was funneled, i.e., the interview started with general and easy-to-answer questions and concluded with narrower and specific ones.

3.2. Research Findings

Data collection procedure in the first part of the research, the cross-sectional survey design was used. The second instrument i.e., the interview was used after the quantitative data were analyzed in order to find explanation for discrepancies found, if any, between what they reported in their survey responses and what was recorded during the interview.

The respondents' answers to the questionnaire survey were analysed manually by using Microsoft Excel 2016 programme. At the first stage of this quantitative analysis, the participants' demographic data i.e., sex, age and year of study, were looked at. In addition to exploring the demographic information, descriptive analysis was carried out to get familiarized with the

prominent characteristics of the respondents' answers to all items in terms of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation, t test and critical t test.

3.2.1. Questionnaire Findings

Table 1. Rate of Importance of TS for Business Purposes

TARGET SITUATION Business Purposes (Variable1)	Rate of importance
	Co
Talking to people at international fairs	15
Participating in business meetings	10
Negotiating/ haggling over the price with suppliers or partners	67
Speaking on the phone to discuss business matters	30
Running business transactions at the bank	15
Understanding written emails, faxes or invoices	22
Mean μ	26.5

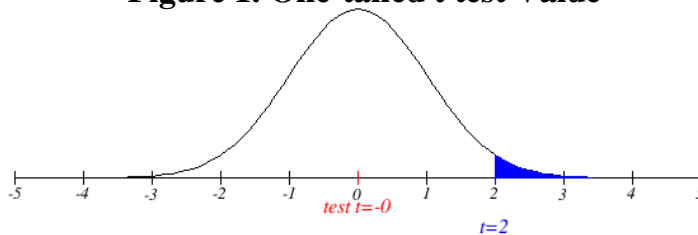
Table 2.Rate of Importance of TS for Social Survival

TARGET SITUATION Social Survival (Variable 2)	Rate of importance
Discussing business issues in informal settings (Business lunch/ dinner)	35
Speaking on the phone for general matters (appointments/visits...etc)	24
Listening to people talking and understanding them	31
Social contact (Hotels/Restaurant/Supermarkets ...etc)	29
Writing faxes, e-mails or letters	20
To overcome a difficulty at the airport or on the plane	26
Mean μ	27.5

Table 3. T-test : Paired two Sample for Means

	Variable 1	Variable 2
Mean	26,5	27,5
Variance	441,9	28,3
Observations	6	6
Degree of freedom	5	
t Stat	-0,12474039	
P(T<=t) One-tail	0,45279453	
t Critical (One-tail)	2,01504837	
P(T<=t) Two-tail	0,90558905	
t Critical (Two-tail)	2,57058184	

Figure 1. One-tailed t test Value



Here, it is one-tailed test which is more appropriate because we only want to determine if there is a difference between groups in a specific direction, either social or business. What we are looking from calculating the t test is to compare the T statistics to the t critical (one-tail) statistics (highlighted in bold). As the results show, T statistics is obviously smaller than T critical statistics and thus there is no significance difference between the two means of the population sample. And this is also clearly confirmed because p. value is larger than Alpha level which is 0.05. In conclusion, there is no difference in the importance of English for business purposes and English for social survival.

Table 4. Respondents Performance in the Target Situations

Target Situation For Business Purposes (Variable 1)	Level Scale						
	0 Co	1 Co	2 Co	3 Co	4 Co	5 Co	
Talking to people at international fairs	1	23	37	16	5	1	
Participating in business meetings	12	20	25	23	2	1	
Negotiating/ haggling over the price with suppliers or partners	2	19	38	16	5	3	
Speaking on the phone to discuss business matters	3	35	24	20	0	1	
Running business transactions at the bank	20	32	15	16	0	0	
Understanding written emails, faxes or invoices	3	32	19	22	5	2	
Mean μ	9	23.83	25	18.83	2.83	1.33	μ Level 13.97
Target Situation For Social Survival (Variable 2)	Level Scale						
	0 Co	1 Co	2 Co	3 Co	4 Co	5 Co	
Discussing business issues in informal settings (Business lunch/ dinner)	4	41	27	9	1	1	
Speaking on the phone for general matters (appointments/visits...etc)	6	29	35	12	1	0	
Listening to people talking and understanding them	1	12	15	20	20	15	
Social contact (Hotels/Restaurant/Supermarkets ...etc)	0	32	30	17	2	2	
Writing faxes, e-mails or letters	11	33	28	11	0	0	
To overcome a difficulty at the airport or on the plane	3	32	31	17	0	0	
Mean μ	4.16	29.83	27.66	14.33	4	3	μ Level 13.83

