



**Fourth Year Sudanese University Students' Attitudes towards ESP Courses in
Three Colleges at University of Bahri**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating fourth year Sudanese university students' attitudes towards learning English for Specific Purpose Courses in three colleges at University of Bahri. Students study English for Specific Purpose courses as a part of their study to obtain the undergraduate degree. The research has adopted a qualitative research approach. A structured-group interview is used as a tool for data collection. The total number of the study population is (45). The random-sample of this research is (6) students who represent 10% of the population. The data has been analyzed qualitatively and thematically. Some results revealed that the learners have negative attitudes towards the English for Specific Purpose courses, and they are not interested attending the lectures due to namely: English for Specific Purpose course textbook content , the large classes, lecture time and their low level of English.

Key words: Attitudes, ESP Courses, University Level

المستخلص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة لتقصي اتجاهات طلاب السنة الرابعة الجامعيين السودانيين حول تعلم كورسات اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة في ثلاث كليات بجامعة بحري. حيث يدرس الطلاب كورسات اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة كجزء من دراستهم للحصول على الدرجة الجامعية. اعتمد البحث نهج البحث النوعي. تم استخدام مقابلة -محكمة كاداة لجمع البيانات. علما بأن اجمالي عدد مجتمع الدراسة (45). ضمن عينة البحث العشوائيه (6) طلاب يمثلون نسبة 10% من مجتمع الدراسة. تم تحليل البيانات نوعيا وموضوعيا. اظهرت الدراسة بعض النتائج التي توصلت اليها: لدى المتعلمين مواقف سلبية تجاه كورسات اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة، لا يهتم المتعلمين بحضور المحاضرات بسبب: محتوى كتاب مقرر اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة ، والفصول المزدحمة بالطلاب ، ووقت المحاضرة وضعف مستوى اللغة الإنجليزية لديهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاتجاهات ، كورسات اللغة الانجليزية للأغراض الخاصة ، المستوى الجامعي

Introduction

Students' positive attitudes are considered important factors towards successful learning. The success of teaching ESP courses at Sudanese universities relies on how students respond to ESP courses. Throughout a long experience of teaching at Higher education level, the researcher had experienced the challenges that relate to the students' attitudes in three colleges at University of Bahri. The students scored lower grades in their midterm and final exams, paid less attention during the ESP lectures and some did not attend their ESP lectures regularly. Fourth Year Sudanese University Students' attitudes have impacted negatively on their learning of the ESP courses. The researcher assumed that students' attitudes were influential and critical elements impeding learning of ESP courses at these three colleges. The present study attempts to investigate and explore university level students' attitudes towards learning ESP courses at grade four. Students' attitudes have been the focus of many studies, (Sayeed, 2017 and Alharbi, 2022), however little studies have been carried out on Sudanese university students' attitudes towards ESP courses.

Bader Alharbi (2022); a lecturer at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia, conducted study entitled an investigative study on Saudi English for specific purpose students' attitudes toward the learning of English language. It aimed at gauging the attitudes of Saudi health track students on learning ESP and exploring the factors that impact the students in their endeavours. It used mixed methods by survey and follow-up interviews to gather information from 57 Saudi students enrolled at the preparatory year program and interviews with 25 students. Findings show that the students have a positive attitude toward learning English for Specific Purposes. In addition to that, the study reports some factors which shape the students' positive attitudes toward learning ESP: (1) teaching quality, (2) classroom scenario, and (3) classroom environment.

The study of Sayeed (2017) at university of Engineering & Technology, Bangladesh entitled Learners' Perceptions and Attitudes towards ESP Courses. It aimed to reveal the perceptions and attitudes of the learners towards their ESP courses. Researcher used mixed method research, combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches of research. The sample was 40 first semester students from different departments who have to study two ESP courses to fulfil their undergraduate degrees. Questionnaire survey

was the main instrument used in the research. The results of the study show that most of learners had negative attitudes towards the ESP courses, they were not properly motivated to study these courses, -and they did not get interest dealing the very courses as the course contents mostly do not match their mainstream courses.

