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Effectiveness of an Interactive EAP Programme for the Tertiary Level ESL Learners

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Abstract

Academic English is a principal gatekeeper skill for students' academic performance and achievement in their career. This paper describes an experimental study aimed at implementing and evaluating the efficacy of an interactive EAP programme for the tertiary level ESL learners. The investigator developed an interactive EAP programme considering the needs of the target group learners. The programme had been validated by the experts and tried out to the college students to evaluate its effectiveness. Seventy-two university-level ESL students participated in this experiment. They were two groups for the experiment: an experimental group with interactive EAP programme treatment and a control group with no treatment. Needs analysis questionnaire, language proficiency tests (pre-test and post-test), programme feedback questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. The analysis and interpretation of data revealed that the interactive EAP programme was effective in enhancing academic English skills of the tertiary level learners.

Keywords: Academic English, Social English, English for Academic Purposes, Interactive learning



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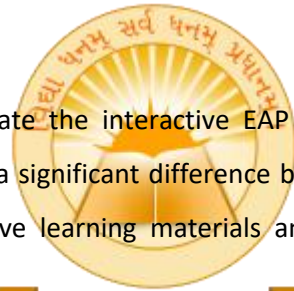
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1. Introduction

Academic language is meta-language which every ESL learner needs to master for academic success. All students need to acquire academic language to thrive and succeed in an academic setting. Not only that it is a threshold skill for employment and advancement in the workplace. It has been observed that the lack of competence of university ESL students in academic language affects their overall academic performance (Willis, 2013). ESL learners face many problems when using academic English. ELLs (English Language Learners) who speak English well in a social situation, however, are not necessarily prepared for academic tasks in the classroom. According to Halliday (1994), many students who are highly successful in informal context may struggle to communicate at school/college in instances where academic language is required. They face problems when writing essays, reports, paragraphs, applications or paraphrasing. They employ 'playground language' in formal settings. Nevertheless, academic language gets least attention in ESL classrooms. This leads to poor acquisition of academic language by ESL learners. The present study by designing interactive language learning programme aims to bridge this gap and facilitate successful learning of academic language.

2. Statement of the Problem

The problem of the research was to evaluate the interactive EAP programme. The summative evaluation was conducted to know whether or not there is a significant difference between the results of the experimental group learning academic English through interactive learning materials and the results of the Control group with no treatment.



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3. Interactive Learning

Engagement is the biggest buzzwords in education right now. In a traditional classroom setting, learners are passive recipient of knowledge. Usually, other than the teacher's voice, the most noticeable aspect of the traditional classroom is its silence. Interactive learning is comparatively a modern second language instruction approach. The approach focuses on enhanced interactivity of various modes to boost ESL instruction. Interactive learning has been defined in various ways.

"Interactive learning is a hands-on approach to help students become more engaged and retain more material. With or without a form of technology."

- Lindy Hatten (n.d.)

"Interactive learning is a pedagogical technique that engages students by having them actively participate with peers in lessons."

- Rebecca Renner (2018)



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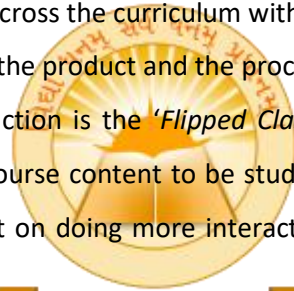
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“Interactive learning actively engages the students in wrestling with the material. It reinvigorates the classroom for both students and faculty. Lectures are changed into discussions, and students and teachers become partners in the journey of knowledge acquisition.”

- Stanford University School of Medicine

The features of Interactive Learning are as follows:

- Interactive approach encourages students to interact with each other and with the subject matter.
- Students are active participants in interactive approach to teaching-learning. Rather than sitting at their place like passive sponges ready to absorb the material, with the interactive approach, learners are part of the lesson.
- Interactive education includes a variety of techniques that range from lessons that require conversational skills to extensive project-based learning.
- Interactive learning may take place across the curriculum with or without technology
- Interactive learning focuses on both the product and the process.
- The foundation of interactive instruction is the *‘Flipped Classroom’* (or inverted classroom) method. The teacher chooses and provides the course content to be studied at home before the next learning session. Thus, time in the classroom is spent on doing more interactive learning strategies, such as discussions or hands-on activities (Dexway, n.d.).



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4. Method

The research design used for the present study was an experimental design. There were two groups used in this research; those were experimental group and control group. Seventy-two tertiary level students (36 in Experimental Group and 36 in Control Group) of various professional programmes of CHARUSAT University, Changa (Anand, Gujarat) participated in this study. The treatment was conducted in one group while the other group was kept for performance comparison purpose only.

