Teaching English for Specific Purposes: Motivating Students

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Abstract: *Motivation is without any doubt an extremely significant factor in the effectiveness of teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP). When students are intrinsically motivated, they are more engaged and they consider academic activities meaningful and enjoyable, which might have more positive effects on the long term. Since motivation plays a pivotal role from this point of view, it is extremely relevant to design lessons meant to increase students' intrinsic motivation, as it encourages active participation and it creates a more suitable environment for them to remember the information and use it again in the future. From this perspective, the aim of the present paper is to offer an examination of content-based instruction (CBI), taking into consideration the fact that it focuses on the practical application of English, and to analyze the impact that this approach might have on motivating students. This paper also mentions some activities that might be employed in a CBI-based lesson, in the light of the fact that CBI has the potential to transform ESP teaching from a more theoretical activity into a more engaging and meaningful one that directly aligns with students' real-world needs and professional goals.*

Keywords*: ESP; intrinsic motivation; content-based instruction;*

Introduction

The process of learning a foreign language can sometimes be challenging for students and even more so, ESP classes might seem problematic if the participants cannot see the practical side. Against this backdrop, getting students actively involved and keeping them engaged is essential, especially these days, when technology is playing an increasingly significant role in students' lives.

It has always been clear for teachers that finding the proper ways to draw everyone's attention simultaneously is most often not very easy to achieve and for the past few years this has turned into an issue that causes real concern. During the pandemic students were given free access to technology in class and teachers adapted their teaching methods in order to make them more attractive in the online environment, thus going back to in-person interaction might have brought different student expectations. This is a situation that instructors have to tackle from various perspectives, since including digital tools and other technology-based methods may actually have an undesired effect. Working with modern applications and focusing on

adopting innovative approaches usually involve using the internet in the classroom. This may impact students negatively and may "stand in the way of pursuing their goals", given that a study found that those "with better results generally visited websites like Google and YouTube" while those "with moderate or bad results generally spent time on social media platforms (mainly Facebook and WhatsApp) (Hemal et al.).

Genuine interest and total engagement might be regarded at times as utopian goals, but, nevertheless, feeding students' passivity through traditional teaching methods leads to boredom and skipping classes (Asmali 90), therefore implementing new techniques with the purpose of increasing their motivation is definitely worth examining in order to assess its potential to dissipate monotony and stir curiosity during ESP classes.

Motivation

At this point it is necessary to offer a definition of motivation, even if this "is extremely hard since it is one of the most complex and challenging issues educators face" (Scheidecker and Freeman qtd. in Kanellopoulou and Giannakoulopoulos 150) and to distinguish between the two main types of motivation which are essential when talking about managing student behaviour, that is intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. According to Ryan and Deci, "[t]o be motivated means *to be moved* to do something", but one should not view motivation as a unitary phenomenon, since people "vary not only in *level* of motivation (i.e., how much motivation), but also in the *orientation* of that motivation (i.e., what type of motivation)" ("Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations" 54). The orientation of motivation is what the present work aims at discussing, given that this concept refers to the rather straightforward distinction between situations when students do certain activities because they are genuinely interested-due to several reasons- and situations when students start doing work just because they are externally controlled, in one way or another.

In the 1985 book, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*, Deci and Ryan articulated self-determination theory (SDT), which mainly focuses on how social-contextual conditions can facilitate or prevent human flourishing. In other words, SDT seeks to understand what people "need from their psychological and social environments to be fully functioning and to thrive" (Ryan and Deci, *Self-Determination Theory* 4). When it comes to motivation, SDT differs from other approaches from the point of view of the stress on the sources and various kinds of motivation which influence behaviour. The effects can be seen in "the quality of persistence, performance, and health benefits (or costs)" (Ryan and Deci, *Self-Determination Theory* 14). While Ryan and Deci differentiate between external, introjected, identified, integrated and

intrinsic motivation, the latter seems to be the key to deeper learning and better performance when studying foreign languages, as it creates better conditions for more actively engaged students (Kanellopoulou and Giannakoulopoulos 143). Increased intrinsic motivation involves considering academic activities meaningful and enjoyable and might have significant outcomes, such as academic success, retention, and mental wellbeing (Kotera et al. 10173), while students who have higher levels of extrinsic motivation complete tasks based on external factors and extrinsic consequences (10164).

