

English Language Teaching in Costa Rica: Reflections on Emergent Challenges

Edited by
Juan Pablo Zúñiga Vargas
Jesús Irán Barrantes León



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Foreword

Teachers everywhere are always faced with new challenges as they engage in their pedagogical praxis; it is not easy to cater for students' needs (whether special or not) and bring about new ideas to teach and arouse students' interest and desire to learn, especially when one's job does not end at the workplace and continues at home. These are but a few of the hurdles teachers around the globe have to surmount. Indeed, teaching is a profession that is all too often misunderstood, underestimated, and harshly criticized.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in a country such as Costa Rica is no different. Indeed, foreign language teaching poses additional difficulties when considering that pedagogy is an act of communication, and in the teaching of English, language is both the means and the end of instruction. In this regard, the English language curriculum in Costa Rica is far from perfect, so it is not uncommon for English teachers here to have to start from scratch each time that they teach a new language course.

Moreover, most English teachers in Costa Rica are native speakers of Spanish, which causes them to be discriminated against because they are considered inferior when compared with people coming from North America or Great Britain. This treatment is mostly unjustified as public universities in Costa Rica have sound English language programs with strong pedagogical components to train good teachers. Also, a little too often, native speakers who do not have any kind of pedagogical preparation are hired to be teachers by certain language academies, which can be rather counterproductive; the fact that, in theory, everyone knows their native language well is no guarantee that they can teach it successfully. A teacher is much more than a container of information.

As a further matter, the year 2020 brought new challenges for (English) teachers all over the world; a pandemic was able to turn our lives upside down, which had to be adapted to fit into what was called "a new reality." Thus, teachers everywhere had to reinvent themselves, learn, relearn, and unlearn to teach in an education modality that they were not expecting. This condition exposed different limitations that had remained unnoticed up to this time in Costa Rica (and in other parts of the world). For example, students coming from low-income families had little or no access to the Internet, computers, and/or mobile devices; in this regard, remote learning made us even more unequal, and (English) teachers had to come up with alternative ways for students to continue their educational process. This required critical reflection and action as the reader will be able to see in the following pages.

This book comprises a collection of essays written by students from the Master's Program in Education with an Emphasis on English Learning from Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica as part of their graduation project. In each of the manuscripts contained here, a Costa Rican English teacher reflects on and systematizes some of the challenges found in his or her professional practice along with possible solutions or recommendations. It is expected, therefore, that the information contained in this book may be of help to other English teachers around the world facing similar challenges.

Juan Pablo Zúñiga Vargas

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About the Editors

Juan Pablo Zúñiga Vargas is an English language teacher educator at Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in English, a Licentiate Degree in University Teaching, and a Master's Degree in English Teaching as a Foreign Language, all of which were obtained at the University of Costa Rica. He is also the main editor of the academic journal *Ensayos Pedagógicos*. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8717-3793>

Jesús Irán Barrantes León is a professor of Spanish as a Second Language in national and international institutions. He has been a faculty member at the University of Mississippi (Old Miss), Department of Modern Languages. Currently, he is both a professor and tutor of final postgraduate graduation projects at the Schools of Teacher Education, Natural Science, and History at Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica. He also collaborates in academic committees and councils at Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica. He is a member of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Education Sciences from UNED and a Master's Degree in Education with an Emphasis on University Teaching from Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica.

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Development of Listening Comprehension Skills in 8th Graders of the Bilingual Experimental High School in Santa Cruz by the Promotion of Local Belonging during Online Learning

Andrea Mojica Barquero¹
Universidad Nacional
Costa Rica
amoba15@gmail.com

Abstract

This essay explores and analyses the implementation of an original website that collects material and learning activities which help students comprehend, and eventually produce the language prompted by input and insights that correspond to Costa Rican (Santa Cruz's) interests, people, places, culture, identity, and traditions. Such a resource can also provide students with other means for language comprehension development, through different forms of representation and related content. Due to the current inability of repeating, inferring, interpreting, and comprehending spoken language in a common physical room, there should be a virtual space in which resources can be organized according to each linguistic objective proposed in MEP's language program.

Keywords: listening activities, spoken comprehension, online education, combined modalities, cultural belonging

Introduction

The new modality of learning adopted by the Ministry of Public Education (MEP, for its acronym in Spanish) in Costa Rica has brought different challenges to our educational system as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. This sanitary emergency brought to our attention the gaps that remain regarding organization and delivery of virtual classes; distance learning is taking over without an efficient implementation. Currently, students from public high schools are forced to learn and comply with the program's objectives regardless of the limitations of online teaching in each region.

In the case of Guanacaste (the fifth province of Costa Rica), at *Liceo Experimental Bilingue de Santa Cruz* (LEB²), students are required to follow a program that corresponds to three different subjects for English learning: Listening and Speaking, Reading and Writing, and English Literature. Moreover, students have face-to-face interaction, in each subject, with the teacher and classmates once every two weeks since it was suggested to subdivide groups into two subgroups: A and B. This means that the time of direct interaction inside a classroom is reduced, and more self-guided learning should be promoted to enhance

1. English Teacher at *Liceo Experimental Bilingue de Santa Cruz*, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. Graduate of the English Teaching major at Universidad Nacional, Heredia. Also holder of a Licenciante Teaching Degree from Universidad Castro Carazo, San Jose, Costa Rica.

2. Bilingual Experimental High School for its acronym in Spanish

students' continuous practice.

The exposure to the language is limited to one hour a week, every two weeks. As a consequence of the shortness of time, student's comprehension of ideas and details has been weakened; in fact, students are less likely to understand the main and secondary ideas of spoken language due to the lack of practice and the reduced language interactions. In addition, online teaching has pushed teachers to use and develop different learning technologies so that distance learning can be supported and delivered with quality resources that can fit the students' uniqueness as a community and as a specific learning population.

The adaptation of resources that can be useful for the achievement of MEP's listening objectives is definitely a challenge. Though the target learning population has enough technological literacy to manage and interact on different online platforms and websites, the gathering and adaptation of material to a virtual space that can be accessed remotely and can expose students to the language is necessary for the effective implementation of the program's objectives in the current teaching conditions. Therefore, this essay explores and analyses the implementation of an original website that collects material and learning activities which help students comprehend and produce the language prompted by input and insights that correspond to Costa Rican (Santa Cruz's) interests, people, places, culture, identity, and traditions. Such a resource can also provide students with other means for language comprehension development. Due to the current inability of repeating, inferring, interpreting, and comprehending spoken language in a common physical room, there should be a virtual space in which resources can be organized according to each linguistic objective proposed in the language program.

Such a resource is a product of the analysis of the current learning conditions which point out to a detriment of spoken production and comprehension as a consequence of distance learning and lack of language exposure. Besides that, the type of resources used in online teaching do not always comply with the learner's cultural background and individual interests, which leads to lack of motivation towards the acquisition and practice of the language. Therefore, the implementation of this resource within the language lesson can work as an alternative to continue education in times of distance learning.

Population of Study

For the purpose of this essay, the population of study corresponds to 8th graders from Liceo Experimental Bilingüe de Santa Cruz (LEB), Guanacaste, Costa Rica. Such students come from different parts of the region to this institution with the purpose of developing high quality English Language skills through five high school years. In fact, LEB's Plan Anual de Trabajo [Yearly Action Plan] (2021) states that the institution's mission is offering academic education of excellence, enriched by the efficient proficiency of English as a second language, with the purpose of preparing and interacting successfully to the country's workforce and face the new millennium based on human principles and values³. The importance of the institution within the community is undeniable. In Santa

3. Translation into English from the original version.

Cruz, the institution represents a route of working and laboring success after graduation through the acquisition of English. Due to the proximity to the most visited places of the area and the influence of local tourism, its attractions and related businesses in the zone, the independent proficiency of a foreign language turns out to be a decisive point among recruiters and talent seekers.

As stated before, in the academic offer of Bilingual High schools in Costa Rica, English is taught through three different English subjects: Listening and Speaking, Reading and Writing and English Literature. The design of the website is based on the learning objectives for listening and speaking classes and goals, and it is directed specifically to 8th graders from the community of Santa Cruz, Guanacaste, who attend the Bilingual Experimental High School. The selected group of students correspond to teenagers from 13 to 15 years old, who were born in Santa Cruz or its surroundings and whose English proficiency exit level for this school year should be above B1 as specified by MEP in the English program (MEP, 2017).

English Program for 8th Graders from LEB

The Ministry of Education in Costa Rica (MEP) has launched a differentiated program for Bilingual modalities of secondary education (MEP, 2017). According to the program, the mediation activities and learning objectives are scaffolded in a sequential logical way that matches the proficiency levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This means that, as set in the organization of goals and objectives, students are expected to have a proficiency level of B1 according to the CEFR by the end of 8th grade (MEP, 2017). Such proficiency involves the achievement of the following competencies from the CEFR- B1 in reference to the band:

1. Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.
2. Can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken.
3. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest.
4. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. (MEP, 2017, p. 30)

Besides setting the expectation for the exit proficiency level of students, the program describes the approach that is best adopted for the whole national educational community, which is the Action-Oriented Approach:

This curriculum adopts the Action-Oriented Approach, within the communicative language methodologies, which places emphasis on what learners know and do to communicate successfully by completing tasks, using general and specific competences in meaningful context and real-life scenarios. There is a progressive shift from the Communicative Approach to the Action-Oriented Approach. The

curriculum maintains an eclectic view, but favors the Action-Oriented Approach among the other pedagogical views. (MEP, 2017, p. 31)

As presented in the curriculum, the approach used in the program promotes the active use of the language in situations and events that correspond to real scenarios. In addition, it encourages the use of the language in problem solving and conversational situations. “Within this approach to English language learning, learners develop communicative competence, gain knowledge of various English cultures, and develop their full potential as national and global citizens” (MEP, 2017, p. 31).

Distance Learning Challenges and Problematization of Current’s Learning Conditions

According to the English program, “the Action-Oriented Approach sees learners as active agents responsible for their own progress in learning and sees communication as a social activity designed to accomplish specific tasks” (MEP, 2017, p. 31). However, that principle of the approach is unfairly represented in the current conditions of MEP’s online learning. There are several challenges that have to be faced when trying to implement online learning in the country. Though there is an urgent need of maintaining educational continuity, as explained by Quesada (2009), who highlighted the importance of virtual scenarios for the delivery of academic content; there are more setbacks that have to be addressed.

Though the current learning conditions have come as an alternative to provide a chance for practice and achievement of the set objectives, the problems triggered by the sanitary emergency are only adding up to the old gaps and decline of the quality of learning. Within the scope of education, there have been challenges in terms of resources, access, expertise, commitment, time and tasks management, among others. Clearly, there has been a great change to the use of resources in the classroom. Body language and expressions are barely interpreted in virtual scenarios and learners do not yet know how to act and participate in synchronous meetings. One of the most important tools, which is exposure to the language, is sometimes none for students who do not have a device to connect or proper connection to establish a virtual meeting. Written practices are set to be the remedy to the lack of connection and resources, but it will not be effective in the understanding of spoken language.

