Empirical Effects on Technology Aided Learning
for English Communication (TALEC)

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【Abstract】

Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) is currently one of the largest industries in the Philippines. The industry is responsible for employing over a million Filipinos to work in customer service related jobs such as human resources, accounting, and call centers. These jobs require a high level of English Language proficiency in order to effectively communicate with their international customer base. Because of this, English language training with an emphasis on pronunciation is seen as an increasingly necessary part of university education. This paper looks at the results of a study that examined the effects of using Teacher Assisted Learning to help students develop their English pronunciation and improve their chances to work in the BPO industry. The study looked at three sets of students and found that when using this technology the amount of graduates who entered the BPO field increased over the three year period.

【Key Words】

technology, internet, Technology Aided Learning, Business Process Outsourcing

1. Introduction

Technology has developed to the point of ubiquity. Every aspect of our daily lives is impacted in some way by the use of technology, be it at home, work, or at school, and in most cases this impact is seen as advantageous. Education is one area in which the rise and application of technology use has been steady. Computers have made their way into the classrooms since the 1960s and have been used to supplement course content (Lacina

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2004). Over time, the use of computers has evolved and now there are various ways that technology can assist in learning. Technology-Aided Learning (TAL) is one way to frame this idea, and it can be described as the use of various forms of interactive information technology, such as computers, mobile devices, and audiovisual materials, to assist in the delivery of educational content. More specifically, when properly balanced with direct instruction, TAL can provide simulated practical experiences, enhanced visual explanations, and online discussions between teachers and students. (Hewitt-Taylor, 2003). Additional benefits to incorporating TAL elements into instruction include greater engagement in the subject matter, increased intrinsic motivation, greater and deeper collaboration between students, and the ability to individualize instruction and/or allow students to learn at their own pace (Benham, H., Carvalho, G., & Cassens, M. 2014; Ferrell and Ferrell, 2002; Ivers, 2003; Ranasinghe & Leisher, 2009; Sivakumaran, T., Garcia, K., Davis, L., Jones, Q., Choi, J., Dawson, M., 2012).

This has many positive implications in the field of language learning and instruction in that there are countless websites and applications available on the internet and on mobile devices to assist language learners in developing all of the four skills (writing, reading, speaking, and listening). For language teachers specifically, there are a variety of ways that they can integrate TAL elements into their individual classes or their broader programs. Some examples of this are the use of online flashcard sites like Memrise or Duolingo to assist in vocabulary acquisition, tools like Google Docs which allow students (and their teachers) to work collaboratively on writing assignments in real-time, websites like ELLLO and YouTube which provide students access to hours of free authentic materials to develop listening and speaking skills, as well as the countless number of blogs and online news sources to help students become better readers.   Perhaps one of the biggest advantages to having access to technology is the ability to target student-specific needs (Ottenbreit-Leftwich, A.T., Glazewski, K.D., Newby, T.J., and Ertmer, P.A., 2010). This can be done for individual students, but it can also be done to help university programs align their curriculum and instructional practices with the specific needs of their students.

In the case of *the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Pasig* (University of Pasig), a public university in the Philippines, TAL is used to prepare their students for work in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry. This is a highly demanding industry that requires a high level of English proficiency from its workforce. By providing instruction paired with information technology, the university aims to address key areas of difficulty (specifically soft skills and pronunciation) for Filipino students hoping to enter this field. Thus, this paper aims to examine the impact of Technology Aided Learning for English

Communication specifically on Filipino University students hoping to enter the Business Process Outsourcing industry.

2. Background

According to The Philippines Department of Trade and Industry (as referenced in Shead, 2017), BPO is a delegation of service-type business processed to a third-party service provider. These jobs tend to include services and functions involving payroll, human resources, accounting, and most commonly, call centers (Lockwood, J., Forey, G., & Price, H. 2008).