The table 4 above shows that the highest numbers of respondents' performance in the target situations are found under 1 , 2 and 3 scale which represents, "I try but I'm not very good", "I can do but I make lot of mistakes" and " I'm ok at doing this but I can make a few mistakes" respectively

Also, the average of the respondents' level out of the five scale level is quite similar in both target situations; **13.97** in Target situation for business purposes and **13.83** in target situation for social survival. These findings help in identifying the level of the course those learners are to start from. Information gathered from this question will be deployed in recommending guidelines for an appropriate syllabus.

Table 5 Skills the Respondents Seek to Improve

Skills in Target Situations	Not interested	Interest ed	Very intereste d
	Co	Co	Co
Talking to people at international fairs	11	21	51
Participating in business meetings	27	40	16
Negotiating/ haggling over the price with suppliers or partners	30	33	20
Speaking on the phone to discuss business matters	07	15	62
Running business transactions at the bank	18	29	36
Understanding written emails, faxes or invoices	30	37	16
Discussing business issues in informal settings (Business lunch/ dinner)	11	33	39
Speaking on the phone for general matters (appointments/visits...etc)	26	33	24
Listening to people talking and understanding them	11	41	31
Social contact (Hotels/Restaurant/Supermarkets ...etc)	14	34	35
Writing faxes, e-mails or letters	14	31	38
To overcome a difficulty at the airport or on the plane	9	48	26

Table 5 illustrates that the highest number of the repondents (**62** which reprsents **74.69%**) reported that they are very

interested in improving skills of negotiating/ haggling over the price with suppliers or partners, followed by **(51, i.e. 61,44%)** for talking to people at international fairs. Participating in business meetings with **40 (48.19%)** is the third largest number. It's worth mentioning that these previously mentioned situations require listening and speaking skills at the work place.

It is also observed that listening and speaking skills are at the top of the business professionals' goals under social life. The highest number **48 (57.83%)** of the respondents reported that they are interested in bettering their ability to overcome difficulties at the airport / on a plane. Social contacts (hotels, restaurants, supermarkets) get the second highest number, **41 (49.39%)**. Skills that got the least interest by business professionals (under both target situations) are , **a)writing faxes, e-mails or letters** , **b) understanding written emails, faxes or invoices** and **c)running business transactions at the bank** which are represented by the following figures **38 (45.78%)**, **34 (40.96%)**, **33 (39.75%)** respectively.

These findings support the claim of Voiles and Henderson (1980, p.129) that “listening and speaking skills are more important in business than reading and writing, because we spend most of our communication time listening and responding”

3.2.1. Interview Findings

In this section, interviews for business professionals were analysed; the findings were summarised in form of themes as will be illustrated in the subsequent section.

1. English as an asset.
2. The importance of English for business purposes
3. The importance of English for daily life events

The responses of all informants according to the themes above-mentioned are reported in the following discussion.

3.2.1.1. English as an Asset

Most of the interviewees agree that business without English is a nonstarter. In other words, they explained that English is apparent in every step during business transactions with foreigners and even in the mother country. They gave a very significant analogy by saying that nowadays the illiterate man is not he who cannot read or write, or know nothing about computing, but it is he who does not know English.

3.2.1.2. Importance of English for Business Purposes

There was no disagreement in the answers of the interviewees concerning the importance of English in their field. The largest percentage (about 90%), reported that English forms a vital tool that underpins any business deal with both foreign suppliers and customers.

Respondents stressed the fact that English is the key step to deal with foreign suppliers or customers. One interviewee commented that English nowadays is considered as important as a financial capital. With English, he added, we can go further and explore new business horizons with which we can expand our field activities.

Informants, especially those whose English proficiency is quite low, considered all the situations that require English as the most difficult ones and they prefer to bring an interpreter to do the job on their behalf. Whereas others who can manage a few words in English stated that price bargaining as the most important because discount in any deal is beneficial and they have to be skilful enough (either in business or in English) to get the best price.