On the other hand, both teachers and students require more training in the teaching and learning of virtual and distance scenarios. As to this pandemic, it was urgent for teachers to have taken over online environments and virtual education, most of them without prior experience in online teaching and not even enough resources or connection in some locations of the country. Teachers have shown and expressed how mentally exhausting this transition has been.

Many teachers and students of the zone have reported how they have felt that the academic burden has affected their health and state of mind (Kikut, 2020). Time manage-

ment techniques were required for the correct implementation of distance learning so that both teachers and students could deal with their roles effectively within real and reachable timetables. By accepting that not being in school does not mean that learning is stopped, there is a need to promote commitment within the school community.

Finally, the pandemic's limitations have modified the curricula. As of now, there is clearly more knowledge and competences that need to be acquired and the administrative limitations also include time and how it is distributed among the different groups and levels. As explained in the COVID-19 report from ECLAC- UNESCO (2020),

A number of decisions need to be taken and resources made available that present a challenge for school systems, educational establishments and teachers. This is true of curricular adjustments and prioritization and the contextualization needed to ensure that the contents are relevant to the current emergency situation, based on consensus among all relevant stakeholders. (p. 4)

According to this report, countries should adapt and be flexible when addressing such changes, not only because of the prioritization of contents and objectives, but also to innovate in means of learning and cooperate in the different learning- virtual environments (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020).

Spoken Comprehension (Listening Skills) Development Principles

This essay describes the implementation of a website in which the development of listening and spoken comprehension is enhanced by the promotion of local belonging during online learning. According to Wang (2018), one of the most important principles for the development of spoken comprehension is the selection of appropriate resources, content and material, which vary according to their levels and needs.

Therefore, he has defended that designing task-oriented approaches centered on tasks related to the students' interest helps them learn listening skills. "Listening exercises are most effective if they are constructed around a task. That is to say, the students are required to do something in response to what they hear that will demonstrate their understanding" (Wang, 2018, p. 2). When tasks require students to inform, describe, react, analyze or construct something after having spoken input, the process turns out to be more convenient and insightful. Also, Wang (2018) has insisted on the fact that representing real life scenarios in such tasks will provide learners with a chance to live and comment on real experiences, which can as well work regardless of the experiences each lives.

Pertinence and Importance of Content Used on the Website (Cultural Background and Local Belonging) for the Development of Listening Skills

This essay seeks to promote a website to gather insightful material that can be accessed remotely and can support the public system's specific English program by providing a space of exposure to the language tailored to their local features and cultural background. The use and importance of this site not only meets the objectives set in the cur-

ricula, but it promotes local belonging and the exposure to spoken language. In the development of the website, there are videos, audios and readings related to the people, traditions and places from Guanacaste, which means that the content used relates directly to daily life situations that they experience in the learner's own communities and households.

Wang (2018) also explained that effective distance learning is only possible when authentic learning experiences are approached. Also, Walker (2014) said that "Sociolinguistic elements of listening, such as the student's cultural background and the student's knowledge of the cultural background of the foreign language can also play a significant part in the student's comprehension of the verbal discourse" (p. 168). She pointed out that when there is use of prior knowledge for the completion of learning tasks, that has shown to be more engaging and significant in the understanding and acquisition of listening skills. Therefore, the website and content material focus on the description of local traditions, people, and places to which the student can easily relate.

Website's Name and URL:

MASTERING THE BEAST!

<https://8thgradelisteningandspeakingleb.weebly.com>

The name of the website relates to the local tradition of bull riding and how culturally relevant it is for citizens and teenagers around the province and especially for people in Santa Cruz. In addition, it represents a metaphor which compares both bull riding and the understanding of spoken English. As in learning spoken comprehension, bull riding requires practice and risk taking. Students, like bull riders, need to work on methodologies that can help them "hold on the language" as much time as possible, and the ultimate understanding of the message is the rewarding experience that motivates learners, as much as mastering the beast encourages *Guanacastecos*.

Activities that Involve Language Comprehension within the Website

According to Khan (2014), there should be an objective after listening which is an implied outcome objective. Based on this outcome, a series of activities or strategies can be used to achieve the listening objective, according to Morley (2001) as follows.

Table 1
Listening Activities according to specific outcome

Outcome of Listening tasks	Examples of activities within the website	Mediation activities and extra resources
<p><i>Listening and performing Actions and Operations:</i></p> <p>Students perform specific actions by the delivery of commands and instructions that should be followed within the recording.</p>	<p><i>Listening Activity 1- Traditions in Guanacaste:</i> Students are required to listen and order a series of words</p> <p><i>Vocabulary_ Traditions in Guanacaste:</i> Students can listen and draw a picture, figure, locating routes of specific points or images</p>	<p>Such texts can also be read aloud so that reading skills can be practiced. Creating content and listening for sharing their experiences through audiovisuals is a good way to help them practice their oral skills.</p>
<p><i>Listening and transferring information:</i></p> <p>The function in this activity should be focused on ideas and details</p>	<p><i>Listening Activity 2- Traditions in Guanacaste:</i> Students are required to fill out a text with the information they hear</p> <p><i>Listening Activity 1- Traditions in Guanacaste:</i> Students use such recording as a dictation exercise.</p>	<p>Dictations are suitable activities in this category. Creating digital content with self made visuals and local settings will motivate the use of language. Listening to Speak and Listening to Write activities are suggested.</p>
<p><i>Listening and solving Problems:</i> Requires students to expose to problem solving methodologies that can help them cope with meaning and interpretations</p>	<p><i>After listening 1: People in Guanacaste:</i> In this activity students can be asked to interpret the information and compare it to today's reality. They would analyze how much lifestyles have changed.</p>	<p>Listening to Speak and Listening to Write activities that can follow a recording or a video which presents a problem and guides students into proposing solutions.</p>
<p><i>Listening, Evaluating, and Manipulating Information:</i></p> <p>This activities demand student's reasoning and interpretation, so that there can be a different outcome to the one that was first presented</p>	<p><i>Listening Activity 1- Amazing Places in Guanacaste:</i> In this section, students are required to watch a video and answer some questions.</p>	<p>Listening to make predictions and assumptions activities are helpful when developing reasoning and interpretational skills. Blogs after</p>

		videos, or digital portfolios can also help them gather reactions based on recordings.
<p><i>Interactive Listening-and-Speaking:</i></p> <p>Message or orders taking, dictations are suitable activities in this category. Negotiating Meaning through Questioning/Answering Routines: The focus of the outcome is both to transmit the information as well as negotiate meaning in interactive listener/speaker exchanges</p>	<p>The <i>Content Producer</i> section of the website proposes a means for students' participation and engagement. Students are required to create images, videos, presentations, flyers, in each section of the website. Dialogues and Role Plays are widely suggested.</p>	<p>A student can give a presentation or share anything else of interest to the students through a video or an image. Either during or soon after the presentation is over, each listener is supposed to ask and answer questions, as both the speaker and listener</p>

Note. Adapted from Khan (2014)

Suggested Implementation of the Website within the Language Lesson

According to MEP's (2020) guidelines for the delivery of lessons during this sanitary emergency, the different moments of interaction, virtual or face to face, should be clarified and exemplified in the monthly plan. These moments are: Connection, Clarification, Collaboration and Construction (MEP, 2020). According to such guidelines, the Connection stage is set for pre-teaching activities, in which vocabulary and topics are mainly introduced. If this stage is delivered synchronically, it is a good suggestion to reinforce oral production by repeating and emphasizing sounds. The second stage corresponds to the clarification of topics after the introduction of some insights. This stage is part of the mediation activities during the whole lesson plan and it provides the chance of clarification and representation of data through different stages or means during the four stages. After the first clarification stage takes over, MEP (2020) requires teachers to plan and work in activities in which students can cooperate actively with their peers and within the school community. For this stage, asynchronous projects that involve contact with classmates will require students to develop some basic technological literacy to contribute to the different learning platforms, such as Google Docs, video makers, photo editing apps, video meeting rooms, and so on.

The following stage will lead students to the construction of knowledge through the design and implementation of any artifact that can help teachers prove students' learning. This evidence includes recording, videos, presentations or any kind of activities that proves

students' understanding of the topic. All these stages are proposed by MEP with the purpose of providing a sequential and logical structure to the planning of activities and mediation strategies in times of synchronous, asynchronous or face to face classes. These sessions are developed through Microsoft Teams, which is the online virtual learning platform adopted by MEP. In such a platform, students should work on the uploaded documents and material, and also should be able to join the different meetings and synchronous sessions. All the students from the assigned group of study have access to such a tool and are required to deliver their assignments through this official means.

Table 2

English Monthly Plan that Includes Some Sections of the Website

Section of website: <i>Mastering the Beast!</i>	Mediation activities	Further resources	Evaluation
1- Vocabulary_ Amazing Places 2. Vocabulary_ Traditions in Guanacaste 3. Listening 1_ People in Guanacaste	<i>Conection:</i> Students are required to create a list of new vocabulary gathered from each section. A picture, drawing or sentence can represent each term. Handwriting is encouraged through the use of notebooks. Voice recordings with students' own voices repeating words is also important in this stage.	Notebook, Translators, Voice Recordings, video and audio players, video conferencing apps, Google Drive, Google Docs, video editors, Canva, Youtube, Blogs, Google Sites, Microsoft Teams	Listening activities to draw or represent vocabulary. Spelling quizzes or tests in synchronous sessions. Word matching exercises.
Listening 1_ Traditions in Guanacaste Listening 2_ Traditions in Guanacaste	<i>Clarification:</i> Recordings should be analyzed in different stages of the task, therefore, re- playing the recording as many times as necessary will provide students with multiple opportunities of coding and understanding the heard insights. They are required to listen to the recording for one purpose in the first instance and for another purpose the second time. This is to be completed in both synchronous or asynchronous moments.		Voice Recordings and drilling Word-meaning matching exercises

Listening Activity_ People in Guanacaste Listening Activity_ Amazing Places	<i>Collaboration:</i> Students are required to collaborate in an oral presentation project. Students are required to do research in any of the topics of the website, and provide a solution to any problem encountered in the province that can relate to people, places or traditions of Guanacaste.	Cooperation in different sharing apps, with real time participation. Peer-Feedback
Listening Activity_ People in Guanacaste Listening Activity_ Amazing Places	<i>Construction:</i> They are required to create a digital poster and share the information and proposed solutions to the rest of the class in either a video or a synchronous meeting.	Understanding of technological platforms through the constant supervision of its use. Self, peer assessment.

Note. Adapted from MEP (2020)

Conclusions and Overall Reflections

The process of choosing the target population and skills was rapid and clear because of the decreasing spoken comprehension among the school population. Language exposure and practice were limited to written practices, and oral skills were left aside. As a result, students have a hard time understanding main ideas and details in videos and recordings regardless of its length. Therefore, the use of a website that can gather recordings and videos helped them practice in times of little language exposure. Once the population and language skills were chosen, the objective of the website was clear in complementing MEP's curriculum and providing a virtual space that could gather recordings and spoken language in various forms with the purpose of practicing and exposing learners to the language permanently. However, it was necessary to provide a means of action, how can it be possible to motivate students into participating and practicing on the website?

