English Language Centre - English Course

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(Learning report)

Abstract—This report aims to describe the knowledge acquired through the English course, my experiences and how they have influenced my development as a person. I've learned new vocabulary, improved my speaking and writing and developed social skills working in different groups.

Index Terms—Learning, evolution, culture, personal experiences, difficulties

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1 INTRODUCTION

THROUGHOUT this report I will describe my learning and personal development, influenced by the participation in the English course.

I'll start describing which were the objectives to get with the course, either professionally as personally.

I will address how the concepts described in the activity report, changed my way of seeing the English language and culture of the country and how it had changed my person. I will also discuss the dynamics of class, how the fact that the class is composed of students of various ages and different backgrounds influenced my development and the way how I interacted with each one of my classmates.

Finally I will address how the course influenced my academic experience both now and in the future.

2 OBJECTIVES

Given that English is the universal language and that in the computer science engineering environment its acknowledgement is essential, I decided to enrol in a English Language course in order to improve my speaking and writing skills.

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Besides that most of my computer science engineering books and lectures are given in English and its comprehension is necessary to understand the theoretical concepts of the subjects.

Even though the lectures are given in English, the main reason for the insertion in the course was the fact that many companies ask for English Certificates at some job interviews that I've been to.

3 SKILLS

3.1 Speaking skills

At the beginning, I had great difficulties when speaking given the fact that I didn't have much vocabulary and I tended to translate from Portuguese to English before speaking to someone.

With the classes I became able to speak more accurately, without the need to translate in my head before any kind of speaking once the classes were mainly made at an orally level.

3.1.1 Way of speaking

One of the many things that I learned was that there are different conducts depending on the situation and people who you are talking to, therefore, the way to talk to a friend or to a stranger is quite different.

I have had experiences talking in English with people from ERASMUS that come from all over the world, with people from companies and in a more professional manner and as well with my classmates. Soon I realized that the

(1.0) Excelent	LEARNING					DOCUMENT						
(0.8) Very Good	CONTEXT x2	SKILLS x1	REFLECT x4	S+C x1	SCORE	Structure x0.25	Ortogr. x0.25	Gramm. x0,.25	Format x0.25	Title x0.5	Filename x0.5	SCORE
(0.6) Good												
(0.4) Fair	2	1	2.8	0.5	6.3	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.5	0.5	1.92
(0.2) Weak												

way to talk with each one of these tree groups was quite different.

The way I talked to the first ones (students from ERASMUS) was in a very informal manner and therefore my lack of vocabulary was not an issue due to the fact that we were all at ease and with no professional worries. However, in the second case (people from companies), there was a little more pressure given the fact that the way you express yourself can make a difference between candidates when applying for a job, which can give much pressure.

This way, I learned that some words don't work or don't make sense in some kind of conversation, for example, if a friend ask you what kind of hobbies you have, you could answer "Oh, I like to surf, go to the beach and stuff like that", but if you was at a job interview and the interviewer ask you the same question, you have to answer in a more professional way like "My hobby is to surf, take some walk in the beach and things related with the sea". all this has to do with the level of confidence you have with whom you're talking to.

3.1.2   Debates

In the classes we did some debates where it was given a subject to argue about. Some of us had to be for and others against it. Sides were then switched after a while in order to everyone learn how to argue from both sides of the debate. When we are for a subject we have to show to the audience all the high points that the topic brings to the society. Contrary, when we are against a subject we have to highlight all the disadvantages that are associated with the topic.

3.1.3   Ask for help

We then learned English expressions used do ask for help and once again the language change whenever we are talking to a known person or an unknown one. If we want to ask for help to a friend we probably say "Hey John, help me here with this wheels" but if you ask to a neighbour that you barely know, you should say "John, would you please help me with my car? I'd be grateful if you don't mind!" For

this chapter we had to made some dialogues between the class's students.

3.1.4   Compare things

We learned also how to compare things in a interesting way instead of just compare like "A is much beautiful than B". In order to become a little more professional, we could say "B is nowhere near as beautiful as A".

3.1.5   Talking on the phone

Some expressions about phone conversations were learned also in classes, so whenever exists some complications with the communication, we can use some expressions like "Sorry, that's a bit delay on the line, can you repeat please?". To practice this vocabulary we were organized in groups and to simulate interferences on the line the teacher put loud music while we perform the conversations in order to be impossible to listen to each other.

