

Multimodality in Teaching English for Specific Purposes in Higher Education: the case of teaching Business English at ISIG Kairouan

Hassen Khammari^{1,*}

^{1,*} Higher Institute of Computer Science and Management, University of Kairouan, Tunisia.

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Abstract: The importance of technology in people's daily lives has opened avenues for its effective utilization in various educational domains. Among the online resources available, the YouTube website stands out as an integration option for traditional English lessons, rendering it a significant asset in the field of teaching and learning. This research paper sheds light on a novel approach to teaching English courses by exploring the impactful role of multimodal texts found in numerous YouTube videos when employed as teaching material in classrooms. The study findings assert that YouTube can serve as a valuable resource for incorporating English lessons, aiding comprehension, and enhancing students' overall performance and understanding of English. Moreover, the inclusion of YouTube videos emerges as a prominent factor in facilitating learners' comprehension of business English terminology. The paper emphasizes the need to investigate students' attitudes towards the use of YouTube and the potential concerns they may encounter when using it as a tool for learning business English.

Keywords: Multimodality, Technology, Business English, ESP

1. Introduction

The history of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Tunisia traces back to the 1980s when the Tunisian ESP Center was established by the British Council and the American Cultural Centre. This center provided funding for visiting experts to deliver lectures, organize summer schools, seminars, and other training activities in Tunisia (Labassi, 2010, p.22). ESP programs are primarily designed for learners and professionals aiming to enhance their English skills in specific professional domains. Universities and institutions specializing in scientific and technological fields have progressively incorporated ESP courses into their curricula. The Higher Institute of Computer Science and Management in Kairouan (referred to as ISIG) offers various ESP courses tailored to students' areas of study. For example, management students undertake business English courses during their three-year License program. English classes

* Corresponding Author: hassenkh08@live.fr

are held once a week, with each session lasting one and a half hours. While French serves as the medium of instruction, students express a desire to use English as the language for academic purposes. This enthusiasm stems from recognizing the significance of English in their business careers and broader scientific research endeavors. To develop a business English program for management students, the design took into account the shift in English Language Teaching (ELT) approaches, which have moved from a linguistic focus to a communicative approach (which ESP embodies). Building upon the work of Ellis and Johnson (1994), the business English program at ISIG considered several specific aspects: needs analysis, assessment of students' proficiency levels, syllabus development, course objectives, allocated time, student expectations, and evaluation (Labassi, 2010, p.22). English teachers at ISIG adopted multimodal instructional practices, employing blended learning that integrates visual, audio, gestural, and spatial modes of communication. Multimodality creates a conducive environment for learners to actively engage in the course and demonstrate greater readiness to produce spoken or written output. According to Yi and Angay-Crowder (2016, p.988), English language learners increasingly engage in multimodal literacy practices, and teachers are incorporating multimodal teaching methods in their courses. By adopting a multimodal approach to teaching business English, teachers at ISIG aimed to cater to learners' diverse learning styles and individual differences.

II. Literature Review

1. ESP: Definition and Scope

ESP is recognized as a subset of English as a second/foreign language. Richards and Schmidt (2010, p.29) define ESP as language used for specific, limited types of communication (e.g., medical reports, scientific writing) that involve lexical, grammatical, and other linguistic features distinct from ordinary language. Traditional general English courses are insufficient for a large audience of students and professionals who require English courses tailored to develop specific skills and strategies for their professional lives. For instance, business English students engage in practical tasks such as product presentations, business negotiations, customer/client conversations, and conflict resolution. All the themes covered in ESP courses are relevant to learners' interests and fields of study. Jackson (2005, p.305) observes that "Simpler, more traditional language support courses may no longer be adequate in today's complex world." Similarly, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p.32) confirm that ESP has evolved into a broader activity, with English for Business Purposes (EBP) gaining increasing importance. Consequently, interest in ESP has grown significantly, and most universities now offer ESP courses aligned with students' areas of study.

