

# Research-based Instruction, an Essential Tenet of the Foreign Languages' Pre- service-teacher Education at Universidad de Pamplona<sup>1</sup>

Instrucción Basada en la Investigación,  
un Principio Esencial de la Formación  
de los Futuros Docentes en Lenguas  
Extranjeras de la Universidad de  
Pamplona.

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## Abstract

This paper reports a personal reflection that describes how the Bachelor of Arts in Foreign Languages at the Universidad de Pamplona provides preservice teachers with a research-based instruction. In an attempt to contribute to today's scholar discussions on foreign language pre-service teachers' education, this reflective piece illustrates a unique way of teaching research to FL undergraduates. The author first provides an overview on the area of teaching research to undergraduates in Colombia; second, a description of how pre-service teachers learn the theoretical foundations, paradigms, designs and approaches mostly used in educational inquiry; and the two-year process student researchers go through. Finally, the author *discusses the lessons learned and what the future of this process might be like*.

**Keywords.** Foreign languages, pre service teachers, student researchers, CLIL, research-based instruction.

## Resumen.

Este artículo presenta una reflexión personal que describe cómo la Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad de Pamplona brinda a los docentes en formación una instrucción basada en la investigación. En un intento por contribuir a la discusión académica actual sobre la educación de los futuros docentes de lenguas extranjeras, esta reflexión ilustra una forma única de enseñar la investigación a los estudiantes de lenguas extranjeras. Inicialmente, el autor proporciona una visión general sobre enseñanza de investigación a estudiantes de pregrado en Colombia; en segundo lugar, una descripción de cómo los docentes en formación aprenden los fundamentos teóricos, paradigmas, diseños y enfoques utilizados principalmente en la investigación educativa; y el proceso de dos años que llevan los estudiantes investigadores. Finalmente, el autor analiza las lecciones aprendidas y cómo será el futuro de este proceso.

Palabras Clave: Lenguas extranjeras, docentes en formación, estudiantes investigadores, AICLE, instrucción basada en la investigación

## Resumo

Este artigo apresenta uma reflexão pessoal que descreve como a Licenciatura em Línguas Estrangeiras da Universidade de Pamplona oferece aos docentes em formação uma instrução baseada na pesquisa. Em uma tentativa por contribuir com a discussão acadêmica atual sobre a educação dos futuros docentes de línguas estrangeiras, esta reflexão ilustra uma forma única de ensinar a pesquisa aos estudantes de línguas estrangeiras. Inicialmente, o autor proporciona uma visão geral sobre ensino de pesquisa a estudantes de graduação na Colômbia; em segundo lugar, uma descrição de como os docentes em formação aprendem os fundamentos teóricos, paradigmas, desenhos e enfoques utilizados principalmente na pesquisa educativa; e o processo de dois anos que levam os estudantes pesquisadores. Finalmente, o autor analisa as lições aprendidas e como será o futuro deste processo.

Palavras Chave: Línguas estrangeiras, docentes em formação, estudantes pesquisadores, AICLE, instrução baseada na pesquisa.

## Introduction

This personal reflection describes how the Bachelor of Arts in Languages at the Universidad de Pamplona provides pre-service teachers with research-based instruction. The final aim of incorporating research, as part of the teacher preparation is to provide students with a twofold purpose: first, providing in-service teachers with the theoretical foundations, paradigms, designs and approaches mostly used in educational inquiry; and second, enabling them to conduct small-scale projects to integrate theory into practice that exposes them to a *learning-by-doing research training*. After having taken part in a national symposium aimed at discussing the future of foreign language learning and teaching in Colombia, I found particularly inspiring that several high school teachers, experts and researchers highlighted the importance of teaching research to undergraduate students, as a way to make a far-reaching change on in-service teachers' education; along with a deep-seated transformation on learning foreign languages (FL) in Colombia. Paraphrasing one of the concluding remarks from mainstream FL teachers' hardly-heard voices, I have come to understand that research is the key that opens a world of greater understandings and learning opportunities for pre-service teachers in Colombia.

