MAKING BUSINESS ENGLISH TEACHING INTERNATIONAL THROUGH THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS: A CASE STUDY IN A CLIL CONTEXT

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Abstract

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers might be expected to use realia in their lessons as it is thought to be designed to meet the students' real needs in their professional life. Teachers are then expected to offer authentic materials and set students in authentic contexts where their learning outcomes can be highly meaningful. The present paper is aimed at studying different digital tools that can be employed in the Business English (BE) lesson as a way to offer a collection of formats businesses are currently using so as to internationalise and advertise their products and services. A secondary objective of our study will then be to progress on the development of multidisciplinary competencies students are expected to acquire during their degree.

Findings will confirm students' interest in working with updated realia in their BE lessons, as a consequence of their strong belief in the necessity to work with updated didactic resources. Despite the limitations social media can have as a means to teach BE, students will still find it highly beneficial since it will foster their familiarisation with the digital tools they will need to use when they get to the labour market.

Keywords

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Business English, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Internationalisation of Higher Education, Foreign Language (FL) teaching

INTRODUCTION

Including realia in the teaching programme of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) lessons is essential, as it is conceived as a way to respond to the students' real needs in their professional life (Català, 2014). It must be explained that the concept of realia is meant as real objects or pieces of writing, used to help teach students in a class, as defined by Cambridge Dictionary.

Teachers can then be asked to offer authentic materials and set students in authentic contexts where their learning outcomes can be highly meaningful.

Authenticity in ESP

Experts have already identified the importance of using authentic materials in ESP as their use fosters a learner-centred methodology in which students can face tasks and situations taken from the real world (Torregrosa Benavent & Sanchez-Perez Peñamaria, 2011; Perlova & Kharkiv, 2016).

One of the effects of using authentic materials in the ESP lesson is said to be student's engagement (Lee, Amini & Ravindram, 2021), as they help students understand their use in class as a mirror of the challenges in real life. They may also visualise the difficulties encountered by the ESP teachers in finding updated resources as compared to the employment of traditional text books with outdated writing tasks.

In our study, we will be concentrating on one way of engaging students with authentic material. In our case, we will be using social networks as a way to bridge the gap between their everyday life and their ESP learning outcomes.

Previous studies in the use of social media teaching tools in Higher Education (HE) have already proved (Figueras-Maz, Grandio-Perez & Mateus, 2021) students share both positive as well as slightly negative attitudes towards this new trend.

Apart from considering student's attitudes towards using social networks in class, the effect of such a university teaching practice has also been studied in recent research. In particular, the use of Facebook as a

teaching resource has shown to improve the written skills of students apart from enriching their vocabulary (Zarei, 2019; Tafazoli & Chirimbu, 2013). Additionally, it is quite significant to highlight that researchers also pointed out that social networks could help students develop the four main language skills, including listening and speaking (Tafazoli & Chirimbu, 2013).

Emerging technologies are daily transforming writing genres (Fathqi, 2021) and this is very important to be taken into account when designing the ESP syllabus.

It is on ESP, particularly, on Business English (BE) teaching, that our study focuses, as the ongoing process of digitalisation is leading firms to use social media to communicate with potential clients. This has led to recent research on the presence of digital tools in the teaching of BE (Milhaes, 2022).

CLIL and authenticity

The present study was carried out in a CLIL context, in other words, in a Content and Language Integrated Learning context (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). This teaching approach involves the use of a foreign language to teach not only the language but also content. This can be explained as the context of our research is the Bachelor's Degree in Business Management and Administration taught at the University of Cadiz, Spain. Students who study this Degree have the possibility of following an itinerary, conceived as a minor, through which they can specialise in international business. In order to be certified that they have completed the minor they need to study six subjects through English (given that this would be a foreign language to most of them, being Spanish their mother tongue). Out of these six subjects, only one of them is language specific, thus, the remaining five subjects are content (rather than language) specific. The way in which the minor is designed shows the approach adopted is CLIL as opposed to EMI (English as a medium of instruction). In such an environment, language learning goals are not secondary (Bradford & Brown, 2016), that means the dual focus embraced (Marsh, 2002) invites the CLIL programme designers to adapt the monolingual syllabus to devise the CLIL one, as to promote not only content learning but also foreign language learning and acquisition.