It is a common belief that intrinsic motivation is an internal drive to participate in an activity simply because the activity itself is rewarding, but this interpretation transforms this type of motivation into a quality that students either possess or lack, making "the innocent child culpable for not having (or not having sufficient) intrinsic motivation to engage in academic activities on their own" (Hummel 1). Nevertheless, one can avoid blaming students by redefining intrinsic reinforcement in a way that permits the study of the related concept of student performance, given that such an approach can help "structure the educational setting to support relevant student activities that are indicative of what could be labeled internal motivation" (Hummel 1-2). This proposal suggests that teachers can shape the educational environment in order to support certain student activities. If that is the case, the teacher has the very hard job of designing and planning lessons that enhance participants' intrinsic motivation.

As it has been previously stated, when students are motivated, they get involved in various activities enthusiastically and they genuinely desire to do certain tasks, which means there are higher chances for them to thrive throughout the whole learning process. It is then undoubtedly necessary to promote student motivation with the purpose of achieving the best results. Even if some researchers state that intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation can complement each other (Kanellopoulou and Giannakoulopoulos 160), there are frequent situations when intrinsic goal setting leads to better long-term results than relying on external incentives (Poghosyan 1). Even more so, there are voices that state that true motivation must be intrinsic, it must come from within us and extrinsic enticements in form of prizes and rewards used to convince someone to perform certain activities equal bribing, because motivation is completely different from compliance (Clanton Harpine 87).

The use of external elements to get students to do something or, put differently, extrinsic motivation, can be translated in the classroom in grades, points for completing a task or a penalty for not completing it and, indeed, it may get students to learn, but in the long term it might have negative consequences because it cannot foster genuine interest in the topic and students cannot maintain their engagement (Bandhu 4). What this means is

that students learn in order to pass exams, some of them want to obtain very good results and they go through all the teachers' requirements having in mind the course outcome. Nonetheless, being motivated in such manner does not spark real interest or more profound desire for knowledge.

As one can see, despite the fact that externally motivated learners do their job and can perform very well, extrinsic motivation is not the solution for life-long learning or, at least, long-term academic or professional goals. If that is the case, should one desire to create better learning environments for students, the solution must be searched from a different point of view and that is where intrinsic motivation or, more precisely, boosting pure curiosity and involvement, plays a noteworthy role.

In order for students to perform to their full potential it is essential for teachers to boost their inner motivation, a not so easy task. Ryan and Deci link intrinsic motivation to satisfying three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness. Autonomy involves the sense of volition and refers to being involved wholeheartedly in something, competence is translated into the need to feel mastery, the feeling that you can actually perform successfully, and relatedness is concerned with belonging to a group and feeling cared for by others (*Self-Determination Theory* 10-11). It is thus important for instructors to promote these three elements if one wishes to help students develop intrinsic motivation, since their method of introducing learning tasks creates contexts that offer room for students' inner motivation to flourish or, quite on the contrary, can prevent the process (Niemec and Ryan 136). The feeling that one is part of a group is a need that is important to satisfy perhaps from the very first lessons, in the light of the fact that only when one feels comfortable and accepted in a group, can one respond properly to the group's requirements. In order to enhance students' sense of belonging teachers should establish clear expectations, norms and routines, which means providing a sense of structure and predictability (Asy-Syila 12). At the same time, it is imperative to stress the importance of offering students emotional support. In an article in which there is a list of twelve tips to stimulate intrinsic motivation in medical students a positive interaction between the teacher and the student is linked to the creation of a safer space where participants can express their feelings, doubts and questions and it is, simultaneously, associated with higher commitment (Kusurkar et al. 2011).

In English classes motivating students is even more important as it represents a context where there is not much contact with the target language community and the participants need to receive more help to succeed in language learning (Nat 104). In these circumstances it is significant to find the proper methods that can be used to motivate foreign language learners. In a study which examines language teachers' ways in motivating students in

learning foreign languages, after applying open-ended questionnaires with the teachers the authors found that there is a lot of room for improvement when it comes to teachers maximally motivating learners and the authors propose some methods to motivate students. The first one is the Verbal Method, the traditional one used by most instructors, and the second one is the Visual Method, which encourages the use of media (videos) to enhance students' motivation (Rahman and Sahayu 189).

As it has been shown, there are several actions teachers in general can take to boost their students' intrinsic motivation, but can these represent the solution for ESP classes as well or are there differences when tackling this topic in the context of ESP classes? The ESP teacher's mission can be said to be more difficult than the one of the general English instructor, given the fact that participants in ESP classes come with more specific expectations related to "the nature, content and achievement of the course" (Poghosyan 2). On that account, the process of acquiring English goes on more smoothly when they are presented with relevant materials which appeal to them and which can be used later on for learning or professional purposes (2).

