



COLECCIÓN CONOCIMIENTO CONTEMPORÁNEO

Innovación en la enseñanza de lenguas: mejoras docentes para el aprendizaje del siglo XXI

Coords.

María Valero-Redondo

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Dykinson, S.L.

INNOVACIÓN EN LA ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS:
MEJORAS DOCENTES PARA EL APRENDIZAJE DEL SIGLO XXI



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2023

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ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS
EN CONTEXTOS ESPECÍFICOS

TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING TO THE TEST: A STUDY ON STUDENTS' COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

Following the Definition and Selection of Competences Project (DeSeCo) (OCDE, 2005), where competences are defined as the acquisition of lifelong *knowledge, abilities, and attitudes*, the Spanish Education system incorporates *competences* into the official curriculum (e.g. LOE, LOMCE, LOMLOE)⁴⁸. At the level of Higher Education (HE), the DeSeCo Project served to set the basis of the so-called Tuning Project, which was born out of the needs of the Bologna Declaration (1999) such as the “mutual recognition of periods of study abroad and of degree qualifications” (Tuning Academy, n.d.). As phrased by the Tuning Academy itself, this was a “project by and from universities which focused on an intercultural system for developing outcomes-based, student-centred and *competence-based* learning” (n.d.; our emphasis).

To achieve students' competence development, lecturers must develop and implement their own methods and approaches instead of solely relying on a prescribed textbook (Espada et al., 2020; López López et al., 2018). One highly recommended methodological orientation to work on

⁴⁸ This study is part of a teaching innovation project called “Diseño e implantación de un proyecto de innovación educativa de carácter interdisciplinar en las materias de ‘Inglés II’ y ‘Economía del Turismo y la Hostelería’ del Grado de Dirección Hotelera” and funded by the *Institut de Recerca i Innovació Educativa* of the Universitat de les Illes Balears (academic year 2020-2021; Grant PID202158; IP: Tamara Bousó).

key competences in the classroom is Task-Based Language Teaching (henceforth TBLT) (Estaire, 2009; Nunan, 1989). Numerous researchers have pointed out the benefits of this approach to language teaching and learning from a theoretical and a practical perspective (Ahmed & Bidin, 2016; Bouso, 2019; Córdoba Zúñiga, 2016; Kafipour et al., 2018; Richards, 2006; Waluyo, 2019; Winnefeld, 2012), and from both, the students' and the teachers' perspective (Douglas & Kim, 2014; Nhem, 2020; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011; to mention just a few). Despite the promising results, it has also been pointed out that more empirical evidence is still needed to assess its effectiveness in different educational settings (Samuda et al., 2018). In an attempt to contribute to this area of research and, more specifically, to address our students' competence development, the present investigation aims to test the effectiveness and impact of the TBLT approach in HE via an interdisciplinary project conducted between the courses "English II" and "Economics of Tourism and Hospitality" of the new official Bachelor's Degree in Hotel Management (DHM) of the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB). More concretely, the research questions that this study seeks to address are the following:

- RQ1. What is the students' *perception* of the English language in general before and after the implementation of the method?
- RQ2. What are the students' *expectations*, and what is their level of *satisfaction* with the interdisciplinary TBLT project after its implementation?
- RQ3. What *competences* (i.e. *abilities* and *attitudes*) they acknowledge have been fostered with the project?
- RQ4. Do we observe an improvement of the students' *academic performance*, that is, of their *knowledge* of specialised English, and of the hospitality sector in general?

The structure of this chapter is as follows. Section 2 contains information related to the history and features of TBLT, the context of our study, and the design and procedure of implementation of our pedagogical programme based on TBLT. Sections 3 and 4 offer details on the

sociolinguistic profile of the participants, the measuring tools adopted, and the methodology used for the quantitative analysis of our data. Finally, section 5 presents the results of the tests and surveys designed and distributed among the students to test the impact and effectiveness of TBLT in our courses.

2. TBLT: THEORY AND APPLICATION

2.1. THEORY

Second Language Teaching has become a need in the globalised world we live in. Up to the 1950s, the dominant methods were those focusing on the surface structure of the language such as the Grammar Translation Method and the Direct Method. From the 1950s onwards, new ways of teaching embodied in the Situational or the Audio-lingual Methods arise, and over the 70s and 80s innovative alternative methods such as the so-called Total Physical Response and the Silent Method were also used. Yet, the most important changes in the area come about with the arrival of the communicative approach. The focus now is not only on the surface structure of languages but also on the use of language as a means of communication (Hymes, 1967), being this characterised by four well-defined dimensions (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980): (i) the linguistic, or grammatical competence —linked to the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of a language—, (ii) the sociolinguistic competence —related to the appropriate use of a language according to the situation—, (iii) the discourse competence, which involves the command of the rules of the discourse (e.g. cohesion, coherence, turn-taking, among others), and finally, (iv) the strategic competence, —concerned with the use of communication strategies to compensate for shortages in the other three competences just mentioned—.

