

MyEnglishLab

Improving TOEIC Grades using a blended learning solution

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At the INSA University in Strasbourg, I teach English to engineering students using Language Leader. As one of the French 'Grande Ecoles' the institution has a reputation for producing high flying graduates of international calibre. Despite being recruited for their academic abilities, students often leave school with low scores in English even after six years of study in the secondary system. In order to receive their diplomas students have to obtain a score of 750/990 in the TOEIC examination and since 37.5% of INSA students were failing to obtain this grade, I was hired to help improve the performance.

With all the competing demands for their time and only two contact hours per week, it is quite a challenge to bring these students up to the required standard of English to graduate. This is not because students are bad language learners, but because they cannot see the importance of a foreign language, refusing to invest time to learn. I had the difficult task of not only finding a programme that would enable them to reach the required score, but one that would rapidly change students' attitudes at the same time.

When I heard about MyLanguageLeaderLab, an online component for the Language Leader course, I realised that this could be the solution to our needs. The MyLab component reinforces the work that students do in class by providing activities that correlate with the Language Leader coursebook. Students can do these activities online whenever they are connected to the internet, they receive their grades immediately and these are fed into the automatic gradebook. So far I have used the MyLab with 116 students and 40 more are expected for the next semester.

I give my students about 90% of the listening and speaking exercises to complete from MyLanguageLeaderLab. Previously, this volume of homework would have been impossible to check, but with the MyLab I can verify which students have completed the homework, check their grades and analyse their mistakes. I can e mail those students who fall behind and discuss any problems or performance issues. I also use the MyLab for administering progress tests throughout the course by assigning

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these to the Students' calendars (although these are not instantly marked).

I am still learning new things to do with the MyLab, but even at this early stage it has made me more efficient. In fact, I would say that it is the equivalent of having three assistants! I also ask my students to watch a number of DVDs of TV shows and films which help to motivate them. The comprehension questions can be put on the MyLab which saves me having to make several photocopies. I put everything on the MyLab system including the semester schedule and I can send updates without the need to give students my personal e mail address.

After only two months, I can talk and joke with students who previously found it difficult to communicate in English. My students also speak a lot more because of the interesting subjects given for speaking practice in the book itself. They are also given an assignment each week which provides the basis for an oral presentation. The structures they use are reinforced through the exercises they have completed from the MyLab.

I have already seen an improvement in student grades and my fourth year class is a good example. After only two months of using the MyLab the pass rate in their TOEIC mock exams has increased from 28% to 61%, and all except two students have improved their grades. In fact the two failing students hadn't worked on the MyLab regularly and I was able to show how inactive they had been compared to the rest of the class. After this initial success, I am eager to see how much they all improve by the end of the academic year and in their actual TOEIC exams!