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Editorial

Josephine Taylor*

Publishing an academic journal dedicated to bilingual education and language learning is certainly hard work, but it is not difficult. GiST is fortunate to receive an ample number of potential manuscripts each semester when we publish our call for papers, and these articles typically come from around the globe. It appears there are scores of dedicated teacher-researchers within Colombia and beyond interested in sharing their work with others. In addition to our growing recognition among established researchers and academics, many of GiST's authors are publishing in such a journal for the first time. As part of its editorial policy, GiST has dedicated itself to guiding and mentoring new authors through the steps of preparing and publishing research. Our international peer reviewers are indispensable in this process, often going far beyond the required actions, offering suggestions on content, literature reviewed, editing, and proofreading, all in the interest of improving the articles and contributing to the quality of the journal.

Some of these first-time authors are classroom teachers, not university professors, but we also receive a growing number of submissions from local and international university professors. Indeed, as most journals, GiST undoubtedly benefits from university policies requiring its professors to conduct and publish research continuously. Some would even say that such policies are simply fueling the existence of journals such as ours, and that the research conducted under these policies may not even reflect pertinent inquiry, rather the narrow interests of the professors and departments to comply with set standards of how much and how often research must be conducted and published.

In the case of Colombia, the national agency for the advancement of science, Colciencias, promotes research and scientific advancement in the country. It also establishes and controls the norms for how research should be conducted and published, and also requires researchers to register and maintain a national CV online in which they update their profiles with absolutely every professional and academic activity, from conferences attended and papers published, to courses taught and

degrees obtained. The registry also requires scholars to file personal data such as identification number, date of birth, and other information that makes it possible to track these individuals and their work.

Periodically, academic journals in Colombia are invited to review by Colciencias, and categorized according to its system. This system and these categories are subject to change each time the call is opened. In the case of GiST, our journal is currently in Category B, but to maintain that category, the journal must now comply with additional requirements. These requirements include the registry of all persons involved in the publication of the journal in the last five years. This includes not only authors, but also peer reviewers, and members of the Editorial and Scientific Committees, as well as the Editors, of course. Recently, these individuals were asked to submit their personal data to be uploaded into the Colciencias central system. Most of the people who have been supporting GiST accepted this request and provided the information, although others justly declined, citing concerns about privacy and identify protection. In fact, standards around the globe are significantly tighter than in Colombia in regards to sharing of personal data. One could argue that it is unrealistic and inappropriate to expect that international participants in our journal share information with us that they would never be asked to disclose in their own countries. In addition to the disclosure of personal data, in order to maintain the current category, Colciencias is requiring authors published in journals to have at least a level 5 in the H Indexing system, or an “H5,” indicating the number of articles published and the number of citations of each article, using Google Scholar as the source of this information.

Ironically, perhaps, the same system that is intended to better the quality of research may actually stifle teacher-researchers’ attempts to publish as it continuously passes even more restrictive policies. Younger journals like GiST actually thrive due to our work with first-time authors. Our mentoring of these authors is a key component of our work with scholars who have no H Index to speak of, have never conducted research or published before, and who mostly likely do not work in the university system. These authors most likely come from public and private sector schools and institutions around Colombia, especially, or in other countries in Latin America, and also from governmental and private organizations dedicated to the improvement of education.

By adhering to Colciencias policies and striving to maintain the B Category of the journal, in the strictest sense, GiST would need to begin rejecting submissions from these individuals, favoring those with established publication records, recognized research, and

advanced degrees. Perhaps GiST would then enjoy more recognition internationally due to its increased visibility in the established indexes, but in the opinion of this Editor, we would be remiss in our mission and that of the institution to improving education in Colombia.

Indeed, a key aspect of improving education in our country is empowering, mentoring, and publishing the voices from the field, classroom teachers in the public and private sector, and encouraging scholarship and reflection precisely among this group of individuals. In keeping with UNICA's mission, we feel that classroom teachers rather than university professors are in the unique position of framing direct, precise, and relevant inquiry in response to the daily challenges of education in our context. Indeed, it may be argued that the classroom teacher is the focal change agent in education in any context, and certainly in a country like Colombia in which inequality is the defining characteristic of the educational system, in which vast differences exist in the quality of education, where a miniscule portion of the country's students receive very high quality education, and the vast majority of students are subject to sub-standard, ill-equipped, and ineffective schools.

Reforms, innovation, and well-documented experiences in this area are direly needed. It is GiST's intention to continue promoting, mentoring, and publishing work by these teacher-researchers as one of our key contributions to scientific inquiry, but also to the improvement of education not only in Colombia, but around the world. At the same time, we will strive to comply with the new standards set forth by Colciencias, to the extent that these standards do not represent an impediment to the fulfillment of our mission.

While GiST generally publishes both research and reflective articles, most from Asia, Africa and Latin America, it may be fitting that this issue features solely research articles, mainly from Colombia. Most studies stem directly from the classroom and deal with innovation in the teaching of language skills, as well as insightful treatments of intercultural components of language teaching and learning. **Ender Velasco Tovar** shares research into the effect of systematic text analysis on the writing of EFL students. The results report the effectiveness of the proposed model of theme-rheme analysis for the teaching of factual EFL writing and on the writing performance of EFL students in terms of cohesion and coherence at the paragraph level.

In terms of speaking skills, first-time author **Nubia Patricia Carrero Pérez** reports on the effect of task-based learning and speaking tasks specifically on the oral performance of high school EFL learners

at a public school in Bogotá. Task-based learning and speaking tasks in particular are an effective strategy in school-based programs in which English classes may be as infrequent as once per week. In this case, the speaking tasks led not only to gains in oral proficiency, but in students' attitudes and motivation towards tasks particularly and English class more generally.

Rounding out the articles on language skills, **Edna Velásquez'** study focuses on the role of lexical competence in reading comprehension in students of Spanish as a Heritage Language. Surprisingly, the study indicates that a steady increase in lexical competence does not lead to an equally steady improvement in reading comprehension. These findings suggest first that vocabulary knowledge may be overestimated in its direct and unique relationship to reading comprehension. The findings also point to the likely role of other, including non-linguistic factors in the reading process.

Several studies in this issue of GiST focus on issues of culture and intercultural competence and communication. **Eliana Edith Roberto Flórez** and **Gladis Leonor Arias Rodríguez** look at the role of stereotyping in a university English program in Colombia. It is possible to observe how individuals and groups' perceptions and prejudices towards others affect the process of teaching and learning. Roberto Flórez and Arias Rodríguez found that both groups, teachers and students, developed and perpetuated stereotypes towards the other group. It can be argued that this process of "othering" deprives our interlocutors of a fair chance. In this university, students' attitudes towards learning English may have hampered the efforts of teachers to motivate learners towards the target language. By the same token, teachers' stereotyping of students according to their field of study possibly affected instructors' ability to address students as individuals and respond to their particular needs.

Amelia Chloe Caroline Newsom-Ray and **Sarah Jane Rutter** offer another study of task-based learning, this time in the context of a business university in Colombia. They explore a task-based case study approach in the business English program. The authors argue that by utilizing and combining existing knowledge and skills with vocabulary and structures presented in class to solve case study problems, students were able to increase confidence and, as a result, greater language proficiency.

One of the challenges in any classroom today, especially in high school settings, is the need to develop not only cognitive abilities and content knowledge, but also so-called "soft skills." Among those most critical for preparing learners for adult life include cultural and

intercultural competence, citizenship and ethics. **María Eulalia Guerrero Moya**, **Liliana Muñoz Ortiz** and **Ana María Niño Díaz** report on the effect of literature circles and storytelling as tools to help Colombian high school students identify differences in cultures. It was also possible to observe how exploration of differences helped students build identity and analyze their reactions in situations that challenged their own levels of tolerance. **Yi-Fen Cecilia Liu** continues the focus on intercultural competence in this issue in her study of interference of Spanish as a foreign language speakers' first language on their cultural identity and pragmatic competence. She finds that L2 speakers find it difficult to accept particularly the address forms of the target language culture, much less incorporate these into their own speech.

As in previous issues of our journal, GiST is pleased to be able to offer research on the use of technology in language learning, particularly research that delves more deeply into students and teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of particular tools. **Turgay Han** and **Semih Okatan** share their study of Turkish high school students' attitudes and experiences in EFL classrooms equipped with interactive whiteboards. They find that the use of IWBs has the potential to increase learners' exposure to and motivation towards the target language. As is common with technology, challenges can be found in the degree of instructors' level of comfort with the tools, and with the school infrastructure's ability to successfully incorporate them into the school setting.

Mónica Rodríguez-Bonces and **Kris Ortiz** explore the use of the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model with a chat tool to enhance online collaborative learning. Their setting is the national vocational training center in Colombia, where the online model is widely available, but underexploited. Their findings suggest that by incorporating the steps of cognitive apprenticeship into the chat, both learner motivation and language development are positively affected.

This issue's articles focus strongly on the classroom setting, in high schools, technical and vocational, and university programs. As argued at the outset of this editorial, it is our interest to promote not exclusively, but consistently the point of view of the learner and the classroom teacher as important change agents in learning systems. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of our committees, as well as our supporters and collaborators for responding to GiST's requests for articles and peer reviews. Through the collaboration of these dedicated professionals, we can truly say that we have come to enjoy a strong sense of network and community around our journal. This support makes it possible to persevere in our mission of improving education in Colombia and around the globe.

Editor

***Josephine Taylor** earned her BA in English and French from Emory University and an MS in Teaching English as a Second Language from Georgia State University, both in Atlanta, Georgia. She has been a teacher and teacher trainer for 30 years in the US, Germany and Colombia. She has also worked extensively in publishing, consulting, curricular innovation, and educational improvement projects. She is currently Editor of *GiST Education and Learning Research Journal* as well as Professor/Consultant at the *Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana*, ÚNICA.

Effectiveness of Systemic Text Analysis in EFL Writing Instruction¹

Efectividad del Análisis de Texto Sistémico en la Enseñanza de Escritura de EFL

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Abstract

This action research study investigates the effectiveness of a model based on the theory of systemic text analysis for the teaching of EFL writing. Employing students' pieces of writing and a teachers' survey as data collection instruments, the writing performance of a group of monolingual intermediate level adult students enrolled on a private EFL school in Bogota, Colombia was gauged before and after the model implementation. The results suggest that the proposed model is somewhat effective for the teaching of factual EFL writing and that it has a seemingly positive effect on the writing performance of EFL students in terms of cohesion and coherence at the paragraph level.

Keywords: EFL writing, cohesion, coherence, thematic patterns, text analysis.

Resumen

Este estudio de investigación acción explora la efectividad de un modelo basado en la teoría de análisis sistémico de texto para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera. Se utilizaron escritos de estudiantes y se aplicó una encuesta a los profesores como instrumentos de recolección de datos para determinar el nivel de escritura de un grupo de estudiantes adultos de nivel intermedio, matriculados en una escuela privada de EFL en Bogotá, Colombia. Los resultados sugieren que el modelo propuesto es hasta cierto nivel efectivo para la enseñanza de la escritura objetiva de EFL y parece tener un efecto

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aparentemente positivo en el rendimiento de la escritura de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera en términos de cohesión y coherencia a nivel de párrafos.

Palabras clave: escritura EFL, cohesión, coherencia, esquemas temáticos, análisis de texto.

Resumo

Este estudo de pesquisa ação explora a efetividade de um modelo baseado na teoria de análise sistêmica de texto para o ensino do inglês como língua estrangeira. Utilizaram-se escritos de estudantes e aplicou-se uma enquete aos professores como instrumentos de coleta de dados para determinar o nível de escritura de um grupo de estudantes adultos de nível intermediário, matriculados em uma escola particular de EFL em Bogotá, Colômbia. Os resultados sugerem que o modelo proposto é até certo nível efetivo para o ensino da escritura objetiva de EFL e parece ter um efeito aparentemente positivo no rendimento da escritura dos estudantes de inglês como língua estrangeira em termos de coesão e coerência ao nível de parágrafos.

Palavras chave: escritura EFL, coesão, coerência, esquemas temáticos, análise de texto.

Introduction

The inability of some EFL students to acquire high levels of proficiency in L2 writing has been the subject of heated discussions amongst teachers across many EFL contexts, resulting in harsh critiques made by various professionals in terms of disorganisation and lack of coherence found in EFL writing (Horner & Min-Zhan, 1999; Keck, 2006; Olivas & Li, 2006; Wall, Nickson, Jordan, Allwright & Houghton, 1988; Woodrow, 2006; and Yu, 2009).

Linking theoretical concepts from systemic functional linguistics to the EFL classroom, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of a model based on the theory of Systemic Text Analysis (Bloor & Bloor, 2013) for the teaching of EFL writing. This model entailed the application of three thematic patterns through text analysis tasks to a class of intermediate adult students as part of their writing instruction over a period of four weeks. Students were first introduced to the basics of systemic functional linguistics theory and were asked to carry out theme and rheme analyses of three different texts. These included a biography divided into two parts, and a text about different types of paint. Each analysis was used as the platform to introduce three different thematic patterns, namely continuous, zigzag and split. Students then carried out further analysis of a text about poverty, in which they had to identify themes-rhemes and a mixture of thematic patterns. Finally, they were asked to write their own paragraph collaboratively.

In order to investigate the effectiveness of such a model, the study was based on these two research questions: To what extent is the proposed model effective for the teaching of factual EFL writing? and Does the proposed model have any effect on the writing performance of EFL students in regard to organisation of ideas at paragraph level? The results suggest that the proposed model is effective to some extent for the teaching of EFL writing and that it seems to have a positive effect on the cohesion and coherence of students' paragraphs in factual pieces of writing.

Literature Review

Theme and Rheme

Based on systemic functional linguistics, a text is said to have cohesion and coherence when the language in it is organised and connected through structural and cohesive components. Within structural components, Halliday and Mathiessen (2004) define theme in a clause as "the starting-point for the message: it is what the clause is going to be about" (as cited in Eggins, 2004, p. 299). On the other

hand, rheme is identified as “everything that is not the theme” (p. 300). In other words, it could be said that the former is the subject of a clause which tends to be known because it has been mentioned before or can be worked out from the immediate context, and the latter provides new or unknown information which helps develop the topic or idea. The table below exemplifies this.

Table 1. Sample sentence broken down into unmarked theme and rheme

Theme	Rheme
Marianne North	was born in Hastings in 1830.

The example above can be considered as unmarked theme. However, on many occasions, proficient writers make different choices when packing information in a clause. While an unmarked theme indicates a common choice made by writers and equality of meaning in a clause, a marked theme denotes an uncommon choice and unusual balance of meaning. Readers are prompted to the fact that meaning may need to be made from the context of the clause in a different way. The table below exemplifies this.

Table 2. Sample sentences broken down into marked theme and rheme

Marked Theme	Rheme	
As for Marianne North,	she was born in Hastings in 1830.	
It	was in Hastings	Where Marianne North was born.

Thematic Patterns

This refers to the different ways writers tend to introduce, package and organise information at paragraph level in pieces of writing (e.g. factual) in order to give these cohesion and coherence. Bloor and Bloor (2013) identify three main thematic patterns. In a continuous thematic pattern, the clauses within the same paragraph begin with what was identified as theme in the first clause. This pattern may be repetitive, but it gives a clear focus to the writing. The figure below illustrates this.

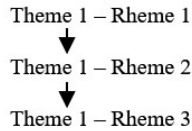


Figure 1. Continuous thematic pattern (Bloor & Bloor, 2013, p. 90)

This pattern may look like this:

Marianne North was born in Hastings in 1830. She revealed a talent for drawing and developed a fascination for travelling from her father at an early age. She devoted the remainder of her life to painting after her father's death in 1869.

(Text adapted from Royal Botanic Gardens Kew).

In a zigzag thematic pattern, the clauses within the same paragraph begin with an item that was identified as part of the rheme in the first clause. This pattern gives more cohesion to the writing when a change in subject ought to be introduced, as opposed to when new themes are brought externally i.e. from outside the text. The figure below illustrates this.

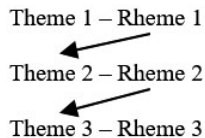


Figure 2. Zigzag thematic pattern (Bloor & Bloor, 2013, p. 91)

This pattern can be exemplified as follows:

Miss North travelled widely, frequently enduring considerable discomfort in order to paint flowers in their natural habitats. The habitats she portrayed were colourful and vivid, often including representations of flowers and wildlife. Her paintings achieved a high level of artistic competence, despite her lack of formal training. Her lack of training, however, did not hinder her natural talent and speed for drawing and painting, sometimes completing a picture in one day.

(Text adapted from Royal Botanic Gardens Kew).

Lastly, in a split thematic pattern, an item that was identified as part of the rheme in the first clause is divided systematically. Subsequent clauses within the same paragraph are developed around such item, providing a pattern that gives clear organisation to the writing. Cohesive devices such as firstly, secondly, then, etc. can be added to prompt readers even further. The figure below illustrates this.

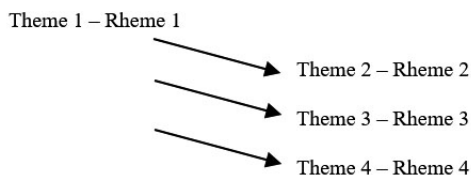


Figure 3. Split rheme pattern (Bloor & Bloor, 2013, p. 92)

The text below exemplifies this pattern.

Many amateur artists first learn about three types of paint and the media in which pigments are suspended. Oil paint is the product of pigments that are bound with a medium of drying oil. This oil is a mixture of linseed boiled with pine resin. Pastel paint is a medium in the form of a stick, consisting of a pure powdered pigment and a binder. This binder has neutral hue and low saturation. Acrylic paint is fast drying paint containing a pigment embedded in an acrylic polymer emulsion. This emulsion can be diluted with water, but it becomes water-resistant when dry.

(Text adapted from Doerner, 1949)

Text Analysis in the EFL Writing Classroom

It has long been recognised that the integration of reading as the basis for subsequent analysis can develop students' awareness of writing subskills or "top-down and bottom-up strategies" (Davies, 1988, p. 134). There is also a wealth of evidence suggesting that EFL students' writing performance is likely to improve when performing classroom tasks that involve reading and writing (Cheng, 2008; Connor & Farmer, 1990; Cumming & Riazi, 2000; Flowerdew, 2000; Kongpetch, 2006; Sidaway, 2006; Yuan-Shan & Shao-Wen, 2011), particularly within the genre-based approach to teaching EFL writing. These tasks usually entail guided practice using genre templates through which the teacher scaffolds lexico-grammar and discoursal features found in texts. Also, some authors have found a positive relationship between L2 teaching-

learning and linguistics theory instruction (Cuenca; Pastor, cited in Rojas, 2014, p. 160).

However, there is little information about research on the application of thematic patterns analysis with EFL classrooms and its effectiveness in relation to writing instruction. Therefore, this allows room for more specific studies, perhaps of a qualitative nature, to determine if systemic text analysis instruction translates into either progress or regress in terms of students' writing skills. This has major implications for EFL writing teachers in regard to the way the teaching of writing is approached and the variety of activities that have to be brought into the classroom.

Methodology

Research Design

The assumption in this study is that the application of the proposed text analysis model could potentially contribute to an increase in the writing performance of EFL students, specifically in relation to organisation of ideas at paragraph level. Therefore, the study set out to answer the following research questions: To what extent is the proposed model effective for the teaching of factual EFL writing? and Does the proposed model have any effect on the writing performance of EFL students in regard to organisation of ideas at paragraph level?

In order to find the answers to these two questions, this study compared students' pieces of writing before and after an intervention based on a model using Bloor and Bloor's (2013) thematic patterns described earlier. The intervention took place across four different text analysis tasks, and a subsequent collaborative writing task.

Due to its purpose, short time scale, practical nature, researcher involvement and immediate application to classroom issues, this study can be framed within the first cycle of an action research approach (Bell, 2010). This strategy was chosen based on factors such as suitability, feasibility and ethics, bearing in mind that other strategies such as experiments or case studies would not be viable (Denscombe, 2010).

Context and Participants

This study took place in a private English language school in Bogota, Colombia. The participants were a monolingual (Spanish-speaking) group of 12 adult students enrolled on an intensive intermediate level general English course (B2) over a period of four weeks. During the study, participants received about ten hours of instruction per week under the Communicative Language Teaching

(CLT) approach. The class was made up of seven females and five males between the ages of 20 and 39. They all were either working or studying at the time of the study, and their motivations for learning English included personal development, further studies, and better employability prospects. The writing instruction proposed in the model as part of this study was embedded within the main course instruction and was not delivered as separate sessions. Consent forms were signed and dated by each participant before taking part in the study.

Twelve teachers working at the same language school also took part in the study. Their L1 was English, and they had a minimum of two years post-CELTA teaching experience in various contexts. Their sole role was to give an overall assessment of the participants' writing performance.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection instruments included two sources: students' artefacts and a teachers' survey.

Students' artefacts. In order to gauge participants' progression or regression in terms of writing performance, students' pieces of writing were collected before and after the model implementation, in Weeks 1 and 4, respectively. These included factual paragraphs around three topics, namely: computer types, the seasons, and kinds of holiday accommodation. Students were given 30 minutes to carry out the tasks which had a word limit of 120-180 words.

The twelve students were divided into three groups of four. Each group was then randomly assigned one of the three topics for the first task. The students wrote about the same topic for the second writing task after the model implementation. Once copies of handwritten work had been made, students were asked to type in their pieces of writing and submit the soft copies. Soft copies were cross checked against hard copies to make sure that no changes were made to the former.

Sampling was carried out using a non-statistical approach. That is, each participant in each of the three groups was assigned a number from one to four. These numbers were then written on separate cards and one participant from each group was randomly drawn to be measured in terms of his/her writing performance. In total, three samples, i.e. students were selected. Although this might have caused issues with data reliability, the decision to select only three samples for the analysis was made purely based on the nature of the action research study. In other words, the time was too short (4 weeks) and the financial and human resources were limited (involvement of third parties to carry out analyses of thematic patterns was not viable).

Teachers' survey. In order to offer more consistency to the study, the twelve teachers were asked to assess each piece of writing employing a five-point Likert scale based on the following question: *Understanding cohesion and coherence as the organisation of ideas, clear focus in the development of ideas, and linking between ideas through cohesive devices, how would you assess the cohesion and coherence of the following pieces of writing? 1) Very poor, 2) Poor, 3) Acceptable, 4) Good, or 5) Very good? Please give a reason (or reasons) for your choices.* This, by all means, was not a complex and exhaustive statistical procedure. On the contrary, it was purely an internal peer survey exercise.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Students' artefacts. A qualitative analysis was employed. Writing samples from the three selected students were coded to guarantee anonymity and then analysed for theme, rheme and thematic patterns (Bloor & Bloor, 2013) on both instances, before and after the model implementation.

The implementation of the proposed model for the teaching of factual EFL writing was carried out in Weeks 2-3. The teacher-researcher implemented a workshop in which participants worked collaboratively through three text analysis tasks. Students analysed three texts for theme and rheme. These analyses were the basis to introduce the continuous, zig-zag, and split thematic patterns. To follow up this session, students were asked to bring one example of the three patterns found in authentic material written in English, for example, magazines, newspapers, books, and so on. One week later, the teacher-researcher incorporated a second workshop in which students had to carry out a theme-rheme and thematic pattern analysis of a different text about "types of poverty." Then, students were asked to write a short collaborative paragraph on a topic of their choice in which one thematic pattern or a mixture of these was included. Students shared the paragraphs and the teacher provided feedback.

Artefacts before the model implementation were coded as 1a, 1b and 1c whereas those afterwards were coded as 2a, 2b and 2c, assigning one letter to each of the three writing topics, a) computer types, b) the seasons, and c) types of holiday accommodation. In order to measure students' writing performance, analyses were carried out grouping samples before and after the model implementation according to the three topics given to the students, i.e. computer types (1a-2a), the seasons (1b-2b), and types of holiday accommodation (1c-2c). The paragraph analyses were carried out by the teacher-researcher.

As the main concern in this study was the organisation of ideas at the paragraph level, grammar, spelling and punctuation errors were not taken into consideration. However, these were highlighted in grey during the analyses.

Teachers' survey. The 12 teachers were divided into three groups of four people, and each group was presented with a pair of samples e.g. 1a-2a, or 1b-2b, or 1c-2c so they could give an overall assessment of cohesion and coherence within the Likert scale. An important aspect during the data collection for this part of the process was that teachers were not told that the pieces of writing had been written by the same student, so they would not have any preconceptions about which samples had been written before and after the teaching intervention. They were asked to disregard grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling mistakes during the assessments, and specifically focus on aspects of cohesion and coherence. Teachers were given the opportunity to give reasons for their assessment. Their qualitative comments were grouped into four categories coded for analysis: 1) organisation of ideas, 2) clear focus on development of ideas, 3) linking between ideas through cohesive devices, 4) other reasons. Teachers' assessments of samples were collected, organised and tabulated. As suggested when working with ordinal data (Denscombe, 2010), the quantitative data from the peer survey was analysed by working out the mode (i.e. the most common answer) as a measure of central tendency, and the range as a measure of dispersion of data. Quantitative data was contrasted to gauge any kind of progression or regression in the students' writing performance.

Results

This study was founded on general issues related to disorganisation and lack of coherence found in EFL writing, and on the assumption that the application of a model based on the application of three thematic patterns through text analysis tasks could potentially contribute to an increase in the writing performance of EFL students. The research was designed around two questions: To what extent is the proposed model effective for the teaching of factual EFL writing? and Does the proposed model have any effect on the writing performance of EFL students in regard to organisation of ideas at paragraph level?

Analyses of Samples 1a and 2a

The contrast of analyses 1a and 2a showed that the proposed model is to some degree effective for the teaching of factual EFL writing, and that students' writing performance is likely to improve when carrying out tasks involving text analysis followed by writing.

In general, analysis 1a showed a rather disjointed paragraph with the majority of themes brought externally i.e. not related to previous themes or themes mentioned earlier in the text. It had too many external themes (2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10), which prompted a lack of internal cohesion and coherence within the piece of writing.

The word count in analysis 1a tallied 170 words. There were a few internal links between themes. For example, only themes 2-3 and 10-11 followed a continuous pattern, and rheme 8 - theme 9 followed a zigzag pattern. Rheme 2 showed a split thematic pattern including various computer types i.e. “[...]desk computers, notebooks, ultrabooks[...]”, but only one of these was subsequently developed later i.e. “a desk computer” (theme 5). This is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Analysis of sample 1a

No	Theme	Rheme	Pattern
1	The first computers	used to be huge, as big as a whole room, and not very impressive in terms of power, but now	
2	We	have different types of computers, such as desk computers, notebooks, ultrabooks and in a couple of year maybe	external theme
3	we	will see quantum computers.	Continuous
4	Every kind of computer	has its own advantages and disadvantages, for instance,	
5	a desk computer	is more powerful and customisable than notebooks, but	split from rheme 2
6	You	can't carry your desk PC in your bag which is very important if you are a university student or a bussiness man.	external theme
7	Nowadays, there	are computers for everyone and every lifestyle and	
8	the companies	do great efforts to bring to life new funcionalities like touchscreens, fingerprint recognition and 3D force touch on the pad track.	external theme
9	Some of these funcionalis	could have sound like fiction on the past and now are a reality, so	zig-zag
10	We	do not know what is going to be next but	external theme
11	We	can be sure that the next type of computers will be better than ever.	Continuous

In contrast, although its word count was lower, analysis 2a seemed a more compact paragraph with plenty of themes linked internally resulting in better organisation within the paragraph. The word count in analysis 2a tallied 134 words. Compared to analysis 1a, there were more internal links between themes and fewer themes brought externally. For

instance, themes 1-2 followed a continuous pattern, then an external theme i.e. “everyone” (theme 3) was brought in. Rheme 4 was then split into “3 main types of computers”, subsequently developed in rheme 5 “desk PC”, theme 9 “laptops” and rheme 12 “ultrabooks”. Each split was well developed later. For example, rheme 5 and themes 6-8 were linked through a zigzag-continuous pattern, themes 9-10 showed a continuous pattern, and rheme 12 and themes 13-14 followed a zigzag-continuous pattern. This is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Analysis of sample 2a

No	Theme	Rheme	Pattern
1	Computers	have changed over the time. At the beginning	
2	They	were big machines that only few people could use.	Continuous
3	Nowadays everyone	can use [them] based on their necessities.	external theme
4	There	are 3 main types of computers.	
5	The most common	is the desk PC,	split 1 from rheme 4
6	this machine	is not portable but	zig-zag
7	It	is the best choice to work with large programs and	Continuous
8	They	are easier to modify in order to keep them updated.	
9	In contrast, laptops	are portable and easy to carry everywhere but	split 2 from rheme 4
10	They	have a lower capacity and are less adaptable.	Continuous
11	People	use them to do task like sending emails, searching on [the] internet and other daily assignments.	external theme
12	Finally there	are ultrabooks which have the same characteristics of laptops, but	split 3 from rheme 4
13	They	are slimmer and lighter and unlike laptops	zig-zag
14	They	don't have CD-room and internet port.	Continuous

These results might be worthy in the sense that the proposed model could potentially be a valuable writing aid for teachers whose students find it hard to be precise and concise when writing within a word limit. Also, these findings seem to contribute to other research in which a positive relationship between L2 teaching-learning and linguistics theory instruction has been found.

Analyses of Samples 1b and 2b

The contrast of analyses 1b and 2b corroborated the view of various professionals who have criticised the disorganisation and lack of coherence found in EFL writing. On the whole, analysis 1b showed a fairly good use of internal links, but too many shifts in themes resulted

in a paragraph with a loose focus and a piece of writing that lacked coherence in relation to the task in hand i.e. “the seasons.”

The word count in analysis 1b tallied 132 words. There were some internal links between themes, but the choice of themes assumed familiarity of the reader with the seasons, so these were not explained or developed appropriately. This can be exemplified by rheme 1 which mentioned the phrase “four seasons,” but only two seasons were mentioned later in rhemes 4 and 5. Although themes 2-3 showed a continuous pattern, seasons would be expected to appear as themes as opposed to rhemes, but this was not the case. Instead, the writer chose to use marked themes beginning sentences 4-5 and 8-9 with the impersonal pronoun “it” as the theme. Then, “They” (theme 10) was linked back to “[...] these countries [...]” (rheme 9). Last, an external theme (“Most people” - line 11) was brought in and linked to themes 12-14 through a continuous pattern (“they-they-they”). This is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Analysis of sample 1b

No	Theme	Rheme	Pattern
1	There	are four seasons.	
2	Each season	cover 3 months in a year.	
3	The seasons	depends on the place you are in.	continuous
4	It	is common [that] while in one country it is winter,	split 1 from rheme 1
5	at the same time [it]	could be summer in another.	split 2 from rheme 1
6	But seasons	do not take place all over the world.	
7	There	are some countries where the weather changes every single day.	
8	In some others, it	rains most of the time.	
9	It	happens because these countries are near to the Ecuador's line or	
10	They	are close to the poles.	zig-zag
11	Most people	prefer cities where they can have the 4 seasons, because	external theme
12	They	can buy different kinds of clothes, Also,	continuous
13	They	are certain about what the weather is going to be like.	continuous
14	And finally, they	can make especial plans for each season.	continuous

On the other hand, analysis 2b carried out after the model implementation seemed to have better cohesion and coherence due to a larger amount of internal links and more sustained themes throughout the piece of writing.

The word count in analysis 2b tallied 161 words. Compared to analysis 1b, there was more consistency in terms of greater number of internal links between themes and rhemes. For example, rheme 1 showed a split thematic pattern in which the four seasons were included i.e. “[...] winter, summer, autumn and spring.”. Each of these was developed later in themes 3, 7, 10 and 12. The “winter” (theme 3) was developed through a continuous pattern (“It” - theme 4), and themes 5 and 6 were linked to their previous rhemes through zigzag patterns i.e. “[...] variable weather.” in rheme 4 and “[...] snow.” in rheme 5. The “summer” (theme 7) was developed through two consecutive continuous patterns (themes 8-9). The “autumn” (theme 10) was also expanded similarly in theme 11. The “spring” (theme 12), the last split from rheme 1, was developed through two consecutive continuous patterns (themes 13-14) and a zigzag one linking rheme 14 “[...] weather conditions.” and theme 15 “These conditions.” This can be seen in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Analysis of sample 2b

No	Theme	Rheme	Pattern
1	One year	has four seasons such as winter, summer, autumn and spring.	
2	Each season	has a three month duration, Although in the countries close to Ecuador there are no seasons at all.	
3	Winter	is the coldest season.	split 1 from rheme 1
4	It	has variable weather.	Continuous
5	The weather in Winter	can include low temperatures, wind and snow.	zig-zag
6	Snow during winter in some countries	allows children to have fun making snow angels, snowman and [having] snowbattles.	zig-zag
7	Summer	is the favorite season for most people because	split 2 from rheme 1
8	It	has sunny days with amazing weather.	Continuous
9	It	let people to do more activities outside.	Continuous
10	Autumn	is when trees fall their leaves and the landscape start getting colorful with different tones like yellow, brown, orange and red.	split 3 from rheme 1
11	It	is usually windy and rainy.	Continuous
12	Spring	is the last one of the seasons.	split 4 from rheme 1
13	This season	is where flowers grow and all animals awake from their hibernation.	Continuous
14	It	is a season with mild weather conditions.	Continuous
15	These conditions	are perfect for outdoor picnics and leisure activities.	zig-zag

Of course, the word limit in the paragraph after the model implementation was greater, which allowed the student more room to

extend ideas further. However, this could mean that the proposed model based on thematic patterns analyses carried out in the classroom is somewhat effective for the teaching of factual EFL writing in the sense that teachers can point out alternatives students could use to develop and extend their ideas better without losing the focus in paragraphs.

