



Refining ESP Learning and Increasing Motivation through the Incorporation of Technology into TBLT

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Abstract

This research investigates whether incorporating technology into Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) would help further improve their attitude. If TBLT can help to build their interest in learning English, TBLT combined with technology would give even better results in instilling a positive attitude in learning English, enabling these students to improve their English. Questionnaires were used to measure the attitudes of the learners towards the English language and the TBLT method that they have been exposed to. Three (3) questionnaires were used in this needs analysis because they cater to three (3) different groups of respondents (students, ESP lecturers and department lecturers). Lecturers agreed that an English language course is necessary for the students of the Hotel and Catering Management course at their institution. Surprisingly, they felt that the Listening and Speaking skills are the most important skills for their students. Technology is seen as an effective tool in teaching and learning. Thus, these lecturers also found that the use of technology is something good. 36.7 percent of the students believed that the current module has not given them enough motivation to use English, especially for spoken English. This analysis hopes to be able to explore how attitude and performance can be affected by task conditions. The fact that new technology is going to be employed in

the module may definitely contribute to the existing knowledge about TBLT, specifically to the cognitive perspectives of it.

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1. Introduction

Malaysia took a bold step in re-adopting the English language as a medium of instruction for Mathematics and Science in order to ensure that Malaysians are able to keep abreast with scientific and technological development that is mostly recorded in the English language (Ministry of Education, 2002 cited in Pandian & Ramiah, 2003).

The change in policy is congruent with the significant developments and understandings in second language acquisition that emphasise the role of meaningful, understandable input. Kessler and Quinn (1987), as cited in Pandian and Ramiah (2003), stated that 'teaching Mathematics and Science in English provides a rich context for genuine language use and as such serves as a focal point around which oral language and literacy in English can develop'.

Integrating English as a second language with subject matter instruction is an example of a content-based language learning method (Mazlin, 2020). The technique focuses not only on language learning but also on using the language meaningfully in learning Mathematics, Science or other academic subjects (Reilly, 1988).

Thus, the English Language syllabus at one of the higher institutions (northern region) aims at consolidating and enhancing competence in using the English language amongst the students to enable them to perform effectively in the workplace and in work-related as well as social situations. In order to meet this aim, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is being employed in the curriculum under the term English for Technical Purposes and English for Business Purposes. The curricula for both English for Technical Purposes and English for Business Purposes would integrate the teaching of skills, language functions and grammar. Students' backgrounds, competency levels, the goal of the course, and the language function are other aspects that should also be looked into when choosing the appropriate language form for that particular lesson (Mohamed Mokhtar et al., 2022).

These students are taking English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which aims to prepare them with the required technical and commercial skills. Most of the time, they are performing tasks related to their field of study. As English lecturers, what can we do to help improve the student's English language proficiency? Would the normal classroom teaching be able to equip them with the necessary knowledge? Or are there other approaches we can use to help these students in acquiring the language?

In the Malaysian context, English is termed as a second language because it is second to Bahasa Melayu in importance for all official purposes. There is also a growing concern about the level of English proficiency at the workplace, which, if left unchecked, could lead to the country losing its competitiveness, especially in the industry and technical fields.

A study that was carried out on unemployment among graduates conducted by the National Higher Education Research Institutes revealed that incompetence in English contributes to a significant factor in not securing a job. It is suggested that in the preparation of graduates for employment, each institution of higher learning should pay greater attention to the acquisition of communication skills, English language proficiency, and entrepreneurial skills (Mey, 2003).

Therefore, it is hoped that employing ESP and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as an innovation would be able to improve students' attitudes towards learning English. Besides that, this study will also investigate whether incorporating technology into TBLT would help to further improve their attitude. If TBLT can help to build their interest in learning English, TBLT combined with technology would give even better results in instilling a positive attitude in learning English, enabling these students to improve their English.

2. Needs Analysis in ESP Setting

The reason this needs analysis was carried out is to find out some background information about the lecturers and students on the current syllabus and lesson. In the questionnaires, we introduced the idea of incorporating the use of technology in teaching to find out whether it is a good idea to incorporate this technology from both the lecturers' and students' views.

According to Basturkmen (1998), needs analysis has been identified as the identification of difficulties and standard situations by observation of participants functioning in a target situation in conjunction with interviews and questionnaires. It is considered the cornerstone of ESP and leads to a much more focused course, added Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998).

