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'MAY THE FLOW BE WITH YOU' CREATING FLOW IN THE ESP CLASSROOM

Abstract

Flow experiences represent states of sharp focus and concentration in an activity perceived as interesting and enjoyable, posing challenges optimally balanced to a person's skills level. They are characterized by complete immersion and involvement in a task and are believed to be a strong motivational force in generating optimal learning experiences. It is the aim of the present study to establish whether flow is experienced in an ESP classroom using simulation as an instructional format, and explore the types of tasks most conducive to the flow state. The findings obtained suggest that flow was consistently experienced in the Simulation project, and thus attest to the effectiveness of this technique in creating an environment enhancing the ESP learning experience.

Key words: simulation, flow, flow theory, optimal experience, ESP

"To be playful and serious at the same time is possible,
and it defines the ideal mental condition."
(Dewey 1933: 286)

1. Introduction

Teaching ESP in the 21st century and preparing students for the complex requirements of professional communication in a globalized workplace arena is a challenging task. It calls for a quest for imaginative and creative methodological approaches that are not only pedagogically and linguistically sound, but exciting and motivating as well.

Arousing motivation is believed to be one of the main prerequisites leading to effective learning. Creating stimulating and enjoyable learning experiences in a learning environment abundant with meaning and purpose is a teacher's ultimate goal. One of the promising pathways leading to this goal may be found in striving to attain flow, a concept developed in the field of positive psychology as flow states are believed to be a strong motivational force generating optimal learning experiences.

Although prominent in various psychological studies ever since the seventies, the concept of flow has not been extensively studied in the field of foreign language

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learning. To the best of our knowledge, it has not been tested in teaching English for Specific Purposes. Therefore, in this paper, we would like to explore this concept in an ESP classroom using simulation as the instruction format. The aim of the present study is to establish whether flow is experienced in an ESP classroom and to explore the types of tasks that are most conducive to flow experiences.

The first part of this paper will describe the concept and components of flow and explore the rationale for choosing simulation as a pedagogical approach in teaching English for Specific Purposes. The conditions under which flow is believed to be triggered are juxtaposed with the structure of the Company Simulation, implemented in our English for Business Purposes course, providing grounds for the given research. The second part of the paper will be devoted to the presentation of the study itself, providing information on the participants and the settings, as well as the design and implementation of the Company Simulation as an alternative/complementary approach to teaching English for Business Purposes at the Belgrade Business School. Following data analysis and discussion, the closing section provides conclusions on how successful and effective simulation as a game and task-based approach technique is in creating flow as an optimal learning experience.

2. Background to the study

2.1 The concept of flow

The questions of motivation and what moves a person to engage in an activity and persist in an effort to accomplish it are a recurring theme in human psychology (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011). Seen as one of the key preconditions for successful learning, motivation has long figured as a worthy topic in the study of foreign language learning, starting from the traditional views proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972), to this very day, when it is understood more in terms of its dynamic features (Dörnyei 2005).

The Flow Theory, coming from the provenance of positive psychology, once again turns the attention to "the study of personal meaning, motives and emotional well-being" (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011: 5), and offers SLA a fresh way of understanding motivation, the engine and the driving force behind successful language learning. Raising the level of motivation in learning activities is certain to lead to a higher level of achievement. And tasks capable of inducing flow may be the key.

The term flow, introduced and explored at length in the field of psychology by Csíkszentmihályi (Csíkszentmihályi 1975, 1988, 2014a, 2014b), is used to describe the optimal psychological state of consciousness. This is a state of complete engagement and involvement in an activity, when concentration is deep, yet effortless, and alertness

is at peak. It is a moment when work and leisure merge and working stops being tedious, when we are in total alignment with the task, and we lose track of time being totally immersed in an activity, yet having perfect concentration and control. This is how flow is universally experienced and reported by individuals across continents, age, social class and gender (Csíkszentmihályi 1975; Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi 2002). Goals are seen as clear and important, and the person feels his or her skills are up to the challenges of the task at hand. A person operates "within one's own capabilities, either at the peak of them or stretching them beyond the present, i.e. former limits" (Csíkszentmihályi 1975: 36). At the same time, the whole experience is perceived as being exciting and fulfilling, and the source of pleasure lies not only in the accomplishment of the goal of the activity, but also from the enjoyment accompanying the experience (Csíkszentmihályi 1975: 38).