It should also be added that a recently launched learning scheme offered by the University of Cadiz allows students to study a joint Degree programme in Business Management and Administration plus Finance and Accounting. These students need to follow the optional itinerary Business students have, but as a requirement to be certified the Double Degree. Therefore, during the academic year 2021-2022, students within the English for International Business subject, that is, the subject to be analysed in the present paper, will belong either to the Degree in Business Management and Administration, having optionally chosen to take the CLIL itinerary, or to the Double Degree in Finance and Accounting plus Business Management and Administration, participating in this CLIL itinerary as a condition to receive the corresponding certificate.

Previous research already envisaged the key role of authenticity in CLIL (Pinner, 2013) as students showed to be specially interested in being offered an authentic approach to language learning. This content-focused approach facilitates students' engagement through the authenticity of its purpose.

The students taking part in the teaching-learning programme which is being examined in the present paper are already involved in an authentic use of the language, as English might be considered the lingua franca of international business (Anglemark & John, 2018). Students are then expected to use English as a foreign language both in the English for International Business (EIB) subject as in their content subjects.

Digitalising the classroom

The digitalisation of HE is a key policy for most European Higher Education Area institutions (EHEA). As can be seen in the third Strategic Plan of the University of Cadiz (University of Cadiz, 2021) planned to reach December 2024, improving the transversal, professional and digital competences of its students is present in its first objective: Innovating, redesigning and updating the teaching offer as to adapt it to the social and economic needs of our environment. This is projected as a way to contribute to the required internationalisation of the University and, besides, as a way to respond to the digital transformation taking place in all processes of our everyday life (University of Cadiz, 2021). Digital transformation is even considered one of the five transversal intersecting lines to be drawn in the newly published strategic plan of this institution. Digital business (Mishra, *et al.* 2021) is then a multidisciplinary competence to be developed by the students of a Degree in Business Management and Administration. Digitalising the Business English classroom is a must if we understand digital business is a reality as the digital transformation means employing all technical possibilities for firms to be as competitive as possible (Huseynli & Huseynli, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

A two-phased study will be presented. The first phase will cover the analysis of course tasks accomplished by undergraduate students at the University of Cadiz (Spain) in their third year of the Degree in Business Management and Administration by comparing the activities suggested in some frequently used BE textbooks. The second part of our study will present a survey conducted to these students in 2021 and 2022 so as to verify their interest in learning new ways to digitalise as well as to internationalise their future businesses.

Participants

Focusing on our context, as said before, Business English is the field of work we will be examining. Bearing in mind the undergraduate studies we are to examine offer six subjects taught through English, we can say students are expected to acquire and develop knowledge through a foreign language. In particular, students go through the following subjects: International auditing and accounting, International managerial skills, English for international business (which is the only language course), Applied econometrics for international business and economics, International management of family business and the end of degree project which is developed and presented in English (this dissertation elaborated and presented at the end of the Degree is conceived as a subject and that is the reason why this is the sixth subject rather than an individual project).

Students taking part in this optional itinerary enter a bilingual programme which is designed as to follow the CLIL approach. In the context of this particular teaching approach, using authentic language as well as authentic resources and materials is promoted as a way to facilitate meaningful learning of both content and language.

Given the fields of study covered in the different subjects, students have the chance to learn the language of accounting, auditing, business management and econometrics among others. Apart from learning the language in the content subjects, students are given the possibility to deeply study the language in the English for International Business subject.

Instruments

Moving towards our particular case study, and prior to describing the actual activities carried out within our investigation, it is important to analyse what really made us research on the topic.
We had two objectives to accomplish:

OBJECTIVE N. 1: Analysing digital tools used by businesses as to internationalise and advertise their products and services.
OBJECTIVE N. 2: Developing multidisciplinary competencies students are to acquire during their degree.

Phase 1:

This phase included the study of BE textbooks as to discover some of the most frequent writing activities. The first two textbooks chosen were selected from the library of the University of Cadiz, after looking for textbooks which included not only a summary of its content but also a detailed list of activities. In particular, these were the ones analysed: Cordell's 2001 *Cambridge Business English Activities: serious fun for Business English students* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, ISBN: 0521587344) and Jones and Alexander's 2003 *New international Business English Student's book: communication skills in English for Business Purposes* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, ISBN: 0521774721).