Stevens (1977), as cited in Momtazur et al. (2009, p. 40), suggests that needs analysis is a necessary first step for specific purposes of language teaching as it is more concerned with the nature of scientific discourse. In addition, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, p. 122) also state that needs analysis is the process of establishing the "what and how of a course". Robinson (1991), as cited by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), also stresses that needs analysis study should be repeated so that it can be built into the formative process. It is not only for determining the "what and how of a language teaching" but also would lead to a very informative database for learners, sponsors, subject specialists, and

above all, ESP practitioners' views and opinions of the English language (Robinson, 1991 cited in Momtazur et al., 2009). Proposals on theories about teaching and learning languages have gone through changes and have been included in the language teaching methodologies based on the needs of the learner (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020).

Thus, the main sources for needs analysis listed by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) are the learners, people working or studying in the field, ex-students and documents relevant to the field, clients, employers, colleagues and ESP research in the field. They also suggested the use of questionnaires, analysis of authentic spoken and written texts, discussions, structured interviews, observations and assessments as the main data collection methods for needs analysis. According to Benesch (1996), as cited by Ferris (1998), needs analysis consists of the collection and analysis of one or more of the following types of data: questionnaires in which students provide information about their background and goals, surveys in which instructors are asked about their course requirements, course syllabi and assignments, and observation of students or instructors in naturalistic settings.

In conclusion, needs analysis is a starting point for identifying the communicative and linguistic needs and goals of students. It is hoped that with the insights gained from the needs analysis, a more successful language course can be defined and fit the learners' needs.

3. Instructional Computer Technology (ICT)

Technology in the classroom is nothing new in education. The utilization and integration of Instructional Computer Technology (ICT) tools in English lessons have proven to be effective in assisting students in acquiring English language competency as well as enhancing the quality of their learning experience (Zaiton & Samuel, 2006). This is because integrating ICT tools in teaching can lead to an increase in students learning competencies and increase opportunity for communication (Jorge, C. M. H., Jorge, M. d. C. A., Gutiérrez, E. R., García, E G., & Díaz, M. B. (2003). This can be further supported by the key findings under ImpactCT2 (www.becta.org.uk), which show that the use of ICT tools in teaching and learning has positive effects on behaviour, motivation, communication and process skills. Thus, by combining TLBT and ICT in the course, it is hoped that the course would enable enhanced learning, as well as teaching. In addition, hybrid learning has become a popular method of teaching among schools and institutions (Chen & Mokhtar, 2023), and this could be enhanced and encouraged in the education system.

4. Data gathering instruments

Eight (8) ESP lecturers, seven (7) Hospitality lecturers and thirty (30) Hotel and Catering Management students had been chosen to complete the questionnaire. Questionnaires were used to measure the attitudes of the learners towards the English language and the task-based language teaching method that they have been exposed to. The students are the first semester students of the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management course. The students were chosen at random to participate in this research, and since they are school leavers with no background knowledge in hotel and catering, what they learn during the lessons will constitute their first ESP lesson related to the field.

5. Findings and Discussion

There are three (3) different respondents responding to the questionnaire: the ESP lecturers, the Hotel and Catering Management lecturers, and the Hotel and Catering Management students. Their profiles are discussed in further detail in this section.

ESP and Hotel and Catering Management Lecturers

From the responses we have obtained from the questionnaires of both the ESP and Hotel and Catering Management lecturers, we can conclude that both of the parties agreed that an English language course is necessary for the students of the Hotel and Catering Management course at their institution. Surprisingly, they felt that the Listening and Speaking skills are the most important skills for their students. As presented in Table 24, 100 percent of the Hotel and Catering Management lecturers felt that Speaking is the most important skill, while another 85.7 percent of the respondents agreed that Listening is another important skill for their students. Reading and Writing skills are regarded as of lesser importance skills for their students. As shown in Table 14, a slightly lower percentage was obtained from the ESP lecturers when only 87.5 percent of the respondents felt that Speaking is the most important skill for their students, while another 75 percent of the respondents agreed that Listening is the second most important skill for their students.

It was also found that the ESP lecturers felt that the current English language syllabus needs to be restructured. A reason given by Respondent ESP2 was:

“...our syllabus should be restructured as it does not really help the students to grasp the language or in other words to value the importance of language in their field of work...”

