

**INCOMING FOREIGN STUDENTS AS A RESOURCE TO IMPROVE ENGLISH IN  
BUSINESS STUDENTS. A PILOT STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JAÉN**

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# **INCOMING FOREIGN STUDENTS AS A RESOURCE TO IMPROVE ENGLISH IN BUSINESS STUDENTS. A PILOT STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JAÉN**

## **ABSTRACT:**

This paper presents the results of a pilot scheme carried out at the University of Jaén and aimed at improving the level of English of Administration and Business Management students, through the participation of a group of incoming foreign students who teach business English during their stay at this university. This research has allowed us to obtain feedback about the improvement in the listening and speaking skills in students who have taken part in this activity and, also, about how it has motivated the foreign tutors by encouraging a fuller integration within their new environment.

**KEYWORDS:** English, foreign students, peer tutoring, undergraduate education

**JEL descriptors:** A22, A29

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This research stems from the work carried out by Castilla Polo, Moreno Aguayo, Cámara de la Fuente, and Chamorro Rufián (2010, 2012), who, taking into consideration the undeniable role of English in the academia, have explored the development of transversal competences in the study of English in the two groups which participate in the teaching-learning process at this university: students and lecturers of the degree in Administration and Business Management (henceforth ABM) at the University of Jaén. In broad terms, the results obtained made two central issues clear: (i) it was essential for students and lecturers (especially the former) to acquire and reinforce language competence; and (ii) it was necessary that the university committed itself to assist in the acquisition of such competence, especially by means of the teaching of specific lessons from the ABM syllabus in English.

It is well known that one of central concerns of the European Higher Education Area (henceforth EHEA) is to foster student mobility between European Union countries, and this means that proficiency in a second language is a required competence (Tudor, 2005), as well as the tool to widen the students' academic, geographic and professional horizons (Bruner & Iannarelli, 2011; Kedia & Englis, 2011). In this context, we decided to implement an experience that consisted of providing our ABM students with a reinforcement of their English skills by means of the assistance of foreign students currently enrolled at our University in Study Abroad programs.

The activity devised proves to be beneficial for both groups involved. Local students, who receive English lessons free of charge, improve their English, since foreign students at this University often have significantly better English skills than local students (EPI EF, 2011) (furthermore, foreign students may occasionally come from English-speaking countries). Besides, these students will obtain accreditation for their participation in this activity. Foreign students, on their part, will receive a diploma that acknowledges their activity as language instructors, plus an economic compensation. For both groups, this activity would entail an exceptional opportunity to engage in intercultural relations with students from various different countries, something which would prove especially interesting for peer

tutors in a foreign country. Vez (2009) argues the use of language education according to the idea to promote the acceptance of linguistic and cultural differences.

The advantages of the immersion methods for learning foreign languages are the basis for bilingual education. In this respect, Coyle (2002) defines CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) as a system of learning through common subjects, which allows to develop thinking skills together with their basic needs of interpersonal communication and the competence in the cognitive-academic language, adding that this methodology comprises multiculturalism, offering opportunities for students to interact with other cultures. This methodology has mostly addressed the learning of English as a second language (Pérez-Cañado, 2012). However, CLIL methodology has also been employed in the context of the teaching of other foreign languages, namely Chinese (Wang, Ni, Wang, & Jiang, 2004), French (Jäppinen, 2005), or Spanish (Lyster & Ballinger, 2011).

We have found preliminary studies suggesting the importance of English proficiency at university level, more specifically for students of the degree in ABM (Gallardo Vázquez, Sánchez Hernández, & Corchuelo Martínez-Azúa, 2008, 2010; Sánchez Cañizares, López-Guzmán Guzmán, & Fuentes García, 2010); this research justifies the pertinence of initiatives/activities intended to reinforce this linguistic competence. Other studies have found evidence of attitudes toward the foreign language in high school students, from students who were enrolled in the first year of the university degree, from different backgrounds, Valencia (Spain), Flandes (Belgium) and Valdosta (Georgia, USA), emphasizing the global methodologies (García Laborda, Bejarano, & Simons, 2012). Their results show, in the three groups (although with differences), that one of the deficiencies found is the lack of motivation. In this line, Manzano Díaz and Hidalgo Díez (2009) studied the relationship between learning styles and use of reading strategies and the proficiency level in the English language in university students in Cuba, noting that English is a prerequisite in any university. They find that the predominance in pragmatic and reflexive styles are associated to more frequent use of reading strategies, and they have a great influence in high academic results of the English language.

