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Expectation-based Teaching: An Action Research in English Report Writing

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ABSTRACT

The concept of customer orientation in the field of marketing can be applied in teaching English. It is always necessary to understand students' needs, discuss and share this information as well as respond to the information accordingly to improve students' performance. This paper addresses the need for understanding the students' needs and teaching accordingly to improve the quality of English report-writing. A proposed Expectation-based Teaching (EBT) approach was tested (n=79). The findings of the action research indicated that the students performed better when they understood what was expected of them in writing a statistical-based English report. The overall mean score of the students increased significantly after they were briefed and taught based on the expectations of the writing components. The content quality of their writing was much better than before. These trends were the same for samples with different demographic characteristics.

Keywords: Expectation-base teaching; English; Action research; Report-writing skills; MUET

INTRODUCTION

There have been great emphasis and effort by the Ministry of Education (Malaysia) to improve the standard of English among secondary school students. For instance, there has been an increasing number of trained and qualified English teachers to enhance the teaching and learning process. The Malaysian government will continue to emphasize the importance of English and competency of English teachers.

In fact, the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) was introduced to enhance the students' command of English in a holistic approach. As such, the MUET curriculum stresses the components of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Table 1 shows the marks assigned for each of the components as well as the overall scoring scheme. Reading (120 marks) carries the highest weight followed by Writing (90 marks). The focus of this research will be on the report-writing section of the MUET.

One of the challenges faced by the MUET students is writing, typically report-writing. Generally, their scores on Paper 4 (Report) are found to be relatively lower. The newly introduced component of report-writing (previously, summary writing) is statistical and analytical in nature. Many students do not know how to write a precise and yet informative report. Their skills in this statistics-oriented report-writing should be enhanced and appropriate approach for teaching it must be developed, tested and implemented accordingly.

Table 1: The Assessment Structure for the MUET

The Papers	Marks	%	Band (Marks)
Paper 1: Listening	45	15.0	1 (1-99)
Paper 2: Speaking	45	15.0	2 (100-139)
Paper 3: Reading	120	40.0	3 (140-179)
Paper 4: Writing	90	30.0	4 (180-219)
(Essay & Report)	(54 & 36)	(60 & 40)	5 (220-259)
			6 (260-300)
Total	300	100.0	

The quality of content is one of the areas of concern for scoring higher marks. They should be able to write a good report that can meet the examiners' expectations. After all, quality is about meeting expectations. As such, this action research aims to find out whether an Expectation-based Teaching (EBT) can be effective in improving the content quality of their reports.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this action research is to develop and test a teaching approach for improving the report-writing quality of the MUET students. The specific objectives are as follows:

- i. To test the effectiveness of an expectation-based teaching approach.
- ii. To explore whether demographic variables will moderate the relationship between expectation-based teaching and content quality.

RELATED LITERATURE

Marketing and management scholars and practitioners suggest that the high performing organisations and individuals are very competent in terms of serving their target customers. They are very customer-oriented. It is also observed that more and more researchers have illuminated marketing mechanisms in the education sector (e.g. Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007; Green, 2006; Mehra & Rhee, 2009; Voon, 2006).

Market orientation concerns the implementation of marketing concept. It is about putting the interests of the customers first. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) emphasized the following critical behaviours for market orientation:

- generation of information
- dissemination of information
- responsiveness to the information

Market orientation is regarded as a culture that most effectively and efficiently creates the necessary behaviours for the creation of superior customer value (Narver & Slater, 1990). The latter reiterated that the server should be customer and competitor-oriented, and inter-functional coordination is essential. Knowing and serving are important components of putting the customers' interests first. This implementation of marketing concept will tend to benefit the targeted customers and in return the producers or providers (individuals or organizations).

It is believed that this important set of culture, beliefs and behaviours are relevant for schools and teachers. In the context of teaching and learning, putting the interests of the students first will be essential. The teachers need to be student-oriented. In fact, a lot of empirical research suggested that understanding the students' needs and then teach will be more effective (e.g. Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007). There was another example where an experiment was carried out by an English teacher to test the customer-oriented approach for teaching summary writing (Teo, 1991). Before asking the students to summarize any passage, the teacher made sure that they understood the text by asking them questions and explaining any difficult vocabulary. For her first lesson, she gave them practice on note-taking. Then she gave them practice on writing

short notes of messages in a sentence. After this, she gave them practice on taking out important points by using an understanding technique. Then they played a game called ‘Many words into one’ before they practised summarizing in the form of a sentence. This was followed by practice on summarizing a paragraph and paragraphs respectively. The results from the experimental and control groups indicated that the students performed better under the suggested approach.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework for this experiment-based action research. The independent variable was the teaching of report-writing called Expectation-based Teaching (EBT). EBT was basically about a teaching approach in which the students were briefed on the examiners’ expectations with regards to the writing requirements for the MUET paper (e.g. Title, Introduction, Body and Conclusion). The students should know what were expected of them. If they knew the examiners’ expectations, then they would answer or write better. Therefore, it was hypothesized (H_1) that EBT would lead to better writing performance in terms of content quality (dependent variable). The influences of demographic variables (H_2) were also analysed.

