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Design of a business didactic unit for “Tierno Encanto” Association to promote communicative skills, Guanacaste, Costa Rica 2021

Diseño de una unidad didáctica empresarial para la Asociación "Tierno Encanto" para promover las habilidades comunicativas, Guanacaste, Costa Rica 2021

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Abstract

Community associations in Costa Rica engage in projects requiring members to communicate in a lingua franca to effectively lead and negotiate with foreign investors contributing to social welfare initiatives. Consequently, the implementation of comprehensive training programs focusing on English language proficiency for this sector is imperative. This study aims to evaluate the design of an English didactic unit emphasizing Business speaking skills for the "Tierno Encanto" Association in Guanacaste, 2021. Qualitative data collection methods, including needs tests, Likert scales, and focus groups, are employed to triangulate the data, ensuring convergence and integration of qualitative findings. The results indicate that despite possessing limited instrumental language proficiency, the participants recognize the necessity to enhance and acquire English language skills, particularly in the context of business, to improve their job prospects and professional competencies within the region. This evaluation serves as a foundation for developing tailored English language training programs that address the specific needs and goals of community associations in Costa Rica, empowering members to effectively engage in business communication and maximize the benefits of collaborations with foreign investors.

Keywords: community associations, lingua franca, didactic unit, language proficiency

Resumen

Las asociaciones comunitarias en Costa Rica participan en proyectos que requieren que sus miembros se comuniquen en una lengua franca para liderar y negociar de manera efectiva con inversores extranjeros que contribuyen a iniciativas de bienestar social. En consecuencia, la implementación de programas de capacitación integral que se centren en la competencia en el idioma inglés para este sector es imperativa. Este estudio tiene como objetivo evaluar el diseño de una unidad didáctica de inglés que enfatice las habilidades de comunicación empresarial para la Asociación "Tierno Encanto" en Guanacaste, 2021. Se emplean métodos de recolección de datos cualitativos, que incluyen pruebas de necesidades, escalas de Likert y grupos de enfoque, para triangular los datos, asegurando la convergencia e integración de los hallazgos cualitativos. Los resultados indican que, a pesar de tener una competencia limitada en el idioma instrumental, los participantes reconocen la

necesidad de mejorar y adquirir habilidades en el idioma inglés, especialmente en el contexto empresarial, para mejorar sus perspectivas laborales y competencias profesionales dentro de la región. Esta evaluación sirve como base para desarrollar programas de capacitación en inglés adaptados que aborden las necesidades y metas específicas de las asociaciones comunitarias en Costa Rica, capacitando a los miembros para participar de manera efectiva en la comunicación empresarial y maximizar los beneficios de las colaboraciones con inversores extranjeros.

Palabras clave: asociación comunal, lingua franca, unidad didáctica, desempeño del lenguaje

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INTRODUCTION

Guanacaste, Costa Rica, is a province experiencing notable social-economic progress with significant population growth and infrastructure development in recent years (la republica.net, 2021). According to Castillo (2021), Guanacaste possesses attractive characteristics for investors, including a quarter of the national hotel occupancy and 53% of foreign visitation concentrated in the region. It is also renowned as a pioneer in clean energy utilization, with a young population and a high degree of educational preparation. Monica Castillo, the director of Real Estate Intelligence at Collier's, stated that Guanacaste is an area with immense potential that has yet to be fully realized.

The population of Guanacaste is actively seeking to transform their communities and improve the lives of its citizens. In pursuit of these objectives, collaborative and socialistic groups have emerged to lead projects and accomplish complex agendas by leveraging international donations for future community initiatives. However, many community associations are managed by individuals who lack training in negotiation, meeting coordination, and project presentation in a second language. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize the significance of fostering accurate English-speaking proficiency among community associations.

Furthermore, research in action andragogy within this context can contribute to the future development of English for specific purposes courses. By conducting such research, educators can design programs, courses, and holistic curriculum that support lifelong learning and second language acquisition in non-educational institutional settings. This approach will empower community association members to effectively communicate and navigate the complexities of international collaborations, thus maximizing the impact of their projects on local communities.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this action research is to design a Business Curriculum for a Community Association to bridge the acquisition of English speaking proficiency when using the ESP approach and foundations and communicative need studies to the language skills needed in negotiations, meetings management and presentation in a community association setting called 'Tierno Encanto' which has brought a lot of projects to transform the reality thanks to alliances with international stakeholders.