3.2.1.3. Importance of English in Daily Life Events

Businessmen find that General English is inevitable as well. One of the respondents gave an anecdote that he experienced in China and which convinced him to rush to learn English. He said *“There was an old Chinese woman carrying a very huge bag and walking with difficulty; when I noticed her I gave her a hand by carrying the bag. Then a British couple looked at me and the husband said to his his wife “look at Algerians, they still take junk to their country”. “I must admit I felt very sorry and I wished I had been able to reply and say that Algerians are helpful people but unfortunately I could not, my English was very poor”*. He added.

The informants, indeed, anticipated the answer to this question and replied that once boarding a plane heading to a foreign country (particularly Asian countries) Arabic and French vanish and English takes over. They asserted (those who travel) that English is needed everywhere, airports, hotels, restaurants, supermarkets, etc. They agreed upon the fact that English is needed for social survival abroad and the lack of such language would create a kind of isolation from the community and a linguistic deprivation. Also, the lack of language proficiency would hamper any attempt to build social relations.

English is, also, according to them very important for social interaction and chat in social events. Some of them elaborated more by stating that business English can be acquired via experience and in case of encountering a difficult word or label, they resort to technical dictionaries or to the internet; whereas how to build those business words in a well-formed utterance is what is needed.

4. Discussion

This section provides overall findings of the study. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire and an interview designed for a group of informants from business community, businessmen at El Eulma business district. In order to explore needs of business people regarding their occupational settings in the field, a hypothesis was formulated in the beginning of the research because a scientific investigation usually revolves around a hypothesis. Based on a claim of businessmen, it was decided to conduct an experiment based on the following assumption:

Consider the claim of businessmen that English for business is more important than general English and thus this hypothesis should be tested

Null hypothesis **H₀** would be:

H₀: English for Business Purposes \geq English for Social Survival

And thus the alternative hypothesis **H₁** would be:

H₁: English for Business Purposes $<$ English for Social Survival

In order to accept or reject the null hypothesis a test of difference of two means (t test) was implemented. One-tailed test was calculated and results revealed that t test statistics are smaller than t critical statistics and this proved that there is no significant difference between the two variable means of the sample.

And since there is no significant difference between the two means, the null hypothesis is rejected. English is not only needed for business purposes, it is also important for social life.

In order to back up our research findings, we opted for interview questions to enrich our data collection and support or

reject the given claim. Interviews answers have backed up the alternative hypothesis that business English is as important as general English.

5. Course Description

Since results have revealed that Business English can be less important or equal in importance with general English, as a part of a whole curriculum, we suggest a business English communication course for beginners (here, false beginners) and intermediate learners (according to self-evaluation test in section 3 of the questionnaire). This course incorporates learners with different education levels. It is expected that a proficiency gap creates a problem in the course and this is why it is preferable to adopt a task-based syllabus.

Most research participants are business practitioners and learners simultaneously who already have work experience and want to improve their English to develop their profession career. Hence, it is expected also that El Eulma Business experts can speak and understand business-related terminology besides general English vocabulary, and understand cultural differences. McCarten (2007, p. 26) states ‘making vocabulary personal helps to make it more memorable.’ So again, general English courses have an advantage over ESP courses.

The task-based syllabus is encouraged in this context because:

- ✓ First, it promotes the eventual uses of the target language by emphasizing the real-world resemblance of the tasks with the purpose of preparing the students for the real-world tasks.
- ✓ Second, tasks derived from the analysis of learners’ needs (target situations) increases learners’ interest and motivation (Robinson, 2001).

- ✓ Third, while performing tasks, learners can learn the target language through contextualized and meaningful use of the language rather than learning sentence-level usage of the language.
- ✓ Fourth, tasks presented with gradually increasing complexity provide rich, elaborated, and comprehensible input for the language acquisition to occur (Doughty & Long, 2003).

6. Conclusion

We have chalked out all the results and decided whether we either confirm or refute the research hypothesis and assumption. In an attempt to confirm or refute the hypothesis, we have employed triangulation method to collect data (questionnaire survey and interview protocol as primary data) the results were not compatible to what we have predicted. El Eulma Business professionals are not necessarily in need to be skillful in Business English more than general English. Also, it was proved that the level of the business professionals is quite similar in situations that require English for business and others where General English is needed.

After having obtained the results and arrived to a conclusion we have opted for some recommendations about course design and what would be, according to findings, suitable for ESP adult learners of business English.

