

**GiST**

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## GiST Education and Learning Research Journal

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English & Marr (2019) claim that language teachers “should claim and own the discipline of language study, and position themselves as critical language experts within their institutions” (p. 19). This means that revisiting the knowledge base that sustains our daily work helps to promote an understanding of language teachers as professionals rather than instructors. Despite language teaching is enriched by many disciplines and influenced by contextual factors, it is important to acknowledge the two main disciplines which converge to provide the basis for our profession: Linguistics and Pedagogy.

This idea coincides with what many authors describe as the components of teacher knowledge: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and contextual knowledge. Content knowledge relates to our specific subject matter, e.g. English as a language; pedagogical knowledge is linked to the skills of how to teach, and contextual knowledge is connected to an interest in students and their communities (Shulman, 1987; Grossman, 1990; and Putnam & Borko, 2000).

Many of the articles in this edition document innovative practices in the teaching of skills, which contributes to the construction of content knowledge. For example, in relation to writing, we can find **Julio-Cárdenas & López-Pinzón** which implemented a model named Reciprocal Teaching Model for helping a group of tenth graders to develop this skill. Likewise, **Pérez & Vargas-Daza** explored the creation of picture books to foster narrative writing skills in fifth graders. **Montero-Arévalo** also addressed writing by analyzing how genre-based approach affected ninth graders’ reading comprehension and writing.

For content knowledge, also **Camacho-Vásquez & Ovalle** analyzed the influence of video games on vocabulary acquisition in a group of students from the BA in English Teaching. **Uribe-Enciso, Fuentes-Hernández, Vargas-Pita & Rey-Pabón** identified problematic phonemes for Spanish speakers learning English by reviewing theoretical and research reports. Additionally, two of the articles in this edition addressed pedagogical knowledge by analyzing the implementation of pedagogical approaches. **Agudelo & Morales-Vasco** inquired about the ways in which project-based learning could work as a catalyst for developing autonomy in both teachers and students. Similarly, **Arboleda-Arboleda & Castro-Garcés** narrate an experience on the use of literature to foster language learning in a university EFL classroom.

Johnson and Golombek (2011) state that learning to teach is a social activity, which means that teacher educators need to socialize novice teachers into the

theories, activities, methodologies, and language related to the profession. Two of the contributions address the complex issue of assessment: **Sevilla-Morales & Chaves-Fernández** inquired about authentic assessment in listening comprehension at an English teaching major in the University of Costa Rica. Similarly, in Colombia, **Herrera-Mosquera & Zambrano-Castillo** explored how English learning was assessed in an English language teacher education program. Finally, **Han & Takkaç-Tulgar** explored an aspect we all have experienced as novice teachers, which is teaching anxiety and coping strategies at a Turkish elementary school context.

The editorial team of GiST Journal hopes you find this new issue professionally enriching as well as inspiring for all those in the profession who want to make their reflections, pedagogical and research experiences known to the wider audience.

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# Authentic Assessment in the Listening Comprehension Classroom: Benefits and Implications<sup>1</sup>

Evaluación auténtica en el aula de comprensión auditiva:  
Beneficios e implicaciones

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## Abstract

This research paper discusses the benefits and implications of bringing authentic assessment into listening comprehension classes. The study was run in 2016 based on a mixed-methods model to research and included 38 college students enrolled in a listening comprehension class at an English Teaching Major (ETM) from the University of Costa Rica (UCR). Data collection instruments included plans of improvement, portfolios, self-assessment forms, teacher-student conferences, verbal calls, and impromptu reflections. Data were validated through several procedures (e.g., triangulation and reflexivity) and analyzed in the form of emerging themes from the information collected. Findings are that authentic assessment can and should be used more in listening comprehension classes to bring assessment and instruction together, as well as to provide opportunities for skills integration. The study yields implications for theory and practice, and it constitutes a proposal to move from traditional to process evaluation, and from norm-referenced testing towards more criterion-referenced assessment. Nonetheless, the aim should not necessarily be a radical 'no' to paper-and-pencil tests, but a more balanced use in combination with other strategies so that assessment becomes more reliable, valid, fair, and authentic for all EFL actors involved.

*Keywords:* authentic assessment, testing, listening comprehension, portfolio, weekly plans

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### Resumen

La presente investigación discute algunas bondades e implicaciones de implementar la evaluación auténtica en clases de comprensión auditiva. El estudio se desarrolló en el año 2016 mediante un modelo de investigación mixta y contó con la participación de 28 estudiantes universitarios matriculados en un curso de comprensión auditiva de una carrera de enseñanza del inglés (CEE) de la Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR). Los instrumentos de recolección de datos incluyeron planes semanales de mejora, portafolios, reuniones entre el profesor y los estudiantes, intervenciones orales y reflexiones improvisadas *in situ*. Los datos se validaron mediante distintos procedimientos (por ejemplo, triangulación y reflexividad) y se analizaron por medio de categorías emergentes de la información recabada. Los hallazgos sugieren que la evaluación auténtica puede y debe ser utilizada con mayor frecuencia en las clases de comprensión auditiva. Esto, a fin de unificar la evaluación y la enseñanza, además de generar espacios para la integración de varias destrezas del idioma. El estudio genera implicaciones a nivel de teoría y práctica; asimismo, sugiere un cambio de paradigma evaluativo, reemplazando la evaluación tradicional por la de proceso, y las pruebas estandarizadas por las referenciales. No obstante, no se plantea un reemplazo radical de los exámenes escritos, sino un balance adecuado, en conjunción con otras estrategias en procura de una evaluación más fiable, más válida, más justa y más auténtica para todos los actores de enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras involucrados.

*Palabras clave:* evaluación auténtica, medición, comprensión auditiva, portafolio, planes semanales

### Resumo

A presente pesquisa discute algumas bondades e implicações de implementar a avaliação autêntica em aulas de compreensão auditiva. O estudo se desenvolveu no ano 2016 por meio de um modelo de pesquisa mista e contou com a participação de 28 estudantes universitários matriculados em um curso de compreensão auditiva de uma carreira de ensino do inglês (CEE) da Universidade da Costa Rica (UCR). Os instrumentos de coleta de dados incluíram planos semanais de melhoria, portfólios, reuniões entre o professor e os estudantes, intervenções orais e reflexões improvisadas *in situ*. Os dados se validaram mediante diferentes procedimentos (por exemplo, triangulação e reflexividade) e se analisaram por meio de categorias emergentes da informação recebida. As descobertas sugerem que a avaliação autêntica pode e deve ser utilizada com maior frequência nas aulas de compreensão auditiva. Isto, com o fim de unificar a avaliação e o ensino, além de gerar espaços para a integração de várias destrezas do idioma. O estudo gera implicações ao nível de teoria e prática; da mesma forma, sugere uma mudança de paradigma avaliativo, substituindo a avaliação tradicional pela de processo, e as provas padronizadas pelas referenciais. No entanto, não se propõe uma substituição radical das provas escritas, senão um balanço adequado, em conjunção com outras estratégias em procura de uma avaliação mais fiável, mais válida, mais justa e mais autêntica para todos os atores de ensino de línguas estrangeiras envolvidos.

*Palavras chave:* avaliação autêntica, medição, compreensão auditiva, portfólio, planos semanais

## Introduction

In the changing worldwide scenario of modern language education, authentic assessment has gained unprecedented attention from various researchers, scholars, and practitioners (Ali & Ajmi, 2013; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Charvade, Jahandar, & Khodabandehlou, 2012; Frey, Schmitt, & Allen, 2012; Li, 2013; and Moya & O'Malley, 1994). Nonetheless, in actual classroom practice, authentic assessment remains, at best, a dilemmatic subject (Moya & O'Malley, 1994). Some of the factors contributing to this include perceived impracticality and unreliability (Brown, 2010), teachers and students' lack of familiarity with this type of evaluation, and the large amounts of time invested and cost of resources (Murphy et al., 2017). In addition to these, scholars have identified related issues including resistance from institutional authorities and stakeholders, lack of willpower and funding, and reported degrees of subjectivity in the way these evaluations are conducted. And as researchers make their way into this relatively-new field of inquiry, challenges continue to emerge, and questions continue to arise for theoreticians, institutional authorities, and teaching practitioners the world over.

At a theoretical level, perhaps the most evident limitation is the lack of empirical studies on authentic listening assessment in English Language Teaching (ELT). Compared to the general popularity of language assessment, research on this remains rather sporadic and unsystematic (see Dewi, 2018; Li, 2013; Miller, 2003; Yurdabakan & Erdogan, 2009). In order to help bridge this knowledge gap, the current study set out to answer the following research question: What are the benefits and implications of bringing authentic assessment into listening comprehension classes in an EFL program at a public university in Costa Rica? Data were collected from 38 junior students from an English teaching program in Costa Rica. Using a mixed-methods design and different data collection instruments, qualitative data were triangulated to cross-check information and satisfy methodological trustworthiness.

Since changes in teaching paradigms should necessarily imply changes in assessment trends (O'Malley & Valdez, 1996), this paper serves a baseline to move from traditional to process evaluation: from standardization to localness, and from norm-referenced testing towards more criterion-referenced assessment. Findings assist our understanding of the benefits and implications of implementing authentic assessment in listening comprehension classes, and they help bridge gaps between theory and practice as they bring theoretical precept and classroom reality together while implementing authentic assessment. Lastly, they bring us closer to the qualitative assessments which many seem to endorse but which few are examining through empirical research.



## Theoretical Background

### Some Initial Considerations

While the list of publications in the subject area is vast (e.g., Airasian, 2001; Ali & Ajmi, 2013; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Cohen, 1994; Curtis & Nunan, 2001; Douglas, 2000; Gamboa & Sevilla, 2016a; Genesee & Upshur, 1996; Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters, 1992; McKay, 2006; O'Malley & Valdez, 1996; and Rojas, 2004) and we have therefore left some works unexamined, we hope that for the goal of this paper our brief discussion addressees the core issues put forward during the past few decades.

As some authors have made it clear, the notion of authentic assessment is not new and has been subject to changes throughout the years. As early as the mid' 1980s, increased attention was paid to the benefits of self-assessment strategies such as portfolios (Charvade, Jahandar, & Khodabandehlou, 2012), probably inspired by the ways in which many painters, writers, and other artists displayed their professional skills through portfolios (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; O'Malley & Valdez, 1996; Zollman & Jones, 1994, as cited in Charvade, Jahandar, & Khodabandehlou, 2012). From then on, important advancements have been made both in the alternatives available to teachers and, more crucially, in the way assessment is viewed. Brown & Hudson (1998) challenged the popularly held idea of authentic assessment as a form of alternative assessment (see Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters, 1992) and advocated instead for the term *alternatives in assessment* because, as they argued, "why [...] should we even refer to the notion of "alternative" when assessment already encompasses such a range of possibilities?" (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010, p. 123). Tests then came to be viewed as a subset within the wider scope of assessment, so that, to date, a number of key characteristics have been proposed for all types of assessment: usefulness, purpose, reliability, validity, practicality, washback, authenticity, transparency, and security (see Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010; Combee et al., 2007; Gamboa & Sevilla, 2013; Gamboa & Sevilla, 2016a; and Rogier, 2014). These characteristics are roughly summarized below.

*Usefulness* means the extent to which a test is congruent with the needs of a specific audience; it has been considered by some as the most important testing principle, and it is closely linked to the concept of *purpose* (or test goal) (Bachman and Palmer, 1996, as cited in Rogier, 2014). In order for a test to be useful, its purpose must match the test taker's reasons for learning the language. *Reliability* deals with the consistency of student scores over time; that is, the assessment's ability to render similar scores if administered in a different moment and place to students with similar characteristics (Brown, 2010; Combee et al., 2007; Rogier, 2014). *Validity* is, in essence, an assessment's capacity to assess what it is supposed to assess (Brown, 2010;

Combee et al., 2007;). *Practicality* deals with the assessment's being easy to create, easy to administer, and easy to evaluate (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Combee et al., 2007; Rogier, 2014). *Washback* makes reference to the effect of assessment on the curriculum; in other words, it is the extent to which an evaluation can impact the teacher's methodology, assessment strategies, institutional policies, etc. *Authenticity* has to do with how much an evaluation resembles something that the student would do with the language outside of the classroom context (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Combee et al., 2007; Rogier, 2014). Lastly, *transparency* means the degree to which students are informed about the expected goals and skills to be accomplished and the means through which these will be assessed (Rogier, 2014). But in addition to these principles, Brown & Abeywickrama believe that alternatives in assessment, such as the ones listed below, call on teachers to perform new instructional and assessment roles (2010, p. 123). In the authors words,<sup>3</sup> these forms of evaluation:

1. require students to perform, create, produce, or do something;
2. use real-world contexts or simulations;
3. are nonintrusive in that they extend the day-to-day classroom activities;
4. allow students to be assessed on what they normally do in class every day;
5. use tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities;
6. focus on processes as well as products;
7. tap into higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills;
8. provide information about both the strengths and weaknesses of students;
9. are multiculturally sensitive when properly administered;
10. ensure that people, not machines, do the scoring, using human judgment;
11. encourage open disclosure of standards and rating criteria; [and]
12. call on teachers to perform new instructional and assessment roles.

For the purpose of clarity, we will use the term authentic assessment throughout the whole paper, although we know that other terms such as on-

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<sup>3</sup> Semicolons and period added to account for grammatical accuracy; original citation did not include any of these.

going assessment, alternative assessment, classroom assessment, qualitative assessment, or process assessment are also common in the professional literature. According to O'Malley & Valdez, alternative assessment means evaluation that is criterion-referenced rather than dictated or imposed by standardized measures. This type of assessment is authentic in that it resembles the types of activities used in the classroom and in real-life contexts; and it is also "consistent with classroom goals, curricula, and instruction" (O'Malley & Valdez, 1996, p. 2). Simply put, authentic assessment refers to "the multiple forms of assessment that reflect student learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes on instructionally-relevant classroom activities" (O'Malley & Valdez, 1996, p. 4).

This new perspective emerges from a need to more consistently assess the full range of skills in students, as well as to parallel the advancements gained in recent decades in the field of language education. It also arises from the realization that the insights of traditional assessment contribute little to curriculum development (O'Malley & Valdez; Rogier, 2014). In modern days, such concerns have also been backed up by policy makers and administrators who have become aware that traditional assessment (particularly multiple-choice-based tests) does not help develop the higher order skills that students will need in order to meet the challenges that await in the decades to come (Brown, 2010; O'Malley & Valdez, 1996).

Authentic assessment includes a wide array of alternatives such as portfolios, student self-assessments, performance assessment, writing samples, projects and exhibitions, experiments or demonstrations (O'Malley & Valdez, 1996), rubric-referenced assessment, conferences and interviews, observations, peer-assessments, and journals such as language-learning logs, response to readings, dialogue journals, acculturation logs, etc. (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

In order to design this type of evaluation, O'Malley & Valdez (1996, pp. 17-19) have proposed some crucial steps such as the following:

1. build a team;
2. determine the purposes of the authentic assessments;
3. specify objectives;
4. conduct professional development on authentic assessment;
5. collect examples of authentic assessments;
6. adapt existing assessments or develop new ones;
7. try out the assessments; [and]
8. review the assessments.

When used appropriately, authentic assessment can yield invaluable benefits, particularly in providing raw material for reflection and decision making. It also has great potential for transparency since authentic assessment demands that evaluation criteria be informed in advance to students. But above these gains, the noblest of all is perhaps that it helps bring effective teaching and assessment together. In our opinion, when educators manage to accomplish this, we have to agree with Tudor (2001) that the language teaching field has reasons to be proud of the advancements made in the last four or five decades.

Naturally, challenges exist which need to be acknowledged and dealt with. One of them is certainly the issue of maximizing practicality and washback (Brown, 2010). While authentic assessment guarantees high levels of washback, authenticity and appeal to intrinsic motivation, it tends to be largely impractical (time consuming and difficult to handle in some contexts) and unreliable (Brown, 2010). Added to that is the fact that students may not be ready for a shift in evaluation trends and may therefore experience distress in adjusting to them, not to mention the likely resistance from the administration—especially since authentic assessment demands a lot of willpower and resources. Additionally, these alternatives in evaluation tend to be highly subjective, especially if training is not made available to teachers and assessors. However, a question we need to ask here is, are traditional assessments free from this type of subjectivity? Grant (1990, p. 5) has provided the following insights on the matter:

Though the scoring of standardized tests is not subject to significant error, the procedure by which items are chosen, and the manner in which norms or cut-scores are established is often quite subjective--and typically immune from public scrutiny and oversight.

In spite of the theoretical momentum gained so far by the field of authentic assessment, advancements are much less solid as we move on to the specifics of authentic listening assessment. In fact, things are not even clear-cut for the *teaching* of listening due to historical disagreements on what the construct itself should involve, a condition which has earned listening the nickname of “the Cinderella of communication strategies” (Vandergrift, 1997). While empirical studies have been and continue to be reported on authentic listening assessment (e.g., Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Pan, 2017; Porter & Roberts, 1981), findings as to its real benefits are scarce within the macro picture of language assessment and ELT.

After examining the complex —and often polarizing— status quo of authentic assessment, to a large degree we agree with Brown’s (2010) assertion that we must “scrutinize the practicality, reliability, and validity of assessment alternatives while simultaneously celebrating their washback potential,

authenticity, and appeal to students' intrinsic motivation" (p. 126). This must be done, ideally, in the understanding that: (1) in time, authentic assessment needs not be so time-consuming and unreliable and (2) the long-run benefits of authentic assessment outweigh its potential drawbacks. In the current research project, we have made all possible efforts to integrate the cornerstones of assessment—usefulness, purpose, reliability, validity, practicality, washback, authenticity, transparency, and security (Brown, 2010; Combee et al., 2007; Rogier, 2014)—with Brown & Abeywickrama's (2010) principles for authentic assessment, as well as with O'Malley & Valdez's (1996) steps to develop this kind of assessment.

### Methodology

This study can be characterized differently based on its paradigm, epistemology, and design. Following Cohen, Manion, & Morrison's view, our investigation adheres to a naturalistic paradigm since it conceives truth as personal, subjective and unique and thus deems research as depending on several perspectives, including the subjects', the researchers' and society's (2007). The inquiry is therefore based on an emic epistemology, where knowledge is co-constructed from within the culture, as opposed to outsider-expert research which seeks to create universal laws about the phenomenon under study (Ecksenberger, 2014). As naturalistic and emic, our study uses a QUAL-Quan research design, with a strong prevalence of qualitative data. Also known as the "exploratory mixed methods design," this model begins with a qualitative phase to get a first glimpse of the research problem and then weights results against quantitative data (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 463), which, incidentally, accounts for methodological trustworthiness.

### Participants and Context

Participants comprised thirty-eight purposively-sampled junior students enrolled in an English teaching major at UCR, West Branch. The program was first opened in the 1970s as a response to the growing demand for English teachers and has undergone adjustments in both curricular content and administrative matters ever since. In 2015, the major was accredited by Costa Rica's official accrediting entity (SINAES)<sup>4</sup> and is currently being evaluated to pursue reaccreditation in 2019. In the light of these processes, certain teaching changes were suggested, including authentic assessment as part of the evaluation criteria in all courses. This led the researchers to use authentic

<sup>4</sup> Spanish for *Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior*.

assessment as a platform for the course *IO-5005 Laboratorio de Comunicación Oral V* (henceforth, Lab V), whose goal is to develop listening and vocabulary skills for academic purposes as a complement to the *IO-5440 Comunicación Oral V* course. Lab V covers a range of top-down and bottom-up skills such as listening for main ideas, making inferences and drawing conclusions, listening for details, discriminating between phonemes, and many others. In addition to this, it includes preparation exercises for the Test of English as a Foreign Language test (TOEFL) to train students in the test-taking skills they will need if they are required to take this examination later in their professional lives. Historically, the TOEFL component, in particular, has represented a significant challenge for English teaching learners, with verbal reports of anxiety, stress, and even academic frustration.

### Research Procedures

In order to conform to the new accreditation requirements and account for a more democratic approach to language instruction, several techniques were combined in an on-going assessment project. These did not seek to replace summative evaluations, but simply to bring in a wider spectrum of assessment possibilities into the classroom. The data were collected at different points in the semester and later cross-checked for content validity. Participants were asked for written consent and guaranteed full confidentiality to ensure response accuracy and comply with research ethics. Ethics procedures included, amongst others: (1) assigning code names to participants so that their real identities were protected, (2) keeping data sources such as portfolios, student self-assessments and checklists in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researchers, and (3) offering to share a copy of the final manuscript before it was sent for publication.

### Data Collection Instruments

- **Plans of Improvement (POIs):** On a weekly basis, informants were asked to (1) set their own learning goal, (2) design an activity to reach that goal, (3) set a schedule to carry out the proposed activities, (4) assess the effectiveness of the activities, and (5) write annotations for the following week in order to achieve a sense of content continuity and write down notes that they wished to keep in mind for the following week. Voluntarily, students sent their POIs to get professor's feedback that helped build interactive-diaries dynamics (see Genesee & Upshur, 1996), which in turn fostered closer communication between the students and the instructor and allowed for classroom adaptations based on the POI reports.

- **Student Self-Assessments:** Three times during the semester, students filled out a self-assessment form to reflect upon their progress and weaknesses and devised strategies to overcome such deficiencies. They were advised to link this technique to the POIs and peer-assessments they did at other points during the term.
- **Verbal Calls:** Each time summative assessments were returned, students were encouraged to give impromptu reflections on test scores and ways to improve their listening skills. They were also asked to provide feedback on the quality of the assessments.
- **Final Portfolio Report:** As a final project, informants compiled all their POIs in a learning portfolio. They made corrections suggested along the course of the semester and wrote an introduction and a conclusion where they reflected critically about the experience in the project.
- **Strategy-Assessment Checklist:** At the end of the semester, participants rated the effectiveness of the project in terms of listening comprehension via a checklist that included statements on whether and to what extent the project had helped achieve a series of cognitive and metacognitive skills.
- **Teacher-Student Conferences:** These were five-minute meetings for students to verbalize their experiences with the authentic assessment strategy. These conferences served as an opportunity for students to discuss the benefits and challenges of the above techniques, and as a means for the professor to provide one-on-one advice on the strategies students were putting into practice.

## Trustworthiness Methods

Three procedures were used to achieve instrument and methodological trustworthiness: (1) employing multiple data collection techniques (see previous section), (2) using various levels of triangulation (methodological, theoretical, and researcher triangulation), and (3) self-disclosure or reflexivity. The latter included being critical about how the researchers' own biases may influence the study; thus, hidden beliefs about authentic assessment were discussed and calibration sessions were conducted to agree upon the naming, grouping, and displaying of the categories.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

As stated earlier, this study sparked off as to assess the benefits and implications of bringing authentic assessment into listening comprehension courses at an EFL program in Costa Rica. As data were named, grouped, and

displayed for analysis, three major categories emerged in terms of benefits for students: *self-awareness and goal setting*, *sense of achievement*, *critical thinking*, and *general knowledge*. In the analysis ahead, qualitative data will be interpreted concurrently with quantitative information gathered via the participants’ appraisal of the project. The following citing codes will be used to specify the instrument and sources where data come from.

*Table 1.* Qualitative Data Citation Codes

Instrument Type	Data Source	Citing Code
Plans of Improvement (POIs)	Oral Lab V Students	POI 01-036
Student Self-Assessment	Oral Lab V Students	SSA 01-036
Student Portfolios	Oral Lab V Students	SP 001-036
Strategy-Assessment Checklist	Oral Lab V Students	SAC 01-036

Source: Researchers’ own design

For each category, qualitative excerpts of raw data will be accompanied with verbal descriptions and explanations. These will be further triangulated with the participants’ quantitative appraisal of the project in general. Different data sources suggest the project had a positive impact on at least four major areas: self-awareness and goal-setting, sense of achievement, critical thinking, and general knowledge.

**Self-Awareness and Goal-Setting**

The first recurrent theme was self-awareness and goal-setting. Participants reported that keeping a weekly plan of improvement helped them become aware of both their limitations and accomplishments, which in turn led them to set goals to tackle learning problems or to stick to the tasks they found beneficial. In his accounts of the events for week three, participant 26 acknowledges some limitations he faced but immediately goes on to state that he will take advantage of the experience in order to maximize his learning on the following week:

In short, I must manage to control the environment and myself to perform the subsequent activities in an accurate way. Besides, I will use all the techniques I have learned, but did not applied, to do better on the next test practice (POI 26 [Week 3], sic).



Participant 38 offers valuable evidence in this same regard throughout different POIs she created. On week two, she states that she chose to work on identifying main ideas and details in the topic of *brain and language* because she had previously identified limitations on these two skills: “In the second video I missed some details, and I could not understand very well some aspects that he was talking about so I played it twice” (POI 38 [Week 2], sic). On the following week, she issues the following reflection: “This week I decided to practice TOEFL listening exercises because I noticed that I could identify general ideas when I practice with videos at home, but it was difficult during the practice at the lab” (POI 38 [Week 3], sic). Shortly after, she explains that the difficulties experienced in class were due to concentration problems resulting from lack of vocabulary:

It continues being difficult for me to be concentrate while listening to long audios. Moreover, I notice that my lack of vocabulary sometimes affect me while listening an audio. Because when I do not understand a word, I miss my concentration by monitoring what the word means or thinking if I know the word (POI 38 [Week 3], sic).

Just like participant 26, informant 38 also engages in goal-setting upon becoming conscious of existing limitations: “This week I listened to lectures and conversations from TOEFL exercises in order to improve concentration, fast answering and details” (POI 38 [Week 4]). If we notice, on week two this participant becomes aware of her need to work on listening for details, on week three she identifies weaknesses in her concentration, and on week four she tackles the two issues together and goes beyond by working on TOEFL exercises. The reliability of this data is further corroborated via the participant’s thoughts in the final portfolio:

...as TOEFL is a type of exercise which is really fast, and I had problems with the speed of the audios, I discovered that writing down what I was hearing was a technique to improve my concentration and my speed to answer that help me a lot (SP- 038, sic).

Evidence of self-awareness also comes from participant 22, who reports to have realized the wealth of free access listening tools available online:

Thanks to the plan of improvement, I was able to find helpful activities, applications and websites that are really helpful to develop better skills [...] I now realized that there are excellent tools on the internet [...] and are free to use, so there is no excuse not to go further in my learning process (SP- 022, sic).

A common denominator within the current category is the participants' awareness in relation to the TOEFL component. This came up most evidently in the self-assessment instruments they completed, with comments such as "the major challenge I'm facing right now is the TOEFL exercises [...]" (SSA 33, sic); "in those exercises the time is reduced so I don't have enough time to read the answers before completing" (SSA 24, sic); or, "the major challenge is TOEFL exercises [...] There are too fast and also idioms and phrases are challenging" (SSA 34, sic). In all cases, however, the constant among respondents was also that they had goals underway in order to meet these drawbacks. Comments on this included, for example, "I'm looking for audios similar to TOEFL test" (SSA 31, sic); "to overcome these challenges I need to practice TOEFL at home" (SSA 33, sic); "I became a better listener [...] I just need to devote more time on the challenges" (SSA 34, sic); and "[I will] spare some time for practicing TOEFL and work on the portfolio" (SSA 37, sic).

In addition to the above, a variety of claims were made that sometimes the activities did not work as expected. Participant 33 describes limitations in terms of the content and length of a video that she meant to watch in order to reinforce TOEFL test taking skills. As she puts it:

This activity was too bored to me because the passage was too long about 6 minutes and I get lost in the middle. Also, I do not like that the video present the questions but not the answer of each question so I do not know if I am answering correctly (POI 33 [Week 7], sic).

Something that merits our attention is the honesty element. Acknowledging these facts is relevant to the validity of our results as they evidence participants' confidence to write about both, the cases where activities did not work, and about their thoughts on what teachers should consider for further project implementation. At any rate, the mere act of verbalizing these issues is but proof that self-awareness has indeed taken place.

Turning now to the quantitative data on this category, results are generally congruent with the ones drawn from the qualitative information. On assessing the correlation between the project and the development of self-awareness and goal-setting to tackle various learning limitations, 76.3% ranked it as "very much" (beneficial), 21.1% rated it as "about right", and 2.6% evaluated that link as being "too little"; none of the informants ranked it as totally useless. A chart with these numerical values will be presented at the end of this data analysis.

### Sense of Achievement

The second category has to do with student's reported sense of achievement. From improved tactics for the TOEFL test to the mastery of regular course content, data suggests clear progress in terms of this category:

[...] I got into a higher difficulty of audios, and I learned to have a discipline to practice it without problem... at the beginning of the course I got a really low grade in my diagnostic test, and since that moment I felt afraid and nervous about TOEFL exercises. That is why, I think I took around too weeks to start to practice deeper with TOEFL audios, but now I can say that I faced my fears about that, and at this moment I feel comfortable practicing with that kind of audios (SP- 038, sic).

On the same lines, participant 21 states that despite some difficulties he faced, he made substantial progress because of the project:

In spite of some difficulties; through these ten weeks I could see significant progress in my listening skills due to this plan. I believe that the portfolio strategy really works; it is a useful tool because it allows a detailed sight of weaknesses, and main points to work on. I am going to apply this strategy from now on in order to get a better understanding of English in all areas of my life (SP- 021, sic).

Participant 06 takes it one step beyond and analyzes the possibility of replicating the POI strategy in other classes in order to test its effectiveness in further educational contexts. In her final portfolio report, she notes:

I think that this type of assessment is very enriching for the teacher and for the student, it is a way to document achievements, where the student describes his way of learning, expresses doubts and make comments on each activity, all this makes the portfolio an interesting and enriching tool. I have the intention to apply this methodology in other subjects and verify their effectiveness and efficiency in any educational program (SP-006, sic).

Further evidence on sense of achievement —especially in terms of vocabulary acquisition and listening strategies— was recorded through the student self-assessment strategy, with the inclusion of comments such as “I learned more vocabulary, phrasal verbs. I also learned to listen for main ideas and details [...]” (SSA 15, sic); “I learned vocabulary and a strategy that is helping me with TOEFL exercises” (SSA 18); and “I could comprehend easily

details in audios, and I could use new vocabulary” (SSA 01, sic). From the final portfolio, similar general comments were documented:

Without more to say, I really thank God and the professor for having this wonderful idea of the weekly plan. It helped me a lot because even when I like English, I know that I wouldn’t have been as constant practicing it as I was with this work (SP- 034, sic).

In addition to these two sub-components, sense of accomplishment was emphasized also in terms of skills integration, for the different assessment strategies required students to combine a number of linguistic skills. In participant 19’s words, “I have learned more vocabulary and finally, I have practiced my writing skills every time I had to write the evaluation of the activities” (SP- 019). To sum up, we end this sub-section with a comment from subject 20, who outlines the main advantages of the project:

Sincerely, I am motivated to do those exercises because I really have seen progress during my last two evaluations. I feel like “super powerful” and a feeling of support have come to me. It really says “go Luis, you can do it”. And, indeed, I am doing it. [...] Finally, I would like state that during my three years being tested in my laboratory courses, this listening assessment plan is one on the most brilliant ideas to put into practice. All the changes that I have experimented during this plan have been successful (SP-020, sic).

On the quantitative side of the data, numbers from the strategy-assessment checklist (SAC) reinforce the qualitative analysis above. Thirty-six-point eight percent of the informants evaluated the project as “very much” helpful in building sense of achievement, 60.5% as “about right”, 2.6% as “too little”, and 0% as not useful at all (see full chart at the end of data analysis section). Although not conclusive, results from this category match previous findings by Sevilla and Gamboa (2016a) that this type of pedagogical innovations fosters student sense of achievement and bring them closer to the life-long learning expected at various levels of their professional profile.

### **Critical Thinking**

The third category was critical thinking; and while we are fully aware that critical thinking is a rather elusive construct, for the purpose of this analysis we understand it simply as the ability to use higher order skills including assessing, valuing, appraising, criticizing, weighing, and recommending, as suggested in various critical-thinking-relevant phases of Bloom’s taxonomy

(see Bers, 2005). Thus, our analysis of critical thinking begins with evidence from participant 29, who praises the strategy as a whole but criticizes the course syllabus, the students, and herself:

I did not have many complaints about the course nor the professors but I complain on the program and the students including myself. I consider it is necessary to change the material for Lab courses because unless we learn with prerecorded conversations natural ones will it give us the real sense of communication [...] In my own opinion, students should be doing this extra effort not as a part of the evaluation but for personal improvement (SP-029, sic).

Strictly speaking, besides critical thinking this excerpt also shows proof of self-awareness. However, evidence on critical thinking predominates as the student is critical of the course material, the syllabus, herself and her classmates. She also weighs and recommends changes on ETM's listening courses in order to make learning more authentic. In a similar context, participant 33 is critical of her own choice of materials for TOEFL practice when she reports: "The activity of watching this video supposed to help me practicing TOEFL exercises [...] but this activity do not really work to me because that video was too long and does not have the answer of each question [...]" (POI 33 [Week 7], sic). Another participant (36) acknowledges that the reason she was successful in completing the project was that it had a summative value. This is so —she admits— due to the academic workload it places on students: "[...] If the portfolio had not had a score I think I would not have done it because it is too difficult to spend time doing these activities because I had many things all the weeks" (SP-036, sic). And still another participant takes the lead and provides recommendations for future implementation:

I recommend both professors and students that if they could share information about websites or educational applications in order to do the plan that would be great, because sometimes students have a really hard time finding acceptable activities and they might not know how to search for that on the Internet (SP-022, sic).

A last comment comes as a word of motivation for students interested in a project of this kind in the future:

I would suggest not giving up when the exercises become tougher or when the person is not so motivated; quite the contrary, people must be aware that there are good and bad days when they may either do better than they have done before or mess all up (SP-25, sic).

At a numerical level, data displays high degrees of consistency with the qualitative analysis. Students' rating of critical thinking skills development was 60.5% for "very much", 31.6% for "about right", 5.3% for "too little", and 2.6% for "nothing". Of the three categories analyzed so far, critical thinking exhibits one of the highest "very much" rankings; however, it is also the first to exhibit any values for "nothing". The instruments used did not seek to delve into the reasons for these ratings, but data from the strategy assessment checklist indicates that critical thinking was particularly promoted in the TOEFL exercises because many exercises dealt with implied meaning and inferences, and that whenever it was not promoted, it was because some of the activities did not exhibit this component explicitly.

### General Knowledge

This is the last category of analysis identified in terms of benefits of authentic listening assessment, with qualitative data suggesting promising outcomes at various levels. Topics such as brain functioning, U.S. politics, cultural stereotypes and physical disabilities, interiors decoration, and insights about law and teaching make up some of the achievements reported through different data collection instruments. On week two, participant 38 offers a claim along these lines as she states: "Moreover, the content of the video helped me to understand better how my brain works, and how it relates to my language learning process." (POI-038, sic). Along the same lines, informant 31 provides similar evidence when, after outlining her main challenges with the plan of improvement, she asserts:

However, not all was lost because I have had noticeable improvement in listening, for example I was able to understand some controversial topics around Donald Trump and his argumentations about *Latinos*. Also, when I watched the *My Name is Khan* I felt overwhelmed for all the Muslim polemic, and situations that people with special necessities must face (in the case of Khan). Additionally, I learned the reasons why emotions are produced and the psychology of dreams by watching *Inside Out* (POI-031, sic).

A fact that stands out from the data above is the variety of topics this student reports to have explored on a single week. Although we see a common thread between the first two topics (i.e., politics and ethnic groups), a different subject is reported on at the end of the paragraph (the origins of emotions), which once again points to the project's potential to help students devise their own learning agendas and examine the issues of their own preference. An additional example of this can be found in participant 37, who points out: "I

watched videos related to things which I like because when I was tired of academic life I spent time looking for something interesting and I found videos about how to decorate rooms and clothes,” as well as from informant 20, who highlights:

To be honest, this week has been the most effective because I have been looking for information that is not presented in our feel of teaching. So, I have learned different laws and statistics that different countries apply in their working context. I am interested in this topic because becoming a lawyer is one of my future goals. Also, I discovered that I learn more when something calls my attention. Even if I am not able to understand every single word I am able to understand what the laws establish (POI-020, sic).

This passage presents a blend of at least two elements: general knowledge and goal-setting. Although goal-setting was analyzed previously in this section, we point it out here as an appendage of general knowledge since, as we have interpreted it, the student’s immediate motivation to explore these topics is part of a learning need experienced in the course. The convergence of other goals and topics is, at any rate, an added bonus in the context of any educational endeavor, and one which in our opinion should attract more attention from instructors and stakeholders alike.

As a last point, analysis of this category concurs with the results for the *sense of achievement* category above, in that they continue to parallel Sevilla and Gamboa’s 2016a claim that teaching strategies of this kind serve as a platform to prompt not only the target contents but also learning autonomy.

Numerically speaking, results appear to be encouraging as well. On table 2 below, we sketch a summary of the percentages coming from the participants’ quantitative appraisal of the project, and which we have used throughout the previous paragraphs to triangulate the information gathered. The numbers on the top indicate the extent to which informants felt the project had been beneficial in each of the categories discussed previously (1= nothing; 2= too little; 3= about right; 4= very much; NA: No Answer).

*Table 2. Summary of Students' Assessment of the Project*

Criteria	1	2	3	4	NA
<b>The project has helped me to...</b>					
1. become aware of my limitations and set goals to meet these limitations	0%	2.6%	21.1%	76.3%	
2. build a sense of achievement on contents proposed for the week	0%	2.6%	60.5%	36.8%	
3. reflect on areas where I have made progress	0%	2.6%	31.6%	65.8%	
4. develop a general sense of critical thinking	2.6%	5.3%	31.6%	60.5%	
5. acquire general knowledge on the topics studied	0%	5.3%	28.9%	65.8%	
6. organize my time and deal with homework assignments	2.6%	18.4%	42.1%	36.8%	
7. process the contents of the week	2.6%	13.2%	39.5%	44.7%	
8. improve my (listening) learning strategies	0%	0%	21.1%	78.9%	
<b>In general, this experience...</b>					
1. motivated me to undertake independent, life-long learning	0%	2.6%	15.8%	78.9%	2.6%
2. helped me to nurture permanent (listening) learning habits	0%	2.6%	21.1%	73.7%	2.6%

Source: Participants' responses

Despite these positive results, we are certain that they do not escape criticism. Skeptics could argue that such benefits are the natural product of students' immersion in the course; that the opposite would be rather counterintuitive given the amount of effort invested from beginning to end. Following this logic, one would need to admit that there is little or no credit in the outcomes reported herein. Nonetheless, while such arguments may be true in principle, the current study does not pursue credits of any sort but instead seeks to systematize the benefits from this intervention strategy in order to draw implications for theory and future classroom application. Together, the results of this section indicate that authentic assessment bears a number of advantages to the teaching of listening comprehension in EFL programs. The next section, therefore, moves on to discuss the findings in light of the research goal and presents the conclusions and implications for theory and practice.



## Conclusions

As stated previously, the present paper systematizes the benefits and implications of bringing authentic assessment into the listening comprehension classroom. In terms of the benefits, findings suggest positive links between authentic assessment and these classes in terms of the following themes: self-awareness and goal-setting, sense of achievement, critical thinking, and general knowledge. They also indicate that projects like this not only bring assessment and instruction together, but they also provide opportunities for skills integration through teacher conferences, peer-assessments, verbal calls, and the many other techniques employed. Along with this, students are given opportunities to build learner autonomy as they take charge of their own responsibilities in their own time and at their own will. In the long run, this will lead to what Tudor (2001) has termed the political (or social) scope of autonomy: a kind of learning that transcends the classroom boundaries and ensures successful learning for life.

Taken together, the evidence from this research provides insights for both classroom application and the field of knowledge at large. For classroom use, these data invite a move from traditional testing to ongoing assessment, and from norm-referenced towards more criterion-referenced evaluation. While generalizations are not possible given the small sample used, at any rate the aim should never be a radical “no” to objectively-scored examinations (if changes are to be enforced), but instead a more balanced application, and in combination with other techniques, in order to match the many realities that converge in an ELT context. For the advancement of second language assessment (SLA), our study sheds light on three key issues. First, it expands the body of available empirical literature on authentic assessment in listening comprehension—a skill already acknowledged as neglected even at the teaching level (see Gamboa & Sevilla, 2013 and Vandergrift, 1997). Second, it examines the benefits and implications of incorporating authentic assessment in the listening comprehension classroom considering Combee et al. (2007) and Rogier’s (2014) cornerstones of language assessment, Brown & Abeywickrama’s (2010) principles for authentic assessment, and O’Malley & Valdez’s (1996) steps for developing this kind of evaluation. Lastly, it sets the grounds for future inquiries and proposes research methods that may help reach a more comprehensive examination of SLA. In so doing, such inquiries should not discard challenges such as *The Hawthorne Effect*, a phenomenon where participants modify their behaviors as a result of being part of research (Porte, 2010, p. 103), and increasing the sample size to attain generalizability of results.

All in all, while the project has proven successful in the scope of this research, we must not ignore a series of drawbacks that need to be considered if successful implementation is to be attained. For instance, we know from

instructional experience and educational research that this type of evaluation is time consuming. It, therefore, requires a lot of willpower, support from authorities, and a constant adjusting and readjusting of our professional praxes. It also bears high degrees of subjectivity, which demands that teachers combine assessment strategies to cross-check student progress and counterbalance such shortcomings. Lastly, an eventual change of this sort brings about receptivity issues (i.e., the degree to which a teaching change is welcome or not) which require effective coordination between curriculum planners and stakeholders on the one hand, and between instructors and department heads on the other. These and other drawbacks should be considered in future investigations to offer a more comprehensive picture of the benefits and implications, as well as challenges of authentic assessment in listening comprehension courses.

In terms of research application, two major limitations were identified. The first one is the small sample used, which limits transferability of findings; the second one is the scope of the study: Since the inquiry was limited to benefits and implications of authentic assessment in a listening comprehension class, it was not possible to assess the project's downsides for students, professors, policy makers, and curricular authorities. Future studies must definitely address these weaknesses and provide sound evidence on their outcomes.

Within this context, agnostics may wonder why we should adopt assessment models that cannot deal with these limitations successfully. Without meaning to oversimplify matters, perhaps the questions that need to be asked here are: Why continue to endorse traditional models that have not only proven insufficient but also ignored the wealth of other alternatives and failed to deal with these same issues effectively? What if instead of arguing over the traditional-versus-authentic-assessment dichotomy we joined efforts to make language assessment a more democratic, more participatory, and more honest endeavor? For now, these are questions that will only be answered through systematic, empirical research on the links between authentic assessment and listening comprehension in EFL programs.

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# Project-Based Learning as a catalyst for Students and Teacher Autonomy Development: The experience in a State School in Nilo, Cundinamarca.<sup>1</sup>

El Aprendizaje Basados En Proyectos como catalizador del desarrollo de la Autonomía en los Estudiantes y el Profesor: La Experiencia vivida en un Colegio Oficial en Nilo, Cundinamarca.

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## Abstract

This paper reports the findings of a graduation thesis which intended to identify the effects that Project-Based Learning implementation had on the development of autonomy of a group of tenth grade English language learners and their teacher. In this Action Research study, several instruments were used. An initial questionnaire to confirm perceptions; a student's attitude scale to assess how students worked, both individually and in small groups; small group conferencing, which enabled students to speak about their projects; a teacher-research journal with teacher's reflections on the implementation and effectiveness of the action strategies; and students' journals containing reflections on the different stages of the process. The data gathered showed that PBL work led to both learners and their teacher having more positive attitudes and behaviors towards their own academic activities and teaching practice, respectively. This methodology encouraged learners to become decision makers, to gain responsibility and confidence, and to raise awareness of their role in the classroom, while also promoting the development of several features of the teacher's teaching style. Thus, knowledge in the classroom was built cooperatively.