General objective

- To promote communicative Skills proposing the design of a Business Didactic Unit for "Tierno Encanto" association, by applying elaborated research instruments, Guanacaste, 2021.

Specific objectives

- To identify the language limitations of the participants by applying a need analysis survey for the didactic design.
- To design a sample didactic unit that fosters the communicative skills and jargon vocabulary in adult learners by researching English for business materials.
- To apply sample workshops for the English communicative skills acquisition by guiding a focus group.
- To relate the data, gather in the focus groups using pivot tables for qualitative data.

Research Questions

- What are the communication needs of the participants?
- Which topics or strategies are accurate to foster participants skills through a didactic unit?
- How will the training affect the entire association?

METHODOLOGY

In the following section, the approach design of this proposal is portrayed. The research approach is mixed between qualitative and quantitative to use either quantitative or qualitative data analysis. Also, to apply both instruments to validate the data collection from the perspectives of naturalistic and positivistic approached. The application of both approaches will benefit the inquiry in this dissertation due to the possibility of analyzing literature in the two design methods. In the following Creswell (2014) quoted examples of research using more data collecting instruments in his book research design.

Mixed methods involve combining or integration qualitative and quantitative research and data in a research study. Qualitative data tends to be open-ended without predetermined responses while quantitative data usually includes closed-ended responses such as found on questionnaires or psychological instruments. The field of mixed methods research is relatively new with major work in developing it stemming from the middle the to late 1980s. (s.f)

Besides, the usage of both quantitative and qualitative methods is a common practice in the inquire of English for specific purposes course designs like it is portrayed in the book English for Occupational Purposes by Dam (2008) in the following.

The study adopted a mixed-methods design, involving a microscale case study within a single institution as well as a macroscale survey with representative institutions. The purpose of using the mixed method approach in this study was to gain a more comprehensive and enhanced understanding of the phenomena by maximizing the strengths of different methods. (p.33)

Participants

To begin with relate to the question what are the communication needs of the participants? The participants in this research belong to a community marked by several social issues such as low education level, drug consumption, and no economic growth. Most of the participants are adults. Fourteen males and twenty females who are single between 18 to 40 years old. On the other hand, some have finished their high school, but some claimed that they never have been trained in using a second language. Moreover, between the participants, there are university students who are studying a major related business. In addition, one of the participants needs special accommodation due to deafness in one of his ears. However, he is one of the most prepared and educated members of the group at the university level. In the case of women, they are at the university level, but they have issues to attend to their families and children at home sometimes. The occupations vary from medical sciences, business administration, and information technology to pedagogy. The other participants are not at the university level, and they labor in diverse places in town. On the other hand, the community union leaders are two males well educated and lots of experience in community unions' management. Finally, due to the action research method, the researcher is included in the inquiry as a member who seeks to transform and change the reality of those participants.

Data collection

In the following, the instruments to collect data are defined. Therefore, a questionnaire to acquire needs data also other qualitative techniques such as the focus group. Finally, group techniques to hear the narrative of the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section the data obtained will clarify which topics or strategies are accurate to foster participants skills through a didactic unit? As explained in the research proposal the designing of English courses

for specific groups and population requires inquiring in the needs of those who will participate in the implementation, as it is a portrait by Flowerdew (2013) in the following paragraph.

Needs is an umbrella term that embraces many aspects, incorporating learners' goals and backgrounds, their language proficiencies, their reasons for taking the course, their teaching and learning preferences, and the situations they will need to communicate in. Needs can involve what learners know, don't know or want to know, and can be collected and analyzed in a variety of ways. (p.325)

In addition, tables and graphics will be used to foster the understanding and comprehension of the collected quantitative data. In the following part of this chapter, the quantitative data gathered through the survey instrument will be portrayed to be analyzed. First, the gender of the participants is 43% of females and 57% of males and only one participant chooses the LGTBI option.