Analyses of Samples 1c and 2c

The contrast of analyses 1c and 2c showed that the proposed model appears to have a rather positive effect on the organisation of ideas in factual paragraphs produced by EFL students. The word count in analysis 1c tallied 127 words. Generally, taking into account the task topic, it would have been expected to have more than one type of holiday accommodation included and developed in analysis 1c. There were some internal links between ideas, but, in general, this piece of writing was too short and not properly developed, and some themes chosen by the writer lacked coherence in relation to the task topic “types of holiday accommodation.” For instance, “[...] variety of holiday accommodation [...]” in rheme 1 was developed through a zigzag pattern in theme 1 (“The most common places”). Similarly “Hotels” in rheme 2 was subsequently developed through a zig-zag pattern “those places places” in theme 3, and a continuous pattern “Some of them” in theme 4. Then, a new theme “you” (theme 6) was brought in from outside the text and developed using a continuous pattern. This is shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Analysis of sample 1c

No	Theme	Rheme	Pattern
1	Depending on the kind of tourism like, you	could find a huge variety of holiday accommodation for all tastes and budgets.	
2	The most common places	are Hotels, where people can rest without having in mind what to cook or What's the time;	
3	those places places	offer services that can start from a place to sleep, to a luxury suite with all the premium equipment you can imagine.	zig-zag
4	In addition, some of them	offer plans for their guests that can include breakfast, meals and snacks too.	Continuous
5	Having that in, mind if you	want to decide where to spend your holidays firstly	external theme
6	You	must have clear the kind of tourism you like or want; defining if you want to rest, to meet new places or to experience new things.	Continuous

Conversely, analysis 2c appeared to have better cohesion and coherence because of the larger amount of embedded internal links in the text. The word count in analysis 2c tallied 166 words. Compared to analysis 1c, analysis 2c was longer, had more internal links, and included more variety of content regarding themes. For example, an item in rheme 1 (“people”) was linked to themes 2-3 through a zigzag-continuous pattern. Four types of holiday accommodation options were introduced in rheme 3 and later split into themes 4 (“Hotels”), 7 (“Apartments for rent”), 10 (“camping”), and 13 (“Hostals”). The first split was developed through two consecutive zigzag patterns in rhemes 4-5. The second split then followed a similar pattern linking rhemes 7-8. The third split, “camping” (theme 10) was developed through two continuous patterns (themes 11-12). The last split “Hostals” in theme 13 was partly linked to theme 14 “The main disadvantage of this type of accommodation” which subsequently showed a zigzag pattern i.e. “bathroom” in rheme 14- theme 15, as shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Analysis of sample 2c

No	Theme	Rheme	Pattern
1	Kinds of holiday accommodation	are a difficult choice for people.	
2	When people	decides where to spend their holidays,	zig-zag
3	They	usually choose between the next four options: hotels, apartments, camping and hostals.	Continuous
4	Hotels	offer many services for their customers such as restaurants, bars, swimming pools, etc.	split 1 from rheme 3
5	However, the quantity of services	is directly related to its cost.	zig-zag
6	Its cost	depends on the number of stars.	zig-zag
7	Apartments for rent	provides least services in comparisson with hotels while giving more privacy.	
8	Least services	mean that sometimes people need to cook their own food.	zig-zag
9	Cooking	is not ideal when you want to rest.	zig-zag
10	The next option, camping,	is the cheapest kind of accommodation but	split 3 from rheme 3
11	It	is not a comfortable option.	Continuous
12	Sometimes it	involves sleeping outdoor in cold conditions.	Continuous
13	On the other hand, Hostals	have reasoonable prices while giving people the opportunity to meet more human beings.	split 4 from rheme 3
14	The main disadvantage of this type of accommodation	is the lack of private bathroom.	partially external theme
15	A bathroom	may have to be share between many people.	zig-zag

Once again, the word limit in the latter analysis was larger, so this gave the student more opportunity to develop ideas better and include more types of holiday accommodation.

Teachers' Survey Results

The table below shows the tabulation of the peer survey results according to the following coding. Cohesion and coherence: 1) very poor, 2) poor, 3) acceptable, 4) good, or 5) very good. Categories for open-ended reasons behind assessment: 1) organisation of ideas, 2) clear focus on development of ideas, 3) linking between ideas through cohesive devices, 4) other reasons.

Table 9. Tabulation teachers' survey results

	Sample 1a	Reason	Sample 2a	Reason
Teacher 1	4	2	4	1
Teacher 2	3	2	4	2
Teacher 3	4	4	5	3
Teacher 4	5	3	4	3
	Sample 1b	Reason	Sample 2b	Reason
Teacher 5	3	2	4	1
Teacher 6	4	2	2	4
Teacher 7	4	1	5	1
Teacher 8	3	2	4	2
	Sample 1c	Reason	Sample 2c	Reason
Teacher 9	2	2	4	2
Teacher 10	3	1	4	1
Teacher 11	3	3	4	1
Teacher 12	3	1	4	1

Samples 1a-2a. A breakdown of the survey results for samples 1a-2a showed that two out of four teachers (i.e. teachers 2 and 3) assessed the piece of writing after the teaching intervention slightly better in terms of clearer focus and usage of linking devices. One teacher saw no improvement, and another one (teacher 4) deemed the paragraph before the implementation better because of its usage of linking devices. The figure below shows a visual representation of these results.

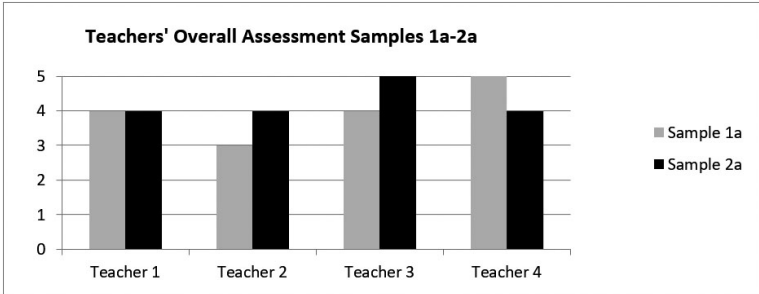


Figure 4. Teachers' overall assessment samples 1a-2a

These results seem to partly contradict those from the qualitative thematic patterns analyses 1a-2a, and seem to indicate that the proposed model is not fully effective for the teaching of factual EFL writing. It appears as though students' writing performance is not always likely to improve solely as a result of the implementation of thematic patterns in paragraphs, and that cohesion and coherence can also be based on the linkage of ideas through cohesive devices.

Samples 1b-2b. The survey results for samples 1b-2b showed that three out of four teachers (teachers 5, 7 and 8) assessed the piece of writing after the teaching intervention slightly better in terms of organisation of ideas and clearer focus. One teacher (teacher 6) saw regress because of other reasons, in particular, the lack of coherence in relation to the wrong chronological order in which the seasons were introduced in the text, and the impression that some subtopics in the paragraph such as "snow" were not directly related to the main topic of the seasons. The figure below shows a visual representation of these results.

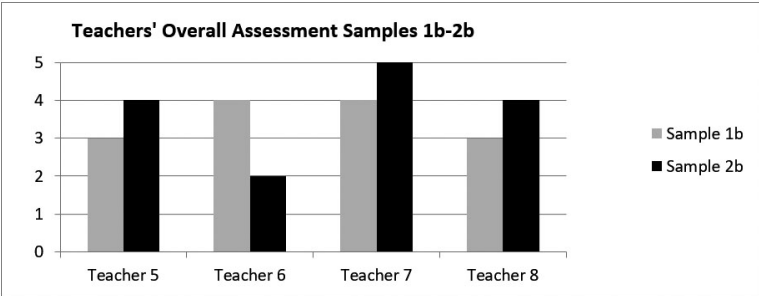


Figure 5. Teachers' overall assessment samples 1b-2b

These results seem to corroborate those from the qualitative thematic patterns analyses 1b-2b, in which the proposed model based on thematic patterns analyses and subsequent writing is somewhat effective for bringing organisation and clear focus to ideas within factual paragraphs. However, students may need to thread carefully around the logic behind the introduction of ideas, particularly, when chronological order is concerned.

Samples 1c-2c. The survey results for samples 1c-2c showed that four out of four teachers (i.e. teachers 9, 10, 11 and 12) assessed the piece of writing after the teaching intervention slightly better primarily in terms of organisation of ideas, and secondarily in relation to clarity of focus on ideas. The figure below shows a visual representation of these results.

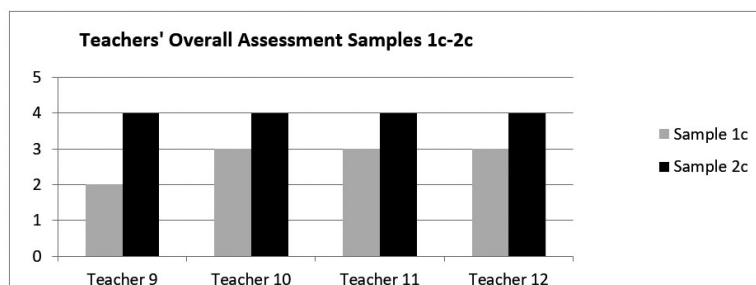


Figure 6. Teachers' overall assessment samples 1c-2c

These results seem to validate those from the qualitative thematic patterns analyses 1c-2c, where the proposed model appears to have a rather positive effect on the organisation of and focus given to ideas in factual paragraphs.

Mode before and after teaching intervention. A close look at the mode within reasons given by teachers for their overall assessment of pieces of writing in the survey reveals that the value that occurred most frequently among the set of answers in the paragraphs before the model implementation was 2 (i.e. clear focus on development of ideas), whereas the one afterwards was 1 (i.e. organisation of ideas), as shown in the table below.

Table 10. MODE before and after teaching intervention

													MODE (the most common)	RANGE (measure of dispersion)
Reason Samples 1a, 1b & 1c	2	2	4	3	2	2	1	2	2	1	3	1		
Arranged	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	4	2	3
Reason Samples 2a, 2b & 2c	1	2	3	3	1	4	1	2	2	1	1	1		
Arranged	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	1	3

In general, it seems as though the majority of teachers, other than one group of teachers (i.e. teachers 1-4), assessed the paragraphs after the intervention slightly better than the paragraphs before the intervention. The mode within the reasons behind the assessments showed that those slight improvements were partly due to a change in the organisation of ideas. Therefore, these results seem to validate those from the qualitative analyses which had shown that the proposed model appears to improve the organisation of ideas in factual paragraphs.

Conclusions

Overall, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of a model for the teaching of EFL writing entailing the application of three thematic patterns (Bloor & Bloor, 2013) through text analysis tasks.

The results of qualitative analyses showed that the samples after the model implementation seemed to be better developed and included more internal links within the paragraphs. They appeared to have more continuous, zigzag, and split thematic patterns bringing more variety and better organisation to the pieces of writing. Moreover, a sample after the model implementation, which had a shorter word count than its counterpart before the implementation, was deemed more compact and better organised. This could potentially place the proposed model as a useful tool for teachers to help students become more precise and concise when writing within a word limit.

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The results of teachers’ quantitative assessments tended to confirm those from the qualitative analyses, which had shown that the proposed model appears to aid the organisation of ideas at the paragraph level. However, cohesion and coherence can also be brought into writing via other means such as cohesive devices. Students may need to be careful with how ideas are presented, particularly when chronological order is a main concern e.g. the order in which the seasons occur.

Therefore, it could be concluded that the implementation of a model based on thematic patterns analysis is somewhat effective for the teaching of factual EFL writing. Such a model has a seemingly positive effect on the writing performance of EFL students in terms of their paragraph cohesion and coherence. The results of this study suggest that giving students practice in recognising different ways of packaging and organising information in texts through text analysis tasks appears to translate into moderately more cohesive and coherent pieces of writing. The results of these analyses appear to confirm Bloor and Bloor's (2013) view that thematic patterns serve as a channel to introduce, package and organise information cohesively and coherently at paragraph level, and also Davies's (1988) idea that integrating reading as the basis for subsequent analysis can develop students' awareness of writing subskills.

Indeed, the results of this research need to be taken with caution, as they are particular to the context in which this study was carried out. For instance, being an action research project, the results here are limited by factors such as data reliability in relation to the researcher's involvement, which means that results could not be generalised to all teaching contexts. The fact that only three students were measured in terms of progress or regress in their writing performance poses major questions in the study. Ideally, if the samples produced by the 12 students before and after the model implementation (i.e. 24 samples in total) had been analysed, this would have made the data more robust.

Future studies could perhaps enquire further into the application of the same model to groups of students in other contexts e.g. young learners. Also, it would be worth gauging successive impact of the model on students' writing performance in subsequent writing tasks at later stages within the action research cycle. Researchers could potentially explore the role of L1 in relation to the model application and the distance between L1 and L2. For instance, would research on the application of the model with Chinese and Arabic EFL students produce similar results?

Ultimately, the outcomes of this study can only be seen as a further alternative to the never-ending process of teaching-learning EFL writing, and as a minor contribution to Rojas's (2014) idea of narrowing down the gap between the role of linguistics theory and its applicability to the EFL classroom.

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Texts adaptations in the Literature Review section

Examples of continuous and split thematic patterns. Texts adapted from: Royal Botanic Gardens Kew – ‘Marianne north and the North Gallery, Kew’. Key Information Sheet K9.

Example of split thematic pattern. Text adapted from Doerner, M. (1949). *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting: with notes on the techniques of the old masters*. New York: Mariner Books.

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Effects of Tasks on Spoken Interaction and Motivation in English Language Learners¹

Efectos de las Tareas en la Interacción Oral y en la Motivación de Aprendices del Idioma Inglés

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Abstract

Task based learning (TBL) or Task based learning and teaching (TBLT) is a communicative approach widely applied in settings where English has been taught as a foreign language (EFL). It has been documented as greatly useful to improve learners' communication skills. This research intended to find the effect of tasks on students' spoken interaction in English and motivation towards speaking English in the classroom. Thirty-five adolescent tenth grade students from a public school in Bogota, Colombia, participated in the study. They reported positive influence of tasks in their English oral interaction improvement as well as on their motivation towards speaking English in the classroom.

Keywords: Task based learning, TBL, TBLT, tasks, spoken interaction, speaking English, motivation, students' perceptions.

Resumen

El aprendizaje basado en tareas es un método comunicativo ampliamente aplicado en contextos donde el inglés se enseña como idioma extranjero. Se ha documentado ampliamente como de gran utilidad para mejorar las habilidades comunicativas de los aprendices. Esta investigación pretendió encontrar el efecto de las tareas en la interacción oral en inglés y en la motivación de los estudiantes hacia hablar inglés en el salón de clase. Treinta y cinco adolescentes de grado décimo de un colegio público en Bogotá, Colombia, participaron en el estudio. Ellos reportaron influencia positiva de las tareas en el mejoramiento

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de su interacción oral en inglés y en su motivación hacia hablar inglés en el salón de clase.

Palabras Clave: Aprendizaje basado en tareas, TBL, TBLT, tareas, interacción oral, hablar inglés, motivación, percepciones de los estudiantes.

Resumo

A aprendizagem baseada em tarefas é um método comunicativo amplamente aplicado em contextos onde o inglês se ensina como idioma estrangeiro. Tem-se documentado amplamente como de grande utilidade para melhorar as habilidades comunicativas dos aprendizes. Esta pesquisa pretendeu encontrar o efeito das tarefas na interação oral em inglês e na motivação dos estudantes para falar inglês na sala de aula. Trinta e cinco adolescentes de segundo ano do ensino médio de um colégio público em Bogotá, Colômbia, participaram no estudo. Eles reportaram influência positiva das tarefas escolares no melhoramento da sua interação oral em inglês e na sua motivação para falar inglês na sala de aula.

Palavras chave: Aprendizagem baseada em tarefas escolares, TBL, TBLT, tarefas escolares, interação oral, falar inglês, motivação, percepções dos estudantes

Introduction

In the last years there has been a growing interest for the learning of English language in developing countries due to the position it has taken all over the world in many areas of the society development. This fact has provoked recurrent inquiry of applying a method that benefits learners in their communicative skills improvement in the English learning process. Specifically, there has been great concern about speaking skill since it is the least practiced in contexts where this language is taught as a foreign language (EFL). According to Guide 22 of the Colombian Ministry of National Education (2006), “a foreign language is the one which is not used among the immediate or local environment and it can be principally learned inside a classroom where students are generally exposed to the language during controlled class periods” (p. 5).

Throughout the time, teachers at schools have applied traditional teaching systems focused on grammar learning and on reading / writing processes, leaving aside the progress in listening and speaking skills. Jones and Hodson (2012) reaffirm this when they point out that “the explicit teaching of speaking and listening has been neglected” (p. 2). However, when the interest is to give more opportunities for oral interaction in the classroom, TBL / TBLT is one of the communicative approaches that has granted notorious results in environments where students have little contact with English language (Lochana & Deb, 2006; Mangu, 2008; Shintani, 2011; Thanh & Huan, 2012; Yim, 2009). Indeed, research acknowledges TBL advantages in issues related to motivation, communication, oral interaction when learning a foreign language (Barnard & Viet, 2010; Naznean, n.d.; Plews & Zhao, 2010; Tabatabaei & Atefeh, 2011; Xiongyong & Moses, 2011). Although research highlights the mentioned attributes, it lacks description of the TBL implementation process.

The present research intended to find an effective strategy to improve students' English spoken interaction at a public school where it is taught as a FL. There thus emerged the inquiry about the effect of communicative tasks on adolescent students' oral interaction and the impact of tasks on their motivation to speak English in the classroom. The questions that guided this study were 1) What is the effect of communicative group tasks on students' spoken interaction in English as a foreign language? And 2) What is the effect of communicative group tasks on students' motivation towards speaking English in the classroom? The findings reveal that communicative tasks positively impacted students' spoken interaction in the FL and were successful

in increasing their motivation towards speaking English when solving them in the classroom.

Literature Review

Studies by Plews & Zhao (2010), Barnard & Viet (2010), Xiongyong & Moses (2011), Jong (2006), Chuang (2010), Yim (2009), among others, report the application of Task Based Learning approach in public schools, especially in the context of developing countries where English is taught as a FL. Most studies refer to issues such as motivation and communication, students' perceptions, and learning the foreign language.

Motivation and Communication

Teachers have largely considered TBL / TBLT beneficial for increasing students' intrinsic motivation, participation, and collaborative and communicative skills interaction. In fact, in several studies they highlighted the relationship between motivation and communicative activities (Plews & Zhao, 2010; Barnard & Viet, 2010; Xiongyong & Moses, 2011; Jong, 2006; Chuang, 2010; Tabatabaei & Atefeh, 2011). In addition, Yim (2009) asserts that teachers believe that having students work together to complete tasks maintain them interested and actively involved. Thanh and Huan (2012) found that learners were highly motivated when working towards personally meaningful goals and challenging but achievable tasks.

Students' Perceptions

Chuang's 2010 study reports that what students loved most about task based lessons was that they could share and exchange information with their partners; doing exciting interactive group work and creative role-playing also interested them. They liked the feeling of self-fulfillment when completing the task and they were keen on learning actively not passively. Also, they enjoyed tasks because they were practical and similar to real life situations. Some participants pointed out that the task based activities trained not only their oral skills but also their problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

Another important impression that students report is their preference for TBL instead of traditional methods (Thanh & Huan, 2012). In this study, students showed interest in learning English,

were highly motivated by tasks, and were encouraged to participate in doing tasks because “classes are full of activities and play” (Lochana & Deb, 2006, p. 156). Students also had a more positive attitude towards learning English (Yim, 2009). They stressed the role of small group work through learning language in context, and they liked the opportunities for contributing to the group (Than & Huan, 2012).

Learning the Foreign Language

Naznean’s (n.d.) study found that TBL provides a variety of learning opportunities for students of all levels and capabilities. Plews and Zhao (2010) also found that TBL integrates the development of language skills and learning strategies, and that it establishes relevance for students’ needs. Xiongyong and Moses (2011) discovered that TBL provides a relaxed atmosphere that promotes target language use, the activation of learners’ needs as well as skills interaction. Besides, a correct execution of TBL seemed to comply with the acquisition of knowledge as regards the four language skills on the basis of social interaction. On the contrary, Choo and Too (2012) detected low- level students’ inability to cope with tasks, and only students with higher proficiency were able to reach the goal. To the contrary, in another study, tasks tended to hold bright students back (Jong, 2006).

Lochana and Deb (2006) observed that students started talking in English and using it for various purposes. Also they assert that some students expressed improvement in their writing skills because of the feedback they received from the teacher and the challenging nature of tasks given to them. Moreover, other studies report that teachers observed greater confidence in their students in speaking (Yim, 2009) and increased vocabulary, likely due to the utilization of TBLT (Thanh & Huan, 2012). Some other teachers reported that TBLT allowed learners to achieve greater accuracy of performance and to produce more complex language and fluency (Mangu, 2008). In the study carried out by Tabatabaei and Atefeh (2011), teachers highlighted the variety of language teaching methodologies and the creative, lively and collaborative learning environment that made the betterment of learners’ interaction skills possible. Shintani’s research (2011) showed that TBL lessons achieved interactional authenticity and provided opportunities for negotiation of meaning, which is presumably profitable for acquisition.

Some studies at public schools in Colombia perceived TBL’s suitability for encouraging EFL oral interaction. González and Arias (2009) found that “students negotiated meaning when interacting and

this permitted them to take advantage of communicative TBL activities to express what they wanted to say spontaneously” (p.7). Forero (2005) states that when solving tasks “the students interacted among themselves or with the teacher in most of the cases” and that “students practiced the language and improved their oral skill, although many of them had several problems with grammar and sentence building” (p.76).

Despite the advantages found and the fact that TBLT emphasizes students’ freedom to use the language they have when developing tasks, other teachers expressed concerns about students’ modest target language proficiency and use, and the uncertainty about the role of grammar (Plews & Zhao, 2010). Barnard and Viet (2010) also found that teachers stressed the need for their students to produce language correctly in terms of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Jong (2006) discovered that the majority of the teachers perceived that students generally had difficulty expressing their ideas in full sentences, or finding words and structures to express meaning. Teachers stated that the reason was the lack of knowledge in grammar and vocabulary, and TBLT’s ineffectiveness in terms of grammar instruction. Additionally, more than a half of the teachers in this study showed some negative response regarding TBL’s integration of language skills in the classroom.

Methodology

Research Design

The proposed methodology for this project was based on the principles of qualitative research that pretends to describe and to interpret social realities, involves the researcher in the real setting, and lets the researcher observe evident situations to explore tendencies and recurrent behaviors over time (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The study sought to find the effect of communicative group tasks on the students’ spoken interaction in English and on the motivation towards speaking the foreign language in the classroom. To know this effect, an action research methodology was proposed as it emphasizes finding solutions to a problem through an intervention planning, implementation, reviewing, and evaluation (Cohen et al., 2007). A triangulation of methods of data collection were suggested since Campbell and Fiske affirm that it corresponds to the use of more than one method in the search of solutions for given objectives (as cited in Cohen et al., 2007). Cohen, et al. (2007) also ratify that triangulation gives great confidence to the researcher by more contrasted methods.

When attempting to improve oral interaction in the FL, there are variables found in the literature: the relevance of creating opportunities, like tasks, for using the foreign language for speaking purposes and the motivation that learners experiment when participating actively in such opportunities. Although the literature sets these variables among others, it does not detail specific procedures to be applied. Consequently, the proposed data collection sought to find the effect of communicative group tasks on students' spoken interaction in English and on the motivation towards speaking it in the classroom.

Setting and Participants

This research took place at a public school located in the Country Sur neighborhood of Bogota, Colombia. It serves students from lower income families. It is a large school covering about 4,900 students in morning and afternoon shifts. It offers school grades from pre-school through 11th grade. The school has inter-institutional agreements with three institutions for technical programs for 10th and 11th graders. Students in the study were tenth graders and belonged to the afternoon shift 1003 class. There were 24 girls and 12 boys, ages 14 to 17.

English is taught as a foreign language with two sessions weekly of two academic hours each. There are audio or visual resources available for teachers to use during lesson development but not all the English teachers can access to them. Teachers at public schools are not allowed to ask students to purchase textbooks or other materials for classes and the school library lacks of resources for English teaching and learning. Because of this and because of the large class sizes, listening and speaking are the least worked skills.

Data Collection Instruments

To gather information that gave answers for the research questions, three qualitative techniques were applied: Test, Observation, and Interview.

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Test. For the present study, an oral domain referenced test was applied to ten students before and after the intervention. Students were selected according to their performance and participation during previous English lessons: four outstanding students, three average students, and three students who show low performance. The test consisted of an oral interview in English, in which the questions ranged from easier to more challenging related to information about personal and education domains. Students who could continue to respond to basic

questions received more challenging questions. Students who were unable to respond to basic questions or more difficult questions did not receive more questions to answer. The purpose of the test was to assess whether students' speaking interaction domain corresponded to A2 scale established by the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001) which states that at this level language users:

Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his / her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need. (p. 24)

Observation. For this research, observation through field notes and video recordings registered information of the students' oral interaction during ten sessions in which they were solving different communicative tasks according to the ones proposed by Jane Willis in her Task-Based Learning framework (1996). This instrument purposefully observed whether students used the foreign language, how they interacted when solving the tasks, and how motivated they seemed towards using English.

Interview. A five question interview in Spanish language was given to ten students at the end of the intervention; these ten students were the same ones selected for the test. Questions included inquiring about their opinion on tasks, how they perceived their interaction and motivation towards speaking in English, how they felt when solving tasks, and what tasks they liked most and why. The purpose of this interview was to know how the intervention affected students' motivation at solving tasks and towards speaking English in the classroom.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Collected data were analyzed through the following methods: Exploratory data analysis for pre- and post-test, and Content analysis for classroom observations and interview.

Pre- and post-test analysis. Ten students were asked to participate in a speaking interaction test which pretended to assess whether students speaking interaction domain corresponded to A2 scale established by the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001).

Students were selected according to their performance and participation during previous English lessons: four outstanding students, three average students, and three students who showed low performance. Each student was separately required to answer twenty questions related to information about personal and educational domains. If the student was able to respond to basic questions or more difficult ones, he / she was given more challenging questions; on the other hand if the student was not able to answer some questions, he / she was not given any more questions.

For the test (Pre and Post) a Rubric was created, based on the CEFR A2 scale. In this Rubric there are three levels of classification: PROFICIENT A2 USER, ADEQUATE A2 USER, AND USER IS BELOW A2, which correspond to the number of questions correctly answered and the way they were answered. In this study “correct” means that the student was able to give appropriate answers for the questions by a word, an utterance or a complete sentence. Ten questions were asked about personal domain (family, friends, hobbies, sports, favorite music / singers / bands, daily activities) and ten more were asked about educational domain (school: actions, parts / places, friends, favorite subjects / teachers, feelings). The number of correct answers given by each student, in the pre- and post-test, were totalized into a grid and then tabulated through an Excel data base. The data were entered and then analyzed using exploratory data analysis since it is a form of analysis in which data are descriptive, self-explanatory, and can be simply understood (Cohen, et al., 2007).

Bar charts were created to see the total of each student’s correct answers, the average of correct answers given by all students, and the percentage of students classified in each one of the Rubric levels.

Classroom observations and interview analysis. Information collected from classroom observations and the interview was analyzed through content analysis. In accordance to Cohen et al. (2007), “content analysis takes texts and analyses, reduces and interrogates them into summary form through the use of both pre-existing categories and emergent themes in order to generate or test a theory” (p. 476).

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In this research, content analysis was initiated after all classroom observations and interviews were carried out and transcribed. Units of analysis were selected and condensed as categories, then a code was assigned for each one of them. Category descriptions were displayed in a chart and relevant findings were summarized combining the results from both the classroom observations and interview.

Classroom observations corresponded to each one of ten class sessions which included two or three communicative tasks or processes such as classifying, matching, ordering, comparing, draft mind map, jigsaw puzzle, and sharing personal experience. Topics for tasks were related to personal domain (family, friends, hobbies, sports, favorite music / singers / bands, daily activities) and to educational domain (school: actions, parts / places, friends, favorite subjects / teachers, feelings).

Questions in the interview included the students' opinion about the communicative tasks, their perception about the tasks usefulness to improve oral interaction and motivation to speak in the foreign language, what tasks were preferred by them and why, and how students felt at solving tasks.

Results

The results obtained from data analysis provide support to this study's hypotheses. In terms of oral interaction in the foreign language, the post-test results indicate an increase in the percentage of correct answers as well as in the percentage of students classified as Adequate A2 User or Proficient A2 user, according to the rubric created.

Observation results indicate that the use of English language was obvious when solving tasks, particularly at the "sharing personal experience" task. With regards to motivation towards speaking English in the classroom, observation results demonstrate an active and spontaneous participation of students, as well as the students' effort to use the foreign language when sharing information. These results also reveal that students consider communicative tasks as important since they promote interaction and motivation towards speaking English in the classroom.

Gains in English Proficiency based on Pre- and Post-test

In general, data from the pre- and post- test indicate that students' level of English improved in the period of ten weeks of carrying out task-based lessons in the classroom.

Test results show that students were able to answer twice as many questions correctly on the post-test than on the pre-test. Figure 1 shows the results of pre and post-test in respect of the average percentage of correct answers given to the twenty questions. The pre-test bar graph

shows an average of 5,5 correct answers while post-test bar graph shows an average of 11,8 correct answers.

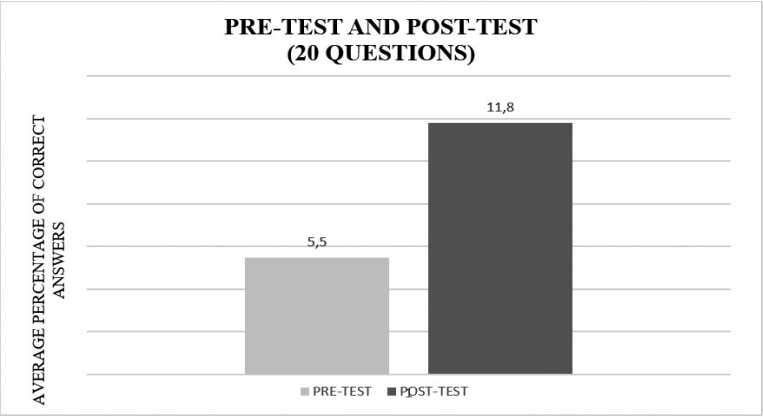


Figure 1. Pre and post-test number of correct answers.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of students who were classified as Below A2 User and the percentage of students who were classified as Adequate A2 User or Proficient A2 User, in respect of correct answers given in the pre and post-test, according to the rubric. It can be observed that in the pre-test, 90% of the ten students were classified as User is Below A2 and 10% of the ten students were classified as Adequate A2 User or Proficient A2 User. In the post-test, 40% of the ten students were ranked as User is Below A2 and 60% were classified as Adequate A2 User or Proficient A2 User.

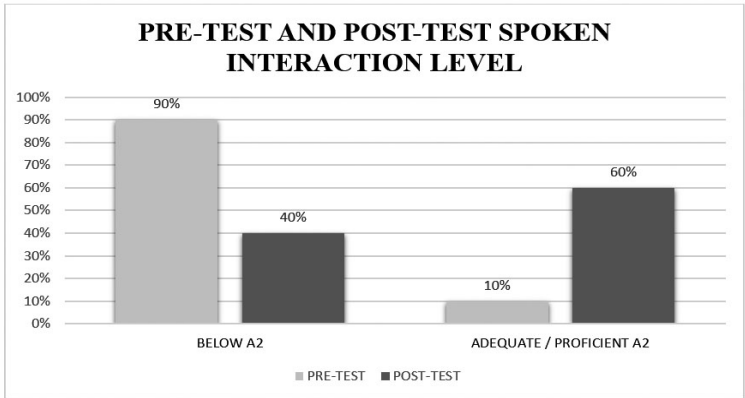


Figure 2. Pre and post-test spoken interaction level

Figures 3 and 4 show the number of students classified in each one of the three levels of the rubric in respect of the results in the pre-test and the post-test. Figure 3 shows that in the pre-test, 9 students were ranked as User is Below A2, none student was classified as Adequate A2 User, and only 1 student was classified as Proficient A2 User. Figure 4 shows that in the post-test the number of students ranked as User is Below A2 decreased to 4, 2 students were classified as Adequate A2 User, and 4 students were ranked as Proficient A2 User.

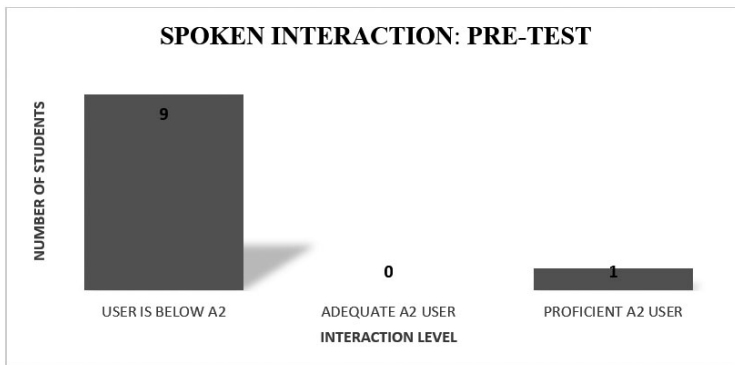


Figure 3. Pre-test spoken interaction

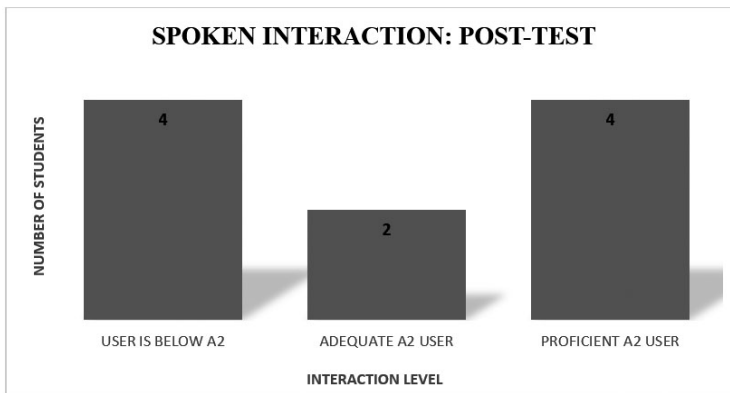


Figure 4. Post-test spoken interaction.

Figure 5 shows the number of correct answers given by each student in the pre- and post-test. It can be seen that the number of correct answers increased in the post-test for all students when compared with the results in the pre-test.