Additionally, we examined three out of the first eight options Google offers when searching for "Business English textbooks". These were the ones considered given the fact that the list of activities was not shown in all of the books found: *English for Everyone Business English Practice Book Level 1: A Complete Self-Study Programme* (DK's 2019, London UK, ISBN: 9780241253724), *Business Vocabulary in Use Advanced. Third Edition. Book with Answers* (Cambridge's 2017, Cambridge University Press, UK, ISBN-10: 131662823X) and *Business English Handbook* (Macmillan ELT's 2007, ISBN-10: 140508605X).

Taking into account the aforesaid BE textbooks, some of the productive activities appeared repeatedly in the activities suggested. These were: writing a resumé, faxes, BE letters and CVs. The activities covered the layout and sections of each production activity apart from specific vocabulary to be used in these precise writing tasks.
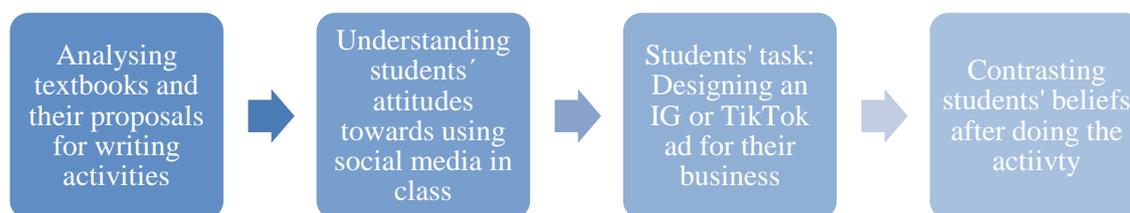
Phase 2:

Once identified some of the most common productive activities offered to BE students, the teacher reflected upon the following aspects concerning the use of these writing tasks:

1. Practicing writing skills helps students have an active role as it fosters production in the Foreign Language (FL).
2. Letters are nowadays not as common as emails in BE writing practices.
3. Faxes are not used anymore, at least, in our region.
4. Working with CVs as a source for BE lessons is complicated as this writing genre can have a huge amount of sections and information to deal with. Resumés could be considered a better option or even cover letters, as they summarize the most important sections to be covered in a curriculum vitae.
5. Nowadays, a very important channel of information for business is social networks, but they seem to be missing in certain recently published BE students' books.

After this reflection, the teacher decided to employ digital tools used by businesses as to internationalise and advertise their products and services. This would make the programme renovated by using up-to-date realia and would also help the teacher develop multidisciplinary competencies in their students, such as the digital ones.

In so doing, the students were asked about their opinions towards the use of social media in the EIB lessons, as to compare their beliefs before actually carrying out the task, with their attitudes towards this teaching-learning practice at the end of the subject.

It needs to be mentioned that students' opinions at the beginning of the course were collected through a group interview in which all students were asked to make their comments in front of the class. Additionally, at the end of the course an individual survey was circulated as to know whether their thoughts had changed after doing the activity. That means the process of the present study covered the following sections:
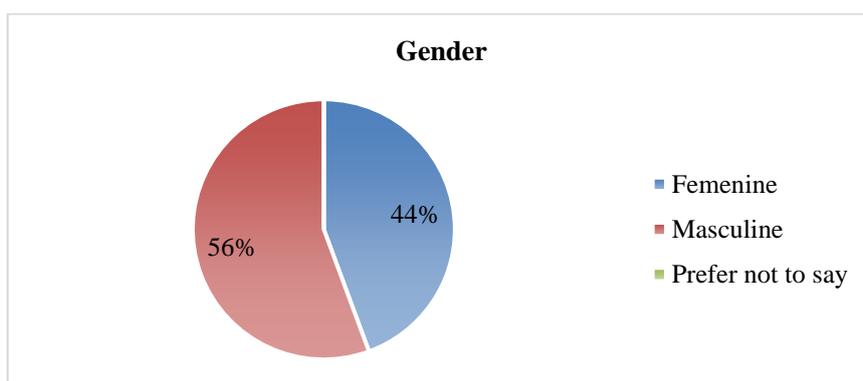

Graph 1. Sections of our study

As can be seen in graph 1, students were asked before and after doing the social media activity as to see if their opinions had changed. In order to know what the activity entailed, it must be explained that during the academic year 2021-2022 the EIB students were asked to design an advert for a specific product or service of a company they had supposedly set up through Instagram or Tik Tok. They were given some examples and were told that if they used one of these platforms rather than Facebook they would be given extra mark. The reason to do so was that in previous academic years, students were asked to design a Facebook advertisement which consisted of a picture and a text, but this time the teacher wanted them to also develop speaking and listening skills through the same task, so it seemed that with the tools offered by Instagram and TikTok students could find it easier to add voice to the written message.