Guanacaste is a culturally rich region that is proud of its roots, traditions, and beautiful landscapes. Such cultural and local love and belonging could be the means that encourages students into sharing, learning, participating, and using the language in different contexts. In other words, the comprehension of details and main ideas in short and more complex recordings will be triggered and guided by information that corresponds to their real world, town or habits. Later on, it can lead to the development of tourism-related language that can comply with the work force and local economy, as an indirect benefit of such design.

In terms of the construction of the webpage, selecting the activities, designing the page, and creating its content was quite challenging. First, the understanding of basic graphic design principles was very overwhelming. Understanding about images and layouts was essential for the initial design of the webpage. Keeping consistency in layouts, fonts and colors within the different pages was difficult to follow, as well. The use of apps for the edition or production of videos and pictures was indeed learned throughout the process, which points to improvements that should be implemented to attract learners to its use.

Further Improvements and Recommendations of the Resource

The implementation of the website in the language lesson requires students to understand and work in secondary online platforms that will help them produce such artifacts that will evidence their learning. The newest generations are very acquainted with such sites; however, some teachers and even students are not yet familiar with these apps. A change in the understanding of online information and tools should also be part of these flexibilities that Costa Rican education requires.

Understanding and proposing the most suitable ways of handling data, discriminating information, using basic search engines, summarizing and synthesizing information, creating audiovisuals, doing basic picture edition, sharing and collaborating simultaneously in word documents, working on virtual identity and affectivity and addressing situations appropriately to overcome gaps is necessary to achieve enough online technological literacy.

As to the implementation of the website, the lesson plan proposes some activities that can be changed according to the needs and limitations of each group. It is important to highlight that the website does not yet include a section in which the comprehension can be achieved from dialogues or language interactions. Therefore, teachers are to create spaces of language interaction among the different participants using the different meeting room technologies. In the case of Microsoft Teams, there is a specific chat section that can be used for this purpose. Such moments of language negotiation should be mediated by the teacher; however, spaces for self and peer feedback should be allowed for the improvement of the interaction.

Moreover, the designed resource is intrinsically promoting local and cultural belonging by focusing content to a specific geographical place. In fact, students' participation is always encouraged in the Content Producer's section with the purpose of bringing to our eyes the different aspects of Guanacaste's culture that are worth sharing. Through the visualization of the province, its identity, and people; the language functions developed in the learners will be related to Guanacaste's uniqueness. Again, the basic understanding of online tools that can help students achieve such goals is necessary. Also, risks of discomfort or cyber violence should be mitigated by communicating the expectations and consequences since the beginning of its use.

Finally, it can be suggested to include and update more information as videos and audiovisuals are shared by students. Listening activities that include information gathered

and shared directly by students can turn it into a very meaningful learning experience. Also, the implementation of more learning objectives and its development within the site can include the addition of more grades and levels, so that the resource can be widely used among the same educational community.

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The Promotion of Online Student-Centered Classes to Achieve Communicative Language Teaching with the Help Offered by Technological Tools

Genesis Rodriguez Vargas¹
Universidad Nacional
Costa Rica
g.ne.ziz.23@gmail.com

Abstract

Nowadays, teaching virtually has become a challenge due to the COVID 19 emergency. However, with the help of technological tools, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes can be directed towards a student-centered perspective which can aid students to be active in the class and participate orally. Furthermore, the implementation of technological tools became highly essential in the classes. This paper aims to explain the importance of a student-centered class and Communicative Language Teaching. Also, the importance of both working together in the class with the help offered by some online resources. Also, some online tools are explained that were applied in an EFL class. Moreover, this paper concludes that teachers should continuously innovate their classes by investigating new online tools that allow them to put into practice Communicative Language Teaching in a student-centered class.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, foreign language teaching, online resources, student centered learning, technological tools

Introduction

The situation that the world is facing due to COVID-19 has brought many changes. For instance, nowadays, face-to-face classes need to be replaced by virtual classes as a strategy to avoid the spread of the virus. Because of this change, teachers need to update themselves by finding new technological tools that better suit the virtual class modality. Moreover, I have heard from my coworkers at SAMAGU¹ high school that have said that virtual classes do not allow students to be active participants since there is no physical interaction. Therefore, some classes have become more teacher-centered which is not encouraging communicative language learning.

Nevertheless, virtual classes can become a good resource of knowledge to enhance a student-centered environment that encourages communicative learning because virtual classrooms assist the process of communication among learners and teachers (Arman, 2019). Likewise, technological tools can help teachers to interact with students face-to-face. Student-centered learning is possible in online classes which at the end helps to

1. English Teacher, Centro de Estudios de Inglés Conversacional, Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica and Santa Maria de Guadalupe High School in Santo Domingo de Heredia, Costa Rica, Bachelor's Degree in English Teaching

2. Santa Maria de Guadalupe in Santo Domingo, Heredia, Costa Rica

have a communicative language learning class. Moreover, I have seen that in my classes Student-Centered Learning and Communicative Language Teaching work well together since the student-centered approach encourages communicative learning.

A student-oriented class sees the teacher as the facilitator and students as active participants in their learning process. Moreover, Student-Centered Learning can be also implemented in virtual classes along with communicative learning. Based on my experience teaching at CEIC, EFL virtual classes have become a challenge for teachers that may state that it is more complicated since students are not really present in the class due to the fact that they can turn off their camera and microphone, but this may not justify that the class can become a teacher-centered one.

Thus, it is possible to lead the classes towards a student-centered perspective that engages students to become active participants and inspire communicative learning among them. As Jeyasala (2014) agreed, “teachers should help students to develop communicative competence every time and should provide spaces to interact with others through oral activities in order to use the target language” (p. 111). Nowadays, since virtuality has become a daily aspect for teachers to work with, online resources can help them to promote student-centered classes following the Communicative Language Teaching approach.

Some teachers have guided the virtual modality towards a teacher-centered perspective. The reason might be that there is the lack of knowledge of tools to use. Teachers are not aware of the technological tools they can use to enhance students communicatively. Nevertheless, virtual classes have the same potential as face-to-face classes. With the proper technological tools, teachers can direct the class towards a student-centered one that promotes communicative language teaching. There should not be any excuse to engage students communicatively because the technological tools exist, but what is needed is just to put them into action. For this reason, this paper intends to examine some of the technological tools that help teachers to apply a student centered learning within the communicative language teaching approach. It is important to examine each aspect separately in order to understand how a student-centered class engages communicative learning using technological tools.

Student-Centered Learning

As Larasati (2018) claimed, “Student-centered learning is an approach to education focusing on the needs of the students, rather than those of others involved in the educational process, such as teachers and administrators” (p. 154). This approach sees learners as active participants in the class; students are not passive learners. For this reason, the teacher is the facilitator that engages students to learn independently; the teacher provides the material and explains the subject, but the students are the ones that use the content, activities, and material. The teacher planned the classes and created information, so students can use these activities and information to learn.

The student-centered perspective sees the teacher as a helper and the students as autonomous learners. According to Khadidja and Sari-Mitchel (2014), “The teacher is

expected to be the first facilitator in such experiments in order to be followed by his fellow students. His role is determinant as he has to minimize the difficulties of learning in such a different environment” (p. 70). An important aspect about this learning approach is that students are free to participate when they desire; they have the freedom to decide upon their learning.

As Emaliana (2017) stated, “students centered learning considers the needs of the students as a group and as individuals; students are active participants in the learning process (p. 61). Student-centered learning sees the students as the protagonists in the class; the classes are planned towards the students; they are the doers in the class. Likewise, the teacher provides students with the opportunities to learn independently and from one another and coaches them in the skills they need to use effectively. Furthermore, this student-centered environment helps students to be autonomous learners, enhances communicative participation, and provides dynamic classroom activities. Student-centered learning goes hand in hand with Communicative Language Teaching because my experience working with virtual classes has shown me that when students are placed as the protagonists in the activities created, they become more independent learners and they are more willingly to work in the class; hence, student-centered learning is primordial in order to include communicative learning. Then, it is important to examine Communicative Language Teaching continuously.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT is understood, according to Richards (2006), as “the knowledge we have of a language that accounts for our ability to produce sentences in a language. It refers to knowledge of the building blocks of sentences and how sentences are formed” (p. 3). Also, CLT includes cooperative activities rather than individual ones, as well as the fact that the information discussed and communicated has a meaning and purpose. Richards (2006) mentioned “Instead of making use of activities that demanded accurate repetition and memorization of sentences and grammatical patterns, activities that required learners to negotiate meaning and to interact meaningfully were required” (p. 13). Moreover, students are independent learners, so they take ownership of their learning.

Also, CLT is not only about communicating topics without meaning; in fact, CLT has a relationship between meaning and communication. It is not only speaking the target language, but it also emphasizes the meaning that the students communicate. This approach provides students with the chance to share their ideas and thoughts with others. Isakova (2018) mentioned that “Communicative competence is developed through modelling of communicative situations and developing training, which help develop self-confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness, personal and social activity” (p. 2). Communicative Language Teaching is the key to engage students to critically discuss the subject.

Furthermore, CLT is primordial for EFL classes since students communicate with each other and practice the language, so they prepare themselves to talk outside the class. Similarly, Communicative Language Teaching allows students to work more independently;

therefore, they can be autonomous in their own learning; they can identify their errors, provide feedback and help each other. As Toro et al. (2018) said, “Students are provided with metalinguistic and elicitation feedback to improve their communicative skills which allow learners to be aware of their mistakes while receiving input from the teacher through oral interaction” (p. 118). The students in this approach share real meaning; it is not only speaking the target language but also communicating real meaning in the target language.

Communicative Language Teaching and Student-Centeredness

According to Richards (2006),

CLT proposes that teachers now had to assume the role of facilitator and monitor. Rather than being a model for correct speech and writing and one with the primary responsibility of making students produce plenty of error-free sentences, the teacher had to develop a different view of learners’ errors and of her/his own role in facilitating language. (p. 5)

This means that CLT proposes student centered learning as part of its model. As I have seen in my classes, CLT should work together with student-centered learning because CLT needs to be in a student centered environment to allow students to be active learners and share their ideas with the others in the class.

It is important to understand that without student centered learning; it is not possible to have communicative learning in a class. If the class is based on teacher centered learning, there is no opportunity to have a communicative learning perspective. As Isakova (2018) said, “The fact that classes in communicative approach are student-oriented does not rule out the importance of the teacher, who, in this case, is defined as a facilitator of language learning and an independent participant within the learning-teaching group” (p. 2). The classes engage the students’ speaking proficiency and allow them to practice it at the same time.

The teacher is the facilitator; as Richards (2006) proposed, the teacher, “creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning” (p. 23). Therefore, CLT comprises a student centered perspective because it emphasizes the role of the teacher as helper in the learning process. Students are aware of their own learning and they are in charge of it; students are the protagonists of their learning process. The teacher is always present in case students need assistance, but the attention is guided towards the student.