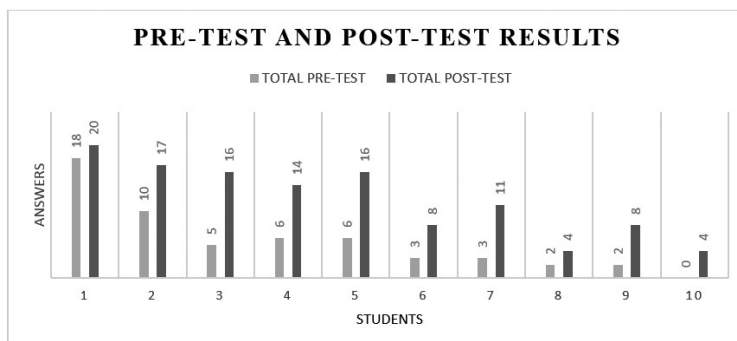


Figure 5. Total of answers given by each student in both the pre-test and post-test

Tasks Promoting Free Spoken Interaction

In general, it was possible to observe that when students were solving communicative tasks, they interacted freely and spontaneously in the foreign language, used the vocabulary, asked, or answered without worrying about making mistakes. Students helped each other with pronunciation, vocabulary, or how to answer. Particularly, outstanding students were frequently consulted: “Let’s ask Elkin, he knows. - Elkin, is husband ‘esposo’? - yes, it is.”³ “-Karen, what is leather craftsman? -I think it is related to making things using leather.”⁴ “Hairdresser? Ah my mom ‘es’ a hairdresser –you don’t say ‘es’, you must say ‘is’ –so, my mom is a hairdresser.”⁵ Students said English words while solving the tasks, for example “Postman corresponds to jobs or professions,”⁶ “This is the image for watch TV,”⁷ “Intelligent positive qualities.” When giving answers to questions, students did not worry about structuring sentences, just using the vocabulary “Falcao, Messi soccer players,” “Free time swim, watch soap operas,” “Teacher economy arrogant.” Outstanding students tried to respond saying some more structured sentences like “On holidays drink beer with friends, play billiards y go to concerts with they,” “At school, study for tests,” “I learning play trumpet.”

³ “Preguntémosle a Elkin, él sabe –Elkin, husband es esposo? –sí.”

⁴ “Karen, qué es leather craftsman? –creo que tiene que ver con hacer cosas en cuero.”

⁵ “Hairdresser? Ah entonces mi mom es hairdresser –no dices ‘es’, dices ‘is’ –entonces mi mom is hairdresser.”

⁶ “Postman va en jobs o professions”

⁷ “Esta es la imagen de watch TV”

Tasks as Motivation to Use the Foreign Language

It was also noticed that when working on most tasks, a great deal of students used both Spanish and English language, but when participating in “sharing personal experience” task, students struggled using the foreign language. Students used the native and the foreign language when sharing experiences or anecdotes as well as when describing images or confirming vocabulary. For example it was heard “That’s go swimming because the man is swimming,”⁸ “The three groups must be genre, instruments, and singers / bands,”⁹ “Study for tests corresponds to actions as well as talk to friends,”¹⁰ “Arrogant, oops! negative quality –yes, like Economy teacher,”¹¹ “Lazy is ‘perezoso’, isn’t it? –Haha like Social Studies teacher.”¹² . When participating in “sharing personal experience” task, students used Spanish but incorporated English words: “I live with my mother, I also live with my father and sister,”¹³ “In my free time, I play soccer and my parents sometimes take me to play bowling, bowling? At ‘Salitre’ Coliseum Lanes, near ‘Simon Bolivar’ Park.”¹⁴

Students’ Perceptions about Tasks

In general, students reported in the interviews (in Spanish) that communicative tasks are excellent, interesting, and practical since they are different from traditional lessons. They motivate students to speak in English, promote participation, are a useful tool to learn the foreign language, help develop speaking and listening skills, as well as creating the need to talk without worrying about accuracy. When asked about their opinion it was affirmed that tasks “are cool because we changed things we were doing,”¹⁵ “They make us interact,”¹⁶ “They are different from current English lessons,”¹⁷ “They are more practical than theoretical things.”¹⁸

⁸ “Eso es go swimming porque el señor está nadando.”

⁹ “Los tres grupos deben ser genre, instruments y singers / bands”

¹⁰ “Study for tests va en actions, también talk to Friends”

¹¹ “Arrogant, uy negative quality –sí como el professor de economía”

¹² “Lazy es perezoso, cierto? –hahaha como la teacher de social studies”

¹³ “Yo live con mi mother, también live father, sister”

¹⁴ “In mi free time, soccer player y algunas veces mis papás me llevan a jugar bolos, Bowling? In lanes coliseum cerca del park Simon Bolivar”.

¹⁵ “Son chéveres porque cambiamos lo que llevábamos haciendo”

¹⁶ “Nos hacen interactuar”

¹⁷ “Son diferentes de las clases de inglés que se hacen”

¹⁸ “Son más prácticas que teóricas”

About the statement that tasks promote students' interaction, some students said that "Everybody participated,"¹⁹ "There were people that before were not interested but during these lessons there were many people that participated,"²⁰ "As everybody saw each other talking in English, they were not worried about people's comments,"²¹ "One did not any more feel ashamed for participating."²² When talking about the usefulness of tasks, students stated that "I liked when we saw videos because we learn to listen,"²³ "Speaking is the best way to learn another language,"²⁴ "They were useful to us learn how to talk more in English,"²⁵ "They help us to improve our vocabulary a lot,"²⁶ "I think before of this I hadn't been able to talk and to answer in such a way."²⁷ Students also affirmed that tasks create a need to talk freely "Here, everybody talked without feeling ashamed, they needed to talk,"²⁸ "There were people that dared to speak no matter if that was wrong,"²⁸ "Many students dared to talk despite pronunciation was not good."²⁹

Students' Preferred Tasks

It was also affirmed that students preferred tasks related to motivating topics or those which represent a challenge to be solved. About motivating topics it was said that "I liked when we talked about our hobbies, about our favorite music,"³¹ "I liked so much the free time video,"³² "I liked all activities because they were about topics that called our attention,"³³ "When we were organizing actions that you

¹⁹ "Todas las personas participaban"

²⁰ "Hubo personas que antes no se interesaban pero en esas clases había mucha gente que participaba"

²¹ "Como veían a todos hablando en inglés, no se preocupaban del qué dirán ni nada de eso"

²² "A uno ya no le daba pena participar"

²³ "Me gustó cuando vimos videos porque se aprende a oír"

²⁴ "La forma oral es como la mejor forma de aprender otro idioma"

²⁵ "Sirvieron para que uno aprendiera a hablar más en inglés"

²⁶ "Nos ayudan a mejorar mucho nuestro vocabulario"

²⁷ "Creo que antes de esto no hubiera sido capaz de hablar y dar respuestas así"

²⁸ "Acá todos hablaban sin que les diera pena, se veían en la necesidad de hablar"

²⁹ "Había gente que se atrevía a hablar así estuviera mal"

³⁰ "Muchos se lanzaron a hablar así no estuviera bien la pronunciación"

³¹ "Me gustó cuando hablamos de nuestros pasatiempos, sobre nuestra música favorita"

³² "Me gustó mucho la del video del free time"

³³ "Me gustaron todas las actividades porque tenían temas que a uno le llamaban la atención"

displayed on the TV.”³⁴ When referring to tasks like jigsaw puzzle or mind maps, students affirmed that “I liked the one about the words we knew, when the mind map,”³⁵ “The jigsaw puzzle, the one about the school map because we had to set pieces,”³⁶ “The jigsaw puzzle and the mind map because we had to think a lot, look carefully, not doing wrong,”³⁷ “They help us to think through doing, organizing sentences, organizing images, joining parts.”³⁸

Conclusions

This study attempted to establish the effect of communicative group tasks such as classifying, matching, ordering, comparing, draft mind map, jigsaw puzzles, and sharing personal experience, on students’ spoken interaction in English as a foreign language, and the effect of these tasks on students’ motivation towards using English language to communicate in the classroom. The findings provide support to the literature reviewed and allow to conclude that there was a positive impact of communicative group tasks on students’ speaking skills, and that these tasks promoted free and spontaneous oral interaction among students when solving them.

The tests in this study made it possible to conclude that students improved their English spoken interaction and interviewed students appreciated tasks as a useful tool for getting that improvement. This conclusion is consistent with some assertions reviewed in the literature including Plews and Zhao (2010), who state that tasks integrate the development of language skills and are beneficial for increasing students’ communicative skills. Yim (2009) also affirms that participants achieve confidence in speaking, and a study by Tabatabaei and Atefeh (2011) also asserts that tasks help learners’ interaction skills improve.

Chuang’s (2010) study demonstrates that participants feel that TBL activities train their oral skills as well as problem solving and critical thinking skills. This is re-affirmed in the present study when students reported that solving tasks strengthened these skills because

³⁴ “Cuando estábamos organizando las acciones que nos colocabas en el televisor”

³⁵ “Me gustó la de las palabras que sabíamos cuando el mind map”

³⁶ “La del rompecabezas del plano del colegio porque tocaba organizar las fichas”

³⁷ “La del rompecabezas y la del mind map porque teníamos que pensar muchísimo, mirar bien, no equivocarnos”

³⁸ “Lo ayudan a uno a pensar haciendo, armando oraciones, organizando imágenes, uniendo las partes”

they involved processes such as thinking through doing, matching words or sentences to images, grouping vocabulary, solving jigsaw puzzles or mind maps, organizing and joining parts, among others.

Naznean's (n.d.) study concluded that TBL provides variety of learning opportunities for students no matter their level or capability. The current research permitted to observe that all students, outstanding and weaker, participated actively when solving the tasks and tried to do their best when using English, particularly in "sharing personal experience" tasks. These findings contradict Choo and Too (2012), who stated that teachers detected that low-level students were not able to cope with tasks and that only outstanding students were able to achieve the goals.

Studies such as the ones of Ilin, Inozu and Yumru (2007) and Xiongyong and Moses (2011) state that tasks facilitate the communicative practice of language items and provide a relaxed environment that promotes the target language use, the activation of learners' needs and skills interaction. This can be concluded from the present study as well since it could be observed that students struggled using the foreign language and helped each other with pronunciation, vocabulary or how to answer. Many students, freely and spontaneously, dared to use the vocabulary, asked, or answered despite their mistakes. Besides, interviewed students stated that tasks created a need to talk freely, helped to improve their vocabulary, and that these activities were useful to talk more in English language.

The reviewed literature and the current study permit to conclude that tasks' characteristics such as group interaction, nature of topics, and types, greatly influenced the students' motivation and participation towards speaking English in the classroom. With respect to group interaction, Yim (2009) stated that having students working together allows them to stay interested and actively involved. Chuang (2010) affirms that the thing that students liked most about tasks was that they could share and exchange information with their partners. Plews & Zhao (2010), Barnard & Viet (2010), Xiongyong & Moses (2011), Jong (2006), Chuang (2010), and Tabatabaei & Atefeh (2011) highlighted the benefit of tasks for increasing students' intrinsic motivation, participation, and collaborative learning. Tabatabaei & Atefeh (2011) also considered that tasks promote a creative, lively, and collaborative learning environment. In the present study, students expressed that they liked helping each other for language items or those related to tasks solving, and that tasks are better if they are solved with friends.

Besides, it could be noticed that students liked sharing information and that there was cooperation of students for solving the different tasks.

Regarding the nature of topics and type of tasks, Thanh and Huan (2012) affirm that learners were highly motivated when working towards personally meaningful goals and challenging but achievable tasks. In the present study, students expressed that they liked tasks related to motivating topics such as hobbies, music, friends, and school among others. Students also manifested that they preferred tasks which represented a challenge to be solved like jigsaw puzzles or mind maps.

In terms of participation and motivation towards speaking English, Chuang (2010) states that students are keen on learning actively not passively. Yim (2009) affirms that students display more positive attitudes towards learning English. Choo and Too (2012) assert that teachers reported having improved classrooms dynamics and observed effective team work, social interaction and lively atmosphere in the classroom. This study allowed to observe that tasks promoted interaction, and every student wanted to participate without feeling ashamed. Interviewed students expressed that the tasks motivated them to speak English and that they promoted active participation. These two studies dissent from Yim (2009) and Chuang (2010) among others, in which teachers expressed negative perceptions related to classroom management when solving tasks because of the noise that they were not able to control.

Finally, it can be concluded from the present study that tasks motivate students to speak in English since they are different from traditional lessons and because they are practical. This is in accordance with Thanh and Huan (2012)'s study, which asserted that students preferred TBL instead of traditional methods.

The present study offers information about the effect of communicative tasks on students' spoken interaction in English and on their motivation towards speaking English as a FL in the classroom. However, there are some undesirable conditions that should be considered. The development of oral tasks in the classroom implied a noisy environment, but this was also intensified by external noise from outside the classroom that sometimes affected the lesson development. There were some limitations related to the availability of audio visual devices since in some opportunities it was too difficult to access to them. Consequently, the order of the planned tasks had to be modified or they had to be postponed. Occasional unplanned school activities negatively interfered with the continuity of some lessons and again they had to be restarted or completed afterwards. It would have been profitable to

develop these communicative tasks with students belonging to other classes, but it was not possible because the large number of students in each class would have implied the creation of more resources in not enough time.

In a subsequent research, some points could be considered as the ones related to the continuity of this project, the inclusion of tasks in wider lesson plan methodologies like Ubd or Ganag, the implementation of tasks for other communicative skills, as well as the creation of resources according to school grades, students' ages, and their topics of interest.

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Lexical Competence and Reading Comprehension: A Pilot Study with Heritage Language Learners of Spanish¹

Competencia Léxica y Comprensión de Lectura:
Un Estudio Piloto con Estudiantes de Español como
Lengua de Herencia

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Abstract

The basic questions that guide this study are: (a) what percentage of vocabulary from a passage would a Spanish learner need to know to demonstrate 'adequate' (a score of 70 out of 100) comprehension of it? And, (b) what type of curve would best describe the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension? Fifty-three students enrolled in two courses of Spanish as a Heritage Language (SHL) at a metropolitan university read a newspaper article, underlined the unknown vocabulary and then answered a reading comprehension test. Our findings suggest, as in previous studies for English as a Second Language (ESL), that a 98% of vocabulary coverage is needed to show adequate comprehension of an authentic passage. The curve that best describes this relationship was not linear as they concluded but was similar to a logarithmic function, which appears to suggest a relationship that obeys to a law of diminishing returns for Spanish as a Second Language (SSL) reading.

Keywords: Lexical competence, reading comprehension, Spanish as a Heritage Language

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Resumen

Los dos interrogantes básicos que se abordan en este estudio son a) ¿Qué porcentaje de vocabulario de un pasaje debe conocer un estudiante de español para demostrar una comprensión ‘adecuada’ (un puntaje de 70 sobre 100)? y b) ¿Qué tipo de curva es la que mejor describe la relación entre vocabulario conocido y comprensión de lectura? Cincuenta y tres estudiantes matriculados en dos cursos de español como lengua de herencia en una universidad metropolitana leyeron un artículo periodístico, subrayaron el vocabulario desconocido y luego respondieron un cuestionario de comprensión de lectura. Nuestros resultados coinciden con los de algunos estudios previos para el inglés como segunda lengua, en donde se concluye que se necesita un 98% de cobertura de vocabulario para demostrar una comprensión adecuada de un pasaje auténtico. La curva que mejor describe esta relación resultó no ser lineal como en estudios previos, sino similar a una función logarítmica, lo que sugiere una relación que obedece a una ley de rendimientos decrecientes para la lectura en español como segunda lengua.

Palabras claves: Competencia léxica, comprensión de lectura, español como lengua de herencia

Resumo

Os dois interrogantes básicos que se abordam neste estudo são: a) Que porcentagem de vocabulário de uma passagem um estudante de espanhol deve conhecer para demonstrar uma compreensão ‘adequada’ (uma pontuação de 70 sobre 100)? e b) Que tipo de curva é a que melhor descreve a relação entre vocabulário conhecido e compreensão de leitura? Cinquenta e três estudantes matriculados em dois cursos de espanhol como língua de herança em uma universidade metropolitana leram um artigo jornalístico, sublinharam o vocabulário desconhecido e depois responderam um questionário de compreensão de leitura. Nossos resultados coincidem com os de alguns estudos prévios para o inglês como segunda língua, onde se conclui que se necessita um 98% de cobertura de vocabulário para demonstrar uma compreensão adequada de uma passagem autêntica. A curva que melhor descreve esta relação resultou não ser lineal como em estudos prévios, senão similar a uma função logarítmica, o que sugere uma relação que obedece a uma lei de rendimentos decrescentes para a leitura em espanhol como segunda língua.

Palavras chaves: Competência léxica, compreensão de leitura, espanhol como língua de herança

Introduction

After several years of playing a secondary role in language teaching, vocabulary has recently gained prominence. This is in part due to the development of new language teaching approaches that grant it an important role in the process of second language acquisition and teaching. Applied linguists are now paying more attention to the study of vocabulary acquisition, the way learners store and retrieve words, and the pedagogical implications arising from these findings. Several research studies (Lafford, Collentine & Karp, 2003; Mochida & Harrington, 2006; and Read, 2000, among others) have found high correlations between vocabulary knowledge and other linguistic skills. While Kelly (1991) and Mecartty (2000) established a positive relationship between lexical competence and the development of listening skills, Hawas (1990), Koda (1989), Laufer (1992) and Meccartty (2000) found similar results for reading comprehension.

In particular, these studies about the relationship between lexical knowledge and reading comprehension have been done primarily for English as a first and second language. In addition, similar studies have been conducted for the case of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in several countries. Some of these studies have been replicated for other languages, but there are still very few studies focusing on Spanish.

Scholars in the field of Heritage Languages (HL) have begun to explore the lexical competence of their speakers and its impact on the process of language (re)acquisition and teaching. For example, Polinsky and Kagan (2007) found high correlations between lexical proficiency and grammar knowledge for different heritage languages (Russian, Polish, Armenian, Korean, Lithuanian and Spanish). Fairclough (2013) designed a lexical recognition test containing words from *A Frequency Dictionary of Spanish: Core Vocabulary for Learners* (Davies, 2006). Her aim was to measure the vocabulary size of heritage language learners of Spanish in the USA. She concluded that receptive learners (those who understand Spanish but have limited oral skills or are unable to speak it) recognize around 60% (approximately 3000 items) of the 5000 most frequent words in Spanish, and that intermediate students recognize around 90% (about 4500 words from the 5000 most frequent). She then indicates that to be able to succeed in intermediate level classes designed for these learners, where an extensive reading of authentic material as well as writing is required, receptive learners would need to increase their lexical repertoire.

Since no empirical studies were found regarding the relationship between reading comprehension and lexical competence for heritage

language learners (HLL) of Spanish, this work aims to contribute by beginning a discussion on this matter. Moreover, it will address the question of the existence of a lexical threshold, namely, the possible existence of an approximate percentage of words that students should know in order to understand an authentic reading passage.

Literature Review

Bravo (2011) notes that one of the first appearances of the concept of lexical competence can be found in Richards (1976). This researcher does not use the expression *lexical competence* but instead refers to *knowing a word*. The basic premises of his proposal are listed below:

1. Vocabulary knowledge of native speakers continues to expand in adult life, in contrast to the relative stability of their grammatical competence.
2. Knowing a word means knowing the degree of probability of encountering that word in speech or print. For many words, we also know the sort of words most likely to be found to be associated with the word.
3. Knowing a word implies knowing the limitations on the use of the word according to variations of function and situation.
4. Knowing a word means knowing the syntactic behavior associated with the word.
5. Knowing a word entails knowledge of the underlying form of a word and the derivations that can be made from it.
6. Knowing a word entails knowledge of the network of associations between that word and other words in the language.
7. Knowing a word means knowing the semantic value of the word.
8. Knowing a word means knowing many of the different meanings associated with a word. (Richards, 1976, p. 83)

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As noted by López-Mezquita (2007), Richards' proposal is the starting point of a significant number of studies with different research approaches and has served as a framework for further studies on lexical competence. The most recognized and used taxonomy that compiles and further elaborates on Richard's components is Nation's (2001). For

Nation, knowing a word means being able to account for components shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Nation's taxonomy of the components involved in knowing a word

Form	spoken	What does the word sound like? How is the word pronounced?
	written	What does the word look like? How is the word written and spelled?
	word parts	What parts are recognizable in this word? What word parts are needed to express the meaning?
Meaning	form and meaning	What meaning does this word form signal? What word form can be used to express the meaning?
	concept and referents	What is included in the concept? What items can the concept refer to?
	associations	What other words does this make us think of? What other words could we use instead of this one?
Use	grammatical functions	In what patterns does the word occur? In what patterns must we use this word?
	collocations	What words or types of words occur with this one?
		What words or types of words must we use with this one?
	constraints on use	Where, when, and how often would we expect to meet this word?
	(register, frequency ...)	Where, when, and how often can we use this word?

(Nation, 2001, p. 27)

The inclusion of the spoken form (pronunciation) and collocations stands out in this new model. In addition, Nation distinguishes between receptive and productive vocabulary, recognizing that productive skills require higher levels of knowledge than receptive skills.

Two other dimensions that have been traditionally studied as part of lexical competence are vocabulary *size* and *depth*. To refer to vocabulary *size* (the amount of known vocabulary) some authors use the term *breadth*, while for referring to the quality of vocabulary knowledge (the depth of knowledge of words), the term used is *depth*. Qian (1999) points out the lack of empirical studies that document the relationship between breadth and depth of vocabulary in reading comprehension. In a study with college students, he explored the role of breadth and depth of vocabulary in reading comprehension. He concludes that for ESL students knowing a minimum of 3000 word families, there is a high correlation between the scores in a reading comprehension test and those in two vocabulary tests (one testing breadth and the other testing depth).

Bravo (2011) confirms the results obtained by Qian for EFL students. The author measured the vocabulary size of thirty-three university students at a Chilean university by using the *Vocabulary Levels Tests*. She also determined the depth of knowledge of this same vocabulary by using the *Word Associates Test*. In addition, she assessed the students' level of reading comprehension using the reading comprehension section of the *Test of English as a Foreign Language* (TOEFL). This researcher concluded that the two dimensions – breadth and depth of knowledge of vocabulary– are strongly related to reading comprehension. However, the author observed that the two factors do not predict reading comprehension with the same certainty. The strongest and most significant relationship that she found was between breadth and reading comprehension at the 3000 word level and academic vocabulary.

Both Bravo and Qian, among other linguists, also recognize that effective reading comprehension is not only the product of a high lexical competence (vocabulary size and depth). For them, reading is a complex process that requires many more skills besides lexical competence. In other words, for effective reading comprehension to take place, several factors play an important role. Among these factors, we can mention the following: a) grammar knowledge, b) previous cultural as well as topic knowledge, c) the effective use of reading strategies such as inference of meanings, d) personal skills to process information, e) personal motivation, and also f) the reader's ability to engage with the text, among others. However, while these factors are all very important

in determining comprehension, it is the understanding of vocabulary that has shown to have the greatest impact, as discussed below.

As cited in Cartaya (2011), the relationship between reading comprehension and lexical competence had already been demonstrated for L1 reading by the eighties (Anderson & Freebody 1981; Stanovich 1986; Sternberg 1987). For L2 Spanish, Mccarty (2000) examined the relationship between grammatical and lexical knowledge in reading and auditory tasks with college students. He found that both grammatical and lexical knowledge correlated significantly with reading, but only lexical knowledge accounted for both the variation in reading comprehension and listening comprehension.

Koda (2005) presents evidence to support the idea of a bidirectional nature of this relationship according to which vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are “functionally interdependent.” The author states that both vocabulary comprehension and reading comprehension feed each other. That is to say, a reasonable amount of vocabulary contributes to being a good reader, and being a good reader is a key factor to acquiring more vocabulary. Readers learn vocabulary through reading and consequently increase their vocabulary by improving their reading skills.

Laufer (1997) concludes that the greatest obstacle that the reader faces to comprehend a text is the lack of vocabulary. She then suggests that the starting point for increasing comprehension would be to guarantee that students acquire a lexical competence that prevents interpretation errors and leads to successful inferences from the context. The reader should recognize enough sight words in order to gain a lexical competence that helps to overcome the obstacles that impede reading comprehension.

The question then arises: How much vocabulary does a second language reader need to know in order to evade the obstacles that arise in reading comprehension? In other words, what is the minimum amount of words L2 learners must have to be able to infer meaning and have a better understanding of a reading passage? Laufer (1989, 1992, and 1997), as well as Nation (1990, 2001 and, 2006), have agreed on postulating the existence of such a threshold in what is known as the *Lexical Threshold Hypothesis*. According to this hypothesis, there is a minimum amount of vocabulary that L2 learners need to possess in order to reach acceptable reading comprehension.

The first attempt to answer the question about the lexical threshold was Laufer (1989). The author investigated how much vocabulary L2

English students from the University of Haifa needed to know to obtain a minimum score of 55% in a reading comprehension task. The score of 55% was the passing score required at the University of Haifa. This researcher asked the participants to underline the unknown words from a reading passage and then she adjusted the results with a translation test. From the experiment, she concluded that the amount of vocabulary necessary to understand a text was 95%

After this initial attempt, there were and still are many others that seek to confirm this finding. Nevertheless, this still remains the most cited study and the frame of reference in the search for the lexical threshold in reading comprehension. However, the methodology used in this study was highly criticized, and even more controversial was the criterion of 55 % used for proper reading comprehension.

Years later, Hu and Nation (2000) compared the effect of 80%, 90%, 95% and 100% text coverage on reading comprehension of fictional texts among college ESL learners. They concluded that none of the participants reached comprehension at 80% coverage and only a few students at 90% coverage reached an acceptable comprehension. Some of the participants comprehended at 95% coverage, but most did not. According to these findings, the minimum lexical coverage that is necessary for an adequate comprehension of a fictional text is above 80%. Furthermore, since coverage of 95% guarantees between 35% and 41% of comprehension for only some students, they conclude that a lexical coverage between 98% and 99% is necessary to achieve an adequate comprehension of a text.

More recently, Schmitt, Jiang, and Grabe (2011), in their study with ESL students at different universities around the world, seeks to determine the nature of the relationship between the percentage of known words in an academic text and comprehension of said text. A total of 661 intermediate ESL students from eight different countries were given a lexical recognition test with words from two reading passages, and they were later asked to answer a reading comprehension test about the passages. The results of this study confirm Hu and Nation's (2000) assertion that 98% of lexical coverage is needed to achieve a satisfactory comprehension of reading texts. The authors of this study also show that the nature of the relationship between the percentage of lexical coverage and the percentage of reading comprehension is linear. It means that the more words the student knows, the more comprehension is achieved at proportional increments.

To these empirical studies on the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension we can add the contribution of Davies (2005)

for Spanish as a second language. The objective of his investigation was to determine the relationship between vocabulary range and text coverage for Spanish as a Second Language. The author concludes that with a limited vocabulary of 1000 frequent words, a learner of Spanish as a second language is capable of recognizing between 75% and 80% of all words in a written text in fiction, or non-fiction and around 88% of all the words in oral discourse. He also finds that after the 1000 word threshold, increasing vocabulary does not augment comprehension significantly. With double the amount of words (2000), the lexical coverage only increases between 5% and 8%. Accordingly, with a vocabulary of 3000 words, lexical coverage increases only between 2% and 4%. This is explained in Table 2. The author concludes that a “law of diminishing returns” is visible here – learning additional vocabulary after the first 1000 words does not necessarily imply a proportional increase in lexical coverage.

Table 2. Percent coverage by groups of words according to Davies (2005)

	Fiction	Non fiction	Oral
1st thousand words	76.0	79.6	87.8
2nd thousand words	8.0	6.5	4.9
3rd thousand words	4.2	3.5	2.3
FIRST 3000 words	88.2	89.6	94.0

It can be seen from Table 2 that, with a vocabulary of 3000 words, a student of Spanish as a Second Language would be able to understand between 80 and 90 percent of any written text and 94% of a typical native speakers’ conversation. These percentages are lower than the ones found for ESL by Laufer (1989) and Hu and Nation (2000).

Davies does not explicitly state it, nor is it the aim of his work, to describe the nature of the curve that best accounts for the relationship between known vocabulary and reading comprehension. However, from his findings, it can easily be inferred that if a law of diminishing returns is in effect, the type of curve that best describe this relationship would be a function of the type seen in Figure 1 and not a straight line like that of Figure 2, as Schmitt et al. (2011) concluded.

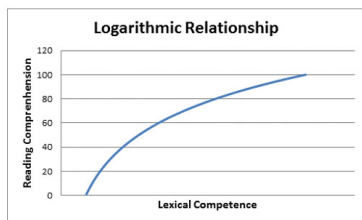


Figure 1. Relation between lexical competence and reading comprehension (Davies, 2005).

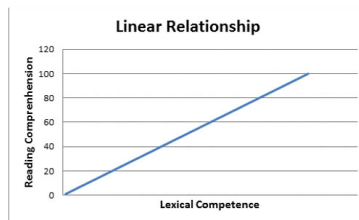


Figure 2. Relation between lexical competence and reading comprehension (Schmitt et al., 2011)

Indeed, for the latter, there is a proportional relationship between the amount of words known and reading comprehension, which means that comprehension increases proportionally with the amount of known vocabulary. Davies, on the other hand, asserts that knowing a larger number of words does not necessarily increase reading comprehension proportionally, given that the increments are progressively smaller with each gain in word knowledge. The best graph to illustrate this assertion is that of Figure 1.

The studies discussed so far are some of the most representative exploring the relationship between lexical competence and reading comprehension and some of the most cited studies for English and Spanish L2. Research on the same topic in Spanish as a heritage language (SHL) was found to be quite scarce, in part because this is a relatively recent field of study. As Kondo-Brown (2010) notes, there are no studies related to vocabulary and reading comprehension for SHL, except Rodrigo, McQuillan and Krashen (1996), a quasi-experimental study that examined the effect of free reading in the academic vocabulary learning of these students. The authors concluded that free reading is beneficial for heritage speakers as it contributes to the acquisition of vocabulary and improves the students' academic repertoire.

Methodology

Research Design

In order to acquire information on the relationship between lexical competence and comprehension of authentic texts for Heritage Language Learners of Spanish (HLLS), a pilot study was conducted with two intermediate groups at a major urban university in the Southwest of USA. The basic questions that guided this study were: (a) what percentage of words from an authentic passage would an

HLLS need to know to demonstrate ‘adequate’ (a score of 70 out of 100) comprehension of it? And, (b) what type of curve (logarithmic --Davies, 2005-- or linear --Schmitt, Jiang & Grabe 2011) would best describe the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension?

It is worth noting that 70% was chosen to be the cut point for ‘adequate’ comprehension to reflect what most USA higher education institutions consider to be a passing grade.

Participants

The participants in this study were 53 (34 female and 19 male) students enrolled in two intermediate level SHL courses at the above-mentioned university. They were placed at this level after taking the institutional placement test for heritage Spanish learners.

Data Collection Instruments

The two instruments utilized for this study were a reading passage and a reading comprehension questionnaire designed and piloted by the author. The passage, *El Clima Enloquecido*, was an authentic newspaper article about climate change, containing 441 words. The questionnaire contained 10 multiple-choice comprehension questions, each with four choices.

The format chosen was that of a multiple-choice test which is widely used to test not only general knowledge but also reading comprehension. Schmitt et al (2011) refer to this format as “a standard in the field of reading research” (p. 32). Multiple choice tests have the advantage of being very practical to grade and they are very objective. Furthermore if, as suggested by Nation (2009), “4 choices are given, the learners have only a 25 percent chance of guessing correctly.” (p. 32)

All of the questions asked students to draw inferences from the text which according to Nation:

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...involves taking messages from the text that are not explicitly stated but which could be justified by reference to the text. This can involve working out the main idea of the text, looking at the organization of the text, determining the writer’s attitude to the topic, interpreting characters, and working out cause and effect and other conjunction relationships which might not be explicitly stated. (Nation, 2009, p. 34)

Procedure and Data Analysis

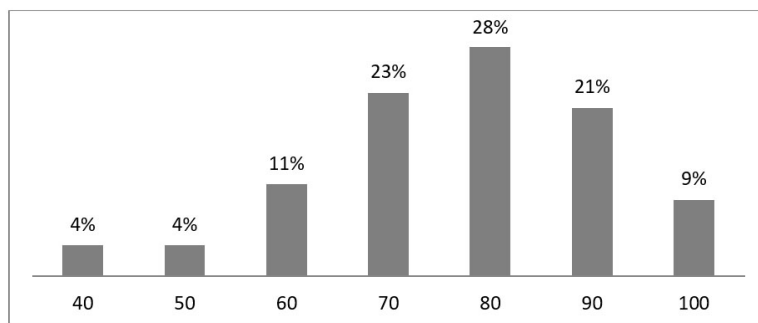
After distributing the newspaper article, students were instructed to read it entirely, to identify the unknown words and underline them. Then, the reading comprehension questionnaire was handed out, and they were asked to read the article at least once more, and as many more times as needed, to answer the ten comprehension questions. Students had a total of 45 minutes to finish the test that was graded on a 0-100 scale assigning 10 points for each right answer and 0 to every wrong answer.

Table 3 shows the reading comprehension scores with their corresponding frequencies and Figure 3 is the graph of their distribution.

Table 3. Reading comprehension scores and frequencies

Score	frequency	%
40	2	4%
50	2	4%
60	6	11%
70	12	23%
80	15	28%
90	11	21%
100	5	9%
Average = 70	53	100%

Figure 3. Distribution of score frequencies for the reading comprehension test



Subsequently, the underlined words in each one of the tests were counted to get the percentage of known words per student, and different ranges of lexical coverage were established for the whole sample.

Finally, the average of the test scores on reading comprehension for each of the different ranges of lexical competence was found and all the data were tabulated.

Results

Figure 4 shows the average of the test scores on reading comprehension for each of the different ranges of lexical competence found. The graph demonstrates that a comprehension score of 70% is achieved somewhere between the 97.5 and 98.3 ranges of lexical competence, which seems to confirm Schmitt's findings for ESL. Our first question would then be answered by saying that this group of HLL demonstrates 'adequate' (a score of 70 out of 100) comprehension of an authentic reading passage when they recognize around 98% of the vocabulary from the reading passage.

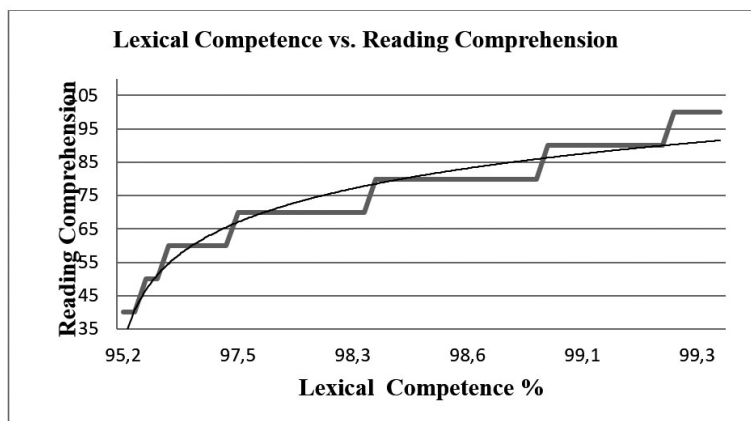


Figure 4. Average reading comprehension per range of lexical competence

Figure 4 reveals a nonlinear relationship, i.e. it does not reflect a proportional relationship between lexical competence and reading comprehension. Instead, it corresponds to a logarithmic function that would better reflect the law of diminishing returns suggested by Davies. In other words, in this particular experiment, greater lexical knowledge did not necessarily lead to a proportional increase in reading comprehension.