Data collection

The data collection process involved two surveys, one of them done at the beginning of the course in the form of a group interview and the second one circulated through Google forms at the end of the course. The group of students surveyed were 44, out of which almost 56% were male students and more than 44% were female (see graph 2). Students were aged 20 to 27, most of them were doing the Business Management and Administration Bachelor's Degree and they were in their third year and second semester of their studies.
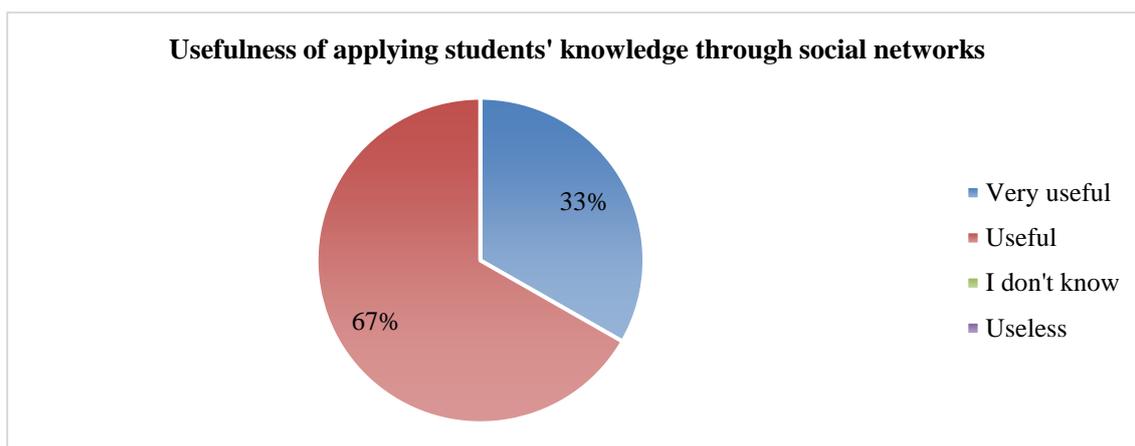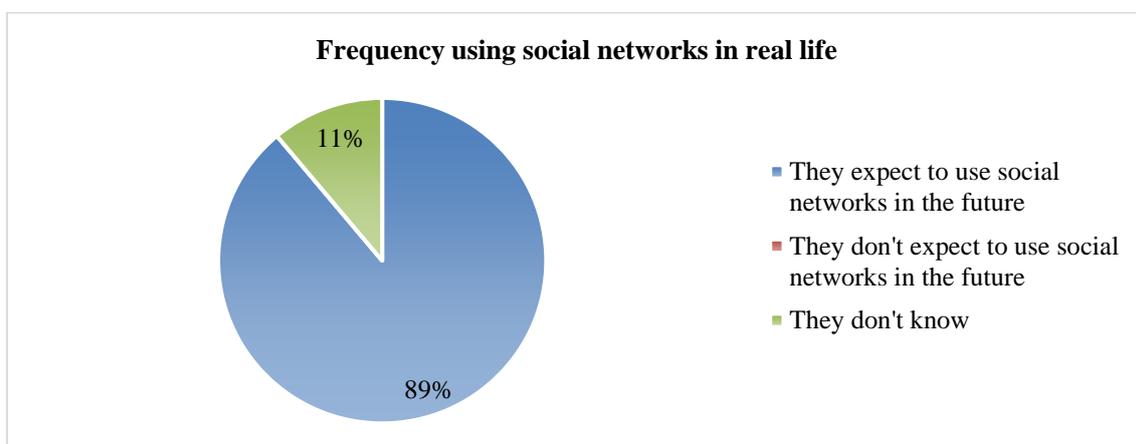

Graph 2. Surveyed students

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students were basically asked the following two questions: 1 How useful do you think it would be to apply your knowledge through social networks (Facebook, IG, TikTok...)? and 2 Do you think you will be using social networks (Facebook, IG, TikTok...) in your future work?
To both questions students give rather positive answers, see graphs 3 and 4.