For Daniel Goleman, flow is a state of neural harmony, where "the most challenging tasks are done with a minimum expenditure of neural energy" (Goleman 2009: 92), only what is relevant to the immediate task is set going. The mind in flow is relaxed, yet alert. People in flow perform their tasks with ease, effortlessly and naturally. Yet, at the same time they are fully concentrated and focused (ibid.). Flow maximizes cognitive abilities and is a place where people are at their best (ibid.).

The term and concept may have seemed ethereal and mystical when first introduced in the '70s, however since then this field has received extensive theoretical and empirical exploration and validation and has found many practical applications in educational, occupational, clinical and sports settings (Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi 2002).

Flow is a prerequisite for successful learning (Goleman 2009: 89). Studies of the flow model in education have shown that the experience of flow increases persistence and long-term commitment in students, as well as academic and professional achievement (Csíkszentmihályi 2014a; Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002). Not only does it lead to enhanced performance, but it is also one of the long-term inner sources of satisfaction and happiness.

In the field of SLA, the Flow Theory has been accepted and validated by researchers subscribing to the dynamic view of motivation, especially by Dörnyei and his colleagues (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011: 94-97). Flow is understood as a motivational property tightly associated with the dynamic concept of task (-induced) motivation and situation-specific motivation (Dörnyei 2005: 80-82). This type of motivation is related to state motivation as opposed or complementary to the generalized and stable trait motivation associated with an overall interest in the subject matter (Dörnyei 2005: 80–81). In other words, flow results in "emergent motivation" (Csíkszentmihályi 2014b: 234; Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi 2002: 91), aroused by tasks and proximal

goals in the constant interplay between various personality and situational factors (Dörnyei 2005: 81; Dornyei and Tseng 2009: 118). By opening the door to the micro perspective, this concept allows us to "to break down the complex and prolonged L2 learning process into discrete segments with well-defined boundaries, thereby creating researchable behavioral units", i.e. tasks **(**Dörnyei 2005: 80).

In the words of Dörnyei, the importance of flow theory in SLA lies in its identifying "the task conditions under which flow can occur" (Dörnyei 2005: 82). Egbert (2003), a pioneer in researching the role of flow in second/foreign language learning, has used the Flow Theory as a powerful framework for conceptualizing and evaluating language learning activities. She has adopted and adapted the original flow model for the study of flow experiences in SLA. By focusing the research of flow-inducing tasks around the four dimensions of 1) the balance between challenge and skills arousing the will to explore, 2) attention focused on the task at hand 3) intrinsic interest and authenticity of the task, and 4) a sense of control over the task, she has set the framework for assessing and evaluating flow experiences in second/foreign language learning (Egbert 2003: 499). She has shown how "teachers can theoretically facilitate the flow experience for students by developing tasks that might lead to flow" (Egbert 2003: 513).

Until recently, apart from Egbert's seminal study (2003), flow has hardly been studied in language learning activities. However, more and more papers on this topic have been appearing recently. Czimmermann and Piniel (2016) explored flow and anti-flow in Hungarian EFL learners, reaffirming that flow was induced when task difficulty was at optimal levels, and confirming that language teachers can have a role in engaging learners' attention by designing relevant and interesting activities that will enhance the language learning experiences. In a study of flow and anti-flow in connection to motivation in language learning and self-efficacy beliefs about learning English as a foreign language, Piniel and Albert (2017) came to the conclusion that increasing learners' motivation creates more opportunities for experiencing flow. On a smaller scale, flow has also been studied in relation to reading comprehension (Shahian et al. 2017), vocabulary learning (Amini et al. 2016), and translation studies (Mirlohi et al. 2011), all confirming the major conditions of flow and finding flow to promote successful language learning.

In the next part of the paper, we will introduce simulation as a game and task-based instructional format exploring its potential to induce flow in ESP students.