The development of the communicative approach took place thanks to the European Council. David A. Wilkins (1976) analysed the different communicative meanings that a learner needs in order to understand a language. He distinguished two different types of meanings: (i) those related to notions (time, quantity, place, and frequency), and (ii) those related to communicative functions (asking, complaining, etc.).

Wilkins' exhaustive analysis served as the basis for the publication of the well-known Threshold Level (van Ek, 1975), which contains a set of descriptors that a learner should master to be able to use a foreign language in a number of ordinary and specific situations. Although syllabuses based on notions and functions were particularly relevant for the period, these were also criticised for not paying enough attention to the discourse dimension of the communicative competence which is crucial for the correct use of a language in context, as in, for instance, the case of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) modules like the one we are addressing here. In the words of H. G. Widdowson himself (1979, p. 254; our emphasis),

[*notional-functional categories provide*] only a very partial and imprecise description of certain semantic and pragmatic rules which are used for reference when people interact. They *tell us nothing about the procedures people employ in the application of these rules when they are actually engaged in communicative activity*. If we are to adopt a communicative approach to teaching ..., then *it is discourse which must be at the center of our attention*.

Such flaw of notional-functional syllabuses ultimately led to the emergence of the so-called TBLT approach, a pedagogical model whose goal is the development of the communicative competence in all its dimensions by focusing on the students' capacity to do things with words (Estaire, 2009, p. 9).

Since its origins, TBLT has adopted many different forms. We find proposals that only see the task as the main unit of the organization of the curriculum (Candlin, 1990; Long, 1985; Prabhu, 1987), and suggestions that combine notional-functional syllabuses with the undertaking of a particular task (Estaire, 1990, 2009; Estaire & Zanon, 1994; Nunan, 1989). There are also many definitions of tasks (see Long, 1985; Nunan, 1989). One of the most cited and adopted in the literature is the one provided by Skehan (1996, p. 38; our emphasis; see also Ellis, 2003, 2013):

a task is taken to be an activity in which *meaning* is primary, there is some sort of relationship to the *real world*, *task completion* has some priority, and the assessment of task performance is in terms of *task outcome*.

In addition, tasks can be of two different kinds (Ellis, 2003; Long, 1985; Nunan, 1989): communicative (or unfocused tasks) and pedagogical (or focused tasks), depending on whether they involve the main four skills (speaking, writing, listening, and reading) or revolve around a particular linguistic aspect (grammar, vocabulary, phonology, etc.). In a task-based approach to language teaching both types of tasks must interact so that students adopt an active role in the resolution of a particular problem, and all dimensions of their communicative competence are developed.

In her framework for the elaboration of teaching units using TBLT, Estaire (1990, 2009) structured the teaching unit into a number of tasks that hinge upon a final major task or project. The author identified six key steps in the elaboration of a teaching unit under this approach. These are: (i) selection of a topic considering the interests and the needs of the students, and proposal of a final project, (ii) identification of the learning goals, (iii) content specification, (iv) task planning and sequencing, (v) task adjustments, and (vi) tools and assessment procedures to adjust and improve the learning-teaching process. In step (iv), i.e. task planning and sequencing, lecturers must consider both unfocused and focused tasks. Unfocused tasks form the backbone of the teaching unit, and around them focused tasks must be presented. Also, it is highly recommendable that unfocused tasks involving productive skills follow those unfocused tasks that include receptive skills, mostly because the latter provide the necessary input to perform the former (Etaire, 2009; Nunan, 1989).

Another aspect that should be taken into account in task sequencing is the degree of difficulty. Three aspects have been claimed to intercede here: the input offered, the learners themselves, and the procedure. With regard to the procedure, in order to facilitate the teaching-learning process, TBLT experts distinguish three phases: the pre-task, the task, and the post-task phases (see Ellis & Shintani, 2013, p. 142). The first one aims at generating interest and introducing some new linguistic items, the second concerns the undertaking of the task itself (an unfocused task involving one of the four main skills previously mentioned), and the last phase (i.e. the post-task phase) refers to the presentation of the output of the task in question to the rest of the class. This helps students to develop a sense of

responsibility and to get more involved in the project they are conducting by making them protagonists of their learning process (Estaire, 2004).

