WORKING ON INNOVATION IN ESP IN TOURISM: THREE EXAMPLES

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Abstract. Most students start studying for a Degree in Tourism Management at our university (Florida Universitaria, Valencia, Spain) at the B2 English level, but without any prior contact with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Tourism. Creating motivating experiences that boost students' interest in the English for Tourism I, II and III, mandatory subjects that they take throughout their degree, is a challenge to us. The aim of this paper is to present three examples of short projects in ESP, each conducted in one of the three years when students have English. All the projects share the following characteristics: learners apply their expertise to tourism related situations, students in other degrees or lecturers at Florida Universitaria participate as target audience, and IT tools are used for developing the projects and communication. As regards the assignments, first-year learners prepared a *Valencia City Guide* for the European lecturers who participated in our International Week. Second-year students drew up a proposal for a cultural exhibition for young people, taking information from the feedback given by other students within the target age group. Third-year students created an online game about Valencian monuments. Third-year students for a Degree in Education (future English teachers) reviewed the text and gave feedback; the activity was answered by first-year education students who played the role of tourists. Data obtained from satisfaction questionnaires, together with the feedback given by students in class, proved a positive effect of these projects on students' attitude towards the subject and subsequently on academic results.

Key words: ESP, motivation, project, innovation, IT, tourism studies

INTRODUCTION

The present paper focuses on projects in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly on English for Tourism. Although for decades ESP has been a subject of interest for scholars, research in this field still faces many challenges since, as Widodo (2016: 277) claims, 'ESP continues to evolve because professional settings change'. Nevertheless, the main objective of English for Specific Purposes remains to be training students to perform professionally in situations where communication must be in English.

The projects we present were carried out at Florida Universitaria, a private institution set up as a cooperative and affiliated to the University of Valencia (Spain).

The students who participated were in the first three years of a Degree in Tourism and come from different backgrounds and nationalities (Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Japanese). The student age range is from 18 to 23; all of them have to take three ESP courses throughout their degree. Most of them started the degree at the B2 English level, but without awareness of how ESP could help them in their careers and underestimating its value.

In this scenario, boosting students' interest in the English for Tourism modules was a challenge to the language lecturer and innovation appeared as the most effective alternative. The main aim of this paper is to present the project-based methodology as a means of increasing students' motivation and maintaining it throughout three academic years. Evidence shows that raising students' interest results in the improvement of their English command in a professional setting.

In the following sections, first, the process followed to meet the abovementioned goals will be explained. Then, the examples of three short projects in ESP will be described, and students' self-reported feedback will be analysed in terms of motivation and satisfaction.

Finally, the conclusions reached will be presented. It is important to stress that in each section the scholars' theories that have influenced the present paper will be explained.

THE PROCESS

The process that led to the design of the three projects here presented started with a needs analysis and continued with the identification of the motivational factors that would be the core of the pedagogical proposal; after that, the outline of the projects, based on the subject contents, was written, and the organizational arrangements were decided on.

Given the importance of a needs analysis in ESP courses defended by authors such as Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Robinson (1991), Moreno (2004) and Rahman (2015), at the beginning of the module English for Tourism I, a survey was conducted to identify students' idea of what they needed to communicate professionally in English.

The questionnaire devised contained the three components suggested by Rahman (2015: 26): TSA (Target Situation Analysis), LSA (Learning Situation Analysis) and PSA (Present Situation Analysis). After analysing the results obtained and the scenario for the English courses to take place, the project-based methodology stood out as an effective way of increasing students' interest and helping them meet their language goals.

Concerning motivation, there is no denying that this is a challenging field of research and many issues beyond the lecturer's control must be faced. To begin with, students and lecturers frequently hold different views on what is motivating. As Ames (1990: 411) puts it, learners are motivated, but they are

not always necessarily motivated to do what the teacher wants them to do. Additionally, there are many factors that can affect students' motivation, considering only those related to the English class, Gardner (2007: 11) already lists six: the teacher, the class atmosphere, the course content, materials, and facilities, as well as personal characteristics of the student (such as studiousness, etc.). Still, the advantages of increasing students' motivation beat the difficulties to such an extent that, according to the studies carried out by Lee, Gardner and Lau (2020: 451), the benefits brought by L2 teachers' motivational practice can even transcend the classroom.