As mentioned before other factors besides lexical competence may affect reading comprehension. Factors such as the reader's grammatical

knowledge as well as his or her familiarity with the discourse structure of the text must contribute in some way to the understanding of a written text. Also, textual factors, such as length, difficulty, or theme and individual factors, such as prior knowledge on the topic, interest, motivation, and ability to make inferences, must also influence a reader's ability to comprehend a text. Perhaps further studies of all of the above factors that affect reading comprehension would help us explain the type of graph found here.

Conclusions

It can be concluded then that at least for this group, the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension did not increase proportionally. The answer to our second question would be that the nature of the relationship between the percentage of known words and the score obtained in a test of reading comprehension of an academic text, obeys the law of diminishing returns, best represented by a logarithmic function, as suggested by Davies (2005).

One of the limitations of this study was the limited number of participants (only 53 students) and the fact that beginner and advanced students were not included in this study, only intermediate. For this reason, it is impossible to generalize these results to all SHL. Another limitation was the reliability of the lexical competence instrument, that is, the underlying procedure used to measure the students' lexical recognition that was criticized in Laufer's (1989) study with ESL students. Due to time restrictions, no additional tool was used to adjust the results obtained or to ensure that the students did not overestimate or underestimate their vocabulary knowledge. For future studies, it would be advisable to find a more reliable measure of lexical competence, such as a lexical recognition test and to use additional measures of reading comprehension such as reading recall protocol instruments, translation tasks, summaries, cloze tests, etc. Future empirical studies could also address the same research questions but with different types of texts such as fiction and non-fiction.

As of July 1, 2012, 53 million was the estimated Hispanic population of the United States (17% of the total) and it is projected that by the year 2060, it will reach 128.8 million residents (31% of the total). Not surprisingly, Spanish is the second most-spoken language in USA with over 800,000 students (more than half of the total FL enrollment) taking Spanish classes in institutions of higher education (MLA survey, Fall 2006). The high demand for Spanish classes not only for second language learners but also for heritage language learners is

evident. In spite of this, research in the area is still scarce and language professionals continue to base their pedagogical practice, curriculum design as well as instructional and testing materials on research findings for ESL. Given the growing demand for Spanish as a foreign and as a heritage language, it is imperative that scholars in the field start conducting their own research to identify effective teaching practices and curricular design.

The importance of this study is that it helps corroborate the findings of previous research in ESL for SHL. According to these studies, vocabulary knowledge plays a much more important role in reading comprehension than it was previously recognized. If as shown here a large vocabulary is indeed the key to understanding and dissecting a text, it is clear that students need to devote more time and energy to the acquisition of certain high-frequency words. Instructional as well as testing material and curriculum design should also reflect this reality in order to achieve better results in the process of (re)acquisition of Spanish.

As for lexical competence, it should be promoted from the basic levels and it should be reinforced throughout all courses. The implementation of all the traditional techniques of learning vocabulary, such as using high-frequency words lists, vocabulary flashcards, semantic maps, or word families as well as instruction on the use of the dictionary, are highly recommended. Extensive reading activities are also very effective, especially at intermediate and advanced levels, to promote the development of a greater lexical repertoire. Although it has been widely recognized the important role that extensive reading plays in vocabulary acquisition and in the development of strategies and reading skills, this activity is often neglected by students and instructors. For this reason, it is recommended that instructors provide sufficient opportunities for reading in Spanish, both inside and outside the classroom.

The nature of the relationship between lexical competence and reading comprehension found here makes evident that although vocabulary is an important factor in reading comprehension, it is not the only one. In fact, a large number of variables (such as grammatical knowledge, background knowledge, awareness of discourse structure, etc.) make independent contributions to reading comprehension. A thorough examination of all the variables that influence reading comprehension is impossible to accomplish in a single study. Therefore, it is recommended to continue conducting both qualitative and quantitative research to advance, confirm and validate previous results

for ESL. Hopefully, in the future, these findings will be reflected in effective teaching practices and curriculum design as well as appropriate instructional materials for SHL.

Researchers, instructors, students and all those committed to the development and maintenance of heritage languages and advanced biliteracy for their speakers, need a deeper understanding of the complexity of the reading process. SHL students, in particular, pose new challenges to instructors. With this population, the principal language instruction objective pursued is to maximize the use of resources that these students already possess. However, once heritage learners have achieved this lexical access threshold, it is important not to disregard the other factors that might affect reading comprehension as well.

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Teachers and Students' Stereotypes about the Teaching and Learning of English¹

Estereotipos de los Profesores y Estudiantes sobre la
Enseñanza y Aprendizaje del Inglés

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Abstract

This article is the result of a research study that examined teachers and undergraduate students' stereotypes about English teaching and learning processes at a private university in Tunja, Colombia. The research was carried out with six English teachers and twenty undergraduate students from first and second semesters. The instruments used to collect data were semi-structured interviews and questionnaires from both teachers and students. A grounded theory method was used to analyze the gathered information. Findings demonstrate that language teachers created stereotypes about students' academic work, behavior, and attitudes due to their experiences with them as their teachers, and particularly according to students' academic majors. Students also evidence stereotypes about the teaching and learning of English, according to their experiences in English class.

Keywords: English language, language teachers, teaching and learning process, stereotypes, undergraduate students.

Resumen

Este artículo es el resultado de un estudio investigativo el cual tiene como finalidad compartir los resultados después de examinar los estereotipos de los profesores y estudiantes de pregrado sobre los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje del inglés en una universidad privada en Tunja, Colombia. La

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investigación se llevó a cabo con seis profesores de inglés y veinte estudiantes de pregrado pertenecientes a primer y segundo semestre. Los instrumentos usados para la recopilación de datos fueron: entrevistas semi-estructuradas y cuestionarios aplicados a profesores y estudiantes. Los resultados demostraron que los profesores de idiomas crearon estereotipos sobre el trabajo académico de los estudiantes, comportamiento y actitudes debido a sus experiencias al relacionarse con ellos como sus profesores, en especial de acuerdo con el programa académico de los estudiantes. Los estudiantes también evidencian los estereotipos sobre la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés de acuerdo con sus experiencias en el salón de clase de inglés.

Palabras clave: Idioma inglés, profesores de idiomas, procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje, estereotipos, estudiantes de pregrado.

Resumo

Este artigo é o resultado de um estudo investigativo o qual tem como finalidade compartilhar os resultados depois de examinar os estereótipos dos professores e estudantes de graduação sobre os processos de ensino e aprendizagem do inglês em uma universidade particular em Tunja, Colômbia. A pesquisa foi realizada com seis professores de inglês e vinte estudantes de graduação pertencentes a primeiro e segundo semestre. Os instrumentos usados para a recopilación de dados foram: entrevistas semiestruturadas e questionários aplicados a professores e estudantes. Os resultados demonstraram que os professores de idiomas criassem estereótipos sobre o trabalho acadêmico dos estudantes, comportamento e atitudes devido a suas experiências ao relacionar-se com eles como seus professores, em especial de acordo com o programa acadêmico dos estudantes. Os estudantes também evidenciam os estereótipos sobre o ensino e a aprendizagem do inglês de acordo com suas experiências na sala de aula de inglês.

Palavras chave: Idioma inglês, professores de idiomas, processos de ensino e aprendizagem, estereótipos, estudantes de graduação.

Introduction

This article shares the results of a research project into teachers and students' stereotypes about the teaching and learning of English at a private university in Tunja – Boyacá, Colombia. Stereotypes present themselves in different contexts, and in this case, English classes are not the exception. There are many factors that affect English teaching and learning processes. Thus, the study allows us to reflect on teachers and students' stereotypes that emerge from different perspectives. In addition, the project provided a space to detect aspects that language teachers take into account when they create stereotypes about their students. It also allowed for the discovery of how undergraduate students perceive their own English learning process.

Two categories emerged from the data analysis: teachers' stereotypes about students' academic performance in English classes, and students' stereotypes of their own English learning process and academic conditions. These allow us to delve more deeply into the subject and explain teachers and students' positions, to identify strengths and weaknesses about the use of English, to contribute with ways to guide the methodologies for English classes, and to encourage students to recognize the importance of learning English as a foreign language.

This study permitted the researchers to carry out informal talks with language teachers and undergraduate students in order to verify how students were the subject of stereotyping from teachers and from themselves. A variety of stereotypes emerged from students' performance and the academic process of learning English, and particularly in regards to their academic programs. According to students and teachers' answers, the results showed that students can be classified with both positive and negative stereotypes towards their English learning process.

Literature Review

The theories that underpin this study are based on stereotyping in general, as well as teachers' and students' stereotypes about the process of teaching and learning English. These issues contribute to understanding the presence and importance of stereotypes in education.

Stereotypes

A stereotype is a thought adopted about a specific group of individuals, or assumptions people make about a variety of different topics and issues. These can also relate to ideologies developed according to people's own experience, customs and beliefs. Further,

stereotypes relate to accepted views and norms of social groups that are developed in people's minds.

Allport, one of the pioneers of analyzing stereotypes (1954), studied the complexity of people's relationships, the perceptions of the social environment, and the way people process information. Further, that stereotypes are examples of the bias people develop according to the characteristics of situations, and the shortcuts they adopt which lead to erroneous perceptions of the world (Allport, 1954). Stereotypes produce misinterpretations in people's daily lives because they do not allow us to see situations or behavior from an objective point of view. McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears (2002, p. 4) state, "Over time, this negative view of stereotypes has become the received wisdom."

Most stereotypes have both positive and negative features, and these may vary in terms of how tenaciously they are held and how likely they are to be developed for a given target. Different parts of the stereotypes are likely to be salient in different contexts. (Schneider, 2005, p. 556)

Hall (as cited by Holliday, Kullman & Hyde, 2010, p. 126), argued the following:

Stereotypes get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reduce everything about that person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity.

On the other hand, O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery and Fiske (as cited by Holliday, Kullman & Hyde, 2010) defined stereotypes as a "social classification of particular groups and people as often highly simplified and generalized signs, which implicitly or explicitly represent a set of values, judgements and assumptions concerning their behavior, characteristics or history" (p. 126).

Based on the previous definitions, some authors agree that stereotypes are inherently "bad" or "wrong" because they are illogical in origin, resistant to contradiction or morally mistaken. According to Fishman (1956), stereotypes are not taken seriously in different context because these may be essentially incorrect, inaccurate, contrary-to-fact, and therefore, undesirable taking into account people's beliefs in general. However, stereotypes may refer to positive characteristics of a particular person or group of people. Allport (1954) did acknowledge that stereotypes were not always negative, but this fact has often been overlooked. Taylor and Simard (1975) argue that "out-group stereotypes may lead to the positive outcome of mutual social differentiation: each

group is seen as it wishes to be seen and any desired differences are highlighted” (p. 240).

At the same time, stereotypes have been seen as ways to appreciate and simplify the understanding of the world. They also help to understand people’s conduct with respect to certain social problems. In fact, stereotypes have serious consequences in society. However, Schneider (2005) mentions that negative stereotypes are more difficult to change than positive ones.

Stereotypes in Education

In terms of stereotypes in education, Wright (2004) states that students may be classified as good or bad students. The author explains that good students are characterized as hard-working, reliable and responsible. Sometimes, language teachers believe that intelligent students are good students, but according to Wright (2004), innate intelligence is not the only key or the most important aspect for a student to be successful in their academic performance. Being a good student implies a positive attitude towards each academic duty. In contrast, bad students are characterized by being lazy, irresponsible, rarely showing interest in the subject. They complain about everything, and it is difficult for them to follow instructions (Wright, 2004).

Bearing in mind students’ behavior, teachers tend to classify them according to these positive or negative attitudes towards the teaching and learning of English. Students show these attitudes based on their own strengths and weaknesses in the subject. According to Gardner (1985), attitudes present cognitive and affective aspects in terms of behaviors and emotional states. Students’ behavior shows their values and motivation towards academic activities. Gardner (1985) links the individuals’ rationale for any activity, such as language learning, with the range of behaviors and the degree of effort employed in achieving goals. Victor and Lockhart (1995) explain how students create their own stereotypes based on previous academic practices in regards to learning English. Even if teachers or students avoid stereotypes, they are present in many cases in the academic contexts.

According to Horwitz (1988), conflicting attitudes have a powerful impact on how objectives, methodologies and assessment procedures are perceived, accepted or refused. Besides, these attitudes allow learners the opportunity to unravel this complex network of stereotypes, to reflect on how these factors affect their day-to-day decisions and behaviors, and possibly to start a process of negotiation. In Horwitz’s study, students and teachers improved their communication, and as a

result, the quality of education increased. It was recognized as a way to include students and teachers in the effort of joint learning.

Another aspect that influences the way students and language teachers create their own stereotypes is students' purposes. For instance, when students recognize the importance of learning English within their professional life, it has several advantages such as getting a job easily, understanding academic information on websites or recognizing that nowadays the human being is living in a globalized world. These aspects are supported by McKay (2002), who argues that learning English has international recognition, increases cultural knowledge.

Finally, it is necessary to highlight that the classroom atmosphere influences the teaching and learning process of English. Supporting this, O'Reilly (1975) and Kelly (1980) establish that the teacher is a part of the learning environment as perceived by the learners. As such, his or her teaching behavior affects the learners' perception of the classroom climate. Thus, stereotypes that emerge in English classes are powerful when these build a positive or negative relationship between teachers and students.

Methodology

Research Design

This research was developed based on a descriptive case study as it focused on the analysis of small groups of participants. Researchers collected data through teachers' interviews, and student and teacher questionnaires. This allowed for the identification of language teachers and students' stereotypes about teaching and learning English as a foreign language. It also provided a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analyzing information and reporting the results.

Researchers do not focus on the discovery of a universal, generalizable truth, nor do they typically look for cause-effect relationships; instead, emphasis is placed on exploration and description. Furthermore, the descriptive case study is a relatively formal analysis done in order to analyze classroom life. Hakin (1987) states, "The case study is the social research equivalent of the spotlight or the microscope in which emphasizes is placed on the value of understanding a phenomenon as it exists within a natural context" (p. 61).

Context and Participants

The participants involved in this study were six English teachers from a private university in Tunja, Colombia. The teachers were selected bearing in mind that one of them has been working in this institution for

12 years, two more teachers had labor experiences in another country such as England and Ireland, three language teacher were selected because they have had the opportunity to work with all the faculties and the last teacher was chosen because he had been working at the university just one semester. In addition, undergraduate students were selected from first and second semesters at the same private university. The process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language is based on the development of communicative skills, and is part of the required subjects of the curriculum.

Data Collection Instruments

According to the characteristics of this study, the following instruments were implemented:

The semi-structured interview. This was used with six language teachers who were part of the Language Department staff. This technique was used to collect data because its flexibility allows us to know in detail specific and relevant aspects of the research such as the stereotypes teachers created about their students. Corbetta (2010) recommends the semi-structured interview because it provides an appropriate environment for a fluid dialogue between interviewer and interviewee.

Teacher questionnaire. This was implemented to collect data as a way to obtain specific information related to teachers' opinions about students who attended to English classes and the different stereotypes that emerged according to each academic program. McClure (2002) recommends to apply this instrument with open or closed questions as a mean to measure facts, attitudes or values.

Student questionnaire. It was used in this research as a way to obtain information based on students' stereotypes about their own process of learning English and the way they perceived this process at school and at university. Bearing in mind the previous information, the main objective proposed in this research study was to identify teachers and students' stereotypes about English teaching and learning processes as a foreign language at a private university.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This study was done following the grounded theory approach since it permitted to describe the process to be carried out in order to analyze data which was gathered through the use of several instruments. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that this approach consists of a set of

steps to formulate hypotheses based on conceptual ideas that guarantee a good theory by creating categories based on the data gathered.

In order to validate the findings of this study, methodological triangulation was used. According to Rothbauer (2008), triangulation is seen as a research strategy that can reduce deficiencies caused by using only one method of inquiry. Besides, it involves the use of different ways to gather data. Data analysis permitted to face the different points of view between students and teachers in order to make conclusions that contribute to improve the field of teaching and learning English.

Results

Two main categories arose from the current research in order to achieve the main objective of this study. Besides, the grounded theory approach was implemented to analyze the data gathered and a methodological triangulation was used to validate the findings of this project.

Teachers' Stereotypes about Students' Academic Performance in English Classes

This category emphasized how each academic program was stereotyped according to the undergraduate students' academic performance in activities that were achieved in English classes.

The private university where the research took place offers a variety of academic programs such as Electronic, System and Mechanical Engineering, Law, Business and Accounting. Once language teachers had the opportunity to work with undergraduate students in different faculties, similarities and differences were found when teachers created stereotypes about students. According to this, Bandura's theory (1986) explains the way that our internal mental process works, it means that stereotypes influence the way people interpret and perceive the world. As a result of this, individuals can and often do perceive the exact same event or situation very differently. Thus, the participants agreed that most of the students from this university have obstacles in order to develop activities assigned in English classes, they lacked the context to really practice and immerse themselves in the language, and for these reasons, a lot of students found difficulties in their English learning process. As it was mentioned in the semi – structured interview

A lot of different levels in each of the classes that I teach most of the students find difficult to learn English and this can affect their attitudes to learn in English. Some people don't prepare minimum effort in to learn English...

In the previous sample, it was evidenced how language teachers had had the experience to teach English in different faculties with different levels. The way they perceived the process of learning and teaching English as a foreign language was with stereotypes, for instance, they noted that most of the students do not make enough effort to learn the language, they had problems in terms of confidence and most of them did not have a clear idea of team work.

Besides, language teachers were aware that the students had different learning styles, which were reflected in their performances along the academic activities such as individual work, small group work, individual tutoring with teachers, among others. These aspects contributed to create students' stereotypes. According to Allport (1954), stereotypes are studied as the complexity of people's relationships, the perceptions of the social environment and the way people process information.

First of all we have to take into account that students are different in terms of learning, every single human being has his/her own learning style and students come from different backgrounds.

In spite of finding the process of learning English difficult for the students, language teachers also created stereotypes according to the faculty students belong to, understanding stereotypes like assumptions people have about different topics or people's ideologies. These stereotypes can emerge in different contexts as well as in education. Ambady, Shih, Kim, and Pittinsky (2001) stated that stereotypes have different effects in people; hence, negative stereotypes produce negative reactions in people's behavior, and on the contrary, the positive ones can facilitate people's cognitive performance. The researchers realized that most of the language teachers created stereotypes of their students bearing in mind the academic programs offered by the university.

I consider that students change in terms of their attitude, behavior and personality according to their programs, for example civil engineering students are active and responsible, they participate actively rather than architecture students.

After analyzing the data gathered, these are the most common stereotypes language teachers had about students according to their major. Some are positive and others are negative. Likewise, Schneider (2005) mentions, "Most stereotypes have both positive and negative features, and these may vary in terms of how tenaciously they are held and how likely they are to be developed for a given target." (p. 329)

For instances most of the languages teachers mentioned in the gathered data through the research instruments applied the following excerpts:

Law students like speaking in public, even if they like to complain about many things. They are more dedicated to learn English because they take 10 levels during their major; besides, they are punctual and good readers.

International Business are very weak for learning English, their attitude is negative because they are not aware about the importance of learning a foreign languages, which is essential for their major. In addition, Electronic, System and Mechanical Engineering students are kind of analytical and practical; they are very creative and organized, they like doing different kinds of activities because they get bored easily. Architecture students are creative, but the problem is that they are somehow lazy in English classes. Accounting and Business Administration students, in general, are kind of good at planning and organizing things.

Law students are much more generous to speak...Architecture and Civil Engineering students are more concerned about projects and other areas, thus, English is seen as an obstacle they have to get over because it is a mandatory subject, electronic students are organize and they hate wasting time

The previous samples demonstrated that stereotypes were created bearing in mind many factors such as age, values, attitude, and academic goals, among others. These stereotypes are linked or affect education contexts in positive or negative ways. According to Holliday, Kullman and Hyde (2010), stated

The experience of confronting students who overtly refuse, or are more or less unwilling to accept, classroom procedures belongs to every teacher – and the more pervasive and subtle is this refusal, the more difficult is for teachers to build a positive relationship with their students. (p. 126)

Moreover, stereotypes affect people's thoughts, emotions, and behavior. However, Schneider (2005) mentions that negative stereotypes are more difficult to change than the positive ones.

Another relevant aspect that language teachers took into account when they formed stereotypes about students was based on their own professional experience. According to Wright (2000), students may be classified as good or bad students.

In general, I consider that students in this university are dynamic, they have good behavior and attitude, but few students - not so many - have personal problems, like in the family or maybe they don't have the best academic development. However, Law students like to discuss a lot,

students of Civil Engineering, they have good performance, architecture students like doing things.

The previous sample expressed that there are different kinds of students, students who take seriously their academic performance, students who only care about getting good grades, students who are not excellent students, but have a positive attitude to the process of learning another language, among others. According to Wright (2000), innate intelligence is not the only key or the most important aspect for a student to be successful in their academic performance. Being a good student implies a positive attitude in front of each academic duty. In daily academic practices, students show different social problems (families, friends) that affect their emotions, beliefs and ways to face the academic challenges, but in despite of their problems, they demonstrate positive attitude in their academic process and it is a very important aspect to keep in mind in order to achieve their professional goals.

On the other side, language teachers mentioned that according to the students' profile based on their major, it is necessary to adapt useful methodologies in the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. It is understandable that every single human being is different because s/he is unique, but also it is relevant to perceive that some groups have certain similarities maybe because they belong to an academic program with specific skills. For instance, Law students have the ability to read and understand extensive texts, Architecture students are good at drawing, and Engineering students need to understand Mathematics and Calculus well, among others. It means that multiple intelligences play an important role in this context because it does not mean that everybody has to be good at math, at drawing, at speaking another language. Languages teachers generated students' stereotypes bearing in mind their professional profile. According to the previous statements, teachers feel the necessity to bring appropriate activities to the students in their English classes, trying to find the way students like learning English in simple workshops that call students' attention. Hence, some of the interviewees revealed:

Law students like sharing about politics and history which is a big part of their profession. In this way they prefer reading about topics of their own field of study. Architecture and Engineering students are very active people; they like to do drawing and creative activities.

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The last sample showed how language teachers at the university have to accommodate to what methodology suits their students' necessities. Bearing in mind that students have weaknesses and

strengths in their process of learning English, some of them have the necessity to improve reading skills, others in pronunciation, writing or speaking. One aspect to highlight in this study is that some teachers help students to recognize the importance of learning English. In conclusion, this category shows that stereotypes from language teachers is indeed a very important issue at the university

Students' Stereotypes in their English learning process and Academic Conditions

This category shows the students' stereotypes emerged in English classes. Learning English is not an easy task in our context because there are many prejudices in terms of learning and teaching; some years ago, English was not important or necessary for our lives as professionals, so we did not have the need to learn this language, but with the demand established by the Free Trade Agreements and the expansion of the communications the role of English in our country has changed.

Thus, English is seen as an important subject in people's academic and professional life. The government is interested in improving the skills in this subject; hence, it implemented the bilingualism project which unfortunately has shown low results, Sánchez (2013) argues that in Colombia, despite the bilingualism project, students' English level is still low; for this reason, it is necessary that, from the classroom, English teachers propose ways that contribute to motivate and improve the proficiency in this language, and investigation is one of the ways to guarantee changes in this field of education.

Students from this private university in Colombia expressed their stereotypes about learning English in different ways. First, about English methodologies, there have been many complaints from students which became stereotypes about learning English because adult people have had bad experiences with their English learning process as product of the educational system; however, the culture for learning this language is changing, as it can be seen in studies done about this field:

The English culture in Colombia is growing, with English-language media reaching an increasing number of students and, in some cases, aiding their learning. However, the challenges faced by English teachers - a lack of resources, motivation, access, time, language skills and contextual training - continue to present barriers to positive and equitable English acquisition in formal education. (British Council, 2015, p. 58)

Besides, undergraduate students stated:

My experience of English was bad at school because we only learnt separate words and we could not communicate using English.

In fact, students' English learning depends largely on schools, some private schools have implemented bilingual curricula as a way to improve their quality, this is also a mechanism to compete with other schools and get more students because some parents are conscious that their children need to know English as a way to take advantage of their professional life. Thus, a student argues about it:

It was good because my English teacher demanded me a lot and it helped me to learn, the problem was that we did not have enough hours a week.

In addition, in the Colombian environment, it is growing the stereotype that learning English is positive for the development of people and the country because there are more possibilities to travel, work, study, export and import products; it is also perceived by a teacher and by students:

The stereotype that people who speak good English have more job prospects and better salaries motivates students to learn, use and improve their English.

In general, the researchers found that students also created stereotypes about English classes in a positive and negative way bearing in mind their academic experiences they faced in school and nowadays in the university context. Students realize that learning English is essential for their professional majors. According to students' stereotypes of their English learning process at the university, it can be seen that some of them have a positive attitude, as follows:

My attitude is very good because it is important to learn another language. The methodology of the teacher is adequate and facilitates my learning process.

Moreover, it is still viewed how some students show a total lack of interest in learning English; therefore, it is very difficult to have positive results in teaching this language:

My English learning is not the best because I have not been so interested in it, I am only worried about the subjects of my field of study.

Additionally, when students enter university, they perceive the importance of learning English because in the different subjects they have to work with bibliography in English and they must investigate on the Internet; thus, it makes them feel the need to improve their

English skills; however, teachers observe that students have different stereotypes about their English learning process, depending of their environment; thus one of the teachers said:

There is a small minority of students who recognize the importance of English in their lives; therefore, approach the subject with interest. The majority of them seem blissfully unaware of the potential benefits of learning the world's most widely spoken language and the relative disadvantages of not doing so, even in their own region.

Students' academic development is affected by different factors such as stereotypes, behaviors, contexts, and also personal perspectives; however, students' academic performance is also product of the motivation they find in the context.

Unfortunately, in our atmosphere, teachers perceive that the conditions do not contribute enough, and it is an aspect they have to assume and look for ways to motivate the acquisition of this language, taking into account that English has become indispensable in all fields of knowledge. One of the teachers argued:

I feel that students have common difficulty in working with English because there are lacks in the context to really practice and immerse themselves in the language."

As it was mentioned before, English teachers have to face many difficulties for teaching because the conditions are not the best; thus, this is one of the reasons why the Bilingualism has not attained the expected results in Colombia after 12 years of implementation. According to studies done by Colombia Aprende (2014), only 8% of students leave school with a B2 level; English is taking position in people's minds due to the exigencies of current times. One of the ways to improve English use is through research because it permits to identify problems, create solutions, propose new methodologies and strategies, create new materials, and also motivate teachers to progress in their academic practices.

This study aimed at identifying the teachers and students' stereotypes presented in English classes at a private university in Colombia. Some stereotypes found were positive and others negative. This research tried to help language teacher reflect about negative thoughts they have from students who belong to different academic programs in positive

characteristics. Besides, it is necessary to avoid sharing negative stereotypes with new language teachers because they might perceive a bad impression about their students before meeting them.

The main findings can summarize that stereotypes are always going to exist in the academic context. Even if people do not believe in them, they exist as the culture and tradition of people. Acceptance depends on the environment; thus, people can reject or accept them. Teaching English is engaged in stereotypes as products of teachers and students' thoughts and background; however, students are different. They react according to their own experience and sometimes they are affected by the major they are studying as a normal process of learning.

Bearing in mind the different studies carried out based on stereotypes, the finding of this current study concluded that in the process of learning English, there have been some stereotypes due to the manners we have lived as a developing country. They have origin in the internationalization of knowledge through the Internet, the Free Trade Agreements, and also the positions of our governments in front of world power countries. Some years ago, English was seen as a secondary subject; thus, it was not important. Nowadays, the evidences of this investigation show English is necessary for people's progress and also for the development of the country. People feel the necessity to be involved in technology, science, education, business, among others, thus, English become in a useful tool to understand the field mentioned previously.

As it was mentioned in the literature review, in other studies as well as in this study, students are engaged in academic programs; in terms of learning English, some of them are not very involved. Moreover, about students' personality, they are very respectful. In some cases, language teachers create stereotypes about them taking into account their attitude in the English classes; however, this is an attitude teachers have to avoid because students have the same rights and learning opportunities. When language teachers created negative stereotypes about certain students, it affects many aspects such as the atmosphere in the classroom, students and teachers' attitude in front of English classes or the friendship between learners and teachers.

One of the goals of English teachers is to guide students' performance in this language. Thus, this investigation highlights students and teachers' stereotypes and problems about the English processes of teaching and learning. The limitations presented in this research was the lack of time of the languages teachers who were the participants of this study. It was so difficult try to set up the time for

applying the instruments. Besides, this study is useful for other areas, not only in English classes because stereotypes might be presented in different fields of study. Also, teachers who belong to the variety of academic programs offer in the private university where the research took place have the duty to encourage students to learn English according to their majors.

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Task-based Learning and Language Proficiency in a Business University¹

Aprendizaje Basado en Tareas y Suficiencia de Inglés
en una Universidad de Negocios

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Abstract

This project adds to the growing body of empirical research focusing on the effects of task-based learning (TBL) on second language acquisition. Through the design and implementation of two business English case studies, in which learning was scaffolded through a sequence of tasks, the authors argue that a TBL approach to language teaching more effectively engages students and promotes greater oral language proficiency than traditional approaches. The authors argue that guiding students to utilise and combine their existing knowledge and skills with vocabulary and structures presented in class to solve case study problems has the potential to result in greater student confidence and, subsequently, greater language proficiency. Nevertheless, various factors can significantly reduce the successfulness of TBL in this context, including disparate learner profiles in cultural and business knowledge, life experiences, motivation, as well as constraints in terms of time and institutional assessment.

Key words: Task-Based Learning (TBL), Business English, Case Studies, ESL, TESOL, Task Sequencing

Resumen

Este proyecto se suma a un significativo número de investigaciones empíricas, centrándose en los efectos del aprendizaje basado en tareas (TBL) en el proceso de adquisición de una segunda lengua. Mediante el diseño e implementación de dos estudios de caso en las clases de inglés de negocios, en las que el aprendizaje

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fue escalonado a través de una secuencia de tareas. Las autoras sostienen que el enfoque de aprendizaje basado en tareas involucra de manera efectiva a los estudiantes en el aprendizaje del idioma y promueve una mayor competencia del lenguaje oral que los enfoques tradicionales. Las autoras afirman que el guiar a los estudiantes en el uso y combinación de sus habilidades y conocimiento existente con el vocabulario y las estructuras presentadas en clase para resolver problemas de estudio de caso contribuyen a que el estudiante tenga mayor confianza y posteriormente un mayor dominio del idioma. Sin embargo, diferentes factores pueden reducir significativamente el éxito del aprendizaje basado en tareas en este contexto, incluyendo los diversos perfiles de los estudiantes en relación al conocimiento cultural y empresarial, experiencias, motivaciones, así como las limitaciones en términos de tiempo y evaluación institucional.

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje basado en tareas, inglés de negocios, estudios de caso, inglés como lengua segunda, Enseñanza de Inglés como Lengua Segunda, secuencia de tareas

Resumo

Este projeto se soma a um significativo número de pesquisas empíricas, centrando-se nos efeitos da aprendizagem baseada em tarefas escolares (TBL) no processo de aquisição de uma segunda língua. Mediante o desenho e implementação de dois estudos de caso nas aulas de inglês de negócios, nas que a aprendizagem foi escalonada através de uma sequência de tarefas escolares. As autoras sustentam que o enfoque de aprendizagem baseado em tarefas escolares envolve de maneira efetiva os estudantes na aprendizagem do idioma e promove uma maior competência da linguagem oral que os enfoques tradicionais. As autoras afirmam que o guiar os estudantes no uso e combinação de suas habilidades e conhecimento existente com o vocabulário e as estruturas apresentadas em aula para resolver problemas de estudo de caso contribuem a que o estudante tenha maior confiança e posteriormente um maior domínio do idioma. Entretanto, diferentes fatores podem reduzir significativamente o êxito da aprendizagem baseada em tarefas escolares neste contexto, incluindo os diversos perfis dos estudantes em relação ao conhecimento cultural e empresarial, experiências, motivações, bem como as limitações em termos de tempo e avaliação institucional.

Palavras chave: Aprendizagem baseada em tarefas escolares, inglês de negócios, estudos de caso, inglês como língua segunda, Ensino de Inglês como Segunda Língua, sequência de tarefas escolares

Introduction

This research project was developed in order to address an increasingly important area of second language acquisition: students learning English in order to compete in the international job market. The authors were interested in approaches which facilitate the effective development of communicative skills for business purposes. Moreover, the authors were particularly interested in the ways in which existing knowledge and skills can be harnessed and integrated in order to facilitate business-focused communication. To this end, a Task Based Learning (TBL) approach to Business English was applied in a South American university setting in order to investigate how redesigning modules of study into sequences of activities might facilitate students' oral communication skills.

Currently the Colombian government is implementing initiatives in order to increase bilingualism in the country. For example the National Bilingualism Programme, created by the Colombian Ministry of Education in 2004, offers all students the possibility to become bilingual in English and Spanish (De Mejía, 2011). As mastery of the English language is positioned as a fundamental aspect to this process, it is important to investigate best practice firmly situated within the Colombian context. This includes an analysis of current practices and initiatives in many contexts, including business settings.

At the university in this study, the application of case studies has proven challenging for students across all Business English courses at the university. Breen (1984) argues that by placing communication at the centre of the curriculum, both goal and means merge to become one and the same. Yet, we often witness students who are able to produce language in class activities, but who are less capable of producing spontaneous, unstructured dialogue. Consequently, TBL's emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language (Nunan, 2004) is of particular interest for the university. The ensuing research therefore aimed to explore the usefulness of TBL for increasing language proficiency including motivation, engagement and greater confidence with the language (Willis & Willis, 2007).

In order to address these interests, the following two key research questions were created: How does TBL promote students' oral language proficiency in Business English? and How does TBL engage students in both content and oral language learning through the solution of business case studies? Results demonstrated that by employing Nunan's (2004) TBL approach to the development of Business English case study materials, TBL has the potential to lead to improved oral

proficiency through greater student engagement, spontaneity, and communicative confidence through the provision of opportunities for the application of existing skills and socio-cultural knowledge in a way which supplements, complements, and encourages the integration of existing language skills and life experiences.