A learner-centered class allows a communicative learning environment. Communicative learning helps EFL students to interact in the target language. Toro et al. (2018) stated that learning is more productive when students are engaged in a dynamic learning environment. This also is applied for the virtual class modality; a dynamic learning environment should include a student’s learning perspective directed towards communicative learning. Arman (2019) mentioned that “In a learner-centered class, students work in pairs or groups to compare and discuss their answers, or reading and

responding to each one's written assignments and propose possible improvements" (p. 45).

Communicative Language Teaching and Student-Centered Learning in the Class

As previously stated, CLT and student-centered learning may aid each other. Therefore, student-centered classes help to achieve CLT. However, in online classes, teachers need the help of technological resources to apply these two correctly. In this section, we will explore the technological tools to implement in order to promote online student-centered classes to achieve communicative language teaching. Since EFL virtual classes have become the new modality in education today, it is important to mention and explore resources that teachers can use to learn how to teach a virtual class.

Moreover, virtuality should not be an impediment to allow students to communicate orally. For example, in a study from 2019, Al-Qahtani explained that virtual classes seem to raise positiveness in regards to teaching and learning; the majority of participants of his study agreed that there is no difference among virtual classes and face to face classes (Al-Qahtani, 2019). Although virtual classes are new for many teachers, these ones are not an impediment to allow students to communicate actively.

As Al-Qahtani (2019) proposed, "virtual classes enhance comfort and engagement in dialogue, a teacher should try to motivate and improve students 'communication skills'" (p. 237). Even though people may think virtual classes complicate the educational system, it is the opposite since classes can enhance communicative learning in a student-centered environment. As was stated, technology is a useful tool for teachers to enhance CFL along with student centered learning. Therefore, there are many websites, applications, among others to apply. Some of these tools will be described below:

Flipgrid

Flipgrid is a website that allows teachers to create group discussions about a topic they desire. The students can discuss the topic with recordings, written text, and video. Then, the teacher can reply to the students' answers, and also the students can reply to the other students. This website engages students orally. Also, it motivates students to participate using their speaking skill; some students feel embarrassed when they have to speak in front of everybody, which makes it difficult for the teacher to assess students. I have used this website in my classes at CEIC1. I have found that Flipgrid helps my students gain confidence speaking the language since when they are recording themselves, they are just interacting with the website. Therefore, they may feel more comfortable and secure. Moreover, this one also allows all students to participate since sometimes in synchronous discussions not all students participate.

Flipgrid also allows CLT learning since this website promotes self-assessment and reflection in students; this website includes students in their learning process; as active participants, they can visualize their recording so they can identify their areas of

3. *Centro de Estudios de Inglés Conversacional*, Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica

improvement. Flipgrid is also compatible with other learning platforms, so teachers are able to set assignments that automatically directs students into the website. As Stoszkowski (2018) stated, “Custom integration means Flipgrid can be embedded into a range of other platforms in the students’ learning ecosystem (e.g. Blackboard, Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams)” (p. 2). Furthermore, Flipgrid offers the opportunity to integrate CLT along with Student-Centered Learning (SCL) since it gives students the opportunity to become the owner of their own learning.

Padlet

Padlet is “an online tool that provides a virtual wall and collaborative space accessible from any Internet Enabled device” (Fisher, 2017, p. 163). This tool allows students to add information in real time; it is an interactive board in which students can add images, videos and recordings. As Fisher (2017) said, “Any number of participants can simultaneously view, add, and rearrange content on a Padlet, including text, images, and links to other web pages, videos, or documents” (p. 163). With the help of this platform, teachers can encourage students to actively participate in the class and also they become the center since they are the ones interacting with it.

The teacher may explain how to use the website, but the students are the ones that participate actively with the platform. Padlet can create communicative activities in which a topic is posted in the interactive board and the students can comment on it. They can record a response, write it and also hear the other classmates' responses. Fisher (2017) affirmed that “Padlet is a very easy to use technology that can be applied to engage students in a large number of ways both inside and outside of the classroom” (p. 165). Overall, Padlet is a tool that promotes communicative learning and self and collaborative feedback; Padlet gives students the chance to comment on the other posts, so they can contribute with feedback to their classmates.

Genial.ly

Genial.ly is a website in which teachers can create interactive content such as board games, live worksheets, oral games, presentations, among others. However, there is not much research nor studies conducted since it is a new website. Moreover, some authors have confirmed that Genially is an unknown tool by some teachers. However, if teachers use this tool, they can help interaction and creativity while learning. Also, the implementation of this tool aids the student to be the protagonist of their learning (Tutilló-Piña et al., 2020, p. 263).

However, based on my experience implementing this website at CEIC, I can say that students really enjoy the implementation of this one. In Genial.ly, teachers are able to create graphic communication, animated effects, embed videos, audios, and images. Also, teachers can use the created templates and modify them according to the class or they can create activities from scratch. This website offers a broad list of activities that teachers can use to engage students communicatively.

For instance, teachers can create a virtual snake and ladders board game, and within this one a set of questions that the students can answer orally. The game includes the dice and the pieces; the teacher just has to add the questions. Also, students can play with quizzes that have interactive images and music. Students really enjoy these quizzes because these ones catch their attention and make the learning process more dynamic and fun. In fact, in these games the students not only learn but also have fun. Genial.ly has reinvented online learning and also has provided content that allows ELF teachers to have the chance to guide their classes into a CLT and student centered environment.

Conclusion

Since the virtual modality started, classes have become more guided towards a teacher-centered perspective. The reason for this might be the lack of knowledge of technological tools to implement. However, there are plenty of tools that can be used to promote student-centered classes to achieve communicative language teaching. Some of these tools are explained and revised in this paper. It is important to conclude that many communicative activities can be prepared in the class for students to practice the language; these activities enrich student critical thinking, allow them to receive and provide feedback.

Nevertheless, the virtual modality is not an excuse to continue creating teacher-based classes. Therefore, the class can be moved towards an environment in which students are able to actively participate in the class. Since virtual classes have become a key resource to continue teaching, teachers should continuously research for online tools that promote student centered learning along with CLT. Moreover, EFL teachers should ask and revise if these tools truly meet and accomplish the objectives stated for the specific population. In my opinion, teachers should be self-critical in order to see the effectiveness of each tool applied in the class.

Nowadays, the internet offers numerous websites, applications, and online resources such as Flipgrid, Nearpod, and Genially, which engage students to be the center of the class and communicate orally. Nevertheless, I believe that students should have the possibility to practice the language with their classmates and also be the owners of their own learning. To conclude, virtuality is an opportunity to reinvent our English classes, it is also an opportunity to experiment with new online resources that might become really useful in our classroom.

Recommendations

After going through the process of teaching online as an emergency measure, I have learned that teachers should innovate their classes; they have to continuously research new tools to use in the class. Teachers should investigate technological tools that allow students to be active in the class. Nowadays, there are many websites that allow students to use the language; virtual classes can be dynamic and engaging with the correct online resources. However, I advise that to try online tools before applying them in the class in order to see the issues that the tools can present. In fact, I have seen that the majority of the new online

tools teachers use in the class may present some difficulties. Therefore, teachers should be prepared to provide solutions to students to overcome those issues.

Similarly, I believe I have developed new skills to motivate students to learn. Forexample, I have seen that it is important that teachers interact as much as possible with the students. This means that teachers turn on the camera all the time, explain all the topics, and clear out doubts. Sometimes students feel stressed, overwhelmed and sad, so teachers should project that are interested to know the students' life outside the class; students are not only students but also human beings that have feelings and they want to share what they feel. Teachers should listen to their students and ask them as much as possible how they are dealing with virtuality. Likewise, I have seen that students, because of virtuality, are more stressed and overwhelmed since they are on a computer all day long. Therefore, teachers should work harder to motivate students. I advise teachers to create activities that the students enjoy and allow them to forget about all negative aspects they are going through.

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The Role of Non-Native English Teachers (NNETs) Within the English-Learning Process

*Greivin León Ureña*¹
Universidad Nacional
Costa Rica
greivin.leon.urena@est.una.ac.cr

Abstract

This article highlights the role of Non-Native English teachers (NNETs) within the English-learning process. The perspective of various authors characterizes the abilities, skills and competencies of Non-Native English Teachers (NNETs) in comparison to native English teachers (NETs), and this accurately portrays the pivotal role of Non-Native English Teachers in this context. These important differences in the techniques and methodologies used by teachers in the educational process are reflected in the approach and treatment of the students. Further, it is evident that some stereotypes continue to influence the perspective of both employers and parents in relation to Non-Native English Teachers (NNETs). Based on this, the role and influence of Non-Native English Teachers (NNETs) within the English-Learning Process is affected.

Keywords: native teachers (NTs), non-native teachers (NNTs), English-learning process, role

Introduction

The English language continues to be a universal way of communication. Its relevance corresponds to the way people communicate with each other, no matter the place, race, skin color, or country they are. Nowadays, job seeking has become more difficult since English is one of those requirements enterprises are asking for. Due to this, to find the best place to learn English represents a priority for many people. In this line, according to the Coalition of Development Initiatives (CINDE, for its acronym in Spanish), by 2008, there were approximately 7 thousand vacant positions that required the mastery of a second language as an essential requirement; even so, the professionals who graduate from some higher education institutions lack not only a solid training in a foreign language but also good training bases (CINDE, 2008). In other words, offering English classes, courses and tutoring turned out into a marketing competition. Those who need to learn the language for any reason look for the best academies and the “ideal” language instructor, but who is the ideal teacher?

1. English Teacher, Sun Valley High School. Bachelor’s Degree in English Teaching

Over the years, many English teachers have been experiencing discrimination against their profession. They are considered less competent to reach objectives with EFL learners; they are NNETs. Due to the importance of eradicating this thought, it is essential to describe the fundamental role of the NNETs within the process of learning the language. From this perspective, Villalobos (2014) stated that both in the Costa Rican context and worldwide native teachers are prioritized over non-native teachers in the hiring processes, since it is considered that native teachers have greater knowledge and use better teaching and learning strategies.

In the Costa Rican context, NNETs can provide the system with many aspects, such as understanding students' needs and speaking the learner's language; thus, students feel confident in case there is something difficult to understand. From this perspective, the support of a teacher who understands the difficulties that students may feel in the teaching and learning process can represent a point of importance so that the students can develop the skills that a new language can generate. The foregoing considers that in the educational context, as indicated by Yiching (2005), barriers can be found that can affect the teaching and learning process and the development of listening comprehension. Within these, the author mentions belief barriers, habit barriers, processing barriers, English proficiency barriers, and affective barriers. These become relevant since they can imply that in the process the student no longer wishes to continue or is nervous during classes. Likewise, the author considers that teachers must identify other barriers such as forgetting to activate strategies, consider strategies as extra burdens for information processing, be challenged by the complex nature of the strategy, have problems carrying out the appropriate strategies, and even be unable to understand the text after applying strategies. These aspects can, to a large extent, be perceived in a better way by the NNETs. So, culture is an aspect to mention as it reinforces the difference between the settings in English-speaking countries and the Costa Rican culture.