The reasons why adults choose to learn English vary from short-term goals to long-term ambitions or from personal to professional motives. Knowing English undoubtedly represents an advantage when participating and adjusting to a new culture (Hassan et al. 84), which is a situation that more and more young adults have to handle, but when talking about teaching English for specific purposes to students one must also take into account the way in which modern generations learn. Generation Z and Millennials have different learning styles from past generations, so it is important to adjust and update courses in order to obtain their attention. They have been exposed to modern technologies ever since they were little, so the teacher needs to bring contemporary techniques into the classroom. Their early exposure to technology is translated into the fact that they are very much interested in interactive, dynamic and visual technologies, which has an impact on how they perceive and learn and which actually means that the teacher needs to introduce "novel techniques, different authentic materials", invent "new and more interactive tasks" and "enhance teacher-student cooperation in the process of learning" (Stefanova and Zabunov 204).

Studies have found that students who have a positive attitude towards second language learning are aware of the language's importance for their careers and the motivation for learning is more intrinsic (Martin-Gonzales and Chaves-Yuste 41). Therefore, creating the proper learning environment becomes a necessity. In that context, teaching materials and methodology are considered "one of the key factors for success in an ESP course" (Gonzales Ardeo 164). In order to create a positive learning environment, the instructor can challenge students, "prompting reflection on progress." In addition,

learners need to be encouraged to have open dialogues, think critically and be presented with game-based learning (Martin-Gonzales and Chaves-Yuste 42).

Content-Based Instruction

The origins of content-based instruction (CBI) are linked to Canadian immersion programmes, in which students were studying their school subjects in a foreign language (Cenoz 10; Snow qtd. in Snow and Brinton 1) and it represents an approach in which teaching is based on the content. The concepts of communicative language teaching provide the guidelines for CBI, which is based on two relevant principles. The first one revolves around the usefulness of using the second language to acquire information, not as a goal in itself, and the second one stresses the learners' needs as facilitating the acquisition of the target language, which is in this case perceived as a tool with a real purpose (Richards and Rodgers qtd. in Bula Villalobos 73). CBI is being used more and more nowadays, in settings where English represents the "international language of communication, or *lingua franca*" (Snow and Brinton 2).

The relationship between CBI and motivation has been the subject of several studies and there are encouraging results which show that CBI, which is in the end committed to language and content development (Corrales and Maloof 15), can indeed enhance students' motivation (Miyasako 95, Yuanxing and Prachamon 58, Corrales and Maloof 20). If, as it has been stated before, motivating learners intrinsically is an extremely significant aspect from the point of view of the effects on academic success and mental health, the use of CBI in the classroom should definitely be exploited if it helps boost student motivation. Content-based instruction also develops thinking skills that students can transfer to other subjects and it helps them develop abilities such as note-taking, summarizing or extracting relevant information from a text (Djabbarova 338).

In the case of content-based instruction the foreign language becomes the tool, it is not the target anymore. Put more simply, students can learn about the things they like, they do not just study the language from a more theoretical perspective, which becomes a more attractive method of improving the linguistic abilities while gaining knowledge on various fields of interest. It is therefore more than beneficial to find ways in which CBI can be used in the classroom.

Out of the four language skills, Reading is the one that can be improved more easily through the use of CBI. As it has been stated before, the content selected must be as relevant as possible to students' interests. Rather than focusing on other methods which might use isolated and artificial language situations and tasks, researchers found that content-based instruction "provides multiple opportunities for authentic, meaningful

language situations, topics, and tasks" (Corrales and Maloof 21). For instance, rather than asking students to work on scenarios that do not relate to their real-life experiences or professional contexts (like filling in blanks, answering hypothetical questions or describing pictures/situations that lack real-world application) teachers should propose texts and scenarios that offer students the opportunity to acquire information which can be immediately used (for example, finding tasks performed by different people in a text or summarizing relevant ideas).

As pre-reading activities one can use several tasks, such as asking open-ended questions so as to get the students interested in the lesson and actively engaged in the topic and to encourage them to think critically and express their ideas, or anticipation guides, in order for the students to see how much they know about the topic and to offer them the opportunity to update their knowledge. The pre-reading stage is also a perfect moment to integrate technology in order to create a more interactive type of lesson. One can use various online apps to create polls and surveys related to the topic of the lesson, online quizzes or digital flashcards to draw participants' attention on specific concepts or vocabulary.