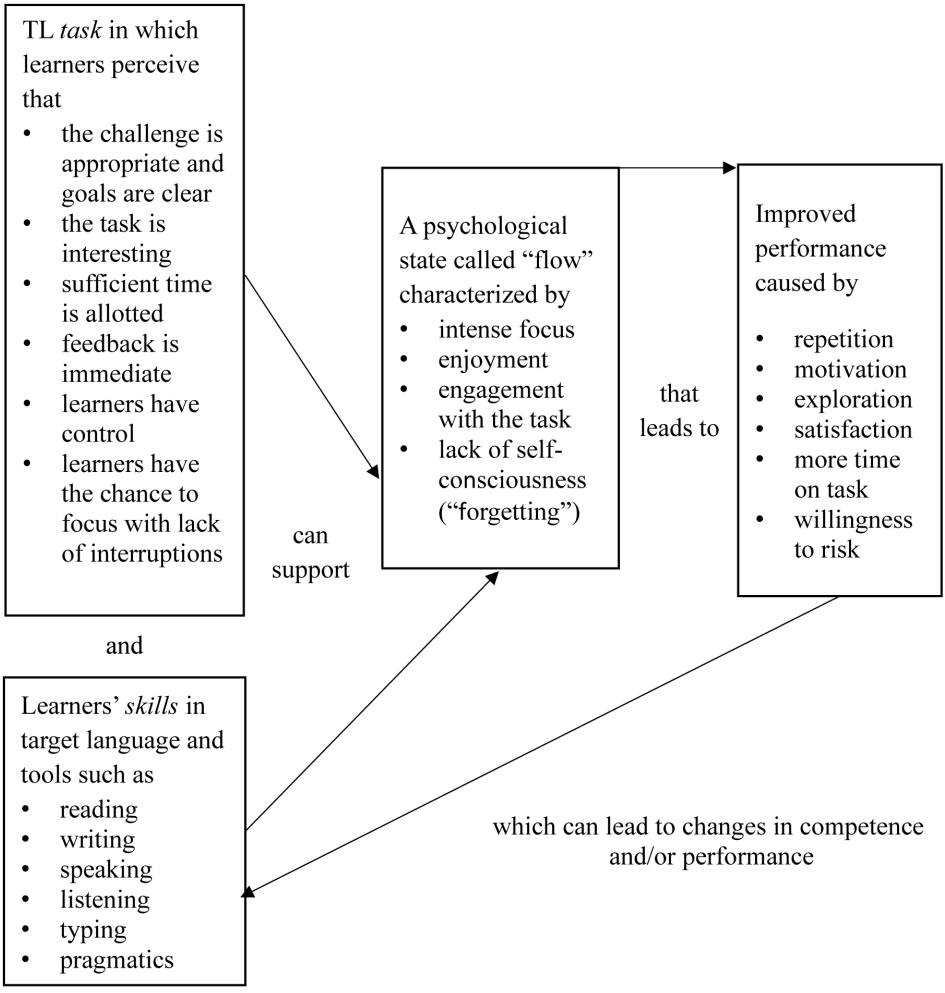

Figure 1. Model of the Relationship between
Flow and Language Acquisition (Egbert 2003: 502)

2.2 Simulation and flow

2.2.1 Simulations - an overview

There are several reasons why simulations, as a class of game-based learning techniques, are on the rise in higher education. Simulations provide a safe and interactive ambience for learning and trying out different competencies and skills in a

world that is imaginary, yet with functions that are realistic. They create a micro-world mirroring and modelling the multi-dimensional aspects of the real world, enabling students to discover its principles and relations (Rieber 1996). They allow for an integrated approach in acquiring content knowledge along with specific skills, such as decision-making, innovation, problem-solving and leadership (Johnson et al. 2011: 5).

Games and simulations enable the creation of an exciting learning experience through direct interactions in an immersive environment. They create a space respectful of individual learning styles and strategies, increasing motivation and leading to longer-lasting learning (IGI Global and Felicia 2011). Therefore, finding ways how to capture their motivational force in the world of learning is the holy grail of teachers and practitioners (Garris et al. 2002).

It was in this spirit that we intended to explore whether flow, typical of games and leisure activities, would find its way to a language classroom as well. For these reasons, we have implemented simulation in our English for Business Purposes course. It has enabled inter-curricular integration and the simultaneous development of various communicative, cognitive and interpersonal competences and skills. Since play is still preferable as a source of flow, and play and leisure are often rated as being experiences with a more positive quality (Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi 2002: 98), we have tried to integrate play-like and work-like activities in a game-based environment, promoting creativity and cooperation, in the hope of inducing inspiring and engaging experiences contributing to successful learning.

