ESP Class Activities to Boost Student Engagement in the Classroom: A Case Study

Trinh Thi Thuy[*1], Kieu Linh[1], Phan Thi Thanh Tam[1]

[1]University of Labour and Social Affairs, Hanoi, Vietnam

Abstract:
English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is regarded as a challenging course for students since it necessitates not only a solid foundation in basic English but also a strong understanding of professional topics in order for pupils to acquire this material effectively. The authors discovered that there was little student participation in class sessions when teaching ESP. Finding out why students don't actively participate in class activities as well as what kinds of activities can encourage students to do so was the goal of the research. The study was carried out on a group of 24 English students majoring in human resource management at a university in Hanoi. After 6 weeks of face-to-face learning, activities to encourage student participation were applied. Both qualitative (interviews and discussions) and quantitative (surveys) methods are used in the research. The research team used a 5-level Likert Scale survey to collect information from students. Research results have shown the reasons why students limit their participation in activities, as well as the factors that help increase student participation in activities that lecturers deploy in the classroom.

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, ESP instruction and learning have become more and more significant factors in determining job prospects for graduates. Students with strong ESP skills will feel more confident while approaching and completing professional job in the future. Participation in lessons is crucial in assessing a student's attitude, degree of engagement with the material, and amount of knowledge acquired in each session. It also helps determine the calibre of teaching sessions and the academic progress of students. According to Bissex (1996) "we teach students by giving them opportunities to ask their own questions, leading discussions, and allowing students to express their wishes". Three variables, according to research by Berquist and Phillip (1975), prevent students from participating in class activities: teachers' one-way communication, students' differing learning styles, and the teacher's inability to provide clear directions. "A combination of challenging instruction with effective positive support from the instructor is necessary to improve participation of learners into classroom activities," according to a different study by Tuner and Meyer (2004). Meanwhile, the researchers emphasized the connection between study habits and learner participation in class. These authors demonstrated that "classroom engagement is linked to factors such as: subject achievement, personal achievement, goals, comprehension of instructions, as well as teacher support".

Numerous scholars both domestically and internationally, including Burkšaitienė and Šliogerienė (2018), Duyen Can (2019), Sumipo, Jasmin, M. (2019), Batuto & Morena E. (2019), Elsadig & Hamadan Abdala (2019), etc., have expressed interest in the topic of teaching ESP in universities. Research indicates that a variety of factors, including the challenges that individual students face, can impact the teaching and learning of English for specialised applications. personnel and educational settings. Linking what students learn to real-world problems might increase their interest and engagement in the subject (Burkšaitienė and Šliogerienė, 2018:489– 495). A study by Tar I. et al. (2009) on the lack of language ability identified that

students are too indifferent, passive, lack passion for science and are not very interested in research additional knowledge. They do not learn much from English courses at university, leading to language competence not being formed or not being strengthened. In Duyen's (2019) study, ESP teaching and learning at the university level is mainly influenced by the influence of globalization and internationalization (Duyen, 2019:143). However, studies have not mentioned the uneven level of students' foreign language proficiency and their awareness of the importance of ESP in their future studies and careers.

Students in Hanoi's universities face a variety of communication challenges in an academic setting, but even after completing their education, many still deal with issues connected to their inability to speak and write effectively. They take a lot of English classes at college, but they still struggle to utilise the language correctly, therefore they are unable to achieve the objective of studying ESP. While university-level research on ESP has been done, the majority of these studies have concentrated on ESP training curricula to satisfy student output requirements. In light of this, the researchers think it's critical to identify the causes of students' disinterest in ESP lessons and offer some recommendations for ESP instruction that works.

This study was conducted at a university in Hanoi. Due to time and space constraints, the research was only conducted with a small group of students during a specific teaching and learning period. The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. Why do learners demotivate in activities during ESP classes?

2. How can we increase learners' participation in ESP classes?

2. Theoretical background
2.1. Classify learners based on their level of participation during class
Learning can be defined as either gaining new knowledge or changing one's current knowledge, abilities, and behaviours. Students must therefore actively participate in the search process if learning activities are to be described as the pursuit of knowledge, skills, and behaviours. Pupils must actively seek out information by doing research and obtaining it from both within and outside of the classroom. Students' behaviour in the classroom frequently reflects how they look for and process information. There are two categories of student behaviour in the classroom: passive and active. They are divided into two groups by Mohd Yusof (2011), Hussein (2010), and Bas (2010) according to the students' involvement level in the classroom. The passive group consists of doing something, taking notes, sitting quietly, and listening. Inquiring, voicing ideas, and responding to queries are examples of active groups.

