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TRAINING THE TRAINERS: ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND MEETING EXPECTATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Efforts toward making Malaysia an effective global competitor in this challenging era call for communicative competence and mastery in English and/or other languages to ensure competency and effectiveness in our human capital. As such, various measures, drastic at times, have been undertaken by the Government to achieve the country's aspirations. One such measure is the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English in schools.

In tandem with the Government's effort, institutions of higher learning are gradually encouraging a wider use of English as a medium of instruction at tertiary level, necessitating for lectures in science and technical subjects to be conducted in English. In line with this effort, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia has taken various steps to prepare content lecturers to deliver their lectures in English. Spearheaded by the Human Resource Unit of the University, The Language Unit and the Department of Modern Languages, a number of lecturers had been identified to undergo a training programme referred to as "Instructional English for Science and Engineering".

This chapter aims to share the experience of the instructors

in the Department of Modern Languages in conducting the training programme to lecturers from various faculties at the university. The lecturers who had undergone the training would eventually conduct the training to their colleagues in the respective faculties, hence the course was referred to as "Training the Trainers". In particular, this chapter will relate the experience of a group of language instructors handling the content subject specialists from the Faculty of Civil Engineering. The challenges faced by the instructors will be outlined followed by the guiding principles adopted in the planning and design of the training programme.

CHALLENGES IN THE DESIGN OF THE PROGRAMME

The following are some of the challenges in preparing the training programme for the group of Civil Engineering lecturers:

Lack of definition for the Terms of Reference

The limited information available with regard to the expectations and requirements of the stakeholders and the scope or framework of the training to be implemented resulted in limited input for the language instructors to draw upon when designing the training programme. As such, the language instructors were left to make some 'guesswork' as to what would be deemed most appropriate and relevant for participants who were subject matter experts in their specialised discipline. As highlighted by Roe (1993), we should take the guesswork out of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Thus, due to the constraint of time, an informal enquiry through the phone was made to the Deputy Dean of Academic Affairs of the Faculty of Civil Engineering. However, only minimal information and general feedback were provided. Thus, the aim of the programme was simply stated as "to enhance the confidence level of content

lecturers in delivering lectures in English" and "to improve their overall communicative skills so that they would be able to help the students while conducting lectures in English, such as being able to respond to students' questions and give the necessary feedback". Such were the limited definition as to the terms of reference made available to the language instructors.

Lack of information about the participants

Another challenge was the limited information about the participants, except for the fact that they were lecturers from the Faculty of Civil Engineering. With this limited input, the language instructors were aware that the participants were from diverse academic backgrounds and expertise with different areas of specialisation in Civil Engineering. Other pertinent information in relation to their years of teaching experience, age group, levels of English Language proficiency was also not available before the implementation of the programme but was only obtained after the programme began. As such, the language instructors could only guess the preferred learning styles and strategies and different individual expectations and requirements. The only information given prior to the training was the list of names of the participants assigned by the faculty to undergo the programme.

The lack of sufficient data meant that assumptions and presumptions had to be made as to what would be most appropriate and relevant for the participants. Nevertheless, two of the language instructors had some past experience in a research involving the communicative needs of civil engineering undergraduates at the university (Hamzah, Abdul Raof, Abdullah and Louis, 1995). The earlier collaboration with subject specialists proved useful. For instance, in giving examples to illustrate certain elements of effective lecture, the language instructors were able to recall some examples of subject matter content related to 'Building Materials in Civil Engineering Construction'.

Decision on the best approach for instruction

Another big challenge faced by the language instructors was to decide the best approach to be adopted in teaching. Several questions were raised as shown in the following examples:

- Should the focus of instruction revolve around language aspects and if so, which form and structure should be given emphasis? Should the teaching of grammar be incidental and not prescriptive? This was made difficult because the proficiency level of the participants was not known.
- Should the focus be on the acquisition of skills rather than language, and if so, what skills should be taught? Considering the fact that the participants might have vast teaching experience, would it be appropriate to highlight skills of effective lecturing in English?
- Should the focus on content be general or should it relate specifically to civil engineering? Considering the fact that the language instructors lacked authority in terms of content knowledge, should attempts be made to refer to content relevant to the field of civil engineering? If topics related to their specialised field were chosen, which aspects of the field would participants find relevant, authentic and meaningful?
- How should the language instructors tap on the expertise of the participants, given the expert nature of the participants in their specialised disciplines? What was the possibility of harnessing their expertise to its full potential to the benefit of the participants in general?
- What would be the best approach to the learning process? Should it be totally learner centred considering the fact that the participants were mature adults? How much input should the instructors provide? How would the instructors meet the indefinite expectations of the participants?