*Key words:* Autonomous learning; teacher's autonomy; awareness; decision makers; missions; Project Based Learning; students' attitude; responsibility; confidence; collaborative work.

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### Resumen

El presente trabajo da cuenta de los hallazgos surgidos de una Investigación Acción como proyecto de grado, cuyo objetivo era identificar los efectos de la implementación del modelo de trabajo por proyectos sobre el desarrollo de la autonomía de un grupo de estudiantes de inglés de grado décimo y su profesor. Para tal efecto se utilizaron instrumentos como: un cuestionario de inicio, para confirmar percepciones previas; una escala actitudinal para medir el trabajo individual y grupal de los estudiantes; conferencias en pequeños grupos, para analizar el trabajo de los estudiantes en los diferentes proyectos; el diario del profesor, que contenía las reflexiones después de la observación del trabajo de los estudiantes y; el diario de los estudiantes, donde éstos consignaron sus impresiones después de cada proyecto desarrollado. El análisis de la información colectada arrojó evidencias claras sobre el desarrollo de actitudes y comportamientos positivos de los estudiantes participantes y el profesor-investigador frente a sus actividades académicas y su práctica pedagógica, respectivamente. Los proyectos implementados alentaron a los aprendices en la toma autónoma de decisiones y en el acrecentamiento de su responsabilidad y su confianza. Asimismo, los estudiantes, a través de su trabajo, exhortaron al profesor a mejorar su práctica pedagógica. En consecuencia, la construcción del conocimiento se convirtió en una labor hombro a hombro.

*Palabras clave:* Aprendizaje autónomo; profesor autónomo; actitud de los estudiantes; conciencia; toma de decisiones; misiones; trabajo por proyectos; responsabilidad; confianza; trabajo colaborativo.

### Resumo

O presente trabalho da conta das descobertas surgidos de uma Pesquisa Ação como projeto de formatura, cujo objetivo era identificar os efeitos da implementação do modelo de trabalho por projetos sobre o desenvolvimento da autonomia de um grupo de estudantes de inglês de segundo ano do ensino médio e seu professor. Para tal efeito se utilizaram instrumentos como: um questionário de início, para confirmar percepções prévias; uma escala atitudinal para medir o trabalho individual e grupal dos estudantes; conferências em pequenos grupos, para analisar o trabalho dos estudantes nos diferentes projetos; o diário do professor, que continha as reflexões depois da observação do trabalho dos estudantes e o diário dos estudantes, onde eles consignaram suas impressões depois de cada projeto desenvolvido. A análise da informação coletada evidenciou evidências claras sobre o desenvolvimento de atitudes e comportamentos positivos dos estudantes participantes e o professor-pesquisador diante de suas atividades acadêmicas e a sua prática pedagógica, respectivamente. Os projetos implementados animaram os aprendizes na tomada autônoma de decisões e no acrescentamento da sua responsabilidade e sua confiança. Da mesma forma, os estudantes, através do seu trabalho, exortaram o professor a melhorar a sua prática pedagógica. Em consequência, a construção do conhecimento converteu-se em um trabalho ombro a ombro.

*Palavras chave:* Aprendizagem autônoma; professor autônomo; atitude dos estudantes; consciência; tomada de decisões; missões; trabalho por projetos; responsabilidade; confiança; trabalho colaborativo.



## Introduction

The increasing importance of English in Colombia has promoted not only new policies on English teaching but challenged the educational system and its participants to devise strategies to educate learners to achieve a certain level of proficiency in this language. However, teachers struggle with a diverse array of difficulties, including learners' inabilities to develop interest in and motivation towards the study of a foreign language, coupled with a lack of self-confidence to understand and use such languages. The battle to fully engage students, who are often inattentive or easily distracted, in the learning activities, and the apparent lack of commitment to complete work outside the classroom are on top of the those that teacher's face in every subject. As a result, this research study was designed to investigate possible teaching strategies that may overcome these barriers mentioned above that are hindering English proficiency across schools in Colombia. Following an analysis of the concept of autonomous learning, a more conscious perspective emerged: the two actors in the classroom, teacher and student, inevitably depend upon each other. Through the Project, students were given the opportunity to have a more active involvement and be more aware of their role in their own learning process. Concurrently, the purpose was to encourage teacher(s) to identify strategies to improve their own teaching practice. The procedures explained below demonstrate attitudinal and practical changes in both the learners and the teacher.

## Literature Review

The concept of Project-Based Learning (PBL) is related to the constructivism principles that emerge from the pragmatic, cognitive, and social constructivism view evidenced in Dewey's philosophy (Railsback, 2002). Considering this, PBL recognizes aspects not only in regards to the nature of learning but its application to real life, and the possibility of improving learning by making it into an active process, with interacting and involvement of the surrounding environment. Hence, through PBL students should be able to apply what they learn to everyday life scenarios and understand the possibility to improve by working with others. Furthermore, it encourages students to be more engaged, due to the more challenging and complex nature of the work, and the interdisciplinary rather than a departmentalized focus (Anderman & Midgley, 1998; Lumsden, 1994 in Railsback, 2002). For this reason, the interaction between teacher, learner, and environment must be boosted.

PBL enhances students' motivation and increases responsibility in the learning process. As Fried-Booth (2002) states: "Project Work offers learners an opportunity to take a certain responsibility for their own learning,

encouraging them to set their own objectives in terms of what they wanted and needed to learn.” (pg. 6) Building on from this, Stoller (2002), in a more detailed description, highlighted the importance of student focused approach: negotiation of students’ interests; attention to topics and content that students are interested in; student-centered instruction; integration of the four skills in lesson activities; preparation and presentation of a final product; and promotion of students’ autonomy in the learning process. Therefore, it is important that the different stages of PBL can be developed and adapted according to the needs and requirements of the individual teachers and their students in diverse teaching and learning contexts.

Learner autonomy is seen as a key feature to promote learners’ awareness of the skills, learning styles, strategies and attitudes that influence their learning. For this reason, the concept of learner autonomy and its literature requires exploration.

Despite its importance, the concept of Learner Autonomy is difficult to define precisely (Little, 2000). In fact, the discussion is still open as to whether it is considered a capacity or a behavior, with Little (1991) defining Autonomy as “a capacity - for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independence” (p.4), while Holec (1981) states that learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one’s own learning. Furthermore, the interpretation of learner autonomy can differ from culture to culture and person to person due to differences in belief systems and perspectives. On their part, Benson & Voller’s (1997) idea is that autonomy is subject to the abilities and attitudes that people possess and, as a result, it can be developed in different ways to varying degrees.

The literature on learning autonomy includes a wide range of contexts such as holistic, social, political, and even philosophical. Benson (2007) suggests that the concept of autonomy can be applied to three distinct contexts, with a different definition in each; technical, political, and psychological. At the technical level, autonomy is concerned with the management, strategies, and techniques of learning, whereas at the political level, it is the ability to control the situational contexts of learning. And lastly, at the psychological level, the author defines autonomy as the inner capacity for self-direction or self-regulation of learning.

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In the same vein, Nunan (1997) claims that encouraging learners to move towards autonomy is best done inside the classroom, by incorporating student focused content goals and learning processes. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to involve them in making choices and creating situations in which they are able to develop their own goals and learning strategies. From the Literature on autonomy, the main features of the term that are repeatedly used, highlight the responsibility of a person to analyze the various possibilities in a

situation, make informed and considered choices, and effect changes in one's life and activities.

### **Teacher's role**

Teachers play a key role in promoting students' autonomy; however, they must develop their own autonomy before being able to help learners with theirs. For some authors, Teacher Autonomy refers to "the teacher's ability and willingness to help learners take responsibility for their own learning" (Thavenius, in Cotterall & Crabbe, 1999). According to this definition, teachers must reflect on their role and develop ways to adapt to the students' new roles, in order to help them on their way to becoming autonomous and independent. There is a clear link between learner and teacher autonomy, although greater emphasis is placed on the former because it requires the latter to achieve it. To widen the concept of teacher autonomy, Little (1995) explains that for teachers to be autonomous, they must develop a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, through continuous reflection and analysis of their teaching, and affective and cognitive control of the teaching process. Supporting this idea, Tort-Moloney (1997) refers to an autonomous teacher as "one who is aware of why, when, where, and how pedagogical skills can be acquired in the self-conscious awareness of teaching practice itself." (p. 51) In addition, Little (as cited in Smith, 2001) established the connection between teacher and student autonomy when he remarked that "it is unreasonable to expect teachers to foster the growth of autonomy in their learners if they themselves do not know what it is to be an autonomous learner." As a result, teachers may also need to address their own beliefs about teaching and the perspectives of learner autonomy. If not, as Lamb and Reinders (2008) claim, the teacher could, intentionally or unintentionally, constrain learner autonomy in the classroom leading to a lack of authenticity in learning.

### **Methodology**

This study followed a qualitative approach and was based on the principles of descriptive Action Research Methodology. Burns (2010), Jhonson (2008), and Allen and Calhoun (1998) claim that Action Research provides educators an opportunity to reflect on their own practice and seek to identify and investigate problems in their own classrooms.

### **Problem statement**

The initial concern for the teacher in the English language classroom was that the participants in this study were habitually inattentive, got easily

distracted, and frequently complained about the activities proposed by the teacher(s). Students often expressed that they did not know enough English to be able to cope with the activities, and they were not confident enough to use the foreign language in class. Through teachers' meetings, the teacher-researcher realized that those attitudes and behaviors expressed by the students, were quite similar across subjects; with teachers from other disciplines referring to those particular students as "reckless, lazy, undisciplined, unpunctual, uncommitted, and unconscious of their life projects." Teachers believed the characteristics listed above showed a profound lack of autonomy in learners, and hence learning autonomy became the focus of this study.

### Research Questions

Consequently, the question to be answered in this study was: What happens to students' autonomy and the teacher's self-development in our tenth-grade classroom when we implement Project Work for the first time?

### Sub Questions

- The question above was supported by the ones below:
- What are the perceptions of students and teacher in regards to the implementation of Project-Based Learning in the classroom?
- What changes are revealed in the students' autonomy after they get involved in Project Based Learning?
- What changes are evident in the teacher's development following the implementation of Project- Based Learning?

### Context and Participants

This action research project was carried out in a 10th grade EFL class, at a state primary and secondary school in Nilo (Cundinamarca, Colombia), during four 55-minute classes. English instruction was focused on the development of the four language skills. The participants in this study were the teacher-researcher and 21 tenth grade students, 11 boys and 10 girls, whose native language is Spanish. Their ages ranged between 14 and 18 years old. Almost 50 % of them lived in a rural community, and thus many lacked the resources for extra practice, such as libraries or computers, with very few having access to the internet. As they were all beginners, they had particular difficulty expressing their ideas by speaking or writing; however, they could read basic texts and understand elementary instructions given by the teacher.

Each of the projects or “Missions”, as called by the teacher-researcher, comprised four aspects: planning, implementation, presentation of product, and Evaluation.

For the planning step, students shared their ideas about project topics, preferred methodology, resources, and evaluation procedures. The teacher collected all those ideas and opinions with no exception. Regarding topics, 10th graders preferences focused on music, sports and fashion; they also showed predilection for culture, interviews, and gastronomy. After this preliminary exploration of interests and preferences, the teacher asked pupils to gather in groups (which were assigned according to students’ choices). Thus, the teacher summarized information and encouraged learners to discuss and decide on plausible Projects to be implemented in the English class.

After small group discussions, the teacher asked the class to gather in groups, and they were assigned these projects: “A Fashion show”, “around the world (Knowing different cultures and countries)”, “interviewing a guest on T.V News”, “School news”, and “teaching others.”

Teacher’s recommendation for his tenth graders was to develop their first Project by describing school to make it visible to the community. To accomplish this mission, students practiced the vocabulary, expressions, and grammar structures learnt during previous classes. Teacher wanted his learners to be able to use language, so he encouraged them to tell the world about the place where they study through a video.

Mission: “To post a Video presenting the place where I study and receive comments in English.”

Considering students’ previous decision, the teacher suggested a new project through which learners could develop topics they were interested in. “School news” seemed to collect not only topics of their preferences but helped to develop languages abilities proposed by the syllabus at the time it allowed pupils to learn by doing cooperatively. Thus, learners could practice English by telling news considering different topics such as: national, international, sports, fashion, local, school, and environmental news.

To develop this project, tenth graders were encouraged to search information by reading newspapers, watching news, or expanding ideas form classes different from English. Students’ first mission consisted on becoming updated in global facts, knowing about the community and the school. Likewise, Spanish, social sciences and English teachers helped students to expand and support that information. In order to develop this project and collect information, students learnt to ask questions, do interviews, report, read articles, do chronicles, and create into the classroom an environment for the news format together with the teacher. Among their tasks, they interviewed,

and video recorded teachers at school, students, local people and candidates for Nilo's town hall.

### **Data gathering instruments and techniques**

For data collection, various methods were considered. Firstly, a questionnaire was used to confirm the teacher-researcher's perception of the lack of interest in learners for their learning, then, a student's attitude scale which gave the researcher a clear idea of the students' perceptions of how they themselves worked, both individually and in small groups. Furthermore, small group conferencing (Johnson, 2008) was implemented with students in class, which enabled them to speak informally and spontaneously about their projects. Finally, a teacher-researcher journal with teacher's reflections on the implementation and effectiveness of the action strategies; and the students' journals containing reflections on the different stages of the process (Burns, 2010).

### **Data Analysis and Outcomes**

The data was scrutinized following the principles of Content Analysis, since it is a method that may be used with either qualitative or quantitative data, in an inductive or deductive way. The categories were derived from the data, and thus it took the form of an inductive content analysis (Kynga's & Vanhanen, 1999). The results show what happens when PBL is implemented in the classroom for the first time, and how it can be related to the development of autonomy.

After analyzing the information gathered through the different instruments, students and teacher expressed their thoughts and feelings about the activities done in class.

### **Students' Voices**

**Responsibility.** This is the aspect that most students recognized as a positive outcome after implementing PBL. Thus, it was evidenced that this methodology contributed to the development of both individual and collective responsibility, helping the initial features of increased self-management, power and control, leading to the development of autonomy, punctuality, and commitment.

Besides the features above, learners were concerned about the concept of *quality*. They became aware of the importance of making things better and realized that PBL stages positively influenced some aspects of their attitudes

including their decisions, performance, motivation, and consequently, their learning. In order to illustrate the five aspects referred to above, we will quote some excerpts taken from the students' journals.

*“Con estos proyectos somos más puntuales, responsables porque se convierte en una obligación entregar las actividades, no porque sea impuesto por el profesor sino porque fue algo a lo que yo me comprometí y mis compañeros también.” (N.F.) [“With these projects we are more punctual and responsible because it becomes an obligation to present the activities. It is not an imposition from the teacher, but my partners' and my personal commitment.”]*

**Increasing motivation.** During the implementation of PBL, learners described how motivation positively influenced their accomplishment of the objectives and their performance in the English class. Thus, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were evident. Some students felt the inner desire to complete their goals because they wanted to perform well and to improve in each presentation they did. Likewise, extrinsic motivation came from the implicit commitment to accomplish the activities not only for themselves but also for the other members of the group, including the teacher.

At the beginning of the implementation, students showed interest because it was the first time they faced challenging activities. The work increased the learner's motivation to assume a new methodology, a new way to work in class, and a disposition towards learning. After some of the missions were achieved (expression used by the teacher to increase motivation and describe the activities), learners were expected to improve on subsequent missions. The idea to accomplish missions promoted interest in the learners and motivated them to achieve the collective goals. Nevertheless, one of the most reliable aspects that caught the students' attention and interest was demonstrated at the first stage of the implementation when the teacher made the learners part of the process, giving them a main role: recognizing how important they were when their voices were heard for the first time in the activity. Learners assumed the role of the decision makers, and together with this power to make decisions, greater motivation and a sense of commitment came. Letting the students be active participants in the projects and their learning is a great strategy to promote cooperation and strong commitment among learners, since they feel *unconsciously or implicitly* forced to achieve the project goals.

Another aspect that boosted student interest was the innovative proposal that consisted in practicing the language while searching and collecting information outside the classroom using different data collection instruments. Breaking the boundaries of the physical and metaphorical classroom walls allowed students to learn by practicing. Therefore, by encouraging students to

do activities outside the classroom, a new perception of learning is promoted where they take a more active role in the process.

*“Ahora que viene un nuevo proyecto estoy muy entusiasmada y estoy segura que mi nuevo proyecto va a sobresalir, fuera pereza... fuerza pereza.”* [“Now, that a new Project is coming, I am very excited; I am sure that my new Project will stand...Laziness, get out!”]

*“Me siento muy bien que el profe nos haya tenido en cuenta para la elaboración de los proyectos, quiero dar mi mejor esfuerzo.”* (J.M.). [“I really liked that teacher considered us for this Project; I want to do my best.”]

**Working with others.** PBL promoted collaborative work, which is perceived as the act of two or more people working together to achieve a particular goal, either by the sharing of ideas at each stage of the process or the dividing up of the workload. Most of the 10th graders agreed on the importance of working together. The use of collaborative work was an attempt to encourage learners to share knowledge, complement strength, overcome weaknesses, gain confidence, make decisions on different ideas, distribute hard work, and most of all, gain awareness of how one’s good or bad work affects others.

Students demonstrated positive skills while working together, particularly the responsibility to do their best as a team in order to accomplish the objectives proposed in every single mission. Thus, working together is a positive aspect when students discover that, in order to accomplish objectives easily, it is necessary to support and be supported by others. Throughout this project, the positive perception of collaborative work in the 10th graders continued to increase, with collaborative work enhancing the responsibility and interaction of each group member to ensure the whole group succeeded.

*“Aunque todos no trabajamos al mismo ritmo, me gusta trabajar en grupo porque entre todos aportamos ideas, cumplimos con las misiones y sacamos los proyectos adelante”* (D.G.) [“Although, we do not work at the same pace, I like working in groups because we all supply ideas, carry out missions and forge projects ahead.”]

**Getting confidence.** PBL raised good feelings towards learning. Students truly perceived improvement in their learning, which was shown by better performances, more accurate use of language, and a higher quality of work. Additionally, this research demonstrated that PBL encouraged learners not only to learn English but also to improve aspects of their personal life; including the



ability to overcome fears, gain confidence, and develop independence. This idea is supported by S.F., when he says: “*Con esta nueva metodología que estamos trabajando ahora se aprende mucho más que en una clase común y corriente*” [“*With this new methodology, we have learnt much more than we used to do in traditional classes.*”]. This idea of gaining self-confidence and self-esteem is confirmed by the students’ reports of feeling more engaged towards learning English and more enthusiastic, as they are now able to do certain things that they previously could not. For instance, “*Lo mejor que tiene este tipo de proyectos es que nos atrevemos y dejamos el miedo atrás, nos atrevemos a hacer cosas diferentes como ponernos frente a una cámara y perder la pena*”. HB. [“*The best aspect of this type of Project, we dare to do different things, and leave fear behind us, like being in front of the camera and leave shame away.*”]

**Raising awareness.** Using student self-evaluation as an instrument to promote reflection was an important way to encourage learners to achieve the objectives at each stage of the projects. It helped learners to recognize, in themselves and in their work, areas of weakness and strength, areas that required more work, or areas that they were less confident in, their likes and dislikes, and even their beliefs. With the support of their classmates and the guidance from their teacher, the students were able to improve upon any areas that were hindering their performance and also take advantage of their strengths. The process of evaluation was implemented using two strategies; the use of journals to enable the students to express their opinions and feelings and, an attitude scale, where the actions of reflection emerged at the end of each mission when the teacher-researcher asked students to evaluate the performance of each member of the group. The latter activity meant students could see how others perceived their work in class and could compare how distant their self-perception and others’ opinions were. This was useful, as for some students it confirmed and reinforced their good performance, and for others it encouraged them to have a greater commitment to the subsequent activities.

The last activity of the project was the final evaluation, in which the students had to complete a self-assessment and present their report to their teacher, taking into account the achieved objective and their effort to complete it. The purpose of this activity was to augment the development of the student’s sense of responsibility and independence and encourage honesty. This enabled students to be active participants and made them aware of their learning process.

This self, peer, and co-evaluation generated a sense of reflection upon learners that made them conscious of their work and invited them to reflect on how far or close the achievement of the objectives was.

Regarding this aspect, D.G. said: *“No me gustó que algunos compañeros me hayan puesto mala nota, aunque me esforzaré en el próximo trabajo para demostrarles que si puedo hacer las cosas.”* [“I did not like getting a bad mark from my classmates, although I will struggle next time to demonstrate to them that I can do it well”].

On her part, another student said: *“siendo honesta me dio pena que mis compañeros me calificaran porque en este primer trabajo no cumplí con lo que debía hacer. Me esforzaré más”* (A.C.) [“To be honest I felt ashamed when my classmates evaluated me, because in this first activity I did not accomplish what I had to. I will do my best next time.”]

### Teacher's voice

**Eager teacher.** Implementing PBL in 10th grade was a new challenge not only for students, for the students but for the teacher breaking the traditional teaching styles. It was the first time we had worked in such a different manner, breaking the more traditional teaching styles. Implementing methodologies that you never tried before makes you feel unconfident; it creates anxiety due to the expectation to promote acceptance in learners, also the possible changes not only in students but in teacher practice. The teacher adapted the syllabus not only considering the topics to be covered, and each of their time frames, but the pedagogical methods to be used; for this reason, the teacher designed some strategies and possible activities that matched with the features of PBL. There were two main challenges that had to be considered at the start of the process. On the one hand, the anxiety of using unfamiliar pedagogical methods that would challenge the teacher's previous teaching experience, alongside his limited research experience. On the other hand, was the dilemma of how best to implement in the classroom the different theories and concepts on learner autonomy, while managing the reaction of the students towards the new way of working, and the best way to encourage their engagement.

**Time to listen.** Motivation of the students was evident during the different stages of the implementation. This motivation was generated by enabling the students for the first time, to be part of the decision making, alongside the teacher, with the methodological principle focusing on the students as the main actors in the learning process. The students were very involved when their teacher asked them about their opinions to build a new class, their interests, likes, and preferences in terms of topics, strategies, and even in their evaluation method. This first stage of the project was much more democratic than more traditional teaching styles, allowing students to express their opinions and ideas and collectively make the final decision. They felt empowered by having the responsibility of suggesting the different projects to be undertaken by the class. Students moved from being just receivers to being proposers. *“In this*

*early step of the process, I have evidenced that my students like to be consulted about their preferences towards the class, although they recognize they agree with some of the activities we do daily, they express they would like to try others, for instance; to work with videos or outside the classroom.”* However, it was quite important that students realized that although they had much more independence, they were not alone, with continuous guidance available.

**School Community.** Delegating to the students the responsibility of gathering information for the project allowed the teacher to identify their willingness to adopt an active role. *“What a nice surprise... students are so motivated; some of them are even trying to interview candidates for Nilo’s mayoralty”. “They took good pictures (they must spend time outside the classroom).” “Wow... I feel good watching my students going around school with their cameras, paper, and pens asking other teachers for information.”* Importantly, the implementation of PBL allowed the participation of all the community, pupils, and teachers.

**Reflecting as a new opportunity.** This stage promoted a dialogical discourse among students themselves and with the teacher. The students’ voices were again taken into account and, as the performances of both students and teacher were evaluated, meaningful changes emerged as a result; the reflection time helped the teacher to access the suitability of the pace of the projects to determine the attainment of objectives by the learners, to confirm the suitability of the methodology and the activities, and to establish a set of actions that contributed to enhance collaborative work and to reduce constraints in the process.

**Building together.** The teacher enjoyed taking the role of guide, facilitator, listener, motivator, and advisor when implementing projects; the teacher’s voice was as relevant as the students. Although at the beginning of the project students misunderstood the role of the teacher and questioned his contributions, during the implementation of the projects, a more balanced participation of student and teacher was reached. Evidence of this is shown in the following excerpts: *“I heard some of my learners complaining and saying that I need to help them more; they feel I am extremely demanding but the hard work is for them... I realize, that we need time to reflect and explain them the purpose of implementing projects in class and the challenges we need to tackle in both directions.*

## Conclusions

At the beginning of this process, the tenth graders were perceived as inattentive, easily distracted, and students who would complain about any activity proposed. Furthermore, they were perceived as reckless, lazy, undisciplined, unpunctual, not committed, and unconscious of their life projects. Nevertheless, after implementing PBL, students showed some meaningful changes to their behavior and their view of learning. They became more responsible, punctual, committed, and honest. These features of autonomy that the students demonstrated indicate the starting point of a journey towards a better attitude in regards to their academic commitments. Students became more conscious and aware of their role in the classroom, recognizing that good results depend on good performance, and the former is attainable for them, if they work well. They realized that the role of the learner goes beyond the passive receiver, that they should take an active role in the learning process and recognize what is important for their further decisions. These particular students are now able to confront doubts, fears, misunderstandings, insecurity, and some features of low self-esteem. They were able to see that independence emerges when students are aware that they are in charge and take control of aspects of their personal life. However, while the students did demonstrate all the aforementioned positive attitudes during the implementation of PBL, it is not possible to determine whether these aspects of learner autonomy were continued outside of the English classroom setting, for instance during their other classes or applied to decisions outside of the school setting. Hopefully, they were.

Finally, the teacher's self-development was influenced during this study as well. Therefore, he advanced his abilities in solving doubts, dispelling misunderstandings, becoming a motivator, and in guiding his students. It also encouraged him to accommodate new ideas of a creative and innovative nature, which boosted his pedagogical skills. The teacher is now conscious of the need to move from a teacher-centered towards a student-centered model, avoiding the idea that the learners must only follow their teacher's instructions. He realized that, in order to develop autonomy in his students, it was necessary to make a mirror process for analyzing his own autonomy first, so that learning emerged in a co-creation process.

This paper may encourage teachers to get involved in self-reflection processes upon their teaching practices and their teaching styles; in the same vein, it may compel teachers to undertake methodologies that allow learners to have a more participatory role in class where students' opinions and decisions could be taken into account. Likewise, it demonstrates how student-centered methodologies like PBL develop in learners some autonomous practices, whereby real-world connections are made. Along with them, the use of critical thinking skills, of technology, and the enhancement of creativity

and innovation facilitate independence, responsibility, decision making and democratic participation of learners.

All in all, this research could become the starting point for new studies that attempt to explore the long-lasting effect that the implementation of PBL could have on students' attitudes toward academic work and personal life projects.

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# An Analysis of the Pre-service Teachers' Teaching Anxiety and Coping Strategies: A Turkish Elementary School Context<sup>1</sup>

Análisis de la ansiedad y estrategias de afrontamiento en profesores en formación: un contexto de escuela primaria turca

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the construct of English as a foreign language (EFL) pre-service teachers' feelings of anxiety before, while, and after experiencing teaching English within a Turkish elementary classroom setting. Specifically, this intrinsic qualitative study investigates the anxiety sources for pre-service teachers in their practicum experiences and the ways they adapted to cope with these anxiety-provoking sources. The data were triangulated by consulting three sources of information (e.g., open-ended questions in the self-report forms, open-ended questions in the peer-reflection forms, and diaries) relating the 32 participants' practicum experiences. The findings indicated that prior to practicum experience, classroom management was the major teaching anxiety source and the "the most" frequently employed coping strategy was to consult their mentors and cooperating teachers. However, during the actual practicum experience, being observed by a mentor was the most common concern and to cope with it, each participant developed different coping mechanisms. Finally, receiving negative feedback from mentors after the post-practicum experience decreased self-confidence and to compensate, pre-service teachers frequently asked mentors to provide further advice. It is implicated that teacher education programs raise the awareness of pre-service teachers of the potential challenges awaiting them in the practicum experience and equip them with coping strategies.

**Keywords:** Pre-service teachers, teaching anxiety, coping strategies, elementary school, EFL, feedback, practicum experience

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### Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es de investigar el constructo de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), los sentimientos de los profesores en formación antes, durante y después de experimentar la enseñanza de inglés en un salón de clase de primaria turca. Específicamente, este estudio cualitativo intrínseco investiga las fuentes de ansiedad para los maestros en formación y sus experiencias de práctica y las maneras en que ellos se adaptaron para lidiar con dichas fuentes que provocan la ansiedad. Los datos se triangularon al consultar tres fuentes de información (por ejemplo: preguntas abiertas en formularios de autoinforme y diarios) relacionando las experiencias de práctica de 32 participantes. Los hallazgos indicaron que antes de la experiencia de práctica, el manejo de clase era la fuente de más ansiedad y la estrategia para lidiar con la ansiedad más empleada fue la consulta a mentores y docentes cooperantes. Sin embargo, durante la experiencia de practica real, el ser observados por el mentor era la preocupación más común y para lidiar con esto, cada participante desarrolló diferentes mecanismos para manejarlo. Por último, recibir retroalimentación negativa de los mentores después de la experiencia de práctica posterior disminuyó la auto confianza y para compensarlo, los maestros en formación consultaron con frecuencia a sus mentores para recibir consejos adicionales. Lo anterior implica que los programas de formación docente sensibilicen a los a los docentes en formación sobre los posibles desafíos que les esperan en su práctica y que los doten de estrategias para poder manejar dichos desafíos.

*Palabras clave:* Docentes en formación, ansiedad de enseñanza, estrategias de afrontamiento, escuela primaria, inglés como segunda lengua, retroalimentación, experiencia de práctica.

### Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo é de pesquisar o construto de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL), os sentimentos dos professores em formação antes, durante e depois de experimentar o ensino de inglês em uma sala de aula de primária turca. Especificamente, este estudo qualitativo intrínseco pesquisa as fontes de ansiedade para os mestres em formação e suas experiências de prática e as maneiras em que eles se adaptaram para lidar com mencionadas fontes que provocam a ansiedade. Os dados se triangularam ao consultar três fontes de informação (por exemplo: perguntas abertas em formulários de auto-relatório e diários) relacionando as experiências de prática de 32 participantes. As descobertas indicaram que antes da experiência de prática, o manejo de aula era a fonte de mais ansiedade e a estratégia para lidar com a ansiedade mais empregada foi a consulta a mentores e docentes cooperantes. Entretanto, durante a experiência de prática real, o fato de serem observados pelo mentor era a preocupação mais comum, e para lidar com isto cada participante desenvolveu diferentes mecanismos para manejá-lo. Por último, receber retroalimentação negativa dos mentores depois da experiência de prática posterior diminuiu a autoconfiança e para compensá-lo, os mestres em formação consultaram com frequência a seus mentores para receber conselhos adicionais. O anterior implica que os programas de formação docente sensibilizem os docentes em formação sobre os possíveis desafios que lhes esperam em sua prática e que os dotem de estratégias para poder manejar mencionados desafios.

*Palavras chave:* Docentes em formação, ansiedade de ensino, estratégias de afrontamento, escola primária, inglês como segunda língua, retroalimentação, experiência de prática.

## Introduction

The concept of anxiety has attracted much attention in language education because it has played a significant role and has had undeniable effects on the process of teaching and learning (Han & Aybirdi, 2017). Anxiety is an emotional situation of fear and apprehension (Scovel, 1978). Regarding a specific type of anxiety, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) described Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as “a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process” (p. 128). Oxford (1999) divided anxiety into two parts: facilitative anxiety which is the stimulating force in a positive sense, and debilitating anxiety which is the weakening force in a negative sense. Brown (2000) referred to these two anxiety types as trait anxiety which is related to personality characteristics and state anxiety which is felt in a specific situation.

While some studies have been carried out to investigate sources of anxiety for learners (Aydın, 2008; Elaldi, 2016; Gopang, Bughio & Pathan, 2015), others have investigated the anxiety-provoking factors for teachers (Kesen & Aydın, 2014; Machida, 2016) because potential challenges and negative feelings experienced in the teaching process can result in teaching anxiety in non-native teachers of a target language, which may, in turn, negatively affect foreign language education (Horwitz, 1996). Teaching anxiety is connected with preparing and conducting teaching activities in real classroom settings (Gardner & Leak, 1994). As Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety (FLTA) is an emotional state that results from the individual, motivational, and perceptual unease, it can be observed before, during, and after teaching (Aydın, 2016). Foreign language teachers experience teaching anxiety from such sources as classroom management, school-related issues, fear of negative evaluation, and proficiency in using the target language (Azmi, 2012; Machida, 2016). Furthermore, even though foreign language teachers have advanced foreign language proficiency, they can still experience tension and concern in the teaching process (Gregersen, Meza & MaIntyre, 2014; Horwitz, et al., 1986; Merç, 2015; Yoon, 2012). Compared to native language teachers, foreign language teachers differ in regards to responsibilities they shoulder and challenges they face (Yoon, 2012). The profession may become even more difficult for non-native language teachers who are supposed to teach a language which is not their own language (e.g., Merç, 2011; Yoon, 2012).

FLTA does not only affect in-service teachers; pre-service English-as-a-Foreign Language (EFL) teachers who are supposed to attend practicum courses in the final year of their tertiary education can also experience the negative impacts of FLTA. Though they are still learners of the language, they are to experience the transition from being a student to being a teacher

and practicum is the route through which they can have this initial transition. In this process, their being non-native teachers, being inexperienced in the profession, and being observed by their mentors in their practices can become factors causing anxiety for pre-service teachers and may sometimes have severe consequences on their attitudes towards the profession (Kim & Kim, 2004; Merç, 2015; Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013).

The issue of FLTA for pre-service teachers has been an issue of growing attention in different contexts. While the sources of FLTA for pre-service teachers was investigated qualitatively in a Turkish context (Merç, 2011, Paker, 2011, Aydın, 2016), in a Malaysian context (Azmi, 2012), in an Indonesian context (Agustiana, 2014), and in a Thai context (Sammaphet & Wanphet, 2013; Lampadan, 2014), some other studies have investigated pre-service EFL teachers' coping strategies with FLTA in addition to the challenges (e.g., Lampadan, 2014; Mahmoud & Özkan, 2016; Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013).

In light of the relevant literature, although there is growing attention regarding the sources of FLTA for pre-service teachers, there is still a scarcity of research investigating the coping strategies employed by pre-service teachers when they experience FLTA. Furthermore, the sources of FLTA, its effects on pre-service language teachers, and the ways in which these teachers cope with these challenges need an investigation because FLTA is an area in which there is comparatively limited research. Taking this gap into account, this study aims to find out the possible sources of anxiety in the practicum experiences of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) pre-service teachers and reveal the ways they try to cope with these challenging cases. This understanding is expected to contribute to EFL pre-service teachers in that it alerts them about the probable problematic cases they are to encounter and equips them with some effective coping strategies to deal with the anxiety-provoking situations. This study is also expected to raise the awareness of the faculty in training the undergraduate students, inform them about the realities of the practicum period and equip them with coping strategies, in effect helping them "survive" the practicum. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this research gap by examining pre-service EFL teachers' FLTA and coping strategies in Turkish research context.

## Literature Review

Research on FLTA has investigated this phenomenon from different angles, which can be presented in mainly two categories: research on sources of FLTA of pre-service teachers (Agustiana, 2014; Aydın, 2016; Azmi, 2012; Merç, 2011; Paker, 2011) and research on sources of and coping ways with FLTA of pre-service teachers (Lampadan, 2014; MacDonald, 1993; Mahmoudi & Özkan, 2016; Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013).

### Research on the Sources of FLTA

The first set of studies are about the sources of FLTA for pre-service teachers. Centering on the sources creating problems for pre-service teachers during practicum, Merç (2011) asked 150 Turkish pre-service teachers to keep diaries during their practicum experience and conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 of these students. The results of the constant comparison analysis showed that learner profile, classroom management, steps to follow in teaching, and observation were the main challenges for the participants. In a study by Paker (2011), the potential anxiety sources for 101 pre-service teachers during teaching practicum in a Turkish context were investigated. In addition, some students also took part in interviews.

The results were similar to those in Merç's (2011) study, revealing that the participants felt anxious because of evaluation, classroom management, and some pedagogical issues. In a study making a comparison between pre-service and experienced teachers' stress levels in teaching English, Azmi (2012) worked with 51 pre-service teachers and 38 experienced teachers. Using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, the researcher concluded that being observed, unexpected situations, communicative teaching, and student reactions were among the factors of stress for the participants. Both pre-service and experienced teachers seemed to feel under the stress of teaching responsibility.

Another study on pre-service teacher anxiety was offered by Agustiana (2014). The researcher, on a qualitative basis, adapted close-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect data from 50 Indonesian pre-service teachers completing their practicum. Being observed by the cooperating teacher or mentor, lack of experience in teaching, crowded classes, and student questions were the major sources of anxiety for the participants.

Sharing a similar purpose with the above-mentioned studies, Aydın (2016) examined FLTA experienced by 60 Turkish pre-service teachers by collecting data through background questionnaires, interviews, student reflections, and essays. The results showed that being observed, fear of negative evaluation, language proficiency, and inexperience in teaching created stress for the participants. In Aydın's study, the participants were observed to experience teaching anxiety before, during, and after their teaching practices.

### Research on the FLTA Coping Strategies

The second group of studies focuses on the sources of FLTA and the coping strategies of pre-service teachers with these problems. Exploring stress factors for 11 pre-service teachers during practicum, MacDonald (1993) conducted surveys, focus-group interviews, observations, and asked the participants to keep journals. The results revealed that the teaching practicum was the most stressful phase of the educational lives of the participants. Expectations of students, mentors, and cooperating teachers; time management; being evaluated; and role clarification were among the challenges for the pre-service teachers.

The participants reported that they tried to cope with anxiety through communicating, establishing clear goals, and some relaxation techniques. Aiming to find out the anxiety-generating sources for four Thai pre-service teachers' FLTA and their coping mechanisms with potential problems, Sammephet and Wanphet (2013) used interviews as the main research tool and conducted three interviews with the participants: one, a couple of days before their first teaching, the second, a few days after their first teaching experience, and the third, in the middle of semester. The results showed that personality traits, the context of teaching, and being supervised were the major causes of anxiety with the participants. To cope with these challenges, the participants reported using some anxiety management tactics like self-control, accepting and facing the situation, and dealing with it.

Following a phenomenological approach, Lampadan (2014) carried out individual meetings, observations, and interviews with eight Thai pre-service teachers and concluded that teaching preparation, classroom management, and relationships with different agents were challenging for the participants. The participants were observed to benefit from preparation, adaptation, positive attitude, and developing good relationship with their peers and mentors as coping strategies.

### An Overview of Challenges for Language Teachers

Setting out from the results of existing studies, it can be assumed that there are various sources of FLTA from which in-service and pre-service foreign language teachers suffer. The common challenges for in-service and pre-service language teachers are reported to be related to classroom management issues, unexpected situations or student questions, proficiency in using the target language, and fear of making mistakes or negative evaluation (Agustiana, 2014; Lampadan, 2014; Machida, 2016; Merç, 2011; Parker, 2011). On the other hand, there are also some other factors creating problems for pre-service teachers since they do not have experience in the profession

(Aydın, 2016, Paker, 2011). In other words, their lack of teaching experience accompanied by the fact that they are observed and evaluated during practicum by mentors, cooperating teachers, and students can create great tension for pre-service teachers and increase their FLTA (Aydın, 2016; MacDonald, 1993; Mahmoudi & Özkan, 2016 ). In a limited number of studies on the coping strategies (e.g., some anxiety management tactics like self-control, accepting and facing the situation, and setting clear goals) with practicum stress, it is revealed that self-control, accepting and facing the situation (Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013), and holding positive attitudes and establishing strong ties with peers and mentors (Lampadan, 2014) are the main coping strategies of the pre-service teachers.

The practicum process can be regarded as a pre-stage for pre-service teachers to have a chance to observe and practice foreign language teaching in real classroom environments (Smith, 2010). The experiences in this process are of great significance for the future professional careers of pre-service teachers (Gal, 2006). Revealing the dynamics underlying the anxiety experiences of EFL pre-service teachers can contribute to the betterment of their practicum experiences, in which pre-service teachers can already have an idea of what is awaiting them and therefore, can arm themselves against the possible challenges in the process. In addition, this investigation can help the faculty to train the pre-service teachers in a way that combines theory and practice, raising the undergraduates' awareness of the realities in the practicum experience. In this way, pre-service teachers can have more effective and healthier practicum experiences positively affecting their future teaching experiences.

### Method

This research approaches the issue with an intrinsic qualitative design through triangulation, which helps to provide a deeper understanding of the factors causing teacher FLTA. Stake (1995) describes that researchers who want to understand a particular case deeply use this approach. The case that may have peculiarity or ordinariness becomes the focus of interest. The aim of such a design is not to develop a theory, instead the aim is to better understand intrinsic aspects of the case (cf. Hellström, Nolan, & Lundh, 2005).

Triangulation is the use of multiple data collection sources for the purpose of minimizing the biases in research and maximizing the validity of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Denzin, 1989 cited in Flick, 2018). Previous research has also benefitted from interview questions and diaries kept by the participants in the data collection (e.g., Agustiana, 2014; Aydın, 2016; Azmi, 2012; Merç, 2011; Paker, 2011). Therefore, in this present study we used open-ended questions in the self-report forms, open-ended questions in the peer-reflection forms, and diaries to collect data. By doing so, the reliability

and completeness of the data were triangulated through the use of these three sources of data.

Based on the above-mentioned history of the teacher FLTA research in Turkey and the global stance on the matter, the current research is significant in several ways. Firstly, to the best of our knowledge, no research on the pre-service EFL teachers' FLTA factors in a Turkish context has employed three steps in the data collection procedure: before the participants' real teaching experiences in the classroom (e.g., pre-teaching experience), during their teaching experiences, in the classroom contexts, and after their teaching experiences. We selected this research context and the participants because they have been identified as special in the sense of being last-year students in their study programs and have no prior teaching experiences, and the researchers of this study wanted to see if they can find out why they have teaching anxiety and how they overcome their teaching anxiety problem. Secondly, this study used several data collection tools (e.g., self-reports, interview questions, reflections forms and diaries).

### **Sampling and Recruiting**

A purposeful sampling strategy was followed to portray the different perspectives on the anxiety problem in the first teaching experiences by pre-service teachers. This study was conducted with the participation of EFL teacher candidates during the spring semester of their 2016-2017 academic year. EFL teacher candidates who were enrolled in EFL teacher education programs in two different Turkish state universities other than the students in other language-related programs such as translation and interpretations were invited to participate in the study voluntarily because the researchers of this study had close relationships with them as they were our students over 4 years. They were given consent forms for privacy and their previous level of teaching experience and their level of proficiency in English were assumed to be similar because they were classmates.

### **Participants**

The participants consisted of 32 pre-service English teachers studying at ELT Departments in two state universities in Turkey; 71% (19) participants were female and 29% (13) participants were male. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 27. The participants' native language was Turkish and they were assumed to have advanced levels of English proficiency. These participants were fourth grade prospective English teachers who were supposed to attend a 14-week teaching practice at elementary schools of the Ministry of National Education for their teaching practicum.



During this teaching practicum process, the participants were expected to experience the teaching profession in its authentic context where they could have their initial teaching practices. Therefore, these 32 participants were thought to represent the group of pre-service teachers who could possibly experience foreign language teaching anxiety in their initial teaching experiences. Table 1 summarizes the participants' background before starting to practice teaching at state schools and their first teaching practices.

*Table 1.* The learning program of the participants to prepare them to teach

<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Prior to practicum experience</b>	<b>Setting</b>	<b>Aim</b>
Two semesters for background gaining (28 weeks)	Instruction on language teaching methodology and techniques, syllabus design, classroom management, instructional material design and testing and evaluation.	University programs	To prepare the pre-service teachers for the theoretical background of language teaching and learning before becoming EFL teachers.
<b>Step 2</b>	<b>Starting practicum m experience</b>	<b>Setting</b>	<b>Aim</b>
4 weeks	At the beginning of their practicum experiences, they observed cooperating teachers at classroom settings and received feedback regarding their observation experiences from both their mentors at schools and supervisors at the university. The feedback was given in a discussion manner. This step continued for the next 4 weeks.	They started to observe students, peers, and mentors at secondary or elementary state schools.	To prepare them to teach.
<b>Step 3</b>	<b>Practicum experience</b>	<b>Setting</b>	<b>Aim</b>
8 weeks	They taught language topics such as grammar, speaking, and reading as presented in student books and the teacher's book.	They started to teach at the schools.	To help them improve their real-time teaching skills and to gain experience in the real classroom context.