Otherwise, Liu (2001) separated students into four categories depending on their behaviour: complete integration, engagement in the situation, limited participation (marginal interaction), and the group that merely sits and watches (silent observation). Students in the first group actively engage in class activities and are aware of what they should and shouldn't say. According to Zainal Abidin (2007), this set of students frequently participates instantly and spontaneously. When pupils are affected by several elements like socio-cultural, cognitive, emotional, language aptitude, or environmental factors, they participate in the situations. These elements frequently affect how involved a student is in class activities, as well as how they interact with other students and the teacher at any given time. During class, individuals who belong to the marginal interaction group typically listen more than they speak.. This group of pupils, in contrast to the other group, usually would rather listen and take notes in class than engage in discussion or activity. Lastly, there is a subset of children that choose to stay out of verbally engaging activities and simply sit and watch. They appear to take notes in class using a variety of media, including writing and audio, and to process the material that is presented.

The proactive group frequently engages in active participation in classroom activities as information seekers, as indicated by the diverse categorisation of student behaviours in the classroom. Students' active participation in the classroom is demonstrated by their questions, comments, and simple answers to questions from the teacher and other students. A pleasant learning atmosphere in the classroom can be

created by students' eagerness and desire to participate in activities through verbal interactions, according to Davis (2009).

2.2. Factors affecting learner engagement

Previous studies have shown that there are several factors that influence student engagement in the classroom, including the following:

The student's personality is the first consideration. Research by Pajares (1996) and Schunk (1995) demonstrated that students who perform well academically and are self-assured participate in class activities on a frequent basis. Research by Rahil, Habibah, Loh, Muhd Fauzi, Nooreen, and Maria Chong (2006) showed that curiosity and an eagerness to investigate are traits of a self-assured personality. Students get increasingly engaged in classroom activities as a result of this motivation. They will ask questions, voice their ideas, and participate in class discussions to demonstrate their keen interest in learning new information. Siti Mazziha, Nik Suryani, and Melor (2010) found that students with self-limiting personalities frequently exhibit passivity in class activities due to their inability to focus in class, fear of looking foolish, lack of confidence, lack of lesson planning, fear that others will know they are capable, fear that the teacher will criticise their answers, and confusion. These pupils frequently take part in class activities to a lesser extent.

The teacher's style and demeanour make up the second aspect. According to Siti Maziha, Nik Suryani, and Melor's (2010) study, positive nonverbal behaviours like smiling and nodding while listening to students' responses can have an impact on teachers' personality traits, which in turn can affect how much participation students have in class activities. These traits include support, understanding, ease of closeness, and friendliness. According to Fassinger (2000) and Dallimore, Hertenstein & Platt (2004), a teacher's assertiveness and transparency also motivate pupils to engage fully in class activities. Students are inspired to participate in class more and more when they possess these favourable personality traits. Only the personality features of teachers are significant in motivating students to participate in class discussions, according to a different study by Siti Maziha, Nik Suryani, and Melor (2010) that looked at the influence of factors on university students' involvement in Malaysia.

Besides positive personalities, a teacher's methods also impact the classroom environment. The study of Nurzatulshima, Lilia, Kamisah & T. Subahan (2009) showed that the level of student participation was higher when teachers divided the class into small groups of 3 to 5 members, assigned tasks and tested progress of the groups' work and provide specific comments. Using a variety of teaching techniques by teachers will encourage students to be more active and not feel bored during class.

The personalities of the students make up the third aspect. A significant finding of Siti Maziha, Nik Suryani, and Melor's (2010) study on students' actions in the classroom at a Malaysian institution is that peers' personalities have a big influence on students' motivation to participate in class activities. Furthermore, Cayamus & Martin (2004) noted that students who are open-minded frequently encourage other students to participate in class activities by acting as a positive role model for them.

The classroom setting is the final component. Students' motivation to participate in class discussion activities is also impacted by the size of the class. About 90% of students who responded to the survey in Shaheen, Cheng Audrey, and Lim's (2010) study stated they preferred to engage in discussion activities in small groups as opposed to large courses. Pupils will feel more at ease and be more inclined to participate in class activities in a classroom that has sufficient lighting, air conditioning, and other necessities.

