



Title of Report: English for Customs and Excise

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1. Identify and describe the training program.

This case report describes a training program for employees working in the Customs and Excise department of a company in Bayreuth, Germany. The time allocated for the training course is thirty hours of lesson time, which is divided into twenty ninety-minute lessons. The participants attend the lessons two or three times a month depending on their availability. No lessons take place during school holidays, at the participants' request. It is envisaged that the participants will complete the allocated number of lessons within one calendar year.

One teacher is responsible for delivering the complete training program. The teacher is a native English speaker from the UK who holds a CELTA (a certificate in teaching English to speakers of other languages) and has been teaching English in companies for four years.

2. Describe the target audience for the training program.

The trainees are all Germans based in the southern state of Bavaria and working in a multinational tobacco company. Their ages range from the early thirties to the late forties. Two of the three participants work together. Their work involves tracking and recording the movement of raw materials and finished products delivered to and produced by the factory where they work, for the purposes of customs and excise controlling. The third trainee works in a team responsible for the controlling of tax stamps. The training is funded from the budget of the Customs and Excise Department.

None of the trainees are taking part in English training in their company for the first time. Moreover, the trainees had all been assessed through an interview conducted orally and face-to-face, which the assessor used to assign their spoken English a level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). No assessment of their written English was made at this stage, but it was assumed that their level of written English would be slightly lower than that of their spoken English.

3. Describe the needs assessment procedures utilized to develop the program.

When this new group was instigated at the start of 2011, needs analyses were carried out again during a discussion in English initiated by the assessor for this purpose,

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during which she took notes on their use of English. This record would form the basis of an analysis of their language needs. She also took notes on their feedback to questions regarding their learning goals: what they would like to be able to do in English by the end of the course. Additional needs analyses, as well as an assessment of the learners' written English, were based on on-going informal assessments of their output during previous English courses they had participated in (e.g., homework assignments and exercises completed in lessons which had been taught by the assessor).

In cooperation with the learners, the assessor then compiled a list of "can do" statements during the next meeting. These statements represented what the trainees would like to be able to do by the end of the course and included the following goals: (1) to improve awareness of grammatical accuracy and implement it while speaking and writing in English, (2) to react more spontaneously and quickly while making conversation with English-speaking colleagues, (3) to broaden knowledge of vocabulary specific to the field of customs and excise, (4) to communicate more confidently and efficiently in English on the telephone, and (5) to give presentations in English more effectively.

A needs analysis was also performed continuously during the training itself through the analysis of learners' errors and areas where their skills required further improvement as they completed the tasks assigned to them, for example, a telephone dialogue. More exposure to the trainees' use of language resulted in greater exposure to their needs, while new needs arose, as previously identified needs started to be met.

4. Explain the English language training program's over-arching goals and specific objectives.

The overarching goal of the training program is to enable the participants to more effectively communicate verbally at work. More specific aims include (1) improving the trainees' repertoire of vocabulary relevant to the field of customs and excise, (2) increasing their confidence in communicating with native speakers in English, (3) enabling them to react more rapidly in situations where they need to communicate spontaneously in English, (4) increasing their grammatical accuracy, and (5) improving their presentation and telephoning skills.

The aims of the program reflect the teacher's belief that conversational skills and informal communication in English play just as great a role (if not an even greater role) in successful international communication as more formal skills, such as the ability to write a report in English. The trainees share this view. Perhaps one of the most obvious reflections of the role this perception plays in the program is the time allocated at the start of every lesson to an informal discussion led by the trainees about their recent activities.

5. Describe the teaching methods and training procedures used in the program.

Teaching is carried out through vocabulary input from business English course books and authentic materials in English which the participants use in their work, followed by freer language production and then feedback and error correction based on the language output.



We use L2 to L1 to L2 translation activities (i.e., English to German to English translation tasks) to work on grammatical points, such as the use of negatives in a range of tenses and present perfect versus past simple contrast. The trainees also participate in role-plays and simulations during which they take part in telephone calls and give presentations, before receiving feedback from the teacher and the other trainees.

Spoken genres are given priority over written genres of communication since the trainees already feel confident in communicating through written genres and their needs lie, principally, in the improvement of their capacity for spoken communication. More specifically, the course focuses on telephone interactions, making conversation with visitors and colleagues, and giving panel presentations and individual presentations.

6. Describe the teaching materials used in the program.

Learning materials used include material from business English course books, materials in English that the participants use in their work, and worksheets created for the course by the teacher, which focus on specific language or vocabulary needs. The “can do” statements, which were also emailed to the trainees as a written document, inspired the learning materials used in the program, which were either selected or created by the teacher.