## Data Collection

Prior to collecting the data, the researchers of this study applied for and received a letter of permission from the heads of the departments. Next, the researchers invited the students to participate in the study. The volunteer participants were informed about the study and were given consent forms in which the researchers had stipulated that the participants' safety, privacy, and confidentiality would be strictly taken into consideration and that the collected data would be kept confidential by the researchers. The content of the study was explained and they were given a signed and dated copy of the consent form by the researchers (c.f. Aydın, 2016; Paker, 2011; Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013).

The data were collected through several instruments. The background questionnaire helped the researchers to obtain information about the participant profiles including their age and gender. The peer observation forms enabled the researchers to understand the perspectives and thoughts of the participants regarding their observations of their peers' performances (see Appendix). With the help of this form, the participants could express how they perceived their peers' facial expressions, their instructional language and their attitudes. In this way, the participants could evaluate the performances of their peers as an outsider.

## Background Questionnaire

The background questionnaire included questions regarding the The background questionnaire included questions regarding the demography of the participants such as gender and age. It was given prior to the study.

## Observations

Observations were made by each pre-service teacher (e.g., participant-observation) and by their peers (e.g., peer-observation). While a pre-service teacher was teaching in a classroom, other participants observed him/her in the same classroom over a 12-week period. Each pre-service teacher lectured one hour each week while the rest of the participants were making observations and taking field notes. During the peer observation, the participant-observers used a simple observation strategy to focus on facial expressions, and language use in the teaching experiences in the authentic classroom atmosphere. Further, in the interviews, observations, and diaries, the participants were directed to focus on the specific details about the problems they encountered and the strategies to cope with them each of pre, while and post authentic teaching experiences.

In the diaries and self-observation forms, the participants were asked to reflect on their own teaching experiences and focus on the challenges they encountered and how they coped with these problems in the pre-, while- and post-stages of teaching. Peer observation forms and self-observation forms were used to enlighten the participants' FLTA experiences and their coping mechanisms. The participants were asked to fill in the peer observation and self-observation forms immediately after each teaching experience in order not to miss critical points in their observations. With the help of the self-observation forms and diaries, the participants could evaluate their own performances and experiences in the light of the questions in a guided way and in their diaries in an independent way. In this way, they could hold a critical stance regarding their performances as an insider.

The participants recorded field-notes based on day-to-day observations over a 12-week period. A group of participants (e.g. 6-7 participants) entered the different classrooms together each week and one of them lectured while the other students observing and taking notes. The data regarding the perspectives of the participants' teaching experiences were collected through the following three steps:

*Before the teaching experiences:* The open-ended questions for pre-teaching experiences focused on their opinions about their first teaching experiences, the problems encountered while preparing to teach and how they try to overcome them.

*While-teaching experiences:* The open-ended questions for while-teaching experiences were about specific details concerning possible problems encountered, such as classroom management, time management, committing language mistakes, other observers (e.g., mentor, supervisors, peers) and their immediate strategies to overcome such problems.

*Post-teaching experiences:* The open-ended questions for post-teaching experiences focused on other potential factors that cause anxiety such as supervisor feedback, grading the teaching performance, their wishes about the past experience and evaluations on how to cope with such sources of anxiety.

## The interviews

The researchers also conducted interviews with the participants. The interview questions were prepared in the light of previous literature on teacher FLTA and the conversations between the participants and researchers. The participants were mainly asked questions about the challenging cases creating anxiety in their teaching experiences and how they tried to cope with these challenges. The interview questions were thought to cross-check the answers

the participants provided in the other instruments. The interviews were mostly done in the native language of the participants to convey feelings more effectively. Each interview lasted 15/20 minutes. The interview records were translated into English and proofread by a native speaker.

### **Diaries**

The last instrument was participant diaries. The pre-service teachers were asked to keep diaries over a 12-week period in which they reflected on their teaching experiences considering the sources of anxiety and their coping strategies. The participants were told that they were free to comment on any particular experience or on their overall evaluations of their teaching instances. The aim in asking the participants to keep diaries was to ensure that they could narrate their FLTA experience from any perspective that they desired for.

These instruments were all adopted to triangulate the data and to increase data trustworthiness. With the help of these instruments, the participants could adopt the perspectives of insider and outsider in the process of evaluating their practicum experiences taking the anxiety-provoking cases into account. All these instruments were thought to help the researchers' cross-check the participant answers.

### **Data Analysis**

In the data analysis process, the researchers followed a three-step In the data analysis process, the researchers followed a three-step analysis in which each data set was first separately analyzed and then all the data sets were cross-checked to compare similar and different answers. These three steps were;

- Individual analysis of each data set in which the answers of the participants to each instrument were separately checked in order to reach a clearer framework for the answers,
- In-group analysis in which the same data set was analyzed taking each participant's answers to the same instrument into account,
- Cross-group analysis in which the answers in different instruments were compared to each other in order to identify similar and different points in participant comments.

The below table displays the three-step data analysis process:

**Table 2.** Summary of the three-step analysis process

Steps	Process	Data sources
Step 1: Individual analysis	Separate analysis of the data sets	Diaries, field notes, peer-observation forms, interviews
Step 2: In-group analysis	Comparing participant answers in each set	Diaries, field notes, peer-observation forms, interviews
Step 3: Cross-group analysis	Comparing participant answers across the data sets	Diaries, field notes, peer-observation forms, interviews

Before conducting the main analysis process, the researchers carefully went through all the data sets following data reduction, data display and drawing conclusion steps (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this process, the researchers reached an initial code-forming, which was supported by the codes presented in previous literature on FLTA (Aydın, 2016; MacDonald, 1993; Parker, 2011). This initial analysis process was followed by the main three-step data analysis process as presented below.

Step 1: In the main data analysis process, the researchers first conducted individual analysis of each data set. In this step, the data sets were separately analyzed and recurring items common in different data sets were identified. The experiences of the participants were analyzed according to the stages in which they experienced FLTA (pre, while and post stages of teaching).

Step 2: In the second step, each data set was analyzed in detail through a comparison of participant comments to each other to identify similarities and differences in comments. This step was followed in order to find out whether similar codes were valid for each participant considering particular instruments.

Step 3: In the final step, a cross analysis of all the data sets were conducted in which the comments of the participants provided in different instruments were compared to each other. In this way, the participant comments and experiences were cross-checked to understand whether the same participant provided similar comments in different instruments. All these three steps involving in-group and cross-group comparisons of the data sets were followed to ensure trustworthiness in data analysis.

As regards the coding process, the researchers, in the light of existing literature on FLTA, divided the data into discrete parts and identified similar

and different aspects in each data set. Then, data display was followed in order to summarize the data about the anxiety factors and coping strategies. In this process, a descriptive approach was followed to present participant experiences more clearly, involving participant quotations.

In the conclusion drawing step, the researchers compared the themes identified as a result of the analysis process to reach an understanding of the common experiences of the participants regarding FLTA. This comparison was done to ensure trustworthiness in the analysis process.

## Results

Results obtained from the study show that EFL pre-service teachers experience FLTA before, after and during their teaching experiences. Furthermore, they employ various coping strategies to alleviate their anxieties. Table 1 shows the FLTA anxiety-provoking factors among EFL pre-service teachers and their coping strategies to overcome the anxiety problems before authentic teaching experience.

According to the findings shown in the table, there are five factors that may cause teaching anxiety. These are classroom management, fear of making mistakes, lack of teaching experience, time management, and establishing a good rapport with students. To overcome their anxiety problems, they employed 13 distinct coping strategies as reported by themselves and their peers.

### **Anxiety sources before teaching events and pre-service teachers' coping strategies**

The following table shows the FLTA sources and the coping strategies reported by the participants before their authentic teaching experience.

*Table 3.* Sources of FLTA reported and coping strategies employed pre-practicum experience (data obtained from the three sources)

Pre-practicum experience	
Sources of FLTA	Coping strategies
Classroom management (27) 38%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- consulting the mentor or cooperating teacher (21)</li> <li>- chatting with friends (15)</li> </ul>
Fear of making mistake (16) 23%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- practicing beforehand (14)</li> <li>- preparing many different materials (12)</li> <li>- preparing lesson plans (6)</li> </ul>
Lack of practicum experience (12) 17%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- practicing beforehand (9)</li> <li>- searching for examples of practicum experiences from the internet (5)</li> </ul>
Time-management (9) 13%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- preparing lesson plans (7)</li> <li>- preparing many different activities (5)</li> <li>- practicing beforehand (4)</li> </ul>
Establishing good rapport with students (7) 10 %	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- consulting mentor or cooperating teacher (4)</li> <li>- chatting with friends (2)</li> </ul>
Total: 71 (100%) (the total number of the items reported by the participants)	

Firstly, as listed in Table 3, among the possible anxiety-generating factors before teaching experiences, the major concern of the pre-service teachers was about classroom management. Since they were not the real teachers for the student profile they were expected to teach, most of the participants expressed their anxiety about how to control a class full of unfamiliar learners. A participant, referring to classroom management as her biggest concern before she entered the classroom, stated that classroom management could be a problem for her since she was not the real teacher in the class:



My biggest fear was about classroom management. I was not their real teacher; I was just like an elder-sister to them. So, I was anxious that I would not be able to set control over the students, which would negatively affect my teaching performance. (March 2017-from the diary)

Since potential cases creating classroom management problems were among the greatest concerns for the participants, most of the participants wanted to eliminate the negative effects of this problem before it happened. Consulting their mentors and cooperating teachers was one of the ways they tried to obtain some information to cope with management problems. Almost half of the participants also reported having rehearsed before their teaching practices to get as ready as possible for teaching and so that students would not detect gaps in their instruction, leading to management problems. Referring to the need for being prepared beforehand as a coping strategy in his comment, a participant, who expressed his high level of anxiety before the teaching events, provided the comment below:

Before teaching, I really become anxious and, mostly, I experience difficulty to control this. I am anxious about classroom management. I believe if I cannot control my fear, this would reflect itself in my performance. So, in order to overcome this problem, I try to benefit from the suggestions of my mentor and cooperating teacher because they are experienced in teaching. I also do practicing before my teaching event several times to get ready for it. In this way, if I am ready to teach, then students cannot find a way to conduct disruptive behaviors in my class. (April 2017-from the interview)

Secondly, as illustrated in Table 3, fear of making mistakes and lack of teaching experience were reported as the second major FLTA provoking source. The participants' comments revealed that there is a positive relationship between the fear of making mistakes and lack of teaching experience. Fear of making mistakes was frequently mentioned by the participants since they lacked necessary teaching experience through which they could get used to teaching and feel more relaxed. In addition, fear of making mistakes seemed to be both the cause and the consequence of teaching anxiety. In other words, the more the participants were afraid of making mistakes, the more their teaching anxiety increased; and the higher their teaching anxiety was, the more they suffered from the fear of making mistakes. Pointing at the relationship between her fear of making mistakes and the two-way connection between fear of making mistakes and teaching anxiety, a participant commented as follows:

I experience high levels of teaching anxiety because I don't have enough teaching experience and, therefore, I am afraid of making mistakes. I believe if I had enough practicum experience, I would have much more confidence in myself so I would not experience fear of anxiety at this level because I would know how to teach. The fear of making mistakes increases my anxiety. I think,

my fear increases my anxiety and my anxiety increases my fear in turn. (March 2017- from the interview)

In order to overcome the fear of making mistakes and the drawback of her inexperience in teaching, the same participant also referred to some ways she used to minimize the negative impacts of anxiety:

I am aware of the points increasing my teaching anxiety, so I have developed some ways to deal with them. Since I lack practicum experience and I am afraid of making mistakes, I observed that practicing for the teaching events beforehand helps me overcome these challenges to a great extent. I also try to prepare lesson plans for many different activities so that I would experience fewer problems during teaching. (May 2017- from the diary)

Thirdly, as reported in Table 3, another concern which was also related to inexperience in teaching was time management. Some of the participants frequently mentioned time management as a possible problem in their teaching events. Since they were not used to controlling instruction time because of the lack of teaching experience, they were afraid that they would experience difficulty using the time appropriately. Considering time management as a challenge, a participant also referred to the coping strategies he benefitted from his teaching practices:

As I hadn't conducted a full lesson before, I was afraid I would not manage to fill the time up or I would finish the activities long before the break... In order to prevent the possible risk of time management, I tried to prepare detailed lesson plans and set time limitations with each step. I also prepared many different activities in case I had more time to fill up. And, I pre-practiced the steps in my lesson plan so that I could get used to the process. (May 2017- from the interview)

Fourthly, as described in Table 3, establishing a good rapport with students is another FLTA source: the concern for some of the participants was having positive relationships with the students in their practice school experience. Though the participants were not the actual teachers of those students, they wanted to have a good rapport with the students, desiring to be considered as teachers. One of the participants shared the strategies she utilized to establish a good interaction with the students, underscoring the importance of this point for her:

We have been taught that if students love the teacher, they love the lesson. So, though I am an intern, I wanted to have a good relationship with the students in practice school. For this purpose, I consulted my cooperating teacher to learn her strategies about how to establish good relations with the students. Besides this, I sometimes talked with some friends to learn their experiences with the students. (April 2017- from the interview)

### Anxiety sources while teaching events and pre-service teachers' coping strategies

The Table 4 shows the FLTA sources and the coping strategies reported by the participants and their peers while authentic practicum experience.

*Table 4.* Sources of FLTA reported and coping strategies employed while practicum Experience

While practicum experience	
Sources of Anxiety	Coping strategies
Mentor observation (32): 22%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ignoring being observed (27),</li> <li>- focusing on instruction/activities (22),</li> <li>- avoiding eye-contact with a mentor (18),</li> <li>- taking a deep breath, keep calm (17)</li> </ul>
Classroom management (30): 20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- activating students (22),</li> <li>- ignoring disruptive behaviors (21),</li> <li>- eye-contact with students (19),</li> <li>- using body language (16),</li> <li>- dealing with problematic students individually (13),</li> <li>- keeping calm (11)</li> </ul>
Time management (27): 18%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- following lesson plan (23),</li> <li>- focusing on instruction/activities (19)</li> </ul>
Fear of making mistakes (25): 17%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- following lesson plan (18),</li> <li>- focusing on instruction/activities (14)</li> </ul>
Teaching in English (21): 14%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- switching to Turkish (19),</li> <li>- interactive teaching (15)</li> </ul>
Voice control (13): 9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- body language (9),</li> <li>- smiling face (6)</li> </ul>
Total: 148 (100%)	

Firstly, as seen in Table 4, being observed by a mentor, who was the faculty supervisor of the participants, was the most common concern among the participants: most of them reported that they felt more relaxed with teaching while they were alone with the students. In fact, the attendance of the mentor in their lessons increased their anxiety and this appears to have had a considerable impact on their psychological and sometimes physical control, which had a negative influence on their teaching performances. Declaring mentor observation as the main difficulty during his teaching performance, a participant maintained that he experienced actual tension with the mentor sitting in a chair in the back of the classroom observing his teaching:

Normally, I had a really good relationship with my mentor, and I felt comfortable communicating with her. But, when she came to observe my teaching, things changed. Suddenly, I realized that I was anxious because of her presence in the class. She was not doing anything negative. She was just sitting at the back and I knew she was there to provide some suggestions for us, but I couldn't help feeling anxious. I think being observed by my mentor was the most challenging part of the practicum for me. (March, 2017, -from the self-observation form)

To deal with the presence of a mentor observing them somewhere in the class, each participant developed different coping mechanisms like ignoring the presence of the mentor and cooperating teacher, avoiding eye-contact with them, taking a deep breath and keeping calm. Most of them utilized the ignoring strategy. They pretended that the mentor was not there, or s/he was one of the students. They also avoided having direct eye-contact with the mentor in order not to be affected by her/his non-verbal reactions. They mostly tried to take deep breaths and carry on with their teaching. Experiencing anxiety because of mentor observation, a participant commented that she tried to adapt different strategies to cope with this stress:

There was nothing I could do about the presence of my mentor. She was there to do her job. So, to deal with the anxiety caused by being observed, I tried to ignore the fact that I was being observed. I just pretended that I was alone in the class with the students. I also did not look directly into my mentor's eyes because I knew it would increase my anxiety. I just took a few deep breaths and did my best to keep on my lesson. (April 2017- from the diary)

As described in Table 4, the second main problem for the participants was classroom management, i.e., controlling students with disruptive behaviors. Since most of the pre-service teachers were young and inexperienced, they were sometimes challenged by students in practice schools. There were unexpected and unnecessary questions or some attempts to distract interns' or other friends' attention. These events had adverse effects on the participants' performances and increased their anxiety, which was clearly expressed by a

participant who was distressed by management issues occurring in one of the classes she attended:

Before my teaching experience, I decided to be a lovely teacher for the kids and have fun with them during lessons. It worked well for most of the classes; however, there was a problematic class. You can't imagine how naughty they were. Almost all the students were talking and laughing unnecessarily not paying attention to the lesson and not

caring about the teacher. This distracted not only my attention but the interest of a few students who wanted to participate in the lesson. They were really making me anxious. I hope I won't have such students when I become a real teacher. (April 2017- from the interview)

Since classroom management was a serious issue, the participants tried to apply different methods to decrease, though not completely eliminate, the damaging effects of management problems. They noted that, if possible, they tried to motivate the students by drawing their attention to the lesson. When they could not get their desired attention, they either ignored the negative behavior or tried to warn the misbehaving student/s through direct eye-contact or non-verbal language. A participant provided some comments on the effectiveness of these ways in dealing with disruptive students:

There are misbehaving students in every class but what matters is the amount and intensity. As a pre-service teacher, I try to develop some ways to deal with management problems. For example, I try to attract students' attention and involve all of them in the class. When some students continue doing problematic behaviors, I approach them or

have eye-contact with them. If this does not work and there is nothing I can do, then I ignore them. What else can I do? (May 2017- from the interview)

Thirdly, as conveyed in Table 4, controlling the time allocated for their teaching practice was one of the challenges for most of the pre-service teachers. Since they did not have adequate experience in teaching, they experienced difficulty in adjusting for time: they occasionally finished their activities earlier and at other times, later than they had scheduled. Therefore, time management was a concern during their teaching performance; struggling with time management in the first few teaching events, a participant expressed that gaining experience is likely the solution for time management issues:

In the first three or four teaching events, I felt anxious about time management because I was either early or late to follow my plans. Therefore, I started to prepare more detailed lesson plans to follow during my teaching. I also tried to concentrate my and students' attention on instruction and activities to limit unnecessary interactions or acts. Now, I think, and my cooperating

teacher says, I have better time control. The more experienced I become, the better time management skills I can have. So, time is the healer. (May 2017- from the interview)

Fourthly, as shown in Table 4, fear of making mistakes, also felt before teaching events, was another problem experienced in the process of teaching. There appears to be two reasons why some of the participants were afraid of making mistakes: being observed by a mentor and being ridiculed by students. The participants did not want their mentor teachers to watch them making mistakes because it could negatively affect their evaluation. Wishing to be regarded as the real teachers of the students during the classes, they did not want students in practice schools to hear them making mistakes, either. Therefore, they felt the need to find some tactics to cope with this problem, as reported by a participant:

Among the other things, fear of making mistakes in front of the mentor and the students is a big problem. Of course, making mistakes is natural but still it is not good when you do it in front of the mentor or students. So, in order to avoid making mistakes, I try to stick to my lesson plan because I prepare lesson plans with every step-in detail. I also try to concentrate my full attention and students' attention on teaching and prefer to ignore everything else. (March 2017- from the interview)

As shown in Table 4, the language of instruction was considered a challenge for some of the participants. All the participants were attending secondary schools for their practicum practices and the course contents they were expected to teach were not advanced level topics. They experienced difficulty in adjusting the instructional language to the levels of the learners: since most of the students were elementary level learners, the participants sometimes found it difficult to use appropriate levels of instruction in English. Calling attention to this, a participant maintained that though the topic was easy, teaching it with simple items was difficult and he shared the tactics he utilized.

Before I taught the secondary school students, I thought that it would be easy to teach them because the topics were simple. However, when I began teaching, I realized that it was not as easy as I thought. Because though the topics were simple, it was challenging to teach them using the language they could understand. So, when I found it difficult to find simple phrases to teach, I sometimes switched to the native language,

Turkish. (April 2017- from the self-observation form)

Finally, as shown in Table 4, another problem encountered in the comments of a few participants was voice control which is most probably related to the lack of teaching experience. Some of the participants stated that they were either speaking louder or quieter than they should and this negatively affected students' attention. Having some difficulties in voice management (e.g., loud or in a low voice), a participant shared the following experience and coping strategy:

When I feel anxious, I experience difficulty in controlling my voice. Since teaching practices are anxiety-generating situations; I can't help having some voice-control problems during my practices. Therefore, in order to deal with this problem, I try to integrate my body language into my instruction. (May 2017- from the interview)

#### **Anxiety sources after teaching events and pre-service teachers' coping strategies**

The following table shows the FLTA sources and the coping strategies reported by the participants and their peers <after?>authentic practicum experience.

**Table 5.** Sources of FLTA reported and coping strategies employed post-teaching Experience

<b>Post-practicum experience</b>	
<b>Sources of Anxiety</b>	<b>Coping strategies</b>
Being evaluated/getting feedback (35): 29%	- considering feedback for development (29), - asking a mentor for further advice (23)
Being graded (34): 29%	
Having good impact on mentor (29): 24%	- asking for evaluation from mentor and cooperating teacher (17)
Having good impact on students (21): 18%	- having little chats with students (16)
Total: 119 (100%)	

In Table 5, almost all the participants experienced tension because they knew that they would be evaluated and provided with feedback based on their teaching performances. Most of them were concerned with receiving negative feedback from their mentors or cooperating teachers, thinking that it would decrease their self-confidence. Appreciating the importance of feedback for future performances, a participant referred to his fear of negative evaluation and explained that he would be influenced by the content of feedback:

Getting feedback on our teaching performances is beneficial for us to develop ourselves. However, no one wants to be criticized. So, receiving negative feedback, though it is true, may decrease my self-confidence and motivation leading me to think that I don't have the capabilities to be an English teacher. (March 2017- from the interview)

Experiencing this anxiety, some participants also developed ways to deal with this stress. There were two key solutions the participants mentioned: considering feedback as a tool for development and asking mentors to provide further advice. A participant underlined the necessity to receive feedback on the following:

It is not just enough to stand in front of the students, teach them and leave the class. In order to become better teachers, we need to be aware of our strengths and weaknesses. At this point, being evaluated by our



mentors and cooperating teachers is advantageous for us. Since they are professionals, they can think of the points that we cannot see... Receiving feedback may not always be so desirable but still, we need to see it as a chance for professional development. (April 2017- from the diary) in Table 5, being graded for their performances created concern and anxiety for most of the participants.

Though they were prospective teachers, they were still students and getting high marks was therefore important for them. Experiencing frequent concern from being graded, a participant shared her thoughts:

I try to do my best in all courses and, to be honest, I want to get high marks. This is also valid for teaching practicum. Here, we are evaluated and graded according to our teaching performances and I often have the fear of getting low marks in practicum. (March 2017- from the interview)

The participants referring to the anxiety caused by being graded did not mention any strategies to cope with this anxiety source. As shown in Table 5, the experience of being observed by a mentor who has more professional experience was reported to increase the participants' desire to have a good impact on the mentor. As the mentor is the source of feedback as well as grading, pleasing the mentor may be a priority for the participants. With this in his mind, a participant explained that he wanted to please the mentor:

The mentor is the one to evaluate us and to give grades on our performances; so, it is important to leave a good impression on the mentor. (March 2017- from the interview)

There were no specific suggestions provided by the participants regarding the way to deal with the concern to have a good impact on mentors. They implicitly referred to asking mentors or cooperating teachers for additional evaluation on their performances to further assess their perceptions of their teaching.

Finally, as shown in Table 5, more than half of the participants considered having a good impact on the students in the practicum school as an important aspect of their teaching. They expressed their desire to teach something to the kids and be role-models. Sharing her wish to be part of good memories for her students, a participant stated that she was having little chats with the kids to understand whether they liked her or not:

Being a teacher is a perfect feeling. During my practices, I tried to follow the idea that we need to be with students and not against them. I believed we could add something to them in this way. And, I wondered whether I could accomplish this. So, I was sometimes asking them questions about my teaching or approach. Luckily, it seems I could do it. (May 2017-from the interview)

In conclusion, there were different sources of stress for pre-service teachers affecting their anxiety levels before, during and after teaching events ranging from educational to individual issues. Therefore, the existence of these problems inevitably directed the participants to search for some ways to cope with the challenges and to increase their motivation and the quality of their performance.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The results of this study pointed at the following conclusions to be discussed. The first conclusion is that FLTA was experienced in the before, during and after stages of the teaching experience. This result was in line with those reported in much of the previous research proposed by Aydın (2016) and Sammephet and Wanphet (2013). This overall conclusion can reveal that the pre-service teachers are under the influence of different factors resulting in FLTA in all phases of the teaching practicum.

The second conclusion has to do with the factors causing anxiety for the participants. Regarding their before teaching experience, the participants reported being negatively affected by the concerns of classroom management, fear of making mistakes, lack of teaching experience, time management, and establishing a good rapport with students. These concerns were also mentioned as anxiety-provoking factors by Lampadan (2014), Machida (2016), Merç (2011) and Paker (2011). Considering the actual teaching phase of the teaching experience, the participants noted that mentor observation, classroom management, time management, fear of making mistakes, teaching in English and voice control were the reasons why they felt FLTA. Similar causes of FLTA felt during the teaching experience were also reported by Kim and Kim (2004), Merç (2015) and Sammephet and Wanphet (2013). Interestingly, classroom management before and during teaching experience other than factors related to language (e.g., making mistakes and proficiency) are frequently reported as a FLTA factor in research conducted in Turkish and Thai contexts (Lampadan, 2014; Mahmoudi & Özkan, 2016, Merç, 2011). Additionally, being observed has been frequently reported as a teaching anxiety-provoking factor in previous studies conducted in Turkish, Thai and Indonesian contexts (Agustina, 2014; Aydın, 2016; Azmi, 2012; Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013). As for their after teaching experiences, the participants expressed that they were under the effect

of anxiety caused by getting feedback from mentors, being graded, hesitations on having a positive impact both on students and mentors, which echoes the results reported by Merç (2011).

The third conclusion is related with the coping strategies employed by the participants. The participants were observed to adapt distinct coping strategies with an aim to overcome the FLTA problems they encountered in different stages of the teaching experience (e.g., 13 strategies before the teaching experience, 18 strategies during the teaching experience and 4 strategies after the teaching experience). While previous research has reported that communication, establishing clear goals, relaxation techniques (MacDonald, 1993), anxiety management tactics like self-control, accepting and facing the situations (Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013), adaption and developing positive attitudes (Lampadan, 2014) are the main coping strategies employed by pre-service teachers, our study showed that the Turkish pre-service teachers employed a wide range of coping strategies, from consulting, to mentorship, to receiving advice and practicing taking deep breaths and switching to L1.

In light of these results, we can conclude firstly that fear of making mistake is also a factor that is comparable to foreign language anxiety, apart from FLTA. This conclusion can be reached based on the participant experiencing referring to the factor of fear of making mistakes, as both the *cause* and the *result* of the teaching experience: the participants' having the fear of making mistakes caused them to experience teaching anxiety and this in turn negatively affected their teaching performance increasing the level of being afraid of making mistakes. Secondly, pre-service teachers can experience different types of FLTA in each of their before, during and after teaching experience (Aydın, 2016; Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013). Thirdly, teaching in English caused the participants to experience FLTA. This may indicate that the profession may become even more difficult for non-native language teachers who are supposed to teach a language which is not their own language (Merç, 2011; Yoon, 2012). Fourthly, the participants reported having a lack of experience and being observed by their mentors caused FLTA. As stated in the previous research literature, these factors can cause anxiety for pre-service teachers and may sometimes have severe consequences on their attitudes towards the profession (Kim & Kim, 2004; Merç, 2014, 2015; Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013). Fifthly, classroom management was also found to be a common factor causing FLTA in this study. This may have stemmed from crowded classrooms, as also reported by Merç (2004), due to the difficulties of classroom management in such large classes. We should note however that in a study by Aydın (2016) it was reported that the pre-service teachers polled did not perceive any problems related to crowded classrooms. Sixthly, although Yoon (2012) found that lack of self-confidence is a factor in FLTA, the findings of the present study is complementary with those of Aydın's (2016), in as much as the participants did not report the lack of confidence as an FLTA factor.

The conclusions reached in the present study suggests that first and foremost, as the pre-service teachers need more training on practical strategies on how to cope with their FLTA problems, the raising awareness of FLTA and strategy training topics should be embedded in the teacher training curricula. In such a process, the issue of training the faculty also becomes essential as the faculty do not receive formal training on how to conduct the process of practicum. Therefore, with the aim to prepare the pre-service teachers for the possible challenges awaiting them, the faculty should receive formal training regarding effective mentoring. Secondly, although some anxiety-provoking factors such as fear of making mistakes, classroom management and time management can be observed in most of the inexperienced in-service teachers, other superfluous factors such as mentor observation and being graded can only be observed in pre-service training programs. If such superfluous FLTA factors can be eliminated through creating authentic teaching settings, the preservice teachers can more easily focus on the act of teaching and alleviate their FLTA and employ common coping strategies; otherwise, they may always try to be perfect by avoiding making mistakes. However, as Aydın (2016) suggested, if teachers are made to understand that making mistakes is a natural part of the teaching process, it is possible to eliminate such an FLTA source by eliminating the attempts at perfectionism and by being realistic with situations that contribute to teachers making mistakes. Therefore, again it can be suggested that the courses in the undergraduate programs should be designed and conducted in a way to train pre-service teachers, who can seek to do their jobs as best while understanding that they are also human beings who may naturally make mistakes. In this way, we propose that the negative effects of the anxiety created by being observed or graded should naturally decrease.

The results of this study were in line with those reported in existing research on FLTA. However, as this research was grounded on qualitative basis and conducted with comparatively limited number of participants, the issue of generalizability requires further discussion since the number of participants, the student profiles in the practicum experience as well as the context in which the study is conducted, can influence the results of the study.

The study was limited to 29% male and 71% female for a total of 32 participating pre-service teachers of English from two different universities. This reflects the overall male and female rate in the English Language Teaching Departments. This gender-based limitation portends to an area of future research, where a more balanced gender-based participation could be beneficial. Moreover, the study collected data from qualitative sources such as diaries, open-ended questions, and interviews; to understand deeply the issue of FLTA, other techniques such as concurrent data collection with think-aloud protocols should be used in further research.

In conclusion, this study discussed a facet of FLTA in EFL teacher training in Turkey, and it raised important issues for EFL teacher training programs in Turkey in terms of aligning pre-service teacher education with the students' needs when it comes to teaching skills and training mentors to help them eliminate their FLTA problems in actual field teaching contexts. Further, it can be suggested for mentors that they can present confidence-building opportunities in classrooms such as in-front-of-class presentations and assignments (e.g., interviews, text analysis and mock televised news presentations) as initial ingredients in the FLTA-combatting recipe.

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## Appendix

### Date of Observation:

<b>A. Experiences before taking the class</b>			
	<b>Observed</b>	<b>Not observed</b>	<b>Comment:</b>
The problems encountered before taking the class and the strategies to overcome them.			
Other problems causing anxieties (e.g., lesson plan, classroom management, language proficiency, etc.)			
<b>B. Experiences during the class.</b>			
How were the anxiety provoking situations reported prior to the taking class overcome?			
Did you realize the difficulties you might have had before the lesson? (What has happened?)			
What were the biggest challenges faced in his first class (classroom management, linguistic competence, adjusting time, fear of making mistakes, following the lesson plan, supervisor observation, etc.)?			
How did you deal with these problems? What did you do when he realized that he was unable to carry out his lesson as he planned in advance?			
What did you do when you realized that he had made a mistake in describing the lesson?			

Did you feel inadequate when speaking the lesson in English? If you feel, what have you done to overcome this situation?			
How did you master class management problems you encountered in the course?			
What did you do to solve time management problems when conducting the course?			
Did you feel that the course was ignored by the students? If you have felt, how did you proceed to overcome this situation?			
Has your mentor at the school and your advisor at the university caused stress on your friend? In your opinion, what was the source of this stress? How did you proceed to get rid of the negative effects of this stress?			
<b>C. Post-application experiences</b> <b>• What were the causes of stress after your lecture (feedback on the course, advisor and teacher assessment, grading)?</b>			
How did you deal with these stress sources?			
What did the application experience give you?			
If you had the opportunity to repeat the same lesson, what would you like to change?			

# Effects of Genre Based Approach (GBA) In EFL Reading Comprehension and Writing<sup>1</sup>

Efectos del enfoque basado en los Géneros Textuales (GBA) en la comprensión lectora y escritura del inglés como lengua extranjera

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## Abstract

The present paper puts under examination the effects of Genre Based Approach (GBA) on 9<sup>th</sup> grade students from a city in the Caribbean coast of Colombia. The purpose of the study is to analyze how GBA affects reading comprehension and writing by comparing the students' results before and after the execution of the approach. GBA was implemented in six sessions using instruments for data collection that included tests, questionnaires and interviews. The genres selected for the study were anecdotes and recounts, which are the type of texts used in the English section of national exams in Colombia. The overall findings show that students' reading comprehension, writing, motivation and autonomy improved after the implementation of GBA; as a result, the students were able to understand, explain and recreate the genres that were part of the study.

*Keywords:* GBA; genre awareness; reading comprehension; writing; autonomy

## Resumen

Este documento examina los efectos del enfoque basado en los géneros textuales (GBA) en estudiantes de noveno grado provenientes de una ciudad en la costa caribe colombiana. El estudio tiene como propósito analizar cómo afecta el GBA la comprensión lectora y la escritura de los estudiantes, para esto fueron contrastados los resultados de los estudiantes antes y después de la aplicación del enfoque. El GBA se implementó durante seis sesiones utilizando exámenes, cuestionarios y entrevistas con el propósito

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de reunir la información necesaria. Los géneros textuales utilizados en estudio fueron anécdotas y recuentos, debido a que son los tipos de textos que hacen presencia en la sección de inglés de los exámenes nacionales en Colombia. Los resultados generales muestran que la comprensión lectora, escritura, motivación y autonomía de los estudiantes aumentaron al completar las sesiones donde fue implementado el GBA; como consecuencia, los estudiantes comprendieron, explicaron y recrearon los géneros textuales utilizados en el estudio.

*Palabras Clave:* enfoque; géneros textuales; comprensión lectora; motivación; autonomía

### Resumo

Este documento examina os efeitos do enfoque baseado nos gêneros textuais (GBA) em estudantes de primeiro ano do ensino médio provenientes de uma cidade no litoral caribe colombiana. O estudo tem como propósito analisar como afeta o GBA a compreensão leitora e a escritura dos estudantes, para isto foram contrastados os resultados dos estudantes antes e depois da aplicação do enfoque. O GBA se implementou durante seis sessões utilizando provas, questionários e entrevistas com o propósito de reunir a informação necessária. Os gêneros textuais utilizados em estudo foram anedotas e recontos, devido a que são os tipos de textos que fazem presença na seção de inglês dos exames nacionais na Colômbia. Os resultados gerais mostram que a compreensão leitora, escritura, motivação e autonomia dos estudantes aumentaram ao completar as sessões onde foi implementado o GBA; como consequência, os estudantes compreenderam, explicaram e recriaram os gêneros textuais utilizados no estudo.

*Palavras Chave:* enfoque; gêneros textuais; compreensão leitora; motivação; autonomia

## Introduction

The difficulty in reading texts has been an object of study, and for several decades, researchers have claimed diverse causes for lack of reading comprehension. Chambliss (1995) states that one of the reasons for low levels of understanding is the absence of exposure of students to readings with different structure than narrative. Scholars around the world have implemented an approach that exposes the students explicitly to the text structure, yielding positive results. This approach has been used in Colombia in order to improve reading comprehension in students. It is the case of Genre Based Approach (henceforth GBA), which have had positive results in students, increasing their understanding of texts. However, the GBA is still unknown in Colombia, due to few studies that have been dedicated to implement it.

Overall results in GBA studies revealed improvement in students' comprehension and motivation for reading. It is feasible to believe that the implementation of GBA in Colombia may facilitate the development of literacy skills in order that the students have a deeper understanding of written texts. It also will have an impact in national tests, but beyond that, reading comprehension is not focusing on an exam or an ability to answer correctly. Reading comprehension is a life skill that creates thinking citizens and potential writers that can push forward a country.

The interest behind developing this research was born when the teacher realized that her group of students presented problems during reading comprehension activities. A significant percentage of students were not able to understand the texts and struggle when they had to answer questions from different levels of comprehension, including questions directly mentioned in the text.

## Previous literature

Reading encompasses more than decoding characters in a text; it implies the interpretation of what an author intends to say to an audience. In this order of ideas, reading is not possible without comprehension. According to Wallace (2001) "Comprehension is the form of the presentation of text followed by post-reading questions on the text" (p. 26). It is important to clarify that every reader has a personal interpretation of a text. Nevertheless, comprehension questions are present in many published materials in an effort to develop reading skills (Williams & Moran, 1989).

Reading comprehension-based approaches have been created taking a stance in controversy whether a text has one meaning or multiple meanings determined by the reader (Masuahara, 2013). Some authors suggest that the real

meaning is the one intended by the author and the efficiency of comprehension is determined by the interpretation of this meaning (Williams, 1983). On the other hand, Widdowson (1979) states that the meaning will diverge from reader to reader depending on several factors. We can conclude that every text written has an intention and an audience, and readers possess different points of view, backgrounds and reactions. However, it is essential for a reader to be able to understand the intention of the writer, the context of the text, the type of text, the audience that will read it and interpret the information provided by the author with the aim of creating a personal opinion of the text.

The understanding of a type of text requires establishing the patterns that master the text and the features that differentiate that specific structure from others. These patterns are named genres. Genre is a term used for categorizing different types of text (Hyland, 2004). According to Cope and Kalantzis (1993), “Genre is a term used in literacy pedagogy to connect the different forms texts take with variations in social purpose.” (p. 7). So, genre not only refers to the grammatical structures of texts, but the social contexts where they are performed. Cope and Kalantzis (1993) also point out that “Genres are textual interventions in society; and society itself would be nothing without language in all its patterned predictability” (p. 7). Each society has established patterns where genres are used according to specific circumstances and culture. According to Martin and Rose (2008), genres are considered as staged, goal oriented social processes. They are considered staged due to the fact that there are several phases to accomplish an objective, genres are also goal oriented because there is a desire for obtaining a result and finally social, since every writer directs their text to a specific audience. In this regard, genres show us more than how a text is conformed; it presents us the purpose of the writer, their society customs and patterns.

Martin and Rose (2008) state that “genres are defined as a recurrent configuration of meanings and that these recurrent configurations of meaning enact the social practices of a given culture” (p. 5). This means that genres have specific uses for particular contexts, and there exist several categories that are grouped according to the genre’s purpose. When a purpose needs to be established, the writer has to take some decisions, they have to set their intention, this decision will place the writer in one category that is followed for several choices, which will end in one specific genre inside a general one.

The recognition of the stages allows the reader to identify the intention of the writer and permits that the reader relates texts with similar structure. In writer’s case, they can set the intentions of their text and follow the stages that are established. One approach that uses the recognition of types of text as a strategy for reading comprehension is the GBA.

The structure of texts changes depending on the culture. Nevertheless, there are patterns that main types of text use. According to Farrell (2009), types of text can be classified into fiction (novels, short stories, plays and poetry) and nonfiction (essays, reports and articles), as the technology becomes part of the culture new genres appeared as memos, text messages and emails with their own characteristics and structures that can be easily identified. The awareness of the structure of different types of texts, its features and its rules can help the learners to comprehend better and recall the contents of a text while the learners develop their writing skills (Farrell, 2009).

Rose (2008) defines six steps for the reading learning cycle. First, prepare before reading, “orients students to the genre and field of the text” (Rose, 2008 p. 16). The purpose of this step is the students understand the text in general terms. In other words, what the text is about, the context and the unfamiliar words. The second stage, detailed reading, is when the “teacher supports all students to read each sentence in a short passage” (Rose, 2008 p. 16). It implies reading aloud the text and the conversion of sentences into simpler ideas for the students. In the third step, preparing for writing, the students “plan exactly what they are going to write, based closely on the passage they have studied in detailed reading” (Rose, 2008 p. 16). In this point, the teacher encourages brainstorming for new ideas based on the features that the students identified on the last stage with as a means to collect ideas for a new text.

The step following the collection of ideas is joint rewriting, where “the teacher supports the class to write a new text that is patterned on the reading text” (Rose, 2008 p. 16). The teacher in collaboration with the students create a new text created based on the ideas that the students provided and later this text will be similar to the students’ writing. In the individual rewriting or fifth stage “the students practice writing a new text using the same patterns as the reading and joint rewriting texts” (Rose, 2008 p. 16). During this particular time, the students have the opportunity to work on their own and allows the teacher to support the students’ texts as preparation for the final stage. Finally, independent writing is when “students use what they have learnt from the preceding stages to write an independent text” (Rose, 2008 p. 16). In this final level, the students write a text that may have a different topic but using the same genre worked previously. While students write their texts, they are conscious of the intention of the text type and will be able to identify the different stages inside the text, its features that may facilitate the comprehension of texts with the same genre.

The six stages mentioned above, summarize the GBA which has been considered as “main institutionalized alternative to process pedagogy currently on offer” (Cheng, 2006). Scholars are always in the pursuit of solutions of students’ needs, in consequence, pedagogies will appear to fit new necessities of students and Genre approach is now one that is currently in use. According



to Lee (2012), Genre approach assumes that students learn best when they are exposed explicitly to the structure of texts, its language and its structural features of different types of texts that they need to learn to read and write.

In 2008, Rose classified the principal genres, its subgenres, purposes and stages. The focus of this study is the stories genre, specifically anecdotes and recounts. According to Rose (2008) “the purpose of a recount is to recount series of events, so its stages include an orientation and a record of events” (p.15). This genre attempts to describe situations according to their sequence of their execution. This is one example of a recount:

1936 it was. I would have been five. We went visiting Ernabella the day the police came. Our greatuncle Sid was leasing Ernabella from the government at that time so we went there. We had been playing all together, just a happy community and the air was filled with screams because the police came and mothers tried to hide their children and blacken their children’s faces and tried to hide them in caves. We three, Essie, Brenda and me together with our three cousins ... the six of us were put on an old truck and taken to Oodnadatta which was hundreds of miles away and then we got there in the darkness.

My mother had to come with us. She had already lost her eldest daughter down to the Children’s Hospital because she had infantile paralysis, polio, and now there was the prospect of losing her three other children, all the children she had. I remember that she came in the truck with us curled up in the fetal position. Who can understand that, the trauma of knowing that you’re going to lose all your children? We talk about it from the point of view of our trauma but - our mother - to understand what she went through, I don’t think anyone can really understand that. It was 1936 and we went to the United Aborigines Mission in Oodnadatta. We got there in the dark and then we didn’t see our mother again. She just kind of disappeared into the darkness. I’ve since found out in the intervening years that there was a place they called the natives’ camp and obviously my mother would have been whisked to the natives’ camp. There was no time given to us to say goodbye to our mothers. (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010, p. 111)

The second emphasized genre in this research is anecdotes. Martin and Rose (2008) state that “the point of an anecdote is to share an emotional reaction. To this end, anecdotes present a sequence of events that is out of the ordinary and conclude with the protagonist’s reaction to the events” (p. 52). One identifier of this type of text is the complication followed by a reaction during the narration. Following an example of an anecdote:

My name is Millicent D. I was born at Wonthella WA in 1945. My parents were CD and MP, both 'halfcaste' Aborigines. I was one of seven children, our family lived in the sandhills at the back of the Geraldton Hospital. There was a lot of families living there happy and harmonious. It was like we were all part of one big happy family.