This statement seamlessly aligns with Bower's claim that "...incorporating research into the undergraduate curriculum can result in improved learning outcomes" (2010, p. 50). Other authors have identified additional benefits for incorporating research into the undergraduate curriculum. For instance, undergraduate students can enhance their "...ability to develop intellectual curiosity, acquire information independently, understand scientific findings, analyze literature critically, speak effectively, act as a leader, and possess clear career goals." (Bauer and Bennet, 2003, p.221). Similarly, undergraduate students can improve their confidence in doing research in their academic area (Seymour, Hunter, Laursen, & DeAntoni, 2004). The remaining pages describe my personal points of view on how this unique research training engages FL undergraduate students at the Bachelor of Arts in Languages, English-French at the Universidad de Pamplona in a reflective and critical learning process that initiates them into the subtle intricacies of doing research in foreign languages. Ideally, equipping future language teachers with research competences will help them critically reflect on the role they should play when teaching foreign languages.

### Teaching Research to FL Pre-Service Teachers

In Colombia, minimal research has been centered on how foreign language pre-service teachers are formally trained to become successful student researchers. Cárdenas and Faustino (2008) conducted research that reports FL undergraduate

students' learning experience throughout different research courses as part of their curriculum. At the Bachelor of Arts in Languages at the Universidad de Pamplona, two studies somewhat revealed how research training is provided to FL students. Latorre and Delgado (2015) found that research training goes hand in hand with a training in reflection. The findings also showed that for pre-service teachers, research is complex and challenging; and it is a source of knowledge. Martínez-Cáceres' (2016) case study aimed at describing the student researchers' research projects conducted in French, revealed that case study is the most frequently used methodology; and the oral production is the most common topic under study. The author also found that student researchers' difficulties include the topic selection and the writing of the report.

In a literature review, Cote Parra (2012, p. 26) highlighted that in Colombia, “most previous research studies on FL pre-service teachers have focused on aspects such as the strengths and weaknesses that practicum-supervisors have identified in their trainees (Quintero, Zuluaga & López, 2003); teaching preparation programs and curricular innovations (Cárdenas & Faustino, 2008; McNulty & Usma, 2005; and McNulty-Ferri, 2010); student-teachers' perceptions, research skills and experiences during their practicum (Gallego et al., 2001). Other studies have focused on students' language learning and use (Farias & Obilinovic, 2008), especially on EFL writing (Viáfara, 2008; and Quintero, 2008) and reading (López and Giraldo, 2011)” (p.26). Other papers report on the development of linguistic competences (Arismendi, Colorado, and Grajales, 2011); the use of ICTs (Espitia & Clavijo, 2011); and strategy instruction (Lopera Medina, 2012).

Generally speaking, the landscape of research on how foreign language pre-service teachers are formally trained to become successful student researchers has not changed much; in the latest issues, among the top five journals in Colombia, only one, *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, devoted an article to discuss research experiences of undergraduates in Colombia. Quintero Polo (2019), in an attempt to answer the research question on how EFL student-teachers' formative pedagogical and research experiences are portrayed in a transformative and critical outlook for initial teacher education, described the student teachers' research projects “...that focused on going beyond the implementation and evaluation of the effectiveness of EFL instructional strategies.” (p. 36). However, the author did not explain how they were trained to produce such report.

## Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

In 2010, five colleagues and I started the Teachers' Research Group in Foreign Languages-GRILEX<sup>3</sup>, at the Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras, Inglés-Francés at the Universidad de Pamplona, under the research line, Learning and Teaching Foreign Languages; and its dual research journey: do and teach research. On the one hand, it attempted to improve the teaching practices by engaging teachers in reflection; on the other hand, it redirected the way research would be taught to pre-service teachers, which is the main purpose of this reflection. In 2011, five colleagues and I started the Student Research Group in Foreign Languages-SILEX<sup>4</sup>, as a way to provide undergraduates with a meaningful learning experience that would articulate research content and learning French and English as foreign languages (FLE & EFL). Honestly speaking, I must confess that I started teaching research content through English and French as foreign languages, not knowing that it referred to Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Fortunately, once I became acquainted with CLIL, it was formally adopted, as "...an approach or method which integrates the teaching of content from a curriculum subject with the teaching of a non-native language." (Lesca, 2012, p. 3). Despite the simplicity of this definition, we have come to understand that it encompasses a complex process that "...requires teachers to engage in alternative ways of planning their teaching for effective learning" (Coyle, 2005 p.2.).