BPO is one of the fastest growing industries in the Philippines, with roughly 1,493 BPO-related establishments in operation employing 1.3 million people (PSA, 2015; Chandwani, 2019) and a projected value of $55 billion USD by 2020 (Maclang, 2015). This growth can be attributed to a number of factors including, but not limited to, local government and international investment, BPO companies being relatively inexpensive to run in the Philippines, and a well-educated workforce that is proficient in English (Agoncillo, 2016; Maclang, 2015; Shead, 2017). According to Lockwood, Forey & Price (2008), most of the call center jobs work with international banks, IT firms, retailing outfits, and insurance companies. This has led to a demand for applicants with high levels of English proficiency who are able to communicate effectively with native speakers of English from these companies' home branches in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Because of this, many companies from these sectors employ a number of recruitment efforts in order to attract qualified customer service representatives or call center agents; however, one of the biggest reasons for BPOs not meeting their hiring goals is a lack of English language proficiency among their applicants (Lockwood, 2010). In an attempt to remedy this, many companies and institutions have gone so far as to partner with BPO companies that offer training to senior high schools, colleges, and universities.

Indeed, for the last five years, *the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Pasig* (University of Pasig) has been in partnership with BPO companies such as Sutherland, Oeridian and Edulynx, which conduct comprehensive English language training to graduating students, specifically in the College of Computer Studies (CCS). The objective of this program is to prepare the students to find jobs in the BPO industry by having these partner-BPOs train the students to meet the service-level requirements of their target industries by having them complete at least 100 hours of training before the end of their final semester.

In order to help students meet the language needs of the BPO industry, the partner-BPOs work with the students on improving their soft skills, with special emphasis on accent training. While English is an official language in the Philippines, employees at

many call centers are trained to understand a variety of accents they may encounter and work on perfecting a more North American-sounding accent (Calderon 2016). Also, they are given a chance to practice using these accents in a variety of realistic settings (i.e. company greetings, showing affinity, and connection building with customers).

This accent training is provided through a Technology Aided Tool called Ascentify, which is designed to help students with their pronunciation as well as give them lessons on a variety of topics, such as technology, business, restaurant management, travel, professionalism, and even the call center industry itself. The core feature of this tool is its 'Listen and Repeat' feature. When a 'trainee' logs in, the system provides a 'tutor' that will read the lessons and speak English topic specific words and phrases, which the trainee needs to repeat until their pronunciation is considered correct. The aim is to speak and pronounce the words in a manner similar to that of a native speaker of English. In addition to the accent training, remedial work on relevant points of English grammar and instruction on basic customer service skills are also provided.

3. Assessment of Technology Aided Learning for English Communication

This study examines the impact of Technology Aided Learning for English Communication based on the employment rate of our graduate students most significantly in the BPO industry, which primarily requires efficiency and fluency in the use of English language.

For the purposes of this research, the data below covers the employment rate of graduate students for the academic years 2015-2018 only.

Table 1

Number of employed graduates	Percentage	Industry type
30	37.50%	BPO
50	62.50%	others

Table 2

Number of employed graduates	Percentage	Industry type
51	48.57%	BPO
54	51.43%	others

Table 3

Number of employed graduates	Percentage	Industry type
89	55.63%	BPO

71	44.37%	others

Table 4

| Academic Year	Number of graduates in BPO
2015-2016	37.50%
2016-2017	48.57%
2017-2018	55.63%

In the academic year 2015-2016, 80 graduating students underwent the English Proficiency Training using TAL. Figure 1 shows that 37.5% (or more than 1/3) of the graduates were employed in the BPO industry, while 62.5% worked in other industries.

FIGURE 1
EMPLOYMENT RATE FOR SY 2015-2016
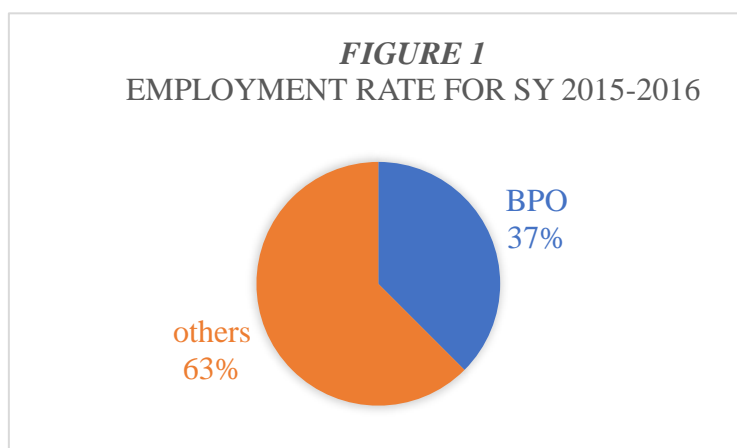
In the academic year (SY) 2016-2017, there were 105 graduating students who had attended the English Proficiency Training using TAL. Figure 2 illustrates that almost 50% of the graduates were hired in the BPO industry.