This statement is further supported by the respondents' views on the current English language syllabus, as shown in Table 22. Only 50 percent of the respondents believed that the current English language course:

- a. prepares students to speak in English,
- b. helps students meet their future workplace language needs, and
- c. motivates students to learn the language

This finding is critical to the Hotel and Catering Management lecturers because they strongly agreed that the students will encounter the use of the English language in the workplace. As shown in Table 25, the students will need to use the language when they are around the hotel: entertaining guests' queries, making and answering telephone calls, and booking hotel reservations. A total of 85.7 percent of the respondents agreed that the students will need to use the English language when they are at the hotel.

Technology is seen as an effective tool in teaching and learning. Thus, these lecturers also found that the use of

technology is something good. Although the ESP lecturers admit that they are familiar with technology, only a small fraction of 25 percent of them utilized technology as their teaching tools. A reason given for this was obtained from Respondent ESP2:

"...not bad at using technology but quite time-consuming."

As for the Hotel and Catering Management lecturers, a slightly higher percentage admitted that they utilize technology as their teaching tools. As shown in Table 26, a total of 57.1 percent of the respondents claimed that they use technology during lessons.

Speaking skill is regarded as the most important aspect of language learning among the ESP and Hotel and Catering Management lecturers. Thus, they both agreed that by adopting more conversational activities, the students will become more confident in speaking the language. A number of remarks were given by the respondents:

"I always use role-play activities in my classroom because I think that role-play is one of the practical ways to train the students to talk and use the language and also to build up their self-confidence." (Respondent ESP7)

"I think information gap should be greatly suggested in classrooms to initiate conversation among the students."(Respondent ESP2)

The Hotel and Catering Management lecturers are also in the same boat as the ESP lecturers when they stated that having more activities that encourage speaking in class will help the students to become more confident in speaking.

We can deduce that these lecturers are keen to practice Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in their classroom teaching and learning. For example, the lecturers, at times, would carry out their lessons outside the classroom setting. They would carry out lessons in a setting that nearly resembles the future working place of their students, which is an inn at their institution. As for the Hotel and Catering Management lecturers, their classes are mostly carried out in a real setting, such as the kitchen (especially for cooking lessons). As a result, assigning tasks as teaching materials has become part of their instructional activities with the students for several reasons:

"...boosts their (the students) confidence as TBLT is more student-centered."

"...encourages students to use the language freely."(Respondent ESP1)

Hotel and Catering Management Students

Based on the results from the Hotel and Catering Management students, most of the students, 76.7 percent, are interested in learning English, although many did not get good results in the SPM English paper. Therefore, it is important that appropriate and interesting activities should be carried out in order to enhance their interests and, at the same time,

to help these students improve their English.

It also seems like the students prefer to do more ICT-based and task-based activities, as more than 80 percent of them have chosen in the questionnaire. It would be beneficial if some changes in the module were made in order to add some elements of ICT and TBLT to make a better module. Saputra et al. (2023) also found that students tend to favour the online teaching strategy, especially when doing task-based activities, for example, role-play.

Looking at the results, more emphasis should be given to speaking skills, too, as it can be seen that the students prefer to use English mostly in written assignments like writing memos. Although the students mentioned that they usually use English for their presentations, this is because it is a must for them to use English when doing presentations on an English subject. Not many of the students (about 40 percent only) were speaking English with their family members and friends at home. They seemed not to be exposed much to the English language as they were more comfortable speaking it with their lecturers and friends at the polytechnic. If this is the case, there should be more chances given for them to practice the language in the polytechnic, especially during the English lesson, as also agreed by both the ESP lecturers and Hotel and Catering Management lecturers based on the data gathered from the questionnaires.

36.7 percent of the students believed that the current module has not given them enough motivation to use English, especially for spoken English. Some amendments could be made to include technology and some task-based activities, which are hoped to better equip the students with the requirement needed to speak in English when facing the real world later.

6. Conclusion

This analysis hopes to be able to explore how attitude and performance can be affected by task conditions. The fact that new technology is going to be employed in the module may definitely contribute to the existing knowledge about TBLT; specifically, to the cognitive perspectives of it. This analysis will also be able to give some insight into how effective TBLT is when it is conducted in a more real-life setting, outside of the classroom. Therefore, by employing ESP and TBLT as an innovation, it is hoped that it would be able to improve students' attitudes towards the learning of English. This analysis will also be a platform to incorporate technology into TBLT, which would help to further improve students' achievement and prepare them for the real world.

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