As student engagement is significantly affected by contextual and classroom factors, including the instruction format (Shernoff et al. 2014), and motivational forces may be inherent to a task, we have endeavoured to develop tasks with features encompassing the identified flow components as will be described later in the text.

2.2.2 The Company Simulation

In the following section we will first outline the structure and format of the Company Simulation implemented in our English for Business Purposes course and then juxtapose them to the identified components of the flow experience as defined in the Flow Theory (Csíkszentmihályi 1975, 1988, 2014a, 2014b) and the Flow Model in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning developed by Egbert (2003) (presented in Figure 1).

The Company Simulation developed for our first-year students revolves around tasks and subtasks related to some of the typical situations and experiences in the professional target culture: setting up companies, dividing company roles and recruiting personnel, attending a trade fair and negotiating. It includes different

business interactions and transactions, such as exchanging telephone calls and e-mails, requesting information, making quotations, placing orders and socializing with foreign guests and associates.

This is an attempt to recreate a representation of the business world reality in which students act out their chosen business roles, in line with Jones' (Jones 1982: 5) definition of simulation as "a reality of function in a simulated and structured environment."

The Company Simulation has seven macro-stages, as shown in Table 1. Each stage of the Simulation project begins with a briefing and ends with a debriefing session. The briefing session is used to introduce the tasks, clarify the requirements, bring attention to specialist vocabulary and useful expressions (Bullard 1990: 59-60) and activate students' motivation and content, linguistic and socio-cultural background knowledge (Knutson 2003: 56-57).

The debriefing session, part of the reflection process in experiential learning, is a reconstruction of the learning experience, its success and its challenges (Jones 1982; Knutson 2003). It reinforces learning through meta-reflection and sets the stage for corrective work.

		Simulation tasks	Simulation subtasks	Organization
Stage I	Task 1	Building a Company Profile	A Setting up a company B Deciding on a business idea	Small groups
Stage II	Task 2	Building a Job Profile	A Delegating roles and responsibilities	Small groups and individual work
	Task 3	Preparing a CV and cover letter	B Job applications	Individual work
Stage III	Task 4		Presentation	Whole group work
Stage IV	Task 5	Attending a trade fair	A Making contacts at the trade fair B Wining and dining	Small groups Whole group work
Stage V	Task 6	Conducting business transactions	E-mailing – enquiries, offers, placing an order, complaints	Small groups

Stage VI	Task 7		Final Presentation	Whole group work
Stage VII		Feedback and Evaluation	A Feedback and Comments B Evaluation and Discussion	

Table 1. The Structure of the Company Simulation

The seven tasks in the Company Simulation focused on different communicative situations stimulating communication and information exchange, with the aim of engaging students cognitively and affectively. The tasks were varied, involving individual, small-group and whole-group work. They were designed to activate all four macro-skills in an integrated way. They had tangible and varied outcomes and clear and meaningful purposes that required information gathering and exchange, decision-making, knowledge sharing, negotiating of meaning and problem-solving.

The first stage is devoted to the building of the conceptual framework for company set-ups, organizational structure and departmental responsibilities. Mixed-ability student teams fulfil the first task of establishing their virtual companies, choosing their names and headquarters, business operations and business missions.

Stage two is built around the task of selecting and delegating appropriate business roles (general manager, marketing manager, financial manager, etc.) and finding out information on the responsibilities and duties of different positions in the company. It also involves individual work on designing CVs and cover letters for the chosen company positions. In order to relax the atmosphere, boost creativity and imagination, students were allowed the freedom to either keep their own identity in the Simulation or create a new professional role which will make them feel secure and free to experiment and communicate without feeling stress and anxiety.

This stage ends with short public presentations of the students' companies (Task 4). Student companies are presented by their respective teams in front of the whole class. This task involves public speaking and using PowerPoint presentations and is aimed at engaging and sustaining student motivation and setting the stage for the phases to come.

Task 5 involves preparations for attending a business fair. It revolves around different professional business interactions, establishing contacts with prospective business associates and various formal and informal social interactions with the objective of closing business deals with other student teams. It is followed by task six where companies exchange e-mails with the aim of closing the business deal.