In sum, the authors found that by implementing a TBL approach to the use of case studies, students were indeed more engaged and increased their oral language proficiency. That said, various factors affected the successfulness of TBL including disparate learner profiles, life experiences, intrinsic motivation and time and institutional constraints. These factors thus highlight important areas for consideration for those implementing a TBL approach to syllabus design.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Task-Based Learning

Task based learning (TBL) has its roots in communicative language teaching (CLT) (Nunan, 2004) which emphasises social interaction as fundamental for language acquisition (Myles & Mitchell, 2004) and provides a practical means of applying the conceptually broad CLT (Skehan, Xiaoyue, Qian & Wang, 2012). In practice, TBL involves using interactive tasks designed to be performed through real communication, as opposed to the teaching of a sequence of language items (Rozati, 2014), or specific linguistic forms (Rodríguez-Bonces, M. & Rodríguez-Bonces, J. 2010). In this way, the learner is placed at the centre of the process (Nunan, 2004) and the teacher acts as a language consultant (Almagro Esteban & Pérez Cañado, 2004), creating opportunities for meaningful language production and interaction (Willis & Willis, 2007). Consequently, TBL focuses less on knowledge of a language and more on what learners can do with the language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Task Based Learning Literature

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Tasks have been discussed and defined in many ways by researchers and educators, from focusing on the importance of communicative information exchange activities (Tang, Chiou & Jarsaillon, 2015) to the form, complexity and scale of tasks (Thomas & Wright, 1999), and the way in which language learners are forced into a variety of roles (Thomas & Wright, 1999). Empirically speaking, as Robinson (2011) highlights, although TBL was initially conceptualised as a means for improving pedagogy, it only had a minimal foundation

in empirical research regarding second language acquisition. TBL has since been studied in a number of different contexts, both qualitatively and quantitatively. For example, Carless (2002) investigated problems implementing task-based learning for young learners in a school setting. Murphy (2003) reflects on the relationship between tasks, teachers and learners. Yule, Powers and Macdonald (1992) undertook research with advanced proficiency learners, highlighting the way in which information transfer tasks may be enhanced when speakers are led to consider listeners needs, as opposed to the form of the speakers message. Rohani (2013) explored how task-based learning influenced the use of positive oral communication strategies and reduced the use of negative strategies. Interestingly, Tang, Chiou and Jarsallion (2015) researched how TBL developed verbal competence and found that TBL improved fluency, lexical, and syntactic complexity but did not improve accuracy. González Lopez and Cabrera Albert (2011), in a similar context to our own, looked at task-based learning principles in a Cuban university setting and highlighted fundamental principles of TBL which should be followed to implement TBL effectively.

Nevertheless, despite the growing body of literature, a gap currently exists with regard to empirical TBL research and language performance tasks in actual classroom settings (Calvert & Sheen, 2015) and also regarding testing and syllabi design (Robinson, 2001). Moreover, the authors highlight an additional gap in the empirical literature in the use of TBL in tandem with a case study approach to (Business) English syllabi design and evaluation. The authors argue that TBL may prove beneficial in this particular learning context. Before discussing how TBL and the case method can work effectively together, it is worth briefly defining the case method.

Task Based Learning and the Case Study Approach

Case studies have been successfully used in many different educational fields, such as business, law and medicine, and it has been argued that case studies can also be useful in the context of English for Specific Purposes for Business (ESP-B) (Almagro Esteban & Pérez Cañado, 2004; Beckisheva, Gasparyan, & Kovalenko, 2015). Indeed, according to Boyd (1991), case studies are the most appropriate pedagogical model for ESP-B. As with TBL, a case study methodology requires students to interact and reflect by analysing and negotiating to solve a problem through which they are encouraged to freely and spontaneously use language in a meaningful context (Almagro, Esteban & Pérez Cañado, 2004; Beckisheva, et al., 2015). Through the use of

case studies, students discuss real life situations using concepts learned in the classroom whilst vocabulary and grammar are taught incidentally through content (Grosse, 1988; Nunan, 2004; Rodríguez-Bonces, M. & Rodríguez-Bonces, J. 2010). Moreover, TBL and the case method further align in that TBL promotes the linking of classroom learning with language used outside the classroom through 'real-world' tasks (Nunan, 2004; Rozati 2014).

Almagro, Esteban and Pérez (2004, p.158) gathered data about the efficacy of the case method and put forward several factors which contributed to students' success, including a) a warm-up phase, b) clear presentation of the scenario, c) anticipation of students' linguistic needs, and d) teamwork to encourage learning, all factors which align well with Nunan's (2004) TBL sequencing. Finally, throughout the unit of work, students are active learners working together to construct their knowledge. Nevertheless, case studies can be difficult for both students and teachers due to the integrated multiple skills needed to perform proficiently (Almagro Esteban and Pérez Cañado, 2004). By following Nunan's (2004) sequencing, as outlined in the methodology section, the authors posit that TBL can overcome some of these difficulties through mini tasks to promote the communicative skills required to participate effectively in case studies.

Methodology

Research Design

Maintaining that teachers are fundamental in education research within the education field, the researchers employed action-research (Stenhouse, 1993; Elliot, 1994) to investigate the applicability of task-based learning (TBL) to address a problem encountered at the university; students exhibiting difficulties producing spontaneous dialogue, particularly in case study-based classroom activities and assessment tasks. More specifically, the authors found that whilst students were able to produce explicitly taught language correctly in controlled grammar practice or vocabulary activities, they appeared much less able to integrate various elements of language learning in order to communicate spontaneously in freer, less controlled activities. Consequently, the researchers, concerned with bridging this gap, redesigned aspects of the syllabus for an Intermediate Business English class in line with Nunan's (2004) TBL approach. The researchers then implemented this redesign and examined the usefulness of employing such an approach as a means to improve communicative competencies and encourage greater student engagement and participation.

Context

The university, located in the capital of Colombia, has a business focus with the objective of preparing students to work in a multinational business setting. The university is medium sized with most students coming from middle class backgrounds. Through the Modern Languages programme, students aim to develop a B1 level for three different languages, according to the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2001), with the objective of acquiring the skills necessary for a competitive international business environment. Modern Language students progress through four levels of English including Basic Business English I, Basic Business English II, Intermediate Business English and Upper Intermediate Business English before continuing their English studies with content classes, that is to say, classes which are content based but taught through the medium of English. Content courses include International Business, Business Speech, English Culture and International Culture. Business English courses at the university often use case studies as a teaching method and speaking evaluation tool. The textbook currently used by the university is *Market Leader* (Cotton, Falvey & Kent, 2010).

Intervention

The sequences of classes used in the study were adapted from the aforementioned textbook. It is important to note that each unit of the textbook involves a case study in which students are expected to find a solution to a problem or complete a complex communicative task. These case studies at the university constitute speaking assessment tasks. However, the case studies in the textbook and the activities leading to their solution are mismatched in that they do not suitably prepare students for the final task. For this reason, the professor adapted two units from the textbook and employed Nunan's (2004) TBL sequencing with the objective of better preparing students for the assessment tasks.

According to Nunan (2004), TBL should meet the following principles: 1) the tasks need to be scaffolded; 2) one task should lead to another task; 3) materials should be recycled; 4) learners construct their knowledge actively; 5) tasks integrate linguistic form, communicative function and semantic meaning; (6) tasks allow learners to move from repetition to creative, freer activities; and (7) students have time to reflect on their learning. With these criteria in mind, the units of work were adapted to include vocabulary, grammar, reading and listening tasks and skills language (set expressions from the textbook) to prepare for the case studies. These were then taught as a series of mini tasks

leading following Nunan's (2004) six steps for TBL, as demonstrated in Figure 1 below.

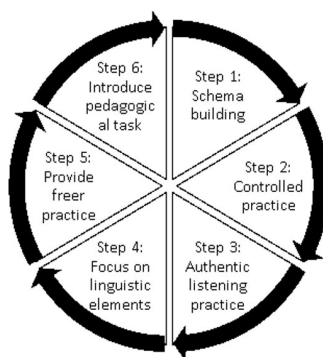


Figure 1. Task based learning sequencing (Authors' representation)

Sequence one. The first sequence of classes involved a series of mini tasks aimed at developing students' abilities to participate in a business meeting in which sponsorship options were discussed. In the first stage, schema-building, students were introduced to brands and marketing vocabulary and participated in activities such as gap fills, crosswords and writing tasks. Students also participated in a brainstorming activity in which they discussed desired qualities of a potential sponsor. The following stage involved listening to a meeting at a sponsorship agency in which sponsorship options for a media company were discussed. This conversation was very similar to what students would be expected to produce later during the case study. After completing the listening activity, students practiced the dialogue and adjusted it to be more relevant to the Colombian context. The sequence of classes included a linguistic focus on expressions students could use for the meeting, including expressions to ask for/give opinions, agree, disagree and make suggestions. After four classes of context setting and controlled practice, students were asked to write a business style letter in which they outlined a suitable sponsorship candidate for their company with supporting reasons as to why this candidate should be selected. The writing task utilised the vocabulary and expressions presented in the previous classes and modelled the language they could use in the pedagogical task.

After schema building, controlled practice, listening practice, focus on linguistic elements, and writing practice; students participated in the pedagogical task. This involved students role-playing a meeting

in which they discussed different options and selected a sponsor for a sportswear company.

Sequence two. In the second sequence of classes, students prepared a presentation about how to conduct business in a culture different from their own. Students needed to include advice and suggestions about cross-cultural negotiations in an appropriately structured presentation. Throughout the sequence, there were class discussions about different cultures and students were asked to draw comparisons between their own culture and those of others. Students participated in reading and listening activities about cultures in general, as well as cross-cultural business interactions in which problems may arise. Students studied modal verbs of advice, obligation and necessity which would aid students in giving advice and explaining cross-cultural rules/norms. This linguistic focus was taught within the context of cross-culturally negotiations with the language embedded in reading and writing tasks. Presentation structure and expression to use in a presentation were taught and practiced in class. The sequence of classes lead to the final pedagogical task which was an assessed presentation about a doing business cross-culturally in any chosen country.

Participants

The students. Nine students enrolled in the course: five female Modern Language students, Karol, Bibiana, Daniela, Sandra and Andrea (pseudonyms) who, on average, were seventeen years old. Four had completed the previous level of English at the university the previous semester, the other student, Daniela, had previously failed Intermediate Business English and was repeating the course. The other four students were teachers at the university: Gabriela, Mariana, Ana and Mateo (pseudonyms). The youngest was approximately thirty years old and the oldest in his sixties. All of them had plentiful teaching experience; two of them, Gabriela and Mariana, were second language teachers of German and French. Mateo was a marketing teacher. Ana worked in a teaching capacity at the university. She had studied the previous level of English the previous semester. Due to time constraints and work demands, Ana dropped out of the course mid-semester.

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It is important to note an inconsistency of student attendance as well as a large discrepancy in terms of metalinguistic and cultural knowledge, language level, and life experience between the modern language students and teachers. All the teachers had travelled abroad, Mateo extensively. Gabriela and Mariana, as language teachers, had greater metalinguistic knowledge than the students in the class.

The teacher. The teacher was a native English speaker with a Master's degree in teaching and six years ESL teaching experience.

Class frequency. During the first half of the semester, classes met for two hour classes twice a week over a two month period. During the second half, classes increased to three times a week, again over a two month period. Each unit of work, structured using TBL methodology, consisted of seven classes.

Data Collection Instruments

Four instruments of data collection were used: the professor's personal reflections, class observations, evaluation scores and attendance rates.

Professor's personal reflections. The professor provided written reflections regarding the TBL process, students' progress, and course units.

Class observations. During the second case study, the classes were observed by two other professors in order to record their opinions about classroom interactions, student engagement, and language proficiency.

Evaluation scores. Students received a grade based on their level of performance in the case study at the end of each sequence of classes. In the first sequence of classes, oral performance during the role play was analysed and measured against the criteria taken and adapted from the *Cambridge Business English Certificate Handbook* (2012). This was chosen due to its usefulness for assessing ability to hold a conversation without over-emphasising form. According to this, students were rated as excellent, very good, good, fair, poor, or not shown in reference to these criteria: a) ability to sustain a dialogue (discourse management); b) linguistic capabilities, such as being able to structure a sentence correctly (language); c) ability to produce intelligible output with good sentence stress (pronunciation); d) ability to maintain and develop interactions and respond appropriately during conversation (interactive communication) and; e) their ability to use appropriate vocabulary to make suggestions, agree and disagree (vocabulary). A percentage score was then generated which counted towards their semester grade.

For the second sequence of classes, students' oral performance was measured against criteria adapted from the *Market Leader* peer assessment rubric (2010, p. 109) for assessing the effectiveness of a presentation. In addition to this, the teacher added the following

criteria: grammar, use of target vocabulary, and pronunciation. Similar to the first sequence of classes, students were rated as excellent, very good, good, fair, poor, or not shown, and a percentage score was then generated which counted towards their semester grade.

Attendance rates. The teacher kept a role of students attending the class and noted down, not only if students were absent, but also if they were late to class.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Two researchers participated in the analysis of the data. Both researchers read the data individually and then exchanged perspectives in order to analyse the way in which TBL engaged students and promoted oral proficiency. In order to do so, both qualitative and quantitative means were employed. In terms of quantitative data, attendance and final evaluation scores were collated. With regard to qualitative measures, the ways in which students interacted with the teacher, the materials and the other students were considered i.e. the extent to which they asked and responded to questions, appeared engaged or disengaged, integrated knowledge from outside the classroom context, and their oral performance during classes and in evaluations.

For case study one, student evaluations were based on the ability to conduct a successful negotiation. A successful negotiation was defined as the ability to a) present their chosen candidate and give supporting reasons as to why their candidate should be chosen, and b) discuss the sponsorship possibilities, and as a group, choose the most appropriate candidate. With regard to the second case study, the focus was on developing students' ability to present information about a culture different from their own and to present suggestions and obligations about doing business cross-culturally.

Results

On the basis of data acquired, the researchers gleaned that TBL can be an effective tool but with limitations. Below, we will discuss students' grades for the pedagogical task, attendance levels, and prior knowledge and life experiences, and how these factors were related to the utility of TBL.

Assessment scores indicated how consistent engagement with each stage of the TBL sequencing promotes oral proficiency. For

example, in the first case study, **Bibiana**, a Modern Language student, who started the course with a lower level than many of the other students, provided an excellent illustration. Despite her initial lower level, as the only student to attend all classes, she achieved a high final grade of 88% for the first case study. She was able to integrate and apply taught vocabulary and expressions and effectively utilise target structures. In contrast, **Sandra**, another Modern Language student, who missed two classes covering grammar, the writing workshop, and speaking practice, unsurprisingly, exhibited poor performance. Although the grammar and vocabulary produced were fair, she lacked the ability to listen and respond naturally, resulting in dialogue lacking in spontaneity. Similarly, Karol and Andrea, Modern Language students, who started the course late, whilst performing reasonably well, demonstrated a tendency to rely on others for the flow of conversation.

In the second case study, **Bibiana** and **Sandra**, who worked together, missed key phases of the TBL sequencing designed to prepare them for the final presentation. During the final assessment, Sandra incorrectly used modal verbs, did not use the structures or phrases taught during the classes, and failed to include any business information. Similarly, Bibiana's lack of preparation was also apparent through insufficient content, despite some attempt to use taught structures and modal verbs. In the case of these two students, the TBL process was not effective as, due to poor attendance, they were unable to undertake each of the mini-tasks successfully. Consequently, they obtained lower evaluation scores in comparison with other students. Moreover, neither were motivated to create an effective presentation, and the time constraints of the course did not allow them to develop sufficient oral proficiency. In contrast, **Marianna** and **Gabriela**, language teachers, benefited greatly from each stage as they took advantage of opportunities to participate and engage with materials and practice taught forms. Consequently, there were able to integrate and apply what had been studied to deliver a well-structured, highly engaging presentation.

Secondly, the importance of previous experience beyond the classroom and materials relevant to students' day-to-day lives was crucial. For example, Ana, one of the education professionals, who also missed two classes in the first unit and started with a lower level than her peers, performed well in the first case study. Whilst demonstrating structural and pronunciation problems, she clearly listened to her peers and responded appropriately. In fact, overall, she demonstrated a strong ability for interactive communication and, at times, dominated the conversation. In comparison, although **Sandra** was able to utilise taught

structures, she performed poorly as she was unable to communicate spontaneously. Likewise, **Karol** and **Andrea** memorised vocabulary and phrases, however, lacked overall fluency. The authors argue that Ana's previous experience of business negotiation was extremely helpful during this task. Indeed, she performed significantly better regardless of the use of specific taught structures and clarity of pronunciation.

Similarly, in the second case study, **Mateo's** presentation, a marketing teacher, was well structured and coherent, using presentation phrases introduced in class. Furthermore, he naturally integrated modal verbs and demonstrated a high level and breadth of vocabulary to convey extensive information. Notably, he was always the most vocal student in classes and demonstrated clear interest in the topic and significant background knowledge, which he was able to synthesise and elaborate. This existing knowledge strengthened the final product as he was able to focus on the application of taught structures and vocabulary and naturally respond to questions. Overall, he demonstrated a high level of oral proficiency motivated by a strong interest in the subject matter and complemented by extensive cross-cultural life experience.

Likewise, **Marianna** and **Gabriela's** presentation was well-structured and linguistically sophisticated. Clearly, their existing cultural knowledge, from having lived and worked in different countries, also facilitated their contributions. These students were clearly engaged by the materials, and consequently, did exceptionally well. Furthermore, both had prior business knowledge and were education professionals. Whilst the class materials honed existing skills, particularly their ability to express opinions and make suggestions in a structured and accurate way, arguably, the tasks also had greater relevance for their working lives. Indeed, it was clear that their life and work experiences had an impact on their motivation and level of engagement, which in turn, had a significant influence on their ability to communicate. Evidently, the way in which TBL allowed these students' the space to express life experiences through taught structures was complimentary and thus extremely effective in terms of developing their oral proficiency.

In both case studies, the mixed group of students led to many pedagogical challenges. Students from the Modern Language programme had a much lower level of English than the teachers; even though they were undertaking a B1 level course, the Modern Language students had an average of an A2 level (Council of Europe, 2014). Moreover, the younger Modern Language students, who had never travelled, were not only much less able to pick up on new grammatical patterns quickly; they also often lacked sufficient cultural and professional knowledge for

the successful completion of tasks. Indeed, as Calvert and Sheen (2015) have noted, students' lack of ability to perform tasks may stem from unfamiliarity with the concepts or tasks themselves. This highlights the importance of carefully tailoring TBL tasks according to the cultural and professional background of students.

Conclusions

Results of the analysis of the above intervention demonstrates that TBL is certainly applicable to the university's Business English programme. The design and implementation of Nunan's (2004) approach provides a clear and effective means of scaffolding learning through sequences of communicative tasks. More specifically, it has the potential to engage students by providing opportunities for them to apply existing skills and socio-cultural knowledge in the language learning environment. In this way, such a restructuring of materials can supplement and complement existing language skills and cultural and professional experiences whilst allowing students to express themselves with the support, but not constraint, of target language and structures.

As a consequence of its application, many of the students were more confident and able to spontaneously produce dialogue as evidenced by the effective use of language, vocabulary, and structures in the final business case study tasks. Whilst this indicates an overall improvement in oral language proficiency, two key areas for consideration were highlighted.

Firstly, one issue illuminated by the project was the necessity for recycling materials to develop proficiency. This was made difficult, however, due to the poor attendance of students. Despite reinforcing material studied in earlier classes to give repetitive exposure, it simply was not viable, and as a result, the units of work lacked continuity. In fact, a review of material often made no sense to students because they had not attended the class in which the topic was initially introduced.

Secondly, research suggests using real-life situations in the classroom makes materials more relevant to students' needs (Almagro Esteban & Pérez Cañado, 2004; Beckisheva, et al, 2015; Nunan, 2004; Rozati, 2014). Indeed, as was demonstrated, students' life experiences and the future applicability of content had an impact on the way in which they interacted with materials and impacted on motivation. However, problems can arise when the gap between students' language abilities and life experiences are too great, and materials are more relevant

and applicable to the lives of some and not others. This highlights the importance of developing materials highly relevant and applicable to students' lives as well as age and culture in order to maximise success for all students. According to Platt and Brooks (2002) for second language acquisition to be at its best, task engagement must take place. Indeed, many students in the class did not seem strongly engaged, as evidenced by their low attendance and observations of classroom behaviour. The authors argue that low motivation and engagement on the part of the younger Modern Languages students may have been significantly related to the relevance and level of the materials. Indeed, many of the younger students had difficulty participating in business role-plays, arguably highlighting the way in which different ages and life experiences can create large discrepancies in oral proficiency simply as a consequence of the materials. Indeed, as Calvert and Sheen (2015) argue, although a task does not appear to be successful, this does not mean that it is an ineffective means of learning. Rather, the structure, input, and implementation according to the specific learner population may not have been appropriate.

In summary, the authors found that TBL has the potential to engage students and promote oral proficiency in the context of Business English case studies. However, the findings highlighted the importance of using highly relevant materials as a means to enhance student engagement and motivation, not only in terms of the future needs of students, but also in terms of existing life experiences. This is arguably particularly important in the context of Business English with young students. Additionally, an area which proves crucial for the development of learners' skills, and fundamental for improving oral proficiency, is the coherent and repetitive recycling of materials during task sequences. As follows, consistent attendance and institutional time and assessment constraints which impede sufficient repetition are fundamental considerations. One area for further consideration then is the question of how educators can effectively design TBL sequences which harness the varying levels and life experience in diverse groups in a way which is beneficial for the whole.

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Evidence of Intercultural Communication Competence in Tenth Grader's Narrative Texts¹

Evidencia de la Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural en Textos Narrativos de Estudiantes de Décimo Grado

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Abstract

This action research study explored the effects of an intervention linking both culture and citizenship in a tenth-grade English language class, and aimed at finding evidence of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) skills through the writing of narrative texts in English. Participants were 75 tenth-grade students, between the ages of 14 and 17 years old who attended three different public schools in Bogotá, Colombia. Through literature circles (discussion groups) and storytelling tools, learners played an active role, discovered similarities and differences among cultures, reflected upon their tolerance levels, and explored ways to face problems. Findings suggest that students were able to identify differences in cultures and how those differences helped them to build identity. In addition, they analyzed how they reacted in situations where their tolerance skills were challenged.

Key words: Intercultural communicative competence; culture; citizenship; narrative texts; literature circles; storytelling, SOLO taxonomy, language acquisition.

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Resumen

Este estudio de investigación acción exploró los efectos de una intervención pedagógica que combinara la cultura y ciudadanía en una clase de inglés de décimo grado, y tenía como objetivo encontrar evidencia de las habilidades en la competencia comunicativa intercultural (ICC) a través de la escritura de textos narrativos en inglés. Los participantes fueron 75 estudiantes de décimo grado, entre los 14 y 17 años, de tres colegios públicos de Bogotá, Colombia. Por medio de herramientas como círculos literarios (grupos de discusión) y narración de historias, los estudiantes jugaron un rol activo, descubrieron similitudes y diferencias entre culturas, reflexionaron sobre sus niveles de tolerancia y formas de enfrentar problemas. Los resultados sugieren que los estudiantes pudieron identificar las diferencias entre culturas y cómo éstas los ayudaron a construir su propia identidad. Adicionalmente, los estudiantes analizaron cómo reaccionaban ante las situaciones en las que sus habilidades de tolerancia eran desafiadas.

Palabras claves: Competencia comunicativa intercultural, cultura, ciudadanía, textos narrativos, círculos literarios, narración de historias, taxonomía de SOLO, adquisición del lenguaje.

Resumo

Este estudo de pesquisa ação explorou os efeitos de uma intervenção pedagógica que combinasse a cultura e cidadania em uma aula de inglês de segundo ano do ensino médio, e tinha como objetivo encontrar evidência das habilidades na competência comunicativa intercultural (ICC) através da escritura de textos narrativos em inglês. Os participantes foram 75 estudantes de segundo ano do ensino médio, entre os 14 e 17 anos, de três colégios públicos de Bogotá, Colômbia. Por meio de ferramentas como círculos literários (grupos de discussão) e narração de histórias, os estudantes desempenharam um papel ativo, descobriram similitudes e diferenças entre culturas, refletiram sobre seus níveis de tolerância e formas de enfrentar problemas. Os resultados sugerem que os estudantes puderam identificar as diferenças entre culturas e como as mesmas ajudaram-nos a construir a sua própria identidade. Adicionalmente, os estudantes analisaram como reagiam diante das situações nas que suas habilidades de tolerância eram desafiadas.

Palavras chaves: Competência comunicativa intercultural, cultura, cidadania, textos narrativos, círculos literários, narração de histórias, taxonomia de SOLO, aquisição da linguagem.

Introduction

During the last two decades, the Colombian government has been implementing policies regarding the learning and teaching English. These policies are primarily aimed at increasing and improving the teaching of English in the country, with the goal of making Colombia more competitive, with citizens who can cope with the demands of globalization. According to these goals, it becomes relevant as well to train people on cultural aspects, as these have an impact on the way people can establish more effective communication and personal relationships with others around the world.

As such, it is important for teachers to support learners in order to understand cultural aspects when learning a foreign language as cultural contact is inevitable in the current globalized world (Graddol, 2006). Even though there is research on the teaching of culture as part of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), through different strategies (Karnyshev, et al., 2014), few studies on this topic have been carried out in the context of Colombian education (Gómez, 2011).

When dealing with culture in the language classroom, teachers can use ICC to help students obtain knowledge and understanding of their own and others' culture, as a way to also help students be able to down prejudices, become more tolerant, and develop the ability to see cultural differences as well as similarities (Byram & Risager, 1999). Furthermore, the inclusion of cultural aspects in the language classroom can also expand learners' world vision and help them to solve the different problems inherent in globalization (Kramsch, 2001).

This article presents the results of an action research study conducted with tenth grade students at three public schools in Bogotá, Colombia. The research question was: *How is intercultural communication competence in tenth-grade English language students developed by storytelling and narrative text writing?* Researchers intended to help learners develop cultural skills such as tolerance, identity, and conflict resolution while enhancing their sense of the self and other. These aspects were explored in cultural contexts (real or fictional) by using literature circles and storytelling. To recognize and assess cultural skills and awareness, the researchers used the SOLO taxonomy (Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes).

Literature Review

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

In general terms, ICC deals with the recognition of the other. It has to do with the person's ability to interact in a foreign culture respectfully with people who have different ways of life, to accept them the way they are, and to appreciate similarities and differences with the own culture (Byram, 1997). For this study, researchers selected the co-orientational model to analyze the ICC components (Fantini, 1995), considering that it focuses on how communication takes place in intercultural interactions and how insights, meanings and intercultural comprehension are built while interacting. Furthermore, this model takes into account relevant concepts to comprehend the resulting outcomes from interactional processes such as understanding and overlapping perspectives.

Communicative competence, in terms of ICC, allows learners to establish and express relationships and understanding of cultural issues that allow them to know the self (identity) and other, solve problems, and reflect on the reasons for decisions or actions, as well as their consequences in a more empathic way. All these features are at the core of the citizenship skills, which foster peaceful coexistence, responsible participation and understanding of difference. Consequently, ICC equips students with tools for providing solutions, bearing in mind different perspectives.

When making interpretations, individuals develop a process of reflection, understanding, and construction of the concept of the self and the other by comparing and contrasting different characteristics, attitudes and behaviors (Holliday, Hyde & Kullman, 2004) that shape the individual's identity. In addition, knowing the self and the other helps individuals develop more tolerant attitudes in terms of mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity, concepts that are key for many educational systems today (Pigozzi, 2006).

Therefore, to test the role of a person in a society and his/her responsible attitude in different situations, becoming familiar with conflict resolution strategies is a must. In this sense, it is necessary to create spaces for students to face real or simulated situations that help them train themselves in finding constructive, peaceful and creative ways to solve problems (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2004).

Research in this field (Gómez, 2011; Karnyshev, et al., 2014) has demonstrated that learners improved their ability to reflect upon the importance of being tolerant, as well as the need to become open minded

and respect other people. In addition, learners developed intercultural empathy toward harsh situations of other cultural groups.

Narrative Texts

Narratives are stories in which individuals share experiences, which often reflect the way they perceive the world. These texts may also depict the individual's feelings in relation to life issues and present viewpoints in a critical way (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The creation of narrative texts as extended writing projects (Kearney, 2010) in a culturally immersed classroom can require students to call upon a number of cultural aspects.

For this study, narrative texts were used in literature circles (Garrison, Forest & Kimmel, 2014), providing the cultural input as the stories' characters could provide the social context students needed. Literature circles (Daniels, 2002; Furr, 2004) are mini-discussion groups, in which participants choose a book, tale, poem, or article and read it within a period of time. In the context of literature circles, peer interaction and clear roles among learners are vital to develop the different cycles. To carry out a literature circle in the classroom, students take specific roles, such as Summarizer, Literary Luminary, Connector, Questioner, Character Wizard, or others that the teacher considers essential. These roles enable students to share ideas and opinions about the texts. By using this tool, students can demonstrate a higher level of respect for others' thoughts, attitudes and behaviors (Medina, 2013).

Likewise, narrative texts for storytelling can account for the cultural contexts students are involved in, which at the same time allow for a better understanding of learners' backgrounds. Storytelling allows students to share experiences, somehow as mirrors of their own reality (McDrury & Alteiro, 2004), which in turn makes learners recognize their own identity and raises their understanding and awareness in relation to ICC (Wu, 2015). They promote students' critical thinking skills, self-acceptance and acceptance of diversity to understand different cultures and their own cultural context (Doganay & Maksut, 2013).

Although storytelling has been mostly used in oral production, and the studies described here were focused on the development of ICC orally, few studies have evidenced ICC skills in written way (Wu, Marek & Chen, 2013). Having this in mind, implementing storytelling in a written form provides more concrete evidence of students' understanding and apprehension of the topics studied according to their conditions and level.

Structure of Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO) Taxonomy

The SOLO taxonomy was originally created by Biggs and Collis (1982). It can be explained in terms of five levels of understanding that are useful to classify the quality of participants' data regarding the assessed items, as described in more detail in the Data Analysis section.

ICC studies show that it is important to have materials and approaches in the language classroom that allow for the teaching of culture through language. This offers possibilities to enhance not only communicative competence, but also to improve experiences and outcomes in relation to this (Mejía & Agray-Vargas, 2014). Consequently, implementing the SOLO taxonomy to evaluate learning outcomes regarding cultural competence can be an effective tool to evidence students' perceptions, understanding, and progress in a more objective and concise way.

In the educational field, the SOLO taxonomy has been used for different purposes and subjects, such as geography, math, accounting, or sciences (Braband & Dahl, 2009; Hussain, Ajmal & Rahman, 2010; Jurdak & El Mouhayar, 2014; Lucas & Mladenovic, 2009; Munowenyu, 2007; Smith & Colby, 2010). This taxonomy has been used to analyze the students' level of understanding of a topic, measure the progression in a competence, establish course objectives, analyze the quality of academic essays, and grade and improve critical thinking skills (Smith & Colby, 2010). Despite the fact that many research studies have been done, there is no evidence of the use of the SOLO taxonomy for measuring learners' outcomes in EFL classrooms or the students' outcomes in regards to their ICC skills development.

Methodology

Research Design

This research study was conducted under the principles of collaborative action research and used students' narrative production as a way to evidence their understanding on ICC topics and the effectiveness of the implemented tools. In order to do so, different instruments such as artifacts, logs, a final questionnaire, and narrative stories were used to collect data in different stages of the implementation.

Participants and Context

Participants for this research project were 75 tenth graders ranged from 15 to 17 years old with B1 English level (Council of Europe,

2011). Selection of participants of the same grade was done to have homogeneity in terms of age, grade, interests, skills, and cognitive development. Furthermore, these learners were characterized by an interest for getting closer with new things, topics and experiences.

Bearing in mind the difficulties of public schools in terms of students' attendance, teacher-researchers used the purposive sample method to choose the population to work with. In this case, the sample is chosen with specific purposes on the basis of the researchers' judgement, as a response of their specific needs (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The criteria to select the subset of participants was based on completeness of the process and activities to guarantee that information collected was not biased. As a result, 15 participants were chosen, five per school.

Pedagogical Intervention

The intervention and lesson planning were applied in three cycles. Each cycle comprised orientation sessions, literature circles, and storytelling tools. One of the reasons for the selection of these last two tools was the need to apply an ICC model (co-orientational model), which worked with comprehension outcomes on intercultural interactional processes.

Orientation sessions were carried out to help participants in the comprehension of basic cultural concepts, tolerance features and conflict resolution strategies. After that, literature circles were the means of providing the comprehensible input which enabled learners to analyze, compare, contrast and take a stance regarding the topics studied in the orientation sessions, and which could appear in the tales they read. Teachers-researchers modelled the first literature circle using the story "Two Monks and a Woman." Then, students, chose their texts using a web tool named *World Stories* which provides readings from around the world. Some of them were "The Fool and the Donkey," "The Wind and the Sun," "Hard Times," among others. Once students had read the story, they carried out the literature circle roles and methodology. These stories helped raise awareness of the differences among cultures, the importance of being tolerant towards the others, and the recognition of their own identity.

Lastly, storytelling was the tool that allowed students to give written evidence of their understanding of concepts while having the opportunity to create fictional or real stories from their own experiences, reflecting upon topics such as culture, tolerance, and conflict resolution.

The length of the written products was around 300 words, and some were created using the Storybird artwork or Power Point Presentations. Storytelling gave evidence of learners' critical thinking skills, intercultural competence, and the ability to get messages across.

During the implementation, data was collected using the instruments described above. Initially, all instruments were completed in paper and then organized in a spreadsheet in Excel, and analyzed using the SOLO taxonomy to solve the research question.

Data Collection Instruments

Artifacts (instructional materials) allowed students to give an account of perceptions regarding different cultural aspects; thus, researchers could keep track of the participants' interpretations of different topics discussed. In this study, artifacts were applied during the orientation sessions and provided evidence of the participants' critical thinking skills like comparing and contrasting information, evaluating and judging situations, and proposing strategies to solve a problem.

Learning logs were used to record the participants' reflections about the content being studied. These were applied at the end of each cycle of the pedagogical intervention and provided information about students' feelings, knowledge, and thoughts regarding their learning experience and ICC skills when being in contact with other cultures.

Stories were used by participants at the end of each cycle to express themselves about their cultural context and perceptions which at the same time allowed researchers to evaluate their intentions and interpretations of complex settings and their way of interacting in different situations (Bruner, 1986; Cohen, et al., 2007) through narrative stories.