This means students can easily understand the importance of learning about culture. Besides, even though native English teachers possess fluency in the language, pedagogical and language training make NNETs capable enough to teach it. It is unfortunate the fact that, these days, teachers are discriminated against for their roots, race or even accents when they possess incredible characteristics and advantages to reach a goal in a class. Due to its relevance, this paper seeks to raise awareness about, inform and deeply analyze why NNETs are capable enough to handle an EFL class in any circumstances.

Based on the previous, the Costa Rican education context reflects that the training processes when teaching English should be improved since there are a great number of students lacking in some competencies. By doing that, the country will begin satisfying this need in the formation of English-as-a-Foreign-Language teachers. Along these lines, Hernández (2008) stated that in the Costa Rican context, one of the main challenges that arise is to offer a training process for the development of English language competence that responds to the needs that the labor market requires. From this perspective, the curricular updating processes have focused both on strengthening the content taught to students and on

the development and improvement of teaching competence through training processes.

That is why it is important to start mentioning that English language teachers have been tagged in many negative and positive aspects, such as accent, English proficiency level, even nationality. Teaching a language other than a mother tongue represents a challenge for any teacher in any circumstances. In Costa Rica, the Ministry of Public Education has been updating the method and the way English teachers are chosen for a teaching position, which nowadays is being a very criticized process. In 2014, the Costa Rican government decided to put the country ahead with the English language by implementing different methodologies to make the level rise. For that reason, English teachers have had several changes in their educational contexts and programs used for the training of students (MEP, 2015).

Now, English teachers are fundamental human resources; however, most of them are not treated equally in terms of job opportunities, and knowledge, even when they are capable enough because of the training and pedagogy they have. In fact, words such as “nativeness” and “non-nativeness” are terms that make society have a big distinction towards native English teachers (NETs) and non-native English teachers (NNETs). Nowadays, people usually have the notion that the ideal instructor to teach English is a NET leaving NNETs aside when the role of these is fundamental in class development and language training (Villalobos, 2014).

From this, one of the questions that arises is why those high schools are looking for native teachers when there are many non-natives with a high English command and pedagogy training that makes them capable enough to reach any of the objectives when learning a language. That is why this topic is very relevant since it aims to teach and keep on informing the population about the excellent competence and the important role of Non-Native English teachers within the process of acquiring English a Second or Foreign Language.

It is notable that NNETs are still seen less competent or less qualified, even in Costa Rica, when they are in charge of training students compared to native teachers. There are many cases in which learners seem to find it difficult to understand how valuable the fact of having a NNET in class is. The role of these teachers has a fundamental objective, and it must be recognized. Villalobos (2011) mentioned that “Studies have shown that both, native and non-native speakers have certain characteristics that help them become good language professionals” (p. 56). By having this concept, it is not necessary to limit a teacher because of his/her nativeness or non-nativeness.

That is why the purpose of this paper aims to reflect on the good (pedagogical) qualities and competencies of a NNET and how important it is to change the perspective of the ideal native teacher to teach a language in our country. On the other hand, it is necessary to strengthen the idea that having a NNET in class can be very beneficial in the Costa Rican context.

Native Versus Non-Native Teachers

In the educational context, one of the main questions that has historically arisen has to do with the quality of the teaching and learning processes taught by NNET. From this perspective, it has been considered that Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) can implement better strategies for the training of students, since they are teaching their native language (Moussu & Llurda, 2008). However, authors such as Butler (2007), Ma (2012) and Villalobos (2011) show that this perspective may not be more than a stereotype that has been sustained over time.

That is why Butler (2007) stated that there is no direct relationship between the quality of the strategies and methodologies implemented by NESTs compared to NNETs and indicated that many of the stereotypes may have as their origin perceptions or attitudes towards NNETs that lack an evaluative and objective foundation. This is so considering that little is known about student evaluations regarding NESTs.

It is worth considering what is mentioned by Llurda (2006), who indicated that even in educational contexts, it is still stated that NESTs can develop a formative process for students with respect to the teaching of English, currently considering that English has become a language that is used worldwide. NNETs can affirm that this language is also their own and therefore consider them as co-protagonists of the profession.

Based on the above, Moussu and Llurda (2008) showed that in many cases, the criteria used to determine that a native teacher can teach their language in a better way is based on elements that become contradictory, considering that in the English language, there are variations that respond to cultural aspects, such as the case of English used by Australians, British, and Americans. In this case, the ownership of the use of the language is not provided by the culture or origin of the professional, but it rather transcends the simplistic logic used in these cases and focuses more on the skills and competencies that the teacher has developed to communicate using this language.

From this perspective, it is evident that the supposed superiority and dominance that NESTs have had over NNETs is decreasing since the latter have proven to be competent teachers both in the context of their own country and internationally. From this perspective they have managed to be recognized as expert teachers in the field, in the pedagogical vision and in the didactic experience that can be implemented in the classrooms.

Along these lines, as evidenced by Villalobos (2011), it is believed that NESTs have clear advantages over NNETs, since English is their native language; it is assumed that they possess a greater mastery and knowledge of the rules that govern this language. Therefore, there is no direct relationship between this condition and the qualifications to teach the language.

For his part, Ma (2012) put into perspective an element that is enriching in the educational process; NNETs are a clear example of an effective learning model, considering that when learning an additional language, the teaching and learning strategies implemented have many experiential elements that facilitate the student to learn more effectively. In addition to this, these teachers have a greater facility and sensitivity to identify the

difficulties that students may experience in this process. About this, he mentioned that “Their formal learning of English skills helps them develop language awareness and enables them to provide appropriate linguistic information about the language to students” (Ma, 2012, p. 282).

In this line, it should be considered that for the student, learning a new language becomes a challenge, since there are contextual factors and factors specific to his personality that can intervene in this process and hinder or benefit the acquisition of the required linguistic skills. Regarding this, Yousif (2006) stated that psychological barriers should also be considered because they are important in the speed of speech when listening and taking breaks during a prolonged listening activity. From this perspective, the teacher's guide is essential both for the student to identify the aspects that must be improved and to make the necessary adjustments that encourage the incorporation and participation of all students.

Based on the above, it is necessary for teachers to establish the necessary conditions that favor students' learning process. The teaching strategies used in this context are aimed both at generating specific skills and habits that allow them to establish real communication in the language that is being learned.

That is why Ma (2012) argued that NNETs can also be more empathetic towards the requirements that students may have in class, and, thanks to cultural affinity, they establish a link that favors learning. From this perspective, the development of the skills and abilities required to efficiently use a new language can be complex, and therefore, that requires special attention from the teacher.

Butler (2007) argued that from the perspective of some Korean students, there is no clear difference between teaching ability in relation to pronunciation and confidence and with the teaching and learning strategies used by NESTs and NNETs. In this sense, the author established that elements, such as individual influences (socioeconomic level), influences generated by the teacher (effect of teacher qualifications), attitudes and level of understanding towards students are aspects that are of interest to students since they can greatly impact their training process (Butler, 2007).

An additional element that should be considered is mentioned by Ma (2012), who emphasized that the classroom environment is an important factor in the context of learning a second language. In this line, students are clear in identifying in NESTs the best possibilities to strengthen the learning of oral and auditory skills, due to the use of a more standard English; however, they recognize that the lack of orientation towards evaluations in the objectives of the educational process, poor understanding of their needs and difficulties, and the use of more complex terms that are not known to students caused them to feel discouraged in class. In contrast to the above, NNETs managed to identify these needs more clearly, since they were specific to their cultural context, which in turn favored the class environment and the students' attitudes towards the process were better.

On this, Ma (2012) showed, in his study, that some students mentioned that they experienced anxiety in the classes taught by the NESTs because they have few encounters

with foreigners, and also, they considered it difficult to understand what they expressed; however, when comparing their experience with the NNETs, they expressed less anxiety and greater facility to communicate with teachers.

From this perspective, Solano (2012) showed that one of the main problems in this context lies in the fact that educational programs for teaching a foreign language are based only on linguistic and methodological aspects, leaving aside basic elements, such as ideology and social processes that are strictly related to the context where this new language is taught. That is why, as previously indicated, an advantage is identified in NNETs considering that they have a greater knowledge of the ideological and social aspects of the culture in which the training process is being developed.

In this regard, Moussu and Llurda (2008) stated that “NS will be better teachers in contexts of English as a foreign language, due to their unique cultural knowledge, while NSS will be better teachers in contexts of English as a second language, due to their experience multicultural” (p. 322). In this sense, according to what the authors propose, the cultural factor is important in terms of the type of approach that will be offered to the students, being in this transcendental line the type of contribution that the NS can offer to their students.

However, even with the advantages that NNETs can have when teaching a foreign language, it should be considered that in many cases, they may feel poorly equipped for the lessons they teach. In this sense, even when some of the criteria established to judge the quality of the training processes they develop have been exceeded, the stigma that falls on them, and the limitations that they face in hiring processes can generate difficulties in accepting their capabilities. For that reason, NNETs sometimes feel they might not be good enough to carry and reach an objective within the class, which might end up in quitting or keep on having troubles with acceptance of what they are good at.

This is supported by Villalobos (2011) who mentioned that in many hiring processes, non-native teachers are discriminated against because the perspective is maintained that NESTs are more qualified than these. For that reason, the author mentioned that

(...) teaching applications from even highly qualified and experienced non-NESTs often get turned down in favor of NESTs with no such credentials. This is illustrated with a letter of rejection sent to a non-NEST applicant by the principal of a language school in London saying: “I am afraid we have to insist that all our teachers are native speakers of English. Our students do not travel halfway round the world only to be taught by a non-native speaker (however good that person’s English may be). (p. 59)

In this regard, Mahboob (2004) mentioned that in many cases, there is a negative self-perception of their abilities when they teach lessons; that is why even when they may have the knowledge and teaching strategies necessary to provide a quality educational process, their perception of their achievements diminishes the impact they may have on

students. And about this, the author was clear when indicating that based on his study that students manage to identify strengths in the training provided by the NNETs compared to the NESTs (Mahboob, 2004).

This is very important if it is considered that mastering a language other than the native one becomes an enriching process both for the person who commands it and for those who interact with and relate to it. That is why in a training process, NNETs enrich and facilitate students to learn the new language to which they are being introduced. Indeed, Medgyes (1994) stated that one of the complex experiences suffered by NNETs lies in the inferiority complex that these teachers develop when they find it difficult to be accepted even when they possess the necessary skills to teach and develop a quality educational process. In this line, the author indicated that although there are clear differences in the teaching strategies implemented by NESTs and NNETs, one of the elements that attracts the most, with respect to NESTs, is the dependence they have on textbooks and the education for tolerance towards mistakes that students may make. On the contrary, NNETs manage to develop strategies more focused on addressing the difficulty or error presented by the students.

In this sense, as Medgyes (1994) mentioned, it is very impossible for NNETs to be able to identify characteristics and competencies that NESTs that may have; however, it is difficult for them to assimilate that this becomes an advantage within the educational process. Therefore, there is a disconnection and a lack of confidence about what they can accomplish. On this, Butler (2007) referred to the importance of using good English in the educational context; however, in many cases, the criterion that determines, from the perspective of the people and those in charge of the hiring processes, that a teacher is competent or not lies in the pronunciation used by the teacher, disestablishing from this perspective an assessment that incorporates other important elements that could determine that a teacher is using a correct form of English, even when he is not a native speaker.