Based on prior research findings and theoretical framework, it is thought that engaging in active learning activities in the classroom will enhance students' learning. The elements that encourage students to actively participate in classes still require further investigation on the part of educators and educational administrators.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research subjects
The research was conducted on a group of students in a ESP class at a university in Hanoi during a period of 6 weeks face-to-face learning. The sample size is 24 students including 6 males (25%) and 18 females (75%). At the time the research was conducted, students had completed 2 English courses, including 01 advanced English course, 01 English course specialized in Human Resource Management course 1, and were participating in the English for Human Resource Management course 2.

3.2. Methodology
The study used a mixed-method approach, with the two primary research methodologies being qualitative and quantitative. Furthermore, the study employs a methodology that combines the analysis and synthesis of relevant theories with comparison and synthesis to produce precise, efficacious scientific recommendations.

Quantitative method is used through a survey questionnaire consisting of 2 parts: part 1 includes 3 questions related to information about interview participants and part 2 includes 31 questions designed on a 5- level Likert scale (from completely disagree to completely agree, equivalent to score from 1 to 5). The 31 survey questions focus on 04 categories: learner's personality (questions 1 to 9); the teacher's personality and methods (questions 10 to 18), the personalities of the group (questions 19 to 26) and the space and design of the classroom (questions 27 to 31). This survey questionnaire was built based on the theoretical foundation and results of previous studies related to factors affecting learner participation. The survey questionnaire was distributed to students in class.

The authors employ qualitative approaches, interviewing several students who represent the groups that replied to the survey in order to gather more in-depth perspectives, in order to guarantee the validity of the research findings.

The gathered data is analysed using analysis, synthesis, and comparison techniques. Next, the data is compared to identify barriers and recommendations for enhancing students' enjoyment of engaging in class activities.

3.3. Data collection and analysis
Twenty-four students received the survey questionnaire. 24 valid response sheets were obtained as a result. Participants in the survey received the survey via Google Form. The software SPSS 20.0 version is used to process the results and determine the average score. The following is the significance of the particular average scores:

1.00 – 1.80: Strongly disagree

1.81 – 2.60: Disagree

2.61 – 3.40: Neutral

3.41 – 4.20: Agree

4.21 – 5.00: Totally agree

Interview participants' responses were recorded and classified according to corresponding standards.

4. Results and discussion
After implementing activities to increase student involvement in classes, teachers observed, surveyed, and conducted interviews with students in the class studying English for Human Resource Management course 2 throughout the course of six weeks of in-person instruction. The particular outcomes are as follows:

4.1. Factors affecting students' participation in classroom activities
4.1.1. Learner's personality

Table 1: Personality factors of learners

	Number	Mean	SD
1. You avoid responding to the teacher's questions because of fear that you won't get the question right.	24	4.18	0.58
2. You don't participate in activities because you don't understand what to do and how to structure the activities	24	3.54	0.42
3. You do not participate in class discussions because you are afraid that your classmates will know your true abilities in your major and language.	24	4.14	0.48
4. You are afraid that your classmates and teachers will laugh at your answers	24	4.12	0.46
5. You prefer to listen and take notes rather than say what you're thinking	24	3.59	0.42
6. You only participate in activities that you find interesting	24	4.21	0.43
7. You are ready to answer the teacher's questions and present your point of view during all classes	24	2.79	0.42
8. Listening and taking notes helps you understand and remember the lesson better	24	3.16	0.79
9. Interacting with teachers and participating in class activities helps you understand and learn more new knowledge	24	4.56	0.41
Valid N (listwise)	24		

The results in Table 1 show that personality affects students' attitudes toward participating in activities during class. Questions [1], [2], [3], [4], and [5] with corresponding results of Mean = 4.18, 3.54, 4.14, 4.12, and 3.59 respectively show that students have limited participation in activities during class because they are not confident and are afraid of being judged by the teacher or other students in the class. As a result, individuals frequently favour passive learning methods like listening and making notes as opposed to voicing their own thoughts or seeking clarification on issues they find unclear. It can be seen from question number 7 (Mean = 2.79), that not every student in the class engages in the activities that the teacher is doing. Rather, it is evident from question 6 (Mean = 4.21) that students only take part in class when they find the

teacher's actions engaging. Regarding question number 8 (Mean = 3.16), students do not benefit from listening to the lesson or taking notes in order to better grasp and retain it. Meanwhile, in question number 9 (Mean = 4.56), students agree that interacting with teachers and participating in activities during class helps them know more. From the results of Table 1, it illustrated that students' personalities are the barriers that limit their participation in activities during class, but if teachers create activities that motivate them, it will help them open up, be more active in interacting during class time, and thereby help them learn more.