2.2. APPLICATION

2.2.1. Context of the study

As previously noted, the context where the project was implemented is the Balearic Islands, which is a major tourist destination both in the Mediterranean region and worldwide. It has, in fact, been considered a paradigmatic example of mass tourism since the 1960s (Aguiló-Perez & Juaneda, 2000). Just to give the reader an idea, the regulated tourist accommodation capacity for the entire region is currently 443000 tourist beds, with a ratio of one tourist bed for every 2.6 inhabitants. This means that the distribution of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by sector shows productive specialisation in tourist-related services, accounting for 35 % of the GDP of the area (Arbulú et al., 2021).

Considering this socioeconomic setting, the newly implemented DHM offered by the only public university in the region aims at addressing the islands' most demanded lodgings and avoid the downsides associated with mass tourism, including sustainability and seasonality, among many others. The DHM has only been running since the academic year 2018-2019 at the UIB and one key aspect that concurs with the DeSeCo and Tuning Projects, as well as the TBLT approach adopted here, is its integral approach. To be more precise, the DHM Memoir includes a set of Basic (BC), General (GC), Specific (SC), and Transversal (TC) Competences that should be developed by the students at the end of the degree. By way of summary, these competences mainly have to do with *knowledge application and transfer* (BC2 and BC4), *critical thinking in foreign languages* (GC2), *teamwork* (GC3 and TC4), *professional use of Information Technology* (IT) (GC5), *knowledge about the dynamic world of tourism and hotel management* (SC13), and *ability to provide alternative and creative solutions to management problems* (SC14). As repeatedly noted, the ultimate goal of the TBLT-based pedagogical programme that we present here was to achieve an improvement of the competency-based learning process in the courses of “English II” and

“Economics of Tourism and Hospitality” of the DHM. Thus, quite crucially, the more specific objectives of our method —see section 2.2.2— are tightly interconnected with these major competences that the DHM aims to develop.

“English II” and “Economics of Tourism and Hospitality” are both mandatory courses offered in the first semester of the second year of study of the degree. “English II” is the second of a four-course ESP language module whose main aim is to enable students to communicate in professional situations in the hospitality industry⁴⁹. The contents and materials used in the course correspond to the B2 Level of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2020). As for the course “Economics of Tourism and Hospitality”, this belongs to the module *Economy, Law, and Territory*, which builds upon the contents covered in “Introduction to Economics”. It aims at delving into the aspects that characterise the touristic and hotel sectors that can be analysed from an economic point of view. All in all, as explicitly shown in Table 1, the contents of both courses complement each other, and are deeply rooted in the world of hotel management.

TABLE 1. *Course contents*

English II	Economics of Tourism and Hospitality
The history of tourism (Unit 1)	Introduction to tourism (Unit 1)
Tourist motivations – push and pull factors (Unit 1)	The tourist as a consumer: touristic and hotel supply (Unit 2)
Describing visuals (Unit 1)	
Advertising and publicity (Unit 2)	
Brands and branding (Unit 3)	Touristic and hotel offer (Unit 3)
Boutique hotels (Unit 3)	
Hotels of the future (Unit 3)	
Tourism and community (Unit 4)	The impact of touristic and hotel activity (Unit 5)
Ecotourism (Unit 4)	Competitiveness and sustainability (Unit 6)

Source: Authors

⁴⁹ The English module in question is divided into four different courses: “English I” (B1.2), and “English II” (B2.1), “English III” (B2.2), and “English for Executives” (C1.1). Additionally, there is an elective course, “Oral Communication in Business English” (C1.2).

2.2.2. Description and procedure of the pedagogical programme

Apart from the task-based activities proposed in the textbooks used in class (Cowper, 2013; Strutt, 2013; Vanhove, 2017), two additional tasks were designed and implemented as part of the TBLT approach adopted in this project, namely the discussion of a series of case studies based on Cooper (2020), and the elaboration of a business plan (the final major task or project). For their design and implementation, lecturers followed the six steps for the elaboration of a teaching unit identified by Estaire (1990, 2009) previously described in Section 2.1. Also, instructors considered the degree of difficulty of the tasks, including always in their sequencing a pre-task, the task itself, and a post-task.

The procedure was as follows. Throughout the semester, students were presented with a set of case studies for weekly discussion in “English II” covering the contents included in Table 1 (section 2.2.1). These specialised readings, expanded the contents that were being discussed in “Economics of Tourism and Hospitality”. Linguistically, these also served as a basis for the acquisition and consolidation of specialised vocabulary and grammar structures. Several activities were proposed as pre- and post-tasks to the readings. They included read-aloud activities (to correct pronunciation and intonation mistakes), class debates, role-plays, video-presentations, *Ted Talk* viewings, short-answer resolution of practical issues as well as the writing of reports, and argumentative essays. To carry out these activities, students had to make active use of several IT tools such as *BB Collaborate*, *PowerPoint*, *Flipgrip*, *Mentimeter*, *Kahoot* or *Quizizz*. All activities received instructors’ feedback to ensure that contents were correctly assimilated, and to prevent the fossilisation of errors.