After an examination of the relevant literature on the field, we have not found evidence of experiences similar to the one described here, either in this or in another degree or university. With the aim of filling the gap evidenced in the previous review, this work endeavors to assess the effectiveness of an activity like the one described, which basically attempts two things: firstly, to improve the use of the English competence of the students participating in it, and, secondly, to achieve a better integration of foreign students in the host university. More specifically, we want to check: a) the improvement of the students' competence in their use of English in the oral skills (speaking and listening), both in terms of their self-perception and that of their tutors'; and b) how the integration of students-tutors in their own international mobility experiences improves. The results obtained make clear that this activity, which is based on CLIL methodology, ameliorates the use of English of ABM students.

This essay consists of six sections. In this one (first section), we justify the need and adequacy of a system of support (remedial) classes like the one suggested. The next section deals with learning English as a competence within the framework of the EHEA. Next, we outline the development of the activity. Fourthly, we specify the methodology suggested. In the fifth section, the main results of the project are presented. Finally, we discuss the results and summarize the major conclusions obtained.

## **2. ENGLISH AS A KEY COMPETENCE WITHIN THE EHEA**

Although the Bologna process implies the transformation of several aspects of higher education, foreign language teaching occupies one of the most important places within this process (Tudor, 2005). Thus, within the competence-based learning model suggested by the EHEA, foreign language proficiency has been set as an integrated competence in various degrees, just as the Spanish Agency for University Quality Assessment (ANECA, 2005, p. 198), in its White Paper on the degree in ABM, stated: "oral and written communication in a foreign language". Likewise, the dossier produced for the Commission on Innovative Teaching in Andalusian Universities (CIDUA) (Junta de Andalucía, 2005, p. 8) also concludes that "for the Spanish university it is a compelling challenge to establish mechanisms that make possible the acquisition and knowledge of a second language, because of the need to enhance

labour mobility, and also in order to foster the possibilities of expression, communication and cooperation with other people and communities". The training based on competencies offers the possibility to achieve a comprehensive education, linking technical and professional expertise to social skills during the teaching-learning process (Durán-Aponte & Durán-García, 2012).

Undoubtedly, second-language learning is a key issue in today's education, more so within the university (Genesee, 2004; Pavón, 2007). In this sense, we have found numerous European statements of purpose and declarations<sup>1</sup> in which active foreign-language learning is considered a central element within EHEA. All these documents agree that it is necessary to promote learning, at least, one foreign language, in university students in order to increase their employability (Milhauser & Rahschulte, 2010) and facilitate mobility during their university years, English being the main target language given its currently leading role (Phillipson, 2008).

In spite of the relevance of English in today's globalized world, where it has become a basic and essential tool, Spain is not well positioned in this respect, lagging behind most European countries according to the classification derived from the English Proficiency Level Index EF (EPI EF, 2011). According to this, Spain ranks 24 out of 44 countries analyzed worldwide (low level). In Europe, Spain ranks 17 out of the 19 European countries assessed.

More specifically, with the aim of establishing English proficiency as a requisite within EHEA, Spanish universities have considered (and to some extent implemented) two actions, namely, introducing English as the language of instruction in several subjects and offering bilingual study plans (Halbach, Lázaro Lafuente, & Pérez Guerra, 2011). However, according to Halbach et al. (2011) these two actions are not being carried out homogeneously in the different universities and degrees in Spain. In this paper, we are providing a realistic alternative for Spanish universities that may prove not only beneficial, but also economic, particularly given the current economic situation.

### **3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTIVITY**

As we have already mentioned, the activity we have implemented consists, in short, in devising a system of English lessons within the degree in ABM, within the CLIL methodology. This is a voluntary activity for both groups involved, students from the University of Jaén and Study Abroad students from foreign countries.