In addition, the instrument focus group was used in the collection of data to listen to the voices of the participants and their perspective of the course.

The first question students were asked to give their opinions was what activities of the English for business course facilitated your learning? The participants responded that the activities that better foster their learning were those in which they needed to get the vocabulary and work in groups. Besides, they were confused at the beginning with the type of mediation that was used by the facilitator. They stated that they expected a teacher-centered class in which all the knowledge was a transfer by grammar exercises and photocopies. In the other hand the participants answered the following questions

Table 1

Focus group

| 1. What activities of the English for business course facilitated your learning? | | percentage |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| discussion | 4 | 11,76% |
| Drills | 15 | 44,12% |
| fill in the blanks | 3 | 8,82% |
| memory games | 6 | 17,65% |
| presentations | 6 | 17,65% |
| Total | 34 | 100% |

Note: The previous table refers to several members in the community association.

The previous table shows the percentage of agreement with the activities and strategies that best fosters their learning process. The English for Business course facilitated second language learning in non-native speakers through various activities, such as drills (44.12%) and memory games (17%). Notably, the guided discussion activities garnered a lower percentage of agreement, further underscoring the effectiveness of the other methods.

Table 2

Focus group

| 2. Does the student-centered activities in the English for business unit inhibit your learning? | | percentage |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Neutral | 14 | 41,18% |
| No | 20 | 58,82% |
| Total | 34 | 100% |

Note: The previous table refers to several members in the community association.

Upon analyzing the collected data, it was found that (41.18%) of participants reported a neutral perception of the influence of student-centered activities on their learning. This suggests that these activities neither hindered nor facilitated their learning process. On the other hand, the majority, comprising (58.82%) of respondents, indicated that student-centered activities in the English for Business unit did not inhibit their learning.

Table 3

Focus group

| 3. What activities of the English for business course caused more stress, anxiety? | | percentage |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Conversational activities | 2 | 5,88% |
| Presentations | 6 | 17,65% |
| Quiz | 6 | 17,65% |
| Listening | 5 | 14,71% |
| Speaking | 15 | 44,12% |
| Total | 34 | 100% |

Note: The previous table refers to several members in the community association.

The analysis reveals that the activities causing the highest levels of stress and anxiety were speaking exercises (44.12%), followed by presentations (17.65%) and quizzes (17.65%). Listening exercises were reported to induce stress and anxiety by 14.17% of participants, while conversational activities were perceived as least stress-inducing at 5.8%. These findings provide insights into the specific activities that may require additional support and attention to alleviate stress and anxiety among students in the English for Business course.

Table 4

Focus Group

| 4. Can you suggest one or 2 ways in which the course can be improved? | | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Conversational activities | 4 | 11,76% |
| More time | 8 | 23,53% |
| Resources | 22 | 64,71% |
| Total | 34 | 100% |

Note: The previous table refers to several members in the community association the community leaders are included.

The findings demonstrate that 11.76% of participants suggested improvements in conversational activities, while a significant majority of 64.71% emphasized the need for more resources. Additionally, 23.53% of participants expressed the importance of allocating additional time. These suggestions highlight potential avenues for enhancing the course and maximizing students' learning outcomes.

Figure 1

Group technique



Note: participants working in groups in their presentation during the course implementation

The second question was to get the opposite data: what activities of the English for business course inhibit your learning. Participants stated that they have difficulties with solo presentations and when the instruction was only in English, they felt confused so they rather get the instruction in Spanish. Also, the following question was what activities of the English for business course caused more stress, anxiety? the responses were that they feel anxious and really worried when they have to come and present alone to the other classmates' despite not being assessed in the activities they felt stress.