These were some of the challenges that had to be addressed by the language instructors when preparing the training programme.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES ADOPTED

Despite the limited information available, the language instructors were guided by a few theoretical underpinnings as a guiding principle in the design of the training programme based on the principles of adult learning. Knowles (cited in Lieb, 1991), for example, identified the characteristics of adult learners, who have certain needs and requirements that necessitate specific techniques and approaches, outlined as follows:

- Adults are autonomous and self-directed learners. They do not want to be directed most of the time as they appreciate the freedom to lead themselves and participate freely in the learning process. Adult learners need to be given the opportunity to work on projects based on their interests. They need instructors who would be able to guide and facilitate their learning process. They also want to assume responsibility for their own learning.

  As such, the language instructors acted as facilitators of learning, preparing the necessary conditions for learning to take place while giving the participants full autonomy in deciding the direction of learning as responsible adults. For example, when given assigned tasks, they were given the freedom to decide on their own groupings and how best to accomplish the tasks satisfactorily through their own choice of topics. In this way, the participants were given more autonomy in the learning process.

- Adult learners come to class with a wealth of experience and knowledge in relation to education and vocation. With

this vast experience, they would want to relate the lessons to what they already acquire. In addition, adult learners require proper respect as individuals who have acquired a wealth of experience and they need to be treated as equals in terms of knowledge.

As such, the language instructors recognised and value these life experiences in the teaching and learning process. The participants were regarded as experts in their specialised disciplines with more authority in terms of content knowledge and expertise. This is in view of the fact that the subject lecturers are the highest authority in the field for content validation, as highlighted by Abdullah, Louis, Abdul Raof, Hamzah (1995). In the approach to teaching, the language instructors, as language experts, only gave comments on language matters and left the participants as content experts to give comments and feedback in relation to accuracy, clarity and sufficiency of content presented by their colleagues. They were given the authority to be peer assessors.

- Adults are practical learners. Having gone through years of working, they would want to have lessons that would be useful for them as part of their career. They are less interested in knowledge and theories for the sake of knowing them but they want to see the relevance and meaning of the knowledge acquired. They want to be able to use the knowledge on the job. As practical learners, adults need specific idea of the learning results. They need to see that their efforts in learning are rewarded, not in terms of monetary return. It can simply be in terms of their satisfaction in demonstrating their ability to perform what has been learned.
- Adult learners must see the relevance and benefits of learning to be motivated. They would want to see a reason for the lessons that they will be learning. One of the reasons is the

applicability of the lesson to their career or responsibilities. In any training programme, the contents of the lessons must exemplify concepts and theories related to their work.

As part of the training, the participants were required to conduct mini lectures which incorporated the input given by the instructors. Through this practical application, the participants will see the relevance of the input they have acquired.

- Adult learners are goal-oriented. Usually, they already have certain goals to achieve when they attend a course or training. An educational training programme for adult learners should have clearly defined goals. The goals of the programme must be explained to them at the beginning of the session, so that they are clear about why they are attending the training or course.

- Adult learners would also want to see the benefits of learning as a continuous process throughout life. Life-long learning postulates that learning does not end when one leaves school. It is more than adult education. Lifelong learning can be defined as "all purposeful learning activity, undertaken with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence" (Frigo, 2001). It is not only about employment-related skills, but also about updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and understanding throughout life. It includes all kinds of learning, including non-formal learning, such as acquiring vocational skills at the workplace or language skills from participating in a study circle, or the acquisition of generic skills such as confidence, teamwork, thinking skills and self esteem, to name a few.

In terms of adult education, life-long learning is applicable to the educational experience of adults by bringing adults' experience closer to one of continued growth and exploration. An adult lifelong learner has usually gained the basic knowledge and developed individual learning that

support continuous learning and development.