Usefulness of applying students' knowledge through social networks

Graph 3. Answers given to "How useful do you think it would be to apply your knowledge through social networks?"

Frequency using social networks in real life

Graph 4. Answers given to "Do you think you will be using social networks in your future work?"

As can be seen in graphs 3 and 4, students think using social networks is very enriching for them to learn how to employ them in their future jobs. However, more details need to be given as to what they answered in the following open-ended question: What do you think about using social media and designing an IG or TikTok advert in the EIB class?

The following statements were given by the students.

Results obtained at the beginning of the course:
• *As young people, we do know how to design it ads appealing way.*
• *It is useful to use these platforms because the current businesses use them and for this reason, we need to have a good and professional command of them.*
• *With the knowledge acquired in the subject, we can capture the necessary information on web pages or social networks due to the vocabulary acquired.*
• *Social networks getting more important than ever, also for our knowledge.*
• *It is important to be able to interact with social medias in today's world.*
• *This is the future.*

Results obtained at the end of the course:
• *I really loved doing this activity.*
• *I really enjoyed this activity.*
• *This activity boosted our creativity, one of my favs!*
• *I think it has been a very good activity that has helped us develop our skills in marketing.*
• *The ads were excellent and many could be used in everyday life. But some still lack more information, such as a website address or a phone number.*
• *I liked the variety of the ads as well as I appreciate the opportunity for using creativity (no strict structure). Thanks a lot!*
• *Interesting and productive activity.*
• *I think that in general the ads were good and quite complete.*
• *The activity was interesting as it was fun, original and it promoted student creativity.*

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Main outcomes
After examining the findings of the study and comparing results taken from the beginning of the course and also once the activity was carried out, we can conclude that students found it really engaging and useful to see how social media can help them in the business world. Students even identified it as their favourite activity throughout the whole subject as they understood it boosted their creativity and it was original and innovative.

Limitations
Analysing possible limitations of using social networks as a tool for their ESP lessons, researchers already identified the fear of some students in having their teachers invading their privacy (Figueras-Maz, Grandio-Perez & Mateus, 2021). In our study, some students refused making a negative analysis of the experience in front of their classmates, but individually mentioned to the teacher they did not feel comfortable in either using their personal profiles for class or showing themselves in front of others. This was then an important inconvenience found as those students unwilling to use their personal profiles would then need to create a new fictional account (something certain students actually did, but took more time and effort from them). It also meant those students who were reluctant to show themselves physically in a video or image had to use additional creativity as to design their advertisements.

A second limitation found in our study was that certain students used one of the two recommended platforms without adding voice. In previous academic years, students were invited to design a Facebook add in which they added an image and a text describing the product or service offered. However, during the 2021-2022 academic year the teacher invited students to use Instagram or TikTok as these tools seemed to make it easier for the user to add sound apart from any written speech. The teacher was then interested in making students develop speaking and listening skills (authors like Fajariyah & Yulia, 2019; Patau, 2017; Ale, 2022, already recognized the effectiveness of using realia for developing speaking skills). The problem encountered was that the addition of voice was not compulsory. Even though they were invited to be as creative as possible, students were not obliged to do it and as a consequence they tended to use writing and reading skills. For future experiments, if the development of speaking and listening skills is an objective of the task, then adding voice to the advertisement ought to be presented to students as a condition rather than a possibility.

General conclusions and future studies
Along the present study we were interested in being able to answer the following question: Is social media a solution for ESP students' challenges when trying to find updated and authentic material for their lessons? It might not be the only solution or even a solution itself, but it can be considered a very beneficial tool for ESP teachers as, first of all, this is a tool that is being used at present by the business world, so students are given an authentic and updated tool they can apply in the labour market. Secondly, social media forms part of most students' everyday life. Thence, it is a way of bridging the gap between their expected ESP learning outcomes and the real world. As CLIL already does, using an authentic environment helps meaningful and authentic language learning.

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