Villalobos (2011) offered a more focused and objective vision by indicating that excellence in teaching and learning processes cannot be based on whether the teacher is native or not, but rather these assessments should focus on the quality of the strategies and methodologies used, considering the characteristics and requirements of the students. As well, she mentioned that "it is completely unreasonable to judge professionals in regard to their native languages alone" (p. 73).

Based on the foregoing, it is clearly identified that NNETs possess qualities that are of great importance for students who are learning a second language because as has been indicated, thanks to the closeness, empathy, and proximity that they establish with the students, self-confidence and the development of a better educational process can be strengthened.

In this sense, it is possible to show that teachers have a transcendental role for students since they are in charge of fostering their interest and motivation in the activities that take place in the classroom. Likewise, this must establish the teaching and learning strategies that promote the interest and effectiveness of the student in the training process.

In this line, students present difficulties that affect their training process; therefore, the attention and empathy that the teacher establishes with the student is essential.

On this, Mahboob (2004) mentioned that NNETs present characteristics that are important for students, such as linguistic factors reflected in literacy and grammar; teaching styles that are reflected in the use of teaching methodologies adapted to the characteristics of the students and allow satisfying the concerns that they may have; and finally personal factors, within which the teacher's own experience as a second language student is contemplated. Likewise, Ma (2012) stated that within the positive aspects that the training processes developed by the NNETs have in student education, the ease of understanding and communicating with students is identified as a clear strength, and this, in turn, is reflected in an improvement in the understanding of the aspects seen in the class.

Villalobos (2011), on her part, emphasized that for students, NNETs are used in a good behavior model, since for them the teacher clearly exemplifies how through the implemented learning strategies; it is possible to achieve an almost native competence in the English language. In this sense, the teacher becomes a role model that directly influences and shapes the behavior and cognitive and execution processes of the student.

By establishing close contact between the teacher and the students, it was easier for them to make the necessary adjustments so that in the event of any difficulty or error in the process; they could code switch to the mother tongue so that for them it was easier to understand. This represents an important aspect, considering that students have more opportunities to improve and learn from the corrections made.

In this regard, it is important to point out that this type of strategy makes it easier for students to assume a more active role in the training process, since their needs are clearly considered; therefore, they are no longer identified as something external to the process. In this way, the students realize their responsibility in the development of the activities and strategies implemented by the teacher. Considering this, Ma (2012) mentioned that an element that characterizes NNETs in the teaching process is the ability to anticipate and prevent language difficulties, this being an aspect of great value for students.

From this perspective, the positions of authors such as Ma (2012), Villalobos (2011), Mahboob (2004), and Butler (2007) reflect that even when there is a reserved or distrustful vision towards NNETs in charge of facilitating the teaching and learning process, in the practical experiences analyzed by them, they have been able to assume a role that has been important to the students. In this sense, it is evident that students are equally benefited when these teachers are in charge of their training process.

For this reason, as proposed by Moussu and Llurda (2008), the perspective of comparison that exists between the NNETs and the NESTs must be overcome, “and based on this, promote a cooperative learning community that facilitates integral development” (p. 319). This is important considering that the ultimate goal of an educational process is to provide students with the necessary skills that allow them to function appropriately in different contexts. Regarding this, the aforementioned authors insist that in the literature,

there are many studies that conclude that both types of teachers have negative as well as positive aspects.

Conclusions

Among the main conclusions obtained as a result of this analysis, it should be noted that some stereotypes about the quality of the educational experience that they can provide are still maintained about NNETs; however, the analyzed authors have shown that these teachers have developed differentiating competencies that, in the teaching and learning processes, acquire great importance for students, such as empathy, attention to the specific needs generated by language differences, and the use of strategies that facilitate the correction of errors made by students in class, which serve as a model for students to understand that it is possible to learn a new language despite the difficulties that may arise.

In this sense, it is clear that the understanding between student and teacher is essential, to benefit the process of acquisition of the required skills and competencies, as well as to establish an educational space that facilitates student progress. As well, as was evidenced, when cultural and language barriers are presented, students can generate states of anxiety that hinder their learning process.

Although the benefit that these teachers can generate in students is clearly how the stereotypes that are still maintained in the teacher selection and hiring processes make it difficult for them to assess the role they have in the teaching process. Medgyes (1994) mentioned that, in the educational context, an Anglo-centric perspective still exists in which it is believed that the native teacher can develop a better formative process. The author stated that “the individual speaks English as his / her first language, has a native-like command of English and has the capacity to produce a fluent and spontaneous discourse” (p. 10). From this, it is established that these teachers can be more creative and therefore be a clear reference in terms of the correct way of speaking a language.

In addition to the above, a positive element emerges which, thanks to the results that these teachers are generating in students and that English, has become a means for global communication; people are increasingly able to recognize that being a native person does not imply that they will use the language in the best way. On the contrary, in the teaching and learning processes, difficulties are evident that cause students to feel relegated or out of context.

Likewise, a growing impulse is identified so that both the NNETs and the NESTs can establish cooperation mechanisms that facilitate the improvement of the negative aspects that have been identified as elements for improvement. Considering this perspective, the purpose of this is to upgrade teaching conditions for students and in this way contribute to the educational and personal development of students.

Recommendations

Among the main recommendations generated as a result of this article, it is necessary to strengthen the teaching processes aimed at people who are in training to act as

teachers of the English language. This means to improve pronunciation, considering that it is one of the points in which students learning a non-native language must reinforce.

Likewise, the participation of higher education institutions is necessary in the strengthening of teacher training; for this, it is essential to develop research processes that select to identify good practices in the training processes taught by non-native English teachers (NNET) and native teachers. These experiences can be incorporated as thematic axes in the study plans of the careers that teach English.

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Challenges and Opportunities Developing Original Digital English Teaching Material in Pandemic Times

Karla Retana Hernández¹
Universidad Nacional
Costa Rica
karla.retana@gmail.com

Abstract

There are many reasons why English teachers may create their own digital teaching material even though there is enough online. This essay describes some of the reasons why teachers should create their own digital instructional resources by analyzing challenges and benefits offered by that. The writer also suggests aspects that teachers should consider when developing educational tools and the systematization of a digital book created by her.

Keywords: challenges, benefits, English teaching, materials development, online teaching, opportunities, systematization

Introduction

Due to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), Costa Rica is facing new challenges in education in which adaptation and technology play an important role in continuing to teach and learn. Online English education supports students in the learning process through the Internet and digital material. According to Anas and Musdariah (2018), educators who have adequate accessibility to the Internet will be able to find useful online material to be used in language lessons. However, most of the time, these online resources are not designed by those who are currently teaching the students, meaning that in many cases, they do not match with their student's actual needs, learning styles, or interests. According to Rahayuningsih (2016), teaching materials are important elements that impact a class. They help students to increase their understanding, achieve the teaching and learning goals, and bring motivation into the learning process. It is essential for teachers to create their own digital teaching material to take into account important educational aspects of their students and curriculum to grow professionally through the development of it.

This essay comprises a definition of what digital English teaching material is, the use of digital English teaching material, what challenges English teachers face to create their own original digital teaching material, valuable reasons why they should create them, what includes the development of teaching digital material, and the systematization of a digital English book created by the writer to exemplify the theme and analyze results.

1. Karla Retana Hernández holds a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science Engineering from *Universidad Latina de Costa Rica*, a Certification in Networking from *Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje*, a Certification in Computer Equipment Operator from *Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje*, an Associate Degree in English from Universidad Nacional, a Bachelor's Degree in English Teaching for I and II Cycles from Universidad Nacional and a Certificate in Spanish Teaching as a Second Language from *Fundación Tecnológica de Costa Rica*. She currently teaches English and Spanish as a second language at Colibri Language School in San Isidro de El General, Pérez Zeledón, San José, Costa Rica.

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Digital English Teaching Material

Hendripides and Hikmah (2018) defined teaching materials as educational equipment, instruments, or multimedia used by teachers to teach and bring motivation for learners to learn. Furthermore, digital English teaching material is developed in a variety of ways, such as texts, conversations, exercises, graphics, games, audios, animation or videos. Digital teaching material allows teachers to integrate multimedia causing students to have the opportunity to access vivid and high quality information any time they want. Multimedia promotes interaction in the learning process letting the students take an active role through playing games, listening to audios, making recordings, and watching videos. Besides, it allows students to recap and pause at their own pace as well as helping students with physical or learning difficulties.

Digital teaching material is presented in digital files, CD-ROMs, DVDs, digital books, blogs and websites, etc. It can be accessed anywhere and anytime; you only need an electronic device and Internet access in some cases. Digital teaching material is enriched with multimedia resources which present different messages or activities using elements such as text, images, links, animation, sound and video. These elements are multi-sensory, getting the attention of the students and including different learning styles in the teaching process.

The Use of Digital Material in English Teaching

For our daily lives and professional purposes, the Internet service plays an important role. The Internet facilitates access to a huge amount of information. You can find instructions on any topic you are interested in. For educational purposes, there are powerful tools such as Google or YouTube that provide guidance or information to use and create teaching material. According to Livingstone and Bober (2004), nowadays, the access to the web has increased greatly from residential areas to educational institutions. In pandemic times, the use of the Internet service grew; the educational system started online teaching, causing teachers to understand how to use video platforms and to learn new ways to develop digital educational material. The integration of digital material in English education brought new opportunities for teachers to share knowledge, and students had more alternatives to acquire it. Charpentier (2014) said that the use of technical resources has reoriented the methods used to teach English recently because information can be transmitted through different devices, such as computers, tablets or smartphones, and it is presented through different resources innovating the development of the lessons.

Challenges Developing Original Digital Teaching Material

Despite the positive effects in education that the Internet has brought in educational contexts, there are some reasons why English teachers do not develop their own digital teaching material, such as the availability of websites, blogs, digital books, games, audios, or videos. Some obstacles that teachers face are a lack of training or assistance at work or demotivation for creating digital teaching material, and little time to make and use online

teaching material, and there are teachers who are not open to incorporating digital teaching resources because they think the way they teach does not require it. These barriers have hindered the progress of technology intervention developed by the educators to support the students in their English learning process, and they have limited learners to be equipped to face the challenges this era brings. The following are main obstacles identified that have affected the development of English teaching material by English teachers.

First, a great number of educators lack training or support at work causing absence of knowledge to use technological tools or programs to create digital teaching material to use in class with their students. According to Marwan (2008) the absence of technical assistance is estimated to be one of the main issues faced by educators to incorporate technology in their praxis. It means that there are educational institutions that do not have staff that give support to teachers to integrate digital teaching material in their lessons.

Second, many teachers do not have the motivation for creating online English teaching material. They do not feel inspired; they do not have enthusiasm, they think it is difficult, or they believe they do not have the skills or creativity. To resume, they have a negative attitude toward something new that they think they are not going to have the control to manage, or they believe they are not going to achieve the goals. George and Sabapathy (2011) wrote that, nowadays, in current education, motivated educators are relevant for going beyond the education field.