We suggest implementing a system of (free) lessons for ABM students, adjusted to the level of language proficiency, with the aim of improving their overall level of English, but focusing on the oral skills, speaking and listening, that is, the skills where they show poorer performance, according to the findings of Castilla Polo et al. (2010, 2012). The contents are based on topics related with the corporate world and the labour market, and they will be either prepared directly by the tutors or introduced through the analysis of authentic material, i.e. articles dealing with business management and economy (from magazines such as *The Economist* or *Fortune*, among others). The latter approach is preferable to that of introducing specific topics belonging to actual subjects from the degree, not only because a foreign student is likely to be less familiar with them, but also because both groups (i.e. the local and foreign students) will find this option more enjoyable. Furthermore, real cases and magazine pieces may also be ultimately beneficial for other courses in the study plan. We are dealing then with a support system intended to improve the linguistic proficiency and that, in our view, goes in the right direction in order to fill the gaps mentioned previously.

On the other hand, this is an initiative that has the additional purpose of integrating foreign students from various Exchange and Study Abroad programs, with an academic recognition, issued by the University of Jaén, of their participation in the support tuition. Given the difficulties involved in establishing a credit recognition system, we have opted for a monetary compensation for each participating student, plus a certificate accrediting their labour as language instructor. Peer tutors have the chance to integrate in the ABM degree, reinforcing incidentally their Spanish proficiency and their oral and teaching skills, especially in the context of some theoretical contents that they will find of use given their academic background.

Finally, we consider that this activity will enrich University of Jaén students, since it not only reinforces their English skills, but ideally equips them to deal with future exchanges in which they –in turn– will become foreign –outgoing– students, as they get to have a first-hand knowledge of foreign cultures. Likewise, these lessons not only contribute to fully integrating foreign students at the University of Jaén, facilitating their rapport with local ABM students, but they also constitute a preliminary teaching experience for the peer tutors, some of whom may feel inclined to pursue it as a professional career in the future.

The activity described above has already been carried out during two academic years: Spring (second) term of 2010/11, and Fall (first) term of 2011/12. We have followed, in both cases, standardized actions for the introduction, follow-up and evaluation of each stage. Likewise, it must be noted that this activity was initially publicized among ABM students, and that prospective participants were requested to provide information regarding their accredited level of English and time-table and shift preferences, with the aim of organizing and homogenizing the groups.

We have devised six phases for the implementation of this activity, and have employed different methodologies depending on the phase involved, which we will describe now in detail.

- a) *Linguistic competence within the group of University of Jaén students.* Since only a small number of students could produce an accredited level of English proficiency, the University's Centre for Advanced Studies in Modern Languages -following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)- had to evaluate the level of English of all those students of whom we did not have such information.
- b) *Selection of peer tutors from Exchange and Study Abroad programs.* The methodology followed implied a personal interview in which the most suitable profiles for each group were selected. Native English speakers, students with a high level of English, and motivation were the initial criteria of selection.
- c) *Implementing support classes.* We established various groups according to the level of the participants. All activities, including the development of the classes, choice of materials and

exercises, were supervised and coordinated by a member of this project. The facilities involved were those of the Department of Financial Economy and Accounting of the University of Jaén, and they include digital and traditional blackboards, and computers. Groups met for two hours per week, for a total of twenty hours per term. However, because we set the goal of having different students and peer tutors in each term, phases a), b), c), d) y e) had to be repeated at the beginning of the second term. For each term we had an introductory session with coordinators, peer tutors and students, where peer tutors presented the content of the activity, its aims, chronogram, and methodology. The final schedule for each group was also discussed and fixed at this initial meeting, with the intention of catering for everybody's needs as much as possible.

- d) *Evaluation of the results obtained by the group of University of Jaén students.* Once the activity was over, the students who had taken part in it were evaluated.
- e) *Evaluation of the experience by peer tutors.* Being the second group involved in this activity, peer tutors were also questioned at the end of the activity.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

A case-study is based on the study of the specificity and the complexity of a particular case in order to be able to understand its functioning in relevant and meaningful situations (Stake, 1995). Single cases may be used to represent an unique case (Yin, 1994). We approach our activity as a specially relevant and specific case which may contribute to its generalization and implementation in various different contexts. To this end, we have devised and used a questionnaire in order to gather information about the effectiveness of this activity in terms of the improvement of the use of English by those students who have been exposed to the aforesaid task. The high specificity of the activity, on the other hand, has made it impossible to use scales and grades previously validated by specialized literature. In this sense, a questionnaire especially devised for this activity has been presented to both groups involved, namely, students (appendix 1), and peer tutors (appendix 2). Both questionnaires were divided into two sections:

aims and functioning. In the first section, two types of questions have been included: first, those addressing the fulfilment of the general objective; second, specific questions linked to the fulfilment of the competences that constitute this aim (listening and speaking). In the second section, questions are introduced regarding the dynamics and the functioning of the groups involved, and dealing with the necessary material equipment for the development of this activity. In order to find out how the improvement of the students was perceived by themselves and the peer tutors, both questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions. Closed questions were aimed at measuring the perception of the improvement of the use of English, whereas open questions attempted to introduce a qualitative component in order to complement what, otherwise, would be an exclusively quantitative analysis (Punch, 2005; Silverman, 2009). Open questions give the respondent more freedom in crafting the answer, and they also increase the cognitive effort (Brace, 2008; Bradburn, Wansink, & Sudman, 2004; Lavrakas, 2008). This type of questions was more often employed in the questionnaire presented to the tutors, and it has enabled us to know not only the tutors' appraisal of the students' improvement, but also the effectiveness of this action, especially regarding the students' integration in the host University, which was also one of the aims of this research.

In addition to the general descriptive analysis of the results obtained, and regarding our specific objective, that is, assessing the improvement of our students' level of English in the oral skills (speaking and listening), we have conducted a non-parametric hypothesis contrast in order to determine whether there existed any differences between the perceptions of improvement by the groups involved: students and peer tutors.

## **5. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS**

This section presents a detailed analysis of the results obtained for the two groups involved in the activity: students and peer tutors.

### **5.1 STUDENTS**

We will first comment upon the results obtained regarding how this activity was valued by those ABM students, after each of the two terms during which it took place.

The number of students who completed the activity in full is, in our view, very significant. For the year 2010/11, out of the 38 initial participants who attended the first informative meeting, 12 completed the course. For the second-term group, out of the 75 initial attendants, 13 students answered the final questionnaire (see table 1); the remaining students either did not attend a single class, or simply dropped out as the course went on.

*[Table 1 around here]*

As shown in table 1, students were divided into three groups during the year 2010/11: two morning & early afternoon groups (one intermediate and one beginners' group), and one late afternoon & evening group (low-intermediate level); and four groups during the next year (2011/12): two morning & early afternoon groups (one intermediate and one beginners' group) and two late afternoon & evening groups (one intermediate and one beginners' group).

Our analysis of the evaluation will be divided into two sections: aims and functioning.

### **5.1.1. Section I: aims**

If we focus on the main aim pursued, that is, to improve the students' English proficiency, all the students surveyed (25) but one state that this aim has been met. Table 2 shows how students surveyed evaluate this issue.

*[Table 2 around here]*

The 56% of the students rate as 'high' the improvement of the listening skill, and 8% as 'very high'; for 48% of the students the improvement of their speaking skill has been 'high', and 'very high' for 16%. 60% of the students claim that the general improvement of their English proficiency has been 'high'. Most participants evaluate the whole activity 'highly' (64%) or 'very highly' (28%). Likewise, all students (100%) manifest that they would recommend this activity to other fellow students, basically because it gives the opportunity to practice and improve their listening and speaking skills, and because

of the great variety of vocabulary used, which has provided them with many useful terms for the world of administration and business management while they were broadening their knowledge. They consider that it is an activity strongly to be recommended if the student intends to spend some time abroad in an English-speaking country; besides, it is a different and enjoyable way to learn English and meet people.

### **5.1.2. Section II: functioning**

The results related with facilities and equipment used are shown in table 3.

*[Table 3 around here]*

Most students surveyed (88%) consider that the facilities and equipment employed have been adequate. Yet, some first year students expressed their dissatisfaction with the sound system of the PC and with internet access. These issues nevertheless were solved for the next academic year, 2011/12. During this year, students only expressed their having found occasional problems having to do with getting physical access to the classroom.

Regarding the manner in which classes were conducted, all the students surveyed manifested that the peer tutors selected (two North-American female students in 2010/11, and one male and one female Greek students, with a C2 level of English, in 2011/12), performed their task satisfactorily.

All but two students questioned considered that the group size was satisfactory, although some manifested that, in the first year, the group decreased excessively because of the lack of attendance of some students; for others, however, these smaller groups proved more adequate as they gave everybody more time for speaking. During the year 2011/12 one student manifests that 5 students per class would be the optimum size.