Hashmi & et al. (2019) conducted a case study entitled dental students' perceptions of ESP material and its impact on their language proficiency. The research aimed at exploring the dental English for Specific Purpose students' perceptions of the ESP material and its influence on their English proficiency in the dentistry department of a Saudi Arabian university. The research adopted a qualitative technique of semi-structured interviews to elicit the views of 12 purposively chosen participants. The key findings indicated that the ESP learners have a very positive attitude towards learning the ESP courses. The results also showed that the course-book contents and material are outdated and inappropriate for the ESP learners in the Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The findings illustrated that the ESP teachers need to use the English language in classrooms and introduce learner-centered interactive activities to encourage students to participate in classroom activities.

The research has adopted a qualitative research approach. A structured-group interview is used as a tool for data collection. The study aims to achieve the following main objective:

- To investigate and explore fourth year ESP university students' attitudes towards learning ESP courses

The study also aims to answer the following question:

- What are the fourth year university students' attitudes towards learning ESP courses?

It assumes the following hypothesis:

- Fourth year university students have negative attitudes towards learning ESP courses

Sudanese universities offered ESP courses to students of diverse fields of study in different departments of colleges. English for Academic purposes (EAP) as a subdivision of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) was an obligatory subject taught to the students of the first and second year at the University of Bahri and it was introduced as a university requirement subject. However, the course is no longer considered as a university requirement, due to a decision made by a former Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Sudan, in the year 2021. Both EAP and ESP courses are now designed by the Colleges of the University of Bahri according to the students' needs at different levels and different grades. Students who study other specializations do not learn ESP courses in the way that they perceive efficient; as a result they are not aware about the importance of ESP courses that are offered by the colleges. It is believed that the students' attitudes are the main reasons behind this problem. In learning a language, the students should have these important factors, namely; interest, motivation, and attitude. The word attitude, which comes from the Latin word "Optus" meaning suitability or adaptation, means behaviour, state, and line of conduct. According to Crystal (1997), attitudes are the feelings people have about their own language or the languages of others. Thus, attitude to language is a construct that explains linguistic behaviour in particular. Bartram (2010) stated that "attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response towards all subjects and situations with which it is related". The attitude has three components i.e. cognitive, behavioural and affective Garret (2003). These three components of attitudes can be explained as follows: *Firstly*, the cognitive aspect of attitude involves the beliefs of the language learners about the knowledge that they receive and their understanding of the process of language learning. In addition, Garret (2003) state that the cognitive attitude can be classified into four steps of connecting the previous knowledge and the new one, creating new knowledge, checking new knowledge, and applying the new knowledge in any situation. *Secondly*, affective aspect of attitude is affected by different emotional factors. The affective aspect of attitude deals with someone's emotions towards an object, with or against, likes or dislikes. The affective aspect of attitude is said to consist of a person's evaluation of, liking of, or emotional response to some situation, object or person. For example, for the

language attitude in learning English, the affective aspect would be a person's liking of the language itself and his/her feeling of excitement or dread, when she or he uses or learns it Garret (2003). *Finally*, behaviour aspect of attitude is behaviour of person's attitude. The behavioural aspect of attitude involves the person's over behaviour directed toward a situation, object, or person Garret (2003). Positive attitudes lead to the exhibition of positive behaviours toward courses of study, with participants absorbing themselves in courses and striving to learn more, such students are also observed to be more eager to solve problems, to acquire the information and skill useful for daily life and to engage themselves emotionally.

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) define “ESP, as a course designed to meet specific learners needs in particular situations”. They also provide broad definition of ESP that can be said that it is a comprehensive term which refers to the teaching of English to those students who learn the language for a particular work or study-related reason. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) also theorize, “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. 19). Regarding the characteristics of ESP, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) provided a number of ESP characteristics that are falling in two categories, first, it is designed to meet specific learner needs, second, it uses relevant methodology and tasks depending on the discipline; ESP methodology is centered on the language, skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) divided the characteristics of the ESP into two and they are namely as follows:

Absolute Characteristics:

- 1. ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners;*
- 2. ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves;*
- 3. ESP is centred on the language (grammar, lexis, and register), skills, discourse and genre appropriate to these activities.*

Variable Characteristics:

- 1. ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;*
- 2. ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English;*