The weekly-discussed case studies and the pre- and post-tasks also provided students with the *knowledge* and *abilities* to prepare the final major task, which, as already noted, consisted in the elaboration of a business plan. This was a group activity in which students had to deliver a ten-minute presentation to an audience of international investors (the teaching staff involved in both courses as well as their classmates). Students were free to present a business plan for a hotel located anywhere

in the world, with the only exception of the Balearic Islands as a possible destination. It was explained that their goal should be to convince the investors about the advantages of the hotel that they managed and that, to fulfil this objective, they had to put into practice their critical skills to analyse the context of the hotel. A set of business plans were given as models for students' reference. Also, the manager of a well-known hotel chain of the island was invited to give a talk presenting the hotel she was managing at the time. This talk also provided students with a valuable role model for their projects. After the presentation, a written version of the project was submitted as part of the course "English II".

This report was a graded activity that represented 10 % of the final grade of "Economics of Tourism and Hospitality" and 20 % of "English II" (10 % for the oral presentation, and 10 % for the written version). It was made clear on the first day of class that students would receive separate feedback (and grades) from their lecturers because they were expected to apply different skills. More specifically, a proper application of economic theories reviewed in class was expected in "Economics of Tourism and Hospitality" whereas the development of soft skills and of the communicative competence in general (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, coherence and cohesion, mastery of oral and written comprehension and production strategies, etc.) would be considered in "English II".

3. ASSESSING TBLT

3.1. PARTICIPANTS

In this section, we describe the sociolinguistic profile of the speakers who participated in this study. The participants were 20 Catalan/Spanish-speaking learners of English enrolled in the DHM in the academic year 2020/2021. They claimed not to have had previous experience in TBLT-based programmes and participated in this study voluntarily. Concerning their working experience in the field of tourism, 82 % of participants declared not to have a job related to tourism in the past six months. This is unusual but somewhat expected considering the global outbreak of coronavirus at the time of implementing this project. To

ensure participants' anonymity, they were asked to use a nickname of their choice in all the activities described in this study.

Most participants claimed to be native speakers of both Catalan and Spanish (70 %). There were also native speakers of only Spanish (10 %) and Catalan (5 %), of Basque (5 %), German (5 %), and Portuguese (5 %). As they were sophomore university students, 60 % of the participants aged 19, 30 % were aged 20-24, and 10 % fell into the 25-29 group. Concerning their knowledge of other foreign languages, they all included in their answers some knowledge of German (A1: 55 %; A2: 30 %; B1: 10 %; B2: 5 %), mostly because their study program also includes four compulsory German courses. Some participants also admitted having some knowledge of Catalan (as a foreign language, 15 % of the participants), French (10 %), Italian (5 %), and Portuguese (5 %).

3.2. MEASURING TOOLS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

To assess the effectiveness of TBLT we followed Melo Martínez et al. (2020). Two surveys were designed by the lecturers to gather information on the students' *perception* of the English language (RQ1), of their *competence* development (RQ3), and their own *academic performance* during the semester (RQ4). As can be inferred from the information given in section 3.1, the project was conducted over the first semester of the academic year 2020/2021. Though the project in itself was interdisciplinary (i.e. it involved two courses), the different tasks of the project were conducted in "English II".

The Initial Survey (IS) accompanied by two English language tests were distributed on the first day of class. In the IS, students had to rate a series of Statements (SS) on a 10-point Likert scale. The survey was divided into three different sections connected to our RQs. The first part dealt with participants' *perception* of the English language (RQ1; see Table 2); SS 12 to 22 targeted students' *abilities* and *attitudes* towards specific aspects of the subject "English II" (RQ3; see Table 3), and items 23 to 33 measured students' *expectations* about how and whether, in their opinion, the interdisciplinary TBLT project could help them acquire the *knowledge* and develop the *competences* the DHM aims to develop (RQ3 and RQ4; see also section 2.2.1). On the last day of class, students completed

another survey (the Post-Project Survey, PPS) which roughly replicated the structure of the IS (it contained ten additional SS, i.e. items 33-43 in Table 4; see section 5.2). This PPS aimed at obtaining students' overall *satisfaction* with the TBLT project once this was completed (see Table 4).

As for students' language proficiency, this was assessed using three different measures. First, the first day of class participants indicated their self-perceived language level according to CEFR standards. Most participants (80 %) declared a B2 level of English, 15 % of the students indicated a lower level (B1), and 5 % stated to have a certified C1 level. The second indicator came from the *LexTALE* vocabulary (proficiency) test (Lemhöfer & Broersma, 2012). This is an online visual lexical decision task that takes around four minutes to complete. It comprises 60 trials (40 English words and 20 non-existent words) where participants are requested to identify whether the words in question are part of the English lexicon or are just simply made-up words. The mean for the group here was 62.5, which broadly corresponds with the upper intermediate level.