Most students (88%) found the groups sufficiently homogeneous, although for some students from 2010/11 there was some degree of heterogeneity within each group, as intermediate students were occasionally mixed with beginners. For the future, a more minute group division is recommended.

The length of the course (twenty hours per term) was deemed appropriate by most students (92%) from 2010/11, although they recommended an earlier start (at the beginning of the term), a separation between the rest exam period and this activity, more hours per week, and a two-term (or year-long) structure. Yet, although students considered that the activity was too short and suggested that a longer duration could contribute to better results in terms of more speaking practice, they also agreed that in that case it would be harder to find time slots for it. We found more discrepancies among the opinions of students from 2011/12, since only 54% of them considered that the duration was appropriate. For 46% of them more classes should have been delivered, and the course should have started earlier.

Most students (84%) approved of the number of hours per week (2), although for some more weekly hours (4 or even 5) would be in order.

Regarding the contents covered in the practical sessions, table 4 shows the activities carried out.

*[Table 4 around here]*

Regarding the contents covered in the practical sessions, as shown in table 5, most students (92%) agreed that they cohered with the goal initially set. The same percentage of students stated that the contents were, in a high or very high degree, satisfactorily linked to the degree; and the judgment passed on the contents as a whole, and their relation with the degree study plan, was ranked as high or very high.

*[Table 5 around here]*

## **5.2. PEER TUTORS**

In the next lines we summarize the results of the (exchange students) peer tutors' assessment, according to the same criteria introduced in the previous section.

### **5.2.1. Section I: aims**

In terms of the degree of achievement of the goal set for peer tutors within this activity, we can state that that it was fulfilled in all cases, and that it can be rated as high.

Participants in the 2010/11 course manifested that the activity contributed to their integration in the University of Jaén, helped them to interact with other students by “providing ideas and other cultural issues”, and fostered their public speaking skills. Likewise, they found that this activity increased their interest in teaching; according to one of them, “more than my interest, my awareness”.

Peer tutors from the 2011/12 course regard this experience as a way to meet Spanish students; these contacts have also contributed to their acquiring a higher level of Spanish: “I learnt more Spanish than I thought”, declares one of the peer tutors. After having taken part in this activity, they have also increased their interest in teaching; as an example, we may quote one tutor as saying “now I enjoy teaching”. Thirdly, regarding the requirement to speak in public as a basic element of the support classes, we must note that the results obtained show a significant and meaningful improvement in terms of a higher confidence and proficiency in this skill on the part of the peer tutors.

On the other hand, table 2 shows how peer tutors have perceived the effects of their activity over the students’ oral skills (listening and speaking), and their general level of English.

In general terms, we can claim that the level of English of all groups experienced a significant improvement during 2010/11. Yet, there are some differences worth commenting. For one peer tutor, the improvement in listening was only medium, unlike another tutor who rated it as high. The whole group of peer tutors agreed that the speaking skill level was highly increased. One possible reason for this success may be the reduced size of the groups, which allows for an intense tutor-student oral interaction and a higher participation than in bigger-sized groups.

The self-evaluation of peer tutors for 2011/12 also shows a high level of success. In general terms, tutors are confident that the group has significantly improved, although when asked about specific categories we find some nuances. Thus, all tutors consider that the improvement in the listening skill has been high or very high. More modest was, compared with the former, the improvement in speaking, which also rated as high, but no tutor rated as very high.

### **5.2.2. Section II: functioning**

As shown in table 3, material resources and facilities are approved by tutors in all cases, and no problem has been reported in any of the two academic years. Participants from 2010/11 stated that they found them satisfactory, although one of the tutors pointed at some difficulties with the loudspeakers of the computer system. We understand this problem has been solved as no further complaint has been expressed during 2011/12.

Focusing on how classes were delivered during the year 2010/11, a primary concern was to determine whether the size of the groups was adequate. We obtained positive answers in all cases, as the small number of students in each group was considered beneficial for teaching purposes; indeed, one of the tutors argued that precisely thanks to this it was possible to establish a close relationship with the students and achieve a greater degree of proficiency in English.

Tutors were also questioned about how homogeneous the level of English of the students was within each group, and they all responded that “differences found (in each group) were not significant”.