Figure 2

Solo presentation

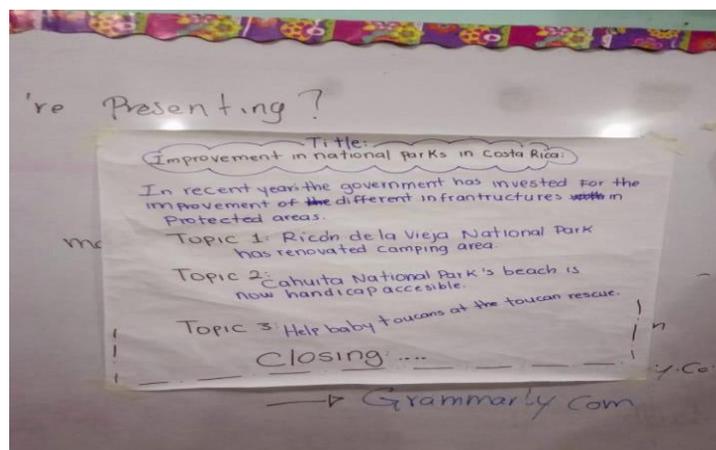


Note: participants doing a presentation during the course implementation

On the other hand, participants portrayed through the following question ways to improve the workshops by answering 2 ways in which the course can be improved. They expressed that the course could be better if they had more resources and access to technology which is due to the technological skills required from employers to hire people with these skills. However, one of the limitations was the place, which is a public school and the lack of internet and video projector to make presentations that are more professional. Also, the schedule was a constraint due to the hour in which some of them could attend the course. They felt that they could not take advantage of all the workshops from the beginning and when they arrived some activities were already explained. Finally, participants were asked to state if the activities were somehow related to business and what they will face in their association.

Figure 3

Outline



Source: participants outline technique to display their presentation during the course implementation

One of the activities was to organize their suggestions to specific discussion cases that later during the workshop they will present in trios. Besides this, they made SWOT analysis to the cases to develop a plan to resolve the situations. The SWOT analysis is a technique used in business to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats a project could confront. Some of them felt challenged by this type of activity because of the lack of vocabulary to express in a sophisticated manner their presentation.

This technique was first taught by one of the members with a university grade in business to activate previous knowledge in the participants who have used this in their university courses. However, the analysis was done in English to later being presented using visual and presentation tips taught before by the facilitator. Related to the technique some participants stated.

“es fácil en español, pero cuando se hace en inglés da muchos nervios. “

“me gusta la técnica no la conocía y no sabía que servía para analizar proyectos”

“tengo que aprender más vocabulario para poder decirlo mejor, porque el vocabulario es diferente a las presentaciones que hacía en otro curso. “

in the other hand, about the course some of the participants said.

“es bueno que se den estos cursos muchas veces uno no puede pagar un curso de inglés o no da miedo porque los profesores nos evalúan duramente. pero aquí el curso es más práctico y no nos dan notas solo nos dan consejos para mejorar.”

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research underscores the importance of enhancing English language proficiency within community associations in Guanacaste, Costa Rica therefore relate How will the training affect the entire association?. The findings highlight the need for training programs that address the specific requirements of these associations, enabling their members to effectively communicate, negotiate, and lead projects in a second language. The study's participants recognized the significance of improving their English language skills, particularly in the context of business, to enhance job prospects and professional competencies.

To further support the development of English for specific purposes courses in this setting, several suggestions can be proposed. Firstly, it is recommended to design tailored training programs that incorporate practical and interactive conversational activities relevant to the business context. These activities should provide opportunities for participants to practice English language skills through simulations, role-plays, and real-life business scenarios.

Additionally, allocating sufficient time within the training programs to focus on language acquisition and skill development is crucial. This will allow participants to engage in meaningful language practice, receive feedback, and address specific areas of improvement. Moreover, providing additional resources such as textbooks, online materials, and multimedia resources can supplement the training and facilitate self-study, ensuring continuous language development beyond the formal training sessions.

Furthermore, collaboration with experienced language instructors and professionals in the business field can greatly enhance the effectiveness of the training programs. Their expertise can contribute to the design of relevant curriculum, authentic assessment methods, and practical exercises that align with the specific needs of community associations.

Lastly, monitoring and evaluating the progress of participants throughout the training programs is vital. Regular assessments, feedback sessions, and opportunities for self-reflection can help participants gauge their language development and identify areas for further improvement.

By implementing these suggestions, community associations in Guanacaste can empower their members with the necessary language skills and competencies to confidently engage in international collaborations, negotiate with foreign investors, and lead projects that bring positive social impact to their communities.

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