Last, given the professional orientation of the study program, a third indicator was taken into consideration. Two ESP tests were designed and distributed on the first and last day of class in the format of a *Google Forms* survey which students completed at their own pace and using their own electronic devices. These tests aimed at measuring students' specialised linguistic knowledge in the field of tourism and hospitality; more specifically, the questions dealt with the grammar and vocabulary needed for professional communication in the field. All questions in the tests were adapted from the supplementary materials included in the teacher's edition of the course textbook (Cowper, 2013; Strutt, 2013). Both tests shared the same structure: they comprised 30 multiple choice questions each, accompanied by four options, with only one correct answer.

4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

The results of the surveys (IS and PPS) were analysed in two different stages. In the first stage, we assessed whether there were statistically significant differences between the ratings given in the IS and the PPS.

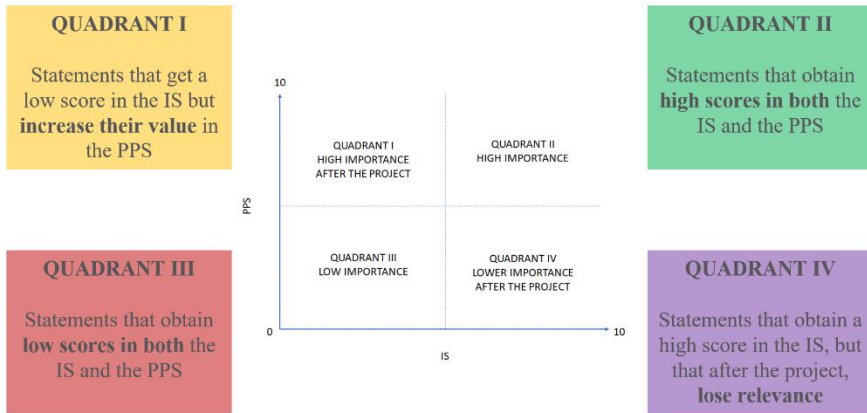
The idea was to identify those variables (statements) the project had a direct impact on. In a second stage, a cluster analysis was performed. Our goal here was to single out the most relevant SS for our students. Clustering is a quantitative data analysis technique that aims to classify data into disjoint subsets (i.e. clusters) according to the similarity or dissimilarity of their characteristics (Abaidullah et al., 2015; Al-Wakeel & Wu, 2016; Gallegos & Ritter, 2005; Huberty et al., 2005)⁵⁰. Following Erdoğmuş and Esen (2016), we used a specific subtype of clustering named partitional clustering that classifies the results into four quadrants (clusters) as shown in Figure 1⁵¹.

Quadrant I will comprise those SS that get a low score in the IS but increase their value in the PPS. Quadrant II will fit the SS that obtain high scores in both the IS and the PPS, whereas Quadrant III those SS that obtain low scores in both the IS and the PPS. Finally, Quadrant IV will involve those SS that obtain a high score in the IS, but that after the project, lose relevance. Quadrants I and II are the most interesting for our analysis as these would reveal a positive impact of the project and unveil those SS (aspects of the project) that matter the most to our students.

⁵⁰ Each dimension is measured in a 0-10 scale (according to the Likert scale used in the surveys).

⁵¹ Cluster analysis methods are broadly categorised into two categories: (1) hierarchical and (2) partitional (non-hierarchical) clustering methods.

FIGURE 1. Classification of the variables (statements) by Quadrants



Source: Authors

5. RESULTS

Performance data from the two ESP language tests showed that the students’ *knowledge of specialised English* improved dramatically (RQ3). Once the semester was over, the average score obtained was 16.63 % higher than the average score obtained for the whole group in the initial ESP test. This indicates that the work done during the semester had an objective positive impact on the students’ linguistic performance.

As for students’ *satisfaction* (see RQ2), the final task of the project, that is, the presentation of a business plan, was very well received (mean: 8/10; see S. 42 in Table 4; section 5.2), and interestingly, their satisfaction levels concerning *teamwork* were considerably high (mean: 8.52/10; see S.43 in Table 4; section 5.2).