4.1.2. Teacher's personality and methods

Table 2: Factors of teacher personality and methods

	Number	Mean	SD
10. Classroom teachers enthusiastically support students in activities	24	4.18	0.58
11. Teachers are always ready to explain when students do not understand a question	24	3.54	0.42
12. For each type of lesson, teachers often apply different activities	24	3.434	0.48
13. Teachers divide students into small study groups of 3 - 4 students	24	4.12	0.46
14. Teachers often assign group homework so students can prepare in advance	24	3.59	0.42
15. Teachers always support students in the process of preparing group exercises and homework directly or through online tools such as Zalo and MS Team.	24	3.44	0.43
16. Teachers often give specific comments to each student	24	3.79	0.42
17. You feel uncomfortable when the teacher comments on your poor answers right in class	24	2.56	0.79
18. You feel motivated when the teacher shows you the weaknesses you need to overcome	24	4.56	0.41
Valid N (listwise)	24		

Table number 2 is the students' evaluations of the teachers. Question 10 (Mean = 4.18); question 11 (Mean = 3.54); question 15 (Mean = 3.44) shows that students have positive feedback about the teacher's personality. The results show that teachers are quite enthusiastic in supporting learners both inside and outside class. Regarding the techniques teachers deploy during the teaching process, with results corresponding to question 12 (Mean = 3.44); question 13 (Mean = 4.12); question 14 (Mean = 3.59); and question 16 (Mean = 3.79), it is showed that students have positive responses to the methods teachers use during teaching. In fact, when receiving negative feedback in class, students often feel demotivated. However, question number 17 (Mean = 2.56), shows the opposite where teachers' feedback in class is still positively received by students. This is because the teacher's feedback makes students feel warm and it looks like they are being helped to improve, rather than feeling like they are embarrassed in front of other students. In question 18 (Mean = 4.56), students completely agree that teachers' feedback makes them motivated to participate in class activities and study better. In short, a teacher's personality and teaching method have a huge impact on learners. Learners will feel interested and actively participate in activities during class if teachers give them specific instructions and reasonable feedback to help them overcome limitations and make progress in learning.

4.1.3. Personality of people in the group

Table 3: Personality factors of people in the group

	Number	Mean	SD
19. You are ready to participate in class activities when prepared and discussed in groups	24	4.18	0.58
20. People in the group often work very seriously when assigned tasks	24	3.54	0.42
21. Group members all support each other to best prepare when assigned homework by the teacher	24	3.14	0.48
22. Your team members always want to receive good grades	24	4.12	0.46
23. You feel that you need to be responsible for group work because other students are very active	24	3.59	0.42
24. You think that the group leader is the one responsible for the overall work, so if the group leader doesn't assign work, that's fine	24	3.44	0.43
25. You feel insecure when working in groups because your group members are good and sometimes do everything for you	24	2.79	0.42

	Number	Mean	SD
26. You feel confident when working in a group because your group members know how to divide work to suit each member's strengths.	24	3.56	0.79
Valid N (listwise)	24		

In Table 3, question 19 (Mean = 4.18) shows that when prepared in groups, students feel more confident and proactive in presenting their ideas. In particular, working in groups with members who are serious, proactive, positive, and have a high sense of responsibility for common work (question 20; Mean = 3.54), (question 23; Mean = 3.59) will help students feel included, supported, and willing to express their views. On the contrary, students have a dependent or passive attitude toward group work (question 25; Mean = 2.79). In short, the personalities and attitudes of team members have an impact on the effectiveness and level of interaction of other members. If students work with active members, they will have a more positive and proactive interaction attitude. And vice versa, if group members are not united, lack trust and support each other, the level of participation will be limited. Therefore, teachers need to find solutions to assign students to group that are suitable for each of them to increase student participation in class.