2. Multimodality in ESP

Multimodality refers to the integration of multiple communication channels to convey a message in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). It involves using sensory modes such as images, sound, music, and video, as well as non-verbal gestural modes, to convey meaning. Dressman (2019, p.39) notes that in the digital age, multimodality has become even more crucial for communication, especially for language learners who rely on the diverse channels available on screens to grasp meaning in a target language. Multimodal learning environments have the potential to motivate and engage learners. Plastina (2013) examined the impact of multimodal content on learners' motivation and found that learners actively participated in the course and demonstrated a remarkable ability to creatively combine linguistic elements with semiotic resources (Plastina, 2013, p.372). In this context, contemporary learners, characterized by curiosity and a desire for challenges, enjoy learning tasks that capture their attention. Traditional ESP courses often involve providing learners with specialized texts for vocabulary and grammar study, leading to demotivation as learners perceive themselves as passive recipients. Conversely, integrating various modes of communication in ESP courses enhances and sustains students' motivation. Learners actively participate in interactive multimodal tasks that position them at the center of the learning process. Lajoie (2000, p.xvii) asserts that "changes in technology's availability and flexibility allow for greater creativity in its use for education and training."

3. Business English

In an increasingly globalized world where English serves as the language of communication in trade and business, mastering business English skills has become imperative for career advancement and ensuring the international reach of local companies. In the realm of higher education, business English courses aim to improve learners' receptive skills (reading and listening) and enable effective communication in spoken and written modes. These courses cover various topics such as marketing, business negotiation, writing business letters and emails, and dealing with conflict and stress. Teaching business English in higher education focuses on preparing students for the multifaceted challenges of the marketplace, recognizing that today's learners are tomorrow's managers and leaders.

4. Background of the Business English Course

In the Tunisian higher education context, all subjects are taught in English or French, with English being a compulsory subject. First-year management students at ISIG study English for two semesters (22 weeks), with each session lasting 1.5 hours. As most students hold a baccalaureate certificate in economics and management, they are considered pre-intermediate

learners. Each semester, students are assessed twice through ongoing evaluations and end-of-semester exams.

5. Description and Outline of the Course

The business English course encompasses receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive skills (speaking and writing). It combines business English communication skills and concepts with general English language skills. The course aims to equip students with the necessary skills to excel in a globalized, multilingual, and multicultural work environment. English skills and vocabulary are developed through exercises, case studies, role plays, presentations, and research on various business topics, including marketing, advertising, negotiation, business practices, and cultural comparisons. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with business terminology and communicate and interact proficiently in English.

III. Methodology

1. Participants

The participants in this study are first-year management students enrolled at Institut Supérieur d'Informatique et de Gestion de Kairouan (ISIG), who are learning business English. The students were randomly selected, resulting in a sample of 60 students, comprising 38 females and 22 males. The gender proportions of the respondents were 63% female and 36% male.

2. Instruments

The instructor delivered a marketing strategies lesson using a classical approach, which involved providing students with a specialized reading comprehension text followed by vocabulary and writing tasks¹. After a week, the same theme was taught using a multimodal approach based on a YouTube video (Appendix 2²). Following the completion of both phases of the experiment, students were interviewed about their attitudes toward the integration of multimodality into the English classroom. The attitudes of students were assessed using a Likert-scale questionnaire, which included demographic information in the first part and items about students' attitudes toward multimodal learning in the second part.

3. Analysis Procedure

To address the research questions of this study, the level of agreement or disagreement among the participants was calculated, and percentages were derived.

IV. Results and discussion

¹ Text source: "Market Leader" pre-intermediate.

² Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8nC4dgKB9g>

Worksheet adopted and adapted from: <https://www.twoteachers.co.uk/marketingmix4ps>

This section presents and discusses the main findings in relation to the study's objectives and research questions. Both quantitative and qualitative results are reported. Table 1 reveals that the participants rated their responses to thirteen statements regarding their attitudes toward the integration of videos into the business English course. The participants strongly agreed with Statement 2 (integrating videos makes learning interesting) at 67%. Additionally, the participants expressed greater motivation to participate in discussions and debates when the instructor incorporated videos into the lessons (66%).

These results align with Almurashi's (2016) findings, as his study investigated the impact of teaching English via YouTube videos on students' motivation and performance. Almurashi (2016, p.32) concluded that video-based lessons on YouTube can help students understand the course content and improve their English proficiency.

Students experienced educational benefits through the integration of video content, which created a more relaxed, spontaneous, and motivating learning environment. Positive effects on the students' confidence and engagement were observed. Students' interest in the business English course has increased and active participation in the assigned tasks was also noted.