5.1. STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION OF ENGLISH AND STUDENTS’ COMPETENCES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS “ENGLISH II”

In this section, we provide an account of students’ perception of the English language, and of their competences and attitudes towards the subject “English II” (RQ1 and RQ3). As can be seen in Table 2, the first part (of the IS and the PPS) comprises questions regarding the students’ perception of the language, including their motivations to learn English. To be

more specific, SS 1, 2, 5, and 6 display a utilitarian view of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in which English is presented as a tool to get a job in the future. The rest of the SS are associated with other objectives like travelling (S. 6), media consumption (S. 8), or accessibility to music in English (S. 9), reading (S. 10), or socialising (S. 11) options. All in all, the results indicate that the students' *perception of English* remained constant over the semester. The one perception that significantly changes is the one in S. 7: students are now even more aware of the importance of English for their professional career as future hotel managers.

TABLE 2. *Students' perception of the English language*

Statements (SS)	IS (mean)	PPS (mean)	Diff. (mean)	Tc-Value
1. Learning English is fundamental to achieve my professional goals	9.63	9.76	0.17	-0.4808
2. English is important to get a job in the Balearic Islands.	9.68	9.62	-0.11	0.2401
3. I have always liked English.	8.26	7.71	-0.5	1.0600
4. I have been in contact with the English language since childhood.	7.21	6.76	-0.56	0.8314
5. I want to learn English well to be able to work abroad.	9.68	9.86	0.17	-0.7175
6. I want to learn English well to travel around the world as a tourist.	9.47	9.48	0.06	-0.0079
7. I want to learn English well in case I ever have to use it in life (just in case).	9.11	8.29	-0.89*	1.8394
8. I feel comfortable watching movies or videos in English. I do not need a translation.	6.74	6.62	0.5	0.2521
9. I fully understand the lyrics of the songs I listen to in English.	7.11	7.38	0.67	-0.6284
10. I feel comfortable reading books, magazines, or browsing websites in English. I do not need to constantly check the dictionary to understand the general idea is intended to convey.	6.79	6.54	0.39	0.5573
11. I feel comfortable interacting in English with other people.	7.26	7.38	0.33	-0.2396

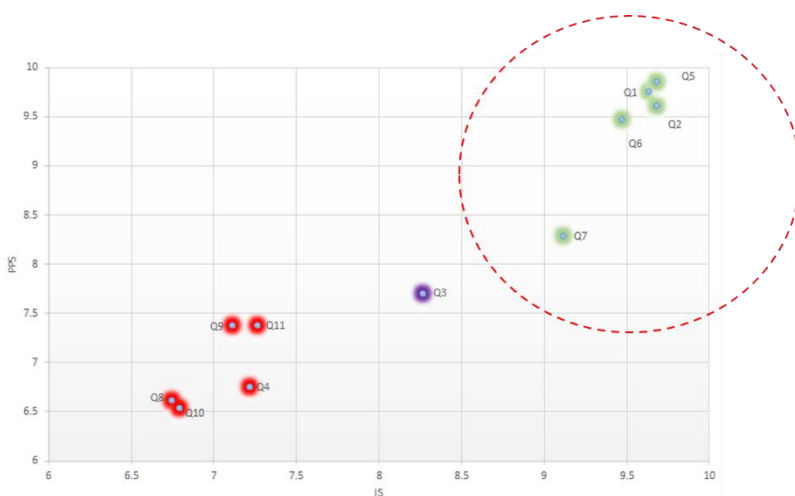
Note: Differences were calculated with a 90 % confidence interval. Statistically significant differences are marked with an asterisk in all tables. To measure the significance of the

results we used a mean difference statistical test that assumes a normal standard distribution; the null hypothesis in this test assumes that the difference in means is equal to zero.

Source: Authors

To identify those SS which were most relevant for our students, as mentioned in section 4, the results were classified into clusters (see Figure 2). The red cluster located in Quadrant III refers to those SS that obtained a lower score than the average in both surveys (IS and PPS). The purple cluster in Quadrant IV, formed by one single statement (S. 3), shows a value near the mean. Finally, the green cluster placed in Quadrant II stands for SS that score higher than the average in both surveys. In this green set of statements, the mean scores for SS. 1, 2 and 5 were particularly high (greater than 9.6), a result which may be explained by the context where this study was conducted (see section 2.2.1).

FIGURE 2. Students' perception of the English language



Source: Authors

Studies indicate that intercultural contact derived from touristic activity has a direct effect on language attitude and language learning motivation (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005; Mostafaei Alaei & Aghblagh, 2020). This is especially relevant in cases where the subject of study is deeply rooted in the social and economic fabric of the region, as is precisely the case of the Balearic Islands. The same reasoning could be applied to interpret

the 0.06 difference obtained in S. 6 (i.e. “I want to learn English well to travel the world as a tourist”), assuming that students pursuing a DHM are indeed interested in travelling around the world.