In 1949 the Protector of Aborigines with the Native Welfare Department visited the sandhill camps. All the families living there were to be moved to other campsites or to the Moore River Aboriginal Settlement. Because my parents were fair in complexion, the authorities decided us kids could pass as whitefellas. I was four years old and that was the last time I was to see my parents again. Because my sisters were older than me they were taken to the Government receiving home at Mount Lawley. My brother Kevin was taken to the boys home in Kenwick. Colin and I were taken to the Sister Kate's Home. We were put in separate accommodation and hardly ever saw each other. I was so afraid and unhappy and didn't understand what was happening. (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010, p. 100)

The clear exposure to text structures is the methodology that many researchers around the world are applying to students from different cultures and backgrounds. Lubawski and Sheehan applied in 2010 GBA to tenth grade students in a public school in Massachusetts. The problem that teachers identified was that the students were not able to understand the written material received in class so they carried out a research with the objective to answer what strategies can be used in order to improve students reading comprehension across different genres. The researchers collected data through observations in the classroom, tests and students' feedback. The results showed that students become more successful and confident in their reading abilities, supporting the statements of some researchers:

GBA to teaching and learning writing seems to be relevant for the students with low competencies and low motivation. It really guides the students to write from the very simple or dependent steps to independent steps. It also promotes and facilitates the student finally to learn in autonomous learning way (Dirgeyasa, 2016, p. 50)

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GBA has had positive results in students' reading comprehension and writing, its stages allow the teacher to work in collaboration with their students and lead them to their autonomy, diminishing their participation in the students' work as gradually as the students embrace their independency. The improvement of reading and writing skills suits two important needs of our students that may lead to important achievements in the future of Colombian professionals.

## Methodology

Classrooms are not homogeneous scenarios where strategies will yield the same result, without giving importance to students' background or context. Considering that each group of students has different lacks and needs, the type of study selected was qualitative research. Sandoval (1996) states that "Due to that there is not possibility to predict the reaction of the group to the GBA, qualitative research allows that the instruments for collecting data be in accordance with the characteristics of each situation. (p. 125)."

The main purpose of the study is to analyze the way GBA affects reading comprehension and writing in EFL students from 9th grade. We chose Action Research to identify the reactions of the students during and after the execution of the GBA. Cohen and Manion (1994) define Action Research as 'a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention' (p. 186). In this study the researcher interfered in a real-world situation, which may yield favorable or negative results, either case with the application of Genre-based the students might improve their reading comprehension skills and in this way other aspects of life might be facilitated for them.

## Setting and Participants

This study took place in a private bilingual school in Valledupar, Colombia. The class selected had 36 students; all of them were in 9<sup>th</sup> grade between 13 and 15 years old. The school was recently recognized as bilingual consequently, the group selected did not have many hours of English until a few years ago. Therefore, the English level of most students is A1 or less, which is lower than presumed for ninth graders.

All the students participated in the written texts, questionnaires but only eight students took part in the interviews. One teacher was responsible for planning, conducting and assessing the students during the implementation of the GBA.

## Instruments

The first instrument used was a pre-test. It had two short readings (one anecdote and one recount), one open question about the main idea of the text and multiple-choice questions related to literal information, inference and interpretation.

After the pre-test, the teacher implemented a structured interview in which she asked the students to explain their answers. The structured interview is one in which the content and procedures are organized in advance. This

means that the sequence and wording of the questions are determined by means of a schedule and the interviewer is left little freedom to make modifications. Where some leeway is granted to her, and it is also notified in advance. It is therefore characterized by being a closed situation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003).

The structured interviews avoid distractions of the teacher in terms of doubts about the next question. It also allows the teacher to pay more attention to the students' answers.

Besides the interviews, the handouts that the teacher gave to the students were adapted from Reading to Learn (Rose, 2008). The structure of the copies provides guidance to the students during the process of writing and after the independent writing phase, the teacher used a rubric to revise the stages of GBA in students' writing. Stevens and Levi (2013) state that "Rubric saves time, provide timely, meaningful feedback for students, and have potential to become an effective part of the teaching process" (p.17). The rubric used in the study was based on the 'three-level rubric' (Stevens and Levi, 2013) which format enables the teacher to verify the mastering of students learning about texts patterns.

*Table 1.* Instruments and its relation to the research objective.

<b>Technique/ instrument</b>	<b>Instrument's objective</b>	<b>Research objective</b>
Pre-Test (Written and oral) Final Test (Written) Oral test	Analyze the answers of the students, in order to know if there is comprehension of the reading or not.	- Analyze the way Genre Based Approach (GBA) affects reading comprehension in EFL students of 9 <sup>th</sup> grade.
Rubric	Check if the students follow the steps of genre in their writing.	- Characterize the writing of students of 9 <sup>th</sup> grade after the implementation of GBA.
Interviews/ Questionnaire Virtual questionnaire	Check level of acceptance in the students.	- Determine students' perception about the methodology implemented.

At the end of the process, the teacher implemented a final test which format was very similar to the pre-test; both included oral evaluations with random students. This test was used in order to compare students' comprehension before and after the study.

Besides the written test, the teacher selected and recorded four random students for an oral test that included open questions about inference, vocabulary and literal information of two texts (one recount and one anecdote).

Finally, in order to evaluate students' attitude towards the study, the teacher applied two questionnaires. First, a structured questionnaire where the students had to evaluate the course from one to five, being one the lowest score and five the highest. This questionnaire allowed seeing patterns in students' answers. The second questionnaire was an "open invitation to write what one wants" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003 p. 248) the open questionnaire enables the students to respond in their own terms and in an anonymous way.

## Procedure

In some sessions, the activities took more time than expected, due to the class was interrupted by coordinators who had to spread information about a parent meeting, teachers who wanted to clarify an assignment or students that were in charge of providing some information related to school events. These situations were common in the school and caused that teacher had to reorganize the activities. However, it was possible the achievement of the activities planned as it follows:

Session zero: Before the application of the project, the teacher applied a pre-test with the purpose of contrasting the level of comprehension before and after the study.

Session one: The teacher explicitly explains the students the structures of the texts, its uses and the features that characterizes, in order that the students identified the different text-types.

Session two: The students had to reorganize texts according to the structure and features.

Session three: The teacher writes in collaboration with the students a recount and an anecdote following their structure and features.

Session four: The students write independently a recount and an anecdote.

Session five: The teacher implemented a final written test, questionnaires and interviews.

Table 2. Description of GBA sessions.

Session	Description	Graphic organizer
Zero	Pre-Test	test
One	Before the presentations of the readings, the teacher practice through games the key vocabulary of the texts then, the teacher shows different texts and ask the students to identify the aspects that distinguish them in order to identify the parts of the text.	Anecdote
Two	With the same categories of texts, the students reorganize readings considering the sequence learnt in session number one. After, the teacher shows the different features of each type of text	Orientation Recount of events
Three	The teacher and the students give ideas for a recount and an anecdote, then each student writes their text following the steps of each reading.	Brainstorming
Four	The students write their own recount and anecdote without help.	----- -----
Five	The students did a final test and we selected some of them for interviews, so they expressed their points of view and the difference between what they did before the approach and after.	Blah, blah

## Results

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This research attempts to investigate the effects of GBA on 9<sup>th</sup> grade students' reading comprehension and writing. The results of this study support previous studies carried out in EFL students and presented positive effects of GBA in reading comprehension of non-native English speakers. Some researchers carried out these studies in similar contexts that included large groups and homogeneous backgrounds (Barletta, Moreno & Toloza, 2013; Sadeghi, Taghi, & Hemmati, 2013).

In the study, the students were able to identify the stages of a text and to identify the purpose of each story. We noticed that in the results, the rising of students' confidence when they answered the oral test at the end of the study, they were sure of their answers that were accompanied with arguments that supported their ideas. We also acknowledged the development of their self-reliance during the independent writing. The students during the re-writing were very teacher-dependent; they were not sure about what they were writing and asked for approval from the teacher in every part of the process.

According to Feez, (1998) in the re-writing stage the teacher should gradually diminish the participation in the text construction so that the students are able to deal with the structure of the texts independently. During the independent writing, there were almost no questions for the teacher and the students completed the writing by themselves. In this stage, it was possible to perceive the increase of students' confidence since the re-writing stage. Previous studies by Haria (2011) and Lubawski and Sheehan (2010) described the increasing confidence in students and teachers as one positive effect of the implementation of GBA and the enlargement of critical thinking in students.

Additionally, one effect that was evident in this study is students' motivation. During the interviews, some students expressed that at the beginning of the course they were not interested, because the activities were not graded. However, during the lessons, the students that were not motivated to do the activities became active participants and some of them were volunteers for the questionnaire's interview, where they talked about their change and their improvement since the beginning of the sessions. In the phase where the students' demonstrated to be more motivated was when they were able to express ideas to construct a text. Rose (2008) suggests the brainstorming when attempting to improve the understanding of stories, he also stated that the ideas provided by the students are closer to what the students will write by themselves. The appropriation of the text allows the students to create a link between the text and them, and it facilitates their understanding and their confidence in writing texts with the same structure. During this stage, the students that were not very interested in the course, started to provide ideas for the text's construction and developing the next stages of the course.

The study focused on three main aspects: Analyze the way GBA affects reading comprehension in EFL students of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, characterize the writing of students of 9th grade after the implementation of GBA, and determine students' perception about the methodology implemented.

Through the implementation of interviews and test, it was possible to determine how GBA affected students' reading comprehension. The results demonstrated that the students were able to answer literal questions easily. However, the questions related to inferring words from the context were

complicated for them. In the pre-interviews the students mentioned strategies that might help them in this type of questions. Nevertheless, when they explained the reasons for selecting the words, the students guessed or expressed that they were confused. After the GBA, in the final oral test, the questions were open and in the inferring questions, most of the students were able to relate an unknown word to a synonym that they had to infer from the text.

On the other hand, the writing skills improved in students from the re-writing to the independent writing. First, in the re-writing the students followed a model and included stories related to the school and people they know. In the independent writing stage, the familiar places diminished, and the students created fictional stories with invented characters and personal desires. They also included more features of anecdotes and recounts that provided a more complex text than the example given by the teacher and the re-writing.

Finally, the students expressed positive answers related to the course, the methodology and the instructor. The students coincided that the course helped their reading comprehension, that what they learned was useful for their development as persons and students. Additionally, they considered that doing the activities step by step facilitated the work for them. On the other hand, one student mentioned the noise as the main problem during the course, due to the heavy traffic close to the institution. Nevertheless, these conditions do not belong to this group only, the setting around school is usually not appropriate for concentration and production. Despite this environment is not adequate for any of the participants in the classroom, it is the condition of many classrooms in Colombia and is completely out of our control.

### Conclusions

In global terms, the results of this study indicate that GBA has a positive effect on reading comprehension and writing on EFL students from ninth grade. The overall results also show that students have a better understanding of texts and were able to infer meanings from the readings. Furthermore, students' writing was aligned to the text types implemented in the study. In this part of the process, the students worked independently, and the findings described that most of the students used the structure of anecdotes and recounts. In addition, some students created more detailed situations in the stories than the ones that the teacher showed as examples. Finally, the results of the questionnaire indicate that students' perception of the methodology implemented was positive, including students that changed their idea of the study from a negative to a positive reaction. These reactions prove that GBA has an important impact on students' abilities and its use may cause a difference in Colombian students from a non-literary country to an ascent in readers and



potential writers. Additionally, GBA allows the teacher to guide the students to a point where they can work independently and develop autonomy and self-confidence in the actions that they perform.

It was also notable in some students that they had the knowledge or a similar word that could lead them to answer correctly the questions of the test, but they were not able to use that knowledge in their favor. Not all the results in the study were positive, even though the students obtained better scores in the written texts, in the oral interviews the students still struggle with the usage of pronouns as well as they did not know at the end of the course, the purposes of the texts that were explained. These negatives outcomes demonstrate the immense necessity of our intervention in favor of students' improvement.

Although further work is required on how we can use GBA in more complex genres related to different areas as science, social studies, literature etc. It is also needed research related to how genre affects other abilities besides reading and writing and how the GBA affects students' and teachers' performance. Additionally, during this study we paid very little attention to students' habits of reading. Therefore, further research can be implemented on how genre-based approach can cultivate reading habits in the students. In this way, we might encourage that the students develop autonomy for selecting texts and in consequence, the expansion of their exposure to different genres and their abilities to understand them.

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# Fostering Language Learning in the University EFL Classroom through Literature: A Task-Based Approach<sup>1</sup>

La Literatura en el aprendizaje de inglés como Lengua Extranjera en la Universidad: Un Enfoque basado en Tareas

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## Abstract

The role of literature as a teaching and learning tool in English as a Foreign Language has long been acknowledged. Literary texts offer teachers opportunities to provide students with authentic materials to heighten their motivation by involving them in challenging Task-Based activities in which they interact with authors and learn about features of these authors' society. The purpose of this research study was to investigate the role of literature as a pedagogical tool in the EFL classroom and see how this can be advantageous in fostering learners' language skills. The sample population encompassed 26 sixth-semester students enrolled in a Reading course who are completing their BA in Foreign Languages at a public University in Colombia. A semi-structured questionnaire and a Reading Guide were designed to elicit information from students who were asked to read an unabridged English language fiction novel. The findings show that the participants' motivation to complete the Task-Based Reading and Writing Project was high and that this had a positive impact on the improvement of their language skills.

*Keywords.* EFL, ESL, Task-Based Approach, Literature, intercultural Communicative Competence

## Resumen

El papel de la literatura como herramienta en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras ha sido reconocido durante mucho tiempo. Los textos literarios ofrecen oportunidades a los profesores para que mediante el uso de materiales auténticos los estudiantes aumenten su motivación, al involucrarlos en actividades interesantes

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Basadas en Tareas, en las que interactúan con autores y aprenden acerca de la sociedad de dichos escritores. El propósito de esta investigación era indagar acerca del papel de la literatura como herramienta pedagógica en la clase de EFL y ver sus ventajas en el desarrollo de las habilidades lingüísticas de los estudiantes. Los sujetos de estudio fueron 26 estudiantes de sexto semestre de un curso de Lectura de la Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras en una universidad pública, en Colombia. Para recoger la información, se diseñó un cuestionario y una guía de lectura acerca de una novela de ficción en lengua inglesa. Los resultados muestran que la motivación de los estudiantes para completar el Proyecto de Lectura y Escritura basado en Tareas fue alta y que esta influyó positivamente en la mejoría de sus habilidades lingüísticas.

*Palabras claves.* Inglés como Lengua Extranjera, Inglés como Segunda Lengua, Enfoque Basado en Tareas, Literatura, Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural

### Resumo

O papel da literatura como ferramenta no ensino e a aprendizagem de línguas estrangeiras tem sido reconhecido durante muito tempo. Os textos literários oferecem oportunidades aos professores para que mediante o uso de materiais autênticos os estudantes aumentem a sua motivação, ao envolvê-los em atividades interessantes Baseadas em Tarefas, nas que interatuam com autores e aprendem sobre a sociedade de mencionados escritores. O propósito desta pesquisa era indagar sobre o papel da literatura como ferramenta pedagógica na aula de EFL e ver suas vantagens no desenvolvimento das habilidades linguísticas dos estudantes. Os sujeitos de estudo foram 26 estudantes de sexto semestre de um curso de Leitura da Licenciatura em Línguas Estrangeiras em uma universidade pública, na Colômbia. Para coletar a informação, desenhou-se um questionário e uma guia de leitura sobre uma novela de ficção em língua inglesa. Os resultados mostram que a motivação dos estudantes para completar o Projeto de Leitura e Escritura baseado em Tarefas foi alto e que este influenciou positivamente na melhora de suas habilidades linguísticas.

*Palavras chaves.* Inglês como Língua Estrangeira, Inglês como Segunda Língua, Enfoque Baseado em Tarefas, Literatura, Competência Comunicativa Intercultural

## Introduction

This study originated in our desire to inquire about students' perceptions of the use of literary texts as a pedagogical tool in the EFL classroom. Literature has long been a focus of study at different levels around the world. Yet the interest of Colombian English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom professionals in using literature as a teaching tool seems to be a relatively new issue, as judged from the scarcity of research studies dealing with it. Different factors may explain this: teachers' notion of literature, teachers' lack of self-confidence in teaching literature, and methodological approaches to teaching literature, among others. Based on our beliefs deeply rooted in our classroom experience, we claim that in spite of any discouraging experience an EFL teacher may have gone through in his attempt to bring literature into his classroom, namely students' low motivation, recitation of book contents at verbatim, and inability to go beyond literal context to make inferences, to build meaning; and what may be worse, student's cutting and pasting other reader's ideas about a given book, couple with rather simplistic questions from the teacher himself, it is still possible to enliven his lessons by engaging students in meaningful tasks. These are designed to establish a fruitful dialogue between writers and language students, a dialogue in which students, as interlocutors, are presented with a wide range of opportunities to learn about authors, their work, and their culture, while immersing themselves in the target language. Thus, the purpose of this research study is to discuss the use of literature as an important vehicle in enhancing EFL learning, particularly in teacher training programs at university level, and point at ways how this can be realized through the design and implementation of task-based tailored activities. To do this, we present relevant research findings dealing with literature in EFL classrooms, look into studies focusing on task-based learning, and rationalize the integration of the two as being complementary in the teaching and learning of a foreign language. This study posed some challenge for the researchers, since in previous class discussions our students admitted not having read a fiction novel completely, nor being given freedom to choose the book they wanted to read, let alone being required to recreate one or more main themes the novel dealt with by expressing themselves aesthetically. Likewise, students felt that they need to spend time in grammar study and in getting familiar with the conventions of academic writing. In this respect, efforts were made to attend to students' needs by planning lessons that addressed their concerns.

## Aim

The aim of this research study was to delve into the role of literature as a pedagogical tool in the EFL class and see how this can be advantageous in fostering learners' language skills, through the use of literary texts as non-instructed materials.

## Review of Literature

### Teacher's notion of Literature

The interplay between literature and language may not always be acknowledged by EFL teachers as a key factor in language learning. In part, this may be due to the lack of agreement on what is understood by *literature*. Hence, any attempt to discuss the role of literature in language learning must start by defining the term. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines literature as "Imaginative or creative writing, especially of recognized artistic value." (2015). Other definitions of *literature* abound. Savvidou (2004) claims that literature is language, and language can indeed be literary. She is, however, concerned with the way some teachers view literature: "... particularly complex and inaccessible to the foreign language learner" (p. 2). She goes on to contend that these views reflect the historic separation between the study of language and the study of literature and asserts that the use of literary texts can be a powerful pedagogical tool. In this same line of thought, other authors have documented the downplay literature has gone through in language teaching for decades (Collie & Slater, 1987 & Short, 1996). Yet, given the fact that literature has proven to be a great resource to go beyond the structural view of language teaching, to build up linguistic as well as cultural competence, additional research continued to be carried out in the field, and works acknowledging the benefits of literature started to appear (Widdowson, 1983; Hill, 1986; Valdes, 1986; Gower & Pearson, 1986; Collie & Slater, 1987; Duff & Maley, 1991, Lazar, 1993).

Motivated by the gains brought about by Literature -- a tool, a resource, or a vehicle, as referred to in different studies--, classroom teachers have successfully come to integrating it in EFL/ ESL contexts, with the certainty that it can be of much help to their students' language learning process. Thus, in the words of Violetta-Irene (2005, p. 74), "Literature in a language classroom provides enough space for the learners to comment, justify and mirror themselves. By using literary texts, the language class can turn out to be lively and motivating." She further indicates ways of using literature in the classroom to help students improve their English language, while describing literature as a field that, although not novel, gives relevance to the literary text as a work of art.



Additional reasons for using literature in the language classroom are pointed out by Lazar (1993). He believes that when presented as it is, a literary text becomes a valuable educational tool, as it constitutes a rich source to spark motivation, immerse students into another culture, trigger language acquisition, and encourage them to speak up their minds.

As presented here, not only is literature the path through which language students can have access to authentic materials, but it is also a useful tool by means of which they are taken through the wonderful world of different text typologies working at their best. In fact, Collie & Slater (2005) emphasize the advantages of the literary text in the language classroom given that it is “authentic material ... learners are thus exposed to language that is genuine and undistorted; they gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode: with irony, exposition, argument, narration, and so on” (p. 6).

As to the undeniable link between literature and language, Ihejirika (2014) demonstrates ways in which literature can be integrated with language teaching and learning with ESL students. He asserts that “There is a symbiotic relationship between literature and language ... Literature and language are not only intertwined but also inter-related; literature presupposes language because it is with the instrument of language that literature is concretized” (p. 86). This view is echoed by Ayo (2003) who claims that literature is instrumental in helping students grow linguistically, for it presents them with novel reasons to want to read, thus being a medium through which they can improve both their reading and speaking skills.

Valdes (1986) states that literature is a viable component of second language programs at the appropriate level and that one of the major functions of literature is to serve as a medium to transmit the culture of the people who speak the language in which it is written.

Kooy & Chiu (1998) in their urge to find ways in which they could expose students to literary texts and share their passion for literature with EFL students, who could barely cope with their limited language skills and worried mainly about passing standardized national tests, present literature as a place where language and meaning merge. For them, literature should be considered “not only for its intrinsic worth, but [also] as an integral part of a language-learning program” (p.79). These studies, then, suggest that teachers integrate literature in their classes and illustrate how beneficial its implementation can be, which is in consonance with our research aims.

Although not widely explored in our local context, studies have been conducted by teacher researchers who have ventured into systematizing and sharing their thoughts in the field. Gomez Rodriguez (2013) encourages the use of multicultural literary texts in the EFL classroom to develop critical

intercultural communicative competence (ICC), as he is concerned with the main focus on the study of language forms and communicative functions and the lack of inclusion of ICC in the Colombian context. Moreover, Garzon Duarte (2007) presents literary texts as a facilitative tool to develop critical thinking skills in the foreign language classroom in an attempt to take students beyond the structural aspects of the language, exposing them to different worlds and different authors' voices, and providing them with more real communication contexts.

### **Teachers' lack of self-confidence in teaching literature**

We have already pointed out that *literature* is frequently associated with complex writing or works that are difficult to understand by foreign language learners. Coupled with this is the belief that only field specialists have the knowledge necessary to teach literature. Although partially true, it is precisely this assumption which deters EFL teachers from venturing into using literature as a powerful tool to enrich and enliven their classrooms. In fact, an EFL teacher may or may not be a literature specialist. Yet, we firmly believe that it is still possible for non-specialists to profit from the array of great literary publications to have their students get a head start in their quest for language learning, by providing them with the type of activities most likely to encourage them to do their best at acquiring and using language for real communication. As understood here, the design and implementation of literary text-based activities do not necessarily have to resemble the ones specifically tailored to meet the needs of students in content-based literature courses. Instead, it is claimed that a more informal teaching approach to teaching literature can be used by EFL teachers, even when they are not experts in the field of literature, provided that they know the target language, like reading literature themselves, and are eager to share their enthusiasm for this magic world with their own students.

### **The Task-Based Learning Approach**

Task-based learning (TBL) can turn language teaching and learning a social and cultural practice. Several authors (Skehan, 1996, 1998; Willis 1996; Nunan, 2004; Ellis, 2003; & Willis & Willis, 2007) have added to consolidating a definition of TBL and have proposed different frameworks that give teachers and learners the opportunity to live and work with the target language in rather dynamic and engaging ways, in which meaning building is vital.

Nunan (2004) highlights how task-based language teaching (TBLT) has permeated educational settings, including its language policies and research agendas. He argues that the focus on tasks acts as both the goal of and the

vehicle for learning by directly linking classroom learning with communication outside the classroom. This author also establishes a difference between real world and pedagogical tasks—discerning language use inside and outside the classroom. This differentiation is consonant with our own view of the TBA shared here, since the tasks we propose to exploit literary texts take students' language further from the classroom setting. In other words, our vision is truly conveyed by Nunan, as he also believes that “a pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language, while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey rather than to manipulate form” (p. 4). Still another useful definition of task is Ellis' (2003) “a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically, in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed ... a task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect to the way language is used in the real world”(p.16)

When characterizing the nature of a task, Skehan (1998) speaks of it as having five characteristics: meaning is primary, learners are not given other people's meaning to regurgitate, there is some sort of relationship comparable to real-world activities, task completion has some priority, and the assessment of the task is in terms of the outcome.

Willis (1996) also provides elements to help teachers define classroom tasks. She indicates that there are six main types of task: listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks. Her framework presents a practical guide for teachers to include tasks in their classes, which encompasses three phases: the pre-task phase, the task cycle, and the language focus. It is essential to highlight that tasks are learner-centered and have specific learning goals. In addition, having a language focus phase at the end gives students meaningful input. Willis & Willis (2007) elaborate more on this point as they state that “form-focused teaching will produce language display instead of meaning exchange ... TBLT takes meaning as its starting point” (p. 113-117).

Studies carried out in specific language classroom settings acknowledge the value of this approach for learners' empowerment. For instance, Torres (2014) favors the positive environment that an EFL setting provides for TBL, given authentic material is provided, and an emphasis on meaning is made because it gives learners “an enriched experience of L2 learning in which immediate use of the L2 produces tangible results, giving purpose and meaning to the L2 learning process” (p.19). Additionally, Byrnes (2002) explores the role of task-based assessment to encourage curricular changes from a form-based normative approach to a language-use and language-meaning orientation. She

illustrates how those task-based assessment practices can be highly facilitative of that complex goal, pointing out that task and task-based assessment must be contextualized within larger intellectual and educational concerns and must reflect the dynamics of a particular programmatic setting.

Sarani & Sahebi (2012) present a specific case of students learning vocabulary through literary texts using task-based learning and acknowledge the benefits that this approach had in teaching technical vocabulary, compared to other traditional methods. They claim that these positive results owed to the particularities of the TBA where learners are presented with a task or problem to solve and have a focus on meaning, rather than on language features during performance. Their study provides further exemplification of the terrain we have walked through in our own research experience. It illustrates a way in which the TBL Approach can be used when dealing with literature as to offer an excellent opportunity for students to engage in learning activities that provide meaningful input, following a process where the teacher collaborates and guides, but does not control students' learning process. Instead, he nurtures an adequate learning environment that prepares students for life-long learning.

Locally, Peña and Onatra (2009) propose a series of tasks to encourage high school EFL learners' oral production framed in Willis' (1996) approach. They offer some theoretical considerations concerning the importance of oral skills and explain how the task, as the basic point of organization, generates the language to be used by students. They then contend that language is seen as the instrument necessary to carry out the tasks presented to students. On the other hand, Galvis (2011) asserts that "importing language teaching approaches that are not locally created can be either beneficial or counterproductive, depending on the specific traits of each culture where such approaches would be ultimately implemented" (p. 200). He also supports the use of TBL for contextualizing language teaching and learning, as he points out that "in the case of the Colombian context and the TBL approach proposed in the CEFR, one can observe that teaching by means of processes is an appropriate match culturally speaking because the Colombian culture has been described as a process-oriented culture in several aspects of life, as explained by Foster (2002) and Frechette (2007), in which process takes more importance than immediate results" (p. 200).

From the preceding discussion we can safely assert that in the EFL realm, looking at literature as a useful medium by means of which cultural contents can be shared can be the starting point in triggering students' interest in venturing to use the target language for real communicative purposes. This will undoubtedly call for teachers' ingenuity in designing lessons which are based on works that appeal to students, and which can be chosen by the teacher or by students themselves. In choosing a literary text, however, teachers must always remember what may sound as trite: One enjoys reading better when

one has a choice in deciding what to read. Isn't this especially true in the case of reading for pleasure, that is, in the case of literature, as it has been defined here? Together with this is the idea that learning, in any field, and particularly language learning, is facilitated by involving learners in hand-on activities; in other words, by having students complete tasks that are meaningful to them. This is the ultimate purpose in implementing the Task-Based Learning Approach in our EFL classrooms, for task-based activities beget language appropriation; language appropriation begets entrance into a new culture; and entrance into a new culture offers students reasons to want to learn more about others.

### Method

The research study was carried out in an EFL context, more precisely, at Universidad del Valle (a large public university in Cali, Colombia). The population sample comprised 26 students in the Foreign Language—English/French BA Program, who had enrolled English VI, an Intermediate-level course offered in the February – June 2018 academic term, which aims at further developing students' reading and writing skills.

Information was gathered by means of two types of instruments. First, a semi-structured eight-item questionnaire was used to elicit data on students' preferences for reading and writing, of which four were closed-end questions and four were open-end questions. (See Appendix A). Second, an open-end questionnaire or Reading Guide, treated as a series of tasks itself, which they used to channel their reading and complete a literary reading project. (See Appendix B). Students were given the Reading Guide on the first day of class. The purpose of the reading project was explained, together with specific instructions about how to complete it. Then, and along the span of the academic term, individual teacher-student conferences were scheduled weekly, in which the student addressed specific aspects of his work and was advised on how to deal with them. The teacher took notes in each conference and, when necessary, used them for general class discussions which would further help students in getting a clearer grasp of distinct linguistic features, including grammar, syntax, style, vocabulary, sentence structure, and others.

## Results

### The semi-structured questionnaire

We found a whole range of student expectations when registering for a reading and writing course, namely, writing on different text typologies, followed by extensive reading, and study of grammar and mechanics. These

choices may be telling of two facts: first, that students feel that they come to a writing class to actually put pen to work, and, second, that the reading of different types of texts provides them with models from which they can learn to later imitate a writer's style. Interesting enough, grammar and mechanics instruction appears as necessary or desired contents, as the participants felt that they needed these to attend to some formal features of good writing. This students' awareness of the importance of form was most probably born out of our previous regular class discussions in which we insisted on allotting equal weight to the form and the content of the written text, since form and content constitute its two inseparable dimensions and, thus, they say much about the writer and his product. Therefore, and contrary to what some teachers may think, we contend that even in beginning courses, efforts should be made to instill in students this idea that although the use of correct grammar and proper mechanics does provide for all that is needed to write well, it does play a crucial role in helping the writer convey meaning by adhering to writing conventions.

The participants believed that the role of literature in foreign language learning is an extremely important one, as it provides them with access into other worlds, thus building bridges among people from different cultural backgrounds to enrich learning. In accomplishing this, they feel that opportunities should be offered for them to read and write frequently on what they read, as literary texts flourish in themes most likely to spark their imagination. Hence, the fact that most of the participants in this study enjoy reading literary publications adds to current research findings and to our practice-born belief that using literature as a tool in language teaching results in significant gains in students' learning process, as this type of reading is in consonance with their own likes and interests.

Interestingly enough, and although we have previously said that reading and writing go hand in hand, one thing is a person's reading preference and another different one may be his preference for writing the type of text he likes reading. This explains why, if most of the participants like reading literary texts, only a few of them admit to their writing about literature. We believe that this may be due to the constraints of literary writing which at first may prevent students from venturing to express themselves since, as we have pointed out, there is this confounding idea that the ability to write, especially literature writing, is a gift only a few chosen people possess, an idea coupled with the fact that the participants say that in most of their courses, and independent of their nature, writing is devoted little time, in favor of developing other language skills.

In short, the students' answers show that the key factor in fostering their language learning lies in involving them in tasks and activities in which they have some interest, as these tasks and activities become instrumental in raising their eagerness to perform better and, consequently, make them move to higher

stages of language proficiency. Based on our own experience, we firmly believe that literature provides myriad opportunities for EFL teachers to help students succeed in meeting their language needs, by planning student interest-based, in-class and outside-class activities.

## The Reading Guide

In an attempt to offer students further opportunities for self-expression, a ten-item, open-ended reading guide was designed as a series of tasks, which was intended to elicit information from students about specific aspects of an English language fiction novel each chose to read. They were required to complete a reading and writing project based on the reading guide, and submit and present their work orally in class. Following is a report of the students' unedited answers to each of the questions in the Reading Guide. (See Appendix B). We will refer to individual students as P1 (Participant 1), P2 (Participant 2), P3 (Participant 3), and so on. Yet, we will account for only some of the students' answers which were selected at random, mainly because of space limitations.

Question 1: *What book did you choose to read?* Students' choice of novel varied in genres and themes. These included science fiction, historical narratives, social and political advocacy, child rearing, hedonism, and juvenile adventure, just to mention a few. The selections were judged to be representative of individual likes and interest in reading and linguistic abilities. (See Appendix D)

Question 2: *What is the significance of the title, as you see it within the context of the story?*

Here, P2 maintains that *Cell* (by Stephen King) is closely related to the development of the story, since it is because of cell phones that people turn into zombies. He points out that "This is how the apocalypse starts ... I see that the word *cell* rhythms with *hell*, which is exactly the situation the characters of the story go through."

What is apparent here is this student's worries for the fate of those who do wrong and how their actions epitomize a society lured and subsequently trapped by technology, actions conducive to hell.

Question 3: *Theme. Several themes may be dealt with in this book. List and explain them.*

When addressing this question, P3 states that some of the themes that *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (by Katherine Boo) deals with include poverty, corruption, economic inequality, life, death, and hope. For this student, "Finding all of these issues in a small community which nobody wants to



acknowledge is something we must know and think about. Injustice, fear, and despair are very common among the characters of the story which lead some of them to committing suicide.” Interesting enough, this student warns that “Although this story tells us about a big problem in India, its point is not only to make people care about Abdul, Manju, Kekahshan, or Asha’s situation, for example, but also make people aware of and care about those other people that have to struggle in life, those we never noticed, even if they are around us. Therefore, one of the most remarkable things in *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* is the way the book connects a social problem with you, the reader.”

As seen, this student has used facts from the narrative and related them to a wider context: the social conditions many people around the world live in. In closing up, P3 has further used all this information to share her personal stand on the issue of poverty, by stating that “It [the story] makes you know and feel that it is real people who are suffering,” something the student tugs as *an awful feeling*.

In dealing with the themes she actually found in her choice of book, P4 writes that friendship finds its way throughout *Looking for Alaska* (by John Green), as it is the theme she feels mostly touched by. She lets us know that “friendship appears from its very beginning to the last meaningful moments of the story as a recurrent element that leads to an interesting drama. In the story, one of the main characters arrived to a boarding school where he has no acquaintances and thus, he is required to make true friends—in order to survive and enjoy his junior year—given the fact that there were enemies to face, authorities to obey, and joyful academic moments to share.” She further makes a connection between the experience the main characters in this story go through and what the main two characters in Wills Hurvin’s *A Time for Dancing*, Samantha and Juliana, lived as school friends. She points out that “Just as Sam and Jules build this unbreakable bond they lived by—one that outlived Jules—the type of relationship Miles was able to establish at school tells a lot about the human nature, since we all need the presence and the support of others, regardless our degree of independence.”

It is worth noting how this student uses background knowledge to make the link among her vision of friendship, what she learned from one of her previous reads, and what she considers is a trait of human beings.

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Question 4. *The plot (a summary of the story). Do not recount the whole story. Focus on the main events, instead.*

In her answer to this question, P23 provided the basic information required by readers to get a grasp of the story told in *Ties that Bind, Ties that Break* (by Lensey Namioka), as a way to trigger their interest in reading it. In other words, she has been cautious not to spoil future readers’ desire to have their own personal encounter with what this China and its people were like.



Set in 19th Century China, *Ties that Bind, Ties that Break* tells the story, in retrospect, of the daily struggles that Ailin, the main character, goes through which had their origin in the social custom of girl foot binding throughout the imperial years. But she is lucky to escape this fate, thanks to the relationship she and her family establish with an American family, the support she receives from her father, and the courage she gathers from one of her school friends. Eventually, she moves to the United States where she spouses a businessman, actually a restaurant owner, with whom she starts a new life.

This question had the participants resort to their synthesizing skills, in order to prevent them from just recounting the sequence of the events, sprinkling it with minor details which they judged to be *essential*, and from using parts of published reviews as if they were their own work. However, the guidance they received throughout the process of putting together their project proved useful in helping them see the forest without necessarily stopping to account for every tree in it and prevented them from incurring plagiarism, which at this time all of them acknowledged as being a blatant intellectual crime.

Question 5. *Main characters, what they want to accomplish, how they go about accomplishing their goal(s), and whether they succeed in doing it. Which of them do you identify most with? Why? Which of them do you identify the least with? Why?*

This question was intended to elicit information on whether the student built rapport with a certain main character in the story, as it is usually this reader-character empathy that determines whether the former feels moved to continue reading and intrigued about the unfolding of the events triggered by the latter, which, in turn, influences the reader's liking or disliking the story. This is, precisely, what happens with P5, who finds herself deeply touched as a result of her having read *Sula* (by Literature Nobel laureate Toni Morrison):

I identify the most with Sula and Nel. I have always been curious about life; I want to experience everything, at least once. I do not like the idea of waiting for a person to love me, meaning that my life would be complete just when that happens. Like Sula and Nel, I had the feeling that my life was really good when my best friend and I were together, laughing and talking all day long. Unfortunately, I also realized that even friendship has an end and that distance can affect the way you treat a person so badly. Nevertheless, although I constantly seek independence, by attempting to realize all my "feminist" ideals, I cannot fool anyone, since I am too desperate for love. I have a very conventional side in my way of finding someone to spend the rest of my life with. I still have my prospect. Likewise, Nel said that hell was not doing the same thing over and over again, but it was change. Changes scare us, because we are

blind to them. I enjoy spending all day long at home, watching movies and reading a book. I do not need crazy things in my life to be happy. I, too, seek tranquility. I think that happiness is the ultimate combination of Nel and Sula: they think they are no longer similar, but they both look for the same outcome.

This student opens up to us, letting us know who she is and why she likes and identifies with Sula and Nel, because she is pretty much like them. Then, she goes on to tell us what she thinks of three other characters and why.

I identify the least with Eva, Hannah, and Helene, the ones who raised Nel and Sula. They are not that different; they are traumatized in some way. But this is not why I do not identify with them, rather I consider them as the model I would not follow. I constantly care and think about the ones around me. I wish them nothing but good. As I was reading these three people's lives, I decided that no matter how bad an experience could be, I would not treat anybody badly, especially the ones I love the most.

Again, P5 has scrutinized these three characters' lives, looked into her own life, and made a resolution: She wants to be true to herself; she is goodness and so, this is what she wants to project in her relationship with others.

Question 6. *Part or parts of the book you find particularly important. That is, the one part of the story you feel touched by. Quote some passages, indicating the corresponding page number(s). Why is this important to you?*

In dealing with this question, this is what P25 singles out, after reading 1984 (by George Orwell): "The choice for mankind lay between freedom and happiness, and that, for the great bulk of mankind, happiness was better." (p. 153). Next, he explains what this means to him:

I believe that this quote captures what we are living today. It is unbelievable that this was written in 1948. This represents our surrender; we are giving up freedom to obtain "happiness", or, at least, what society defines as happiness. We are giving up our time and life by working to obtain material goods that are supposed to bring us security and joy, but in reality we don't even need those things. What we need is freedom and strength to escape society.

What this student has selected as being meaningful to him is based on his understanding of how social systems work, that is, what humans are faced with, as part of the society they live in. The student's position on the issue of freedom and happiness is clearly explained by his choosing freedom over happiness and stating that courage begets freedom.

We believe that in a course, and especially in a reading and writing course, after students have been graded, grades have been reported to the Registrar's Office, and the academic term is over, what remains in the students' mind is what they did in that course and how significant it is for them as individuals. We venture to assert that one instance of this significance is what they read, which actually plays a role in maintaining or in altering their vision of the world they live in.

Question 7. *Linguistic aspects. How do you judge the writer's style? Explain and quote passages to support your claim.*

In connection with this, P24, presents us with this quote from *Kinshu: Autumn Brocade* (by Miyamoto Teru): "East Maizuru was indeed a sleepy town on the northern border of the Kyoto region, facing the Sea of Japan. Snow in winter, humidity in summer, and the other seasons marked only by the leaden skies and the thick clouds, sparse traffic, and dust-laden winds from the sea" (p. 30). Then, this student is quick to let us know what this means to him: "A description like this one makes you feel as if you were actually in the scene. It makes you feel the cold of winter, the suffocation of summer, and see the beautiful brocades of autumn and spring, thus providing you with a brief, yet a substantial description of everything a foreigner should know about this region."

It is true that, as readers, we tend to favor certain writers over other ones, which is a feeling born out of our judgment concerning the way, means, or techniques the author uses to convey his message. Among others, it is the writer's choice of vocabulary, syntactic constructions, sentence structure, paragraph technique, the message itself, and the distance he takes from his readers that set some writers apart from others. Generally speaking, our participants are not an exception to this, when expressing their preference.

Question 8. *Write a letter to the author in which you express your feelings about his/her book. You may want to focus on a particular aspect of this book, including one or more characters.*

The Students' answers to this question show their engagement with different aspects of the story they read and depict meaningful real-life interactions, like in the case of the rapport P1 established with Ooji Kouji, author of *High speed*. Below is her letter to him:

Dear Mr. Kouji:

I'm not good with words. I'm awkward when expressing myself, especially when I want to talk to someone whose work has been well received. I admit that, at first, I found the title and the premise to be a bit cheesy, but as I kept reading, I found myself with a slice-of-life story that in certain aspects reminded me of my childhood: my friends, the routine of walking back home and then meeting with them again to do something together. It also made me reflect on some aspects of my childhood and the relationship with friends. At first, Haru didn't like Rin and wanted to stay away from him as much as possible, because he couldn't understand how someone else could blend with the water as well as Haru himself. It reminded me of how I used to scoff at kids I didn't like. But in the end everything works out for the group and Haru manages to get along with Rin. It makes me nostalgic, wanting to go back to my hometown and see if there are some of my old friends there.

Another aspect that I liked and felt identified with is that I'm afraid of water because I don't know how to swim, unlike Makoto, who is afraid but still knows how—and likes—to swim. I hope that, one day, I can overcome my fear and learn how to swim, too.

As I mentioned, I'm not really good with words, but I wanted to tell you that your book has brought me good memories from my childhood, something really hard to deal with.

Sincerely,

P1]

As can be said that the power of books lies in this unique likelihood, they offer to take readers not only to outer worlds, but also to their inner selves. In doing so, books fulfill their transformational mission. Indeed, nobody comes out being the same after reading a book, regardless of the type of connection a reader might have made with the story and its author. This is clearly illustrated in P1's letter to Mr. Kouji. Thus, the story has influenced her in such a way, that she sees it as a flashback into her own life, her childhood, a revival of moments she shared with some of her friends. Eventually, she is filled with nostalgia, to the point that she admits to her wanting to go back to her hometown, expecting to reencounter her acquaintances.

Question 9. *Besides new vocabulary, what did you learn as result of your having read this book? Would you recommend other people to read this book? What people?*

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It is in our human nature to want others to have what has been good for us and wish others avoid what has caused us harm. It seems that the same happens with our reading experiences. Hence, we praise authors whose work we have enjoyed and, conversely, we use derisive language to refer to those authors and their work we have not found ourselves connected with. The former is what P6 shares about her experience in reading *The Kite Runner*, by Khaled Hosseini:

I learned so many things. I learned about the Afghan history, foreign interventionism, and discrimination in Afghanistan. I also learned that Afghans use the word *hazara* to refer to people who belong to an ethno-linguistic minority group. Still other aspects I learned about are the atrocities inherent to the war and violence and sexual abuse in Afghanistan. Therefore, this book gave me a different vision of Afghanistan and its problems and what people have to live every day there. Likewise, I learned that you have to keep up with your life, be happy no matter the problems you have to face, give the best of yourself, and not give up.

