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IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE-LEARNERS: A TEACHING INNOVATION PROJECT AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to assess the increase in the overall performance of English by University learners of EFL during the first three semesters. Students received instruction in a Spanish institution of Higher Education located in a medium-sized town in north-western Spain. The level of English of these students was A2 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEFR) when they started their University degree; subjects studied included Education, Humanities, Tourism and English Studies. The objective was to reach Level B1 (CEFR) within three semesters. The group comprised around 300 students, the vast majority of whom had recently finished secondary education, and were in their early twenties.

Against a background consisting of students with differing training, interests and degrees of motivation, several teaching innovation projects were carried out by the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of La Rioja over the academic years 2009-2013. This report focuses on the project scheduled for 2010-2012 and specifically gauges students' academic achievement. The basis of the project was exposure to linguistic input, which was developed through autonomous learning rather than by classroom work. Autonomous learning placed more emphasis on oral skills, was guided and self-evaluated in a virtual classroom, and encompassed a wide selection of teaching materials, both written and oral. These were taken from a variety of English courses, grammars, and books engaging specific skills, as well as from online tools and resources.

The results show an increase in the overall performance of the students of English enrolled in the subjects comprised by the project. The average overall performance by students in English Studies increased 7.34% between 2010 and 2012. Increases were also observed in other degrees involving English. For example, the average overall performance in Infant Education increased by 6.28%. The highest increase, at 11.87%, occurred in the Primary Education degree. These improvements can be attributed to the teaching innovation project because the other variables involved did not undergo significant changes. In the current academic year, new initiatives have been adopted that, together with the ones discussed in this paper, are witnesses to a culture of constant teaching innovation.

Keywords:

Performance, EFL University learners, Teaching innovation

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