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workplace and daily life events. Your answers will remain anonymous and will be used only for research purposes. I am very grateful for your help

Section One

1-First name:

2-Email address:

3- You are:

Male

Female

Appendix A

BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear businessmen, managers and assistants in Dubai Business District in El Eulma;

This questionnaire is designed to investigate your needs to learn English and situations where you may use it. It also seeks to gather data about the importance of English in

- University level
- Did not go to school at all

7-Did you study English before?

Yes No

8- If yes; where?

- Public school
- University
- Private school
- Home
- abroad

4- How old are you?

- 18 -22
- 23- 30
- 31-45
- Over 45

5-What is your current business occupation?

Manager

Assistant

6-What is your educational level?

- Primary school level
- Middle school level
- Secondary school level

Section Two

9- TARGET SITUATION: Tick (X) the rate of importance of the situation where you need to use English.

TARGET SITUATION Business Purposes	Rate of importance
	Co
Talking to people at international fairs	
Participating in business meetings	
Negotiating/ haggling over the price with suppliers or partners	
Speaking on the phone to discuss business matters	
Running business transactions at the bank	
Understanding written emails, faxes or invoices	
TARGET SITUATION Social Survival	
Discussing business issues in informal settings (Business lunch/ dinner)	
Speaking on the phone for general matters (appointments/visits...etc)	
Listening to people talking and understanding them	
Social contact (Hotels/Restaurant/Supermarkets ...etc)	
Writing faxes, e-mails or letters	
To overcome a difficulty at the airport or on the plane	

Section Three

10. Tick (X) the suitable number of your performance in these situations from 0 to 5 according to the following key:

0= I can't do this at all, 1= I try but I'm not very good, 2= I can do but I make lot of mistakes, 3= I'm ok at doing this but I can make a few mistakes, 4= I'm quite good at doing this- I don't make many mistakes, 5= I'm very good at doing this- I hardly make any mistake

Target Situation For Business Purposes (Variable1)	Level Scale					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
	Co	Co	Co	Co	Co	Co
Talking to people at international fairs						
Participating in business meetings						
Negotiating/ haggling over the price with suppliers or partners						
Speaking on the phone to discuss business matters						
Running business transactions at the bank						
Understanding written emails, faxes or invoices						
Mean μ						
Target Situation For Social Survival (Variable 2)						
Discussing business issues in informal settings (Business lunch/ dinner)						
Speaking on the phone for general matters (appointments/visits...etc)						
Listening to people talking and understanding them						
Social contact (Hotels/Restaurant/Supermarkets ...etc)						
Writing faxes, e-mails or letters						
To overcome a difficulty at the airport or on the plane						
Mean μ						

Section Four

11. Choose which skill you are interested to improve in business target situations and social life situations

Skills in target Situations	Not interested	Interested	Very interested
	Co	Co	Co
Talking to people at international fairs			
Participating in business meetings			
Negotiating/ haggling over the price with suppliers or partners			
Speaking on the phone to			

discuss business matters			
Running business transactions at the bank			
Understanding written emails, faxes or invoices			
Discussing business issues in informal settings (Business lunch/ dinner)			
Speaking on the phone for general matters (appointments/visits...etc)			
Listening to people talking and understanding them			
Social contact (Hotels/Restaurant/Supermarkets ...etc)			
Writing faxes, e-mails or letters			
To overcome a difficulty at the airport or on the plane			

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

I want to thank you for accepting to meet with me today. My name is Fouzia Rouaghe and I would like to talk to you about the importance of English in your work place and in your daily life. I'd like also to gather information about difficulties you may face in the target situation. The interview should take approximately 15 minutes unless in case of some probes. I am recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session all responses will be kept confidential. Please note that you are not required to answer questions you do not want to.

- A.** What is your age?
- B.** What is your current position?
- C.** Do you use English at work?
- E.** How important is it for you to use English in your job?
- F.** which kind of language barriers you face in target situations such as negotiations, deals, payment, invoices, receptions, airport...etc.
- G.** Do you travel much? Where to?
- H.** Do you use English while travelling abroad? (Hotels, restaurants, trips and journeys)
- I.** In sum, do you think that General English is more needed than business English or the other way round?

In the end, I would like to thank you again. Please let me know if you need a copy of the research findings.