Karaoglu (2008) affirms that lecturers should identify the learners' purposes and needs to develop proper motivational strategies. From this standpoint, the students' opinions given in the needs analysis, as well as the lecturer's previous experience, provided the grounds to choose the following four motivational factors as the basis of the three projects: autonomy, relevance to real life, collaborative work, and IT use.

Regarding autonomy, in the three projects students were guaranteed a high degree of freedom, the lecturer acting merely as a coordinator and advisor after suggesting some initial guidelines. Learners had the possibility to choose the group members, the topics, the methodology and the final outcome they wanted to produce.

In relation to working in situations which would be important to students' professional life, Williams K. C. and Williams C. C. (2011: 9) consider that making the content 'relevant to real life' is the first factor to increase students' motivation. In the projects described in this study, participants were able to apply their language knowledge to tourism related situations, which provided a practical dimension to what they had learnt in class. It is important to emphasize that the assignments were completely integrated in the course syllabus in terms of content and assessment, which added coherence to the subject and the methodology applied. To go the extra mile, students worked for a real audience: foreign lecturers and peers from other degrees at Florida Universitaria.

Concerning collaborative learning, students' cooperation took place at two levels. On the one hand, tourism students worked with peers from other degrees. This type of collaboration had proved highly motivating in similar experiences (Alberola and Iranzo, 2022: 371). The motivational power of working with other students has also been supported by Colvin (2007: 165) who affirms that peer teaching can also contribute to students' learning, motivation, and empowerment. Similarly, Aceto, Dondi and Marzotto (2010: 4) contend that peer-to-peer interaction and individual empowerment are a key factor in enhancing learning and the pleasure of learning. On the other hand, tourism students worked in teams with their classmates; around 15-17 students register for one of the English modules every year, which means that the projects were carried out in small groups (2 to 3 participants).

With regard to the use of IT for class-based tasks, as Widodo (2016: 290) asserts, using different technological tools and platforms provides students with many opportunities to access language in context and to use English as a target language in different professional communication contexts. Besides, Dashtestani and Stojković (2015: 452) also recommend the use of a wide range of technologies in ESP courses to maximize student participation and engagement in language learning. In the projects described in this paper, computing tools were used for research, online team communication, file sharing, quiz and questionnaire design, and for the final product creation and its oral presentation.

THE PROJECTS

The project-based proposals were implemented in three different subjects (one per academic year), Communication in English for Tourism I, II and III, in a Degree in Tourism. This means that each student will participate in three projects in consecutive years, which implies that the projects must be complementary but different.

1   ENGLISH FOR TOURISM I: CREATING A VALENCIA CITY GUIDE

In the first year, students prepared a Valencia city guide for foreign visitors. The lecturers who participated in Florida International Week formed the target audience; they came to Valencia for five days in February and had free time to visit the city after their teaching.

Students researched and compared the existing tourist information to propose original suggestions made by locals following their own experience. They also decided on the content and format of the guide. It is important to highlight the coordination difficulty because all the class had to create one single city guide. In different editions of this project, several formats were chosen to present the information: a notebook with tourist information, a website, or separate leaflets (one per topic). In the International Week welcome session, with all the European lecturers attending, students presented and distributed the guide.

2   ENGLISH FOR TOURISM II: ORGANIZING A CULTURAL EXHIBITION

In the second year, students drew up a proposal for a cultural exhibition addressed mainly to young people.

As part of the course content, students had learnt the basics of event planning and they were tasked with the designing of a cultural exhibition in Valencia. First, learners found out what the term 'culture' involves; then, they chose a topic that could be appealing to young people. Fund raising was not possible for the needs

of the exhibition; therefore, the purpose was to create a proposal to be offered to an institution that might be interested in the idea.