Moving now on to the second part of the IS and PPS, as previously mentioned, this tested students’ *abilities* and level of *engagement* with the subject of “English II”. More specifically, the survey included questions concerning attendance (S. 17), organisation (S. 22), use of additional references and library materials (S. 18 and S. 20), and reliance on the instructor to successfully complete the tasks proposed (S. 19).

The mean difference statistical test performed to identify changes in this area (see Table 3) reveals that in 6 out of the 11 SS included in this part of the survey our students’ perception changed over the semester. Among these changes is their satisfaction with the English course, which improved significantly (see the mean difference for S. 12). Also, the results indicate that the use of traditional learning materials such as books or class notes (S. 18 and S. 20) was less required by the students. This was compensated with peer collaborative work as, according to our results, the project served as a proxy to discuss ideas with others (classmates, friends, family, etc.) (see S. 21).

TABLE 3. *Students’ competence development (abilities and attitudes)*

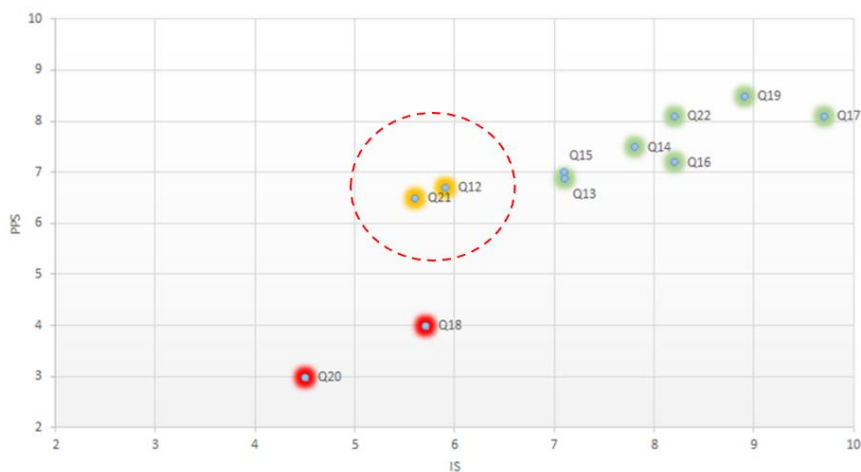
Statements (SS)	IS (mean)	PPS (mean)	Diff. (mean)	Tc-Value
12. I liked the English course we had last year (“English I”) / I liked the English course we had this year (“English II”, academic year 2020/2021).	5.9	6.7	1.1*	1.5410
13. English classes are / were pleasant and dynamic.	7.1	6.9	0.1	-0.3216
14. I feel that I can use what I have learned at the EHIB outside university.	7.8	7.5	0.1	-0.5433
15. I participate / have participated in class regularly.	7.1	7	0.1	-0.2174
16. I feel / have felt more motivated to participate in class when dealing with real cases.	8.2	7.2	-0.6*	-2.2296
17. I attend / have attended classes regularly.	9.7	8.1	-1.7*	-4.4108

18. I complete / have completed class notes with the references included in the recommended bibliography.	5.7	4	-2.2*	-3.0861
19. If I do not understand something, I ask / have asked the instructor.	8.9	8.5	-0.3	-1.1254
20. I have worked with library materials (books, journals, etc.).	4.5	3	-1.3*	-2.9071
21. I comment and discuss / have commented and discussed with those around me (classmates, friends, family, etc.) the topics covered in class to improve my learning.	5.6	6.5	1.1*	1.6486
22. I am / have been an organized student.	8.2	8.1	-0.1	-0.1687

Source: Authors

As before, in Figure 3 the results were classified into clusters to identify those SS that were considered most relevant to our students before and after the implementation of the project. Again, red clusters in Quadrant III stand for SS that obtained a score below the average (these apply to S. 18 and S. 20), whereas those in green score higher than the average (these concern SS. 13-17, S.19, and S. 22). Note that in this case we have an additional yellow cluster (Quadrant I) which refers to those SS whose average values were low in the IS but revealed an important increase in their average value in the PPS. These apply to S.12 and S. 21 which, quite crucially, relate directly to our project. It seems then fair to say that the data presented in this section goes along the idea that TBLT fosters transversal competences (i.e. soft skills) such as *teamwork*, *engagement*, and *critical thinking* (Fernández et al., 2001; García Mayo, 2015). Rather than focusing on traditional methods such as using curricular and library resources and relying on class attendance to achieve academic goals, TBLT allows students to come up with alternative and more creative solutions to solve practical problems.

FIGURE 3. Students' competence development (abilities and attitudes)



Source: Authors

5.2. STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND SATISFACTION WITH THE TBLT PROJECT

In the last part of the survey, students were inquired directly about their satisfaction with the interdisciplinary project. Attention was paid to ensure that students gave their opinion on how this project and the TBLT approach had helped them to develop a series of competences derived from the coordination between the two courses (RQ2 and RQ4). The results are provided in Table 4.