3.1.6   Professional world

This was the last topic addressed in classes and with it we learn vocabulary as profits, revenues, clients, suppliers, investors, go bankrupt, build up new companies, acquire funding etc.

3.2   Writing skills

As with speaking, also the writing depends on the context and situation. A letter is not written the same way as to a friend or colleague as to a professional superior. Greeting is an example of that, where to a friend can say "Hi Richard, what happening Saturday? Business as usual?" but to a stranger it has to be "Dear Richard, I hereby come to inform you that our regular business will take place Saturday. Will you be available?". The farewell is also different in both cases: "Big hug my friend" to a friend or "Best regards" for co-worker.

A complaint was also taught to be written in a professional way, where the the actual complaints has to be said in a non offensive way although showing all the points that made the costumer unsatisfied.

3.3 Listening skills

In order to improve the listening, the teacher always used practice exercises as dialogues between two or more people (from a cd) and asked to fill the gaps in the transcribed conversation. It was also asked to determine who said what and which actions each of the elements took.

This way, we were able to practice the indirected speech once we have to describe the heard conversation.

4 RELATIONSHIPS

My class was composed by a total of 6 people with different backgrounds: a retired person, some students, a student with special needs and working people. The different backgrounds allowed different subjects to be approached during classes and augment my perception of the world and different points of view.

One of the things that I realized with time was that we have to adapt ourselves to deal with different personalities and difficulties on other persons. Once I had a student with special needs in the class, I had to learn to be calm and patient whenever it was asked me to make a group activity with him. Sometimes it was necessary to wait for his answer to the questions or explain again what was the question. It reviled to be a great experience once after this year I'm able to understand my colleague even when no one else can.

With a colleague that is teacher in the high school I learn that teachers need to be heard and therefore we are just allow to talk or give our opinion when they have finished. It was a changeling situation for me once I'm a very impatient person and I prefer dynamical conversations.

A funny point in the relationship with the retired colleague was that he studied at my university and I've realized the changes that happened throughout the years. For example, nowadays students have 3 exams one after the other with no space in between, rather than one exam per week as it happened 30 years ago.

5 CULTURE

My relationship with the teacher allowed me to understand the main differences between the Portuguese and English / British cultures. For example, if in Portugal someone asked another person, in a train station for directions to some place, that person would promptly try to help the other but if the same situation would occur in England the response would not be the same and probably a little apprehensive since the English people are less friendly.

Other example of this temper is shown when asking a friend about his salary. For Portuguese people it is a question like any other but for a English person it represents an intrusive and possibly offensive question.

One funny aspect discussed in the last class was the weddings and I keep asking myself "How come two cultures so close geographically could be so opposite in other aspects, like a wedding?!". Here in Portugal, its common to see the guests giving envelops with money to the engaged couple but according to the teacher, the first time he saw this behave, he thought "There is some kind of mafia! What is inside the envelop?!". In England the wedding gifts are only the ones who are specified in the wedding list in some shops.

Other curious thing is that in Portugal, closest to midnight, the wedding serves seafood to the guests which is unthinkable in England. There, after the cake there are just a few drinks but no more food.

In the end, we conclude that English people are not very talkative nor worm which represents the opposite of the Portuguese people.

6 ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

I started the master degree this year and once there are ERASMUS students, all my classes are given in English, i.e., the lectures, the support material and the exams are given and written in English. Therefore, it was required of me the writing of several papers about technical developments or implementations in my study area.

The practice of writing in the English classes helped me to write this papers since a more objective and technical English was required.

The presentations of those same papers were facilitated with my new and improved capability understanding and speak in English.

Reading and listening started to be a little easier since, at first I had to translate and think in Portuguese to understand everything, but now I am able to think and comprehend everything in English.

One improve made this year was the capability of answer the exams writing in English instead of Portuguese. Although with some mistakes, I feel more comfortable and it seams to me a great chance to practice what I've learned.

7 CONCLUSION

The objectives were achieved given the fact of my evolution in the understanding of English in all its form. I'm now able to talk to people of different places and backgrounds and express my opinions in a more accurately manner.

I'm able also to wait patiently for the comprehension and answers of other people, as well as give the opportunity to them to talk when I realized that they have difficulties.

It is also a high point in my curriculum and because of that I intend to continue and do the FCE (First Certificate) exam since it is the first world wide proof of my knowledge of English.