The final, seventh task in the Simulation, are presentations of all the companies, exhibiting all their activities and transactions, and submitting a portfolio containing the documents generated throughout the simulation: CVs, e-mails and planners, as well as the students' journals reflecting on their progress in the execution of tasks. The Simulation project closes with a comprehensive debriefing session

2.2.3 The Company Simulation and the components of the flow experience

Being a task-based instructional format, the Company Simulation should offer abundant opportunities for triggering flow as it allows the managing of tasks in the direction of flow according to the requirements defined in the Flow Theory (Csíkszentmihályi 1975; Csíkszentmihályi 1990, 2014a) and the Flow Model in FL Teaching and Learning (Egbert 2003). The model describing the relationship between flow and language acquisition, proposed by Egbert (2003) and introduced in 2.1, shows how the interaction between appropriate and well-designed tasks and learners' target language skills can support flow. Flow, in turn, results in learners' improved performance, which leads to changes in learners' competence and/or performance. Although the given model shows that flow depends on various individual and situational factors, we shall focus on the target language tasks exclusively, since the model suggests that the choice of appropriate and interesting FL tasks combined with individual learners' skills can lead to flow as a desirable learning state.

2.2.3.1 Task requirements

Following the flow requirements defined in the Flow Theory (Csíkszentmihályi 1975, 1988, 1990, 2014a) and the Flow Model in FL Teaching and Learning (Egbert 2003), in order to be conducive to flow experiences, in terms of design, a task should:

a. be intrinsically interesting and authentic so the participant would be willing to repeat it;

b. be optimally challenging, feasible, not too easy, not too difficult — an activity too demanding will result in anxiety, and conversely, if a person's abilities are much stronger than the requirements of the challenge, it will lead to boredom;

c. have clear proximal goals and immediate feedback from the teacher or peers, and most importantly from themselves, internally;

d. allow a sense of control, a feeling that you can deal with the situation as this greatly enhances the enjoyment of the activity.

Let us now compare the given requirements with the Simulation task features:

a. The tasks in the Company Simulation were conceptualized in such a way as to address the real, actual needs of our students in their future professional

communication. These specific requirements were built around different activities encouraging students to communicate effectively in a number of situations identified as important for success and advancement in the professional world (Hutchinson and Sawyer-Laucanno 1990; Holmes 2005). Elements of natural interactions in authentic communicative tasks, the negotiation of meaning in the process of task completion and the integration of language, content and skill development in *contextualized, relevant, and meaningful tasks* that replicate authentic workplace target tasks, are all expected to arouse the ***interest*** component.

b. Tasks in the Simulation were challenging, but achievable — in the fragile zone between boredom and anxiety (Csíkszentmihályi 1975). As an output-based approach, this technique progressively pushes student performance (Basturkmen 2006) and allows for both the *matching and stretching of skills*. It allowed completion at various skills level, depending on a student's proficiency profile, so that each student could get a sense that his or her "skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand" (Csíkszentmihályi 1990: 71).

c. Tasks in the Company Simulation are organized in such a way to constitute a "goal-directed, rule-bound action system that provides clear clues as to how well one is performing" (Csíkszentmihályi 1990: 71). Each task in the Simulation has a clear outcome, outlined in the briefing session, and well-defined subtasks leading to the final product.

d. As an active pedagogical approach, the Simulation cultivates learner autonomy and independence. It empowers students to make their own decisions and take control of their learning process. It is an approach that respects individual learning styles and strategies, thus providing students with the sense of control, responsibility, self-efficacy and self-esteem. It raises students' engagement and investment in their work, instils inspiration and intrinsic motivation, and promotes deeper learning (Crookall 1990: 157).

2.2.3.2 Task outcomes

Tasks designed to meet the above-mentioned requirements should increase the likelihood of the flow experience and lead to:

a. a merging between action and awareness;

b. deep concentration on the task at hand;

c. changed perception of time which seems either to have stopped or is passing by more quickly.

d. an autotelic experience (Csíkszentmihályi 1975, 2014a).