- Another important aspect of adult learning is motivation to learn. Woolfolk (1995) defines motivation as the internal state that arouses, directs, and maintains behaviour. If a learner does not have the internal arousal to continue to study, the teacher's effort to assist the learner to learn will be in vain.

    Many theorists and researchers have found that it is important to recognise the construct of motivation not as a single entity but as a multi-factorial one. Oxford and Shearin (1994) analysed a total of 12 motivational theories or models, including those from socio-psychology, cognitive development, and socio-cultural psychology, and identified six factors that impact motivation in language learning:

    1. attitudes (sentiments toward the learning community and the target language);
    2. beliefs about self (expectancies about one's attitudes to succeed, self-efficacy, and anxiety);
    3. goals (perceived clarity and relevance of learning goals as reasons for learning);
    4. involvement (extent to which the learner actively and consciously participates in the language learning process);
    5. environmental support (extent of teacher and peer support, and the integration of cultural and outside-of-class support into learning experience);
    6. personal attributes (aptitude, age, sex, and previous language learning experience).

    For adult learners, motivation can be an obstacle, especially when they have acquired certain stature in life and career. What can be done to motivate adult learners? First, lecturers need to know their reasons for attending a training programme or a course.

They attend a training programme to improve on specific ability or competence, promotion, job enrichment, maintenance of acquired skills or acquisition of new knowledge.

For this training programme, there were several ways in which the instructors encouraged motivation in the participants as adult learners. First, the instructors established rapport with the learners. They needed to see that the instructors were willing to give their extra time and effort to help them in the process of learning. The instructors created a friendly and open atmosphere that showed the participants their willingness to offer help.

INSTRUCTIONAL ENGLISH IN ENGINEERING TRAINING PROGRAMME

Four language instructors were involved in the training programme designed for a group of twenty-five civil engineering lecturers. After much deliberation and discussion, it was decided that the main aim of the course was to equip the academic subject specialists of the Faculty of Civil Engineering with skills and techniques to deliver effective lectures in English in their specialised disciplines. Specifically the course provided opportunities to develop language and communication skills in English for the purpose of delivering and teaching academic content in civil engineering subjects. Participants were exposed to appropriate language input and delivery techniques to facilitate the acquisition of skills in delivering lectures in English.

The main objective of the course was for participants to be able to use appropriate language expressions, form and function in

order to:
- Open a lecture, deliver the academic content of a lecture and close a lecture effectively

- Organise a proper lecture outline as a guide to students
- Prepare effective visuals to enhance delivery in lectures
- Achieve coherence and unity in delivering lectures using appropriate transitional signals and logical connectors
- Explain key concepts of the subject matter with clarity, conciseness and accuracy
- Deliver a mini lecture which incorporated elements of effective delivery

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS OF THE PROGRAMME

The participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire on the effectiveness of the workshop. The majority of the participants agreed that they had improved their self confidence as the workshop had a strong impact on their ability to use English. This was because they were given more opportunities to use English to a greater extent. They also felt that they were able to improve their interaction skills in English and were more confident to conduct their lectures in English after they were given the task of delivering a mini lecture on a topic related to their specialised discipline. This is further supported by participants who also reported that they benefited in terms of improvement in skills related to giving lectures, revolving around the following areas:

- Attracting the listeners' attention
- Improving their argumentative skills
- Explaining concepts
- Giving instructions
- Understanding questions
- Answering questions
- Asking for clarifications

- Explaining lecture notes
- Closing the arguments/ lecture

In conclusion, the findings of the questionnaire revealed that the participants had benefited tremendously from the workshop especially with regard to content, level of comprehensibility of the topics discussed and the level of applicability of the content. Most importantly, the knowledge and experience gained from the workshop were very relevant and purposeful to be practiced in their daily teaching, as they desire to achieve confidence and effectiveness in delivery of content related to their areas of expertise.

CONCLUSION

The important principles in the implementation of the programme as outlined earlier were the recognition of the participants as autonomous learners who were able to take responsibility for their own learning. The focus of the learner-centred activities related to topics relevant to the civil engineering content decided by the participants as subject specialists with authority in terms of content knowledge and expertise. Overall, the perceptions of participants of the programme were very encouraging as the training was deemed useful and relevant in their quest to enhance confidence and credibility in delivering lectures effectively in English.

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