The researcher administered a needs analysis questionnaire to target group learners. Having analysed their language performances through collected language samples and needs analysis questionnaire, the researcher finalised the EAP programme components. The researcher then developed EAP programme considering the principles of interactive learning approach. The steps to develop these materials consist of material design principles proposed by Wilga Rivers (1997). The programme used blended learning approach as it consisted of online and in-contact



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instruction. The interactive programme consisted of self-learning instructional videos, participatory learning activities and tasks, practice exercises based on interactive learning software like 'HotPotato' and 'Words Worth'. In total 30 hours of interactive EAP programme was designed by the researcher. The programme covered all four macro language skills i.e. Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing and also academic vocabulary.

The interactive multimedia learning materials were validated by the experts and tried out on the experimental group learners to enhance their academic English proficiency. The interactive EAP learning materials were used in teaching Academic English to the experimental group, while no treatment was provided to the control group. Before the intervention, the participants from the two groups were tested by using the language proficiency test (total 160 marks) to know their levels of academic English proficiency. The treatment was conducted in two-hour session three days a week for total 5 weeks in the months of August-September 2017. A post-test was given to both the groups at the end of the intervention programme. In addition, the students in the experimental group were asked to respond to a programme feedback questionnaire to receive qualitative inputs about programme effectiveness.

5. Result Analysis and Interpretation

The data quantitative data collected through the aforementioned data collection tools were analysed by using Microsoft Excel programme and SPSS. T-test statistical technique (SPSS) to calculate the data at significant level 0.05. In this testing, the results of pre-test and post-test from the two groups were analysed to test the hypothesis, i.e.

- i. There will be no significant difference between the results of the post-test of experimental and control groups.
- ii. There will no significant difference between the results of the post-test of experimental and control groups.

An overview of the performance of the experimental group and the control group in pre-test and post-test is given in table 1.

Table-1: The Descriptive Analysis of Pre-test and Post-test Results of Participants

| | | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-----------|---------------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Pre-test | Experimental Group | 36 | 73.89 | 17.039 | 2.840 |
| | Control Group | 36 | 68.47 | 16.024 | 2.671 |
| Post-test | Experimental Group | 36 | 104.39 | 18.287 | 3.048 |
| | Control Group | 36 | 69.97 | 15.193 | 2.532 |



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The results of statistical analysis showed that the mean scores of pre-test of experimental and control groups (73.89 and 68.47) (See Table 1). It indicates that the scores of the experimental group are higher than the control group. A t-test was used to check for differences of pre-test scores between the experimental group and the control group. The test confirmed that difference in the pre-test means of the two groups were not statistically significant ($t_{(36)} = -1.533$; $p = 0.134 > 0.05$). Thus, the pre-test established that both groups are homogeneous.

The results of the statistical analysis of the mean scores of post-test of control and experimental groups (69.97 > 104.39) (See Table 1) indicate that the two groups have different mean scores. A t-test was used to check for differences of post-test scores between the Experimental group and the Control group. The test confirmed that the difference in the post-test means of the two groups were statistically significant ($t_{(36)} = -8.915$; $p = .000 < 0.05$).

Therefore, H_1 is accepted, and H_2 is rejected.

6. Discussion

This study reveals that teaching academic English by using interactive EAP programme is very effective. The difference in the post-test mean achievement score of the experimental group and the control group indicated that students who had undergone interactive EAP programme performed better in academic English proficiency test in comparison to the other group students who were not given any treatment. The programme feedback questionnaire by the experimental group participants revealed that most students had expressed a positive opinion about various components of programme like course design, learning environment, teacher effectiveness, improvement in language skills etc.. The qualitative data analysis revealed that participants preferred the participatory activities and flipped classroom strategy implemented during the programme instruction. It was found that integration of technology in EAP programme provides additional motivation for learners' engagement.

7. Suggestions

ESL teachers may draw implications for classroom practice from these findings. To enhance learners' acquisition of academic English, ESL teachers should design need-based English for specific purposes programme. In an EAP programme, the teacher should ensure all modes of interaction: content-learner interaction, learner-teacher interaction, learner-learner interaction. Also, the teacher should integrate various participatory activities and design different kinds of assignments that engage students in cooperative learning. The technology can provide rich and diverse pre and post classroom target language exposure to learners if graded and reliable learning content is designed using multimedia tools and interactive learning platforms.



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8. Conclusion

This empirical study reveals that when an EAP programme with blended learning approach offers more learner–content interaction, learning performance and learner satisfaction can be improved. Most participants commented that they especially liked the learning videos and group-work and pair-work activities. There are several plausible explanations as to why experimental group given interactive learning treatment significantly outperformed the control group. An interactive learning instruction enables learner-centred activities and provides necessary learner–content interaction. This study implies that to create effective learning, e-learning environments should provide interactive instructional content that learners can view on a personalised, self-directed basis. Importantly, the use of technology should be coupled with effective pedagogy to yield desired results in EAP instruction.

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