Documents containing vocabulary specific to their area of work were provided by the trainees and used by the teacher as raw materials for the creation of vocabulary exercises designed to test their existing knowledge, introduce them to new items, and practice identifying and using the new vocabulary. The teacher also produced and selected materials from course books and grammar books which would review and practice the use of specific grammatical forms that the trainees were not using accurately during the two initial meetings. These included the present perfect, future forms, and conditional sentences.

7. Explain the content of the English language training program.

In order for the trainees to perform communicative tasks effectively the course focuses on the following functions: asking for information they receive, clarifying information, presenting information, responding to questions and enquiries, and explaining detailed information and data, which includes subject-specific vocabulary. Therefore, it is anticipated that the course participants will be using their English while communicating on the telephone with non-native speaker colleagues located in other European countries. Thus the communication will take place within a context that uses English as a lingua franca.

The participants also have to make presentations to both native speaker and non-native speaker audiences in Britain, Germany, and other European countries. They regularly go on business trips to other countries, during which it is necessary for them to make conversation in English with their colleagues. The trainees need to be able to understand documentation in English on topics specific to their field, which means that they need to be familiar with the specialized vocabulary such documents contain.



8. Explain the delivery mechanisms employed by the program.

The training course is delivered through face-to-face lessons in a small group of three. These lessons incorporate one-to-one feedback and instruction for individuals. Trainees also complete homework activities outside of the classroom and are encouraged to access online texts, as well as audio and video materials in English outside of the classroom.

Blended learning is also implemented in the classroom on a regular basis. In this context, paper-based and course book materials are integrated with other multi-media learning resources, which include online quizzes as well as video material and audio material from online sources in the classroom. No online platform or web tool is used to deliver the training either inside or outside of the classroom, and this choice can be attributed to the trainees' personal preferences.

9. Explain the assessment procedures used in the program.

The learners are assessed by the teacher on the basis of the progress they make towards achieving the learning goals negotiated with them at the start of the course. A feedback sheet highlighting areas which the trainees need to improve upon is sent to them on a weekly basis. How successfully they address these issues while communicating in the lessons is assessed by the teacher, who gives them oral feedback during the lessons.

The learners are also given written homework assignments designed to test their understanding of the material covered in the previous lesson. Additional homework tasks are given when the teacher is aware that, due to the trainees' work schedules, a lesson will not be taking place for several weeks.

Homework assignments usually take the form of paper-based activities such as completing exercises or preparing the framework for a telephone dialogue role-play. They can also take on a more practical aspect, for example, preparing a presentation for the other trainees or selecting an article from a newspaper or magazine and giving an overview of its contents in the next lesson.

10. Explain the program evaluation mechanisms used.

The program is evaluated through an email request sent to the trainees when they have attended ten of the twenty lessons. It asks them to respond with written feedback on the course up to that point, including areas which could be improved. This feedback is undirected and the trainees are free to write what they want, and to write as little or as much as they wish.

At the end of the program the trainees are sent an online feedback form, consisting of ten questions about the quality of the training program and how effectively it was delivered by the teacher. In their responses the participants give a rating on a five-point scale. There are also spaces for the trainees to leave comments in addition to the ratings they give. An average is then calculated. A summary of the feedback given by email and the



results and comments from the online feedback are passed onto the trainer of the course. The teacher also encourages the trainees to give oral feedback to her regarding areas of improvement throughout the course.

Both forms of feedback used are carried out by an administrator, known as a training manager, who works for the language school that has the contract to deliver language training in the company where the participants work. Feedback for this specific course has been forwarded to the head of the trainees' department in an attempt to demonstrate to him that the money he has invested in this training program from his department's own budget has been well-spent.

11. Discuss the challenges involved in offering this English training program.

The greatest challenge to the success of the program was undoubtedly the scarcity of specific materials for English learners working in the field of customs and excise. This challenge was overcome by the creation of learning materials tailored to the participants' needs. These are based on their own written materials, for example, the creation of telephoning role-play cards which have the learners ask for and give information from a data sheet generated within their teams at work.

A further challenge has been the fact that lessons have not been able to take place on a weekly basis as a result of work commitments, business trips, meetings, and holidays. On average, the participants attend two lessons per month.

Furthermore, the group is also mixed level since one participant began the course at B1 level, another at B2 level, and the third was already approaching C1 level on the CEFR. Additional support, therefore, needed to be given to the participant who began the program at B1 level. Care also had to be taken to ensure that the course could nevertheless be challenging enough for the participant who was approaching C1 level.

12. Describe the successes of the program and explain how they are documented.

The success of the course can be measured by the trainees' response to it: They feel that it is meeting their needs and notice that they are now able to communicate verbally with greater accuracy and confidence than they could before they started the course. Evidence of the program's success can also be found in the quality of the presentations the participants have delivered, and the ease with which they can now interact with their colleagues. Furthermore, they spend less time reading documents in English because their understanding of the specific vocabulary items found within them has increased.