Meaningful learning is precisely what learners experience while learning how to do research through FLE & EFL. I can unequivocally echo McDougald's (2009) claim "...[s]chools and universities are not concerned with just learning English anymore, but are more concerned as to what students can do with the new language" (p.44). Throughout four courses, the curriculum at the Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras, Inglés-Francés, at the Universidad de Pamplona, conveniently engages undergraduate foreign language learners in a two-year research training (see Figure 1), through which they not only become familiar with the theoretical foundations of the complexities of research in foreign languages, but also go through a first-hand experience of critical thinking and problem solving while conducting small-scale research. Prior to the two-year research training in foreign languages, students take "Epistemología" and "Investigación Educativa I" with other B.A. programs at the School of Education (e.g. Pedagogy, Social Studies, and Physical Education). That is why these two courses are taught in Spanish. They provide students with a broad framework on Educational research.

The practical nature of having designed a set of four research courses, taught in French and English as foreign languages, fully explained below, around a learning-

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<sup>1</sup> Spanish acronym for Grupo de Investigación en Lenguas Extranjeras.

<sup>2</sup> Spanish acronym for Semillero de Investigación en Lenguas Extranjeras.

by-doing experience, has allowed the teachers in charge of these courses to give partakers an opportunity to discover the potential directions for their own research while writing a proposal, adopting and adapting research instruments, collecting and analyzing data; and sharing findings with the academic community.

The first research course, an 80-hour process taught in English, is intended to provide an overview of the types of educational and foreign language research. This introductory course facilitates student researchers become familiar with qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method theoretical foundations.

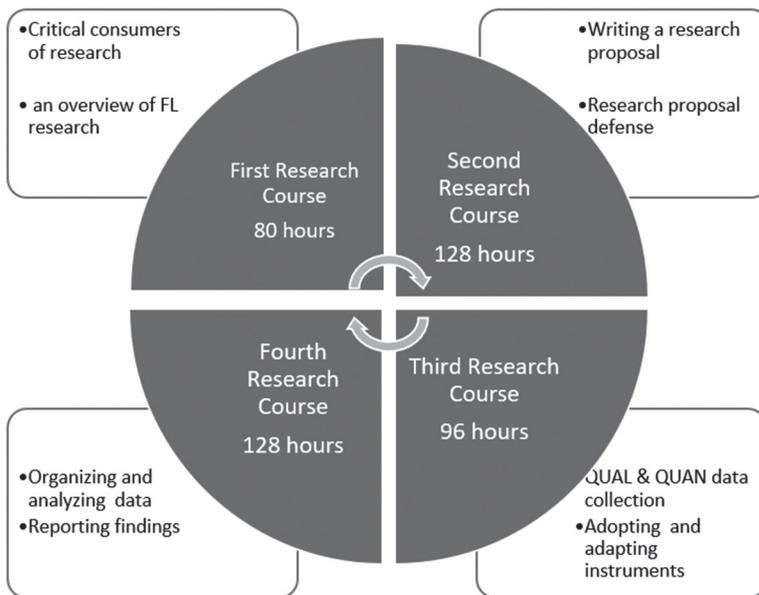


Figure 1. Two-year research training at the Universidad de Pamplona.

Along with research content, students are required to critically read, discuss, summarize and critique research papers that exemplify several quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method research designs. To accomplish this goal, students are engaged in an end-of-semester project that consists of a poster session in which they exhibit the process of writing a critique. Students may also publish a critique. For example, Ferreira and Casadiegos (2013) published a critique in the *Opening Writing Doors Journal*. The authors followed Ryan, Coughlan and Croning's (2007) guidelines to critically assess the believability and robustness of Cañas' (2012) research study.

Ultimately, this initial training will equip them with germane knowledge and research skills to eventually discover their own research topics, which are the base line to write a research proposal in the second research course.