3. *ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or at a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level;*
4. *ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.*
5. *Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems, however it can be used with beginner.*

(Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998:4)

According to Jordan (1997) ESP can broadly be divided into two main kinds: English for Occupational Vocational Professional Purposes (EOP/EVP/EPP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). English for General Purposes (EGP) is called 'TENOR': the Teaching of English for No Obvious Reason' (Jordan, 1997, p.4). English for Specific Purposes (ESP), as a branch of English Language Teaching (ELT), emerged in the 1960s and has since given rise to extensive research. The roots of ESP, though, can be traced back to the aftermath of the Second World War. In fact, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have suggested three reasons common to the emergence of all ESP: Firstly, the end of the Second World War 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" (p. 6). Second, the Oil Crisis of the early 1970s resulted in Western money and knowledge flowing into the oil-rich countries. The language of this knowledge became English. Secondly, the aim of Linguistics changed from describing the language to analyzing the characteristics of English used in certain fields of work or study, this led to a tremendous impact on the emergence of ESP. Whereas traditional linguists set out to describe the features of language, revolutionary pioneers in linguistics began to focus on the ways in which language is used in real communication. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out that one significant discovery was in the ways that spoken and written English vary. In other words, given the particular context in which English is used, the variant of English will change. This idea was taken one step farther. If language in different situations varies, then tailoring language instruction to meet the needs of learners in specific contexts is also possible. Hence, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s there were many attempts to describe English for

Science and Technology (EST). And, finally, advances in the field of educational psychology shifted the focus from the teacher to the learner, thereby creating the need for courses that would suit the learners' needs and increase their motivation. In this final reason Hutchinson and Waters (1987) cite as having influenced the emergence of ESP has less to do with linguistics and everything to do psychology. In all ESP teaching situations, the needs of the learners must be taken into consideration and what they have to do in the target situation Flook (1993). Needs are defined as being the requirements that the students have in order to be able to communicate effectively in the target situation. They are also defined as what the students need to learn to acquire the language. The process of needs analysis often entails collecting information for the sake of having the necessary bases to develop a course which will meet the needs of a particular group of students. In this regard, Richards and Platt (1992) state that NA is "the process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners acquires a language and arranges the needs according to priorities." Consequently, a teacher engaged in the process of NA is required to gather information about "what" the learner need and "how" he can learn. The above definitions imply the existence of different types of needs that the ESP course teacher should take into consideration while designing a course.

Materials and methods

The researcher conducted the study in the College of Management Sciences, College of Medicine and College of Computer Sciences and Mathematics at University of Bahri. The research has adopted a qualitative research approach. A structured-group interview is used as a tool for data collection. This interview included a covering page which introduced the topic of the research. The interview consisted of 3 questions which were intended to get sufficient responses from the participants. It was judged by experienced professors and Ph.D. holders from Sudan University of Science and Technology. The total number of the study population is (45). The random-sample of this research is (6) students who represent 10% of the population. The data has been analyzed qualitatively and thematically. The questions of the interview were developed through the following stages: Firstly, it was designed by the researcher in consultation with some colleagues.

Secondly, it was then presented to the supervisor for approval. Finally, then it was referred to three experts for judgment.

Then the co-efficient value of validity and reliability was calculated by specialised statistician and confirmed to be (.706) and its Validity around (0.84) and these show that there is a high sincerity of the scale and that the benefit of the study.

$$\text{Val} = \sqrt{\text{reliability}}$$

$$\text{Reliability} = .706$$

$$\text{Validity} = 0.84$$

It was conducted to be certain that the data used for the paper is more sufficient, reliable and realistic. The researcher went to the students' lecture hall in the morning during the lecture. After the students were given the background about the interview, what was the purpose of the interview and what their role would be like, and then two students were selected from each three colleges. They were both male and females. They were randomly chosen using students' attendance list. The researcher collaborated with the lecturers of the major courses. Duration of time for each interviewee was five minutes to answer the question of the interview which was divided into three sub-questions. A tape recorder was used in the interview. Application was done on January 2023. After the interview was conducted, the results were transcribed to be used in the research. And the interview data has been analyzed qualitatively and thematically.