Regarding the length of the course, whereas all peer tutors considered that two hours per week was an appropriate work-load, they also held that a greater number of weeks would be in order. The total of 20 hours of teaching was deemed insufficient, due to a number of reasons. One of the tutors claimed that, although she gave students homework, she did not have enough time to cover all the material, and found that more contact hours were needed. Another problem had to do with the proximity of final exams, which forced to some rearrangement of class hours, and even led some to suggest “ending the lessons before the month of the finals”.

For both 2010/11 and 2011/12 we found a mismatch between the number of students initially enrolled (upon which the groups were formed) and the number of students actually attending classes, which helps explain some of the comments by peer tutors. Although all the groups started out with the same number of students, this was not maintained throughout the course. In the late afternoon and evening groups there was an adequate number of students in the intermediate level group, unlike the beginners’ one: “in the A1/A2 group [beginners] I had 2-3 students in class, which was better for them since it worked like private, individualized, tuition”. However, we had a different experience in the morning

and early afternoon groups: the real size of the intermediate group was smaller, which the tutor considered satisfactory, whereas the beginners group, with higher attendance, had an excessive number of students; although this was not perceived like a real problem, the tutor manifested that the maximum number of students should be limited to 10.

One of the major concerns of this activity was that of creating groups with a homogeneous level of English. However, although we established a system of assessment of the level of all students, all peer tutors believe that this was an aspect of the activity in need of improvement. In the peer tutors' opinion, problems arising from the disparity of the level of English of students within one group should be avoided, and they specifically mention the case of students with a level of English proficiency significantly lower than the one they accredited. In the words of two of the tutors, "in group A1/A2 [beginners' level] there were students unable to use the present tense or the simple past correctly"; "there was this couple of students in B1 [intermediate level] with a lower level of speaking [than the rest of the group]".

For the second year (2011/12) tutors agree on the suitability of the length of the activity. Yet, when shown the weekly schedule, they all claim that it is insufficient. It has been suggested to double the number of contact hours, that is, 4 hours per week, which would be the ideal work load according to all tutors.

One final section of the questionnaire dealt with the organization and management of the activity. Here tutors were asked about the suitability of the financial compensation (150 € per group) and about the coordination tasks. During 2010/11 we got some contradictory feedback regarding the economic compensation of the activity: whereas for one of the tutors the compensation was considered insufficient given the amount of work involved, for the other tutor it was high. The suitability of the coordinators of the activity was also unevenly valued, as the tutors rated their task as 'medium' and 'high'. During 2011/12 both the economic compensation and the coordination of the activity have been uniformly evaluated as 'high' and 'very high'.

To conclude, all peer tutors unequivocally expressed a high level of satisfaction with their participation in this activity.

## **6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This paper shows the results of an activity aimed at improving the level of English of ABM students, through the participation of a group of incoming foreign students who teach business English during their stay in the host university. It has allowed us not only to obtain feedback about the improvement in their level of English, but also about the motivation of the foreign tutors by encouraging a fuller integration within their new context.

Regarding the goal of improving the use of English of the students, we have found that 60% of the students claim that the general improvement of their English proficiency has been 'high'. When required to answer this same question, all peer-tutors claimed that the use of English of the students had improved in a significant way. The perceptions expressed by the students and by the peer tutors through a statistical test (table 2) regarding both the perceived improvement of oral skills (that is, listening and speaking), as well as an overall assessment of the activity as a whole, have not shown significant differences. This means for us that, in general terms, both the improvement of the use of English, and the activity itself, should be evaluated very positively.

Regarding the aim of improving the integration of peer-tutors, the results obtained suggest that they found these support classes profitable and of interest, as they fostered their integration in the new environment, made them enter into contact with teaching, and reinforced their public speaking skills. In all cases, peer tutors have rated this activity in general as 'high' or 'very high'.