The second research course comprises 128 hours devoted to providing student researchers with the theoretical foundations and the specialized guidance on writing a research proposal either in English or French. The total number of students who register are split into two courses, each course is led by two teachers, one guides the processes in English and the other one in French. Students are allowed to choose one of the two languages to complete their research projects.

For undergraduate students, writing a proposal is a challenging but enriching experience that serves a two-fold purpose, first, becoming familiar with the topic under study while writing a literature review, which includes a minimum of 20 summarized research papers to document and frame their own study; second, structuring the proposal allows them to carefully think of the phenomenon they attempt to understand, its purpose, and how data will be collected. At the end of the course, students defend their proposals in front of the research committee, which is comprised of two to five teachers in charge of teaching the research courses. This course enables students to collect data during the third research course.

In the third research course, students become familiar with the process of qualitative and quantitative data collection that includes several data gathering techniques, forms and protocols, data recording techniques, and how to deal with ethical issues while collecting data. In addition, students learn how to adopt and adapt research instruments aided by direct communication with original authors. For example, several students have contacted seasoned researchers and experts, such as Horwitz (see appendix 1); Richards and Lockhart; Abbasova; Olaya and Gómez-Rodríguez (RIP), among others, to obtain their approval to use and adapt instruments they have designed. As a learning-by-doing experience, asking for approvals allows them to be aware of the ethical procedures and copyrights while doing research.

Two distinguishing features have characterized this research training: robust fieldwork and timely and personalized feedback. I have come to understand that fieldwork experience is critical to put theory into practice. According to Wolcott (1994), “first-hand experience with at least one and preferably both of the basic field work strategies -participant observation and interviewing- has become the core activity in which everyone must engage.” (p.382). I strongly believe that the only way for pre-service teachers to understand the essence of FL research is to provide them with sustained fieldwork. For example, student researchers spend extensive time observing FL classrooms, and interviewing participants. Along with extensive fieldwork, student researchers are provided with timely and personalized feedback.

The fourth research course completes the two-year research training. In 128 hours, students make sense of the data gathered during the previous course, and write a research report. Therefore, they learn how to organize, code, and analyze data using MAXQDA software and several analysis techniques. Taking into account that we teach research content through English, a distinguishing feature of CLIL, students are also instructed on how to write and defend their final research report.

During the last five years, around 200 students have been trained on the intricacies of doing research while doing research, resulting in around 170 projects. It seems that the number of small-scale projects have decreased over the years. However, it is not like that. Due to a reduced number of mentors, they decided to make groups of two or three students to collaboratively work on a single project.

*Table 1.* Students' small-scale research projects

Student Researchers' Short-Scale Studies							
Studies/ Year	Reading	Listening	Speaking	Writing	Integrated Skills	Others	Total
2014	2	1	3	19	2	14	41
2015	4	0	7	8	12	20	51
2016	2	0	7	0	0	14	23
2017	5	0	10	3	1	10	29
2018	3	2	5	5	6	5	26

## The Essential Tenets of Pre-Service Teachers' Research Training.

The two-year research training provides pre-service teachers with strong theoretical foundations, main research trends in the educational field; and 21st century skills future professional need. According to Buckley (2008),

...education students who work on research projects indicated more strongly than any other faculty that their undergraduate research experience helped them to develop their intellectual skills, their career and collaborative abilities, their research skills, their understanding of how knowledge is created, their ability to write more clearly and effectively, and their capacity to work more effectively with others. (As cited in Bower, 2010, p. 51).

In addition, I have realized that sustained fieldwork and effective feedback have paved the road to accomplish some of the major achievements of this process, which are students' outcomes, represented in articles published in specialized journals

and oral reports at local, regional and national congresses. Although Cárdenas and Nieto Cruz (2019) acknowledged the "... the difficulties non-experienced teacher-researchers have to get published in scholarly journals..." (p. 7), the pre-service teachers who complete the research training are able to write a report worthy to be submitted for publication. Indeed, 27 articles have been published in *Opening Writing Doors Journal*<sup>5</sup>, edited by the Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras, Inglés-Francés at the Universidad de Pamplona. Two articles have been published in *PROFILE: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, which "...started including research in its Issues from Teacher Researchers section articles by teachers who had recently completed their BEd programmes and who had conducted classroom research as part of the requirements to opt for their degrees." (Cárdenas & Nieto Cruz, 2019, p. 7). The first article, *Understanding the Role of Teaching Materials in a Beginners' Level English as a Foreign Language Course: A Case Study*, published by Cruz Rondón, and Velasco Vera (2016), aimed at "...at understanding the role of teaching materials among beginners' level students learning English as a foreign language" (P. 125)<sup>6</sup>.