A person in flow is so deeply involved with the activity that it is perceived as automatic, and there is no awareness of self being separate from the action, there is just

"a centring of attention on a limited stimulus field" (Csíkszentmihályi 1975: 40). It is a state of being in the present moment, not thinking about the past or the future. In flow, there is a deep, total and undivided concentration on the task being performed. The loss of self-consciousness and self-doubt disappear in flow, and this freedom arising from merging with the activity enables doing things more confidently, as it is in effect "a state of heightened awareness" (Csíkszentmihályi 1975: 43). "The flow experience is unanimously described as being exciting, fulfilling, enjoyable" (Csíkszentmihályi 2014a: 159), time seems to disappear and the whole experience is felt to be intrinsically rewarding, "a goal in itself rather than a means to some external reward" (ibid.), also known as an autotelic experience

Simulation is a dynamic, communicative and learner-centred approach, where students are in touch with the phenomenon being studied, not just observing it (Kolb 1984). In simulations students enter another world in its own rights, they are *immersed* in a micro-world created for a particular purpose. They forget that they are learning and that they are students. Self-consciousness and self-doubt disappear. *Fun and excitement*, creativity and imagination engage students both affectively and cognitively and lead to a sense of flow, making the learning experience intrinsically fulfilling and enjoyable, not just a means to pass the exam.

3. Study of flow

3.1 Research questions

The present study examined students' perception of the following flow components in the seven Simulation tasks*: interest, attention, immersion, control, and the challenges/skills* ratio It addressed the following questions:

RQ1: Do the Company Simulation tasks induce flow?

RQ2: Which tasks are more conducive to triggering the flow state in students?

The ultimate purpose of this classroom-based study was to evaluate the effectiveness of simulation as an instructional technique in raising task motivation and enhancing language learning by creating flow, the optimal learning experience.

The following section includes information on the participants, the course background, the tasks, the context of the study (classroom settings), the data collected and their analysis and interpretation.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Participant data

A total of 114 first-year students of the Belgrade Business School, Department of Business Informatics and E-business, enrolled in the English for Business Purposes

course, participated in the Company Simulation project, 37 female (32.45%) and 77 male students (67.55%). Not all 114 students took part in all the Simulation tasks, so the data presented in the analysis section will provide information on the number of participants in each task. As flow is considered to be an aspect of situated and emergent motivation, this fact should not affect the interpretation of the research results.

3.2.2 Course background

The English I course, English for Business Purposes, is a one-semester course for first-year students in all departments, Business Informatics and E-business department included, whose students participated in the study. The course is divided into two weekly 90-minute sessions. Weekly sessions identified as lectures in the curriculum are devoted to meaning-focused tasks in the field of Business English with the aim of developing students' communicative competences in this area. It was work in these sessions that was the subject of our study. The other weekly sessions are reserved for Focus on Form instructions. All the participants in the English I course were administered an initial placement test (Pearson English Placement)[1] in order to determine their proficiency levels, which ranged from A1 to B2 and plus. However, as this factor showed no correlation to the experience of flow in participants, this parameter of the participant background information has not been included.

3.2.3 Instrument

Several different methodologies for measuring the inherently fragile and subjective phenomenon of flow have evolved since the seventies. Depending on the research question being tackled, besides the original Experience Sampling Method[2], today's methods often involve interviews, flow questionnaires, and standardized scales of the componential approach (Moneta 2012; Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi 2002).

The instrument used to gather data on students' cognitive and affective responses during task execution in this study was the Flow Perceptions Questionnaire, designed for the purpose of this research. The items used in this questionnaire combined elements from several validated tests that were successfully used in various previous studies on flow. The questionnaire consisted of 13 items in the Likert format, divided into two parts.

The first part of our questionnaire (9 items) focused on measuring perceptions in the following areas of the flow experience: interest, attention/immersion, control,

[1] https://www.pearsonelt.com/tools/digital/placement.html

[2] In ESM, subjects are equipped with paging devices activated at pre-programmed times to remind the participants to complete a questionnaire describing the moment and their experiences at the time they were paged. This method focuses on flow experienced in everyday experiences (Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi 2002).

and the challenges/skills ratio, rated on a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). Statements 1, 2 and 9 were replicated from the questionnaire developed by Egbert (2003), whereas questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 were taken from the Flow Short Scale (Rheinberg 2015).