Each group had to present a different exhibition; once the groups had the core ideas, they designed a questionnaire about the needs and wishes of potential visitors to find out if their proposal would be successful with young people. It was distributed online to other students from the university within the age range targeted. Feedback obtained helped tourism students modify their initial proposal and adapt it to attract the audience selected. The different exhibitions were presented orally in class.

3 ENGLISH FOR TOURISM III: PROMOTING VALENCIAN ARCHITECTURE

With the aim of promoting Valencian architecture, third-year tourism students prepared an online quiz about a well-known building to be uploaded to a tourism-related website.

After choosing an edifice per group, students had to write a description of this particular building using the architecture-related vocabulary acquired in class. Then, they designed a quiz about the information given, the use of images and videos were encouraged. In this project, tourism students collaborated with two groups of peers. On the one hand, third-year students for a Degree in Education (future English teachers) reviewed the text and gave feedback concerning grammar and vocabulary. Taking into consideration their suggestions, the tourism students modified their quiz. On the other hand, once the final version was ready, the quiz was sent to all first-year education students, who played the role of potential visitors and answered the questions. The scores obtained were analysed and presented in class.

FINDINGS: MOTIVATION AND SATISFACTION

Undoubtedly, the ultimate objective of any class task is achieving teachers and students' satisfaction. Indeed, there is a strong link between motivation and satisfaction. Experience shows that motivation is a key factor to achieve satisfaction (Alberola, 2016: 34).

To learn the motivational impact of the experiences described in the present paper and students' degree of satisfaction with them, a questionnaire was devised. It was divided into three parts, the first with questions about motivation, with major interest placed on the four factors dealt with in the project. The second part was about the participants' satisfaction with their work and the process itself. Finally, in the third part an open question helped to learn the learners' overall opinion and comments.

Questions varied slightly in each project's questionnaire to adapt them to the actual activities done; nevertheless, since the general objectives and

motivational tools of the three projects were similar, it appears more functional to present the results calculating the average rate of the three projects and organizing the data per motivational factor, ratings ranging from 0 to 5 (being 5 the most motivating). Although each project has been implemented every year since 2018, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the projects had to be adapted to the online classes and the results obtained in 2019 and 2020 are not comparable to the rest; consequently, in the present study figures have been calculated with the survey results obtained only in 2021–2022.

As far as the section about motivation is concerned, it can be stated that students found the projects motivating as the average scores ranged from 4 to 5 for all the items. Although only with slightly different results, the four factors could be ranked in line with their motivational effect as follows: the most moti-vating factor for students was autonomy, the questions about having freedom to choose the teammates and the topics to work on scored 4.9 (5 the highest possi-bility). Working for a real audience in professional situations ranked second with 4.8. The IT use with 4.6 was in the third position, and the last in the ranking was working in groups with the result of 4.0. This lowest position for teamwork is explained by the learners that it is difficult to manage the issues that arise among team members. Besides, lecturers should be aware of the influence among team members, which is not always positive. As Dörney (2001: 49) explains, the moti-vation of the task participants is not independent of one another; when a student works with highly motivated or unmotivated partners, this affects the learner's own attitude towards the task.

As regards satisfaction, average ratings also ranged from 4 to 5, but they were slightly lower than in for motivation. The students were more satisfied with the whole process (4.4 points) than with the outcome they had produced (4.4 points). In this regard, the participants argued that they could have done it better with more effort. And finally, 4.6 was the result about satisfaction with the whole project.

In the final part, comments made by the students confirmed that they had enjoyed doing this type of short projects and would like to participate in some more.

CONCLUSIONS

As reported by the students, participating in short projects, three of them analyzed here, was highly motivating and satisfactory for them.

Additionally, from the lecturer's perspective, a more positive and participatory attitude towards the English for Tourism subjects was observed during the time these projects were in progress, and as expected, there was an improvement in students' academic results.

Therefore, the project-based methodology applied has proved rewarding for all the participants and the objectives set were met. However, the three projects described did not prove to be enough for students to be motivated throughout the three years and new projects had to be implemented, for instance, the organization of online training with students from a German university.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that these projects must be completely integrated in the course syllabus to be valued positively by students in line with the way they approach learning.

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