Finally, a questionnaire was applied at the end of the process and aimed at collecting factual, behavioral, or attitudinal data through open questions to evaluate students' background, experience, actions, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, interests, and values (Burns, 2010).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

For analyzing the information, stages proposed by grounded theory were applied. In the open coding stage, a color was assigned to each level of the SOLO taxonomy (Biggs & Collis, 1982) to find codes and patterns as follows: purple for pre-structural (the student

does not understand the concept); orange for uni-structural (the student understands the concept but just repeats the information given by the teacher); red for multi-structural (the student understands the concept but finds difficult to make connections between the topics); light green for relational (the student makes connections with the topic and other topics); and light blue for extended abstract (the student proposes something regarding the concept or situation studied). All instruments were analyzed under these criteria. In addition to this, instruments were classified taking into consideration beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge since these are the most important factors when teaching and assessing culture. Then, the axial coding was applied by analyzing the highest SOLO taxonomy levels in order to define the categories for the study. The previous process also allowed researchers to reduce data in a more accurate and objective form.

Results

When applying the literature circles and storytelling (narrative texts production) tools, researchers found that participants gave evidence on ICC awareness and skills development through the different data collection instruments. In this sense, it is possible to assert that somehow students' ICC level went from a misconceptions about culture and how it affects communication and interaction, to the recognition of its importance to get messages across, increase tolerance towards differences, and to have a wider world vision. Thus, three main categories emerged: *demonstration of cultural awareness by analyzing and understanding culture, evidence of the use of ICC skills through writing, and demonstration of a sense of knowledge and identity.*

Demonstration of Cultural Awareness by Understanding and Analyzing Culture

Being culturally aware means that a person is capable of reflecting, being sensitive, and being able to explore language in a pragmatic way when acquiring knowledge of how the language is used in a target culture (Dufva, 1994). According to Muikku-Werner (as cited in Dufva, 1994, p. 21), this awareness makes the first attempts to communicate in a foreign language possible and successful, demonstrated through different attitudes and behaviors, as explained below.

As Dufva (1994), Lonner and Hayes (2004) assert, culture means everyday behavior and everyday thoughts that a person uses to face daily social interactions. In this sense, there are three components to bear

in mind when approaching culture: a comprehension of what culture means, how cultures are different taking into account communities' beliefs and behaviors, and how those differences have an impact on communication (Murray & Bollinger, 2001).

Taking this into consideration, the most representative attitudes recognized during the study were respect for other individuals, and action-oriented behavior in problem solving. In relation to respect for others, findings evidenced the concept of respect in terms of the adaptation to the conventions that can be established in specific contexts. The process of adaption is possible when the opportunity to value other people is granted and interaction leads to inclusion rather than to exclusion, as evidenced here by one participant:

The lack of tolerance affects in a huge way because not all the people would tolerate that someone disrespect them regardless of the place they are in. Because if you go to a country and you do not like anything, people can turn you down to the point you are excluded.³

Likewise, respecting the others means accepting the difference, avoiding judgements of physical appearance, and valuing cultural diversity. In the stories written, the participants gave evidence of respect for different points of view as a way to show that everybody thinks differently. Similarly, the abovementioned sample corroborated that ICC skills are learnt, and as a result, learning is progressive as well (Byram, 1997), which might be a fundamental attitude to be a better citizen in society.

On the other hand, according to Dufva (1994), when a person is able to take a stand and assume a critical attitude, he/she has reached some power to discover hidden meanings of a situation that makes her/him take action in order to solve a problem. For this study, participants evidenced the necessity to take action when analyzing real life situations. This allowed them to express and reflect positive changes when applying conflict resolution strategies in order to have harmonious relationships within their community.

To sum up, it is important to demonstrate that knowledge put into practice can contribute to a positive transformation in society. Participants identified that strategies to solve problems can be taught and used at the same time. This confirms the importance of teaching ICC skills in the English classroom, as reported here:

³ Original Spanish: Pues afecta de una manera dimensional, porque toda la gente no va a tolerar que les faltes al respeto independientemente en el lugar que estés. Porque si tú llegas a otro país y no te gusta nada pues las personas te pueden rechazar hasta llegar a excluirlte.

I learnt to live together in the society, be more tolerant and accept things of others, since I am aware that each person is different. It is good to teach what I learnt.

Evidence of the Use of ICC Skills through Writing

Since the focus of the writing was to go beyond the form (Hillocks, 2005), this research study used freewriting (Elbow, 1998) to concentrate more on the content to evaluate participants' ICC skills. With this in mind, participants used language to build a world vision; it became a resource for demonstrating understanding, expressing meaning, and interacting with others. Moreover, it helped participants make connections among social communities, reflecting upon different cultural aspects. Finally, it allowed learners to build their own identity and their identity in a group. The results of using this approach are evidenced as follows.

Firstly, being aware of how negative actions can affect communication and interaction is one of the central aspects participants reflected in their stories. Individuals who reflect upon the consequences of their actions are able to re-evaluate their behavior and restructure their response for future situations (Byram, 1997). The opposite is implied when individuals are not sufficiently instructed in ICC skills. Finally, considering the recognition of cultural features, which is an essential part of effective communication and interaction, participants demonstrated awareness when reflecting about respect and tolerance as key aspects for this to happen as stated here: "... We have to breathe and tolerate different people to have a better communication."

Second, the ability to recognize other individuals, bearing in mind their attitudes, behavior, and viewpoints is an essential element within ICC skills (Pusch, 2009). As part of participants' cognitive flexibility, they demonstrated in their writing a capability of analyzing and evaluating situations such as discrimination due to racism, bullying, displacement, age, disability, neighborhood, appearance, gang affiliation, and personal capabilities. Participants in this study were able to conclude that no matter the differences between cultures, there are things that are essential for every human being to live together in harmony.

In the same line, researchers obtained evidence of the understanding of one of the ICC aims in regards to finding the self in a societal context (Byram, 1997), when a participant extrapolated this conception to the necessity of adopting a different behavior as a country if cultural and socioeconomic changes are expected, as reported here:

For example, that the oriental culture is very organized, punctual and educated culture; for that reason they are global potencies because those are those little things that makes the difference.

Furthermore, when dealing with ICC, a person needs to be open-minded and able to adapt to different cultural values. These are survival strategies that allow us to recognize individualities and capabilities, as evidenced by the participant:

Juan Martin was advising them that they all had to help other one and not to judge all. Grandmother: but how is it possible, they are animals, they neither think nor feel. Samuel, you are not travelling with me, close well the eyes and open your mind.

Finally, cognitive flexibility is a component of critical thinking, and it is also considered an ICC skill (Yue & Ning, 2015). In this way, while some participants showed clear stances in relation to different topics and situations regarding conflict resolution and tolerance, others revealed avoidance as a way to face problems, demonstrating a lack of social relaxation and comfort when sharing points of view with others (Rubin & Martin, 2009). Therefore, the lack of flexibility might prevent those individuals from having positive approaches when interacting with others.

Demonstration of a Sense of Knowledge and Identity

Recognizing strengths and weaknesses and having a clear definition of the self and a strongly defined role within a group is important for ICC, as stated by one participant:

The identity can fall ill for people that is not accustomed to live in another culture. At the time there, starting changes of attitudes and loss of own identity.

Thus, having contact with another culture or social group should not disrupt what the individual thinks of himself/herself or what makes him/her unique (Kim, 2009). Participants recognized that if identity is not strongly formed, it can be overridden or distorted when interacting with other people or other cultures.

However, researchers obtained evidence of the recognition of the influence that the environment may have over identity and how being different can exclude individuals from a social group, as stated thus:

We must be able to accept another people and this is the problem of this culture; if you are different, you are out. We are obliged to respect the other.

As a consequence, being culturally competent requires having a group identity and sharing viewpoints within a group to be accepted (Byram, 1997).

Having analyzed the data and obtained the codes and categories, the core category of the research study was identified as narrative *texts to evidence the recognition of cultural awareness, cultural skills and identity perceptions in ICC*. Writing stories is an exercise that helps learners to develop cultural imagination (Usó & Martínez, 2008). In this sense, participants were able to comprehend, analyze, and reflect upon cultural differences that could somehow shape their world vision. Similarly, once students managed to recognize the ICC skills needed to relate with others, creating narrative stories with cultural focus demanded that they inquire about cultural aspects, put themselves in the shoes of other people, and see the world with new lenses (Kearney, 2010). When writing narratives, individuals had to imagine the situations the characters were immersed in, and reflect upon the choices they had to make. By the same token, students not only became more critical regarding their contexts; they also could identify themselves within the stories (Kearney, 2010). Therefore, giving students the opportunity to express and tell their own stories is a way to recognize the value of what they have learnt in the classroom, taking advantage of their knowledge and understanding what they have experienced regarding culture and citizenship in their own lives.

Furthermore, when students put into practice what they have learnt or read, it facilitates the use of that knowledge in other situations making learning meaningful and long lasting. In this sense, life-long learning skills are being implemented and thus, learners may realize the importance of using what they learn in their real contexts.

Finally, one of the most significant advantages when using narrative texts is the possibility to allow learners to represent and build their own self-concept (Bruner, 1994). Participants played an active role in the process of building their identity when writing and reflecting upon different topics, in some occasions about themselves and about situations that were closely related to their reality, as depicted in earlier studies where individuals comprehended how their identities were shaped (Coffey & Street, 2008).

Conclusions

This study focused on analyzing what happens to ICC when using storytelling to implement the writing of narrative texts with B1 EFL tenth-graders. In addition, effects of literature circles and storytelling tools in ICC recognition when reflecting upon topics such as culture, tolerance, and conflict resolution were analyzed.

The main discoveries in relation to the use of literature circles and storytelling tools were that these proved to be effective in order to evidence participants' perceptions and insights when teaching ICC. On one hand, literature circles helped learners express themselves in a natural way. On the other hand, reading stories from diverse parts of the world enhanced participants' exploration of different countries and their cultures, instilling their curiosity to learn from and about other cultures, and boosting in students a sense of being more socially responsible (Garrison, et al., 2014). Likewise, by using storytelling in this study, participants could explore different aspects of ICC skills.

Regarding writing narrative texts, findings indicated that these evidenced the growth of cultural awareness since participants recognized the importance of knowing the culture to be able to communicate effectively with the others and respect them. At the same time, participants showed growth in cultural skills as they demonstrated willingness to change and to be more tolerant and empathetic when interacting with others, and a change in perception about their own identity. In this regard, these changes and new knowledge enabled students to have a different way to interact with others since they were aware of the impact that cultural aspects can have in communication. Considering these aspects, participants could reflect, evaluate, and analyze upon cultural similarities and differences, which allowed them to better comprehend different situations and prepared them to communicate more accurately.

Taking into account the context where this research was developed, the possibility to continue applying this methodology could, firstly, decrease the schools' reports of bullying and discrimination as students could continue being trained on the different strategies to solve conflicts and on raising their tolerance levels by exploring ICC within the English classroom. Second, it is necessary to encourage and support students in the construction of their own identity to recognize and appreciate their traditions, cultural values and viewpoints, so that they can have healthy relationships with others (Holliday, et al., 2004). Lastly, using the SOLO taxonomy for analyzing data is highly recommended since learning outcomes can be objectively set and tracked during the learning process.

Although this research study evidenced ICC skills growth to some extent through the use of narrative texts, further research should investigate the implications of the written narrative texts in the students near contexts and their impact on their families and relationships.

Important drawbacks were, on the first hand, participants' distraction with the use of different websites different from the ones required for the study (Storybird and World stories). This situation could be overcome by training students to learn how to use the internet, so they can be more aware of the advantages to use it for learning purposes. On the other hand, time allotted for the pedagogical intervention was longer than the expected due to the extra activities that each school had to comply with, unexpectedly. Consequently, there were sessions where participants and researchers could not meet, which affected students' capability to recall key information. Teacher-researchers tackled this situation by reviewing the topics at the beginning of each session. Additionally, regarding the writing of narrative texts, learners had problems organizing their written production. As a result, it was truly difficult to comprehend students' ideas and perceptions at the analysis stage. To overcome this situation, teaching students the writing process of narrative texts could support their performance when expressing in a written way. Finally, students' speaking ability can be boosted if they are instructed in the use of cohesive devices and useful expressions for everyday situations. This may avoid the use of the mother tongue during the discussion sessions.

To conclude, this study allowed researchers to ascertain that including ICC in the classroom is vital. Consequently, teachers need to provide educational environments where cultural aspects play an essential role in the process of building identity. Thereby, learners are required to be able to act according to a globalized world which demands being aware enough to respect others and communicate effectively, no matter their ideology, race, gender or beliefs; aspects that are currently being included in Ministry policies in Colombia.

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Cultural Collision: The Interference of First Language Cultural Identity on Pragmatic Competence of the Target Language¹

Coalición Cultural: La Interferencia de la Identidad Cultural Lingüística de la Lengua Materna en la Competencia Pragmática en la Lengua Meta

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Abstract

This reflective study explores a different perspective of intercultural communicative competency (ICC) by focusing on the speech acts that non-native speakers of Spanish from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds find difficult to perform competently in various contexts in Colombia. This article covers a qualitative case study using interpretative phenomenological analysis to describe these foreign learners' experiences. It aims to understand the role of their first language, culture, and identity in their use of Spanish and intercultural communication. The data was collected through interviews and reflection notes. The findings demonstrate the interaction and negotiation between the pragmatic knowledge embedded in participants' mother tongue and the target language as they encountered contradictions of their native cultural identity and that of the target culture.

Keywords: language, culture, cultural identity, pragmatic competence, intercultural communication.

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Resumen

Este artículo de tipo reflexivo explora una perspectiva diferente de la competencia comunicativa intercultural (CCI) al enfocarse en cómo algunos actos del habla del español hablado en Colombia se les dificulta a hablantes no nativos provenientes de diversas procedencias lingüísticas y culturales en varios contextos en Colombia. Este artículo describe un estudio de caso cualitativo el cual utiliza el análisis fenomenológico interpretativo para describir las experiencias de estos aprendices extranjeros. Además, tiene como propósito entender el rol de su lengua nativa, cultural e identidad al utilizar el español y la comunicación intercultural. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de entrevistas y notas de reflexión. Los resultados demuestran que la interacción y negociación entre el conocimiento pragmático innato a la lengua nativa de los participantes y la del español son contradictorias de su propia identidad cultural y la del uso de la cultura objetivo.

Palabras clave: Lengua y cultura, la identidad cultural, competencia pragmática, comunicación intercultural

Resumo

Este artigo de tipo reflexivo explora uma perspectiva diferente da competência comunicativa intercultural (CCI) ao enfocar-se em como alguns atos da fala do espanhol falado na Colômbia se causa dificuldade aos falantes não nativos provenientes de diversas procedências linguísticas e culturais em vários contextos na Colômbia. Este artigo descreve um estudo de caso qualitativo, o qual utiliza a análise fenomenológica interpretativa para descrever as experiências destes aprendizes estrangeiros. Além do mais, tem como propósito entender o papel da sua língua nativa, cultural e identidade ao utilizar o espanhol e a comunicação intercultural. Os dados foram coletados através de entrevistas e notas de reflexão. Os resultados demonstram que a interação e negociação entre o conhecimento pragmático inato à língua nativa dos participantes e a do espanhol são contraditórias da sua própria identidade cultural e a do uso da cultura objetivo.

Palavras chave: Língua e cultura, a identidade cultural, competência pragmática, comunicação intercultural

Introduction

Colombia is developing rapidly and is on the path to globalization and cosmopolitanism. The increasing economic and commercial demands as well as political ties with other nations have created new communicative opportunities. As a result, more foreigners are living and working in Colombia and more Colombians than ever before have direct or indirect contact with people from diverse language and cultural backgrounds in and outside of the country. This phenomenon has produced new challenges for language educators in Colombia to optimize the development of intercultural competence and foster linguistically and culturally double-directional learners, who have a sound understanding of both their native and the target cultures and are able to communicate across language-culture differences. The study was conducted in Colombia with three non-native Spanish speakers (NNSS) from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What speech acts in Spanish do the participants find difficult to use competently in their daily intercultural interaction in Colombia?
2. How does the home culture identity of these NNSS participants influence their pragmatic competence development in the use of Spanish in Colombia?

Literature Review

The reviewed literature for this study focuses on the awareness of cultural differences to explore how first language culture identity interacts with the pragmatic development of the target language, and aspects of pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication.

Fundamental Relationship between Native and Target Language Cultures

Language and culture are two sides of the same coin which allow us to gain membership in a particular society or community. However, we rarely contemplate the function of our native language system, or the role and impact of the phrases and expressions that we use on a daily basis until we encounter and communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds that have different belief systems and social norms. These shared interactions are what make cultures dynamic and never permanently fixed as they are created, recreated and interconnected (Gudykunst, 1983). Culture is defined as the non-

biological part of life; it may be fundamental but not innate because culture is a socially constructed human creation (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Freire, 1970; Jandt, 2001). Hence, cultures have their own internal coherence, logic and validity within a social system (Paige, 1993). Agar (1994) proposes the theory that learning a target language culture is driven by rich point. This occurs when we realize that a culture is different from ours, and we are faced with certain behaviors which we do not understand. The largest rich point is total incomprehension due to huge differences between the source language culture and the target language-culture; it is also the point in which culture shock occurs. Differing societal aspects such as values, behavior, and attitudes are embedded in languages; therefore, one's mother tongue influences the speaker's worldview and is an important source in understanding thoughts, behavioral, and cognitive learning processes (House, 2007).

The Role of First Language Culture Identity in L2 Pragmatic Development

Norton (2013) suggests that language learning is an investment in a learner's own identity. In the process of acquiring an additional language, learners' past and current sense of self encounter and transform each other (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996; Papastergiadis, 2000). Block (2007) explains further the link between SLA and one's sense of identity "when individuals immerse themselves in new sociocultural environments, they find that their sense of identity is destabilized and that they enter a period of struggle to reach a balance" (p. 864). Since identity is constituted by the social environment, it is constantly changing across time and space. Hence, individuals have the possibility of taking up a range of social identities available to them in the 'cultural supermarket' (Mathews, 2000).

In order to establish the link between L1 and the target language culture, one needs to put their own native culture in relation to the foreign language culture (Kramsch, 1993). Schumann (1978) points out that social distance can either promote or hinder second language acquisition depending on the degree of proximity between the L2 learners and the TL communities. His view is further supported by Fantini's (2009) statement that one's native tongue facilitates thoughts and communication within one's native culture. On the other hand, it can also become the biggest hindrance in understanding another global perspective because it prevents one from, "grasping possibilities inherent and encoded in other systems" (p. 265). Hence, the greater the linguistic, social and cultural distance between learners' L1 and the

target language, the more difficult it may be for learners to overcome the contradictory nature to bridge the cultural disparities. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) states “all new learning involves transfer based on previous learning.” (p. 53). This could also explain why the initial learning of L1 will impact the learning of L2. Previous cross-cultural pragmatic research also mentioned that L2 or L3 learners tend to transfer their native pragmatic knowledge when they use the target language. When learners apply their knowledge of one language to another language, the L1 interference can result in a positive or negative transfer. When the relevant unit or structure of both languages are the same, linguistic interference can result in correct language production. On the contrary, when the linguistic and cultural distance between the home and the target language is large, the interference is often a negative one. Chiswick & Miller (2005) developed a quantitative measure of the distance between English and other languages based on the difficulty Americans have learning other languages. The lower the scores on a standardized proficiency test, the greater the distance is between these languages and English. The score for Mandarin is 1.5, which is lower than that of Spanish at 2.25. The results demonstrate that when other determinants of language proficiency are the same, the greater the measure of linguistic distance, the poorer is the respondent’s language proficiency. Apparently, Mandarin is more difficult to learn than Spanish for English speakers due to the greater linguistic distance. Hence, Spanish would be more difficult to learn for Mandarin speakers than English speakers.

Pragmatic Failure in Cross-Cultural Communication

Schumann (1987) discusses in his SLA acculturation model that the degree of which learners orient themselves to the target language culture would determine the extent to which learners acquire the second language. A speaker’s linguistic competence is composed of grammatical competence and pragmatic competence. Thomas (1983) terms pragmatic failure as an area of ‘cross-cultural communication breakdown.’ She further states that pragmatic failure results from the hearer’s inability to infer the force of the speaker’s utterance due to the fact that the speaker and the listener do not share the same values, behavior norms, or world views. As a result, the hearer might perceive the force of the speaker’s utterances to be stronger or weaker than the speaker intended. A message may be interpreted to carry a different meaning than was intended when it is encoded by a person in one culture and decoded by a person from another cultural background (Samovar & Porter, cited in Jandt, 2001)

In addition, Fantini (2009) pointed out learners were most surprised and disappointed when they found out that there is no equivalence in the target language for some frequently used phrases in their L1. He argues that speech acts consist of language, behaviors, and interactional strategies, three essential components for intercultural communication. Therefore, inappropriate transference of speech act strategies from L1 to L2 can cause pragma-linguistic failure. Moreover, when the target language has a wider range of connotations of certain speech acts than the mother language, pragmatic overgeneralization is likely to occur. After all, various elements that are taken for granted in a certain culture do not match the elements of another culture. Being an intercultural speaker is not just merely a code-switching task; it involves learning new ways of thinking, new behaviors and interactional styles, as well as integration of one's home cultural identity and the target language identity.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenology research model as the most appropriate methodology to investigate the phenomena experienced by the participants. According to Welman and Kruger (1999), phenomenology provides a deep understanding of “social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved” (p.189). The following illustration demonstrates the phenomenology research procedures described by Moustakas (1994).



Figure 1. Procedures for conducting phenomenological research

Participants

Prior to the commencement of the study, the participant information statement and participant consent forms were distributed to a university language centre, where there were seven foreign language teachers and assistants. This study was then conducted among those three non-native Spanish speakers who expressed interest and signed the consent forms, which indicated their clear understanding of the study. As this study required participants to describe their personal experiences and perceptions, participants were assured that any identifiable personal details would be kept in the strictest confidence. They were identified by pseudonyms, **Caroline**, **Lilian** and **Zi-ge**:

Caroline is a 23-year-old female from America. She studied Spanish as a subject for two years at university where she majored in Journalism. At the time of the interview, she was working as an English language assistant at a private University in Bogotá. During her one-year stay in Colombia, she took Spanish classes with a language exchange partner, who was studying to teach Spanish as a foreign language. Her Spanish proficiency level was about B1 at the time of the interview.

Lilian is a 25-year-old female from the UK. She started learning Spanish at university, where she majored in French & Spanish. Prior to coming to Colombia, she worked as a language assistant in Guadalajara, Mexico for two years. At the time of interview, she just finished her one-year contract as an English language assistant at a private university in Bogotá. Her Spanish proficiency level was about C1 at the time of the interview.

Zi-ge is a 38-year-old female from China. She is married to a Colombian man and is in an intercultural marriage. She works as a Chinese teacher in a language centre of a private university. At the time of the interview, she had lived in Colombia for four years and had taken Spanish classes for two semesters in the beginning of her stay in Colombia. Her Spanish proficiency level was about B1 at the time of the interview.

Data Collection Instruments

In collecting the data, semi-structured in-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted, and supplemented by reflection notes written by the participants, which aim to gather the complexity by probing, detailing and clarifying issues. Kvale (1996) describes the use of an interview as “a professional conversation which has a structure to gain access to the perception of the interviewee and has a purpose to

interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (pp. 5-6). One month before the interview, each participant was informed about the purpose of the research to obtain their informed consent. In addition, they were asked to write reflective notes (memos) to help them contemplate the issues and difficulties they encountered in their daily use of Spanish in Colombian context.

The reflection journals of the participants were written in English and Chinese. In their mother tongue, they were able to express their deepest thoughts freely without any restrictions. The interviews were conducted in English with the American and British participants and in Chinese with the Chinese participant.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The participants’ responses to the open-ended interview questions were transcribed, translated (Chinese => English) and analysed. The duration of each interview was about one hour, and contained the participants’ extensive responses. Data reduction and transformation were required so that the data could be entered and displayed as a mixture of direct quotes and summary phrases. Thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008) was employed to provide an analysis according to the pre-established research questions to guide the study. Themes emerged through a constant comparative method. The interpretation of the data incorporates both the findings and discussion. The following analysis addresses the first research question: What speech acts in Spanish do the participants find difficult to use competently in their daily intercultural interaction in Colombia?

Table 1. Speech acts NNSS have difficulty acquiring

Addressing / calling people
Greeting
Terms of endearment
Thanking
Responding to compliments
Apology
Parting (leave-taking)

Three content categories emerged from the data analysis, which depict the three phases of pragmatic development that the participants

experienced in the process of acquiring pragmatic competence in the use of target language. The table below depicts findings relevant to the second research question: *How does the home culture identity of these NNSS participants influence their pragmatic competence development in the use of Spanish in Colombia?*

Table 2. Target language pragmatic development phases influenced by home cultural identity

Bewilderment with the Target Culture Norms
Collision between Native and Target Language Cultures
Finding the third places

Results

This study provided participants a valid opportunity to revisit their own selves in their process of self-re-definition and express their own voice in a non-threatening space. Data analysis provided examples of reflections and narratives to elaborate on the participants’ lived experiences of first language, culture, and identity in relation to target language pragmatic competence. With the two research questions as the established objectives, the results are divided in the following three themes generated through the data analysis.

Bewilderment with the Target Culture Norms

In Colombia, these participants are faced with certain behaviors which they do not understand. As outsiders, they realized that they are confronted by surprises and departures from their expectations that signal a difference between their natal-culture and Colombian culture. They are the moments of incomprehension, when they suddenly did not know how to react in the situation.

Extract 1: Here people use skin color as nicknames like *negrito/negrita*. I’m often called *Morenita* here. That would never happen in the States, as it is considered politically incorrect to call a black person ‘nigger.’ It’s very offensive to call someone by their skin color, it’s like making a racist comment. But later on I figured out those names don’t express racial discrimination. On the contrary, it’s a friendly way to address people you know well. (Caroline, interview, Oct 7, 2013)³

Extract 2: One day I was driving to work. It was rush hour and the car in front of me was going very slow, so I over took the car. The driver in that

³ *negrito o negrita* (lit. Blackie, used for both males and females)

car got really upset, so he speeded up and cut in front of me. He got off the car and walked towards me. As I rolled down the window, he said: “Amor, No haga eso en horas pico”. I nearly burst into laughter and I didn’t know how to react. It seems that the driver came over for a quarrel, but it sounded as if he was flirting with me by calling me *amor*. (Zi-ge, reflection, May5, 2013) ⁴

Extract 3: My husband often calls other females *corazon*, *mija* or *preciosa*. I feel uncomfortable about it because it sounds too intimate. But later he explained to me the purpose of using terms of endearment is to show friendliness and to make people feel good. It also serves as an ice breaker and it helps shorten the distance when you talk to strangers. (Zi-ge, reflection, May 5, 2013)⁵

The above extracts demonstrated that these participants from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds perceived the force of terms of endearment and certain speech acts in Spanish of addressing people to be stronger than the speaker intended as they do not share the same system of knowledge or beliefs. It coincided with the explanation of pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983; Samovar & Porte, 1997; Jandt, 2001) caused by inappropriate transference of speech act strategies from L1 to L2.

Collision between Native and Target Language Cultures

The following examples showed that these participants felt uncomfortable or awkward using certain culturally-loaded words and idioms for which they can hardly find their equivalents in their mother tongue due to the fact that some notions and connotations embedded in the expressions clash with their first language identity and culture.

Extract 1: I kind of like it, but for me it’s over the top calling people *Mi Reina*, *mi princesa*! I also like my neighbors calling me *vecina*, but I don’t really use it because it’s not part of my culture. People in the States do say *Darling* or *sweetie pie*, but generally they are kind of more country or older, not my generation. A shop owner nearby my place always greets me by saying “Buenos días! Mi reina!,” “Good morning! My Queen! “No one in the States would ever say that!! And I also found female friends

⁴ *Mi amor*, *no haga eso en horas pico* (lit: My love, don’t do that during rush hour), my love is closer in meaning here to dear or darling.

Amor: (lit. love), but closer in meaning to dear or darling

⁵ *corazón*, *mija* o *preciosa*. (lit. heart, my daughter, and precious)

mija is an abbreviation of the words *mi hija* (lit. my daughter. Also used for *mi hijo*: my son)

here tend to say to me “Me encanta verte” a lot! Those expressions are over the top for me! (Caroline, interview, Sept 30, 2013).⁶

Extract 2: O In the States, we say “I’m sorry” when offering apologies, but here it’s like people don’t want to admit it’s their fault, so they say “Qué pena!” a lot more often than “Lo siento”. In my culture, if you sincerely offer your apologies for your wrong doing you’d say “I’m really sorry” not “What a pity”. “What a shame this happened to you!” I always say “Disculpe” or “perdon” in public transportation when trying to get off /on the bus/Transmilenio; and that makes me a ‘foreigner’ cause no one else says anything. They just push you out of the way. I say sorry a lot; I feel that our culture says sorry a lot, but I don’t think they do here. (Lilian, interview, May 12, 2013)⁷

Extract 3: Once I complimented a friend’s jacket. I said it looks really stylish and made with top-notch material. She replied “A la orden”. Maybe I misinterpreted the expression, then I asked her whether I can borrow it on Christmas day, she said “No”! I still don’t quite understand why people say “A la orden” when they don’t really mean it! For me it’s hypocritical for people to say things when they don’t mean it. In Chinese, we have a saying that goes “When words are once out your mouth, even four quick horses cannot chase them back”, which literally means that one has to keep his/her words. At first, I thought Colombian people are hypocritical, they don’t always mean what they say, but then I realized that they say “a la orden” out of courtesy, and it can’t be taken seriously! (Zi-ge, reflection, May 6, 2013).⁸

The above examples revealed that the collisions are caused by the fact that these participants cannot relate to or identify with the pragmatics encoded in those speech acts, which are in equivalent or even contradictory to their first language. The finding demonstrates that the learners’ home cultural identity does not facilitate, but impedes the learners from achieving pragmatic competence in the target language. The result supports the argument (Kramsch, 1993; Fantini, 2009; Schumann, 1978) that the learners’ native cultural based values, attitudes, and behaviors can be an obstacle to effective communication in the target context depending on the degree of social distance between the L2 learners and the TL communities. The linguistic and cultural distance between Chinese and Spanish is far greater than English and Spanish, thus; the Chinese participant Zi-ge seemed to encounter more

⁶ *Mi reina, mi princesa* (lit. My queen, my princess), *vecina* (lit. neighbor), *¡Buenos días! Mi reina:* (lit. Good morning, my queen!) *Me encanta verte.* (lit. I love seeing you, but closer in meaning to *Im so glad to see you.*

⁷ *Que pena* (‘lit. What a shame) *Disculpe:* Excuse me *Perdón:* (Lit. forgiveness), but closer in meaning to *I’m sorry Transmilenio:* Bogotá’s mass transit system

⁸ *A la orden:* (lit. at your command, or at your service)

conflicts and experience greater difficulty than the other two English speaking participants in overcoming the discrepancy between the native lingua-culture and the target one, which was reflected in her interview statements and her reflective memos.

Finding the Third Place

The notion of the *third place* refers to the point of intercultural encounter, where interlocutors from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds communicate and interact successfully (Liddicoat & Lo Bianco, 1999). They further point out, “The ability to find this third place is at the core of intercultural competence” (p.15). The following excerpts demonstrate that these participants were in the process of negotiating comfortable third places between the self and the other, finding the middle ground between the home and the target culture.

Extract 1: I think it’s very rude to call people according to their physical appearance such as *gordita* or *flaca*. I’m aware that *gordita* is normally for children. But I’m skinny, so my Colombian friends nickname me *flaca*. I didn’t like it at first, then I realized that it’s a jokey and friendly way to call your close friends, so I started to take it light heartedly. (Lilian, interview, May 12, 2013).⁹

Extract 2: When people say nice things like “Que estás bien”, it makes you feel liked. It’s nice to hear even though they say it to everybody. Or “Que le vaya muy bien”. Phrases like those are really nice to hear, but in the United States, we don’t really do it in English. But here, every time I say goodbye to somebody here, they always say “Que estás bien”. You do kind of think oh That’s so sweet, thanks! (Lilian, interview, May 12, 2013)¹⁰

Extract 3: It took me more than a year to start saying “Eres muy amable” every time after saying “Gracias”. I didn’t understand why I had to praise people “It’s very kind of you” for doing their jobs. From Chinese culture’s perspective, we expect people to perform well at work, to do a good job. It’s very strange for me having to pay compliment to people for getting their jobs done. I mean they’re paid to do it, aren’t they? However, here in Colombia it seems you have to say “Eres muy amable” after saying “thank you”, otherwise, people might think that you’re not polite. Later, my husband explained to me that you can get your job done with a friendly attitude or an unpleasantly attitude, so we Colombians praise people for doing their jobs with a positive and service-oriented

⁹ *Gordita*: (lit. *Fattie*), but closer in meaning to *chubby*, *Flaca*: (Lit. *bony*, *skinny*)

¹⁰ *Que estás bien* (Lit. *Be ok*), but closer in meaning to *I wish that you are well*, *Que le vaya muy bien* (lit. *May everything go well*), but closer in meaning to *I wish that you do well*.

attitude. I started to think it makes sense, after accepting their point of view, I feel more comfortable using this phrase. (Zi-ge, reflection, May 5, 2013)¹¹

The above excerpts illustrated that when using the target language or living in a new cultural community, the L2 learner's world views and perceptions towards the others might change after gaining new pragmatic knowledge. The finding supports the notion that culture is dynamic and subject to change (Block, 2007; Zu & Kong, 2009). The awareness of the differences between cultures provide the learners opportunities to adjust themselves to the "new" situations and to empathize with the target language community. These participants were able to appreciate and relate to the social world of the target language even though it took them some time to understand and accept the values and beliefs embedded in the target language system, which is very different from their natal social world.

Conclusions

As indicated, the aim of this study was to explore the speech acts in Spanish that non-native participants found difficult to use properly in their daily interaction in Colombia, the impact of their first language culture identity on this and their subsequent adjustments to achieve pragmatic competence in the target language. The findings of the study reveal that these participants are constantly trying to build and rebuild their target language identity whenever they use the target language. They felt a strong conflict between the attitudes, beliefs and social norms of the home language-culture and the target one. The results also showed that these participants found themselves struggling to perform some speech acts competently in various contexts because the notions and connotations embedded in the expressions clash with their first language identity and culture.