As whether this student recommends this book, she states the following:

I recommend other people to read this book. It is written for a wide audience (adults and teenagers). It is about real facts, situations that happened and are still happening at this moment, which we don't see and we don't know much about. Besides, it is the other side of the story, narrated by someone who knew that world before and after the war. Thus, it gives us another perspective of the story.

It is interesting to read how much this student has taken from the story. Thus, and judging from the student's words, author Hosseini has provided her with a mini course on the history of Afghanistan, a course that regardless its brevity, still accounts for the past and present of this territory and its people. Again, this is what reading can do for us: let us shake hands with people we never thought we would ever meet.

Question 10. *Make a piece of art that, in your opinion, represents the story being told in the book or part of it. Bring your work to class and be ready to talk about it.*

This question was intended to offer students an opportunity to try their artistic skills and exert their creative and imagination power by freely expressing themselves aesthetically. An additional purpose of this task was to have students set up an exhibit of their work for the student population, the teaching and the administrative staff of the School of Language Sciences, and the general public interested in attending our Summer Language festival, which is customarily held as an end-of-term activity jointly prepared by students and teachers.

The pieces of art presented by students included collages, photographs, sculptures, paintings, scale models, drawings, poems, and lyrics which students sang in the event.

The exhibit was set up in one the corridors of the School. Each piece of art was appropriately identified by indicating the title of the book it was based

on, its year of publication and publisher, its author, the student's name, and the technique used to produce it. Each student answered questions from visitors about the work, which resulted in an enriching interaction between attendees and novice artists. (See Appendix C).

## Discussion

The use of literature has been recognized as being of much value for second language students and especially for foreign language students, as it depicts language in different real communicative contexts, triggers students' motivation, and serves as a bridge between authors and their society and readers.

The studies reviewed here reveal that literary texts constitute authentic materials that can be used to meet students' best interests, namely the development of their reading and speaking skills. These studies emphasize the need to exploit these materials by designing learner-centered lessons, particularly by implementing the Task-Based Approach in which students learn by doing. Our study corroborates previous findings, as participants were highly motivated to read the novel they chose, complete the different tasks they were assigned, and present their work orally in class. Equally revealing of students' linguistic progress was the fact that they showed a genuine interest in sharing their work with the public attending the Summer Language Festival by preparing and delivering a mini lecture about their findings.

## Conclusion

We have delved into the use of literature in offering EFL students opportunities to enhance their learning process. Thus, when seen as a tool rather than an end, literature can trigger learners' motivation and offer them unique instances for them to deal with authentic texts that depict the life of people, in terms of their religious, political, economic, and social beliefs, as well as other traits associated with their lifestyle.

Our findings corroborate previous findings which show that even if students' active participation in their learning process is vital, they are not solely responsible for the success of this process. Therefore, in attending to the participants' needs, the weekly teacher-student conferences we scheduled proved useful in helping individual students successfully deal with their reading and writing concerns resulting from their involvement in the different tasks they were to cope with. Likewise, these conferences helped most students build increasing confidence in their oral production, as compared with a certain lack of easiness they showed in individual classroom presentations, which we

think was due to their relatively scarce vocabulary range, the type of topics they knew little about, and the degree of formality inherent to the texts. However, we believe that future English teachers should be conversant with a plethora of topics, not only with that which interests them. Thus, these findings add to the evidence that teachers have a crucial role to play in choosing materials and designing task-based, student-centered activities that can best meet students' needs. In doing this, language teachers need not be literature graduates. All they need is a liking for literature and willingness to try their ingenuity. In our study, participants felt challenged and their motivation for reading, writing, and speaking increased, as shown in what they did. This is because, typically, reading materials are chosen by teachers, which not always match students' reading likes. For example, some of the materials we used to develop course contents dealt with topics in economics, engineering, biology, politics, religion, and gender, which did not appeal to all of the students. Consequently, students showed difficulties in understanding vocabulary and in writing and speaking about these topics. Conversely, giving students the opportunity to choose a book to read was important in raising their motivation to read, write, and speak about their story, and although the written report each submitted needs additional work on revision and editing to fully reflect writing conventions, each shows features of good writing as it is authentic, depicts the author's voice and his knowledge of the world, and speaks to a certain audience. Therefore, it is hoped that these findings contribute to raising awareness of some of the factors that teachers should take into account when planning activities to respond to their students' needs in similar contexts.

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### Appendix A: Questionnaire

Please answer the following survey to the best of your knowledge. This information will allow us to make a needs analysis and improve our teaching practices. You do not need to provide your name.

1	What components do you expect to find in a writing class?				
2	How relevant is literary work (literature) in your English learning? Why?				
3	How often do you read? Why?	Less than 1 hour per day	1 hour per day	2 hours per day	More than 2 hours per day
4	How often do you write? Why?	Less than 1 hour per day	1 hour per day	2 hours per day	More than 2 hours per day
5	What kind of texts do you read?	Literary	Academic	Informative	Other
6	What kind of texts do you write?	Literary	Academic	Personal (lists, reminders, etc.)	Other
7	List the factors that restrain you from reading and writing more.				
8	What kinds of activities would you like to see in this course?				

### Appendix B: Reading Guide

Directions. Submit your answers to the questions below, about the novel you chose to read, and *prepare* a *twenty-minute* presentation to share them with the rest of the class. Use your summary, paraphrase, and quotation cards only for reference, as this is not intended to be a reading session.

1. What book did you choose to read? (title of the book, year of publication, editorial house, number of pages)
2. What is the significance of the title, as you see it within the context of the story?
3. Theme. Several themes may be dealt with in this book. List and explain them.
4. The plot (a summary of the story). Do not recount the whole story. Focus on the main events, instead.
5. Main characters. Which of them do you identify most with? Why? Which of them do you identify the least with? Why?
6. Part or parts of the book you find particularly important. That is, the one part of the story you feel touched by. Quote some passages, indicating the corresponding page numbers. Why is this important to you?
7. Linguistic aspects. How do you judge the writer's style? Explain and quote passages to support your claim.
8. Write a letter to the author in which you express your feelings about this book. You may want to focus on a particular aspect of the book, including one or more characters.
9. Besides new vocabulary, what did you learn as result of your having read this book? Would you recommend other people to read this book? What people?
10. Artwork. Make a piece of art that, in your opinion, represents the spirit of the story being told in the book you read, or part of it. Bring your work to class and be ready to talk about it.

**Appendix C. Some of the pieces of artwork submitted and exhibited by students**



1. Student performing the song he wrote, based on They Say Love is Blind (Kate Halleron).

Link to his video: [https://youtu.be/wh\\_x\\_WujzLs](https://youtu.be/wh_x_WujzLs). Lyrics below.

**THEY SAY LOVE IS BLIND**

He was blinded in the war and never again saw the sunshine  
Or the moon that was surrounded by stars at night  
An inspected trip on train - he didn't know that it would change  
The course of his life - with a surprise

**BRIDGE**

His ex-wife appeared, but now he had a new love  
Two women who loved the same man

**CHORUS**

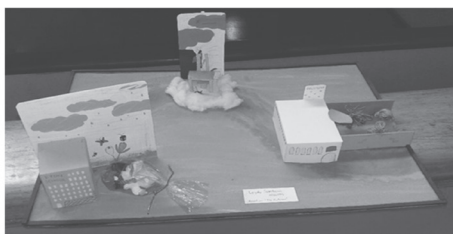
THEY SAY LOVE IS BLIND  
He fought against time and divided his heart  
THEY SAY LOVE IS BLIND  
The civil war took a part of his life  
THEY SAY LOVE IS BLIND  
He was a brave man who never gave up  
THEY SAY LOVE IS BLIND  
He couldn't see, but he could still love.



2. Piece based on  
Ties That Bind,  
Ties That Break  
(Lensey Namioka)



3. Piece based on Kinshu:  
An Autumn Brocade (Teru Miyamoto)



4. Piece based on The Professor  
(Charlotte Bronte)



5. Piece, based on Kinshu:  
An Autumn Brocade  
(Teru Miyamoto)

**Appendix D: List of some of the novels that the participants read**

Brontë, C. (2008). *The Professor*. Project Gutenberg.

Cline, E. (2011). *Ready Player One*. Crown.

Green, J. M. (2005). *Looking for Alaska*. Dutton Juvenile

Halleron, K. (2012). *They Say Love is blind*. Pepper Pace.

Hosseini, K. (2003). *The Kite Runner*, Riverhead Books

Hurwin, W. D. (1997). *A Time for Dancing*. Puffin Books.

King, S. (2006). *Cell*. Scribner.

Kouji, O. (2013). *High Speed*. Kyoto Animation

Namioka, L. (1999). *Ties That Bind, Ties That Break*. Random House.

Miyamoto, T. (2007). *Kinshu: Autumn Brocade*. New Directions.

Morrison, T. (2002). *Sula*. Pinguin Random House.

Orwell, George. (1949). 1984. Harvill Secker.

# The Reciprocal Teaching Model in the Development of Writing in Tenth Graders<sup>1</sup>

El modelo de enseñanza recíproco en el desarrollo de la habilidad de la escritura en estudiantes de décimo grado.

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## Abstract

This article presents an action research study. Its purpose was to determine the extent to which the Reciprocal Teaching model (RT), proposed by Palincsar and Brown (1984), impacts tenth grader's English writing skills. The research work included: (1) A diagnostic stage to determine the participant's initial difficulties in regards to their writing skills; (2) An action stage that consisted of the implementation of some workshops based on the RT model and focused on reading strategies, namely predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing. (3) An evaluation stage where key findings indicated the usefulness of RT for building confidence in the students and for developing their writing skills as they were able to expand their vocabulary spectrum, reduce syntax errors, and improve the content, organization and punctuation of their writing. Findings also suggested that assessing writing performance through portfolios was useful to enhance the school curriculum because students engaged in their own learning and participated actively in the process.

**Keywords:** curriculum; Reciprocal Teaching Model; reading strategies; portfolios; writing

## Resumen

Este artículo presenta un estudio de Investigación-Acción cuyo propósito fue determinar en qué medida el modelo de Enseñanza Recíproca (ER), propuesto por Palincsar y Brown (1984), afecta las habilidades de escritura en inglés del décimo grado. Este trabajo de investigación incluyó: (1) Una etapa de diagnóstico para

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determinar las dificultades iniciales del participante con respecto a sus habilidades de escritura; (2) Una etapa de acción que consistió en la implementación de algunos talleres basados en el modelo ER y se enfocó en cuatro estrategias de lectura como la predicción, clarificación, cuestionamiento y resumen. (3) una etapa de evaluación donde los principales hallazgos indicaron la utilidad de ER para generar confianza en los participantes y desarrollar sus habilidades de escritura, ya que pudieron ampliar su espectro de vocabulario, reducir los errores de sintaxis y mejorar el contenido, la organización y la puntuación de sus escritos. Los hallazgos también sugieren que la evaluación del desempeño de la escritura a través de portafolios es útil para mejorar el currículo escolar porque los estudiantes se involucraron en su propio aprendizaje y participaron activamente en este proceso.

*Palabras claves:* currículo; Enseñanza Recíproca; estrategias de lectura; portafolio; escritura

### Resumo

Este artigo apresenta um estudo de Pesquisa-Ação cujo propósito foi determinar em que medida o modelo de Ensino Recíproco (ER), proposto por Palincsar e Brown (1984), afeta as habilidades de escritura em inglês do segundo ano do ensino médio. Este trabalho de pesquisa incluiu: (1) Uma etapa de diagnóstico para determinar as dificuldades iniciais do participante com relação a suas habilidades de escritura; (2) Uma etapa de ação que consistiu na implementação de algumas oficinas baseadas no modelo ER e enfocou-se em quatro estratégias de leitura como a predição, clareza, questionamento e resumo. (3) uma etapa de avaliação onde as principais descobertas indicaram a utilidade de ER para gerar confiança nos participantes e desenvolver suas habilidades de escritura, posto que puderam ampliar seu espectro de vocabulário, reduzir os erros de sintaxe e melhorar o conteúdo, a organização e a pontuação de seus escritos. As descobertas também sugerem que a avaliação do desempenho da escritura através de portfólios é útil para melhorar o currículo escolar porque os estudantes se envolveram em sua própria aprendizagem e participaram ativamente neste processo.

*Palavras chaves:* currículo; Ensino Recíproco; estratégias de leitura; portfólio; escritura

## Introduction

This study deals with the implementation of the Reciprocal Teaching Model (RT) and its relation to the development of writing skills in the tenth graders of a public school in Cartagena, Colombia. The participants were selected according to Cozby's (2008) convenience sampling, which considers availability, schedule, members, and characteristics. The Action Research approach related to the qualitative research allowed to identify the problem, gather data, interpret, to act on evidence and to evaluate results. Consequently, a diagnostic stage was carried out which indicated difficulties in generating thoughts, translating ideas into readable texts, using accurate grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation, and establishing cohesion and coherence. Therefore, it was clear the need for the implementation of strategies to improve the writing skills in this school. This introspection led the researchers to consider the use of the RT Model because it encourages students to take into consideration their own thinking processes during reading and it helps them to be actively involved in their comprehension process, which is reflected in their written production. The outcomes of the study reported that through the implementation of the workshops under the RT Model, the students developed and improved their writing skills in English. The findings established the usefulness of this model since it raised the confidence of the students towards writing which contributed to the improvement of the skill. Additionally, the practicality of portfolios and the collaborative and cooperative strategies allowed students to learn from their peers and teacher by recognizing writing as a more meaningful and pleasant.

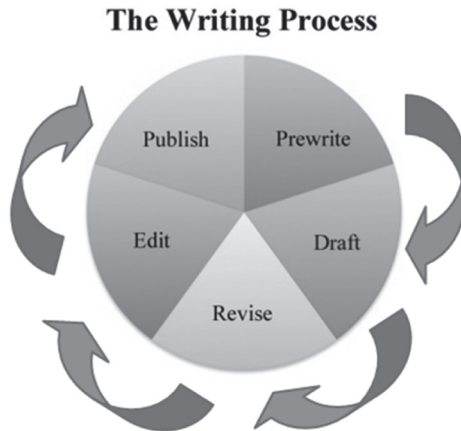
## Literature Review

### The writing process

According to Richards and Renandya, writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners since they must pay attention to different skills such as planning, organization, spelling, punctuation, word choice, syntax and mechanics Richards and Renandya (2002). Cohesion and coherence are two more fundamental characteristics of a well-written passage. The former refers to surface level signals that reflect the discourse organization of the text and the intended purposes of the writer; the latter refers to whatever links the meanings of utterances in a sentence or a discourse.

According to Harmer (2007) teachers need to involve the students in the process of writing, by encouraging them to plan, draft and edit since this process will help them to improve the skill. Moreover, the author emphasizes that teachers should take into account the age, level, learning styles and interest of the students when deciding what kind of writing they want them to do.

The following image illustrates the writing process suggested by Harmer (2004):



*Figure 1. Procedures involved in producing writing (Harmer,2004)*

**Pre-Writing:** It helps to identify and organize ideas because it involves the planning of the writing process.

**Drafting:** It involves the organization of ideas into a coherent structure. The goal of drafting is to transform thoughts into written organization without being constrained by word choice or sentence structure.

**Revising:** It focuses on improving students' writing. Students rethink, rework and refine their piece by applying their knowledge of the language structure to become better writers.

**Editing and proofreading:** It involves the accuracy of the piece and should be undertaken when the revision of the content is complete.

**Publishing:** It entails sharing the writing with an audience and may involve preparing a neatly handwriting or word-processed copy of the final draft and the addition of illustration or other graphic elements if necessary.

## Reading and writing connection

Although oral language is the natural channel of transmitting information, human beings have developed writing systems for communication, too. For some decades reading and writing have been taught separately (Langer & Applebee, 1986). Some research studies have shown that they are very interdependent (Krashen S. , 1984). Taking into account such studies, it can

be inferred that the interconnection of these two skills is so strong that one without the other cannot exist.

According to Durukan (2017), reading and writing skills are important from the first phase of education. Krashen (1984) believes that a great deal of self-motivated reading leads to writing competence. According to Gregg and Steinberg (1980) and Anderson, Spiro, and Montague (1977), both in constructivist theory and in research, reading and writing are meaning generating activities. It is usually assumed that a good reader makes a good piece of writing. Therefore, writing can be enhanced by improving reading considering that this input must be related to the learners' needs and interests in order for them to be encouraged to make their own compositions.

### **Reciprocal teaching**

Throughout the history of language teaching different methods have been used to help students learn a language; those methods have directly addressed the four skills. The importance of reading in developing writing ability has been acknowledged recently and the teaching of writing has been suggested to incorporate reading instruction for language learners (Murcia, 2001).

According to Krashen (2004), no matter how much time pupils spend on writing, this skill cannot be improved without an input. The alternative that this author proposes is to read more because it leads to more vocabulary building and to a better writing style. Since understanding the printed text is the result of the interaction between the writer and reader (Harris, 2000), the RT is supposed to enhance reading and writing skills respectively and, although it has been used for the past two decades, most educators and students are not familiar with it (Williams, 2010).

Palincsar and Brown (1984) mentioned that the RT is an instructional model in which teacher and students take turns to have a dialogue regarding the different parts of the passage to construct meaning. It provides students with four specific reading strategies which are questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and predicting. Through guided practice and modeling the process, the teacher introduces the four key components of this model which are part of a reading comprehension program.

As the authors affirm, the order in which the RT model is used is not established because it depends on the text, the reader and the goal to achieve. They add that sometimes it is good when a pause is naturally made between paragraphs; making predictions for what will happen next before summarizing, asking questions, and clarifying the clues that readers have so far. Other times, however, it may be more natural to summarize and clarify before making predictions and asking further questions.

Different authors agree that the RT model is useful and helpful when developing prompts to encourage pupils to use the language. The prompts provide students with the necessary support to become independent in the use of the strategies, and to explore into their reading comprehension and ability to apply the RT model. The characteristic of each strategy is explained below.

**Reciprocal Teaching Strategies:** Palincsar (1986), Oczuks (2003) among others authors established some strategies for the students to use when reading to enhance comprehension and to better their writing skills. They are:

**Predicting:** It involves previewing the passage to anticipate what may happen next. Readers can use information from the text and their prior knowledge to make logical predictions before reading. Predicting allows learners to interact more with the written piece, which makes them more likely to become interested in the reading material while improving their understanding (Pearson & Fielding, 1991; Hansen, 1981).

**Questioning:** Good readers ask questions throughout the reading process (Palincsar, 1986), but formulating questions is a difficult and complex task, which was evident in this study since the participants showed difficulties in the syntax of the questions. When students know, prior to reading, that they need to think of a question about the text, they read with awareness. They automatically increase their reading comprehension, process the meaning, make inferences and connections to prior knowledge and, finally, make a question (Lubliner, 2004).

**Clarifying:** It helps students monitor their own comprehension as they identify problems or figure out difficult words. During this step of the RT model, teachers and students can share “fix-up” strategies to construct meaning. This strategy is important to increase the vocabulary, which was one of the main difficulties that pupils mentioned in the diagnostic stage.

**Summarizing:** To summarize effectively, students must recall and arrange only the main events in a passage. Additionally, this strategy helps students to identify, paraphrase, integrate, and organize the most important information in the passage into a clear and concise statement. Students can use this strategy as they create a new piece of writing.

### Reciprocal teaching foundations

Reciprocal teaching, although very effective, does not stand alone. Its four strategies are part of a broader comprehension that according to Oczuks (2003) must be combined with some building blocks to be successful. These are:

**Scaffolding:** During RT, instruction is scaffolded or supported. The students can see models of the four strategies, and, finally, work independently as they read while using the RT model to help them comprehend.

**Metacognition:** Metacognition is an integral component in RT because students learn to consciously think about and reflect on their strategy use (Hacker, 1998). Moreover, the learners' metacognition will be enhanced by using the RT and portfolios to monitor their own growth in this process.

**Cooperative Learning:** The author states that because RT is a discussion technique, cooperative learning is integral to it. RT builds on the cooperative nature of learning that contributes with students' reading comprehension to be deepened through social interactions. Therefore, students may work together in their workshops and construct collaborative efforts for a prediction, question, clarification, and summary. Moreover, Brown (1994) mentions that cooperative learning refers to language learning that is authentic and real, it is an interactive approach which purpose is to create a meaningful learning experience.

### Portfolios for assessing the writing process

In an educational context, a portfolio is defined as "a purposeful collection of students' works that demonstrates their efforts, progress, and achievements in given areas" (Bae, 2011). Accordingly, Bae believes that portfolios can be a great tool for teaching writing, and they can promote the authentic writing pieces assessment of students. In addition, portfolio assessment can be helpful for EFL students to increase confidence in writing by allowing them to see their progress over time.

It is interesting to notice that Moya and O'Malley (1994) state that the information derived from a standardized test cannot give the information needed to understand students' progress and achievement; therefore, educators have found an alternative form of assessment, *i.e.*, portfolios. Consequently, this work of research established portfolios as one of the ways to collect data about the students' progress during the intervention stage. Through analyzing students' portfolios, the researcher can have a better understanding of the learners' writing process and the students have more chances of having better writing products.

Moreover, Saddler and Andrade (2004) affirm that there are two elements that could enhance the feedback provided to students' portfolios: *error codes and rubrics*. The former can save teachers' time and allow students to interpret much more easily the teacher's feedback. The latter articulates the expectations that both teacher and students can have by listing the criteria and describing the level of achievements.

## Methodology

### Research Design

Action Research (AR) was the methodology used in this study because it intended to improve an educational aspect of EFL teaching. Ferrance (2000, p.1) maintains that AR *“specifically refers to a disciplined inquiry done by a teacher (researcher) with the intention that the research will inform and change his or her practices in the future”*. This approach is useful to identify the problem, to gather data, to interpret information, to act on evidence, to evaluate results and to start the cycle again. These five steps or phases promote among teacher-researchers *“four basic themes: empowerment of participants, collaboration through participation, acquisition of knowledge, and social change. Furthermore, in conducting action research, we structure routines for continuous confrontation with data on the health of a school community”* (Ferrance, 2000, p. 9). According to Lewin (2006) AR is a spiraling, cyclical process that includes planning, execution, and reconnaissance and this is what teachers do when they do research on ways to teach.

The following research question and objectives were established by the researchers:

#### Research question

To what extent does the implementation of the Reciprocal Teaching Model impact the writing skill in tenth graders at a public school in Cartagena?

#### Research objectives

1. To examine the effect of the RT Model on the improvement of the students' writing skill.
2. To evaluate students' vocabulary range when they are exposed to RT Model.
3. To explore ways to identify students' syntax errors in the writing process.
4. To analyze students' level of confidence when the RT Model is used for writing.

#### Pedagogical objectives

1. To increase the students' writing proficiency using the RT model.
2. To expand the students' vocabulary range through the exposure to the RT model.
3. To reduce syntax errors in the students' writing process after using the RT model.
4. To increase the students' confidence towards the writing process.

### **Context and Participants**

The project was conducted at a public school located in the South of Cartagena where students belong to low-income families who face different difficulties such as gangs' violence, drug addiction, drug dealing, thievery, displacement, poverty, and alcoholism, among others. Most of the students come from displaced families of the blended, extended or single-parent type that scarcely have the necessary economic resources. There are about 1900 students and 80 teachers. The school's facilities include well-ventilated, spacious classrooms. Teachers who work in the institution are well-qualified, most of them have postgraduate degrees or are pursuing one. In the English area there are three teachers who graduated from a Foreign Language Program and have more than 10 years of experience in the field. The English syllabus is aligned to the Ministry of Education policies, and it is based on the communicative approach. In addition, it was designed according to the learners' age, grade, and learning needs. Collaborative and cooperative work and the motivation principle are some foundations that are considered in the English teaching and learning process.

The participants of this work of research were chosen according to Cozby's (1997) convenience sampling, which considers availability, schedule, members, and characteristics. This study was conducted with a group of 27 tenth graders (8 boys and 19 girls). Their ages ranged between 14 and 18. These students were not afraid to speak in English and were motivated towards the learning of the language. However, a placement test-APTIS- showed that they were basic users of English (A1).

### **Data collection Instruments**

To collect information, instruments such as a students' questionnaire, two pre-tests, a coordinator's and teacher's interview, a researcher's journal and portfolios, were administered. Furthermore, some techniques were used in order to gather facts regarding notions about the learners' proficiency level, opinions, attitudes, preferences, improvements and the overall performance in class.

Below is the description of data collection that was administered during the diagnostic, action and evaluation stage.



**Table 1.** Techniques and instruments for data collection in the Diagnostic Stage

<b>Diagnostic Stage</b>	
<b>Data collection technique</b>	<b>Data collection instrument</b>
Survey (Non-observational)	Students' questionnaire
Testing (Non-observational)	Students Pre-test 1
Testing (Non-observational)	Students Pre-test 2
Interviews and Audio recording (non-observational)	Coordinator's Transcription
Interviews and Audio recording (non-observational)	Teacher's transcription
Observation	Teacher's Journal
External observation (Observational)	Bilingualism adviser's observation
External observation (Observational)	Regional Native program Coordinator's observation
External observation (Observational)	Video recording

**Table 2:**Techniques and instruments for data collection in the Action and Evaluation Stage

<b>Action and Evaluation Stage</b>	
<b>Data collection technique</b>	<b>Data collection instrument</b>
Survey (Non-observational)	Likert questionnaire
Testing (Non-observational)	Rubric
Observation	Journal
Testing (Non-observational)	Students' Post-test
Testing (Non-observational)	Portfolio

### **Data analysis and interpretation**

The analysis done throughout the project was based on the grounded theory in which the information was triangulated to obtain an overall view of the results. According to Burns (1999): *"Triangulation is one of the most commonly used and best known ways of checking for validity. The aim of triangulation is to gather multiple perspectives on the situation being studied"*. The data was codified and categorized in order to come up with the most significant occurrences during the diagnostic stage which is presented in the graph below.

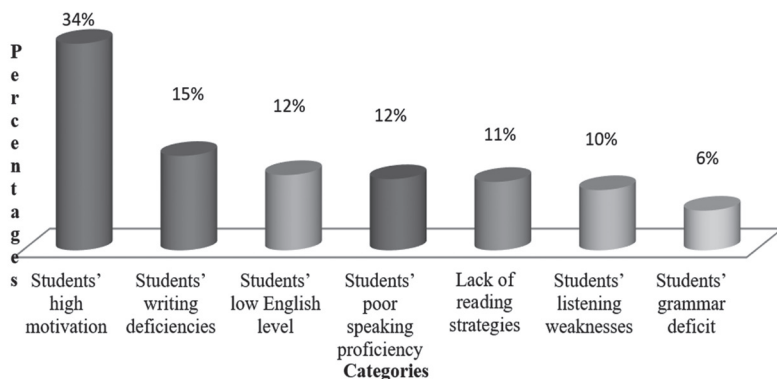


Figure 2. Percentages of the categories found in the Diagnostic Stage.

The results showed that the students had difficulties concerning writing, which was the code with most occurrences. Writing was the most challenging skill for EFL learners; they had difficulties in developing ideas and in using them in comprehensible texts. According to Richards and Renandya, writers must pay attention to planning, organizing, spelling, punctuation, word choice, cohesion and coherence, aspects that showed the highest deficiencies in the instruments (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

During the action stage of the research process some workshops were implemented and the students' writing process was based on four reading strategies: *predicting*, *clarifying*, *questioning* and *summarizing* (Brown & Palincsar, 1984). The phases of pre-writing, drafting, revising, proofreading, and publishing were considered in the design of the workshops. The main purpose of the implementation stage was to familiarize the students with the writing process and with some strategies for the students to write coherent texts of different genres.

#### Week 2

In the **pre-writing phase**, the learners gathered ideas through building up vocabulary with varied activities and by implementing the first strategy of the RT Model, *predicting*. In the **drafting phase**, the students organized their ideas through the strategies *clarifying*, *questioning* and *summarizing*. During this phase, the students also generated questions to interact meaningfully with the text and to clarify ideas. **In the revising phase, the students refined their text. Lastly, in the proofreading phase, they edited their products through collaborative work with their classmates to correct errors in grammar, mechanics and usage. In the publishing phase, the students shared the writing pieces in their portfolios by producing a neatly handwritten or**

word-processed copy of the final draft. The portfolios allowed the researchers to analyze the students' process and growth from one workshop to the other.

Students were exposed to some strategies like brainstorming, listing, modeling, following outlines, adding details, developing ideas through pictures, comparing, and contrasting, clustering and using diagrams to facilitate much more the writing process. Such strategies were modeled by the teacher and inferred by the students whose written outcomes were: narrative and descriptive texts, picture-story boards, contrasting charts, advertisements and brochures.

During the evaluation stage the results from the instruments were analyzed and categorized and the outcomes were arranged through a holistic triangulation. The following graph shows a summary of the categories that emerged.

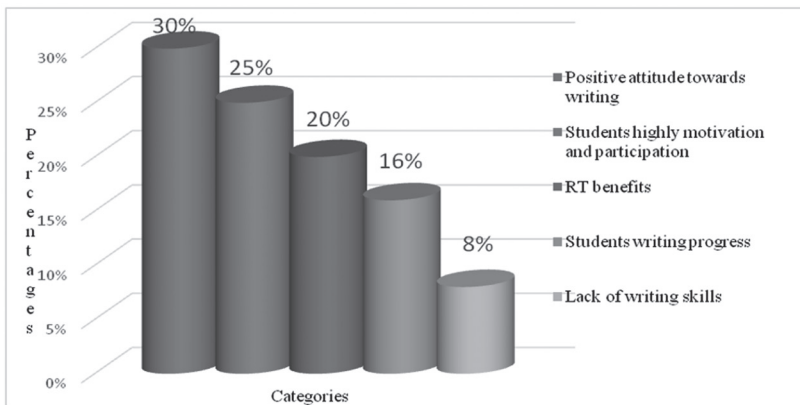


Figure 3. Percentages of the categories found in the Evaluation Stage.

The data triangulation showed five main categories: four positive and only one aspect to be improved. Firstly, the category with the highest percentage in the analyses was *Positive attitude towards writing*. All the instruments reported that there was a continuous positive feeling towards the writing process. Students' awareness rose from workshop to workshop and they gradually had more confidence to write. The following excerpts confirm this issue:

*I could notice the students had different topics to write (festival and celebrations) and they were really concentrated looking for information for their brochure (Teacher's journal).*

*He aprendido mucho de los borradores.../ I have learned a lot with the drafting phase (Students' questionnaire).*

The results from analysis exhibited consistency with the category *students' high motivation and participation*. The results from the instruments revealed that the learners began to enjoy the classes and were also capable of taking a more active participation in the classroom. Besides, the layout, organization and content of the workshops were appealing for the students, which made them feel committed during the intervention. The learning process was meaningful to the learners since they had opportunities in each of the workshops to work cooperatively. These are some excerpts that confirm this:

*Students were participative and enthusiastic in these activities because they really liked visual aids and the topic was interesting for them as well (Teacher's journal).*

*....amo las clases de la miss porque gracias a ella me he motivado.../ I love the English classes because I have been motivated... (Students' questionnaire).*

The third category displayed high frequency as well, *RT benefits*, which means that this method was useful to enhance the writing ability. Although at the very beginning students were not familiar with these strategies, they gradually comprehended this instructional technique and the results evidenced that their writing skills progressed, which is an evidence of the fifth category *students writing progress*. The instruments also showed the development of each one of the writing stages. Students became more aware of planning their writing and considered the teacher's feedback to have a positive effect on their final drafts. These are some excerpts that evidence the high occurrences of these codes:

*Students really did well in these activities because the results were good. They were assertive (Teacher's journal).*

*Me fue muy bien con las estrategias y me siento satisfecha.../ I have done well with the strategies and I feel satisfied... (Students' questionnaire).*

*....ya tilize tili y me atrevo a tener conversaciones con mis primos y amigos en ingles/ I already wrote well and I dare to have conversation with my cousins and friends (Students' questionnaire).*

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*He aprendido a tilizer puntuación, mayúsculas y demás/ I have learnt to use the punctuation, capitalization and so on (Students' questionnaire).*

However, at the initial phase of the intervention, the category *Lack of writing skills* indicated that there were aspects to improve in the students' writing process like content, organization, lexis, syntax, punctuation and mechanics; the results of the instruments showed that such aspects improved

progressively. As a result, the last category emerged with the lowest frequency. Students were familiar with the rubrics' conventions which allowed them to be aware of the aspects to be assessed and consider them to refine their final products. The following are evidences from the instruments.

*Some students still had syntax problems. It is necessary to remind them the structure in an interesting way and practice it much more (Teacher's journal).*

*...al principio me sentí frustrada e insatisfecha con mi resultado, pero en el segundo obtuve una mejor percepción porque mejoré mi escritura.../ at the I I felt frustrated and unsatisfied with my results but in the second workshop I achieved a better perception because I improved my writing...(Students' questionnaire).*

*He aprendido de varios errores y he aprendido a tener una mejor escritura.... / I have learnt from some mistake and learnt to have a better writing... (Students' questionnaire).*

## Results

After collecting the result of the instruments and analyzing the data, the findings showed that the students advanced in the development of the writing competence, which proved the effectiveness of RT model in an EFL classroom to increase the students' confidence in their writing processes. They were able to expand their vocabulary spectrum, reduce syntax errors, and improve their writing contents, organization and punctuation. Additionally, portfolios facilitated the assessment of writing performance under the RT model.

### The effectiveness of RT model

Throughout the implementation of the workshops, students showed that they learned about the writing process under this model. Gradually, students became familiar with the strategies and took advantage of the input given in the workshops to create their own pieces of writing by following the writing cycle. The students were able to improve their writing skills because the model engaged them in a formative writing process and the portfolios allowed a follow-up of their progress.

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### The students' confidence towards the writing process

The students felt confident in the development of the given tasks. Their motivation and commitment increased throughout the process. The

consideration of the students' needs and interests had them deeply involved in the process. Despite some students' frustration at the beginning, they continued the process and achieved good levels of writing performance, as shown in the data collection instruments.

### **Expansion of vocabulary spectrum, reduction syntax errors, improvement of writing content, organization and punctuation**

Through the feedback and the use of correction codes, students were able to improve the main components of their writing skills: lexis, syntax, content, organization, punctuation and mechanics. Students made corrections to their drafts through the symbols marked by the teacher which made them aware of their performance and improved their final texts as well. This was evident in the progress they had during the development of the project.

The strategies of the RT model directed the students to the enhancement of the aforementioned aspects considering that in the prediction stage students learned new words that they used in their own manuscripts. Besides, by questioning, the students could bolster the syntax of questions considered as the most difficult aspect, according to the results of the researcher's journal. Through the clarification strategy, they had the possibility to understand a written piece, to expand their vocabulary range and to enhance the syntax provided in the input. Lastly, through the summarizing strategy, the learners practiced what they had learnt by creating their own piece of writing.

### **Usefulness of the portfolios to assess writing**

Another finding to consider was the appropriateness of using portfolios because they engaged students in their own learning and made them participate actively in their process. Both the teacher and the students recognized this tool as effective in their growth. In addition, portfolios allowed for reflection, which led students to develop metacognition and to become aware of their own learning. Also, the assessment rubrics, which made part of the portfolios, were used by students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and by the researchers to get deeper insights of the students' needs.

### **Impact on the curriculum**

The results showed that cooperative learning, as a basis of RT, created a better scenario where students could learn more by negotiating meaning through social interaction, making decisions and reaching conclusions in most of the stages of the lesson, mainly in the summarizing section. Consequently,

working with peers created a positive effect since it strengthened the students' support to each other and developed commitment to complete the assignments. This also had an evident impact on the curriculum of the setting.

Finally, the RT model in the EFL scenario had students achieve more goals in their writing processes because they improved their vocabulary, attitudes and confidence. Such improvement was also noticeable in the language setting. RT was expected to increase students' writing skills, but it was not expected to have students respond so well in the implementation of the workshops. The findings discussed above lead to the following section in which conclusions and pedagogical implications are presented.

### **Conclusions**

After the implementation of this proposal under the RT model and the analyses of the data collected, the pertinent conclusions and pedagogical implications for future research are drawn so that English teachers, administrators, policy makers, and the academic community in general take them into account if they intend to enhance writing skills using this model.

### **Effectiveness of RT model on a public school**

RT model has been adapted and modified to suit the ESL students' needs and the present classroom setting. The general outcomes derived from all the data collection instruments and the analyses demonstrate that this method has a positive impact on students' writing since it improves this ability. However, the degree of the effectiveness of RT, depends on several factors such as teacher instruction and guidance, the degree of students' involvement in group discussion and individual student characteristics. Considering these features, the learners can be introduced to different types of tasks such as predicting, clarifying, questioning, summarizing, listing, brainstorming, clustering, comparing, sharing personal experiences, among others.

This methodology significantly increases the learners' confidence and enjoyment towards the learning of English; they can participate and share ideas and opinions in small groups which leads to cooperative learning. Therefore, the students have a better learning scenario in which interaction is fostered.

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### **Value of the portfolios**

An additional tool that facilitates the enhancement of writing skills under the RT model is students' portfolios. This is an adaptation to the model which works effectively along with RT because of its organized structure to confirm

the students' growth. Portfolios can be extremely valuable for encouraging students to evaluate their own work and enhance their writing confidence because they provide a means for both teachers and students to monitor progress based on the concept of writing as a process. Rubrics play an important role in the assessment of written production thanks to the provision of clear criteria.

### **Implications for the use of RT in the EFL classroom**

This study's pedagogical implications are directed to students, teachers, institutions, and educational policies in our country. The results show that the strategies implemented in this work of research facilitated the process of writing, their use can be suggested to reinforce EFL learners' writing and reading skills. The use of RT can be a great experience for students to explore an instructional activity in which teacher and students take turns having a dialogue regarding the different parts of the text to construct meaning (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) and as an interactive teaching approach and a cooperative learning to foster writing (Vygotsky, 1978). Besides, during the implementation of the study it was noticed that when using this model, there was an effective learning atmosphere.

The RT model can be used to emphasize the writing process, revising and giving feedback on students' writing which leads to a meaningful interaction between teachers and students. Another advantage of the RT model is its learner-centeredness nature that puts students in the center of the construction of the meaning they want to convey. Considering that students are the main characters of the learning process, the institutional policies should implement this kind of innovation and adaptations to teaching methods that impact the English teaching and the learning process as well. Due to these reasons, the researchers recommend adopting the RT model to positively impact the students' writing skills.

### **Challenges for future research**

As a final point, if the language teaching community replicates this study in contexts with comparable features, it could be positive because it offers more pedagogical and research knowledge by identifying the impact of RT model on English learning. Therefore, it would be very interesting to see the effect of RT model on the improvement of other skills (listening and speaking) for further research studies. In addition, other studies can be done to examine which specific strategies are more effective in the writing process.



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# Shaping Narrative Writing Skills Through Creating Picture Books<sup>1</sup>

Dando forma a las habilidades de escritura narrativa a través  
de la creación de libros ilustrados

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## Abstract

This research sets out to unveil the potential enrichment of initial narrative writing processes in a group of EFL 5th graders through the implementation of picture books as useful tools which can be used to shape the natural ability of telling an event or a sequence of events systematically of EFL students at this level. In this qualitative approach study, writing was regarded as a formal description of structured data which is outlined in the mind, and which has different cognitive stages and works with pre-established categories, as proposed by Flower and Hayes (2008); furthermore, the learning was contemplated from a genre-based approach in which recognizing the needs and proficiencies of the students was the major concern, and this was fueled and supported by the use of familiar routines and cyclical activities in social contexts during the writing process. After following up and analyzing the whole process 5 graders went through in terms of creating a narrative story embodied in the form and principles of a picture book, it was determined that thanks to the use of illustrations, and words students were able to tell simple but meaningful and creative stories about characters (mostly creatures) they used as the protagonists in their picture books. Equally, it was found that the habitual written practices they were exposed to, contributed to a significant extent, to the enhancement of basic narrative writing skills as they were able to express their view of reality in a concrete and simple form, place their basic grammar and lexicon to the service of the narrations they were trying to render and most importantly, they displayed a better capacity of telling an event or a sequence of events systematically.

**Key words:** writing process; picture book; narrative writing; genre-based approach.

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### Resumen

Esta investigación se propone asistir al enriquecimiento del proceso de escritura narrativa de estudiantes de inglés de 5° grado, a través de la implementación de libros álbumes como herramientas útiles que pueden emplearse para modelar la habilidad natural que tienen los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera medio para contar un evento o secuencia de eventos sistemáticamente en este nivel. Para alcanzar éste objetivo, fue necesario entender la escritura como una descripción formal de datos estructurados la cual es esbozada en la mente y que tiene diferentes etapas cognitivas y trabaja con categorías preestablecidas, como lo propuso Flower y Hayes (2008); de igual manera, el aprendizaje fue contemplado bajo un enfoque basado en el género literario donde el reconocimiento de las necesidades y habilidades de los estudiantes fue la principal preocupación, lo que fue soportado por medio de rutinas familiares y actividades cíclicas en un contexto social. Después de analizar el proceso total que experimentaron los estudiantes de grado quinto en términos de la creación de una historia narrativa plasmada en la forma y los principios de un libro álbum, se pudo determinar que gracias a las ilustraciones y palabras, los estudiantes pudieron narrar historias simples pero significativas y creativas acerca de personajes (criaturas en su mayoría) que usaron como los personajes principales de sus libro álbum. De igual manera, se encontró que las prácticas habituales de escritura ellos a las que estaban expuestos, contribuyeron de manera importante a moldear sus habilidades narrativas básicas al escribir, en tanto que fueron capaces de expresar su visión de realidad en una forma concreta y simple, colocando su gramática y vocabulario básico al servicio de las narraciones que ellos querían crear y sobre todo, mostraron una mejor capacidad para narrar un evento o secuencia de eventos de manera sistemática por medio de una contextualización, un clímax y un final.

*Palabras clave:* proceso de escritura; libro álbum; escritura narrativa; enfoque basado en el género literario.

### Resumo

Esta pesquisa se propõe assistir ao enriquecimento do processo de escritura narrativa de estudantes de inglês de 4ª série, através da implementação de livros álbuns como ferramentas úteis que possam empregar-se para modelar a habilidade natural que os estudantes de inglês têm como língua estrangeira média para contar um evento ou sequência de eventos sistematicamente neste nível. Para alcançar este objetivo, foi necessário entender a escritura como uma descrição formal de dados estruturados a qual é esboçada na mente e que tem diferentes etapas cognitivas e trabalha com categorias pré-estabelecidas, como o propôs Flower e Hayes (2008); de igual maneira, a aprendizagem foi contemplada sob um enfoque baseado no gênero literário onde o reconhecimento das necessidades e habilidades dos estudantes foram a principal preocupação, o que foi suportado por meio de rotinas familiares e atividades cíclicas em um contexto social. Depois de analisar o processo total que experimentaram os estudantes de quarta série em termos da criação de uma história narrativa plasmada na forma e os princípios de um livro álbum, pôde-se determinar que graças às ilustrações e palavras, os estudantes puderam narrar histórias simples, mas significativas e criativas sobre as personagens (criaturas na sua maioria) que usaram como as personagens principais do seu livro

álbum. Da mesma forma, encontrou-se que as práticas habituais de escritura às quais eles estavam expostos, contribuíram de maneira importante a moldar suas habilidades narrativas básicas ao escrever, pelo que foram capazes de expressar sua visão de realidade em uma forma concreta e simples, colocando sua gramática e vocabulário básico ao serviço das narrações que eles queriam criar e principalmente, mostraram uma melhor capacidade para narrar o evento ou sequência de eventos de maneira sistemática por meio de uma contextualização, um clímax e um final.