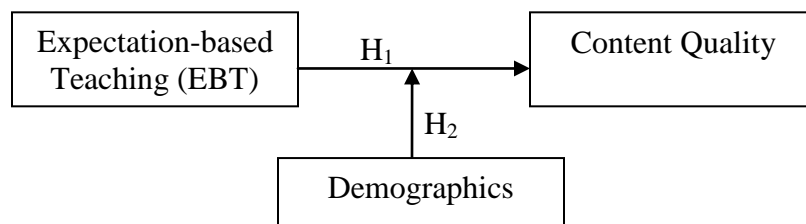


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Specifically, the two major hypotheses which were tested in this action research were:

H_1 : Expectation-based Teaching will lead to higher content quality.

H_2 : Demographic variables will moderate the relationship between Expectation-based Teaching and content quality.

METHODOLOGY

This was a 10-week action research. The research design for this classroom-based study of EBT was mainly the experimental design. The investigation on the influences of demographics was based on a questionnaire survey. The experimentation was qualitative in nature whereas the latter was designed to be quantitative. The findings were used in the intervention stage to practically improve the content quality of the report-writing of the MUET students.

At the initial stage, the selected students who took the MUET subject in the researcher's school were asked to write a required report each and submit it for checking. From the submitted reports, the researcher identified the problematic areas of their writing. The format requirements (i.e., Title, Introduction, Body and Conclusion), technical and language aspects were assessed accordingly. Comments and brief suggestions were written on the individual's written report for the respective student to learn from the specific mistakes. For instance, the technical aspects for the Body of the report included: Analyse information on the visuals, only write what was seen and not based on assumptions, Synthesize the information, and others). These represented the expectations of the teachers or examiners. Thereafter, teaching treatments were carried out and assessments were done to gauge the effects of the expectation-based teaching (i.e., teaching students by telling them what were expected of them for writing a good report).

There were experimental and control groups in this study (Figure 2). The experimental design was technically called Pretest-Posttest Control Group (Malhotra, 2009). The summary of the design is as follows:

EG1 stands for the first Experimental Group whereas CG1 is the first Control Group. The symbol X represents the Treatment (teaching). For the EG1, Observation or assessment of the report-writing skills was done (O_1), followed by another Observation (O_2). Observations (O_3 and O_4) were also done on the Control Group (CG1). Test units were randomly assigned (based on the existing classes where subjects' performances are rather similar) to the experimental or control group. A pretreatment measure was taken on each group. The treatment effect was measured as: $(O_2 - O_1) - (O_4 - O_3)$. Selection bias was assumed to be eliminated by predetermined randomization.

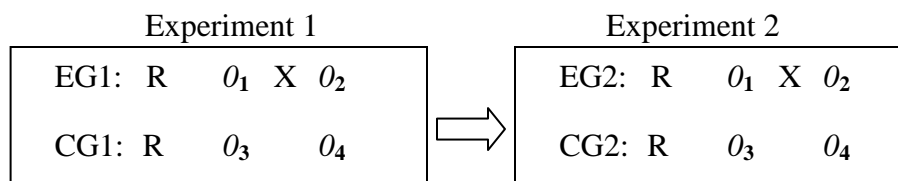


Figure 2: Pretest-Posttest Control Group

The experimentation was repeated for the next two groups (EG2, CG2). The previous Control Group (CG1) became the EG2 whereas another class of MUET students (from another teacher) became the CG2. This second round of experiment enabled the researcher to reconfirm the effectiveness of the OBT approach. The procedures for the experiment were as follows:

- Step 1: Ask EG1 and CG1 to write reports and mark (no teaching)
- Step 2: Teaching EG1 (do not teach CG1)
- Step 3: Ask EG1 and CG1 to write the reports and mark
- Step 4: Teach EG2 (do not teach CG2)
- Step 5: Ask EG2 and CG2 to write the reports and mark

In analyzing the effects of EBT, the scores of the reports were analysed and compared with the groups which were not taught. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, means and mean differences were used. Inferential statistical analyses using t-test (e.g. gender) were also done.