As their Spanish progresses, they constantly attempted to establish a connection with the target social community by trying to make sense of the meaning and purpose behind certain speech acts and to reestablish their cultural identity in the communication with their Spanish speaking interlocutor in social contexts in Colombia. The process of becoming a more effective speaker of the target language, involves mediating one's own home culture-based values and worldview with the target culture

¹¹ *eres muy amable* (lit. you are very kind) *gracias: Thank you*

ones. As a consequence, the respondents had a sense of insecurity, discomfort, and lack of confidence when speaking the target language. The findings revealed that it is not always necessary for language competency to maintain links between L1 and L2 in order to properly use and understand specific terms. These participants of different Spanish levels all encountered difficulty in understanding and using specific terms in Spanish at some point due to the interference of their first cultural identity. Not all of them managed to find third places for all the contradictions between their native languaculture and the target one. They rejected certain notions imbedded in the target language and accepted others. Even though they came to an understanding and acceptance of certain Spanish speech acts after a longer period of staying in Colombia, they still would not use them in their daily interaction because they do not have the habit of doing so in their home contexts.

The findings of this study offer some implications for teaching practices and future research in Colombian context. Due to the nature of a qualitative case study, the present study recruited a small number of participants to gain deeper insight. Further useful research could expand the sample size and investigate further on the issues that learners of Spanish as a foreign language encountered both linguistically and pragmatically in relation to linguistic and cultural distance between their native tongue and the target one. Hence, more constructive suggestions can be provided towards helping foreign learners achieve intercultural communication competence in Colombian contexts.

Galvis (2011) pointed out that the pre-service teachers surveyed in his study found intercultural communication interesting, but yet not applicable in their teaching context in the public school sector due to the lack of meaningful encounters with foreign language speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, even though the ideology of intercultural communicative competence was promoted at the theoretical level in teacher's training at university. However, since 2015 the Colombian National Ministry of Education and El Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA) have partnered with Heart of Change, Atlas Corps and Volunteers Colombia to develop and implement the English Teaching Fellowship Programs (ETF), which have brought hundreds of foreign professionals to Colombia to help provide quality English education to thousands of public school students and English teachers throughout the country. With the increase of exposure to authentic intercultural interaction opportunities, the impact and effects of these bilingual programs have on the development of intercultural communication competence can be examined and explored in the near future.

Learning is a reciprocal process in foreign language classrooms where both teachers and students learn from each other to expand linguistic and cultural knowledge. No text book or materials can provide the sufficient cultural knowledge required for second or foreign language users to conduct their linguistic behavior competently and appropriately in cross-cultural situations. Hence, foreign language teachers play an important role in orienting the target language learners to their home culture and vice versa. If foreign language teachers have better awareness and understanding of their students' natal culture, they will be able to better help students overcome the cultural disparities that prevent them from using the target language competently in varied contexts. In addition, it is essential to incorporate pragmatics knowledge in the foreign language curriculum and instruction to make the foreign culture less threatening and more accessible to the language learner. By fostering foreign language user's target language pragmatics competence, they will be better able to establish the proper linkage between their first languaculture and the target one. This will in turn reduce learning conflicts and allow them to use the target language properly with confidence in various contexts.

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High School Students' Attitudes and Experiences in EFL Classrooms Equipped with Interactive Whiteboards¹

Actitudes y Experiencias de los Estudiantes de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera de Secundaria en Aulas Equipadas con Tableros Interactivos²

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine ninth grade EFL students' experiences and attitudes towards classrooms equipped with interactive whiteboards (IWB). The data were collected with a questionnaire about attitudes towards IWB use in EFL classes, and observations from three different classrooms in three different high schools. The study indicated that the EFL students were not fully aware of how to use IWBs in learning English although they had a background of IWB use. In addition, there was no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of the male and female students towards using IWBs. Overall, the results revealed that EFL students' attitudes towards IWBs were positive although there were some technical challenges in IWB classrooms.

Keywords: FATİH project, Interactive Whiteboards, English as a foreign language, English teachers, ninth grade students

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Resumen

El propósito de este estudio fue indagar sobre las experiencias y actitudes hacia las aulas equipadas con tableros interactivos de un grupo de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera de noveno grado. Los datos fueron recogidos por medio de un cuestionario para conocer las actitudes de los estudiantes hacia el uso de este tipo de herramienta tecnológica y las observaciones de tres diferentes clases entre tres diferentes colegios. El estudio indicó que los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera no estaban completamente informados de cómo utilizar los tableros interactivos para el aprendizaje del inglés pese a conocer los antecedentes del uso de IWB. Además, no se observaron diferencias significativas en términos estadísticos en relación a las actividades de los estudiantes de género masculino y femenino hacia el uso de IWB. En general, los resultados revelaron que los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera tenían una actitud positiva hacia el uso de IWB a pesar de presentarse algunos problemas técnicos en las aulas.

Palabras clave: Proyecto FATIH, tableros inteligentes, inglés como lengua extranjera, docentes de inglés, estudiantes de novena grado

Resumo

O propósito deste estudo foi indagar sobre as experiências e atitudes em relação às salas de aula equipadas com quadros interativos de um grupo de estudantes de inglês como língua estrangeira de primeiro ano do ensino médio. Os dados foram coletados por meio de um questionário para conhecer as atitudes dos estudantes em relação ao uso deste tipo de ferramenta tecnológica e as observações de três diferentes grupos entre três diferentes colégios. O estudo indicou que os estudantes de inglês como língua estrangeira não estavam completamente informados de como utilizar os quadros interativos para a aprendizagem do inglês apesar de conhecer os antecedentes do uso de IWB. Além do mais, não se observaram diferenças significativas em termos estatísticos em relação às atividades dos estudantes de gênero masculino e feminino com relação ao uso de IWB. Em geral, os resultados revelaram que os estudantes de inglês como língua estrangeira tinham uma atitude positiva com relação ao uso de IWB apesar de ter ocorrido alguns problemas técnicos nas salas de aula.

Palavras chave: Projeto FATIH, quadros inteligentes, inglês como língua estrangeira, docentes de inglês, estudantes de primeiro ano do ensino médio

Introduction

Recently, integrating technology with education has gained more and more importance as the internet has taken a place in foreign language learning (Aydın, 2007). By administering activities based on multimedia in the classroom, students are led to take part in a social and collaborative environment, which helps them support and supplement each other's knowledge, skills, and points of view (Lee, 2005). Studies in the field of language teaching and learning have indicated that technology use in EFL classes can bring many opportunities in terms of using a foreign/second language (L2) in real life (Chapelle, 1998; Cloke & Sharif, 2001; Gerard, Widener, & Greene, 1999; Schmid, 2006). Therefore, the activation of learners' auditory and visual abilities by bringing authentic materials into the classroom can be provided or supported by the use of such a tool. Korkmaz and Cakıl (2013) have indicated that IWBs provide perceptibility and make a great contribution to the learning process. These motivational and engaging effects, easy access to every kind of resource, and students' positive attitudes can promote learning and help students put their knowledge into practice (Essam & Asiri, 2012). For example, in an experimental study by Han and Keskin (2016), it was found that speaking activities conducted by a mobile phone application can reduce EFL students speaking anxiety to some extent.

Following Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Turkey launched an educational technology project named the FATİH Project (The Movement to Enhance Opportunities and Improve Technology) in 2010 (MEB, 2014). Every classroom from grade 5 to 12 has been equipped with IWBs to create an effective educational platform. With the help of the FATİH project, which aims to provide equality in education and to equip all classrooms with the technology (MEB, 2014), learners have been able to find opportunities to use IWBs in EFL classrooms.

In spite of the fact that there has been great technological development in education, some problems with regard to language teaching and learning through IWBs might occur: a) teachers' lack of competence using IWBs (Korkmaz & Çakıl, 2013), b) low motivation towards using technology (Al-Faki & Khamis, 2014), c) the fact that it may be time consuming to redesign materials and integrate materials with these technological tools (Johnson, Ramanair & Brine, 2010), d) technical problems (Gursul & Tozmaz, 2010), and e) exposing too much information and teaching very quickly (Schmid, 2008). In this sense, the main aim of this study was to investigate the attitudes and reactions of 9th grade students in EFL classes towards the use of IWBs in one of

the eastern cities of Turkey. This study might be helpful in identifying the drawbacks occurring in the use of IWB in EFL classrooms.

Literature Review

Research has indicated that technology has played an effective role in language teaching and learning since it penetrated into the educational field, and IWB use in EFL classes has generally been regarded as an effective tool in terms of motivation, interaction, effective teaching, broadening the learning environment, and improving language skills (Aydın, 2007; Aydınli & Elaziz, 2010; Conacher & Royall, 1998; Johnson, et al., 2010; Katwibun, 2014; Öz, 2014; Schmid, 2008; Türel & Johnson, 2012).

Johnson, et al. (2010) conducted a study on EFL students' and teachers' perceptions of IWBs. It revealed that most of the students and teachers were positive towards IWB use as it provided interaction and a variety of materials. Likewise, in a study by Schmid (2008), the pedagogical benefits of multimedia use in EFL classrooms equipped with IWBs were examined. The study revealed that multimedia use had a positive impact on motivation, attention, concentration, and vocabulary. In addition, the study proved that IWB use in classes helped learners to understand the content of the lesson better, and that it might make the lesson more active. Another study conducted by Katwibun (2014) aimed to investigate the effect of IWBs on vocabulary teaching in the eleventh grade. The result indicated that there was an increase in terms of students' in-class participation and vocabulary, and that most of the students had a positive attitude towards the IWB.

Studies conducted in the Turkish context have supported the results of studies carried out in other contexts and have proved that IWB use in EFL classes is more efficient and effective than the use of traditional whiteboards (TWBs). Öz (2014) investigated EFL teachers and students' perceptions of IWBs and revealed that although there was no significant difference in teachers and students' perceptions in terms of gender, students' proficiency levels and weekly IWB use resulted in a significant difference. This study showed that the participants were positive towards IWBs in EFL classes. Similarly, Türel and Johnson (2012) examined teachers' perceptions and the impact of IWB use in EFL classes in a large group ranging from 6th to 12th grade. The study indicated that collaboration among teachers, sufficient training on IWBs, and the frequency of use improved teachers' competency in using technology and made the classes more effective and practical. Aydınli and Elaziz (2010) examined 458 students and 82 teachers' attitudes

towards IWBs. The study indicated that both teachers and students had positive attitudes towards IWBs and that the IWBs provided motivation and in-class participation. İpek and Sözcü (2016) carried out a descriptive study on the preferences and attitudes of students and teachers towards the use of IWBs in grades 7-12. In the study, student and teacher questionnaires were used to examine participants' attitudes, preferences, awareness, and consideration. The study revealed that both groups of the participants had positive attitudes towards IWBs. Finally, thanks to the tasks presented through IWBs, students' interaction with their peers increased and they encouraged each other to write, highlight, and correct the texts. They also found themselves in natural written and spoken activities (Johnson, et al., 2010).

Challenges of Using IWB

The reasons why most teachers do not use this technology in their own classes include lack of competency, low motivation, lack of time required for material design, and technical problems (Korkmaz & Çakıl, 2013). In a study, Korkmaz and Cakıl (2013) investigated the difficulties that teachers faced while using IWBs. Interviews with 17 teachers revealed that although teachers had a positive attitude towards this technology and believed that IWB use in classes was beneficial, they did not know how to use it effectively. The study revealed that teachers did not have sufficient competency in using this technology. Similarly, Al-Faki and Khamis (2014) examined the challenges in using IWBs in the Saudi EFL classroom context. The study revealed that the challenges were four-fold: a) lack of a pedagogical framework and competency for teachers, b) lack of administration support, c) a lack of technical support, and d) low motivation of students. The study carried out on students and teachers' perceptions of IWBs revealed that although most of the students and teachers were positive towards IWBs, they believed that redesigning materials took a lot of time (Johnson, et al., 2010). Further, a study carried out by Gursul and Tozmaz (2010) revealed that using IWBs involved some technical problems, such as technical errors in calibration settings. They added that these kinds of problems wasted time as calibration is time consuming. In order to cope with such problems, necessary support was identified as a factor that could improve teachers' integration with technology (Kim, et al., 2013).

Finally, another problem is that in IWB based lessons, learners might be exposed to information and stimuli overload as teachers can access materials quickly and may do the activities very fast (Schmid, 2008). Therefore, learners might have difficulty in matching the teacher's speed and be unable to engage in the learning process.

Briefly, numerous studies have been conducted with a view to investigating the aforementioned drawbacks and advantages of IWBs. However, in the Turkish research context, such studies have been conducted in the western part of the country or metropolitan regions, but in the eastern part of the country, there has been a lack of interest in this field. Therefore, there might be some problems in generalizing IWB use and its benefits in teaching and learning an L2. The pursuit of the relationships between such technology literacy and educational factors in countries like Turkey could be rewarding (Dogan & Abd-El-Khalick, 2008). While all public schools receive a similar amount of funding, support, and staffing, communities in well-off cities generally contribute to their local schools with additional resources, which, in turn, leads the overall educational milieu in these schools to become rather different from that in schools in cities that have fewer accessible communal resources (Dogan & Abd-El-Khalick, 2008). Further, a lack of educational infrastructure leads to inequalities and “polarization in educational opportunities,” and the biggest inequalities are “related to the urban–rural division and regional differences between the West and East” (Smits & Hoşgör, 2006, p. 547). This study might be of help in generalizing the previous research results and shed a light to overcome the problems mentioned above. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the 9th grade students’ attitudes towards using IWBs in EFL classes?
2. Do the students’ attitudes towards IWBs significantly differ by gender?
3. What is the teaching and learning atmosphere like in IWB classrooms?

Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-research design was followed in this study. Specifically, the explanatory design was used to provide “additional information to flesh out the results” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015, p. 559). First, quantitative and then qualitative data were collected “to follow up and refine the quantitative findings” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015, p. 559).

An attitude questionnaire and field notes (e.g. observations) were used to collect the data. One of the researchers took field notes

while observing the classrooms of three different high schools. The field notes were “complete and descriptive, and include everything the researcher/observer feels in addition to what is actually observed, field notes often contain the observer’s feelings and reactions toward the events observed,” and observation is also frequently “referred to as fieldwork” (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 265). Therefore, this study used the terms “observations” and “field notes” interchangeably. In this study, the participant observation was covert in which the participants do not know that they are being observed (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015).

One of the researchers obtained permissions from three ninth-grade English teachers in high schools for observation. The data were collected in four steps. In the first step, the application for permission from the Ministry of National Education was completed. In the second step, the questionnaire was administered to the participants. Later, classroom observations were conducted in three different classrooms at three different schools. In the third step, the collected data were compiled according to the schools. In the fourth step, the quantitative data were computed and analyzed using a statistical computer program and the qualitative data were analyzed according to recurring themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) and classified according to key words.

Participants

Participants included 483 EFL students (191 male and 292 female) in 9th grade of seven high schools that participated in the study. All the participants were selected by convenience non-random sampling. The students were regarded as having the same English level, A1 or A2 according to the small-scale proficiency exam done by the schools at the beginning of the educational year. Although a great number of the students (455) had not taken a computer course before, nearly all of them claimed that they knew how to use a computer. Most of the students (377) used the internet for social networking and doing research. It might be concluded that the students use technology intensively and that this might affect their IWB use in EFL classes.

Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaire. In order to obtain the quantitative data, a student questionnaire including background information and Likert-scale items was administered to the participants. The questionnaire used in this study was developed by Aydınli and Elaziz (2010). They did the Cronbach alpha reliability check (.79) for their adapted version.

The Cronbach alpha reliability check was .92 for this study. The questionnaire included the following sub-sections: a) general attitudes, b) attitudes towards technical issues, c) general positive attitudes, d) attitudes towards motivation, e) attitudes towards time management and organizational issues, f) attitudes towards traditional boards vs. IWB. The questions in the background section were modified by the researcher according to the features of the participants.

Classroom observation. To determine students' attitudes and reactions after a lesson taught with IWB, a researcher in this study carried out observations. The observation was performed in three different classrooms from three different high schools for one lesson period. The observation list including open-ended and multiple choice questions, and field notes were organized so as to examine students' attitudes in the classrooms. The aim of the observation list was to obtain enough data to determine the challenges and the problems that students encountered during the lessons in which IWB was used. The participants were not informed that they were being observed, so the observer was a complete participant (Gold, 1958). This was a covert follow-up observation. The observation was also recorded.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Descriptive and inferential data analyses were conducted to examine students' attitudes towards IWBs by gender. the qualitative data were analyzed based on recurring themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003), using coding and classifying approach (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell, 2012; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009).

Results

Both quantitative and qualitative data showed that a high percentage of students had a positive attitude towards learning and teaching EFL through IWBs. However, the t-test results ($p > .05$) indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of the male and female participants towards IWBs, indicating that gender was not a determining factor in the use of IWBs. Finally, IWB users could face some challenges and technical problems while using IWB. The results of this study are discussed in terms of the research questions.

Quantitative Data Results

Students' attitudes towards IWB use. In this section, the tables were designed according to the levels in the questionnaire and the research questions.

Table 1. Summary of Descriptive Results

Research Questions	Data	Analysis	Levels	Mean	Sd.	Result
What are the ninth grade students' attitudes towards using Interactive Whiteboards	EFL students' questionnaires (n=483)	Descriptive	General attitudes	4,00	1,28	A high percentage of the students have positive attitudes towards IWB use in EFL classes
			Attitudes towards technical issues	3,37	1,49	
			General positive attitudes	2,71	1,41	
			Attitudes towards motivation	3,77	1,37	
			Attitudes towards time management and organizational issues	3,35	1,44	
			Attitudes towards traditional boards vs. IWB.	2,48	1,51	

Table 1 reveals the EFL students' attitudes towards learning through IWBs. The mean scores are near four, which means that the majority of EFL students think that there is a relationship between IWB use and the teaching and learning process. As IWBs provide many opportunities for learners, such as making the learning process easy, exciting and understandable, they have positive attitudes. Second, the table reveals students' attitudes towards technical issues such as sunlight or recalibration that might impede visibility of the board. Third, the table shows that all students have a positive attitude towards IWB use in their own lessons. In addition, the students show no hesitation while using IWBs, nor do they have negative attitudes towards IWB equipped lessons. Next, the table gives EFL students' attitudes towards attention, motivation, and interaction. The mean scores are above three and somewhat near to a score of four, indicating that EFL students think that they are easily motivated with the help of IWBs and that IWB equipped lessons have a positive impact on their concentration and in-class participation. Finally, regarding the results for students' attitudes towards time management and organizational issues, a high percentage of the students think that IWB use in lessons saves time, lessons are well organized, and the time for the lessons and activities in the classroom can be organized easily with IWBs.

Briefly, a high percentage of students had a positive attitude towards learning and teaching EFL through IWBs. IWB use in classes affects not only the participants' attitudes but also the learning elements, which make the learning process easier and more understandable, as in the study carried out by Schmid (2008). In this sense, it is possible to mention that there is a one-to-one relationship between participants' positive attitudes and the effective use of IWB in EFL classes because there is an interaction between the user and IWB (Chapelle, 1998). Further, these results revealed that IWBs provided some positive factors such as saving, source diversity, and increased attention, motivation and interaction. With the help of IWBs in EFL classes, learners have a high level of motivation as it makes audio-visual materials available and attracts their attention. Compared to TWBs, IWBs are believed to be more effective because they provide extra supplementary materials and interaction. The interaction is not one-way in IWB-equipped classes. They enable the direction of interaction from teacher to student, from student to students, or from the IWB to learners. This kind of interaction can be based on the Multi-Dimensional Interactive Teaching Model (Zeng, Lu, & Zuo, 2010), as well as the Interactionist Model (Chapelle, 1998). Learning through IWBs could become more permanent and effective than learning through TWBs. Such a learning style can be based on multimedia learning supported by Mayer's Cognitive Theory (Mayer, 2003). This theory can be related to learning through IWBs as it claims that combining pictures with words can produce deeper learning in students (Mayer, 2003). From the teachers' perspectives, they generally believe that IWBs may provide better learning because the visual materials presented to the learners might stimulate more than one of the learners' sensory organs (Korkmaz & Çakıl, 2013).

In terms of gender, there was no difference in attitudes towards the use of IWBs. Tables 2 and 3 show the students' attitudes towards IWBs by gender.

Table 2. T-test results about male and female students' attitudes towards IWB use.

Gender	N	Mean	Sd	t	df	p
Male	190	3.67	.76	.476	479	.634
female	291	3.33	.74			

Table 2 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of the male and female students ($p > .05$) in terms of their attitudes towards IWB use.

Table 3. T-test results of item (I prefer lessons that are taught with IWB)

Gender	N	Mean	Sd	t	df	p
Male	158	3.78	1.44	.722	386	.471
female	230	3.67	1.47			

Table 3 clearly shows that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female students' preferences regarding IWB use.

The mean scores of the groups are near to four, indicating that males and females have a positive attitude towards IWB use. When the male and female groups are compared in terms of positive attitude, the male students have a slightly more positive attitude than the female participants.

In sum, gender is not a determining component in using IWBs in language learning (Öz, 2014). However, a study carried out by Aydın (2007) on internet use in EFL classes revealed that gender and age were correlated with internet use because younger and female participants were more eager about internet use than other participants.

Qualitative Data Results

Students' reactions to the use of the IWB. The students showed a positive reaction in the lesson in which the exercises or tasks were done through IWBs. A lesson taught in this way increased the students' in-class participation and fired their desire to take an active role in the learning process. Sometimes it was difficult for the teachers to control the classroom as the students made noise. When authentic materials or colorful activities were presented, most students took an active role by making comments. This interaction was not one way but included interaction from teacher to students, from students to students, or the interaction transformed itself into a new form and occurred from students to IWB when the students touched the screen, listened to a track or watched a video.

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Attracting students' attention. During the lesson, the teacher asked some questions related to the topic and wanted students to answer the questions by constructing a bridge between the related topic and their own experiences. When the topic in the lesson was presented together with audio-visual materials, it was very easy for the students to envisage the events experienced before. Communication attracted the

students' attention most because the dialogues presented by the teachers consisted of colorful figures. Reading and grammar also attracted the students' attention as teachers easily could reach supplementary materials for these two skills on the internet. Writing activities were of less importance than these three skills. The information in the course books and a sheet of paper were directly used for nearly all writing activities.

Student performance in IWB lessons. Most of the students were able to improve in skills. The students could easily show a reaction to the stimulus presented through IWB. The reaction to the stimulus ensured that students used the language effectively and they took part in learning as a user of the target language by trying to speak, make comments, or ask questions.

Challenges. Most of the students were competent enough in using IWBs. Nearly all of the students who came to the board to do activities could use the IWB easily. The others whom the researcher could not observe were shy students who did not want to use the IWBs. Some of these students had difficulty in keeping up with the teaching process. In addition, there were other difficulties such as those caused by sunlight, and technical problems with the screen. Another technical problem was poor sound quality.

Teaching and learning atmosphere in IWB classrooms. This research question attempted to determine the learning and teaching atmosphere in IWB classrooms. Although the analysis indicated that the general tone was positive, some challenges could occur during the teaching and learning process. Given IWB use in EFL classes, it is undeniable that there are some technical challenges that IWB users encounter during the lessons. These challenges include electricity cuts and the recalibration of the IWB. When the electricity is cut off, the recalibration of IWB takes a long time and this reduces the time that may be allotted to the activities. Therefore, such a problem is a waste of time. These findings were supported by the study carried out by Gursul and Tozmaz (2010).

Overall, the study revealed that IWB provided source diversity, motivation and time-saving. As well as these positive factors, some specific components have come to the fore in the light of quantitative and qualitative data results such as challenges and technical problems while using IWB.

Conclusions

Overall, the study suggests that the use of IWB could create learner-centered learning. In addition to teachers' roles, the role of the learners is also important in terms of using IWBs. Effective IWB use in language teaching and learning depends on an understanding of how it can be used in a classroom. To the extent that IWB users remain focused on learner-centered activities and learning objectives, IWB use in EFL classrooms remains effective and beneficial. This is because IWBs contribute to students' productive communication and thinking so that their knowledge can be built up by the active engagement that IWB provides and by teachers' strategies (Kershner, Mercer, Warwick, & Kleine Staarman, 2010). Second, a high percentage of the students have positive attitudes towards this technological tool. IWB use in the lessons was observed to be helpful in developing their skills because IWB supports teaching and learning interaction factors (Liang, Huang, & Tsai, 2012).

Further, a high percentage of the students found it easier to concentrate and remain motivated, which affected their in-class participation. Therefore, the students have positive attitudes towards time management and organization as IWB use in the classes saves time, and lessons could be better organized. Third, technology use in EFL classes can provide students with several opportunities to use an L2 in real life (Chapelle, 1998; Cloke, & Sharif, 2001; Gerard, Widener, & Greene, 1999; Schmid, 2006). Nevertheless, if English teachers are to use IWBs well in EFL classrooms, they should acquire IWB technical knowledge and skills, and learn teaching methods for IWBs so as to be able to integrate current materials with the content of the topic (Türel & Johnson, 2012). To overcome technical and methodological barriers, teachers should be educated with effective professional help so as to build up efficacy, on the basis of long-term collaboration and with positive supervision that provides for self-reflection and facilitates student engagement with digital media (DeSantis, 2012). Fourth, suitable materials and an appropriate approach to their use in classes equipped with IWB are necessary in order to render IWB an efficient tool. Sözcü and İpek (2012) indicated that applying, designing and developing materials was necessary for teaching and learning outcomes. Fifth, while using IWB in classrooms, some points should not be ignored in terms of teachers' pedagogy and students' general backgrounds in ICT.

All EFL teachers and administrators must be trained on how to use IWBs effectively. Periodic in-service training programs should be organized to overcome the aforementioned difficulties in using IWB.

IWB use in education supports the student learning outcomes, but IWB use alone is not sufficient. So IWB use should be supported by teachers' experiences, software, and enough technical and pedagogical training to make teachers' progression permanent (Sweeney, 2010). Finally, thanks to the FATİH Project, which is still being carried out, a high percentage of the classrooms are equipped with IWBs, but there are still some discrepancies in using it as an effective multimedia tool at high schools. There is a lack of awareness about technology use in EFL classes. So it is necessary to develop awareness among IWB users and the differences between IWB and TWB should be monitored.

Learning and teaching methods were not handled in this study. The scope of the study included only 9th grade EFL students, so the study might be extended to other grades in which IWB is effectively used, especially in EFL prep-classes where IWBs are used extensively. Therefore, further research can be conducted in different institutions using experimental or action research designs.

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Using the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model with a Chat Tool to Enhance Online Collaborative Learning¹

La Inclusión del Modelo de Aprendizaje Cognitivo para el Desarrollo del Aprendizaje Colaborativo en Línea a través del Chat

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Abstract

In Colombia, many institutions are in the firm quest of virtual learning environments to improve instruction, and making the most of online tools is clearly linked to offering quality learning. Thus, the purpose of this action research was to identify how the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model enhances online collaborative learning by using a chat tool. To describe the effectiveness of this model, five of its teaching methods were implemented in an eight-week period over one semester. Twelve beginning online English students enrolled in Colombia's national vocational and technical training center participated in the study. Data was collected from surveys, chat transcripts, interviews and checklists, and analyzed through content analysis. Results reveal that modeling, coaching, scaffolding, exploration, and reflection may be implemented in a chatroom, developing a sense of collaboration. Learners also moved from guided instruction (modeling) to more independent learning (articulation), assuming the roles of experts. In conclusion, the six teaching methods of the Cognitive Apprenticeship Method enhance online collaborative learning not only because students work together to reach a common goal, but also because they can support each other's learning through synchronous interactions when using a chatroom for this purpose.

Keywords: Chat, Cognitive Apprenticeship Model, Modeling, Articulation, Online Collaborative Learning, Scaffolding.

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Resumen

En Colombia, muchas instituciones están en la firme búsqueda de entornos virtuales para mejorar la instrucción; es así como aprovechar al máximo las herramientas en línea se relaciona con ofrecer aprendizaje de calidad. Así, el propósito de esta investigación acción fue identificar cómo el modelo de aprendizaje cognitivo mejora el aprendizaje colaborativo en línea usando una herramienta de chat. Para describir la efectividad de este modelo, cinco de sus métodos de enseñanza se implementaron en un período de ocho semanas a lo largo de un semestre. Doce estudiantes de inglés en línea pertenecientes a un programa de formación técnica vocacional en Colombia formaron parte de este estudio. Los datos se recopilaron a través de encuestas, transcripciones de chat, entrevistas y listas de verificación. Los resultados revelaron que modelado, coaching, escalonamiento, exploración y reflexión pueden aplicarse en un chat para desarrollar un sentido de colaboración. Los estudiantes también pasaron de la instrucción guiada (modelado) al aprendizaje más independiente (articulación) asumiendo el papel de expertos. En conclusión, los seis métodos de enseñanza del método cognitivo de aprendizaje promueven el aprendizaje colaborativo en línea no solo porque los estudiantes trabajan conjuntamente para alcanzar una meta sino porque a través de la interacción sincrónica en línea se apoyan en el aprendizaje mientras usan el chat como herramienta educativa.

Palabras clave: chat, aprendizaje colaborativo en línea, articulación, modelo de aprendizaje cognitivo, aprendizaje auto-dirigido, escalonamiento.

Resumo

Na Colômbia, muitas instituições estão na firme procura de entornos virtuais para melhorar a instrução; é dessa forma como o máximo aproveitamento das ferramentas em linha está claramente associado com o oferecimento de aprendizagem de qualidade. Portanto, o propósito desta pesquisa ação foi identificar como o modelo de aprendizagem cognitiva melhora a aprendizagem colaborativa em linha mediante o uso uma ferramenta de chat. Para descrever a efetividade deste modelo, cinco dos seus métodos de ensino foram implementados em um período de oito semanas no transcurso de um semestre. Doze estudantes de inglês em linha pertencentes a um programa de formação técnica vocacional na Colômbia fizeram parte deste estudo. Os dados se compilaram através de enquetes, transcrições de chat, entrevistas e listas de verificação. Os resultados revelaram que modelado, coaching, escalonamento, exploração e reflexão podem aplicar-se em um chat para desenvolver um sentido de colaboração. Os estudantes também passaram da instrução guiada (modelado) à aprendizagem mais independente (articulação) assumindo o papel de expertos. Em conclusão, os seis métodos de ensino do método cognitivo de aprendizagem promovem a aprendizagem colaborativa em linha não somente porque os estudantes trabalham conjuntamente para alcançar uma meta, mas porque através da interação sincrônica em linha se apoiam na aprendizagem enquanto usam o chat como ferramenta educativa.

Palavras chave: chat, aprendizagem colaborativa em linha, articulação, modelo de aprendizagem cognitiva, aprendizagem autodirigida, escalonamento.

Introduction

Technology is changing the way students are educated. There are more opportunities of interaction. Currently, virtual worlds offer engaging and stimulating spaces where students can meet online for regular classes. Institutions willing to incorporate technology in educational settings face the challenge of integrating tools that improve learning environments regardless of student type or location. In addition, technology allows users to overcome constraints such as cost, time, or location to carry out tasks that might otherwise be difficult in the “real world.”

In Colombia, many institutions are working towards offering suitable environments for online instruction. For instance, to respond to its main goals of strengthening human capital in the country, contributing to the development of professionals in different areas of knowledge, and offering more job opportunities, the national vocational and technical training center incorporated the Blackboard Collaborate platform to offer online courses, including foreign language courses. Nevertheless, in the diagnostic survey conducted at the outset of this study revealed a gap between what students learn, and how they practice and receive feedback using the virtual tools in the platform.

The diagnosis showed some problems in terms of the way in which online learning occurred. First, social interaction manifested in peer collaboration in most of the cases was reduced. Students carried out asynchronous interaction with their peers by posting answers to tasks or asking questions via technical forums. Second, students expressed feelings of isolation and demotivation due to the lack of immediate feedback, spontaneous language use, or timely support, and due to the lack of peer-to-peer learning. Teachers essentially used the components of the platform to administer schedules, grades, and provide technical support. Students mainly used online tools such as forums, wikis and/or blogs. Third, the questions students asked were not always answered, which made feedback less effective. The result is that these English language students were aware of some grammatical rules and vocabulary in English, but lacked synchronous interaction to use what they had learned. Students even mentioned these situations as reasons for dropping out of online courses.

The researchers in this study examined how the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989), which advocates for student learning through collaboration by observing, imitating, and modeling, enhances online collaborative learning with a chat tool in a group of young adult English students. Enhancing collaboration with this tool offers opportunities for meaningful and

synchronous interaction, which may result in students having more chances to deepen their learning experience, test out new ideas, and receive critical and constructive feedback (Picciano, 2002). Therefore, this research allowed the researchers to identify how the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model enhances online collaboration by using a chat tool, to describe the effectiveness of cognitive apprenticeship in creating a sense of collaboration using a chat tool, and to recognize students and instructors' roles throughout cognitive apprenticeship performed online

Literature Review

Learning in the digital age emphasizes interaction in virtual environments. Brindley, Walti, and Blaschke (2009) affirm that individual knowledge occurs through interaction, meaning the way in which people express thoughts, discuss, and challenge the ideas of others. People collaborate to create knowledge and co-construct knowledge and meaning. In fact, as the worldwide web evolves, it continuously offers new opportunities for collaboration, online interaction, and therefore learning (Richardson, 2006). Enhancing online collaborative learning with a chat tool considers four main constructs, namely online collaborative learning, online interaction, chat, and the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model.

Online Collaborative Learning

Collaboration in learning environments is viewed as “people sharing ideas and working together (occasionally sharing resources) in a loose environment” (Siemens, et al., 2002, p. 23). Online learning implies a sense of collaboration among users since they “share, transmit knowledge or work towards common goals” (Brindley, et al., 2009, p. 4). Online learning is also participatory, authentic, immediate, and engaging (Antenos-Conforti, 2009). These features are relevant because learning is a socially situated activity, and the building of social relationships is vital for cognitive development.

Some researchers have studied the perceptions of collaboration in online learning. So and Brush (2008) studied the advantages of online learning in a blended course. The authors asked participants to take a blended course and record their perceptions about collaboration. Results demonstrated that students who perceived high collaboration were more satisfied with the course and the social presence of the instructor and classmates.

Analysis of online learning environments has also led some researchers (Chiong & Jovanovic, 2012) to analyze why some students

decide not to participate or to reduce their participation level when working in groups. The strategy consisted in analyzing students' reactions towards group work through the development of collaborative tasks. Results showed that there are several challenges to fostering online collaborative learning, mainly in terms of time constraints and/or reluctance to work in groups.

Another example of students' collaboration with peers in online environments is a study of social networks by Kim, Park and Baek (2011). They explored how microblogging using Twitter provided a venue for communicating in the target language with other people, even outside classrooms. Researchers concluded that tweets promoted foreign language output and helped learners maintain social interaction with others.