*Palavras chave:* processo de escritura; libro álbum; escritura narrativa; enfoque baseado no gênero literário.

## Introduction

Nowadays, many children from Colombia deal with problems of writing, not only in their native language but also in a foreign language as English. According to the Ministry of Education in Colombia, all students who are in 4th and 5th grade should be able to write in their EFL class about topics of their interest, make simple descriptions and narrations based on a sequence of images, describe general characteristics about people they are acquainted with, link phrases and sentences using connectors, create short stories expressing their own feelings and preferences, use accurate structures and grammatical patterns of language, double-check the spelling of common words, and make up stories (MEN, 2006), yet students of these grades do not fulfill these writing standards; this has been a constant problem because they do not develop this ability in a proper way at school, and as a consequence they carry on low writing performances and difficulties to other grades.

Thanks to the information collected through the different types of data collection techniques (six-month-observational phase field notes, surveys, and diagnostic test), it was possible to highlight that the preferences of fifth graders under study were focused on reading, listening and speaking in English as a foreign language, which is worth remarking. Nevertheless, this trend showed to us as researchers, that they did not display concern or interest in relation to the development of writing skill which is as important as the other three skills because it is essential in order for them to step into the literary world.

This above-mentioned lack of interest was reflected upon the results students obtained on the written diagnostic section they were administered, in which they were expected to look at a simple picture and write what they understood of it. Almost half of the students did not write a single word, over 25% of them wrote some simple sentences with many spelling mistakes or syntax errors, 16% described the picture very well but in Spanish and consequently, did not follow the instruction about using English to perform the task and just nearly 9% of them wrote some sentences that revealed their having fulfilled the task.

As researchers, we were always aware of the fact that this writing issue was not only evident in their EFL class but also in their Spanish class because for them it was particularly daunting to write a good piece of writing or paragraph in their mother tongue. Melgarejo (2010) stresses out this idea explaining that primary school students in our country do not write good texts in Spanish because they do not have solid grammar structures or understanding of its syntax; however, we are also of the opinion that primary school students may feel frustrated when they to face a written task as they are not familiar with the formats or the assignment that have to do, they do not have the experience to set goals or to think about the potential audience and most importantly, they are not used to writing something as derived from a process.

We were aware as well that asking students to write in a short description or narrative in English about a picture might be hard for them because syntactically the two languages in question (Spanish and English) are very different, and also because they do not have a referent in their mother tongue to start writing in another language. Marble (2012) provides us with pertinent insight on this situation when he says:

Seeing as how reading and writing are skills which are difficult for emergent students to learn, just imagine if a child is not fluent with the English language. Students whose second language is English have a harder time comprehending texts and composing their own written texts” (p. 29).

Despite all the drawbacks and apparently unsatisfactory scenario, we wanted to embrace a change in methodology to engage students into writing simple narratives where they could tell us and their peers about events, sequence of events, familiar routines and cyclical situations without feeling frustrated and held back by their grammar, vocabulary or syntactical errors. In this respect, we agreed with the postulate of Carter et al. (1998) who think that “although some students are not motivated to write, it is apparent that teachers need to change instructional methodologies to increase their students’ written language skills” (p. 10).

Since both of us as researchers had previous research and academic experience revolving around the implementation of storytelling techniques and particularly of the use of picture book to develop communicative skills, we decided to conduct this qualitative study to make use of this tool to shape fifth graders narrative skills and to see whether their interest in this important language skill could be improved by means of picture books (Yoga, 2013).

We acknowledge that the use of pictures books for writing has been widely documented in the field of Spanish as mother tongue by some authors in Colombia such as Triana (2017), who used them to improve guided writing in second grade; Camacho (2016), who attempted to improve fourth graders ‘writing skills through the creation of a picture book; Parra and Salazar (2015), who looked to find out whether constructing a picture book would contribute to strengthening written production of third graders and Melo (2013), who used picture books as spatially integrated multimodal texts to improve written production in third graders. After reading the outcomes of these important works, we think that the study we are reporting here might be revealing in that it may shed some initial light onto the way primary school students under study could relate through the progressive use of picture books to the written tasks they were assigned (narratives stories), enriching not only their lexical repertoire and grammar structures in English as a foreign language but more importantly using their imagination to describe and tell a narrative about their most immediate reality.



## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Writing as an English Skill**

In this study, in line with Nunan's definition (1991), we regard writing as a very complex language skill which is highly cognitive, and one which entails not only controlling multiple aspects such as contents, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling and letter formation but also structuring and integrating information into cohesive and coherent paragraph and text.

To us, writing should not be overlooked as a skill which is merely product- conducive but process-oriented. Upon the recognition of writing as a skill, it is important to concentrate on the writing process before aiming to obtain a particular product because writing is a mental process that has different cognitive stages as stated by Flower and Hayes (2008), which means that these cognitive processes could be beneficial for tracing strategies used by writers. Therefore, while trying to understand the writing process, it is relevant to define the main elements or sub-stages that constitute such process that is to say planning, retrieving information, re-viewing, among others.

Accordingly, Flower and Hayes (2008) claim that the first step in the cognitive writing process refers to the context as being the topic for developing the text in later attempts; the second property is about the previous knowledge that the person makes use of and the drafting of the text in order to meet the expectations of a hypothetical audience; and the third consists of the conscious process of self-regulation in the act of writing starting with the planning, reviewing, correcting, etc. Thus, for this study we considered consider writing not only as the sequence of stages to create a product, but also the cognitive process involved in the creation of the piece of work (narratives).

We would like to pinpoint the fact that for the target population, writing in English represented a great challenge, as in principle many of them were not well prepared to undertake because of the unfamiliar and complex discourse patterns that English posed. Thus, teacher guidance was necessary to help students to set strategies, plan the structure of the text, and find information to develop the ideas and topics as well as modify and reorganize them when checking the structure and grammar of the text, fulfill the task of telling an event and tell a simple but coherent and meaningful narratives to their peers in written.

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### **Narrative Writing**

According to the Alabama Department of Archives & History (2009) narrative writing consists in recounting as neatly as possible a series of actions that transpire in a given period of time, to a reader who is expected to grasp

the happenings and to follow the sequence of events communicated in the storytelling. Therefore, one with the intention of narrating a story must develop the proper skills to present tales and stories, and become aware of the structured description of information that involves procuring a correct writing schema. Moreover, self-expression and creativity are paramount of the narrative process in writing; yet, Schaefer (2001) agrees with the fact of placing the expressiveness of the writer in the forefront, but she also states that teachers must lead students into developing critical skills for them to use the language to convey their ideas and viewpoints. Which is why, she suggests steps for guiding students into communicating their thoughts by using conventions of language to communicate meaning and employing strategies to write coherent stories with strong characters.

In this fashion, there is more to narrative writing than just self-expressions because this process demands practice in a conscious way, where the writer must keep in mind the techniques of “prewriting, drafting, and revising” (Brown, 2009, p. 348), for the technique of prewriting promotes the generation of ideas, and the technique of drafting and revising encourage the writing into free writing and monitoring their own writing process, respectively. Thus, narrative writing is a process that involves the participation of teachers and students, where the students make use of the motivation of expressing themselves through writing as their primary tool, and the teacher provides the necessary knowledge to accomplish the writing endeavor.

As for the underlying pattern that we should take into account when writing narrative stories, Southall (2001, p.p.3-4) claims that we commonly find two types: the one that revolves around a problem or struggle the main character is going through and tries to find its most likely solution (Character-Problem-Solution Narrative) and the other one where the character tells the story in first person and speaks of an appealing and attention-grabbing experience, providing descriptions and details (Personal Experience Narrative). In this study, fifth graders had the chance to choose the pattern they felt more comfortable with.

### **Descriptions in Narrations**

Description is a fundamental element in a text even when it includes images as in the case of picture books since this is not only limited to describing the features or physical attributes of a person, animal or object, a description can go beyond. Thanks to this, attitudes, behaviors and internal characteristics of the characters in a story could be found. There is not possible story in which description is not a part of. Agreeing with Murray and Hughes (2008), describing processes have place in all forms of academic documents: in scientific and technical writing, in research reports, in expository papers,

and formal essays. Certainly, a well-written paper must include descriptions because they allow readers to make rich images of what is intended to be exposed.

Besides, readers are able to make inferences of what is being read based on their life experiences that allow them to create a concrete image and enrich the description in the text. In this sense, Zwaan (1986) concurs with the idea of the “conceptual breakfast” proposed by Grass, given that when a reader pictures in their mind an image of a breakfast scene, but certain reader will picture the image of a table with butter and jam on it because the reader is inferring what was not mentioned in the text). Thus, descriptions in the text give the reader the possibility to ground the narration and shape it into an image that fits the frame of their previous knowledge or even contextualize it in order to make it closer to their reality.

One tool where descriptions are enriched and are abundant is precisely picture books. It is important to clarify that descriptions do not have to be made in a complex way, sometimes a couple of adjectives to refer to sizes or colors will do, whereas in other cases by mentioning a set of nouns, we can get an idea what a place looks like, as it happens when we describe a what we find in a room. We will refer in the following entry to picture books and how they were conceived of in this study.

### **Pictures Books as a Pedagogical Tool**

Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) affirm that picture books lean on being plot-oriented instead of being character-oriented; but this does not mean that characters in a story are irrelevant or that they do not display a distinctive personality, on the contrary, picture books permit a different type of characterization where the pictures and the words complement each other or even contradict themselves. The authors also say that the visual description in picture books is somewhat problematic given that some human qualities are difficult to display through illustrations such as bravery or intelligence; the opposite happens when it is necessary to reveal the characters’ emotions and attitudes toward certain situations, which means that physical description depends to a large degree, on the illustrator’s ability, who can, with great precision, convey information about appearance that would take many words to communicate in much reading time. Conversely, physiological descriptions that can be indicated in pictures need the accuracy of words to depict complex emotion and motivation.

Additionally, these authors point out that in picture books the narration has no space to any interpretation or point of view of the reader, which means that the dialog and illustrations convey straightforward ideas as the central

feature of this genre. There are two types of illustration: line drawing and full color presentations being both symmetrical. Images also bring the opportunity to communicate two aspects in the story through visual signs: causality and temporality. In terms of time, this has to be inferred as this is shown through the use of some elements that indicate the course of time, for example, clocks on the walls or calendars, sunsets and sunrises. Nevertheless, the dialogs help to complete the information relating to over time creating a connection between the images and relevant moments in the text. And causality is shown through images and text when it is well intertwined. These insight became valid and useful in our study as students were encouraged to always keep a narrative sequence or plot while talking about characters and they were reminded to include images that contributed to making time, cause, space, attitude, etc more understandable.

## Methodology

### Type of research

The present study is based on the principles of action research stated by Burns (2010), which suggest a self-reflective, critical and systematic approach to exploring the teaching context, so the researcher can identify a teaching problem and work on an efficient and effective solution. As written by her, there are four steps to take when conducting a research work to pinpoint teaching problems in a classroom: *planning*, to “identify a problem or issue and develop a plan of action in order to bring about improvements in a specific area of the research context” (p. 8); to achieve this, we administered a diagnostic test and a survey to the previous head teacher, *action*, which “involves some deliberate interventions into your teaching situation that you put into action over an agreed period of time” (p. 8); we decided to implement the first sections using picture books to see students’ reactions and writing sensitization process, *observation*, when “observing systematically the effects of the action and documenting the context, action and opinions of those involved” (p. 8); we carried out a rigorous observation process that lasted half a year and then we understood that observation had to be done throughout all phases of the project, and *reflection*, to “reflect on, evaluate and describe the effects of the action in order to make sense of what has happened and to understand the issue (...) explored more clearly” (p. 8). We reflected constantly and non-stoppedly on the effects that the use of picture books might have on student’s narrative skills and on their contribution to describing meaningful situations.

### Data collection instruments and procedures

The present research started with the observation of 5<sup>th</sup> grade students at a primary public school in Bogotá in order to identify the struggles they had when using English as a foreign language in terms of communication and simple expression of events or situations that happened in their most immediate surroundings. Through the use of several instruments (survey to head teacher, comprehensive diagnostic test and field notes), it was possible to pinpoint the most common and persistent difficulties that these students exhibited, being those difficulties particularly related to writing: fifth graders did not possess the necessary basic written skills to tell or narrate a simple story represented in a picture. They could write ideas about the picture but in their mother tongue, that is to say Spanish. With this concern in mind, we set the following goal as the one to reach in our study: to make fifth graders write simple narrative stories related to their context by using picture books as tools and despite their not so proficient grammar, lexicon and writing skills.

To carry out data analysis, it was necessary to work on the microanalysis suggested by (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Patton, 2002) that implies to read line by line all the raw data that were collected during the implementation of the research, to make an in- interpretation; after reading this, the researchers established a way to join the information of the data into categories. It was important to pay attention to the words the students tended to say. The next step was to find recurrent regularities through the data (Patton, 2002) in order to clarify the categories taken from them by the researcher. Then, the researchers were able to choose pertinent categories and sub-categories according to the information given by the data (Freeman, 1998). In regards to the surveys, they were analyzed with a similar system. The first step was to count the answers of the *yes or no* questions to set the patterns and the variations. Following, the open-end questions were checked one by one paying specific attention to the similar answers and the details of the reasons given. To make the information valid, the researchers took into account the triangulation process, which implied having at least three data instruments such as survey, document collection, and field notes. On the one hand, a comparison between instruments was made to get onto the categories and subcategories that were chosen, and on the other hand, the information was made real by taking samples of the instruments, giving validity to those categories and subcategories (Freeman, 1998, p. 102).

Finally, the learning issue was singled out; it was necessary to review the theoretical background to establish a suitable course of action to help students overcome these writing needs. Therefore, according to the learning style of students the approach that successfully worked for them was the *genre-based* and so, the lesson planning followed the next structure: building the context, modeling the text, joint construction of the text and independent construction of the text.

## Participants

Regarding participants, the target population of this study was made up of 21 males and 11 females with an average age ranging from 9 to 10 years old. Concerning the cognitive aspect of students, the students seemed to have some difficulties in output skills because what they knew in terms of language was based on the process of repetition. Based on the diagnostic test authored by the teacher-researchers, and adapted from MYELT which is a platform created by the National Geographic, fifth graders were ranked in A1 level in most of the skills as established by the Common European Framework (2015.).

In relation to speaking, the diagnostic test was divided into two groups, spoken interaction and spoken production; for the first group, the students could interact in a simple way provided the other person was prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help to formulate what [tried] to say, they could ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics. However, for the second, the students were not able to use simple phrases and sentences where they live and people they know, nor they were able to “write a short, simple postcard and fill in forms with personal details” for whatever reason it was.

When the students had to work on the writing part which consisted in looking at a picture and writing what they understood of it, 46,8% of the students did not write a single word, 28,1% wrote some sentences with many spelling mistakes or syntax errors, 16,2% of the students wrote sentences in Spanish that described the picture but did not follow the instruction and just 8,9% of the students wrote some sentences that followed the task. Regarding the grammar and vocabulary sections that are considered a part of writing production, the results were very much alike to those of the writing part.

In the listening section, the students had to listen to a recording about contractions of pronouns and verb to be vs possessive pronouns and select the correct words to complete five sentences, 25% of the students did not mark any answer, and 37,5% of them made up to 2 mistakes, and 37,5% got all of the answer right. In the reading section, all of the students showed a good understanding of the article which is why they selected the correct answers of the questions relating to the text, the questions were multiple choice-one-answers.

All in all, it was possible to ascertain that the skill that needed to be addressed the most was the writing skill because the students’ performance was below the average, portraying a 74,9% of deficiency, and the lack of vocabulary and grammar structures could make relevant the choice of enhancing or expediting their writing production in very basic forms, such as writing postcards, filling in registrations or filling out forms.

## Findings

The collected data in this research was analyzed following the principles of the *grounded theory* proposed by Freeman (1998), the idea of using this analysis approach was to find out the correlation between all the data we collected and the usage of picture books as a strategy to approximate students to writing in a foreign language. Hence, we assert that our research might be useful to gain insights in aspects such as language relationships, goal-based learning strategies, comprehensible meaning targeting and personal expression in language learning because by creating personal pieces of work in the form of picture books, students account for the learning of English as a foreign language and at the same time, they can integrate the content knowledge provided in the classroom with the communicative endeavor of getting messages across in a real context, based on meaningful personal experiences .

Like so, the categories that account for each one of the aforementioned aspects were clustered around the question “How might 5th grade EFL students in IED Domingo Faustino Sarmiento narrative writing skills be shaped through creating picture books?”. The categories that emerged were labeled as performing skills to accomplish goals, input effectiveness and self-expression. Now, we proceed to elaborate in depth the findings of our research.

### Performing Skills to Accomplish Goals

This category is related to the teaching and learning structure named goal-based scenarios (GBSs) developed by Schank, Berman and Macpherson (2009), which advocates for a learning-by-doing strategy through which students engage in practices that focus on a specific skill, where the content knowledge is the means for them to accomplish what they have set out. In this GBS simulation, the teacher only assists students in making the content knowledge relevant for them to achieve their goals and also, s/he provides feedback so that the students remember and internalize what they were taught or assisted on. In relation to this, the goal that students were supposed to achieve was to create simple but meaningful written narratives embodied in a picture book; thus, this category is elucidated in the production of a piece of work and in turn, the creating process and the final product show the disposition of students to complete tasks for reasons such as sense of fulfillment or teacher encouragement. The following are the exhibits for supporting the current category through triangulating the data obtained:



50	When the teacher went out of the class she asked the five students to make	At first, the students did not talk too much but in a matter of
51	the expression they wanted to transmit in their pictures. The students	seconds they felt confident enough to do it because they
52	returned to the classroom as soon as they made the pictures. They went back	realized that they could use the resources provided by the
53	to their seats and the teacher started showing the pictures to the rest of the	teacher on the whiteboard.
54	class. At the beginning, the students were laughing as they found funny the	The students did an excellent job; they were a little bit nervous
55	images; then they started guessing using the vocabulary given on the board.	but they felt comfortable to speak in English until the very end.
56		<i>Performing Skills to accomplish goals</i> (Shank & Berman &
57		Macpherson, 2009, p. 164).

Figure 5. Sample Two. Field Note, March 2017.

<p>3. Do you think that having used the picture book in class helped to improve your skills in English writing</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> a. yes      c. in a certain degree</p> <p>b. no</p>	<p>3. Do you think that having used the picture book in class helped to improve your skills in English writing</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> a. yes      c. in a certain degree</p> <p>b. no</p>
--	--

Figure 6. Survey Number Two, October 2017.

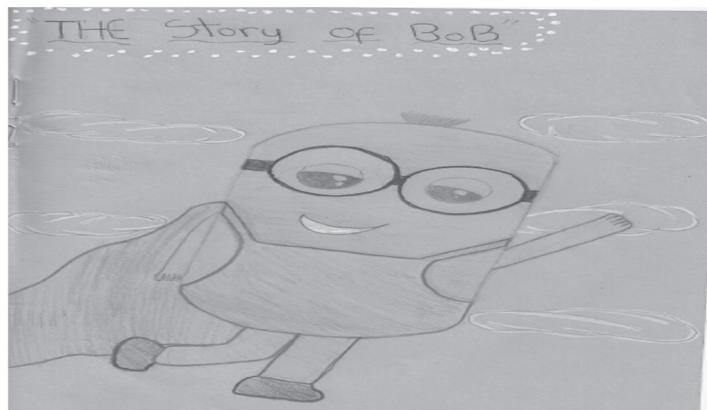


Figure 7. Artifact Number Two, May 2017.

In the three samples shown above, the goal that students were supposed to achieve was the creation and authoring of a personal picture book by performing a task focusing on writing skills; thus, this category of performing skills to accomplish goals is elucidated in the production of a piece of work and in turn, the survey throws light on using the picture book as a tool for improving the writing skills of students as in the title of the cover page of the picture



book entitled “the Story of Bob”, where the author exhibits understanding of the basic use of the definite article which implies articulation with the entity later mentioned in the same sentence (in this case, Bob), or even in the use of the preposition that expresses belonging to the entity as something he has or possesses, rather than using the possessive noun (Bob’s story), making the title sound elaborate and appropriate for the English level students are placed; at the same time, the field note shows the disposition of students to complete tasks for reasons such as sense of fulfillment or teacher encouragement, for the students realization of process as a means of progress.

There was a sub-category that emerged from the previous category and we named it *Spoken and Written Modes of Meaning*. Such subcategory tended to unveil and display different kinds of complexity; both spoken and written modes were progressively more complex in their own way. On the one hand, written language tended to be lexically dense, but grammatically simple; spoken language tends to be grammatically intricate, but lexically sparse” (p. 61) which was mentioned by Halliday (2002); in this regard, the degree of complexity of these types of operations of communicating (spoken) or storing (written) information became higher when students tried to mix the two modes of meaning when facing a specific task that implied selecting one communicative skill or the other; consequently, for this research the students were guided mostly to identify lexical mistakes rather than correcting grammar inadequacies through a process of putting into practice the content knowledge provided by the teacher in a self-led way that was undertaken in the independent construction of the text stage of the lesson planning because “the lexical density [in the written mode of meaning] is the proportion of lexical items (content words) to the total discourse” (Halliday, 2002, p. 56), reason why one of the most recurrent issues while creating the picture books in our attempt to shape narrative writing skills was that students struggled to broaden their lexicon.

Bearing the aforementioned issue in mind, we decided every lesson planning should include a modeling and independent stage, where the teacher and the students had specific duties to be carried out, but they could partake in each stage as subjects of exemplification or active subjects of the learning process (students) and subject of explanation and source of knowledge (teacher) instead of passive subject who merely offered guidance and advice.

Now, with the intention of supporting what was stated above, here are the corresponding samples for the triangulation of the information:

26	The teacher hung some sentences expressing daily routine on the right side	This activity seemed to be really challenging for the students
27	of the board and on the left some pictures showing some people and animals	perhaps they were confused as they could not find any relation
28	doing different activities. The teacher called one person at random and asked	between the written sentences and the images. Some students
29	him to select one number from 1 to 32, the teachers checked the roster and	could accomplish their sentences but only when the teacher
30	checked the name that corresponded to the number selected, and that student	read the sentences aloud. This shows that students still have a
31	had to go to the board and select one sentence and paste it with the picture	degree of conflict making the relation between written English
32	that matched.	and spoken English. <i>Spoken and written modes of meaning.</i>
33		Halliday, M. A. K. (2002)

Modeling the text		
Activity 1: The teacher is going to explain the communicative function as well as the structure of adjectives to describe feelings and emotions on the board. First, the teacher explains the purpose of using these types of adjectives to narrate and to complement information in images; second, the teacher is going to explain the simple present with verb to be to use adjectives and the teacher can ask for the help of students to contribute in the exemplification of the topic. Activity 2: The teacher is going to show flashcards with some faces on them and students are going to guess how those people are feeling. After they give the right answer they have to mimic the face from the picture to show the same emotion. <b>Alternative activity:</b> the teacher is going to pick 5 students to make pictures of their faces showing different feelings. For this activity a tablet is going to be used to show the rest of the class. A poster with the vocabulary needed is going to be hung on the whiteboard.	All students	30 mins

Independent construction of the text		
The students are going to create the four draft of their own picture book, in this occasion the teacher is going to hand out students pieces of paper with two panels in which students have to draw on the right panel the antagonist of their stories. On the left side they have to mention the physical characteristics of this character. Students can check their previous drafts as there are many different ideas to be used for this activity.	All students	25 Mins.

Figure 8. Sample Three. Field Note, April 2017.

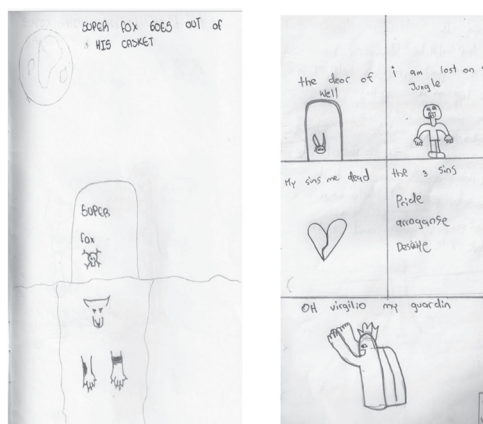


Figure 9. Artifact Number Three, June 2017.

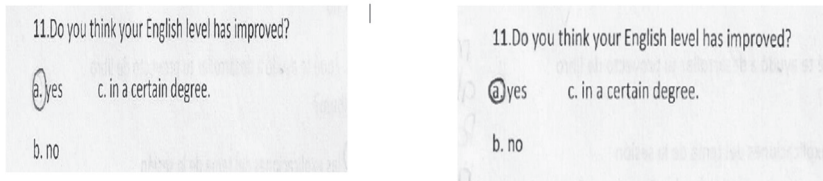


Figure 10. Survey Number Two, October 2017.

The field note referenced above revealed that students had some struggles relating the spoken English with written English. As it was exposed in this sub-category, this happened because of the difficulty that each skill entailed. Nevertheless, students were gradually integrating the vocabulary taught in the classroom by the teacher-researcher depending on what they needed to express in their productions as it is evidenced in the sentence “Super fox goes out of his casket” where the student chooses the word “casket” instead of “coffin” because the first was more appealing to him, even though the two would have served the same purpose. Like so, the lesson planning fragments illustrate the classrooms routines that helped students develop a writing habit perceived as the artistic conduit for students to express their ideas in a simple way, given that language learning process was centered on the making of a written piece of work. Additionally, 75% of students considered that their English level improved with every lesson and activity carried out in the classroom which was asked in 10th question of the survey. The result of the surveys is highly subjective indeed, the number of well-designed picture books created along the implementation of this research project are a proof that students had become more competent in the written aspect of the language considering that, they had had to face many learning obstacles due to the limited exposition to the language.

### Self-Expression

According to Tudor (2000) self-expression is part of the central purposes in language. Likewise, personal expression is a vital element of language use and “the ‘opening up’ of a course to at least some degree of self-expression can help learners find a sense of personal meaningfulness in their language study” (p. 61). In this sense, the lack of any extent of self-expression can lead students to perceive the classroom as something alien to their realities and lives. Therefore, students will not have the possibility to engage in significant learning processes. That is why:

[Self-expression] is one of the main functions of language, and it would therefore be rather strange if it had not found a place to in mainstream

language teaching. Indeed, the way in which this aspect of language is dealt with a course can play a significant role in the classroom dynamics. (p. 68)

In this fashion, the next set of artifacts and excerpts evidence the category of self-expression in students' written pieces:

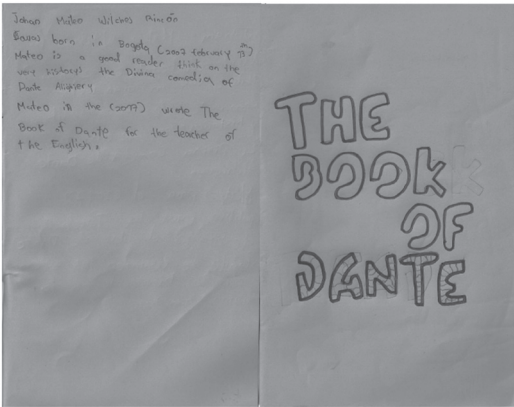


Figure 14. Artifact Number Five, September 2017.

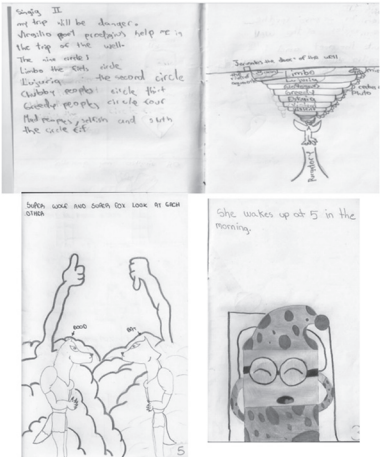


Figure 15. Artifact Number Six, September 2017.

8. What is the origin of your idea for the picture book?

a. from television

b. from a book

☒ c. from my own imagination.

9. Does the protagonist of your story represents you in any way?

☒ a. yes      c. in some aspects.

b. no

Figure 16. Survey Number Two, October 2017.

8	The teacher called two students who were in charge of the special room	Some students were amazed by the kind of art the picture book
9	which is named "English Immersion" she asked them to open it because she	had, they enjoyed finding different objects that were hidden in
10	had something special to show them. When the class was focused and	the images, they could find the relation these objects and
11	organized in the Immersion room the teacher played a video that narrated	shapes have with some classic story, for instance, Student 14
12	the picture book called <i>The Tunnel</i> written by Anthony Browne, as soon as	said "Teacher esa es la cabaña y el lobo de la <i>Caperucita Roja</i> ,
13	the story ended the teacher showed again the images of the story and she	how do you say that in English" the teacher said " <i>little red</i>
14	asked students some sort of question regarding the structure of it: how did	<i>riding hood</i> " so some students were really enthusiastic with
15	the story begin, who were the main characters in the story?, what was the	this activity. When the teacher was asking for the story itself
16	conflict in the story? What was the most exciting moment (climax) of the	students were confused this might happen because they were
17	story? What happened after the two siblings left the forest? (Falling action)	were focused on the images hidden and not in the story so the
18	how did the story end? (ending) What was theme of the story? Where did	teacher has to play the story again and after that they could
19	the story take place? (Setting).	answer the question purposed by her. <i>Self-expression</i> (Tudor)
20		

Figure 17. Survey Number Two, October 2017

As such, the texts written by the student are proof of the impact that *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri had on his life because it is not by chance that the student decided to shape his picture book according to this literary master piece and use its contents as the source of his inspiration and above all, to regard himself as a "good reader". Therefore, in the process of creating a narrative document each student felt the need to materialize their inner thoughts and realize the urges that drove them, so the proposal of this research was a suitable conduit for them to express what at first, they only thought could be done in Spanish or by people with literary expertise. Thus, not only "The Book of Dante" is proof of the significance of this research project to students, but every single piece of work has become a concrete personal creation that includes information related to their experiences, artistic desires and hopes for the future. In this way, students have had the opportunity to narrate a fictional story that places them as the main character of their stories for each one of

them want to be the superhero that saves the day and all the people admire, thanks to their prowess and morally-correct ways, that is why, it is possible to know that the writer of the story “The Story of Bob” is a girl because of the use of the personal pronoun “she” that was used to refer to Bob.

### Conclusions

In the first place, it is worth remarking that throughout this research there was a lingering hope that narrative writing skills could be shaped by creating picture books, particularly of the fictional type, in the creation of such books illustrations and words were equally important given that both helped students to narrate their stories. In general terms, students used illustrations as well as words to situate narratively speaking, the creatures they chose as the protagonists of their picture books. The execution of this literary genre aimed to enhance writing skills through habitual practices guided by the teacher-researcher.

In line with what was stated above, it is possible to ascertain that having implemented this type of literary devices helped students relate to the writing task and enrich their repertoire and grammar structures in English as a foreign language, as it happened in the use of words such as “casket” or “chamber”; as can be evidenced in terms of subject-verb agreement in the utterance “*super wolf and super fox look at each other*” or in “she wakes up at 5 in the morning”.

As for our attempt to mold students’ capacity of telling an event or a sequence of events systematically, it can be said that there was an important progress in this respect as it can be seen in the story “The Super Wolf and Fox”, where the author opted to begin by contextualizing the wealthy origin of *Super Wolf* and the poor provenance of *Super Fox*, decided to climax with the clash of the hero with his antagonist and chose to conclude with the coming to terms between the two characters. Broadly talking, the final written outcomes were satisfactory as students evidenced a gradual upgrade in their writing performance, which came to be little by little as the they got used to the classroom tasks that focused on building vocabulary, and the logical and chronological sequence of narrating a story, and finally, the internalization of abstract notions such as first, second and third persons in singular and plural forms.

According to the main objective of this research which was to analyze the students’ EFL writing skills when narrating simple stories through the use of picture books, the writing process was the central axis of this research, so the expected impact of implementing picture books was accomplished as this had a positive and meaningful effect on students’ writing process in a foreign language. This contributed to the understanding of written language in order

to give students the opportunity to express their view of reality in a concrete form.

As such, in order to characterize students' understanding of the stories told in picture books this research worked on the development of specific stages laid out in the lesson planning that aimed to allow students to employ the vocabulary and grammar structures exposed in the reading aloud of the pictures books, and at the end of every session they had to include the content knowledge into their own pieces of work, so the learning of the topics was made clear in a written form. In this way, the outcome of this specific objective was successfully achieved for the input provided in the lessons was evidenced in written materials that each student created to make the output tangible.

Similarly, to determine the influence of this (picture books) new genre of literature in fostering meaningful writing processes the researchers measured the suitability of the tool selected for this research, according to the degree of motivation and participation in class displayed by the students during the lessons which was positively accepted, as it became the means for the children to materialize their ideas and to express their individuality through graphics and words meant to communicate.

Finally, the researchers made use of different strategies to examine writing processes based on the creation of picture books, such as creating a correction-code based on the emoji system used to express ideas or emotions because students were more likely to understand the mistake and correct it through their own means; another strategy was the use of drafts for the students to polish up the final version of their own picture books, so they had the possibility to modify the stories narrated as many times as they needed, or until they felt satisfied with the development of the pieces of writing.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The pedagogical intervention of this research aimed to helping students confront writing as a means to communicate thoughts and ideas, besides assisting in the fostering of writing skills in a foreign language. In this manner, this research was expected to have a positive and meaningful impact on teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. This implies understanding and assimilating writing processes in order to communicate and to transmit ideas in a concrete form, so the most important aspect of written language is the capacity to surmount the passing of time and to turn the abstract of fancies into the concrete of realia. Therefore, teachers should focus on what the students want to say, so the process becomes the central axis of teaching. Thus, teachers should support and understand students' needs and interests through engaging in and accompanying their own learning process.



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# The Influence of Video Games on Vocabulary Acquisition in a Group of Students from the BA in English Teaching<sup>1</sup>

La influencia de los video juegos en la adquisición de vocabulario en un grupo de estudiantes de la licenciatura en inglés

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Universidad del Tolima, Colombia

## Abstract

This article is the product of an Action Research study that aimed at demonstrating the effects of videogames on vocabulary acquisition in a group of 15 students from 8th semester of the program of B.A in English of the University of Tolima. The analysis of results, gathered by vocabulary tests and students and teacher's journals, showed that the participants could acquire a considerable amount of vocabulary. The experience enhanced the participants' engagement and interactions inside and outside the class. The study allowed the creation of categories de palabras that may serve as a base for further research and implementation in the classroom. Video games seem to be a new trend brought for technology for purposes of pleasure and they have been proved in the educational field as a possible learning mediation, and they will be soon replaced by new devices that could not be considered as an alternative to learn.

*Keywords:* Videogames; Game-based Learning; Vocabulary Acquisition; EFL

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### Resumen

El presente artículo es el producto de un estudio basado en Investigación acción, el cual tenía como objetivo demostrar los efectos de los video juegos en la adquisición de vocabulario, en un grupo de 15 estudiantes de octavo semestre de la Licenciatura en inglés de la Universidad del Tolima. El análisis de los resultados, obtenidos por medio de exámenes de vocabulario y diarios del docente y de los estudiantes, mostraron que los participantes pudieron adquirir una cantidad considerable de vocabulario. La experiencia activó el interés y la interacción de los estudiantes dentro y fuera del aula. El estudio posibilitó la creación de categorías de palabras, que pueden servir como base para futuros estudios y para la implementación de la estrategia en el aula de clase. Los video juegos parecen ser una nueva tendencia que introdujo la tecnología con propósitos de diversión, pero que pronto se convirtió en una posible mediación pedagógica, la cual muy seguramente será reemplazada por nuevos dispositivos que hoy no se consideran como opción de aprendizaje.

*Palabras claves:* Videojuegos; Aprendizaje basado en juegos; Adquisición de vocabulario; EFL

### Resumo

O presente artigo é o produto de um estudo baseado em Pesquisa ação, o qual tinha como objetivo demonstrar os efeitos dos videojogos na aquisição de vocabulário, em um grupo de 15 estudantes de oitavo semestre da Licenciatura em inglês da Universidade do Tolima. A análise dos resultados, obtida por meio de provas de vocabulário e diários do docente e dos estudantes, mostrou que os participantes puderam adquirir uma quantidade considerável de vocabulário. A experiência ativou o interesse e a interação dos estudantes dentro e fora da aula. O estudo possibilitou a criação de categorias de palavras, que podem servir como base para futuros estudos e para a implementação da estratégia na sala de aula. Os videojogos parecem ser uma nova tendência que introduziu a tecnologia com propósitos de diversão, mas que breve se converteu em uma possível mediação pedagógica, a qual muito seguramente será substituída por novos dispositivos que hoje não se consideram como opção de aprendizagem.

*Palavras chaves:* Videojogos; Aprendizagem baseada em jogos; Aquisição de vocabulário; EFL

Introduction

Back in the early 1950s, video games were created as part of the first computer systems; however, it was not until the 70s and 80s, when first computer appeared, that they became popular. Over the years, video games became more important in people’s lives; in fact, young people are spending higher amounts of time with this medium than they used to in the past. Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010) reported that there has been a substantial increase in the time that children and teenagers spend to play video games over the last ten years. Also, Prensky (2001a) affirms that graduate college graduate spent 5,000 hours playing video games, and 20,000 hours watching television during their lives

Video games seem to be highly addictive and have a natural capability to engage players. Characteristics, such as visuals, music, storyline, gameplay, and characters, make them attractive to a considerable amount of people. In fact, they are considered a relatively new way to promote literacy (Chiong, 2009). Since video games have become more complex in terms of graphics, interaction and narrative, a wide variety of genres and topics have emerged to captivate the new public. As a result of this diversity and complexity, more and more people are into the video game industry, as can be seen in the Figure 1 below.

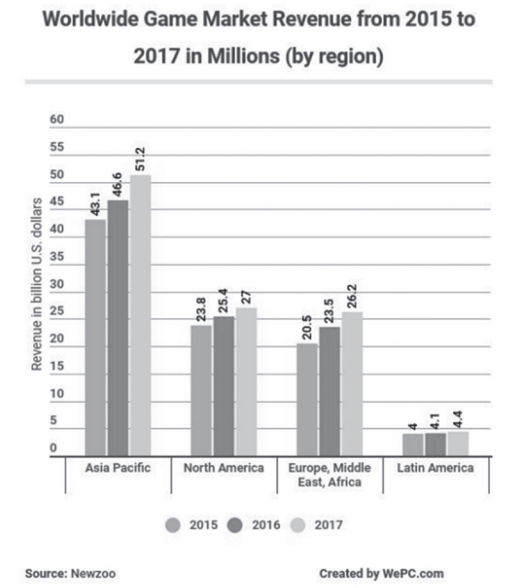


Figure 1. Worldwide Game Market Revenue. Taken form 2019 Video Game Industry Statistics, Trends & Data

Studies regarding the use of videogames in educational environments are novelties but researchers, teachers, and parents recognized that games can use these to develop some valuable skills and insights (Kirriemuir & MacFarlane, 2004). The educational uses include language learning and, according to Klein (2013), playing videogames is beneficial to people who are learning a new language; however, these benefits may be random and not intended for casual gaming. Keeping the former ideas on mind, this research study intends to establish how effective video games are in vocabulary acquisition.

Multimedia (including video games) has been related more to leisure activities with no or little relationship to learning; therefore, some people usually have the idea that video games are not useful at all. The same idea seemed to happen when television was first released. Darryl F. Zanuck, Director of 20th Century-Fox stated in 1946 that “Video will not be able to hold any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night”. Nevertheless, television has become one of the most powerful instruments to transmit information in existence and there are educational programs that are designed for people to learn using them. This example may illustrate that most of the time; ideas against technological creations tend to have a weak logical basis. Thus, this project aims to demonstrate that video games are useful in learning a second language; specifically, we intend to explain how they can be a meaningful tool to acquire vocabulary in English as a foreign language (EFL). This leads us to core question of this study: How can video games influence vocabulary acquisition in a group of students from the B. A. in English?

As such, the research conducted aimed to demonstrate the influence of video games on students’ vocabulary, to determine the relationship between video games and vocabulary acquisition by analyzing learning experiences from the B.A. in English at the Universidad del Tolima, and to measure how effective the use of videogames is to acquire vocabulary through different activities using video games.

## Literature Review

Different scholars such as Gee (2007), Prensky (2004), Shaffer (2006), Musa (2015), Howard and Ting-Yu (2013) argue that video games can be powerful activities for education. In fact, when someone plays, learning happens constantly, even if the players are aware of it or not (Prensky, 2004). Their ideas have inspired different studies all around the globe to demonstrate that video games can take the function of tools and activities in language learning, specifically, in vocabulary acquisition.

With regards to vocabulary acquisition in a foreign language, Gee (2007), says that good video games not only set situations and problems for the entire

gameplay, but they also present several basic tools to navigate properly in the game. These aids include the vocabulary that gamers will use during the actions they take on the video game. He compares this process to creating a foreign language classroom when teachers set the basis for their further practice of vocabulary and grammar. Indeed, he argues that video games are surrounded by different means of written texts such as instructions, dialogues, hints, and descriptions that may enable the development of autonomy.

Musa (2015), developed a case study using games like Minecraft (Mojang) and Candy Crush (King.com) and he concluded that the participants developed new groups of vocabulary when they played these games and that vocabulary acquisition occurs if the words are directly exposed to the player. Also, Howard and Ting-Yu (2013) investigated how an adventure game called Bone could improve listening, reading, and vocabulary skills of a group of college students. This study indicated students acquired certain vocabulary after playing Bone. In a similar study, Vahdat and Behbahani (2013) used a video game called Runaway: A Road Adventure to develop vocabulary in two groups of male and female learners. They concluded that there is not a strong relationship between gender and vocabulary learning, as vocabulary learning occurred eventually in both groups; however, there were some minimal differences in the acquired words throughout the students. Furthermore, Ranalli (2008) used a computer simulation game called The Sims in students and guided the process. The study provided evidence that video games can, with guidance, be used to contribute to vocabulary acquisition of students.

Moreover, in Colombia, Galvis (2011) conducted an entire semester using a video game (Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas) and game-based instructions in a military school. He concluded that students were more attentive and involved and that video games helped students to explore virtual realities that simulate real-life contexts. Additionally, Rivas (2016), conducted similar research where A1 and A2 level students used Minecraft as an extra activity. She found that her students improved their lexicon and grammar through the interaction with this game and activities connected to their gaming experience, by using role-play activities, oral activities, dialogues, and discussions. She affirms her students had a better attitude towards the lessons and a better performance in the activities. She explains they were more connected to the topics as they had background knowledge.

Video games can also change and improve the attitude of learners towards language learning. For instance, Yip & Kwan, (2006) expressed their students' motivation and attitudes change while using videogames; data which was obtained through surveys and interviews. They also affirm that their pupils' attention was easier to retain while using videogame-based activities. Galvis (2012), affirmed in his field notes that playing the videogame can be seen as a form of engagement, attentiveness and entertainment and during the



interviews his students expressed that for them it was an easier way to learn English as they became more engaged and attentive.

The studies mentioned before are valuable not only for their relationship to this research but also for their methodologies, instruments, and findings, which can be adapted to this research. For instance, Prensky (2001b), states that there is a combination of twelve elements which make a game engaging: fun, play, rules, goals, interactivity, adaptiveness, outcomes and feedback, win states, conflict, problem solving, representation, and story. These elements seem to be useful when choosing the proper game to the learning goal and planning the activities. Gee's (2007) relationships of video games and classroom environments are important due to the bond between video games and problem-solving using vocabulary.

Finally, Ranalli's (2008), methodologies are meaningful when working on vocabulary because they imply guidance before, during and after playing the game. The teacher can easily monitor the learner during the process and support the game's feedback implying an educational sense to it.