Focusing on more specific issues, most students have found the support tuition offered through this activity useful and of great interest. The students have rated the activity as of high interest, and they have recommended it to their peers because of such significant reasons as the possibility to reinforce their speaking and listening skills, and learn specific vocabulary of English for business. Other positive aspects underlined by students have to do with the satisfactory size of the groups and the clever choice

of the contents covered, two issues that we find extremely significant in order to confirm the pertinence of these support classes for ABM students. This activity –because of the number of applications received– was initially well received by ABM students, who were aware of and value its potential to improve their English proficiency. However, this initial strong interest has not brought about a correspondingly high participation, due to a significant drop-out rate; this was also shown by Aguilar and Rodríguez (2012), in a research about an English teaching experience conducted in a school of engineering at a Spanish university. In this sense, it must be noted that not all applications responded to a real interest, since many of those who applied did not attend the introductory-informative session, or failed to attend any of the classes. Consequently, our interest lies in exploring why some of the students who attended the introductory session and some of the classes did eventually drop out. From informal comments by the students we gather that some of the reasons have to do with real problems in adjusting the activity to their current schedule. In fact, both the schedule and the length of the activity appear as the two issues in need of rethinking, as participants manifested diverse opinions about the need (or not) to increase the number of hours per week and the number of weeks of the course. Another possible reason would also have to do with a significantly low level of English, which would have prevented them from profiting from the activity, contrarily to what Shaaban and Ghaith (2000) concluded; these authors claim that, with respect to motivation, an initially low competence in the foreign language actually functions as a motivating factor for the learning of that language. From all the above, we can conclude that there is a strong need for a system of support tuition like the one described here, based on CLIL methodology, which may be applied to various fields and degrees, universities, and second languages. This methodology, however, presents a special interest and effectiveness for English language learning and teaching, since, today, English is undoubtedly the world's *lingua franca* and the most important language for international business and trade (Almagro Esteban & Pérez Cañado, 2004). In this sense, this work has contributed to clarify and visualize the effectiveness of this methodology for the learning of business English, as well as presenting the positive evaluation it has received.

## NOTES

1. Council of Europe (1997); Sorbonne Joint Declaration (1998); Bologna Joint Declaration (1999); Prague Joint Declaration (2001); Berlin Joint Declaration (2003); Bergen Joint Declaration (2005); London Joint Declaration (2007); Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Joint Declaration (2009).

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## TABLES

**Table 1: Participating students**

Year	2010/11				2011/12				
Initial applications	61				106				
Students with previous accreditation of English level	20				50				
Students taking the level test (ad hoc accreditation)	18				25				
Schedule	Morning/E A		L A/ Evening	Total	Morning/E A		L A/Evening		Total
Group-level	Gr A Beg	Gr B Int	Gr C Beg-int		Gr A Int	Gr B Beg	Gr C Int	Gr D Beg	
Students initially accepted (with accredited English level)	12	16	10	38	17	19	20	19	75
Students who at least attended one class	11	8	7	26	15	7	8	15	45
Students who attended the last session	6	3	3	12	6	2	2	3	13

E A: Early afternoon; L A: Late afternoon; Gr: Group; Beg: Beginners; Int: Intermediate

**Table 2: Improvement of the English proficiency of the students (%)**

	None	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high	
<b>Self-perceived</b>							
Listening			4	32	56	8	
Speaking	4		4	28	48	16	
General level of English	8			32	60		
General evaluation of the activity				8	64	28	
<b>Perceived by peer tutors</b>							
Listening				25	50	25	
Speaking					50	50	
General level of English					100		
General evaluation of the activity					100		
<b>Test statistics<sup>b</sup></b>							
	Listening		Speaking		General level		General evaluation
Mann-Whitney U	39.000		24.000		30.000		40.000
Wilcoxon W	364.000		349.000		355.000		50.000
Z	-.777		-1.768		-1.514		-.779
Asymp. sig. (2-tailed)	.437		.077		.130		.436
Exact. sig. [2*(1-tailed sig.)]	.521 <sup>a</sup>		.109 <sup>a</sup>		.227 <sup>a</sup>		.562 <sup>a</sup>

a. Not corrected for ties

b. Grouping variable: collective

**Table 3: Assessment of facilities, equipment, and functioning (%)**

	Yes	No
<b>Students</b>		
Adequacy of facilities and technical equipment	88	12
Adequacy of tutors' performance	100	
Adequacy of group size	92	8
Homogeneous level of the group	88	12
Adequacy of activity length	72	28
Adequacy of weekly schedule	84	16
<b>Peer tutors</b>		

Adequacy of facilities and technical equipment	100	
Adequacy of group size	75	25
Homogeneous level of the group	75	25
Adequacy of activity length	50	50
Adequacy of weekly schedule	50	50