Third, some English teachers say that they do not have available time to create and use digital teaching materials in class because they already have a lot of work. With regard to this Hadijah and Shalawati (2017) cited that educators had difficulties to handle their time of developing and using technology in their praxis because they were working in other regular responsibilities. Some of these responsibilities can be the preparation of lesson plans or tests, grade papers or the organization of special events, among others.

Also, many teachers say the time is not enough for them to apply the materials or the resources are not available. In connection with this Bingimlas (2009) explained that there are educators who are trained to incorporate technology in class, but they avoid it because they do not have sufficient time to use it. Additionally, Ruggiero and Mong (2015) stated that educators mentioned that there are limits that affect the use of technology, such as the absence of technology resources.

Fourth, there are teachers who do not want to innovate their classes with the use of technologies because they think the way they have taught is correct and they do not need any change or different implementation. According to Raman and Yamat (2014) older teachers who already have worked many years and have a lot of experience do not have the willingness to adapt and learn new technologies. According to Lawless and Pellegrino (2007) technological education has emerged as a main teaching ability of teaching. Currently, because of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), online education has a fundamental role to avoid the interruption of educational systems. That is why it is necessary for teachers to be able to manage different technological tools and develop digital teaching resources to continue teaching effectively.

Opportunities Developing Original Digital Teaching Material

Even though there are challenges teachers can face through the use of technological tools to develop their digital teaching material, there are valuable reasons why they should develop their own original digital material. Educators evolve their research spirit through investigation about how to use different digital tools, programs, and how to create activities. This gives them the opportunity to keep updating themselves and learn new technologies. According to Torres and Mercado (2004), as educational instructors, we are working through academic investigation, which is the tool that enables us as trainers to grow in our praxis. Teacher empowerment can be built through research. One benefit of it is that educators can learn how to utilize digital tools which are used to make digital material for teaching.

When teachers design their own original digital material, they can apply the teaching philosophies or approaches they use and develop topics related to their curriculum. Hickey (2014) considered that technological resources reflect and will intensify our teaching approaches, analyzing our beliefs about our educational praxis and increasing our effectiveness in constructing pertinent teaching materials. Producing original teaching material helps teachers become more independent and incorporate students' needs and contexts, and that also develops the educator's creativity and innovation. Pun (2013) mentioned that technology gives different opportunities for creating attractive teaching material and effective educational environments. In addition, when teachers use digital resources constructed by them with their students, they can reflect upon their application and modify or update them if it is necessary.

Teaching Material Development

Teaching material development is a term that is not clear for many teachers. The design of learning material includes different stages that are important to know and understand to achieve the learners and educators' goals. Tomlinson (2012) described teaching material development as every stage people do to create and utilize resources for English learning, including their validation, adaptability, layout, construction, use, and investigation. There are four important phases to take into account for the development of teaching materials. They are Needs Analysis, Instructional Design, Universal Design for Learning, and Graphic Design.

The first phase is Needs Analysis; it refers to the collection of data through educational actions that will identify what students need in their learning process. This collection of information can be done through observations, students' notebooks or books, assessments or interviews, among others. After that process, difficulties are selected and students' needs are defined. This stage will validate the purpose of the development of the material for teaching and learning English in a specific context, and it will be a guide for the teacher developer to better understand what he or she must work on.

The second phase to consider is Instructional Design. Işman (2011) confirmed that the main objective of this design is to show organization, creation, judgment, and execution

of the instructional procedure. This process includes different principles to be taken into account. One principle that is part of this stage is the choice of the material that will be developed to help the students to bring solutions to their needs. Something important to consider is the language hierarchy presented in the material. It refers to the sequence of the topics; they must be presented from simple to complex. Also, other aspects to contemplate are the establishment of the goal of the material, the selection of the contents and their objectives, the specification of what skills will be developed through the activities (listening, speaking, writing and reading), and the use of an educational approach and definition of the types of activities that will be developed. They include active, didactic, or collaborative activities. One advantage that you can have as a teacher materials developer is that you know what type of activities your students enjoy, for example conversations or games, and if you know them you can include them in your material.

The third phase is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Courey (2012) said that UDL is known as a series of ideas and approaches applied by teachers with their students through the creation of inclusive educational material. These ideas are presented in different forms for learners to use the material. The material must offer a variety of design, activities, interpretation, and commitment.

That refers to the flexible use of engaging comprehensive material for students and variety in content that allows students to demonstrate their knowledge in different ways. For example, teaching material can be presented in texts, infographics, images, audio, video, and games in a digital book, and students have the opportunity to interact by writing, drawing, speaking, playing, etc. Students' academic goals and their diversity are aspects that must be taken into account. It is necessary for all students to be able to use the learning materials made by their teachers to progress in the learning process and achieve the goals without any exclusion.

The fourth phase to develop teaching material is Graphic Design. Walker (2017) explained that graphic design is in charge of the organization and resolution of issues. Also, it works on objectives, actions, interface experience, and commitment to the people who use the product. In addition, graphic design refers to the interface, and it includes what kind of language will be used, color palette, types of fonts, size, images, the management of the space, and the use of links if they are included and the use of a pedagogical metaphor in case teachers want to create a book, blog or website. The educational metaphor is a symbol used in teaching material to represent specific parts of a resource or to guide the students through the use of the teaching material.

Systematization of an Original English Digital Book for Children Development of the Book

The following is the description of the development of a digital book for children created by the author. Its implementation and a reflection about the results obtained by the use of it with her students. During the development of the digital book for children, the Needs Analysis, Instructional Design, the Universal Design for Learning, and Graphic

Design stages were taken into account. The book was created for a group of children who are nine years old and who take an online basic English course in a private institute in San Isidro de El General, Pérez Zeledón, San José, Costa Rica.

A Needs Analysis was carried out through observations during different classes and assessment results. Through this collection of information, two elements were identified: one, the students' difficulty, which was that they had problems writing and speaking the correct use of the verb "to be" in simple present tense in affirmative sentences, negative sentences, yes/no questions and wh-questions, and two, the selected need; in this case, students needed a digital book with a variety of activities that could guide them on the correct use of the verb to be in written and spoken contexts. After that, the goal of the material was set; it was to use the verb to be correctly in simple present tense in affirmative and negative sentences, yes/no questions and WH-questions when writing and speaking.

In Instructional Design, the establishment of the content of the book was organized in five different chapters, and each chapter had an objective which was related to its corresponding content. Also, for each chapter, the skills to develop were identified, and the types of activities were planned. To decide what learning activities would be included in each chapter, Universal Teaching Design was considered. As a result, the activities created and the way students worked with the book were very varied. For instance, the book taught the verb "to be" through conversations, texts, grammar explanations, exercises, pictures, a game, audios, and a video, and students could listen to audios, read, write, draw, speak, watch a video, play a game, and do exercises.

Another aspect that was taken into account to develop the book was the teaching approach used by the teacher (author of the book). Communicative Language Teaching is reflected in each chapter through the development of the contents. For example, in Chapter 1, students talk about their personal information, and in pairs, they make a conversation where they greet and meet a classmate. In Chapter 2, students share and draw about what their classroom looks like. In Chapter 3, learners have conversations about helpers in their community. In Chapter 4, students describe their friends and family, and in Chapter 5, students ask and answer questions about their pets or family member's pets.

The Graphic Design stage was one of the most elaborated parts because it needed a great deal of online searching to learn how to use new digital tools to create the book. Adobe Illustrator was used to draw, color and set up the book, Windows Voice Recorder was used to record the audios of the conversations and readings, Genially was used to make a board game, and Adobe Acrobat Pro was utilized to add links with multimedia (audios, a game and a video) in the book.

In this stage, also, the color palette and typography were chosen. The palette was composed of five colors, which were used to identify the different five chapters and also to recognize distinct parts of sentences or questions of the verb "to be". The educational metaphor was selected, too. I created an owl, who was interacting through text with the students, greeting, talking about himself, asking questions, and explaining grammar uses and rules.

Implementation of the Book

The book was used by the students during five online classes; each class was one hour long, and one chapter was taught in each session. Skype was used for this purpose. Students had the digital book for the class, but they also had a printed version. During the five sessions that I shared my screen with the book, they could see it, listen to the audios, play a game, and watch a video.

In the first session, students got familiar with the digital book. They met the educational metaphor (an owl), they understood the use of the color code to identify different parts of grammar sentences or questions, and they recognized the bottoms that allowed to link the audios, the game and the video. In the first class, students studied greetings, personal information, and affirmative and negative sentences with the verb “to be”. Everytime I read what the owl said, I made a different voice to get the students' attention. They listened to the audio of a conversation and read it at the same time. After that, students completed a conversation and wrote the answers in their printed book. Finally, they had a conversation in pairs, and they interacted without any problem.

In the second class, the students studied classroom objects and the use of the subject pronouns “it” and “they” and prepositions. In Chapter 2, learners described a picture of a classroom using the vocabulary they already knew. After that, they read and listened to a conversation describing a classroom with their objects. Later, they underlined the classroom objects and circled the prepositions from the reading. They showed the classroom objects they had at home and pronounced their names and where they were located. They did a complete exercise with “it” and “they” and drew three of their classroom objects where they usually place them in their printed book. Next, they described them orally. Finally, they expressed what they saw and compared two pictures of classrooms. For example, they said that in picture 1, the calendar is on the whiteboard and that in picture 2, the calendar is under the shelf.

In the third class, they studied community helpers and yes/no questions with the verb “to be”. They started talking about people from their community and their jobs. They did a matching exercise between sentences and pictures of a community, they listened to and read a conversation at the same time, and after that, they answered yes/no questions with the verb “to be”. At the end, students accessed a link to play a board game, they rolled a digital dice to move their players, they answered yes/no questions with the verb “to be,” and they advanced to reach the goal to win.

In the fourth class, students learned about adjectives and WH-questions with the verb to be. First, they read some descriptions of pictures. Second, they classified adjectives between personality and appearance. Third, students described themselves, one family member, and one friend in written form. Fourth, I read and gave grammatical explanations about wh-questions with the verb “to be”. After that, students did a matching exercise with questions and answers, and finally, students read and listened to a conversation and answered questions about it.

In the fifth session, students studied animals and opposites. They watched a video

about animals, their appearance, and opposites. They took notes and talked about them. Then, they shared about their pets or family members' pets. After that, they did matching exercises about animals and their opposites. They listened to and read a text at the same time and corrected sentences with information about the reading. At the end, they did different exercises to practice all the contents they learned through the book. For example, they wrote an affirmative and negative sentence about an elephant using adjectives, they answered yes/no questions with the verb to be about how butterflies looked like, and they answered wh-questions about the educational metaphor (the owl).

Results

During the implementation of my digital book called I'm Milo, my students used their computers or cellphones. They had the opportunity to choose what device to use for the classes. Also, they were in different locations, most of them were at home, but in one session a student was traveling by car with her mother. There were no location limits for learning. Another aspect I noted is how students are familiar with the technological tools to take the online classes. During this pandemic time, they have already learned how to interact through different platforms because of school or private English classes. In my classes, they learned very quickly how to answer a Skype call or hang up, how to use a camera, a microphone, headsets and chats, and how to go through the digital book and access links.