### **Videogames Used**

There were used two video games called *Scribblenauts* and *Age of Empires II* (Both games were acquired via Steam) From week 1 to 2, the participants were asked to play *Scribblenauts*, which is a puzzle-action game being developed by 5th Cell in 2012 and distributed by Warner Bros. In the game, users take the role of Maxwell, a boy who wants to undo a spell on his sister. The user needs to type words and to use adjectives to solve different problems that allow him to collect starites, which he needs to save his sister. This game includes an ample variety of nouns and adjectives. Besides, it is rich in direct vocabulary.

The second game used, as mentioned, was *Age of Empires II*, which is a real-time strategy game. In this game, players take the control of troops and they must accomplish certain objectives during the campaign. Moreover, the main characters are historical figures like William Wallace, Joan of Arc, Saladin, Genghis Khan, and Barbarossa, among others. This video game was used in order to analyze the specific war lexicon in it. These two games were chosen because of their capability to involve players and their use of vocabulary. Besides, they use a considerable amount of reference vocabulary in the different campaigns.

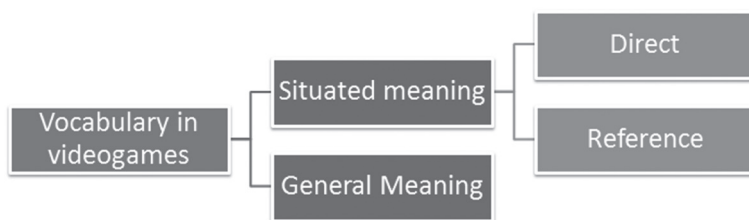
### **Type of vocabulary in video games.**

There can be two groups of vocabulary that gamers might acquire during the gameplay Musa (2015): "general meaning or situated meaning words.

General Meaning is composed of the lexicon that has a purpose apart from the actual gameplay. That means, a player does not need to know them in order to play but these words are present in other functions” (p. 448)

To the group of Situated Meaning words belong all the words included during the game that users are supposed to understand to succeed in a certain game.

In this project there were found two subcategories of situated meaning vocabulary: Direct Vocabulary and Reference Vocabulary. Direct vocabulary is all the words that are visually materialized on the gameplay and the player can interact with them. Reference Vocabulary is all the words that are necessary for the completion of the game. It is important to consider these two categories as it helps to understand that students tend to learn direct vocabulary more than Reference vocabulary.



*Figure 2. Type of vocabulary found in video games. Musa (2015)*

### Methodology

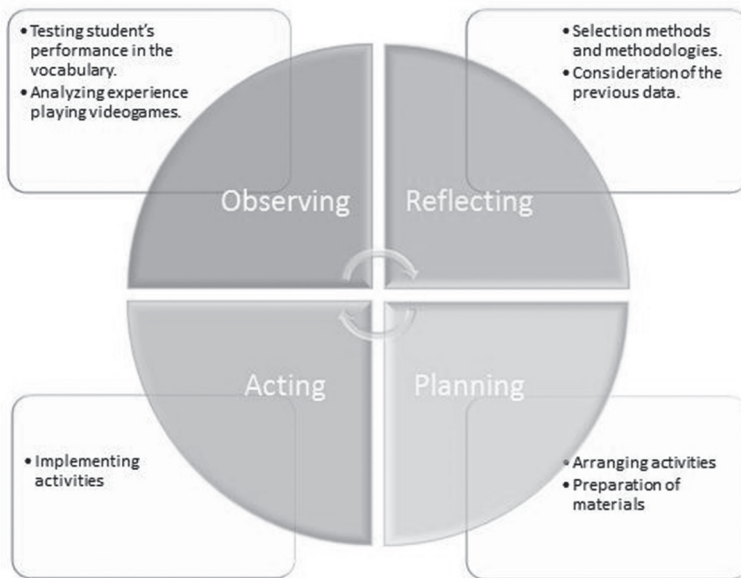
This project applied a mixed method approach given that it combined qualitative and quantitative forms of data analysis. The former was used in the sense that data was analyzed in the form of ideas and images represented in the concepts expressed in the students and teachers’ journals; while the latter was used to analyze the amount of vocabulary acquired by students by comparing the results of an initial and final vocabulary tests.

### Research Design

The design used in this research project was Action Research (AR). Burns (2010) states that Action Research is related to the ideas of reflective practice and the teacher as a researcher. AR, also called teacher research, involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring teaching contexts. The teacher becomes an investigator that tries to question and explore

all sorts of issues in the educational field; in this case, the implementation of video games in order to improve vocabulary skills.

Observation was the first phase chosen to start the study since the intention was to diagnose students' background about video games. In the reflection phase, data from the previous stage was used in order to organize the procedures with which to implement the classroom activities. In the planning stage, different activities were arranged based upon the reflection exercise. Consequently, and as can be seen in Figure 2, during the acting stage the activities were developed leading once more to the first stage, where the teacher observed, evaluated and analyzed how effective the activities were; and after this, the cycle restarted.



*Figure 3.* Action Research schema applied in this study. Adapted from Burns (2010)

### Participants and Context

The 15 participants are in their 8th semester of the program of B.A in English of the University of Tolima, 12 of which were female and 3 were male. Their age ranged from 19 to 23 years old. This group of students was chosen by considering their language level.

## Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

For this project the students were involved in different activities for five weeks, each week requiring 1 or 2 hours of face-to-face-work, and 3 hours of an independent work. During the face-to-face sessions, the researcher and students discussed possible findings and new words, and recorded their progress by using a teacher's journal, and student journals. Additionally, during the last week of the project, the teacher-researcher prepared a test to reinforce the acquisition of new words. During the 3 hours of independent work, the students played the videogames *Scribblenauts* and *Age of Empires II*. They kept a journal where they wrote findings and reactions to the learning experiences. The activities were divided into 3 main cycles that can be seen in Figure 4 and which will be explained below.

**Planning:** In the first part of this cycle, the researchers analyzed and determined the level, likes and dislikes of participants, as well as the video games that were going to be used. Then, the researchers selected proper games according to the observation. Afterward, the vocabulary from the games was selected and a test was elaborated in order to measure participants' performance in the target vocabulary selected by the teacher. Finally, the participants' performance and their opinions about the learning experiences were in order to plan the activities for the lessons.

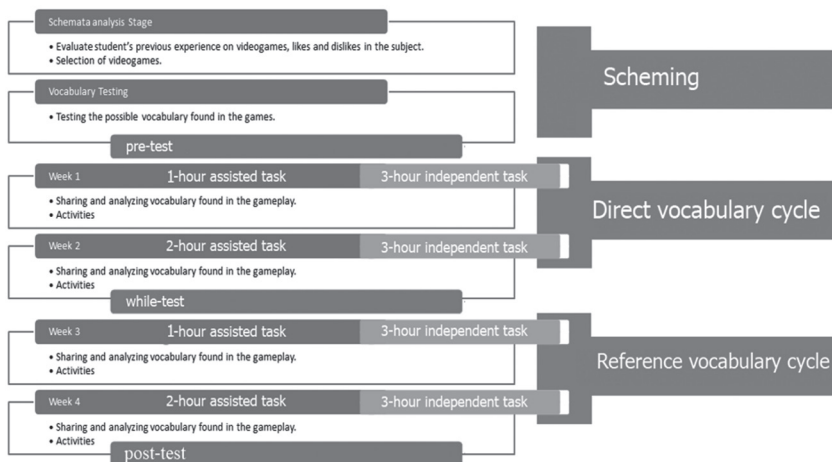


Figure 4. Lessons schema

**Direct vocabulary cycle:** The game used in this cycle was *Scribblenauts*, which is based on direct situated meaning vocabulary. In the first week, participants shared words that they have learnt from the game and analyzed

their uses, as well as their experiences playing the game. During the second week, in addition to the aforementioned vocabulary sharing, the participants performed a test using the lexicon from the two classes that they had seen.

Reference vocabulary cycle: During the last cycle, Reference Language Cycle, students play *Age of Empires II*; additionally, they shared lexicon on the week three and they analyzed the words in contexts. During the last week, the participants analyzed the vocabulary again and carried out a second test using the vocabulary shared during the last cycle. Finally, they took the final test to provide data to determine the effectiveness of the activities (see figure 5)

### Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments in this study were a vocabulary test (see Appendix 1), and teacher and students' journals. Journals were also used in order to evaluate the participants and teacher's reactions to the implementation of the experience as well as how they perceived the learning progress.

The test was divided into 4 sections: synonyms, definitions, image-word, and categories. The first two included vocabulary from both video games. The image-word section included words from *Scribblenauts* and the categories section vocabulary from *Age of Empires*. In the first section, students needed to choose one synonym for the word in bold according to what they knew and the context. In the second section, the participants selected the definition that matches the words in bold in the sentence. In the third section, there was vocabulary from *Scribblenauts*; in this part, the participants had to write to label the pictures. Finally, in the categories section, they were asked to classify the different words into two categories: War Units and War Buildings. This last part used words from *Age of Empires*.

The journals were used in order to consider the students and teacher's viewpoint and reflection processes, "before, during and after a learning experience" (Dyment & O'Connell, 2011, p. 84), as in the activity proposed in this project.

Teachers' journals are another useful instrument to provide information about the implementation, progress, and intervention in a certain methodology.

Results

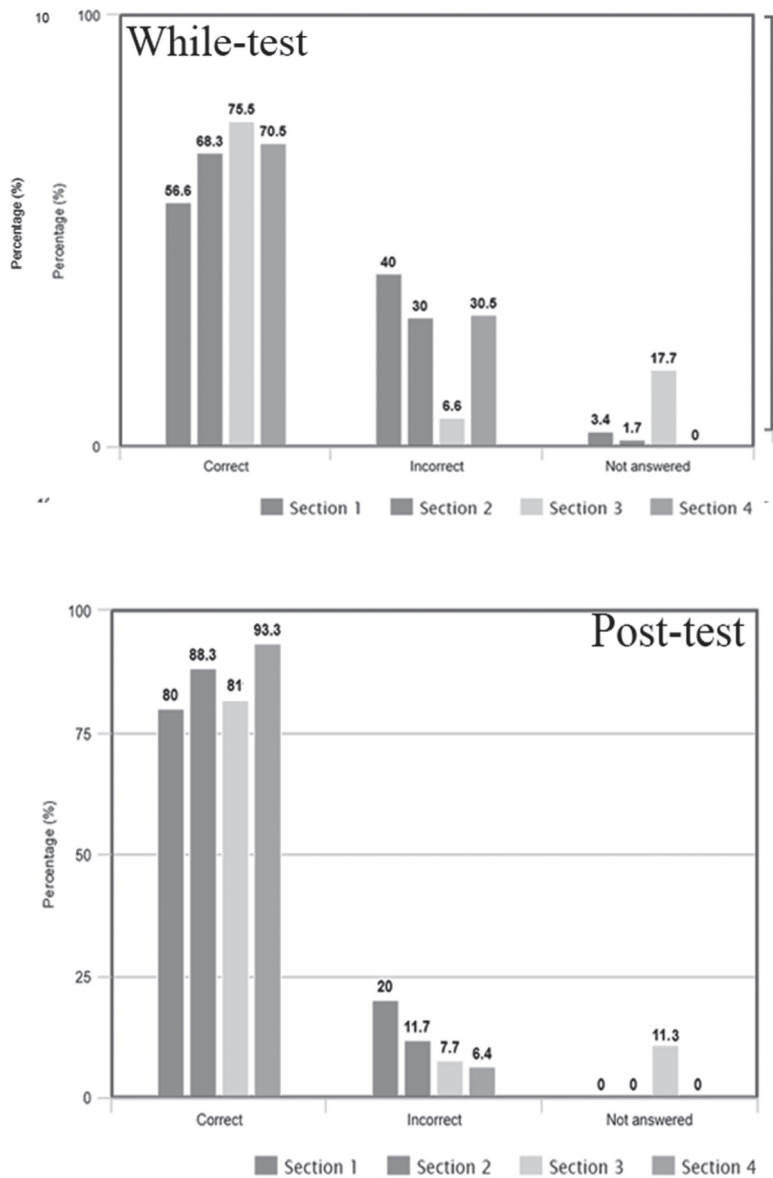
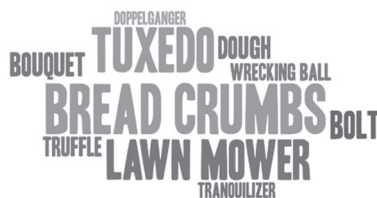


Figure 5. Results of the pre-test, while test and post-test.



Week 1



Week 2



Week 3



Week 4

Figure 6. Word clouds vocabulary acquisition in the three weeks.

## Findings

The findings seem to indicate that videogames could be used as effective tools in the classroom. As the data from study indicates, there is a link between their use and an increased uptake in vocabulary. These games seem to have positive repercussions in the student vocabulary acquisition process. Tomlinson (1998), said that relaxed and self-confident learners learn faster. Krashen (1985) states that non-linguistic variables, like motivation and confidence, may have influence on learning. Video games, and games in general, seem to low the affective filter, and a result enable students' language acquisition since in the virtual environment students work in a context without pressure; because of this, Ghanbaran and Ketabi (2015), state that players are capable of having a deeper processing of vocabulary. This was seen during the implementation, where participants shared different interests in the games, and they expressed their connection to the different topics. For instance, when they were playing *Age of Empires II*, they started talking about the historical characters of the game, some of them even said they searched for their biography and compared them to the stories in the video game. Another benefit we could evidence is the one Deubel (2006) calls as a customized experience. Essentially, each gameplay is different among the participants. There are different paths to follow, making it a unique experience. Shaffer described this

as the “empowerment of the player” (p.138). Students showed the capability to incarnate the main character, which increased the interactivity because they were able to take the responsibility in the context of the game.

This project found that video games may benefit players regarding language learning, and they may improve their lexicon. In fact, studies like Ranalli (2008), Galvis (2011), Howard and Ting-Yu (2013), Musa (2015) and Rivas (2016), among others, state that people can practice, and improve their performance in a target language using video games:

Brief description of what you did in the videogame (main places you were, main actions you did):  
 I played the Campaign of Joan of Arc, it was hard because  
 the game is complicated. I used the Cheats Hahaha. It was  
 about how Joan of Arc became a noble knight and her fall. It is  
 curious how accurate is the game I looked up her story and  
 the game is like a summary.

Figure 7. Excerpt students' journals, second cycle, searching biographies

Musa (2015) states that a lack of academic instruction may cause that the students learn the form but not the meaning of these words. That is why activity was a crucial factor in this study. In fact, the amalgam between independent and instructed tasks showed findings that we may divide into the next components, engagement, interactions, and type of vocabulary.

Prensky (2001b), states that “Computer and video games are potentially the most engaging pastime in the history of mankind” (p.1). Having this in mind, during the it was evidenced that students were engaged as stated in both journals. Besides, the connection they had with the games seemed to cause willingness of sharing and developing the activities.

During the lessons, we found that participants felt comfortable to share their experience, and even more, the new vocabulary was accepted as a part of their tasks. Students could name the new objects and actions during the game, and sharing a topic in common, allowed participants to connect with each other. Based on the analysis of the test and the entries in the journals, we can say that participants increased their vocabulary, and felt more motivated to learn.



Brief description of what you did in the videogame (main places you were, m

I was in creepy house, and I help some be better, also I helped a man who won't free I helped a boy who had lost a kite roller coasters for entertaining few kids I ordered for a woman to throw it to a wall a videocamera to a popponetzi because he have evidence of a sasquatch den

Words you remember using or seeing during the game:

Doppelganger, Sasquatch den, bird seed, theather, cat, kite, spooky, peevish, Rollin

From those words select the ones that are new for you. Then, classify them in the words that in this moment you understood well. Second, the words that you understand well.

Figure 8. Excerpt from students' journal, describing and sharing experiences.

With regards to the interaction, students had two different ways to interact: in class and during the gameplay. This seems to be another reason why the games engaged students easily. Besides, these interactions could have helped students to acquire vocabulary. Both types of interactions affected each other. For instance, having a good interaction with the game helped students to communicate easier in class. Therefore, each interaction helped to first be exposed to and then memorize the vocabulary, before practicing and acquiring it.

In which moment did you learn more words? Mark with an X

Playing: ☒ X Sharing in the classroom: ☐

How do you feel playing the game?

It is really fun to play the game but in class, I can share the things I played and use the vocabulary

Figure 9. Excerpt from students' journal, describing and sharing experiences.

There is nothing real in killing dwarves or ogres, but the tasks the player needs to accomplish (analyze information from dialogues, interact with the objects and space, fail in a certain task and receive feedback, etc.) are like real life. As stated by Klein (2013), there is a necessity to use the language in order to solve conflicts in those simulated lifelike contexts. The vocabulary presented is not isolated; it has a situation, characters, and culture within the gameplay.

We found that the students practiced what they learned in the context of the game. Particularly, during these activities, at the moment of the assisted task, participants appeared to show confidence and previous experience at the time of sharing the vocabulary.

### Conclusions

It is true that we do not intend to create a new theory with the analysis of this learning experience; but, we can draw some conclusions based on the purpose of this study, which aimed to demonstrate the bond between videogames and vocabulary acquisition as well as problematizing the idea that people seem to have about the relation between videogames and language learning.

The virtual interaction seems to affect the interaction in the classroom. As an example, participants experienced and interacted with the words in a previous instance before the class. It may have influenced, that inside the classroom, they were more attentive and participative. Students experienced different perspectives and different paths along the games. At the moment of sharing the experiences with the games, participants looked eager to know what their classmates did. They used different linguistic devices in the social interaction, not only the vocabulary learned, but also, they implemented narrative language. As such, video games seem to offer several opportunities to practice vocabulary in contexts and a teacher can use this type of technological resources to refine the skills acquired during the gameplay.

Lastly, it is fundamental to reflect upon the vocabulary found in the games because this knowledge can be helpful when a teacher plans a videogame-based instruction.

The type of vocabulary proposed does affect the process of acquiring words. For instance, Musa (2015), presents that situated meaning words are more likely to be acquired because this vocabulary is directly exposed to the players, and it is relevant and useful in solving the games. Most of the words assigned for each one of the weeks of implementation belonged to the group of situated meaning. Pondering upon this conclusion, it is essential to plan the vocabulary before assigning the game to the group. Considering the

likelihood of acquisition of the words can help to achieve the objectives of an activity based on games. Eventually, making the best of use of the vocabulary categories can help teachers to plan better classes, set realistic goals, and develop activities that reinforce experiences of players.

Paraphrasing Foucault (1980), it appears that we cannot escape to be influenced for devices that determine our actions as subjects of established discourses. This French author let us see through this notion that these devices function as machines that we can enter though breaking lines that questions pre-existing organizations, but soon, they also become reigning paradigms that could be displaced by new tendencies. Video games seem to be a new trend brought for technology for purposes of pleasure and they have been proved in the educational field as a possible learning mediation, and they will be soon replaced by new devices that could not be considered as an alternative to learn.

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## Appendix 1 – Vocabulary Test



Universidad del Tolima

Vocabulary test  
Pilot Activity  
Videogames and vocabulary acquisition  
Joan Camilo Ovalle Giraldo

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_\_

This is a test to measure your understanding of certain words used in two video games: Scribblenauts and Age of Empires II. In order to analyze your progress during the activities proposed and structured by Joan Camilo Ovalle, from his research investigation about video games and vocabulary acquisition.

First of all, thanks for your help and willing to participate in this process. If you have any question contact the researcher at [jcovalle@ut.edu.co](mailto:jcovalle@ut.edu.co)

A. You are going to be given one word. Circle the best synonym for the **bolded word** according to the sentence.

1. After the party, our mother ordered us to **scrub** the floor of the entire house. We were really tired after that.
  - A. Mop
  - B. Broom
  - C. Brush
  - D. Wax
2. The army will **Rendezvous** their enemies at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.
  - A. Meet
  - B. Attack
  - C. Battle
  - D. Speak with
3. It was really dark and when the **brigand** climbed through the broken window, he cut his wrist on the glass, he left a clue.
  - A. Soldier
  - B. Robber
  - C. Police
  - D. Assassin
4. That man was an **Arsonist**. Hundreds of people in town lost their home because of that man.
  - A. Thief
  - B. Conman
  - C. Robber
  - D. Pyromaniac
5. The army was tired of **Skirmishes**, they now wanted war.
  - A. Deaths
  - B. Losses
  - C. Battles
  - D. Disputes
6. The king had no **heir**, the town was really worried.
  - A. Wealth
  - B. Successor
  - C. Beneficiary
  - D. Army

B. You are going to be given one word. Circle the best definition for the **bolded word** according to the sentence.

1. She put the **dough** in a bag, after that we tasted it and it was delicious.
  - A. A sweet mass of food that is baked or fried.
  - B. A thick, malleable mixture of flour and liquid, used for baking into bread or pastry.
  - C. a small flat or slightly raised cake
  - D. a usually baked and leavened food made of a mixture whose basic constituent is flour or meal and garlic.
2. We went to the garden; the **sprouts** have become bigger and looked beautiful.
  - A. A type of insects that are characterized by its reddish color.
  - B. A seed germinated into its younger form.
  - C. Mole's offspring.
  - D. An acid fruit with a yellow round body.
3. The militia was **poised**, the day was almost there but no one was scared anymore.
  - A. The state of being ready for any future task or event.
  - B. The state of bravery.
  - C. Something or someone who is cleaned and tight.
  - D. Something or someone who joined forces for a shared objective.
4. Unfortunately, he was thin. His **meager** life was enough to put that man into such a being.
  - A. Lack of responsibility.
  - B. Full of unfortunate events.
  - C. Lack of wealth.
  - D. Unfortunate or without luck.

C. There are some pictures below. Write the correct noun in the line next to them.



1. \_\_\_\_\_



2. \_\_\_\_\_



# Assessment of English Learning in a Language Teacher Education Program<sup>1</sup>

Evaluación del aprendizaje del inglés en un programa de licenciatura en lengua extranjera

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Universidad Surcolombiana, Colombia

## Abstract

This paper reports the findings of a study aimed at characterizing the assessment process in an English Language Teacher Education Program (ELTEP, henceforth) at a Colombian public university. Perceptions of teachers and students, revision of some official documents such as course syllabi and test samples, and class observation were used to respond to the inquiries of this study. Interviews, questionnaires, field diaries, and documentary records were employed to gather information for this qualitative-descriptive study. Data analysis suggests that despite the general guidelines proposed by the institution in terms of assessment of learning, and some good evaluative practices implemented by the professors of the ELTEP, the consolidation of an approach is required; an approach understood as criteria and pedagogical procedures that guide both teachers and students, and one that promotes more formative, fair and democratic assessment.

**Keywords:** Assessment; English learning; evaluative practices; formative; democratic; fair assessment.

## Resumen

El presente estudio tiene como propósito caracterizar el proceso de evaluación del aprendizaje de inglés en un Programa de Licenciatura en Lengua Extranjera de una universidad pública colombiana. Desde un enfoque cualitativo-descriptivo, se indagó sobre las percepciones de los docentes y estudiantes frente a este proceso, se revisaron algunos documentos oficiales como microdiseños y muestras de exámenes, y se observaron algunas clases para responder a las preguntas del presente estudio. Como instrumentos de recolección de datos se utilizaron entrevistas, cuestionarios, diarios de campo, y registros documentales, los cuales permitieron realizar la correspondiente

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triangulación de la información. Una vez recolectada la información, se procedió a su respectivo análisis a través de una metodología de estadística descriptiva y análisis cualitativo con el soporte de un programa informático para la codificación y categorización de la información. Los resultados que arrojó este estudio permiten concluir que a pesar de los lineamientos generales que propone la institución en materia de evaluación de los aprendizajes, y algunas buenas prácticas evaluativas implementadas por los docentes del Programa de Licenciatura en Inglés investigado, se requiere la consolidación de un enfoque, entendido como criterios y procedimientos pedagógicos, que oriente tanto a docentes y estudiantes, y que promueva una evaluación más formativa, justa y democrática.

*Palabras clave:* evaluación; aprendizaje de inglés; prácticas evaluativas; formativo; democrático; evaluación equitativa

### Resumo

O presente estudo tem como propósito caracterizar o processo de avaliação da aprendizagem de inglês em um Programa de Licenciatura em Língua Estrangeira de uma universidade pública colombiana. Desde um enfoque qualitativo-descritivo, indagou-se sobre as percepções dos docentes e estudantes diante deste processo, revisaram-se alguns documentos oficiais como micro desenhos e amostras de provas, e observaram-se algumas aulas para responder as perguntas do presente estudo. Como instrumentos de coleta de dados, utilizaram-se entrevistas, questionários, diários de campo e registros documentais, os quais permitiram realizar a correspondente triangulação da informação. Quando coletada a informação, procedeu-se a sua respectiva análise através de uma metodologia de estatística descritiva e análise qualitativa com o suporte de um programa informático para a codificação e categorização da informação. Os resultados que evidenciou este estudo permitem concluir que apesar dos alinhamentos gerais que propõe a instituição em matéria de avaliação dos aprendizes, e algumas boas práticas avaliativas implementadas pelos docentes do Programa de Licenciatura em Inglês pesquisado, requer-se a consolidação de um enfoque, entendido como critérios e procedimentos pedagógicos, que oriente tanto a docentes e estudantes, e que promova uma avaliação mais formativa, justa e democrática.

*Palavras chave:* avaliação; aprendizagem de inglês; práticas avaliativas; formativo; democrático; avaliação equitativa

## Introduction

In order for the teaching and learning process of a foreign language to be meaningful, and students become proficient users of the L2, many variables have to be taken into consideration. Methodology, materials, time exposure, setting conditions, and evaluation, assessment and testing procedures, among others, are some important aspects that may influence student learning, for better or worse. Regarding assessment, Estevez (1997) states that despite rich theoretical principles on this field, poor assessment practices have been promoted in the educational arena for decades. The results of different studies support the gaps between the theoretical tenets and the real assessment practices carried out in the learning process. Rojas and Artunduaga (2018) found out that, according to English teachers and students' perceptions, learners didn't achieve the expected level in advanced courses, because neither the classwork nor the tests were challenging enough during the basic English classes. In addition, Arias and Maturana (2005) concluded that, even though in some school settings English teachers are trying to follow the educational policies and theoretical guidelines on evaluation, assessment and testing issues, much research should be done in our context. In this regard, Jurado (2015) points out that "one of the causes of the high rates of "school desertion" is related to the pedagogic problems linked to assessment practice" (p.5); he also adds, "The university curricula are rigid and the pedagogy and assessment processes are characterized by a vertical approach" (p.5). Therefore, the author believes that open reflection within the framework in research and innovation projects might allow us to analyze the assessment issue in dept. Likewise, López and Bernal, (2009) affirm that "more research is needed on how tests are developed and how all the stakeholders are involved in this process, especially when this research takes into consideration the uniqueness of the Colombian context."(p.12)

Similarly, the assessment process of the L2 in the targeted academic program is not any different from the aforementioned general situation; it has not had a rigorous analysis framed into research experiences. Despite the fact that the higher education institution analyzed, favors formative assessment guidelines from its institutional policies, there are still concerns about how teachers implement those parameters. From our own perspective, we perceive a greater emphasis on the summative assessment rather than on formative assessment procedures. Considering the previous situation, the following objectives were formulated.

- To identify the perceptions that both teachers and students have about the assessment of the English learning process in an ELTEP.
- To describe the assessment criteria and mechanisms commonly used by the teachers of the ELTEP.

- To determine suggestions provided by both students and teachers in regards to the assessment approach and procedures implemented in the ELTEP.

## Literature Review

### What does evaluation mean?

In English speaking countries, there is a distinction between the terms *testing*, *assessment*, and *evaluation* to refer to the act of evaluating students' learning. Brown (2004) points out that *testing* is about a deliberated application of an assessment instrument formed by a group of structured items that measure the learner's performance in a certain field of knowledge. This process might be influenced by external factors when executing it. Bachman (2004) defines *assessment* as the process of collecting information about something that we want to know, following systematic and substantially founded procedures. The results of this process, which objective is usually to interpret the foreign language skills of the student, could be a grade or a verbal description with some feedback. On the other hand, Baehr (2005) suggests that *evaluation* involves the two concepts mentioned before (assessment and testing) since it takes them as sources of information to draw up valuable judgments and make decisions when facing educational processes.

In this case, we could say that the three concepts contribute in different ways to improve the teaching-learning process. Teachers, in many cases, are confined to measure students' performance quantitatively and tend to underestimate all the information that the assessment process offers; which at the same time, would allow to mold the groups in charge objectively, modify teaching methodologies, maximize the learning and produce changes and action plans. Thomas, Allman and Beech (2004), cited in Herrera and Macías (2015), recognize the relevance of evaluation when they highlight its benefits for teachers and students in different aspects: 1) it provides useful information to improve the pedagogical practice of the teacher; 2) it allows the teacher to monitor the student's learning process and contributes to the improvement of it before the course is finished; 3) it gives the teacher important information about accurate teaching methods for each group of students; 4) it allows students to use the evaluation and the feedback to understand better their learning process; 5) it offers students the opportunity to develop and improve their ability to self-assess and consider evaluation as part of the learning process; 6) it helps students to make decisions on how to acquire knowledge and develop abilities; 7) it helps students to prepare for international examinations, especially if the assessment format is the same one they use in them.

The aforementioned benefits that assessment provides to teachers and learners let us establish the potential impact it has on the teaching and learning

process. In this sense, White (2009) argues “While becoming more assessment literate is of prime importance for a teacher’s professional development, the impact for our students in our classes must also remain a consideration.” (p.21).

## Principles of Assessment

Designing and implementing an evaluation is not an easy task, due to the multiple considerations that must be taken into account and the principles that guide it. Several authors have proposed various evaluative principles, in order to facilitate and optimize this process.

First, Brown (2004) proposes *practicality* as a process where tests can be developed within the allotted time; it is easy to administer and has a simple grading system. Similarly, Brown points out that an evaluation ceases to be practical if it takes a long time for the administrator to grade it. On the other hand, Bachman and Palmer (1996), argue, “practicality pertains to the ways in which the test will be implemented, and, to a large degree, whether it will be developed and used at all. That is, for any given situation, if the resources required for implementing the test exceed the resources available, the test will be impractical.”(p.35)

Second, the principle of *reliability*, according to Brown (2004), is presented as the consistency that should be in the results obtained in a test, given in two different moments to the same student or group in similar circumstances. According to the author, different factors should be taken into consideration to determine whether an examination is reliable or not. Reliability can also be affected by variations in the physical or psychological state of the student taking the test, by the errors that an evaluator might make when grading the test, and by factors related to the administration of the test.

A third principle is that of *validity*. Generically, it refers to evaluating what really should be evaluated. For Bachman and Palmer (1996), the validity of the construct corresponds to the relevance and significance of the interpretations made from the results of the test. According to these authors, it is necessary to validate these interpretations by presenting evidence that the test score reflects the linguistic area we want to measure.

Another principle of great relevance in the teaching-learning process of a foreign language is *authenticity*. Teachers must ensure that the language, in lexical and semantic terms and to which the student is exposed, in some way resembles the language used in real second language contexts. To this degree of correspondence that exists between the characteristics of the use of the target language and the tasks that we require the student to do in a test, is what Bachman and Palmer (1996) define as authenticity.

Regarding the principle of *justice* (Shohamy, 2001), it is sought that the procedures used during the evaluation process are appropriate for everyone. This guarantees equity (equal conditions for conducting the test) and transparency of the same. Justice is based on the foundations of impartiality and consistency. That is, the exam administrator must be objective when evaluating and establishing clear evaluation criteria according to the level that we expect students to reach.

The principle of *democracy* can be understood, in the words of Shohamy (2001), and transferred to the field of evaluation in the classroom, in need to develop evaluative practices in “collaboration and cooperation with the evaluated”; in the need to limit the use of evaluations as “instruments of power”; in the need to “take responsibility for the evaluations and their uses” and the need to “protect the rights of those evaluated” (p.376).

Regarding the feedback (washback or impact), Pérez (2007) suggests that it should be opportune and systematic, which implies that from the evaluation, the student should be provided with brief descriptions or critical and stimulating comments on their performance, rather than with ratings. The research results reflected in the literature coincide in pointing out that feedback is the most important part of the entire process due to its enhancing effect on future learning and student performance (Black & William, 1998). According to Pérez (2007), although the feedback is of great importance for the self-regulation of learning, this, in several occasions, is not understood because it is provided long after the work done and the student may no longer be interested.

Pérez (2007) also suggests that a socio-constructivist approach to the feedback process requires students to be actively involved. Sadler (1989), quoted in Rust (2005), identifies three conditions for effective feedback: knowledge of the evaluation criteria, comparison of these with its own work and the action taken to fill the gap between the two. Uncovering these manifestos, Pérez concludes that students should be trained in how to interpret feedback, how to relate it to the characteristics of the work they do and how to improve their work in the future.

### Evaluative competences

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Popham (2009) states that assessing the student performance is one of the fundamental tasks for the modern teacher. Being competent in educational evaluation allows the teacher to make accurate and well-founded decisions that contribute to the improvement of the teaching-learning process.

Likewise, Gronlund and Linn (cited in Wang, Wang and Fan, 2011) point out that teachers, who evaluate their pedagogical practices, can initially realize the needs of their students, monitor the learning and teaching processes,

diagnose the difficulties of learning and confirm learning achievements. However, knowledge about evaluation is considered a theoretical construction and a professional capacity that every teacher should have. Different authors have highlighted that unfortunately, not all the teachers are sufficiently qualified in this area to be able to promote appropriate assessment practices within the classroom; in other words, much more training is required to empower teachers to become more assessment literate.

Stiggins (1995) states that the teacher must know what is being evaluated; why it is being evaluated; what the best way to evaluate the skill or knowledge in question is; how to generate good examples of student performance; what could fail in the assessment process; and how to avoid these difficulties when evaluating. Paterno (2001) and Mertler (2004) also explain that the teacher must know the basic principles that underlie evaluative practices, including terminology, development, and use of methodologies and assessment techniques in one specific area, as well as being familiar with the alternatives of traditional measurement of learning. In this sense, White (2009) claims that teachers must be assessment literate to be aware of the effects their decisions may have on the learning outcomes, so that they can design an assessment plan accordingly, to guide the students to develop a deep approach to their learning.

### **Methodology**

Given the nature of this study, a qualitative research approach was followed. According to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2011), qualitative research seeks to inquire into the quality of a particular activity; it offers a greater emphasis on the holistic description, that is to say, in the detailed description of what happens in a specific activity or situation; or as Merriam (2009) suggests, through qualitative research we are “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences”(p. 23)

### **Setting and Participants**

The context for this study was a public university in Colombia. A total of 340 students of the English Language Teacher Education Program were part of the population. The study was conducted with a sample of about 160 students who were taking from basic to advanced English courses. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21 years old. Another group of participants were five full-time professors; they taught English in the aforementioned courses. Four of them held a Master degree and the other one a PhD degree.

The target population of the present research, to which we would like to generalize the findings, is constituted by the English degree programs of the country. The accessible population is constituted by the approximately 340 students of the bachelor program in English in question.

The sample was selected from pre-established groups, corresponding to the 16 English groups. The sample of students constitutes 50% of the accessible population and for teachers, it corresponds to all of the teachers of this academic assignment. With the groups already established, ten students were chosen randomly in each of these groups. In other words, we used a simple random sampling from groups already assigned (Simple random sampling/cluster sampling).

### **Data collection Instruments**

Data were collected through an interview, a questionnaire, field notes, and a review of curriculum documents.

**Interview to teachers:** The purpose was to identify the conceptions, criteria and assessment practices based on the experience of English teachers.

**Questionnaire to students:** Students answered a structured questionnaire in the digital version, aimed at determining their experiences and perceptions of the English learning assessment process.

**Field notes:** they were carried out by researchers, who did not get involved in-class activities but remained passive observers. They were kept during classes where assessment processes were being developed. These observations were recorded following semi-structured observation formats, as shown in the following table.

*Table 1. Class observation*

Date of class observation: \_\_\_\_\_ English course level: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of lesson: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of students: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Objectives: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Language functions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Instructional activities	Student(s) in-class attitude and performance	Classroom conditions/environment	Resources

Additional comments:

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**Review of Curriculum Documents:** This is perhaps the only secondary source of data collection, but it retains great relevance for the research. We reviewed the syllabi of each of the English courses to verify that the assessment criteria for learning were stipulated there, and that they coincided with what was stated by the teachers in the interviews. Table 2 shows the form used to analyze these course syllabi. Likewise, we revised the students' handbook, the educational project of the program, the educational project of the faculty and the institutional educational project with the purpose of identifying guidelines regarding the evaluation of learning in general and English in particular.

Table 2. *Form to evaluate course syllabi*

PERIODO	CURSO	DOCENTE	HORAS SEMANALES	CRÉDITOS	DEFINICIÓN DE EVALUACIÓN (D.E)		PRÓPOSITOS DE LA EVALUACIÓN (P.E)		CRITERIOS DE EVALUACION						REGLAMENTO EVALUACIÓN (aplazamiento plagio) (R.E)	EVALUACIÓN DE HABILIDADES (E.H)								RÚBRICAS (Rub.)		OBSERVACIONES																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																		
					SI	NO	SI	NO	TIPOS DE EVALUACIÓN (T.E)				INSTRUMENTOS (Inst.)			VALORACIÓN (Porcentaje o puntaje)	Speaking				Listening						Reading				Writing																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																													

## Analysis of data

We followed a content analysis methodology through which we collected the information; it was then selected, leading to the main topics or categories of data classification to be put in each of the research instruments. These data were coded and processed through the Atlas Ti software for this purpose. The topics and their incidents were presented by literal statements of the participants, as well as graphical representations of the data.

## Results

### Perceptions of students and teachers in relation to the evaluation of English learning

The students participating in this study are no exception of what Brown (2004) warned us regarding the feeling generated by the evaluation in the apprentices. For the majority of participants (62.97%), the word evaluation alone generates feelings of nervousness or concern. However, despite this emotional burden, most of them express that the evaluation plays a critical role in the English learning process. Some of its main purposes include diagnosing the strengths and abilities of students, monitoring their progress and assigning the respective grade, determining the effectiveness of the teacher's instruction, and providing the society with information about the achievements and levels of student development. Regarding teachers, it is important to note that most of them have a positive attitude towards assessment, considering that it has a positive impact on students and themselves. They assure that the evaluation process allows both the teacher and students to make a diagnosis about how the teaching and learning process evolves, identify weaknesses and strengths, generate opportunities for self-evaluation, and propose actions for improvement.

In regards to the functions of assessment, a significant number of students (65.3%) conceive it as a summative process where the connotation of diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses, and the measurement of knowledge and learning stand out. The following comments support these findings:

"It is a diagnosis of the abilities and strengths of each student." (EE P2C1)

"It is a process in which the student is shown and challenged to demonstrate what they have learned in class." (EE P2C52)

The majority of the teachers agreed that the evaluation, as it is a permanent process, has a formative character. Three of the teachers affirm that they implement assessments constantly, fostering evaluative moments other than those established institutionally. The following comment thus supports it:

"I try to evaluate almost all the classes, anyway, do quizzes, simply pass them to talk, put them to do their role play, make them all kinds of possible evaluation to give them all the opportunities of the case, so they can improve and feel good in an evaluation."

Regarding assessment principles, for a significant percentage (82.41%) of the students, English evaluations usually inquire about the contents taught, that is, they usually ask for topics studied or skills practiced in class, meeting

in this way the principle of validity. This assertion is ratified by teachers who agreed on the preponderance of validity, by stating that the contents evaluated should correspond to the objectives set for the course.

Likewise, students state that English teachers clearly explain all aspects related to the exam or other tasks that will be evaluated. In terms of environmental conditions, they express that these are appropriate to complete an exam or develop other evaluative activities. These factors contribute to the reliability of the evaluation.

In terms of *Practicality*, a majority of students (80.55%) indicate that the instructions for each of the activities in the evaluations are clear and illustrative. However, regarding the extension of the exams, the percentages are divided between those who believe that the time to answer them is sufficient and those who state that they do not have time to complete the exams. This perception differs from what was expressed by the teachers, who point out that the time allotted for the evaluations is adequate.

Concerning *Authenticity*, for a good number of participants (64.82% of the students and 80% of the teachers) the exercises, dialogues and questions contained in the English assessments are similar to the speeches and interactions that they could face in a real second language context. Likewise, they agree on the fact that the exercises contained in the evaluations are contextualized and relevant.

Most students expressed that the results of the evaluation are very useful for the teacher, for themselves and other members of the academic community (Impact / Feedback). However, there is great neutrality when asking if teachers provide constant and effective feedback. On the other hand, teachers argue that they provide proper feedback in their classes.

Regarding the principles of *Justice* and *Democracy*, 66.67% of students say that teachers are fair at the time of grading exams, but a 51.81% of them state that they do not participate in planning mechanisms for the evaluation. In this regard, the majority of teachers stressed the importance of promoting an evaluation framed in this principle.

## Criteria and Mechanisms

In this section, we characterized the means, instruments, approaches and evaluation parameters implemented in the program. For the collection of the information, we reviewed class observation notes, questionnaires, written exams, and course syllabi.

We followed the concepts proposed by Hamodi, López and López (2015) about means and instruments of evaluation. Thus, we have conceived as

means written exams, essays, quizzes, reading and writing controls, portfolios, exhibitions, debates, and role-plays, among others. Likewise, we regard rubrics as assessment instruments.

### **Means**

All of the 40 course syllabi that we reviewed exhibits common criteria such as: thematic units, evaluation strategies, and their corresponding percentages. The unit with the highest weight (80%) is assigned to written exams, three in total during the semester. The remaining (20%) is assigned to a variety of evaluative activities such as presentations, essays, debates, reading of short stories or novels, role plays, among others. Through the survey, both students and teachers did corroborate that teachers implement the means established in the course syllabi as part of the evaluation process.

### **Instruments**

About the use of rubrics, a little more than half (21) of the course syllabi include them; some of them are not clearly defined because they do not describe in detail the activity to be evaluated or the linguistic ability to be assessed. Other syllabi contain rubrics that focus on a single skill, usually writing. Very few specify in their rubrics the skill and activity to be evaluated. This is corroborated in the analysis of some written exams, which do not include anything in this regard either. However, the observations showed the use of the rubric to evaluate the oral ability where each one of the linguistic criteria to be assessed was defined. In the survey conducted by the students, the majority (82%) corroborated that teachers do use rubrics to assess both writing and speaking skills and many others (70%) expressed that these rubrics are made clear and timely.

### **Approaches and Parameters**

Regarding assessment approaches and parameters followed in the program, the findings indicate that teachers generally comply with the requirements established in the course syllabi, particularly when it comes to evaluating the four linguistic skills and language components through formal evaluations. Most exams show that all L2 skills are assessed and integrated. The speaking test usually take place in a separate section and is conducted mainly through interviews, and in pairs to encourage an oral interaction.

In summary, the large percentage assigned to the three written exams would seem to indicate a formal summative assessment approach, whose

constant elements to be assessed are the four linguistic skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing), and the grammar and vocabulary subdomains. Within this approach, some traits of formative evaluation are evident, such as feedback, self-evaluation and co-evaluation, the use of rubrics, without becoming these common characteristics in all courses.

### **Improvement Alternatives to Strengthen the Assessment of the English Language**

These actions are presented within the framework of an improvement proposal that can contribute to strengthening the evaluation process of the L2 in the undergraduate program investigated. A synthesis of the main suggestions made by students and teachers around the following subcategories are presented in the following section.