4.1.4. Classroom space and design

Table 4: Space and design of the classroom

	Number	Mean	SD
27. Small classrooms are suitable for discussions and interactive activities	24	4.32	0.69
28. The classroom is fully equipped with projectors, air conditioners and other teaching support equipment	24	3.51	0.41
29. Tables and chairs are arranged to suit discussion activities, making it easy to interact with teachers and classmates	24	3.84	0.55
30. You find that the current classroom arrangement makes it difficult to participate in activities during class	24	1.32	0.38
31. The classroom space is too small, making you feel uncomfortable during class activities	24	1.79	0.52
Valid N (listwise)	24		

For class groups in language learning, the facilities are also designed with a small area, with a size of about 20 - 25 students, and desks are arranged in a relatively oval shape. suitable for highly interactive activities.

Therefore, the results in table 4 show that the responses to classroom space are quite positive. In questions [1], [2], and [3] the results were Mean = 4.32; 3.51 and 3.84 respectively, proving that the classroom space met the needs of learners and subjects. This is further confirmed in questions [4] and [5], where the student disagreed with the negative descriptions related to classroom conditions with survey results respectively Mean = 1.32 and Mean =1.79. In summary, the classroom conditions were assessed by students as appropriate, creating favorable conditions to participate in activities during class.

4.2. Factors affecting the level of student participation in activities
After observing and conducting interviews with students in different groups in the class, the results were as follows:

4.2.1. How to count for participation during the learning process.
Question: If I participate in activities during class, will my attendance and midpoint be counted?
This is a factor that, according to the four students who were interviewed, encourages them to take the initiative to participate in class activities. The first student noted, in particular: "I don't need to feel too pressured when taking the final exam, and it will be more convenient to accumulate points during the study process." "The component scores must be high to have a good final score for each subject," thought the second student as well. Two more pupils commented: "I received experience from my classmates in the above course that being active in class also gives the teacher a good impression and will give me good grades." From there, it can be seen that the scoring policies of educational administrators and teachers also have more or less impact on learners' learning attitudes in class.

4.2.2. How to deploy teacher activities
Question: How do you feel about the way teachers deploy activities during lessons?
Based on Liu's (2001) classification, the four pupils stand for four groups. "Teachers' activities are arranged in a variety of ways for each skill and type of exercise," said the first pupil. Second pupil: "I like the types of individual and group exercises that are prepared at home after each class, because I have time to prepare with my friends in the group." "Group activities follow the WASP formula because it is very practical since students can get acquainted with the actual professional activities of personnel and people working in the field of HR management," expressed the same opinion as the third and fourth students. To put it briefly, learners' participation in class activities is greatly influenced by the activities of their professors.

4.2.3. Teacher's personality and teaching methods
Question: How do you evaluate the teacher's personality and teaching techniques in class?
Four students in four groups completed a survey, and every single one of them gave the teacher's demeanour and teaching methods high marks. However, the surveyor also discovered that it is quite challenging to obtain objective feedback when asking students about themselves since, to some extent, students do not want to voice bad opinions towards the person who is actually teaching them. Nonetheless, the results of the above-analyzed anonymous poll indicate that pupils have favourable things to say about the teacher's demeanour and methods of instruction.

5. Conclusion and recommendations
It is an undeniable fact that certain students in the class are hesitant to respond to inquiries or engage in class activities. Consequently, raising student engagement can benefit the learning environment in the classroom and keep students interested in and focused on their studies. The authors offer the following recommendations based on their research to promote student involvement in the classroom:

First: Teachers must assess their pupils' prior knowledge in order to modify their instruction and expand on what they already know. Therefore, when new information is connected to what they already know, pupils will feel more interested and assured.

Second: Teachers need to encourage student collaboration, creating favorable opportunities for students to work and interact together whenever possible.

Third: Teachers must break down the subject matter of the conversation and provide students specific assignments to complete in a variety of group, pair, and individual work situations. Students can become "experts" in each little bit of information through this exercise, leading to larger and more in-depth knowledge content.

Fourth: Students should be free to select the learning style that best suits them, and teachers should be encouraged to offer changes when they feel that the current approach is inappropriate. Students feel more engaged in the lessons when they have a say in how they study and the kinds of activities they participate in.

After all, further research in this area is necessary because the study's findings might not apply to all ESP courses taught at universities due to its short duration and small sample size.

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