Results:

The researcher will present, discuss and interpret the results of the interview that was based on the research hypothesis which stated that "Fourth year university students have negative attitudes towards learning ESP courses."

Question (1) How did you feel attending your ESP lectures?

The respondents were asked about their attitudes on the first question of the interview which states "*How did you feel attending your ESP lectures?*" The result is shown on Figure 1

Answer	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not interested attending the ESP lectures because of textbook, large class, lecture time, my English and not my field	4	67%
Liked the way teacher's teaching	2	33%

Figure 1: *Attitudes of Students Attending Lectures of ESP courses*

As figure.1, shows, 67% of the ESP students said that they were not interested attending the ESP lectures because of textbook, the large class, lecture time, level of English and specialization. 33% of students expressed their like the way teacher's teaching.

Question (2) *To what extent were you satisfied with the ESP courses?*

The interviewees were asked about their attitudes on the second question of the interview which states "*To what extent were you satisfied with the ESP courses?*" The result is shown on Figure 2

Answer	Frequency	Percent (%)
Not satisfied because of much grammar exercises and of my English	5	83%
Satisfied	1	17%

Figure 2: *Students' Satisfaction with the ESP Course*

As figure.2, shows, 83% of the ESP students said that they were not tot satisfied because of much grammar exercises and of their English .17% of students expressed their satisfaction with the ESP course.

Question (3) *To what extent the given ESP courses helped your academics?*

The interviewees were asked about their attitudes on the second question of the interview which states “*To what extent the given ESP courses helped your academics?*” The result is shown on Figure 3

Answer	Frequency	Percent (%)
Did n not help my academics	5	83%
Needed ESP course that has more speaking and writing activities	1	17%

Figure 3: *The Support of ESP courses for Academics*

As figure.3, shows, 83% of the ESP students said that the ESP courses did not help their academics .17% of students said that they needed ESP course that has more speaking and writing activities.

Discussion:

Regarding the hypothesis of the study which states fourth year students have negative attitudes towards toward the ESP courses, the results of the three formulated questions of the interview can be discussed as follows: Firstly, the results of the first question of the interview show that 67% of the interviewees are not interested attending the ESP lectures because of several reasons, namely; the ESP textbook, the large class, lecture time, their level of English and because of their specialization. However 17% of the ESP students expressed their like towards the way instructor’s teaching. Secondly, the results of the second question of the interview show that the overwhelming majority 83% of the students are not satisfied with the ESP courses because of much grammar exercises. This is also the case found in Hashmi,. et al. (2019) case study that despite of the ESP learners have a very positive attitude towards learning the ESP courses, the course-book contents and material are outdated and inappropriate for the ESP learners. Finally, the results of the third question of the interview show that the majority 83% of the ESP students

expressed that the ESP courses did not help their academics and 17% of students said that they needed ESP course that has more speaking and writing activities. These results confirmed what has been found by Sayeed (2017) that learners had negative attitudes towards the ESP courses; they were not properly motivated to study these courses, and they did not get interest dealing the very courses as the course contents mostly do not match their mainstream courses. The unified ESP textbooks in the three colleges do not suit students' English language level, large classes and lecture times were not appropriate for them. These results prove that the ESP students have negative attitudes towards learning ESP course for they expressed negative attitudes attending their ESP course lectures, not satisfied with ESP course and the ESP course gave little support to their academics.

Conclusions:

The analysis of the structured-group interview through qualitative, thematic and percentages revealed the main results as follows:

1. Fourth year students have negative attitudes towards learning ESP courses at the three colleges.
2. University students are not interested to study the ESP courses due to their low levels of English, ESP course textbook week contents, large classes and inadequate lecture time.
3. ESP courses did not help students' academics.
4. University students are not satisfied with the ESP courses because of much grammar exercises.

Recommendations:

With regard to results the researcher recommends the following:

1. Teachers should motivate the students to study the ESP courses.
2. Teachers should provide learners with good background orientation on the importance of ESP courses for academic and career success before the actual teaching of the courses.
3. Teachers should design the ESP courses that should contain topics and activities that arouse the interest of students and give more speaking and writing activities.
4. Textbooks need to be revised and designed according to students' needs.
5. Reducing ESP large classes into smaller classes.

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