#### **Concerning the principles of assessment.**

Students' suggestions focus on two principles of assessment: authenticity and practicality. With authenticity, one of the most highlighted aspects is the need to contextualize the tasks proposed in the evaluation process or the items that are included in the exams; noting that it is necessary to include activities that encourage the natural use of English, as it is sustained below:

“That these are also taken to real life, for example, doing role plays, rehearsals or things like that because the student will interact much more with the language: taking it to a real-life aspect, not only in a sitting desk filling some questions and that is it.” (EEP41C71)

“Maybe it would be much more productive to practice or teach all the new knowledge in a real scenario, making it a lot more meaningful.” (EEP41C60)

As for practicality, regarding the allocation of time for the development of exams, some of the students point out that appropriate time should be provided, especially to perform the exercises corresponding to reading and writing skills. They express it this way:

“My suggestion would be that in the evaluation processes we are given more time depending on the type of evaluation as well as the topics seen in class.” (EEP41C59)

“That the time to present the exam should be extended. Especially in the writing session.” (EEP41C84)

### **In relation to evaluation functions.**

The formative function of the evaluation allows the student to have clarity about the objectives to be achieved, analyze how the process is evolving, and establish the steps that must be followed to reach the final goal. As for the teacher, this type of evaluation requires them to formulate clear learning objectives, design lessons, and tasks that help students achieve those purposes, and help the teacher formulate their own goals and action plans in order to obtain the expected performance (Brookhart, 2005).

Within the framework of this definition, students and teachers made the following suggestions: First, they highlighted the importance of not focusing on the evaluation only on the three exams; they sustain their position by expressing that if they are evaluated with a variety of activities during the process, this experience will be more significant and at the same time, it will reduce the anxiety caused by taking a final exam that includes all the content studied during the course. The following is one of the various comments that support the aforementioned suggestion:

“I believe that in the evaluation process in our program, the result is more important than the process. The final exam is taken into account more, as the only proof of the learning process than the ones carried out in the process, such as workshops, classwork, essays, journals, etc. I think it is discouraging for the student because there are several factors that affect the evaluation and make the student go wrong.” (EEP4C36)

Finally, some of the participants insist on relating the evaluation to factors that emerge from this process such as frustration, anxiety, demotivation, fear, sorrow, among others. To minimize these factors, apart from the previous suggestions, they believe that different assessment alternatives should be included to allow them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, as suggested below.

“I think the evaluation process is important because it is like a metronome that is setting our pace of learning. However, I believe that you should not give much importance to a grade because it does not always demonstrate the knowledge acquired and it usually frustrates students in their performance. You should try to assess in another way.” (EEP41C79)

### **About the focus and parameters of the Program.**

The assessment process should be conceived by educational institutions and therefore by teachers, as a carefully thought out plan which allows identifying the learning achievements and difficulties presented by the students. In turn, teachers could determine which aspects of teaching merit a rethinking

(Bailey, 1998). Thus, assessment must serve as information source for both the learning and the teaching processes so that teachers and students can make suitable adjustments.

It is then expected that the training programs define the established plan through their course syllabi, where the evaluation criteria and strategies will be specified, focusing not only on summative assessment but also highlighting how to guide the process from the parameters of the formative assessment.

Throughout the analysis of the syllabi and the English exams, students show disagreement with the percentages assigned to the three exams officially established by the program, as it is implied in the following comments:

“Personally, and in a general way, I have noticed certain inconsistencies in terms of the distribution of percentages for each official exam. The percentages on some occasions do not justify the whole process of preparation that the student has had for that exam.” (EEP41C37)

“I believe that the evaluations should not have too much percentage of the grade. Many of the other exercises that they give us require more effort and dedication yet, they are not graded as they should be. Many of them do not have a suitable percentage for each. I believe that teachers should see how much we much effort we are putting into improving and how excited we are to improve every day.” (EEP41C73)

In this sense, some of the participants also state that the final exam, which is usually done within the last week, has the highest weight (30%). Learners also point out that they never receive feedback on the results obtained in this test specifically. This does not allow them to identify the weaknesses on which they must work before starting the next course.

According to some of the students, certain aspects of the evaluation are very rigid and do not consider other variables such as tasks they carry out during the learning process, which are sometimes not considered for grading, and the level of anxiety or stress students may be going through. They consider it necessary to take into account that they are learning a language and that many elements that are involved in its learning process are flexible.

“In the program, they have a good evaluation system. However, there is always evidence where memorization prevails, which means that many students do not obtain good grades due to their level of anxiety and stress.” (EEP4C2)

“The learning process should have more importance than the marks obtained during the exams, since learning through the assessment is much more significant. Sometimes we as students have our anxiety level very high on an exam and this betrays us.” (EEP4C2)

In this regard, Butler and McMunn (2006) state that a teaching approach should focus on the student, which means that the learners must be actively involved in all stages of the learning process, from planning to evaluation. Besides, it is important to point out that this type of approach is based on the parameters established by constructivist pedagogies. These state that the appraisal of learning must be based on the construction and application of information, rather than memorization of what the teacher or the text establishes.

Teachers through the survey and the interview suggest that an assessment committee should be formed to develop assessment policies and guidelines so that all of the teachers are on the same page. They also express the need to define common criteria to apply in all English courses and thus determine if students are achieving the proposed objectives. However, English teachers claim that their autonomy should be respected. (P1, P2, P3, P5)

Based on the teachers' opinion, it is also necessary to promote more training in the area of evaluation and assessment of learning and make students more active participant in assessment-related decisions. This perspective is limited to the presentation of exams and is evident in the opinions of two of the participants:

"More training for teachers and talking to students more often about what evaluation is because they do not know. For them, evaluation is a test, not a process." (P4)

"That the teachers can have foundations regarding the assessment process, that we have very clear how the processes should be carried out" (P5)

One final factor considered by teachers is the number of students per course. They suggest reducing those large groups because it affects the quality of the feedback that is provided to students. Besides, it is more time consuming, especially when evaluating the skills of writing and speaking. (P1, P3, P4)

### Conclusions

The focus of assessment in the academic program investigated is slightly demarcated by some principles established in legal documents such as the Students' conduct book and the University Educational Project. In these two documents, it is established that the evaluation must be permanent, comprehensive, multifaceted and above all these aspects, formative. However, the guidelines, methodologies, procedures or good evaluation practices are not specified in these or any other document.



Likewise, there is no evidence of an approach that determines a conception, principles, purposes, functions, means, and ways of evaluating the learning of English as a foreign language. However, there is unanimity in the evaluation of all domains (reading, listening, speaking and writing) and subdomains (grammar and vocabulary) of English in each of the examinations.

There is agreement on the determination to formally assess students through three exams (two midterms and the final) with a weight of 80% of the final grade of the course. The remaining percentage consists of essays, the review of stories or literary novels, presentations or other tasks proposed autonomously by each teacher. This determination makes the written examination, the most familiar assessment instrument for teachers and students.

However, despite having no clear definition of the assessment approach and methodologies within the program, this study made it possible to identify, on the one hand, some common patterns that enrich the evaluation processes and that can subsequently constitute a basis to define the approach; and on the other hand, some aspects that must be reformulated to improve the evaluation process and, of course, the teaching and learning.

In the first place, although the evaluation generates feelings of nervousness and anxiety in the students, both teachers and students conceive it as a process that must be formative, permanent and far from the paradigm of the grade as the only element of judgment. Both teachers and students hold a favorable view of assessment, considering it essential in the teaching-learning process and beneficial to all participants.

Regarding the principles of evaluation, as stated by Brown (2004) and Bachman and Palmer (1996), it is evident that both formal and informal assessment respond to the objectives proposed for each course, in terms of content and skills to develop, thus favoring the validity of the process. The tendency for justice is evident in the evaluations, in both the grading and the degree of difficulty that the exams entail, according to the level of language proficiency of students in each course. Practicality is reflected in the proper amount of exercises and tasks in the exams, the allocation of time, but still persists some concern regarding the assigned time for writing tasks.

Feedback is focused on grammatical and phonetic notions of the language, but not so emphatically on communication or learning strategies. Hence, metacognitive strategies can add a fundamental value to cognitive processes. Likewise, the lack of effective feedback towards the end of the courses is evident in such a way that learners have clarity about possible actions and strategies to be followed in preparation for the courses in the following academic terms. The use of rubrics, even though evident in some of the evaluations, constitutes a pivotal element of meaningful feedback, and therefore needs to be promoted thoroughly within the academic program.

In general, there is evidence of an effort on the part of teachers to follow evaluative principles that result in greater objectivity and justice, including a variety of exercises within formal examinations such as selection, construction, and personal responses (Brown and Hudson, 1998); but there are no self-evaluative and co-evaluative procedures, which also reinforce the principle of democracy. Gan et al (2018) suggested in their study the need for EFL teachers to be better aware of the value of using self-assessment to support students to become self-regulating learners and take the ownership of their learning (p. 527). Self-evaluation and co-evaluation, as well as the use of alternative means such as portfolios, journals and those based on the use of technologies, oxygenate the hetero-evaluative processes, prevalent in the educational tradition.

In order to consolidate the assessment of English language learning in the program, professional development initiatives should be developed where evaluation criteria can be discussed for teachers and students to decide the methodologies and procedures that promote a comprehensive, formative and multifaceted assessment model. As proposed in Troudi, Coombe, and Al-Hamliy's study (2012), more professional development opportunities allow teachers to capitalize the knowledge and experience they have gained over the course of the years (p. 553).

In summary, the strengths and weaknesses evidenced in each of the constitutive elements of the evaluation process analyzed here should be consolidated in principles, purposes, functions, forms, means, techniques and evaluation instruments, on which teachers and students, as the main actors of the evaluation process, must coincide, thus avoiding surprises, disagreements and injustices.

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# Problematic Phonemes for Spanish-speakers' Learners of English<sup>1</sup>

Fonemas problemáticos para los hispanohablantes que aprenden inglés

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## Abstract

When learning English, learners might face a challenging task in mastering pronunciation due to differences in both languages such as sound-to-letter correspondence, size of phoneme inventory, allophonic realization of sounds, place and manner of articulation, among others. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to review both theoretical and research reports on the most problematic sounds for Spanish-speakers English language learners. Approaches to second language learners' errors like Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis although being criticized have contributed to identifying likely causes of errors and dealing with them whether anticipating them or providing appropriate feedback on them. Besides, first language interference and age of second language acquisition have been found as complicating factors in the English pronunciation learning process. Finally, some classroom activities have been reported as successful for facilitating English pronunciation in Spanish native speakers.

**Key words:** English pronunciation; Spanish native speakers; Contrastive Analysis; Error Correction; Interference; pronunciation activities

## Resumen

A la hora de aprender inglés, los aprendices pueden encontrar dificultades con respecto a la pronunciación puesto que existen ciertas diferencias en los dos idiomas, tales como la correspondencia de sonido a letra, el tamaño del inventario de fonemas, la realización alofónica de sonidos, el lugar y la forma de articulación, entre otros. Por

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lo tanto, el propósito de este documento es revisar literatura teórica e investigativa sobre los sonidos más problemáticos para aprendices de inglés que son hablantes nativos de español. Aproximaciones a los errores de los aprendices de una segunda lengua, como el Análisis Contrastivo y el Análisis de Errores que, aunque han sido criticados, han contribuido a identificar las posibles causas de los errores y abordarlas, ya sea anticipándolos o proporcionando una retroalimentación adecuada. Además, la interferencia de la lengua materna y la edad de adquisición del segundo idioma se han encontrado como factores que dificultan el proceso de aprendizaje de la pronunciación en inglés. Finalmente, algunas actividades de clase han sido reportadas como exitosas para facilitar la pronunciación del inglés a hablantes nativos de español.

*Palabras clave:* pronunciación en inglés; hablantes nativos de español; análisis contrastivo; corrección de errores; interferencia; actividades de pronunciación

### Resumo

Na hora de aprender inglês, os aprendizes podem encontrar dificuldades com relação à pronúncia, posto que existem certas diferenças nos dois idiomas, tais como a correspondência de som da letra, o tamanho do inventário de fonemas, a realização alofônica de sons, o lugar e a forma de articulação, entre outros. Portanto, o propósito deste documento é revisar literatura teórica e investigativa sobre os sons mais problemáticos para aprendizes de inglês que são falantes nativos de espanhol. Aproximações aos erros dos aprendizes de uma segunda língua, como a Análise Contrastiva e a Análise de Erros que, mesmo que têm sido criticados, têm contribuído a identificar as possíveis causas dos erros e abordá-las, seja antecipando-os ou proporcionando uma retroalimentação adequada. Além disso, a interferência da língua materna e a idade de aquisição do segundo idioma tem se encontrado como fatores que dificultam o processo de aprendizagem da pronúncia em inglês. Finalmente, algumas atividades de aula têm sido reportadas como bem sucedidas para facilitar a pronúncia do inglês a falantes nativos de espanhol.

*Palavras chave:* pronúncia em inglês; falantes nativos de espanhol; análise contrastivo, correção de erros; interferência; atividades de pronúncia.



## Introduction

Learning English as a second language (ESL<sup>3</sup>) involves, as any language, the development of the four basic skills, writing, reading, listening and speaking, and the four systems, grammar, lexis, discourse, and phonology. In communication, which is the ultimate goal of using a language, the phonological system plays a significant role. One of its components, pronunciation determines how intelligible messages are so that they can be understood by their interlocutors; as stated by Fangzhi (1998, p.39): “good pronunciation is closely linked with clear oral communication”.

Pronunciation is concerned with how sounds are put together in the flow of speech (Boyers, S. 2002, p. 1). More specifically, pronunciation refers to the production of sounds that we use to make meaning (AMEP, 2002, par. 2). Therefore, having a good pronunciation is fundamental for conveying a clear message. Nonetheless, mastering a proper English pronunciation can constitute a big problem for ESL learners as there are some factors that cause difficulties in the learning of pronunciation. For example, the first language (L1) highly influences the degree of difficulty learners may face during the development of the second language (L2) spoken ability as stated by Manrique (2013 as cited in Denizer, 2017, p. 40): “mispronunciation ... errors are the most common types of interference between the mother tongue and the target language”.

Another example has to do with two features of the English language that hinder the pronunciation learning process of English learners. The first particularity is that the English sound system possesses unique sounds that are not common to those belonging to Romance, Sino-Tibetan, and Arabic linguistic families. The second singularity is that English does not have one-to-one grapheme-phoneme correspondence. It means that each English sound can have more than one phoneme realization depending on its syllabic position. Besides, as all other languages, English has various accents and phoneme realizations depending on the country in which it is spoken (Oxford Royal Academy, 2014, par. 2-13). For example, while American people pronounce the word ‘car’ like /kær/, British people pronounce /ka:ˈr / since the /r/ is silent in this position. In addition, authors such as Case (2012), Hernandez, Gonzales and Algara (2011) and Valenzuela (n.d) agree that L2 learners are prone to mispronounce consonant clusters in initial and final positions, to confuse short and long vowels, and to interchange fricative and affricate sounds. Additionally, learners read the words as they are written due to the sound-letter or phoneme-grapheme correspondence in their L1, and they mispronounce not only occlusive sounds in initial position but also diphthongs.

3 ESL is used in this paper as an umbrella term for both ESL and English as a foreign (EFL). EFL is used only when needed to specify the learning context.

Regarding the teaching of pronunciation, there are some singularities that EFL teachers must take into account in order to assist their Spanish-speaking students in achieving satisfactory English pronunciation and successful communication (Griffiths, 2004). Firstly, they have to be aware of the students' L1 phonetic system interference. Secondly, they need to be aware that it is problematic for Spanish-speakers, for example, to adjust their speech organs (velum, tongue, lips, alveolar ridge etc.) to the exact English articulatory movements (Axelrod, 1974). Thirdly, teachers should have a clear understanding of how pronunciation works and needs to be taught (Kelly, 2000). Teachers, who are knowledgeable in these matters, are more likely to "enable learners to surpass the threshold level [i.e. minimum level of language domain] so that their pronunciation will not detract from the ability to communicate" (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 8). However, pronunciation has been neglected in L2 instruction regardless its major role in effective communication: "Despite the fact that acquiring pronunciation is so difficult, in many L2 classrooms, teaching pronunciation is granted the least attention" (Gilakjani, 2011, p.1).

English learners' pronunciation problems is a topic worth-discussing. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to review some theoretical and research literature related to English pronunciation of ESL speakers with a focus on Spanish native speakers. The information gathered was classified in three major themes. The first one discusses the most problematic phonemes or sounds from the theoretical perspective of Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis. The second one examines the factors that affect learning pronunciation such as interference and age. Finally, the third one addresses activities to improve learner's pronunciation such as reading out-loud and flipped learning.

This revision is relevant for ELT scholars interested in segmental phonetic analysis. They might find some theoretical guidelines to gain awareness of the variety of problems that could arise regarding the pronunciation learning process of ESL learners. This information will encourage them to approach the teaching of pronunciation in a more strategic, practical and better informed way.

### **Problematic Sounds**

Contrastive Analysis (CA) considers language from a structural point of view and emerged as a tool to predict L2 items that language learners would find easy or difficult to master because of being similar to or different from their L1. Thus, in practice, by identifying problematic L2 elements, errors could be prevented (Lado, 1957). Error Analysis (EA), another approach to errors, focused on language as developed by learners through hypothesis formation and testing. Therefore, errors are developmental and promote language learning (Corder, 1967).

## Contrastive analysis

CA is firstly developed and practiced by the American Linguist Robert Lado in the 1950's and 1960's in order to facilitate L2 learning by preventing errors. He compares learners L1 and L2 to identify language items that are similar or different between the two languages. He argues that all kind of errors in the L2 are caused by those L2 elements that differ from the learners L1. Consequently, errors can be anticipated and avoided if such differences are noticed. Thus, he claims that errors produced by learners are the result of L1 negative interference. However, later in 1981, the professor and linguist Jacek Fisiak, states that "there are psychological, pedagogical and extra linguistic factors that contribute to the formation of errors" (as cited in Khansir, 2012, p. 1028). Thus, there are some intralingual and developmental causes such as simplification, overgeneralization, hypercorrection, faulty teaching, fossilization, avoidance, and inadequate learning (Touchie, 1986, p. 78).

CA has been strongly criticized for: first, being used merely for analyzing the language selectively and superficially focusing on phonological, grammatical and certain lexical items; second, analyzing those three systems as discrete and hierarchical with grammar at the highest level; third, its structural approach to language where items are linear and should be learnt from simple to complex and through repetition; fourth, associating all L2 errors to L1 interference so that excluding developmental errors caused by learners' experimentation with the L2; fifth, affirming that language difficulties always lead to error and therefore, ignoring the psycholinguistic factor in language learning, and sixth for wrongly predicting errors (Lennon, 2008)

Notwithstanding, CA seems to "work best in predicting phonological error" (Lennon, 2008, p.54). Consequently, nowadays, CA is used to compare two linguistic systems focusing on grammar and phonological systems of languages in order to predict second language problems (Richards & Smith, 2002, and Fang & Xue-mei, 2007, as cited in Sompong, 2014). Following this new practical and theoretical trend, there are some authors who have applied CA to study the differences in the phonological systems of Spanish and English regarding the production, perception and realization of sounds. For example, authors such as Valenzuela (n.d), Frankfurt International School (n.d.), Coe (2001), and Torres (2007) claim that the most notorious difference between the Spanish and English phonological systems lies in their number of vowels, diphthongs and consonants. In the English system there are twelve pure vowels, eight diphthongs and twenty-four consonants. In contrast, in the Spanish language there are five pure vowels, five diphthongs and nineteen consonants. Focusing on vowels, Coe (2001) affirms that:

[Spanish-speaking English] learners find difficulty in differentiating between English vowels, especially when length is a part of the

difference. Typically, at least two English vowels share the ‘phonetic space’ occupied by one Spanish ...vowel, so one-to-one correspondences are practically impossible. (2001, p. 91)

In order to clarify this, Finch and Ortiz as cited in Gallardo del Puerto & Gómez (2008) claim that since the articulatory movements of the Spanish-speakers are accustomed to specific tongue, lips, jaw movements as well as mouth-opening, these learners associate the existing vowel sounds of their L1 when producing the vowel sounds of the TL as it is exemplified in Table 1. Considering consonants in English and Spanish, Coe (2001) reminds us that there are some Spanish phonemes which share characteristics in the place and manner of articulation with English phonemes as seen in the circled phonemes in Table 2.

Table 1. Spanish-speakers’ interpretation of English Sounds

English vowel		Produced as Spanish vowel
/ i: / - / I /		/ i /
/ e / - / 3: /		/ e /
/ Ò / - / a: / - / æ /		/ a /
/ ʊ / - / u: /		/ u /
/ ɒ /		/ o /
/ ɔ /		/ e / - / a /

Note. Information taken from Finch and Ortiz cited in “Lira La enseñanza de las vocales inglesas a los hablantes de español”, by Gallardo del Puerto, F. and Gómez, E. Revista Pulso CUCC, pp. 47-48

Tabla 2. Similar phonetics in English and Spanish

		PLACE OF ARTICULATION							
		Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	G
MANNER OF ARTICULATION	Plosive	p b			t d			k g	
	Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			
	Affricate					tʃ dʒ			
	Nasal	m			n			ŋ	
	Lateral approximant				l				
	Approximant	w				r	j		

Note. Adapted from “English Phonetics and Phonology, by Peter Roach (2012, p. 52).

However, there are some other sounds which are completely different in both languages and therefore hinder the pronunciation of the English learners. To illustrate this, Cala (1997), Valenzuela (n.d), Valero (2010), and Coe (2001) state that English initial voiceless plosives /p/, /t/, /k/ are not aspirated in Spanish, so they often sound like /b/, /d/ and /g/ to English ears as in the case of *bill* and *pill*. Coe (2001) explains that since in Spanish word-final plosives are rare, Spanish speakers tend to use /t/ for final /d/ (e.g. /sæt/ instead of /sæd/, /k/ for final /ŋ/ (e.g. /sɪŋk/ instead of /sɪŋ/) and /p/ for final /b/ (e.g. /bɑ:p/ instead of /bɑ:b/). Regarding pairs of sounds, Gonzales (2012), Valenzuela (n.d), and Coe (2001) agree on the fact that Spanish-speakers are prone to give English /b/, /d/ and /g/ their mother tongue values, which vary according to the context. Between vowels, these sounds are softer continuous sounds, not stops. For example, in the word *adapt* /ə'dæpt/ the phoneme /d/ is not articulated as plosive. Concerning the particular phoneme /ŋ/, Cala (1997) asserts that this sound is found generally in medium position in Spanish, while in English it is found most of the times in final position.

In addition, the fricative and affricate phonemes happen to be problematic for the Spanish-speaking English learners. On the one hand, the phonemic inventory of both languages shares the sounds /f/, /ð/, /s/ and /h/ (Centeno & Anderson, 2007). On the other hand, there are some others like /z/, /ʃ/, /v/, /θ/, /ɜ:/, /ʒ/, /dʒ/, and /dʒ/ which either can differ in manner and place of realization or are inexistent in Spanish (Frankfurt International School, nd; Valero, 2010 and Coe, 2001). To exemplify the later, in Latin-American Spanish the phoneme /z/ does not exist; thus, learners tend to interchange /z/ by /s/ in English (Coe, 2001); for instance, they will pronounce /su:m/ for 'zoom' instead of /zu:m/.

Regarding the liquid phonemes /r/ and /l/, they have particular features in English and Spanish. In the case of /r/, Perez (2011), Gonzales (2012), Cala (1997), Steward (1971), and Centeno & Anderson(2007) compare place of articulation, manner and syllabic position in both languages. The sound /r/ in Spanish can be voiced, alveolar, and vibrant simple or multiple depending on the syllabic position. That is, if the sound /r/ is found as *vowel*+/*r*/+*vowel*, it is vibrant simple, as in the case of *cara* ['kara]; in contrast, if it is found as *consonant*+/*r*/+*vowel* and in initial position, it is vibrant multiple as in *Israel* [isʔa'el]. On the other hand, the sound /r/ in English is retroflex, post- alveolar approximant in almost all syllabic contexts. Concerning the sound /l/, Gonzales (2012) says that in English there are two kinds of /l/: dark and light, while in Spanish this sound has three different allophones depending on the context in which it is placed. That is to say, in Spanish, it is produced as dental before /t/ and /d/, alveopalatal before /tʃ/, and palatal before /k/ and /i/ as in the words *alto* ['alto], *colchón* ['koltʃon] and *llama* ['la ma] respectively.

Another difference between the Spanish and English phonological systems has to do with clusters, which are defined as “a sequence of two or more consonants at the beginning of a syllable (e.g. /spl æʃ/ in *splash*) or the end of a syllable (e.g. /sts/ in *tests*)” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p.110). Concerning Spanish, Gonzales (2012, p.9) shows the tendency to break clusters into syllables. For example: *en-ci-ma*; *in-cre-i-ble*, *ins-pi-rar*, *ins-tru-ment*.

However, from Coe’s (2001) point of view, consonant clusters in Spanish as well as in Catalan occur less frequently than in English, at least in initial position. Adding to this, Gorman and Kester (n.d) conclude that English /sp/, /sk/ and /st/ initial consonant clusters can only occur in Spanish if preceded by the letter “e” like in *espacio* [es’paθjo], *escalera* [eska’lera] and *strella* [es’treʎa].

In conclusion, it seems that CA is a method that helps linguists to highlight the language differences and/or possible problems in aspects such as: morphology, phonology, and syntax. For example, when English and Spanish is compared, the authors mentioned above, which focused their studies on phonology, determined that factors such as isolated sounds, consonant clusters, fricatives, affricates, and liquid phonemes cause difficulties to L1 Spanish speakers in mastering the pronunciation of English.

### Error Analysis

Error Analysis (EA) “deals with the systematic and methodical collection and documentation of second language (L2) errors in learners’ language production” (Hinkel, 2018, p.1) and directs attention to the communicative nature of language as focuses more on errors in language-production processes (Ellis in Hinkel, 2018). Also, it is related to language pedagogy as “Studying the errors made by learners of a second language... is something which teachers have always done for purely practical reasons” (Corder, 1981, p.35).

In the 1960s, EA is proposed as an alternative to CA. It focuses on L2 errors that cannot be attributed to L1 negative interference and that are more related to the L2. According to EA, L2 learners’ errors show their language development and progress, indicate the way learners learn the language in terms of strategies and prove learners themselves that language learning is taking place. Thus, EA argues that errors are natural in language learning and are caused by learners’ experimentation (inferences or hypothesis) with the L2, and that they are essential for language gradual development. Another tenet of EA is that L2 learners follow a universal order of language acquisition and that areas of difficulties in L2 are common to learners (Corder, 1981). Besides, EA differentiates mistakes from errors: the former seen as non-systematic errors of performance (lapses or slips) which do not have to do with language knowledge, and the latter which are systematic and show learners’ language knowledge at a certain point in time; errors tell what learners have not learnt

yet (Corder, 1981, Corder in Hinkel, 2018; Norrish, 1983 in Sompong, 2014). EA focuses on errors rather than mistakes and its followers have proposed different taxonomies of errors, some regarding the language systems (grammar, phonology, lexis, and discourse) and the type of alteration made to the surface structure of the language (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, and James in Sompong, 2014; Ellis, 1994); others based on the cause of the error (James; Norrish; Richards in Sompong, 2014).

Even though EA first, focuses more on the learner as a language processor and user, second, places more importance to the communicative function of the language, and third, has more pedagogical uses, it has received criticism. The major problems arise when: identifying and classifying the errors, differentiating errors from mistakes, determining the cause of the error, and assuming that the language learners use in production is all the language they know (Lennon, 2008; Hinkel, 2018).

Hashim (as cited in Sompong, 2014) suggests that one of the causes of errors, according to EA, is the quality of L2 instruction. To this respect, Corder (1981, 1983) argues that language teachers need to identify and provide appropriate feedback on errors whether in language learning situations or language use contexts: “errors and their analyses shed light on the areas of learning difficulty that can be useful for both language teachers and language learners. Being able to identify these can assist in instruction, with targeted practice and focused teaching.” (Dulay, Burt & Krashen as cited in Hinkel, 2018, p.2). Some studies have used EA to help Spanish speakers improve their L2 pronunciation (Castillo, 2016; Goswami & Chen (2010); Vera, 2014).

The authors referenced above use a similar methodology. They start hypothesizing a set of problematic English sounds for each specific Spanish-speaking group of participants. Then, they apply a pre-test in which the phoneme pronunciation accuracy of the learners is measured. After that, instruction is provided: the researchers explain through workshops either a specific set of phonemes, or the whole International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Finally, they use a post-test to verify if there is any improvement in the learners’ pronunciation after having received instruction.

As already mentioned, the quality of instruction may facilitate or hinder L2 pronunciation learning. For example, Castillo (2016) conducts an interview in order to find out about the most problematic phonemes for learners. Learners claim to have difficulties in the production of English vowel sounds such as: /ə/, /ɜ:/, /æ/, and /i:/. After doing the pre-test, and having learned the IPA, the learners take the post-test to observe if there is any progress in their pronunciation of these sounds. As a result, the author finds that the instruction is not effective enough as the learners continue having problems differentiating the length of the target vocalic sounds.

In another study, Goswami and Chen (2010) choose the English sounds /t/ /d/, /v/, /z/, /ð/, /θ/ and /ʃ/ as the set of problematic phonemes for Mexican Spanish-speakers. The participants are divided into an experimental and a control group. The experimental group take the pre-test and then receive instruction in differentiating target sounds while the control group have regular English classes. As a conclusion, the authors claim that instruction in segmental features result in a significant improvement in the production of the L2 sounds in the experimental group.

Finally, Vera's research, studies the perception and production of the English vowel "schwa" by Spanish speakers. She conducts an experimental study in which the control group is formed by English-native speakers, and the experimental group, by Colombian English learners. She sets a pre-test to evaluate the abilities of the Spanish-speakers to produce and recognize the /schwa/ before the intervention. Then, she provides the Colombian learners with instruction in discriminating and articulating the target language sound. Finally, she administers a post-test from which she concludes that the experimental group shows a higher improvement in the perception of the "schwa" rather than in its production.

To conclude, instruction is one of the aspects to consider when carrying out EA in order to identify problematic phonemes of L2 students. However, it does not always provide a major impact on the pronunciation proficiency level of the learners. As Touchie(1986) argues, one of the causes of learners' pronunciation errors might be related to the teacher approach and the teaching materials.

### **Factors affecting pronunciation learning**

There are several factors that influence the learning of pronunciation. According to Kenworthy (1987), the major ones are: L1, age, amount of exposure to the L2, phonetic ability, attitude and identity, and motivation and interest in having a good pronunciation. In this section only studies related to L1 interference and age are presented. These two aspects have been widely discussed in the field of L2 learning and are still very debatable.

### **Interference**

Interference or negative transfer is the influence one language has on the learning process of another language, which causes difficulties or leads to errors. However, transfer can be positive or facilitative when the languages involved share features. Language transfer has been approached from different views of language learning and therefore, its meaning has changed overtime. For



example, if considered from a behavioristic point of view, negative L1 transfer is the major cause of L2 errors as seen in CA, but if seen from a cognitive perspective, transfer is part of the L2 learning as learners do not build their L2 from the scratch but instead use any knowledge at their disposal, including the L1 (Selinker as cited in Ellis, 1997). Transfer can occur consciously or unconsciously and can be triggered by factors such as the learning setting and the learner's proficiency and characteristics (Benson, 2002).

Some research has been done on transfer in the phonological system. For example, regarding phonological differences between Spanish and English, Gallardo del Puerto and Gomez (2008) highlight the fact that phonemes in English and Spanish are realized in different place and manner of articulation. For example, the sound /r/ is approximant post-alveolar, while in Spanish it is vibrant (multiple or simple) alveolar. In brief as Axelrod (1974) states, Spanish-speaking learners of English need to adjust their speech organs to the exact English articulation movements in order to realize the phonemes properly.

Another factor that creates interference in the intelligible English pronunciation of the Spanish speaker is the orthographic representation of the words. In English, there is not one to one phoneme-grapheme correspondence as there is in Spanish. An explanation of this phenomenon could be the fact that English has a richer vocalic system in which the twelve vowel sounds can correspond to at least 70 orthographic representations (Finch & Ortiz as cited in Gallardo del Puerto & Gómez, 2008).

Finally, Mayordomo (2013) find some pronunciation problems in Spanish-speakers' production coming from the phonological differences between the Spanish and English sets of phonemes. Firstly, they notice a tendency among the learners to produce vowels and diphthongs in English as they are produced in Spanish (e.g. /i/ instead of /ɪ/ or /i:/, /a/ instead of /æ/). Secondly, they identify that Spanish-speakers pronounce the 'friend words' as exactly as they are pronounced in Spanish language (e.g. /'alkə:l/ instead of /'æ.l.kə.həl/).

Clearly, there are differences that produce interference in the L2 learning process. This happens because the learners are prone to use the familiar sounds and patterns of their L1 in the L2. However, there are ways to overcome this difficulty such as giving explicit instruction in articulation and training learning in sound perception, minimal pairs and orthographic representation (Wells, 2000).

## Age

In the case of the age factor, it has been considered a determining factor for developing native-like L2 competence; but, there is still neither agreement

on a certain chronological age when it is not possible to fully acquire the L2, nor on whether it proportionately affects all language areas. For instance, some linguists following the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) argue that when brain lateralization is finished during puberty, skills for language learning are not naturally and easily available (Penfield & Robert as cited in Kirkman, n.d., p. 3; Lenneberg as cited in Harley & Wang, 2014). A different view is supported by Johnson and Newport (as cited in Harley & Wang, 2014, p.22) who argue that such language learning capacity reduces or disappears with maturation only if it is not exercised.

Regarding pronunciation, Kuhl (2010) and Dekeyser (2012) suggest that not all language areas are affected to the same extent, but the phonological and lexical systems need more effort to be developed and might not reach the native-like level. Barlow (2014) in her study with 38 male and female college students aged 20, analyzes the influence of the phoneme /l/ with both early (learn the L2 before 5 years old) and late (learn the L2 after 6) Spanish-English bilinguals, 11 and 14 respectively, and a group of 13 English monolinguals for English pronunciation reference. The two bilingual groups evidence balanced exposure and use of both languages, even though English input and output is a bit greater as they study in a dominant English-spoken institution. Findings reveal that: first, both early and late Spanish-English bilinguals acquired the English /l/ pronunciation with subtle influence of the Spanish /l/; such influence is slightly stronger in late bilinguals. Second, late bilinguals Spanish /l/ is influenced by English /l/ which proves that there is a bidirectional L1 and L2 influence. Third, age have an incidence in the sound production of bilinguals'; the older the learners, the greater the influence.

Another study by Major (2014) conducted with 38 Spanish native speakers aims to determine the influence of cognitive, affective and demographic factors in the participants' L2 proficiency. Results related to age (included in the demographic aspects) indicate that the younger the subjects were when they started to learn English, the higher the proficiency they have achieved. The author explains this finding in terms of the experience using the language: younger learners have had more L2 practice opportunities.

The age factor is one of the most controversial topics in second language acquisition (SLA). Whether or not there is a specific time in the physical and linguistic development of human beings after which a new language cannot be fully learned is still under debate. However, there are some researchers such as Marinova-Todd (as cited in Pinter, 2012) that claim that it is not age per se what affects L2 language learning but other factors such as exposure, practice time, learners' disposition and quality of instruction mainly in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts.

### Activities to help learners improve pronunciation

Teaching pronunciation has been neglected by teachers as they approach it mostly in a reactive way when mispronunciation is noticed (Griffiths, 2011). However, some books (Hancock, 2000; Hewings, 2004; Kelly, 2000; Kenworthy, 1987) and papers (Huang, 2010; Ramírez, 2018) provide different activities to include pronunciation in the regular English classes.

### Reading out-loud

Reading out-loud (i.e. loud enough to be heard) is a method that has been implemented in L2 teaching in order to improve student's oral production. There exist many attempts to define the concept of oral reading; however, Huang (2010) calls our attention at defining reading out-loud as "a kind of comprehensive practice of pronunciation ... [which] can help [students] to overcome the faults of disfluency, repeat, improper pause, and develop natural and good pronunciation habits" (p.149). Thus, teachers can use reading out-loud to help students to develop and improve their oral fluency. Also, teachers use it in order to identify student's pronunciation mistakes and give them appropriate feedback to avoid fossilization (Tost, 2013). Some examples of the use of this method are the studies by Cabrera and Lara (2014) and Hernandez, Gonzales and Algara (2011) who have implemented reading out-loud for identifying pronunciation errors in Spanish-speaking English learners.

In their study, Cabrera and Lara (2014) claim that Spanish-speakers are prone to confuse and mispronounce the affricate /tʃ/, /dʒ/, the alveolar /d/ and the fricative /ʃ/, /ʒ/ phonemes since they have many orthographic representations. In order to analyze whether these phonemes are problematic or not for a group of Spanish- speakers, the researchers ask the learners to read aloud a list of words, a list of sentences and one paragraph where these phonemes appear randomly. They conclude that first, the context provided by text-fragments and long sentences facilitate the realization of the target sounds effectively as compared to the production of the sounds in isolated words, and second, that the written English forms causes difficulties in reception and production of English in Spanish native speakers. Finally, the authors suggest using reading out-loud to help learners link sounds to spelling.

In the second, Hernandez, Gonzales and Algara (2011) hypothesize that the English fricative alveolar /s/ and /z/ are challenging sounds for Spanish speakers from Venezuela as in Latin America Spanish native speakers do not make the oral distinction between the sounds /s/ and /z/ in their L1; therefore, they transfer this phonological feature to English. In order to prove the hypothesis, the learners read aloud a set of words both isolated and contextualized. The authors find that: firstly, the sound /z/ was predominantly

devoiced by Venezuelan English learners; secondly, there is a tendency to interchange the consonant sounds /z/ and /s/ with the glottal /h/. For example, the words same /seim/, second /'sek.ənd/ are pronounced as /heim/ /'hek.ənd/.

These fricative, affricate and alveolar phonemes are identified as the most problematic sounds not only for Venezuelan Spanish speakers but also for Spanish native speakers from different nationalities such as: Catalan, Mexican, Spanish and Costa Rican (Centeno & Anderson, 2007; Kalhousová 2014, Pizarro & Cordero, 2015; Coe, 2001; Steward, 1971).

In conclusion, reading out-loud contributes to identifying problematic sounds and developing fluency. Consequently, pedagogical activities can be done to address specific pronunciation problems in the classroom.

### **Flipped learning**

Bergmann and Sams (2012) define flipped learning as an alternative teaching approach that aims at catering for individual learners' needs by moving the delivery of content in the classroom to the individual learning space, which makes possible to personalize education. Thus, class time is devoted to more practical and experiential activities where learners can apply the content knowledge. While putting theory into practice learners test their own hypothesis, clarify doubts, make new inferences and develop their critical thinking skills (FLN, 2014).

Ramírez (2018) conducts a case study research with 10 in-service Colombian teachers of English in order to determine the effectiveness of a blended course to train the teachers in how to teach pronunciation. The researcher uses surveys, pre and post recordings, interviews, participants and teacher's diaries, and lesson plans to gather information. Besides, she implements flipped learning as one of the pedagogical approaches for running the course. Findings show that these teachers, Spanish native speakers, improved both their English pronunciation (mainly consonants and linking) and their pronunciation teaching skills. The author recommends Flipped Learning as a tool for promoting situated learning as learners can put into practice the content studied.

### **Karaoke**

Rengifo (2009) did an action research with 15 adult Spanish native speakers learning English to determine the effectiveness of the Japanese singing activity, Karaoke, in helping the participants to improve their pronunciation during their classes. The researcher carries out activities such as discussing the meaning of the song, comparing English accents, minimal pairs

discrimination, matching sound to written form, among others to get learners to notice L2 pronunciation features. He also uses observations, interviews and tests to collect information. Findings show that Karaoke is effective not only to reach a better pronunciation but also to improve spoken English in general.

The authors recommend integrating pronunciation as a natural component of the English learning process and raising awareness of its importance in communication.

### Conclusions

As the purpose of this paper was to review some existing literature related to the pronunciation of ESL learners especially Spanish native speakers, the following conclusions were reached: Pronunciation plays an important role in the L2 learning process since oral messages must be intelligible for effective communication to take place (AMEP, 2002). Although CA has been criticized due to its superficial approach to language, it allows researchers to compare two linguistic systems in order to identify potential problems L2 learners might experience in both sound perception and production (Sompong, 2014). Specifically, when comparing Spanish and English, the most notorious differences that makes pronunciation challenging for ESL Spanish native speakers are: the sound-letter correspondence in English but absent in Spanish and the bigger number of vowels, diphthongs and consonants in English.; in both languages, a set of phonemes share characteristics in place and manner of articulation while some others either do not exist or do not have exact correspondence (Coe, 2001; Torres, 2007; Valenzuela, n.d). In addition, error analysis permits both to identify the problems that L2 learners face and to help teachers develop strategies for improving pronunciation. Nevertheless, it was evidenced that the pronunciation instruction does not have a significant impact on learners' production in the short term, and unless it is systematic. Thus, it is important to highlight the fact that the quality of the instruction affects positively or negatively L2 learners' oral production (Castillo, 2016; Goswami & Chen, 2010; Sompong, 2014; Vera, 2014). L1 plays a crucial role SLA. L2 learners resort to their L1 knowledge to deal with gaps in L2 knowledge which might cause negative transfer or interference leading to production mistakes and poor speech intelligibility. However, interference can be dealt with through explicit training in articulation, sound perception, minimal pairs and orthographic representation (Gallardo del Puerto & Gómez, 2008; Wells, 2000). Although the role of age in SLA is still controversial, the CPH has found evidence of early L2 learners' more successful pronunciation management (Barlow 2014). However, some research affirms that age is not determining per se, but the time of language exposure, continuous practice and quality of instruction in EFL contexts that account for better L2 pronunciation in early L2 learners (Johnson

& Newport as cited in Harley & Wang, 2014). There are some strategies for helping L2 learners improve pronunciation. For example, reading out-loud has two main purposes. On the one hand, it helps learners to practice and improve their oral production. On the other hand, it provides teachers with a benchmark to establish what the most difficult sounds for the students are. Also, it allows teachers to provide appropriate feedback in order to avoid fossilization. Thus, teachers can develop strategies and/or materials to overcome learner's pronunciation difficulties (Huang, 2010; Tost, G, 2013). A second way is to implement flipped learning where learners improve their language by working both individually and group through developing their autonomy and critical thinking skills (Ramírez, 2018). Another strategy is integrating Karaoke in classes so learners can pay attention to formal phonological aspects such as: discrimination and realization of specific phonemes (e.g. minimal pairs), and/or discrimination of sounds by accent. Also, they can improve lexis and fluency (Rengifo, 2009). Finally, further research should be done regarding important factors in L2 pronunciation. For example, awareness-raising of the major role of pronunciation in communication, approaches and strategies to improve the quality of pronunciation teaching and learning, the role of pronunciation in English as lingua franca and the respect for *Englishes*, and some other aspects that affect the way L2 pronunciation is approached in ELT.

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**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 25 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.

**Origin 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.

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

**Correspondence.** For contributions, subscriptions or journal exchanges please write to: GiST Journal, Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana ÚNICA, Calle 19 # 2A -49 Bogotá, Colombia. PBX: (57-1)2811777 email: [gist@unica.edu.co](mailto:gist@unica.edu.co) <http://www.unica.edu.co>

## REVIEWERS

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Gist would like to thank the following reviewers for their valuable comments and thoughtful revision:

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COLOMBO AMERICANA



## LICENCIATURA EN BILINGÜISMO CON ÉNFASIS EN ESPAÑOL E INGLÉS

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Modalidad: Presencial  
Duración: 10 semestres  
Título ofrecido:  
LICENCIADO(A) EN BILINGÜISMO  
CON ÉNFASIS EN ESPAÑOL E INGLÉS



Registro Calificado: Resolución No. 1811 del 10 de Marzo de 2011. Registro SNIES: 106242.



## ESPECIALIZACIÓN EN EDUCACIÓN BILINGÜE

En Bogotá y Medellín  
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Duración: 3 semestres  
Título ofrecido:  
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EDUCACIÓN BILINGÜE



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