These cases highlight collaboration from different perspectives and its power to challenge, support, and/or motivate students. Additionally, the examples illustrate the importance of social learning theories. It is evident that learners improve practices and are more enthusiastic about learning when they have the opportunity to learn from and with others. The challenge lies in providing the same environments in online settings.

Interaction in Online Collaborative Learning

Interaction has long been identified as a key element to successful online learning programs (Beldarrain, 2006). There is significant evidence to suggest that meaningful interaction with peers and the instructor is integral to the development of learning environments. Espitia and Cruz (2013) studied peer feedback and online interaction among university students. They promoted collaboration in the course through peer feedback, using a forum tool. After analyzing students' engagement, researchers concluded that students established a social bond with others and achieved a sense of social and academic responsibility. Further, they argue that cognition and apprehension are direct consequences of social interactions. Such interactions involve different participants in the educational setting, namely teacher (or tutor), students, and media, in other words, anyone and anything supporting the learning experience.

Rourke, Anderson, Garrison and Archer (2001) describe how learning happens around different interaction factors. First, the social presence is represented by interaction with peers. Mayes et al. (2011) suggest using different types of grouping. Second, the cognitive presence is represented by the interaction with the content. Schweizer, Whipp, & Hayslett (2002) argue that one of the best methodologies to

interact with content in online learning is via project-based learning since students engage in real-life situations. Third, the teaching presence is represented by interacting with instructors. Shackelford and Maxwell (2012) affirm that providing clear expectations, participating in discussions, providing feedback, modelling, and using various modes of communication are types of learner-instructor interaction.

Chat Tool

Dudeney (2007) defines chat as “synchronous communication between two or more people, using the keyboard as a means of communication.” (p. 130). One of the aspects that makes chat a natural space for communication and interaction is that it simulates normal conversations. Research has been conducted on how to apply a chat tool in educational settings. Skinner and Austin, and Koike (as cited in Warschauer & Meskill, 2000) argue that students want social learning experiences that connect them with their peers through the Web. Skinner and Austin developed a study whose procedure included a prewriting activity using synchronous chat to communicate. Koike’s study offered a blended learning course in which students had the chance to practice what they had learned in an international chat interchange with native speakers. Findings indicated that chats helped students to interact as well as reduce negative feelings. Both studies demonstrate how twenty-first century students are now demanding online instruction that supports participation and interaction instead of lectures or one-way communications (West & West, 2008).

Cognitive Apprenticeship Model

The Cognitive Apprenticeship Model (CAM) was proposed by Collins, Brown, and Newman (1989); however, it has been modified by other researchers. CAM combines cognitive and metacognitive skills and processes (Dennen & Burner, 2008) for students to observe, enact, and practice with help from the teacher and other students. CAM also offers a collaborative environment in which students learn in a group setting and support classmates’ learning. Teachers act as guides providing meaningful opportunities for learning. The CAM includes six teaching methods that promote collaboration among teacher and students: modeling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection, and exploration. Dennen and Burner (2008) describe the six methods in this way: *modeling* as describing the thinking process, *coaching* and *scaffolding* mean assisting and supporting student cognitive activities

as needed, *reflecting* implies self-analysis and assessment, *articulation* consists of verbalizing the results of reflection, and exploration is the formation and testing of one's own hypotheses.

The present study considers all six methods as learners develop a more conscious view of what is learned, build background knowledge, link new and prior knowledge, and evaluate the learning process (Brandes & Boskic, 2008). Students can implement self-reflection by analyzing their accomplishment of goals when chatting. At this point, self-reflection is the result of collaborative practices where students have had the chance to discuss, analyze, and exchange information with others.

In recent years, there has been some research on the application of the CAM to computer use. Liu (2005) conducted a quantitative study which demonstrated that the CAM improves pre-service teachers' performance and attitudes to instructional planning more effectively than a traditional training course. Liu (2005) applied three technologies in her study: multimedia, performance support systems, and Web-based conferencing.

Kear and Donelan (2016) carried out a study to assess online collaborative work. The research addressed the importance of online group work for developing teamwork skills and learning with others. The aims of the research were to investigate the challenge of implementing an online group project, to gain perspectives of students and tutors, and to design group projects which are engaging to students and fairly assessed. Findings revealed that tutors agreed that the majority of students enjoyed the group work and tasks were authentic. Tutors faced challenges when assessing collaboration. Additionally more technical students wanted to incorporate other tools such as Twitter feeds. This research demonstrates how different tools enhance collaboration and promote opportunities for authentic learning when controlled by tutors.

To conclude, online collaboration, online interaction, and cognitive apprenticeship aim to provide students with an authentic experience in which they assume particular roles and responsibilities in the learning process while they teach and learn from each other via chat tool.

Methodology

Research Design

This research adopted an action research approach. The qualitative paradigm permits researchers to identify different viewpoints (Russell

& Kelly, 2002). Figure 1 summarizes the action research process developed in this study.

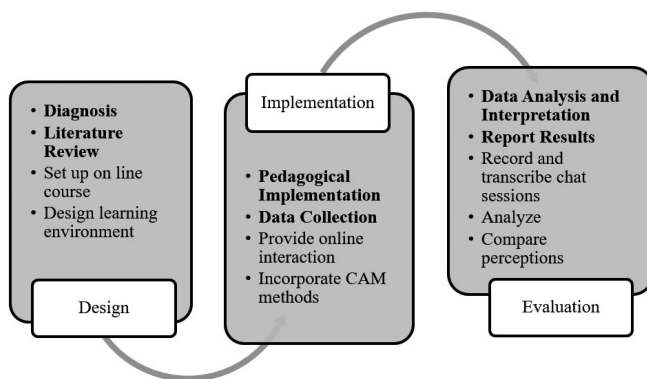


Figure 1. Action research process

In the Implementation stage, the CAM teaching methods were used in eight lessons (See Appendix). The implementation followed the sequence of CAM teaching methods, integrated into several instructional tasks. Additionally, students and the instructor collaborated through different groupings, and support was provided during the synchronous communication using chat. The instructor grouped learners using the grouping tool in Blackboard Collaborate, bearing in mind that collaboration implies common goals and group work.

The pedagogical implementation included five phases with a certain number of hours and specific roles for both teachers and students. In terms of the CAM methods, modeling, coaching and scaffolding were carried out in two sessions each, and articulation and reflection in one session each. Students' roles moved from models, coaches, experts, and peers to independent learners. These models imply that students, from guided to independent practice, supported peers by demonstrating, giving feedback, exemplifying, looking back, and reflecting, as well as solving problems and making decisions about their learning. In addition, there were opportunities for both asynchronous (discussion topics and comments) and synchronous communication (chat rooms for discussion, immediate feedback, and language skills practice).

The pedagogical implementation included four main components. First, activities related to coaching involved students guiding peers. Second, learning outcomes related to the common goal and expressed what students were expected to do according to the institution's defined

levels of competence. Outcomes were functional; i.e., students used language and structures to communicate in social situations, adhering to the CAM requirement of contextualizing concepts. Third, collaboration was understood as the type of interaction and support received, if any. Lastly, materials refer to all the resources used to accomplish the task. Materials depended on the students' level of expertise and objective of the teaching method.

Context and Participants

This study took place at a regional center of Colombia's national vocational and technical training service. This service offers programs to over 250,000 graduates every year nationwide via 33 regional centers. The mission and vision include three principles. First, free access; instruction is free for students and they choose their learning via face-to-face or online vocational programs. The second principle is employability; there are agreements with numerous companies around the country where students can do their practicum. Third, teaching for work; instructors focus on teaching for future jobs. The centers work with school-wide curricula that include materials, course objectives, and midterm and final assessment. The online course in which this research was conducted was also designed in-house by the institution.

Twelve beginning English students, 18 to 30 years old, participated in the study. All participants had six years of previous English instruction in secondary school. Participants were placed in A1 level of proficiency according to the CEFR. All of them reported having already taken at least one online course on Blackboard.

Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected on three different occasions. First, before the pedagogical implementation, a survey was applied as a diagnosis to identify students' perceptions about the methodology in online courses. The survey consisted of five questions about online experiences. Results of this diagnosis were validated when referring to the reasons given by students who dropped English courses and whose main reason was lack of interaction and immediate feedback in online English courses. Second, during the pedagogical intervention, chats were transcribed and a self-assessment checklist was given. These tools allowed for the description of synchronous interaction and collaboration in online settings and the identification of students' reflections and perceptions on their own learning while collaborating with each other. Third, after

implementation, students were interviewed to analyze their perceptions about the effectiveness of the CAM. In this way, it was possible to validate the way in which the CAM enhanced online collaborative learning in chat rooms.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Analysis involved the framework proposed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) in which gathered data is shifted, charted, and sorted in accordance with key issues and themes. This process involved five steps; namely familiarization, identification of themes, indexing, charting, and mapping, and interpretation. In this specific study, the researchers analyzed and interpreted how the incorporation of CAM enhances collaboration by understanding the types of synchronous communication and interaction using a chat tool.

Results

Results before Implementation

Before the pedagogical intervention, a survey was applied to gather students' perceptions about the online sessions and in that way diagnose the problem situation. Analysis revealed four main findings. First, activities in these courses consisted mainly of forums and surveys. Second, students focused on asynchronous rather than synchronous tools. Some participants did not know that Blackboard offered live sessions. Third, interaction with classmates was reduced in online English courses. Students felt isolated and spent more time doing individual written activities rather than collaborating with others. Fourth, students' expectations were not being fulfilled. They wanted to use more Blackboard tools. They also wanted to receive feedback in a timely manner, and receive explanations directly.

Despite the fact that Blackboard Collaborate has many tools, students were only using forums and surveys. Students wanted to perform real-time sessions in which they could work with their peers by receiving feedback and performing tasks. In this case, keeping in mind the nature of the program in which online sessions were scheduled, real-time sessions were expected to happen during the meetings with the tutor. Due to the results of this diagnosis, researchers focused on the chat tool to promote online collaboration.

Results during Implementation

Chat transcript results. The researchers transcribed the chats and identified the type of collaboration in the chatroom. The themes that emerged from each CAM method used in chat included 1) modeling, included asking questions, clarifying, providing feedback, correcting errors, and exemplifying; 2) coaching and scaffolding, including solving problems, providing feedback, motivating, guiding, organizing ideas, and setting pace; 3) articulation and reflection, for example evaluating strategies, reflecting on learning, setting objectives, and providing feedback.

Students’ checklist results. Palloff and Pratt (2005) and Popovici (2012) promote the integration of learner-centered assessment tools such as checklists and peer assessment. In this case, the checklist was divided into four sections. Students’ perceptions about the use of chat were analyzed considering access to the chat, students and teachers’ performance, and feedback. Table 1 reports the percentage of satisfaction.

Table 1. Percentage of Satisfaction

Checklist Statement	Percentage
Access to the Chat Tool	
Easy access to chat tool	83,3
Chat for Educational Purposes	91,7
Instructor’s Performance	
Sessions Appropriate Length	66,7
Instructor’s Guidance	75,0
Instructor’s performance	75,0
Group Organization	83,3
Instructor Appropriate Explanation of Strategy	75,0
Students’ Performance	
Student’s Active Role	75,0
Students’ improvement in their performance	75,0
Opportunities to ask questions to instructor	83,3
Immediate feedback from instructor	75,0
Feedback	
Opportunities to guide a classmate during the session	83,3
Opportunities to give hints and clues to classmates	75,0
Appropriate feedback from classmates	66,7

The first section shows that students know how to enroll in the chat room, and that they used it for educational purposes. The second and third sections demonstrate the instructor's ability to manage the time in the session and to offer guidance. In section four, students reported having an active role during the sessions by giving feedback.

Instructions, guidance, and feedback were also provided. Participants had the opportunity to work with others towards a common goal. In section four, 83% of the students reported having an active role during the sessions by giving feedback. In spite of time issues with some activities, and appropriate feedback from other students, the participants demonstrated acceptance of the use of chat for learning. It is possible that some time adjustments are needed as well as training for students on offering more appropriate feedback to others. In this line, the role of the instructor in the modeling phase is important in order make sure learners are equipped with effective strategies to make feedback useful.

Results after Implementation

Interview. Participants thought that using chat in online English classes provides more opportunities of peer interaction in real time and via different group organization. Students were able to questions and practice with others in pairs or groups. Opportunities for individual work were also provided. Students reported that they felt happy and motivated to interact with others using English.

For me, this is the first time using chats in English classes. It is fun!

Having my instructor during the session makes me feel motivated to attend and make all the questions

Chat is easier to communicate with instructor and friends and to know that other people are behind the screen too.

Participants also mentioned some advantages and disadvantages of using the chat tool. For the former, students reported that chat allowed them communicate in real time, make connections with the instructor and peers, receive feedback, gain confidence to participate, and to reflect on learning. For the latter, participants mentioned that some students were not involved in all tasks due to time constraints. Some of the comments included:

I could test myself and realize how faster I am to answer a question or look for something I do not know

In some tasks, the time we had to work with the classmate was not enough and had to stop in the middle.

Some friends do not have the same performance and we need more time to guide them.

Finally, all participants manifested their desire to continue using a chat tool in the English class. They mentioned time as the only aspect to improve for future sessions.

Some friends take too much time in just one question and we wasted time.

Working with classmates and receiving their suggestions was helpful and made me think in different ways to explain and I learned more

After analyzing the instrument results, two main issues were addressed: online collaboration by incorporating CAM using a chat tool, and the roles of tutors and students in virtual learning environments.

Online collaboration and interaction. Based on the themes that emerged in chat transcripts and interviews, incorporating the CAM with a chat tool provided different opportunities for collaboration and interaction. The CAM teaching methods included games, reflections, interviews, information gap, and problem solving. The CAM also delivered a systematic approach to learning in virtual environments.

Performing a variety of activities improves students' sense of collaboration. The progress of chatting allows us to observe that students started by seeing a model which gave them confidence. Later, they knew they could rely on their peers to practice and receive feedback. At the end, they possessed the criteria to reflect and act upon their learning process. The criteria were assessed when analyzing the themes that emerged in the data analysis and the self-assessment check list. For example, students started by clarifying and/or asking questions, but ended lessons by setting objectives and/or reflecting on their own learning process. Actually, the self-assessment checklist let students state new learning goals.

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Students and instructors' roles in online settings. Chat transcripts and students' self-assessment checklist revealed that learners assumed different roles. Students could be models, coaches, guides, or experts in online learning. They could even self-regulate their learning through reflection. Self-reflection in online environments not only occurs at the reflection teaching method stage, but also when performing scaffolding and articulation, as evidenced in the chat transcripts and

the interview. Students can learn from others and think of their own learning strategies. For example, they can infer best practices and adjust to their own learning process. The interview and chats revealed that students perceived that a chat tool, besides offering a space for social activity, was a suitable place for sharing ideas, discussing, reflecting on learning, asking questions, and receiving feedback on English tasks.

Timely instructor support resulted in students' engagement in activities and was reflected in their active participation and reflection on their own learning, as evidenced in the checklist and interview. The instructor working synchronously with the students helped them ask more questions and not only receive but provide feedback. Student surveys report satisfaction with all the activities. The mediation of computer communication via a chat tool provides a bridge for self-reflective practices supported by synchronous interaction in which teachers act as facilitators.

Conclusions

The six teaching methods of the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model (modeling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection and exploration) enhance online collaborative learning, not only because students work together to reach a common goal (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012), but also because synchronous interactions can help students support each other's learning. The CAM included students teaching one another, students teaching the teacher, and the teacher teaching the students. Chat was useful for interacting with others while learning as students provided feedback, self-reflected, and asked questions.

Warschauer and Meskill (2000) and So and Brush (2008) believe social interaction motivates learners. Using the chat for educational purposes offers synchronous communication for learners to receive timely support. In consequence, learners improve participation through collaborative learning. By creating a sense of social presence online, feelings of isolation and demotivation turn into engagement in activities and motivation as expressed by researchers like Espitia and Cruz (2013) and Richardson (2006).

Online settings involve different types of interaction. All aspects of the discourse serve as triggers for negotiations, and task types influence the kind and amount of negotiation, self-repair, corrective feedback, and negotiation within negotiations as seen in this research. Working in live-sessions like chat demands preparation from instructors. As shown in the pedagogical implementation, learning outcomes must be set

which give the session its purpose and order. Further, activities should be chosen in advance.

The chat, the use of collaborative learning, and the incorporation of cognitive apprenticeship allowed students to be the directors of their own learning process. They were also able to reflect about their learning objectives, self-assess them, set their own goals, and go for them. The teacher, on the other hand, became a visionary agent of the courses where she guided the learning process through the design of appropriate lesson to foster collaborative learning activities and the appropriate support the peers might need.

This research provided many important outcomes that will contribute to the improvement of online teaching at this or other institutions that share similar contextual characteristics. First, the use of the CAM offers collaborative learning opportunities. Each teaching method may be implemented with various tasks. Second, the chat helped students to receive synchronous feedback, guidance, and support. Third, the use of CAM with chat is an opportunity to reflect about the learning process. Some self-assessment tools may be incorporated. Fourth, this study aimed at describing the effectiveness of both collaborative learning and cognitive apprenticeship in terms of creating a sense of social presence online, defined as the ability to portray oneself as a “real” person in the online environment (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). In this sense, chat tool was the tool to create synchronous interaction in online environments.

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Appendix: Pedagogical Implementation

Cognitive Apprenticeship Model: Teaching Methods	Session	Task Content
<p><u>Modeling</u></p> <p>Observing the instructor's demonstration of an explicit task, skill or specific strategy used.</p> <p>The instructor acts as the expert and students as the novice.</p>	<p>1</p> <p>2</p>	<p><u>Instructional activity:</u> Information gap. Instructor models for students. Students take turns to ask questions.</p> <p><u>Learning outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe family relationships - Spell names - Talk about one's family - Give street names and nearby landmarks <p><u>Collaboration:</u> in pairs, give clues, clarify concepts, ask and give information, answer questions related to task, give the partner suggestions and directions, provide feedback</p> <p><u>Materials:</u> worksheet visuals</p>
<p><u>Coaching</u></p> <p>Learning support aimed at bringing performance closer to expert one.</p> <p>Coaches provide hints and feedback which is possible because of the constant monitoring.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>4</p>	<p><u>Instructional activity:</u> Guessing games. Students say advantages and disadvantages of various products. Partners have to guess what the product is. They describe products they usually buy.</p> <p><u>Learning outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tell how much a product is - Get information about products - Compare items in a store <p><u>Collaboration:</u> Group work. Give hints to solve puzzle, provide feedback, guess words, clarify concepts, and confirm information.</p> <p><u>Materials:</u> worksheets</p>
<p><u>Scaffolding</u></p> <p>Peer assistance in reaching required skills. Scaffolding offers reminders and clues.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>6</p>	<p><u>Instructional activity:</u> Problem solving. Students do some bank transactions. They have to explain why they make banking decisions.</p> <p><u>Learning outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do bank transactions - Explain balance situation - Talk about how to save money <p><u>Collaboration:</u> Pairs – A low level student and an advanced one. Scaffolds to approach given situations</p> <p><u>Materials:</u> Worksheet</p>

<p><u>Articulation</u></p> <p>Explaining misunderstandings and decisions made. Students solve problems. They become more experts.</p>	7	<p><u>Instructional activity:</u> Interviewing</p> <p><u>Learning outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Express likes and preferences taking into account the context <p><u>Collaboration:</u> Pairs – A low level student and an advanced one. Students ask and answer questions about their likes.</p> <p><u>Materials:</u> N/A</p>
<p><u>Reflection</u></p> <p>Learners think about how they approached learning and achieved learning outcomes. They find new ways and points of view to enrich their own learning process. Students also compare different problem solving strategies used.</p>	8	<p><u>Instructional activity:</u> Reflection</p> <p>Answer questions about CAM tasks and do check list.</p> <p>Write a reflective paper</p> <p>Complete a mind map</p> <p><u>Learning outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflect about the effect of incorporating CAM - Write a reflective paper expressing if collaboration was enhanced with chat tool. - Read strategies used by classmates to solve a set of given problems and learning tasks <p><u>Collaboration:</u> Groups.</p> <p>Discussion, assessment, peer review, planning based on strengths and weaknesses during the sessions</p> <p><u>Materials:</u> Self – assessment checklist, mind map</p>

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Documentation required. Additionally, authors must attach these documents via the OJS platform.

- 1) Letter addressed to the Editor of GiST Journal, requesting the evaluation of the article.
- 2) The Letter of Copyright Assignment Agreement and Conflict of Interest Statement, both signed by the author(s), verifying that the article is original, and that it has not been published or submitted to another journal for consideration. This format is available on GIST’s page, in the Editorial section, also in the OJS platform.
- 3) CV for each author including studies, professional experience, current position, and institutional affiliation. In addition, each author’s full name should be given in the order in which they wish to appear.

Article Presentation Format

Language. The article should be in English.

Tone. Articles should present scientific, scholarly, and professional research on language education. All biases towards gender, sexual orientation, racial, or ethnic groups should be avoided, as should all prejudiced statements involving disabilities or age. Historical and interpretative inaccuracies (quoting a work inappropriately) are not acceptable.

Length. At least 15 but no more than 20 pages.

Software. The article should be submitted in a recent version of Microsoft Word.

Style. Authors should follow the Publication Manual of the APA (Sixth Edition, 2009) for writing style in general as well as references. Some key aspects of the general APA style include:

- a. Using just one space, not two, between all words and sentences.
- b. Using a ½ inch (five to seven space) indentation on every paragraph.
- c. Placing reference citations within the text (and not as a footnote).
- d. Spacing in-text references according to the example: (Johnson, 2003).
- e. Keeping direct quotations to a minimum. When included, following the APA guidelines for short quotations (less than 40 words, identify the quotation with quotation marks as part of the main text format, and include the page number of the source), and long quotations (more than 40 words, use block paragraph format for the quotation and include the page number of the source).
- f. Placing punctuation within quotation marks, according to the example: ...word.”
- g. Using the 12 point Times New Roman font, for readability.
- h. Double-spacing the entire text.
- i. Utilizing commas before the word and or or in a series of three or more items.
- j. Using digits (e.g., 10; 78; 394) only for numbers 10 and above. Other numbers under 10 may be written out (e.g., four, nine, seven).
- k. Differentiating in the format used with a table and a figure in the graphics which accompany one’s article.
- l. Implementing the editorial “we” or “I” (with the active voice), which is perfectly acceptable nowadays, and even preferred over the use of the passive voice.
- m. Using the five levels of APA heading, (which are not to be numbered).

Although we encourage authors to use the reference lists of previously published GiST Journal articles as a model, seven general examples follow. Please notice that each reference includes the authors name, date of publication, title of the work, and publication data.

Martínez, A. A., Jones, B. B., & Schmidt, C. C. (1997). Título de artículo en español [Title of article translated into English]. *Name of Journal*, 8(3), 492-518.

Chang, F. F., & Donovan, P. P. (Eds.). (1985). *Title of work*. Location: Publisher.

Martínez, A. A. (2009). Title of chapter. In E. E. Godoy (Ed.), *Title of book* (pp. xx-xx). Location: Publisher.

Martínez, A. A., & Jones, B. B. (2010). *Title of article*. Title of Periodical, 24, pp. xx-xx. doi:xx.xxxxxxxx

Martínez, A. A., & Jones, B. B. (2010). Title of article. Title of Periodical, 24, pp. xx-xx. Retrieved from <http://name.of.website>

Chang, F. F (2000, July). *Title of paper or poster*. Paper or poster session presented at the meeting of Organization Name, Location.

Martínez, A. A. (2002, October 12). Title of article. *Name of Newspaper*, pp. B2, B6.

Graphic Aides. Original tables, figures, photographs, graphics, or other digital files which are necessary for comprehension are encouraged. Graphics should be original and may not be reproduced from copyrighted material. Graphics may be included in the text of the article in the place where they should appear. All figures and tables should be black and white.

Title. The article's title should be brief and allow readers to identify the topic and content easily.

Origen of the Article. It is necessary to specify if the article is the result of research, a graduation thesis, an essay, or critique. In the case of it being a product of a research project, the author should indicate the project title, the financing source, sponsoring institution, and project phase.

Abstract. All abstracts should be in English and in Spanish. The abstract should include the scope and intention of the paper, with a concise description of the methodology, supporting theories, general results, and main conclusions.

Keywords. There is a maximum of seven keywords, which must be presented in English as well as Spanish.

Types of Articles

1. Scientific or technological research article: A document which presents in detail the original results of a research project. The structure generally

contains seven important sections: and abstract, an introduction, a review of the literature, the methodology, the outcomes, the conclusions, and a reference list.

2. **Reflective article:** A document which presents in detail the results of a research project from the analytical, interpretive, or critical perspective of the author, on a specific topic, with clear references to the original sources.
3. **Review Article:** A document which is the result of research in which the results of certain research projects which have or have not been published are analyzed, systematized, and integrated together with the objective of demonstrating advances and developmental tendencies. This type of manuscript is characterized by its presentation of a careful bibliographic summary of at least 50 references.

Peer Review Process

As GIST is a bi-annual publication, the Editorial Committee publishes two calls for papers, in approximately April and November of each year. GIST then receives submissions until the published deadline, and carries out the following process with each submission:

The Editor carries out a preliminary evaluation before assigning peer reviewers, with the purpose of verifying that the article complies with the established criteria and guidelines for presentation of articles. This revision is usually completed within a three-week period.

In the case of articles that do not comply with the standards for presentation, according to the specifications of the journal, the Editor requests that the authors adjust the article in order to prepare it to be reviewed by peer reviewers. Authors are given a two-week period to make the requested modifications, and re-send the manuscript again to the Editor for consideration. Once the Editor has verified that the article fits the standards of presentation and specifications of the journal, the process of peer review may begin.

The Editor informs authors of the decision to submit the article to peer review or not within one month.

Articles that fulfill the presentation requirements are submitted to anonymous, double-blind peer review by experts in the field. This means that authors do not know the identity of the reviewers, and vice versa.

The Editor, with the help of members of the Editorial Committee, assigns peer reviewers according to the specific topic of each article. The Editor then invites peers to conduct the review, and once these individuals accept, they are informed as to the procedure for accessing articles in the OJS. In

this same message, reviewers are informed of the expected time period and proposed deadline for the review, approximately one month after a reviewer agrees to conduct the evaluation. It is the hope to always conduct the peer reviews in a timely fashion; nevertheless, adjustments may be made to ensure reviewers' participation.

In order to carry out the evaluation, peer reviewers complete the evaluation form, and in this way, recommend the article for publication or not as well as specifications for revision, if this is recommended. The results of this evaluation serve as input for the Editor and Editorial Committee to decide if the article is publishable, publishable with minor adjustments, publishable with major adjustments, or not publishable.

Once the evaluation is complete, the Editor communicates with the author(s) and informs them of the decision that has been made, indicating whether or not the article will continue in the revision process. Authors have a one-month period to adjust the article and send the revision once again to the Editor. The Editor then reviews the article and reaches the final decision as to whether the revised version will be accepted for publication, bearing in mind its revision according to the input received from the peer reviewers, and the Editor's own independent criteria.

The Editorial Committee will decide on the publication of an article according to the following criteria: the fulfillment of the above stated conditions, methodological and conceptual rigor, originality, scientific quality, and relevance.

If the article is accepted for publication, the Editor proceeds with the editing and proofreading process. Once the final version of the article is completed, it is sent to the author for final approval, and is then forwarded to the design team for its preparation.

Relinquishing of Rights and Distribution of Published Material

The publication of articles in GIST implies that authors relinquish all rights to the article and its content. Authors also authorize GIST to promote and distribute the article via the means it deems appropriate, be it in print or electronically. For this purpose, authors should sign and send both the letter of relinquishment, and the declaration of conflict of interest upon submission of the article. These formats are available in the OJS platform of the Journal.

Code of Ethics and Good Practices

The Editorial Committee of GiST Education and Learning Research Journal, as part of its commitment to the scientific community, strives to guarantee the ethics and quality of its articles. The publication takes the code of conduct and good practice of the Committee of Ethics in

Publications (COPE) as its point of reference, which defines standards for editors of scientific journals, as well as the legal and ethical standards of the American Psychological Association (APA) in the sixth edition of its Style Manual.

All parties involved in the publication of the journal (Editor, Committees, Authors, and Peer Reviewers) must accept and adhere to the ethical guidelines and principles outlined here.

Editor Obligations and General Responsibilities

The Editor of the journal is responsible for ensuring strict compliance with the policies and principles of the journal. Specifically, the Editor is expected to act in an ethical manner in the following aspects:

Decision making. The Editor guides all decisions regarding articles submitted and published according to verifiable criteria of impartiality and fairness, taking into consideration the primary objectives of the journal.

The works submitted are evaluated objectively, based solely on the scientific merit of their content, without discrimination in regards to race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnic background, nationality or political persuasion.

Confidentiality. The Editor is committed to the principle of confidentiality and anonymity in communications between Editor and Authors, and Editor and Peer Evaluators. The Editor shall not disclose information related to the article or its process with third parties or colleagues not related to the journal, except in cases when an expert opinion is required, and in which the express permission for this purpose is granted by the author(s). The Editor shall not use the results of research of articles not accepted for publication for his or her own benefit or that of others, except with express permission from the author(s).

Communication. The Editor shall receive and respond to complaints, petitions, and comments in a reasonable amount of time. This also applies to the publication of corrections or modifications stemming from the editing process of published articles.

Compliance. The Editor strives to comply with the editorial policies of the Journal, and the publication of each online and print issue according to its established publication schedule.

In the same fashion, to:

- Consult the opinion of the members of the Editorial Board and Committee.

- Generate initiatives of support and constantly improve editorial practices.
- Support initiatives to educate researchers on issues of publication ethics and other ethical aspects of the journal.
- Take responsibility for the process of all articles submitted to the Journal, and develop mechanisms of confidentiality and peer evaluation up to the point of publication or rejection by the journal.

Other principles to follow include:

Peer Review Process and Editorial Decisions. The decision to publish or not shall be established via the process of peer evaluation, according to the “double blind” method in order to guarantee that the evaluation process that is free of conflict of interest between the parties. This rigorous procedure allows peer reviewers to value the technical quality, originality, and scientific contribution of the articles, among other aspects, and at the same time provides authors with the means to improve the article. For this revision process, a sufficient number of peer reviewers will be provided, selected from qualified area experts, with the intention of allowing for a more critical, expert, and objective editorial decision- making process.

Editing and Publication Schedule. The Editor provides for the fulfillment of the editing and publication schedule of articles accepted for publication. Upon the publication of each issue, the Editor and the editorial team accept responsibility for the promotion and distribution of the journal to its readers, subscribers, authors, peer reviewers, and other organizations with whom the institution holds agreements, as well as the data bases and national and international indexing services.

General Editor Obligations and Responsibilities

Authors must present their articles in the link indicated on the OJS-web page, according to the guidelines for the presentation of articles established by the journal. Authors are responsible for the ideas expressed in the articles, and for the ethical appropriateness.

Originality, plagiarism and exclusivity. Authors must explicitly state that the article is original in its creation, and that every effort has been taken to respect the intellectual property of those third parties cited within. Articles must not be reprints, nor published in other journals. Further, authors must declare that the findings are original in nature, that no plagiarism exists, nor distortion or manipulation of the facts.

Exclusivity. Articles submitted to the journal must not be simultaneously submitted to other publications.

Citations and references. Authors must ensure that they have received express permission for the use of material they do not own, including the reproduction of charts, graphs, maps, diagrams, photographs, etc. All sources must be cited appropriately, with complete references provided.

Authorship. Articles with more than one author should order authors' names in hierarchical fashion, indicating by this the degree of function, responsibility, and contribution to the article. By the same token, mention must be made to any individuals who have made significant scientific or intellectual contributions to the research, composition, and editing of the article.

Responsibility. All authors submitting articles must assume full responsibility for their work, and ensure that it presents an exhaustive review and discussion of the most recent and relevant literature.

Research ethics. Research studies must use methodology that ensures that subjects are treated with respect and dignity. In addition to those principles of the code of conduct of the American Psychological Association (APA), GIST highlights the following: discussion of the limitations of confidentiality and the safekeeping of the same, minimization of the intrusion and invasiveness in individuals' privacy, conservation of data and informed consent to research, record, or film. Further, the names of institutions or individuals should be avoided, even if the author has gained permission for their use. If their mention is considered necessary, the author must submit signed authorization for their inclusion. The names of the researchers and participants shall likewise be omitted from the article. It is suggested that authors use pseudonyms, for example in case studies.

Conflict of interest. The Editor shall not consider articles that possibly represent a real or potential conflict of interest, resulting from financial or other relationships of competition or collaboration between authors, companies, or institutions mentioned in the article.

Errors in articles published. Any error or imprecision shall be communicated by the editorial team, and the necessary corrections in the online version of the article made.

Obligations and General Responsibilities of Peer Reviewers:

In the revision process, peer reviewers shall adhere to the following principles:

Confidentiality. Peer reviewers shall not share any information with third parties related to the article or its publication process. In such case that an external opinion may be necessary, reviewers shall seek express written authorization from the Editor in Chief, explaining the reasons. By the same

token, reviewers shall not use the content of non-published articles for their own benefit or that of others, except with the express authorization of the authors. The violation of the principle of confidentiality constitutes bad practice by the reviewers.

Contribution to quality. Individuals who commit to evaluating articles submitted to the Journal shall carry out a critical revision, without bias, using clear, non-offensive language, with the intention of guaranteeing scientific and literary quality, according to the area of expertise.

Time management. Although the Journal has a maximum time allotted for the revision process, articles should be evaluated as soon as possible in the hopes of optimizing the revision and editing process. At the same time, peer reviewers who feel that they are unable to fulfill their function as evaluators, either because of lack of expertise, time or possible conflict of interest, shall communicate this immediately to the Editor or editorial team through regular channels.

Detection of errors and bad editorial practices. Reviewers shall pay particular attention to gaps in references to literature or authors that they feel need to be included. At the same time, if in the process of revision it is possible to detect bad practices on the part of authors, peer reviewers are under the obligation to inform the Editor so that he or she may proceed in accordance with the ethical principles of the journal.

Additional Information

Compensation. The author will receive three copies of the edition in which his/her article shall appear.

Concerns. Communicate with the Editor through e-mail or by telephone, please. Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana, International: (57-1) 281-1777 ext. 1296; In Colombia: (05-1) 281-1777 ext.1296

Waiver. Every article shall be subject to the review of the Editorial Committee. The Editor reserves the right to make formal modifications to articles through the editing process.

Editorial Norms. The contents of the articles are the exclusive responsibility of their authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GiST or UNICA. Any article published in GiST may be quoted as long as the source is clearly referenced.

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Reviewers

No. 13, 2016 (July - December)

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