FINDINGS

This experimental research found that the EBT approach of teaching had significantly improved the writing performance of the MUET students. Hence, Hypothesis 1 was supported. The results presented in Table 2 indicate that the overall mean score of the students before the EBT teaching stood at 7.00 (out of 15.00), but the score significantly increased (at $p=0.05$ level of significance) to 10.70 after the students were briefed and taught based on the expectations of the writing component. The content quality of their writings was much better than before.

The trends were the same for samples with different demographic characteristics. These suggested that the EBT approach would be beneficial to all students irrespective of their gender, race, speaking in English (e.g. with family members and friends), parent's income, parent's occupation and preference for reading English report. Hence, Hypothesis 2 (Demographic variables will moderate the relationship between Expectation-based teaching and Content Quality) was not supported.

Table 2: Mean Score Analyses for the Test Samples

Variables	Sample Size (n=79)	Mean scores for content quality					Overall Sig.
		Before	After	Difference	t value	Sig.	
		7.00	10.70	3.70	11.271	0.000	Significant
Gender							
Male	27	6.78	11.19	4.41	Results improved irrespective of Gender.		
Female	52	7.12	10.44	3.32			
Race							
Malay	14	5.21	8.79	3.58	Results improved irrespective of Race.		
Chinese	36	8.08	12.53	4.45			
Dayak	29	6.52	9.34	2.82			
Speak English							
Yes	7	7.71	12.57	4.86	Results improved irrespective of Speaking English.		
No	72	6.93	10.51	3.58			
Parent's Income							
2000 or less	57	6.23	10.12	3.89	Results improved irrespective of Parent's Income.		
>2000	22	9.00	12.18	3.18			

Table 2(Continue)

Variables	Sample Size (n=79)	Mean scores for content quality				Overall Sig.
		Before	After	Difference	t value	
		7.00	10.70	3.70	11.271	0.000
Parent's Occupation						Significant
Public	22	7.91	11.55	3.64	Results improved irrespective of Parent's Occupation.	
Private	20	7.75	11.90	4.15		
Self-employed	27	6.19	10.33	4.14		
Unemployed	10	5.70	7.40	1.70		
Like to Read English Report						
Yes	27	7.48	11.89	4.41	Results improved irrespective of Like to Read English Report.	
No	52	6.75	10.08	3.33		

The results shown in Table 3 indicate that the Experimental Groups (EG1 and EG2) achieved better results compared to the Control Groups (CG1 and CG2).

Table 3: Mean Scores for the Groups

Groups	Experiment 1		Groups	Experiment 1	
	Before	After		Before	After
EG1	7.78	12.17	EG2	8.12	11.61
CG1	7.11	9.86	CG2	4.83	5.04

ACTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

Action research (Figure 3) concerns the use of research findings for further improvement – research is a means to actions (Johnson, 2005; Hendricks, 2006). Therefore, the findings from this EBT research were immediately used to improve the quality of MUET teaching specifically the content quality component of the report-writing in Paper 4.

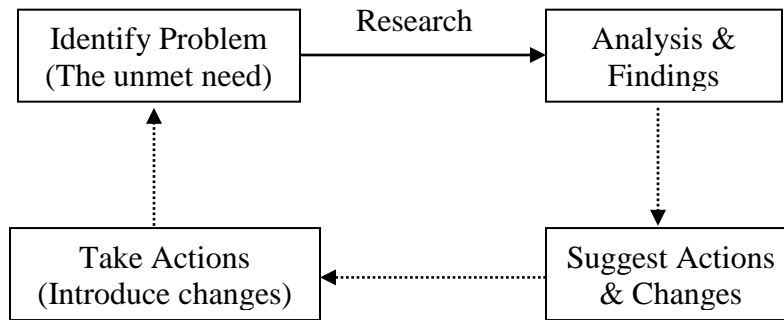


Figure 3: Action Research Process

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This pioneering action research aimed to test the effectiveness of an Expectation-based Teaching (EBT) approach in improving the MUET students' writing performance and to explore the influences of demographic variables on the approach. Experiments and a questionnaire survey were used. The approach was found to be very effective in improving the writing performance of the students in terms of the content quality of the report written. It was found that the selected demographic variables had no significant effect on the impact of the said teaching approach. The approach benefited different types of students with the different backgrounds.

This research indicated the need of putting the interests of the students first in teaching. The students may have different needs such as not knowing the expectations of the examiners or teachers. The proposed EBT aimed to discover the students' needs or weaknesses, thereafter inform them what they could improve. The teaching activities emphasized what were expected of them for writing a good quality report.

This action research was done at a government secondary school and it can be extended and replicated to other schools or should include more schools as well as the participating learners. The procedures for the experiment can be more comprehensive and systematic in comparing the results of the experimental and control groups. In fact, the present research has yet to accomplish the full experimental design for more conclusive findings.

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