The additional four statements in the second part of the questionnaire represent selected items from the experience sampling form (ESF), applied in the experience-sampling method (ESM) (Csíkszentmihályi and Larson 1987: 536). These items measured variables of the experienced difficulty of the task, perceived skills in the activity, importance of the activity to the person, and success in the activity, on a 7-point Likert scale, from 1(low) to 7 (high).

The questionnaires were administered and collected at the end of each session, upon completion of each of the seven tasks that were the subject of the study. The survey responses were entered in Excel sheets, both by tasks and by students. Averages were calculated for all the questions across each task, along with the sum of averages. Averages for each task were also calculated for each student. This enabled us to observe and analyse the data from different angles, as well as look for correlations between them.

4. Results and discussion

The first research question addressed in the study was whether flow occurred in our Simulation classroom. Adopting the model for measuring flow in the foreign language classroom developed by Egbert (2003), we have designated students whose average on a particular questionnaire was 5.0 or above as having been in flow during the given classroom activity. A total of 390 questionnaires were collected and analysed. Table 2 shows the number and percentage of participants in flow for each of the Simulation tasks. Unfortunately, as can be seen from the table, not all students participated in all the tasks, as attendance fluctuated due to holidays and other school requirements. In general, since the number of active students decreased by mid-course, following a general dropout rate, the findings may not be fully generalizable.

	Task 1 N=89	**Task 2** N=78	**Task 3** N=56	**Task 4** N=68	**Task 5** N=22	**Task 6** N=25	**Task 7** N=52
No. of participants in flow	47	43	37	56	16	17	39
% participants in flow	52.80%	55.12%	66.07%	82.35%	72.72%	68%	75%

Table 2. Number of Participants in Flow

Note. *N* - participants attending class.

The findings show that in all the seven tasks more than half of the students were experiencing flow, with the presentation tasks, no. 4 and 7 reaching an exceptionally high rate of 82.35% and 75% respectively, which is a rather encouraging result in terms of the purpose of the Simulation project.

The second question was aimed at identifying the types of tasks in the Simulation project most conducive to flow. To answer this question, following Egbert's (2003) classification, tasks were categorized in terms of their "flow-ability." Tasks where more than two-thirds of participants experienced flow were designated as "high flow" tasks, those engaging among one-third to two-third of the participants in the experience as "moderate flow" tasks and those where only one-third or fewer of the participants reported the flow experience as "low flow" tasks. The results are shown in Table 3.

	Task 1	**Task 2**	**Task 3**	**Task 4**	**Task 5**	**Task 6**	**Task7**
% Ss in flow	52.80 %	55.12%	66.07%	82.35%	72.72%	68%	75%
	moderate	moderate	high	high	high	high	high

Table 3. Classification of the 'flow-ability' of tasks

The results indicate that apart from the first two tasks, which may be qualified as moderate, all the other five tasks belong to high flow tasks. The lower score for these first two tasks may be due to the types of task and task characteristics. However, as the percentage of students in flow got increasingly higher as the Simulation progressed, we may attribute these scores to the accommodation period in the first two weeks, where students were still uncertain about the Simulation requirements.

Table 4 provides a mean score for each task for all students, as another indicator of the "flow-ability" of a task. Following the previously accepted criterion that a score of five or more is a sign of flow among participants for the particular task, we can see that, except for the first task, the remaining six tasks fulfilled the flow requirements of interest, concentration, control and perceived challenge/skills balance. Tasks 4 and 7 received the highest, identical scores, 5.61. Those were the presentation tasks and they seem to have engaged students the most. Presentations were dynamic, engaging and profoundly immersive, so the results are not surprising. And although public presentations are generally demanding and generate stage fright on the verge of panic attacks for some students, it seems that the challenges that were stretching the students' skills were rewarding at the same time. The only task that did not match the flow requirements was the first task, but it missed the rank only marginally.

	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task7
Average score	4.97	5.08	5.16	5.61	5.33	5.35	5.61

Table 4. Means over all tasks from student questionnaires

In the given circumstances and settings of the study, it would be risky to put forward any decisive conclusions, but upon looking at the individual scores we have noticed that there was a tendency for students either to experience flow in all tasks, or not at all. Judging from the individual student data, flow seemed to be more attributable to particular students and perhaps their subjective perception of challenge, skills, feedback, goals and autonomy, rather than characteristics inherent to the task themselves. There was no striking evidence that specific tasks were more conducive to flow as opposed to others. However, although there was a consistency in rating flow components across the Simulation tasks below or above 5.0, the answers did vary to a certain degree, indicating that the type of task did have at least some effect on the whole experience. On the other hand, all the tasks were designed to facilitate the occurrence of flow by integrating flow components. No correlation was found between the results on the initial placement test and the length of language learning with the experience of flow, so this path of investigation was not followed through.