**Table 4: Contents of the classes**

<b>Year 2010/11</b>	<b>Year 2011/12</b>
Introductory session	Introductory session
Different positions in a company	Economy sectors
Functions of every post	Company posts and departments
Professional skills: description and use. Resumés	Corporate social responsibility
Job interview: preparation	Resumés and job interviews
Business meetings and language	Advertising
Purchase language and corporate sales	Solutions and problems of big corporations
Marketing and finances	Green economy
Balance sheet and operating statement	Balance sheet and operating statement
Job interview simulation	Invoices, letter of recommendation, and notes

**Table 5: Students' assessment of the contents of the activity (%)**

	<b>None</b>	<b>Very low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Very high</b>
<b>Adjustment of the contents</b>	4			4	64	28
<b>Adaptation of the contents to the degree</b>			4	4	32	60

## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: Questionnaire for the students

#### 1. AIMS: INTENDED AND ACHIEVED

- A) Do you consider that the aims of this activity have been met? YES NO
- B) Do you believe that your receptive-interpretative oral skill (LISTENING) has improved through this activity? YES NO, if applicable, please grade the progress obtained.

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
YES					

- C) Do you believe that your productive oral skill (SPEAKING) has improved through this activity? YES NO, if applicable, please grade the progress obtained.

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
YES					

- D) Do you believe that your use of English level has changed after this activity YES NO, if applicable, please grade the progress obtained.

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
YES					

- E) In general terms, how would you assess this activity?

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high

- F) Would you recommend this activity? YES NO Why? Please specify

#### 2. EQUIPMENT AND FUNCTIONING

- A) Do you consider adequate the facilities and technical resources employed in this activity? YES NO, if not, what would you change for future activities?
- B) Do you think that your tutor has fulfilled his/her role in a satisfactory manner? YES NO, if not, what is your main criticism to his/her performance?
- C) Was the group size adequate? YES NO, if not, what size would you recommend for future activities?
- D) Was the group level homogeneous and adequate for the correct development of the activity? YES NO, if not, what would you recommend for future activities?
- E) Do you consider that the contents dealt with in this activity have been adequate? YES NO, if applicable, please grade this aspect.

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
YES					

- F) Do you think that the contents dealt with in this activity are linked to your major/minor/degree? YES NO, if applicable, please grade this aspect.

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
YES					

- G) Was the duration of the activity adequate? YES NO, if not, what would you change for future activities?

- H) Has the weekly schedule (two hours per week) been adequate? if not, what would you change for future activities?

Thank you very much for your cooperation

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire for the peer tutors

### 1. AIMS: INTENDED AND ACHIEVED

- A) Do you consider that the aims of this activity have been met? YES NO, if applicable, please grade this aspect.

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
YES					

- B) Do you think that this activity has made your integration at the University of Jaén easier? YES NO, please elaborate.

- C) Has this activity increased your interest in teaching? YES NO, please elaborate.

- D) Do you think that your speaking-in-public abilities have improved through this activity? YES NO, please elaborate.

- E) Now regarding the group, do you consider that receptive-interpretative oral skill (LISTENING) of the students has improved through this activity? YES NO, if applicable, please grade the progress obtained.

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
YES					

- F) Do you consider that productive oral skill (SPEAKING) of the students has improved through this activity? YES NO, if applicable, please grade the progress obtained.

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
YES					

- G) Do you consider that the English proficiency of the students has improved through this activity? YES NO, if applicable, please grade the progress obtained.

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
YES					

- H) In general terms, how would you assess this activity?

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high

### 2. EQUIPMENT AND FUNCTIONING

- A) Do you consider adequate the facilities and technical resources employed in this activity? YES NO, if not, what would you change for future activities?

- B) Was the group size adequate? YES NO, if not, what size would you recommend for future activities?

- C) Was the group level homogeneous and adequate for the correct development of the activity? YES NO, if not, what would you recommend for future activities?

- D) Was the duration of the activity adequate? YES NO, if not, what would you change for future activities?

- E) Has the weekly schedule (two hours per week) been adequate? If not, what would you change for future activities?

- F) Do you consider that the financial remuneration has been adequate? YES NO, if applicable, please grade this aspect.

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
YES					

- G) Do you consider that this activity has been appropriately coordinated? YES NO, if applicable, please grade this aspect.

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
YES					

Thank you very much for your cooperation