When it comes to the selection of texts one should choose authentic materials which successfully foster the acquisition of the language (Bula Villalobos 74), not generic texts with a focus on grammar, because, as Corrales and Maloof put it, all language material and tasks should be based on content as it makes learners feel more motivated and it actually helps them learn the language (21). As a result, students are exposed to specific terminology and become aware of cultural references and various registers.

In terms of reading activities, the teacher might base the exercises on various texts ranging from articles, newspapers, reports, case studies, survey findings to technical manuals, guidelines, meeting minutes, research papers, etc. In order to work with the information that they have to read, students can be presented with different activities that give them the chance to develop certain language skills and, at the same time, get a clearer understanding of their specific field. Therefore, teachers can include tasks focusing on identifying key details, filling in diagrams, flowcharts, concept maps, interpreting data or working with the technical vocabulary.

Further on, in order to reinforce and recycle the knowledge obtained in the reading part, the lesson can continue with oral production tasks. These tasks can include "'read and report', panel discussions, oral presentations, small-and whole-group discussions, etc.", as mentioned by Corrales and Maloof (21), and it is a great way for the participants in the ESP class to enjoy a more practical learning experience. Encouraging students to engage in various speaking activities is extremely beneficial "[b]ecause of its focus on meaning rather than structure", which makes learners "less worried about

making mistakes" and helps them "concentrate more on expressing their ideas" (Corrales and Maloof 21). Students can deliver presentations, starting from the details in the given text and their implications and in that way, they can also improve their public speaking abilities, they can have debates on several topics-which also helps them polish their argumentative and critical thinking skills- or they can have round table discussions in order to encourage everyone's participation in the conversation, a significant element to take into consideration, especially when dealing with large groups. In addition, they can conduct interviews, role-play negotiations, create stories to present the information in an unusual way or solve various scenarios and the list does not stop here.

While teachers can employ a diverse range of strategies and techniques, it is essential for instructors to know their students as well as possible, since the success of the methods is also determined by the teacher's ability to customize various activities in order to best suit the needs and interests of the learners. When selecting this approach, one should never overlook the vital importance of material selection, even if choosing the most appropriate texts is very often not an easy job. One should find authentic materials, with real-world application, given that students' intrinsic motivation is enhanced, as it has been stated throughout the present article, when they are presented with information of immediate relevance.

Further research and limitations

While it is indeed true that CBI is an excellent alternative when teaching English for specific purposes from the standpoint of intrinsically motivating learners, there are also potential challenges to be taken into consideration. Among the issues that must be addressed very carefully there are likely problems such as language transfer, content selection or mixed student levels (Maasum et al. 1002-1004).

A student's native language can influence the use and learning of another language, in both positive and negative ways, thus teachers need to provide feedback as much as possible, in order to avoid situations in which students misuse grammar or vocabulary. Choosing the right texts that represent the vehicle for language learning is also a complex issue, because they should be challenging and balanced- neither too easy, nor too difficult. At the same time, there are situations in which teachers have limited access to specific or technical content, so they are faced with having to adapt existing materials and with using less specialized vocabulary. Last but not least, most groups usually consist of lower-level students and higher-level ones, which is translated into the need to tailor materials so as to create an inclusive environment for everyone and give all the students the opportunity to become more autonomous and develop their language skills. Therefore, in order to

use CBI in the best interest of the students and optimize its effectiveness, the topic needs further study, as it seems it is a suitable way to motivate students.

Conclusions

Intrinsic motivation is undeniably a critical element in teaching ESP and it is thus crucial to design lessons which stimulate students' internal drive to learn English, in light of the fact that it has a positive impact on enhancing academic performance and deeper learning. Students' low level of intrinsic motivation may lead to passive participation, reduced independent study and limited progress, thus, in order to influence both their academic achievement and mental well-being it is vital to find solutions which suit their needs and interests. Consequently, investigating the introduction of other approaches designed to enhance intrinsic motivation is certainly worth exploring and, as this article has shown, CBI may be taken into consideration for such purposes.

Teaching grammar and focusing on grammatical competence is simply not enough anymore, as it makes it difficult for students to see the practical value of what they are learning. They become more motivated when they receive relevant content, which is linked to their interests and goals, and in that way they "can really function in the target language with all its cultural, linguistic, and social elements" (Bula Villalobos 81). Content-based instruction, from this standpoint, gives the students the opportunity to interact with content that captures their attention and aligns with their goals, representing a resource they can use for further study or professional development. This approach might make progress smoother and transforms the process of language learning from an abstract one into a more complex and dynamic activity closely linked to students' real-world needs and professional curiosities.

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