5. Concluding remarks

Bearing in mind that the whole idea of flow may be deemed insufficiently scientific and that flow is a fuzzy and highly subjective state, all the conclusions presented here must consequently be treated as tentative. The data were collected in realistic, unstable classroom settings and the study has limitations in terms of inconsistent sample sizes. Furthermore, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which the flow state increases the actual achievements, as the current study did not explore the language learning outcomes. These measures would require more experimental control over the activities.

Yet, it has managed to capture this elusive state of heightened alertness and concentration in the Company Simulation project, thus confirming our initial belief and hope that flow can be induced and experienced in an ESP classroom. Furthermore, based on the results obtained, we may conclude that as an instructional format, the Company Simulation offers abundant opportunities for triggering flow, seen as a predictor of higher achievements.

The task-based teaching format has allowed us to select and design tasks in the direction of the proven flow components, trusting one of the most important

tenets of the flow theory, i.e. the manageability of creating flow in the classroom (Csíkszentmihályi 2014a; Egbert 2003). The Flow Theory has served as a springboard for conceptualizing and evaluating the given tasks in an attempt to make them "flow-able". It has enabled us to "restructure activities in a way that allows more room for autonomy and interest" (Csíkszentmihályi 2014a: 399), thus allowing students to take an active role and control over their learning, make their own decisions on what and how to learn, how to effectively use the available resources, information and feedback. As a result, we may presume that as a technique, simulation helps students build up skills of self-regulating learning and developing a sense of self-efficacy an important element of motivation, self-esteem and self-confidence (Dörnyei 2001).

Experiential learning encountered in the Simulation is a fertile ground for ESP learning in its insistence on authentic language use and authentic tasks, an important precondition for the rise in the students' interest (Oxford and Crookall 1990). Relevance and connection to the real world, experiences and interests of learners, as well as resolving different contextualized communicative situations add to the interactional authenticity of simulations and are some of the major reasons for the applicability of simulations in English for Specific Purposes.

As an active, experiential and output-based approach to language learning, with performance as a departure point, this technique pushes students into communicative situations where they are left to their own devices and expected to execute a task using whatever existing language and specialist knowledge/competence or skill available with minimum teacher input (Dudley-Evans and St. John 1998). This pressure combined with the drive to communicate and reach the required outcome activates all old and new forms and strategies (Willis and Willis 2001). This enables both the matching and stretching of skills to the challenges at hand, as it consolidates the existing competences and pushes at the same time the development of the verbal repertoire (Basturkmen 2006). Well posed challenges enable the expansion of skills and the maximum exploitation of the zone of proximal development (ZDP) proposed in the socio-cultural approaches (Vygotsky 1978), where learning actually takes place.

The openness and flexibility of the tasks have also enabled interactions at different levels and participation of all students regardless of their ability level. As teaching mixed-ability classes with diverse interests and learning needs is a challenging task, such approaches "that support students' autonomy and provide an appropriate level of challenge for students' skills" (Shernoff et al. 2014: 476) lead to positive learning outcomes for all learners.

The combination of game-based and play-like activities led to the creation of an immersive learning environment conducive to high focus, attention and concentration.

Meaningfulness and authenticity added to the appeal and interest component. Working together they fully engaged the cognitive and affective potentials of students leading to higher levels of achievement and new refreshed motivation.

Although the findings may not be taken without a grain of salt nor may they be fully generalizable, we truly believe they provide inspiring insight into the intriguing, yet elusive phenomenon of flow in realistic settings and may be applicable in raising and managing motivation and engagement in ESP classrooms and thus enhancing the learning experience.

Further research is required and the fine-tuning of instruments for measuring the direct influence of flow on learning and the complex interplay of many individual and contextual variables in developing the required communicative competences (Mirlohi et al. 2011).

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