Table 1: Students' attitudes toward the integration of video in the English course

| Statements | Level of agreement | Percentage |
|--|--------------------|------------|
| 1. Video-based instruction is an effective tool for learning English. | agree | 59 |
| 2. Integrating video makes learning more interesting. | strongly agree | 67 |
| 3. I think that learning is more enjoyable with the integration of videos. | agree | 58 |
| 4. Pictures, sounds, and texts make learning an exciting experience. | agree | 62 |
| 5. Video lessons help me to stay focused on the course. | agree | 39 |
| 6. I feel more confident to actively engage in the course. | agree | 65 |
| 7. I am more motivated to speak and participate in discussions and debates when the instructor integrates videos into the business English course. | strongly agree | 66 |
| 8. Videos help me improve my writing skills. | agree | 56 |
| 9. Videos help me improve my listening skills. | agree | 59 |
| 10. I feel less anxious when I learn through videos. | agree | 48 |
| 11. Integrating videos into the English course encourages me to learn outside the classroom context. | agree | 37 |
| 12. Classical English course design and implementation are outdated and lack originality. | strongly agree | 67 |
| 13. I cannot engage in classical print-based texts because they are not entertaining and exciting. | strongly agree | 71 |

Students' feedback towards the traditional English classes was negative. They felt bored and lacked motivation to follow the teacher, participate actively, and engage in production tasks. The highest-ranked statement was Statement 13 (classical print-based texts do not engage learners), with a rating of 71%. This was followed by Statement 12 (classical courses are outdated and not original) at 67%. These findings indicate that students hold negative perceptions and attitudes toward traditional teaching methods. Students reported that visual content was rarely incorporated into the English course, resulting in limited interaction between learners and teachers.

The current study has demonstrated the extensive potential of videos as a multimodal medium that can be effectively utilized as an instructional resource, even within specialized contexts such as Business English classes. These findings underscore the necessity of opting for more innovative multimodal approaches that make the learning experience more engaging and enjoyable. The findings are consistent with the results obtained by Mekheimer (2011), who asserts that video-based lessons contain interesting uses of language. Yang et al. (2010) elucidated that employing videos can help alleviate learners' boredom, which is generally associated with traditional language learning methods. The presence of native speakers, a real setting, gestures, and authentic accents promotes language learning and enhances students' motivation. Furthermore, videos reduce ambiguities in native speakers' voices, portray the target language and culture, and provide contextualized learning experiences (Herron et al., 1998)

Conclusion

To conclude, this study has investigated the significance of YouTube as a prominent tool in the area of education. Specifically, it explores the effective use of videos for English language instruction at higher education. Based on students' attitudes, the findings of this study indicate that integrating YouTube into English lessons plays an essential role in motivating learners and enhancing their comprehension, performance, and proficiency levels.

Moreover, it is evident that YouTube serves as a valuable resource for incorporating English lessons and facilitating comprehension.

Consequently, English teachers are encouraged to incorporate YouTube into their instructional practices, given the positive responses observed among learners in this study.

However, it is important to note that the study does not undermine the role of textbook-based English courses; rather, it suggests integrating YouTube as an important tool that would support traditional English courses and create a positive environment conducive to learning. Video-based courses increase learner's engagement in learning and create a more motivating

sensory experience than relying on traditional textbook courses alone. Future research should focus on investigating teachers' experiences with incorporating YouTube videos. Such studies would aid in optimizing the use of YouTube for teaching and learning English. Based on the study findings, several recommendations can be proposed. Firstly, it is crucial to ensure classrooms are equipped with an adequate number of internet-connected computers to facilitate access to YouTube³. Additionally, comparative studies should be conducted in different settings and across various subjects taught at university to further explore the usefulness and effectiveness of incorporating video within classroom.

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³ In the absence of computers and internet connection, students used their Smartphones to watch the selected video.

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Marketing Mix 4Ps

1. Watch YouTube Video ‘Marketing Mix 4Ps/McDonald’s examples’ and jot down the ideas that interest you in relation to marketing and the 4Ps

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8nC4dgKB9g>

Provide a short definition

1. Identify and explain each of the 4Ps in the table below, then provide examples of how McDonald’s uses each P to attract customers and increase spending.

| The 4Ps | Explanation of the P | Example of the P used by McDonald’s |
|---------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

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2. In your opinion, which of the 4Ps is the most important? Ensure you justify your reasons.

| |
|--|
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|--|

3. Apply the Marketing Mix 4P's model to a business of your choice.

Chosen Business:

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| <u>Product</u> | <u>Price</u> |
| <u>Place</u> | <u>Promotion</u> |

4. If you worked in the Marketing Department of your chosen business, what would you do differently to attract more customers and increase sales? You can use as many elements of the Marketing Mix as you wish. Ensure you justify your ideas.



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