TABLE 4. Students' academic performance and satisfaction with the TBLT project

Statements (SS)	PPS
23. Rate (from 1 to 10) the level of effort in your learning process at the University School of Hotel Management of the Balearic Islands.	8.53
24. The instructor(s)' explanation about the interdisciplinary project was enough for me to understand the main objective of the project.	6.67
25. I believe that my current English skills, especially after completing the interdisciplinary project, allow me to understand economic concepts better.	7.00
26. Knowing that my work would be evaluated in two different courses motivated me to try harder.	8.38
27. I think that the instructors of both courses ("English II" and "Economics of Tourism and Hospitality") were well coordinated.	7.86

28. I think that the project between the two courses improved my oral and written communication skills in English.	8.10
29. I think that the project between the two courses improved my teamwork skills.	8.52
30. I believe that the project between the two courses has helped me to improve my interpersonal skills.	7.90
31. I think that the project between the two courses has helped me to improve my analytical and negotiation skills.	6.76
32. I think that the project between the two courses improved my capacity for autonomous learning and my entrepreneurial spirit.	7.67
33. I think that the project between the two courses managed to increase my interest in both subjects.	7.14
34. I think that the project between the two courses helped me to improve my knowledge about the hotel world.	8.38
35. I think that the project between the two courses made self-study make more sense.	7.24
36. I think that the project between the two courses made me feel more of a protagonist in my learning process than just attending classes.	7.29
37. I think that the project between the two courses managed to improve my use of new technologies.	6.38
38. I think that the project between the two courses managed to improve my ability to express myself on technical issues.	7.71
39. I believe that the project between the two courses improved my ability to generate creative solutions.	7.38
40. I think that the project between the two courses managed to improve my ability to work in a multicultural context.	7.33
41. I think that the project between the two courses improved my leadership skills.	7.95
42. Overall, I enjoyed working on the project.	8.00
43. I am satisfied with the work that I have done with my classmates.	8.52

Source: Authors

As can be seen, one of the SS that scores above 8 is S. 34 (“I think that the project between the two courses helped me to improve my knowledge about the hotel world”). This result indicates that the implementation of the project had a strong impact on students’ *academic training*, as far as the analysis of different tourism markets is concerned (RQ4). On another level, though still quite high, the statement that obtained the lowest score was S. 37 (“I think that the project between the two courses managed to improve my use of new technologies”). This shows that, although the project used IT tools (for details, see Section 2.2.2), the students did not perceive that their *IT skills* had been particularly enhanced by it. Finally, regarding the overall satisfaction with the

project (S. 42 and S. 43), it is important to note that the average result in both statements clearly shows that the students enjoyed the experience and that they were satisfied with the work done (RQ2). The results go along our previous results that point towards the idea that TBLT enhances students' motivation (see SS. 12 and 21 in Table 3).

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The main goal of the study that we have just presented was to assess the effectiveness of TBLT for competence development via an interdisciplinary project conducted in the courses “English II” and “Economics of Tourism and Hospitality” in the newly implemented DHM at the UIB. Students' perceptions, satisfaction, and academic performance under a TBLT approach were measured with two surveys and a series of ESP tests distributed at the beginning and end of the semester. All in all, the results obtained concur with the findings expounded in previous studies (Córdoba Zúñiga, 2016; Douglas & Kim, 2014, 2014; García Mayo, 2015; Nhem, 2020; Richards, 2006; Waluyo, 2019; Winnefeld, 2012; Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011). We can conclude then that TBLT is a suitable approach to develop students' competences and enhance their motivation while easily integrating contents from different areas.

According to our results, the TBLT approach did not have a significant impact on students' *perception* of the English language: before and after the project, students do acknowledge its relevance for their career as future hotel managers (RQ1). As for the *competences* the project aimed to develop (RQ3) (see section 2.2.1), students' satisfaction with the project (RQ2) clearly led to the development of a set of soft skills (*attitudes* and *abilities* like teamwork, engagement, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills). In other words, the project enhanced our students' capacity to work cooperatively towards a common goal, allowing them to provide alternative and creative solutions to management problems. Our results also show an evident boost of their *knowledge* of the subject area of “Economics of Tourism and Hospitality”, and of specialised English in general, which according to the final ESP test increased by roughly 17 % (RQ4).

Finally, we should mention here that, despite these positive results, our study also has some limitations that should be overcome in the future; for example, by increasing the number of participants in the project, and including a control group who follows the traditional approach. This would allow us to confirm that TBLT is the way to go when it comes to enhancing competence development in an ESP context.

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