The second article, *Identifying Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs About Teaching EFL and Their Potential Changes*, published by Suárez Flórez and Basto Basto (2017), aimed at "...identifying pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching English as a foreign language and tracking their potential changes throughout the teaching practicum" (p. 167).<sup>7</sup>

With regards to oral reports, students who have completed the research training have presented more than 150 research reports at the Congress of Foreign Language Undergraduate Researchers at the Universidad de Pamplona. In addition, more than 50 research reports have been presented at national congresses, including ASOCOPI Annual Congress, ACOLPROF Congress; local, regional and national RedColsi Congresses; Encuentro de Universidades Formadoras de Licenciados, and other regional congresses in foreign languages.

## Moving Forward

Based on the enriching and successful experiences I have gone through; three main scholarly endeavors will largely determine how SILEX will face future initiatives: Varying the types of research designs used, and expanding the phenomena to be studied; taking part in international events; and inviting student researchers from other schools of education and universities in Colombia.

Regarding research designs and research phenomena, I have realized that although most of the small-scale research done by students are qualitative, some students have started to carry out quantitative inquiries, or at least, adopting quantitative instruments to complement data gathered through qualitative observations and interviews. For example, a student researcher incorporated the use of The EmotivInsight, a neuro-

signals capture system to measure anxiety levels. This might change the way students could study the impact of anxiety or stress levels while doing oral reports. Therefore, we would recommend future mentees to conduct more quantitative studies, and to start carrying out mixed-methods studies.

On the other hand, the student researchers are willing to share their research experiences internationally. For example, in January 2020, two student researchers presented two oral reports at the TQR 11th Annual Conference “Contemporary Qualitative Research”, organized by the NOVA University. I am certain it was an inspiring and thought-provoking experience to have had feedback from an international audience. Hopefully, it will be the first out of many successful international presentations.

Finally, I strongly believe that the training students have gone through, and the experience I have gained teaching research to FL undergraduates will help find national and international alliances. Hopefully, this reflection opens potential research venues, which would include student researchers and teachers from several Bachelor of Arts in Languages in Colombia.

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<sup>5</sup> Link to access the Opening Writing Doors Journal: <http://owdj.unipamplona.edu.co/>

<sup>6</sup> Link to access the full text of the article: <https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/52813>

<sup>7</sup> <https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/59675>

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## Appendix

**From:** Horwitz, Elaine K <[horwitz@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:horwitz@austin.utexas.edu)>

**Sent:** Saturday, September 12, 2015 8:47 AM

**To:** SERGIO ANDRES SUÁREZ FLÓREZ

**Subject:** Re: TBALLI Permission

It's nice to meet you all, and I appreciate your interest in my work.

Subject to the usual requirements for acknowledgment, I am pleased to grant you permission to use the Teacher Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory in your research. Specifically, you must acknowledge my authorship of the TBALLI in any oral or written reports of your research. I also request that you inform me of your findings. You would score the TBALLI in the same way you score the BALLI, and I am attaching the revised version of the BALLI (BALLI 2.0) which appeared in my book *Becoming a Language Teacher: A Practical Guide to Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 2nd edition, Pearson, 2013. You will notice that the BALLI 2.0 has some additional items that neither the original BALLI or the TBALLI have. The BALLI and all its variations are simply lists of items. I think it is fine for you to add or subtract items for the specific beliefs you want to examine in your study. But if you do this (add and/or subtract items), please note in your oral and written reports that you modified the TBALLI and how you modified it.

I hope this is helpful.

Best wishes,

Elaine Horwitz

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