FIGURE 2
EMPLOYMENT RATE FOR SY 2016-2017
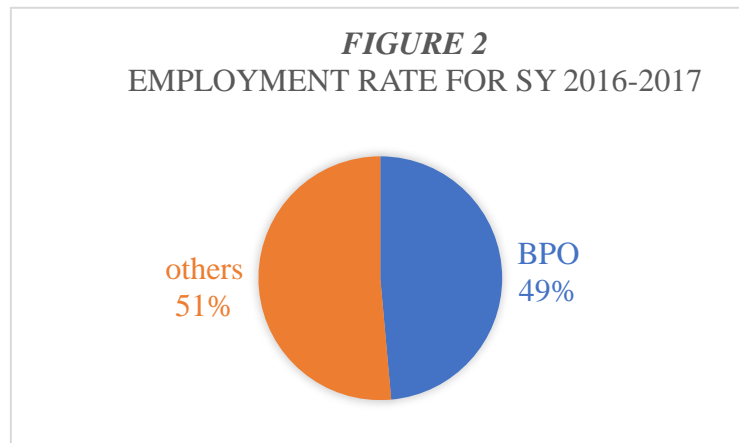
In the academic year (SY) 2017-2018, there were 160 graduating students who had joined the English Proficiency Training using TAL. Figure 3 shows that 55.63% or more than half of the total population of the graduates were hired and worked in the BPO industry.

FIGURE 3
EMPLOYMENT RATE FOR SY 2017-2018
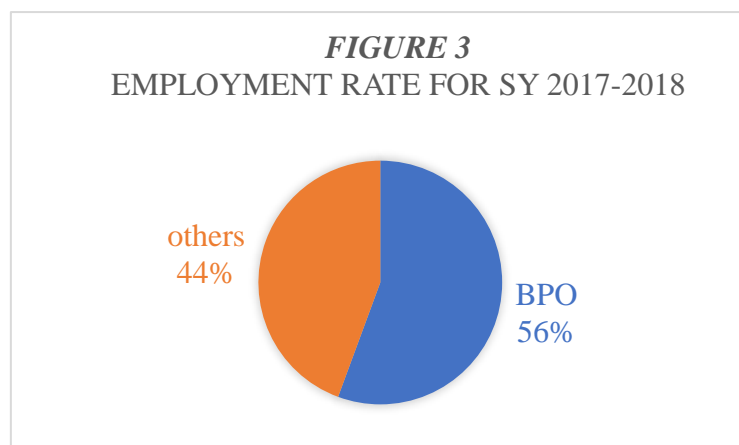
The results of the employment details for the three consecutive school years of the University of Pasig City (*Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Pasig*) College of Computer Studies shows an increase of graduates entering the BPO industry. This necessitates the notion that students who had undergone training using Technology Aided Learning for English Communication have been provided better opportunity in seeking employment in the BPO industry.

4. Conclusion

In a broad sense, technology is the means or platform by which any labor-intensive

task is made easier. Use of the internet and computers are extremely helpful in achieving the goals educators and trainers have set for enhancing the communication skills of our students. The work of basic research that is inherent in preparing lessons and activities has become much easier now as a result of the large amount of resources uploaded and shared online by people from all over the world.

Pronunciation has proven a hurdle for most of the students at the University of Pasig City, second only to grammar. However, through the use of one specific Technology-Aided Learning tool, important features of natural English, such as phonemic awareness, tone and stress can be taught to students in situations that are either authentic, or if not, very near real-world simulations. While Filipinos do speak English and have a unique dialect, being able to speak and easily comprehend other English accents, such as a regional North American accent is something that is desirable in an international business setting.

In sum, through the training provided using TAL, the University of Pasig is able to make its programs more globally relevant and, as a result, improve the competitiveness of its students by allowing them to meet the demands of the highly competitive BPO industry. This is manifested by the statistics presented in the tables and figures that illustrate the increasing number of graduates employed in the BPO industries over the years.

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