For my online classes, I like to create a warm and friendly environment; that is why I made a different voice to read what the educational metaphor (the owl) said. It made the students feel relaxed and be ready to learn. They kept their cameras on most of the time, and they always were on the correct page. Page numbers were very important for my students; they could locate the different chapters, contents or exercises of the book very quickly. Also, I observed that students have developed patience in online classes, and they respected when their classmates were participating by muting their microphones and waiting for their turns. If they needed their classmates or me to repeat something, they requested that in a very polite way.

Interactive elements of the book were another aspect that made the students get engaged. I observed how enthusiastic students were when they listened to the audios, played a game, and watched a video. The intervention of multimedia was a factor that influenced the students to pay attention all the time because they were just not receiving information; they had to interact with it in English. The experience of listening to different voices, having interaction in the game and watching movement and listening to a song in the video activated the children's senses to be ready to participate.

Something relevant to the book was the application of Communicative Language Teaching. In all the chapters, real situations were included. They were related to the students' own experiences, and they felt very identified. For example, in Chapter 5, we talked about pets, and students were very excited about sharing about their dogs or family members' dogs. For that chapter, I created a text about a girl's cat, and I drew it in the book.

In real life, this text talks about my own cat. I could bring it to the screen, and they were surprised that my cat looked like the picture in the book, and it had the same name, “Luna”. I think having the opportunity to personalize the teaching material lets us as teachers take into account resources we have available to be used as a complement during the development of the class.

A main limitation I found during the application of the digital book was that students could not type or draw digitally in it because they needed Acrobat Adobe Pro to have editable access, and it had a fee. However, some alternatives I would like to consider when I create a digital book for my students to write in the future is the use of some free word processors programs, for instance, OpenOffice or LibreOffice as opposed to Word; most students have access to these programs or the use of Google Docs whose access is free. Another option is to have my own website with all my teaching resources for my students to access for free. I think that, as a teacher, when developing any teaching material, it is very important to use tools that all students can have access to without any extra charge to take into account all the students’ contexts because not all of them have possibilities to pay extra fees. However, students had the option to print the book, and they answered the written exercises or drew in the printed version of the book.

Conclusion

English teachers should not limit themselves to avoiding the development of their own original teaching digital material in this modern era. They should expand their knowledge through all the digital tools available on the Internet to progress professionally and to evolve their teaching praxis with their students. Taking into account Needs Analysis, Instructional Design, Universal Design for Learning, and Graphic Design stages in the development of the book was essential for me as a teacher to construct a teaching/learning digital material with strong elements that fit with the context of my students.

The application of our own digital teaching material with our students lets us expand our vision, reflect on and realize aspects that can be taken into account to improve the development of our educational material, and identify elements that boost the learning process. It lets us mature as professionals and bring better opportunities for students to learn English through our own teaching material. In this modern age, in which technology is changing the teaching practices and students are opened to learn new technologies, teachers must take advantage of it and have a positive attitude to promote the use of digital teaching material and educate their students’ parents too about the importance of the use of digital educational materials.

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Three Strategies for True Beginners of an Outreach Program of a Public University in the Current Context of Education in Costa Rica

Lucrecia Borge González¹
Universidad Nacional
Costa Rica
lucreciaborge.lbg@gmail.com

Abstract

This essay explores some challenges faced by both teachers and beginning English learners of an English course which is part of an outreach program of a public Costa Rican university. The introduction offers some general data relating to Costa Rican public primary and secondary education. This information seeks to contextualize and explain some of the difficulties students face in their learning process of a foreign language linked to the quality of public education, specifically of the English and Spanish subjects. Due to the quality of public education, students lack some indispensable knowledge, which slows down their English learning process. Considering these challenges, this essay proposes three different approaches to tackle this situation and to provide students with some useful assets to overcome the obstacles and to facilitate their learning process. The essay analyzes and justifies the three resources that are recommended to meet students' needs, which at the same time pose a challenge to teachers. The resources proposed here are an allocation test, a needs analysis and a set of supplementary material.

Keywords: curricular reforms, background knowledge, mother tongue, parts of speech, syntactic errors, true beginners, placement test, needs analysis, supplementary material, universal design for learning, linguistic skills, self-study, metacognitive strategies

Introduction

At least in the last ten years, the decay of Costa Rican public education has become more evident. According to the *Séptimo informe estado de la educación*² (2019) the low scores obtained by students of primary school evidenced the fact that only one fifth of six graders had the expected linguistic skills according to their level. The outcomes do not seem to improve in spite of the curricular reforms approved in 2012. The Ministry of Public Education (MEP) changed the curricular proposal at all levels and in all subjects in terms of its content and approach in order to improve students' performance.

However, due to several factors, this new proposal has not been fully implemented. One of those aspects, as the *Séptimo informe estado de la educación* (2019) points out, is that only 50% of the primary school teachers comply with the basic requirements for the

1. She majored in English in 2001 from the University of Costa Rica. She completed three semesters of the Master's program in Translation at Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica and is currently studying for a Master's degree in Education with Emphasis on English Learning at Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica. Teacher of English as a foreign language since 1996. She has taught English in different outreach English teaching programs of three public universities in Costa Rica: *Centro de Idiomas* (UNED), *FUNDATEC* (TEC), *Programa Integral para la Persona Adulta Mayor* (UCR), *Programa Cursos de Conversación* (UCR).
2. Seventh Report on the State of Education

División de Educología de la Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica, 2021. <http://hdl.handle.net/11056/21301>
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job. In addition, neither the majority of teachers nor schools follow the recommendations of the latest reform. In general terms, there has not been any true progress concerning students' performance. Furthermore, the quality of education is also affected because, according to the *Séptimo informe estado de la educación* (2019), most primary and high school teachers are not suitable for the job and lack preparation, training and knowledge of the subject matter they teach.

In my practice as an English teacher in outreach course programs of public universities in Costa Rica, I have been able to witness this deterioration and how the consequences of this impoverished education are reflected on the performance of learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Teaching English in this context has become more challenging. Most of the students start their learning process with a lack of background knowledge that used to be expected from them. These adult, young adult and teenage students lack the theoretical understanding of how Spanish, their mother tongue, works, and that influences their learning of English.

According to the Report 72-17 by the Costa Rican Ministry of Education (2017), there are at least two main aspects in the current situation of English teaching in public schools nationwide that demand immediate action in order to be improved. First, only 30,3% of English teachers in public schools reach the minimum level of English required to teach. Second, there are inconsistencies in terms of the number of lessons taught in different schools where the hours taught differ based on availability of classrooms and other resources. Because of these two factors, some schools do not teach the minimum number of lessons per week and the quality of the effective lessons is questionable.

Other indicators of how the quality of English among graduates from public schools has diminished were mentioned by Jiménez (2014) in his report, in which he stated that in 2013 only 47% of high school students graduated from secondary education, 53% of students got grades lower than 60 in English, and 32% of students who took the national high school tests were unable to identify the main idea of a text or make inferences based on a text, which demonstrates poor performance and comprehension when reading in their native language.

Many students do not have fundamental knowledge of their first language and do not know some basic concepts such as parts of speech and how they function. They do not know the basic mechanics of writing and do not have the habits of reading and studying. As a consequence, when they embark on the journey of studying English in a private or an outreach course program, the process of learning the new language becomes a difficult, frustrating task for them. Very often it takes this population more time to learn and understand how the new language works until they are able to construct their own speech starting with simple coherent sentences.

Under these circumstances, the teaching process is now more arduous for English teachers. The educators have to adapt to these deficiencies and must use different resources to remedy and repair these empty holes in the background knowledge mesh that students need to build the basis of the new language. Have course programs become more lenient?

Have their goals to graduate students been lowered? As a result, in this chain of events, has the quality of English these students speak when they graduate from these outreach course programs decreased? These are questions we may not be able to respond to for now. The proposal of this paper is aimed at strengthening the initial knowledge of beginning learners of English so that they become more proficient, autonomous, and knowledgeable English learners and speakers.

It is important to take into consideration the most common kinds of errors made by beginning English learners in the outreach programs. Through years of observation, I have identified that the most persistent syntactic and morphological errors among learners are subject deletion, subject-verb agreement, deletion of the auxiliaries in negative statements and questions, word order in affirmative sentences and questions, number agreement, wrong use of the possessive adjectives, and use of fragments and listing instead of full sentences. For the purpose of this paper, I will not talk about problems related to pronunciation.

The target population of this proposal is Spanish speaking, adult, beginning English students of level 1 of a public university in San Pedro, especially those who have not taken any formal classes in a long time and do not remember the English they learned in high school or even the Spanish syntax and, hence, fit the profile of true beginners. These learners are expected to have some knowledge of English, but their contact with the language has been minimal.

To mention one example, if the grammar focus of the textbook is the object pronouns, usually the teacher has to explain what pronouns are, even go further and explain what a direct object is, and sometimes go beyond and explain what a transitive verb is. However, in the course syllabus, no time is contemplated in the lesson to teach students those concepts, the most basic aspects of a language, such as the parts of speech and their functions, because they are expected to know from what they allegedly learned in high school. As a consequence, students who are not familiar with this information have to study by themselves in order to catch up and be able to progress at the expected pace of the course.

To help these students level up, the teacher must prepare practice and exercises for them to study on their own and to do during out-of-class time. During this time, it is advisable for them to work individually as well as in pairs and small groups. Taking into account this information, it is indispensable for university outreach programs' teachers and other stakeholders to find and materialize solutions for this population of true beginner learners. Three ways to provide support to these students would be first, designing a placement test to determine, at an introductory stage, students' level of English and put them in the most suitable course; second, once the course starts, realizing a needs analysis to identify more accurately the gap between the reality and the expectations; and third, creating a set of self-study supplementary material to level students up and help them acquire the basic knowledge to take up an A1 English level course.

The Placement Test

Through my years of experience as an English teacher, I have been able to analyze learners' needs. In the classroom, I have found that the most common issues among beginning learners are difficulties in trying to recognize and understand main parts of speech, even in Spanish, problems to understand the teacher when she speaks in English, complications to produce their own speech using the structures and vocabulary studied in the level, and drawbacks when trying to respond to questions due to the fact that students do not understand what they hear.

Some indicators of these difficulties are that students seem puzzled after explanations, do not perform as expected because they do not understand the instructions, do not use vocabulary and structures as expected, say things such as "I understand the theory, but do not know how to use it in practice," and lack background knowledge necessary to understand grammar content. Also, when providing further explanation, the teacher often has to use Spanish to make sure students understand. I have been able to compile this information through observation, previous experience, my own classroom notes, and conversations with students. Besides the teacher's observations, experience and collected data, information can be gathered from other sources. The use of placement tests in English courses as a first step for starters before commencing their learning process can provide valuable information that inserts learners' context into a new perspective. The information obtained from the results of placement tests can be used by students and teachers to focus on the improvement of certain skills.

English program courses can opt to use different kinds of placement tests, from commercially designed tests to custom-made tests (Akhidenor-Bamidele, 2019). In the case of the course program of our interest, the test is designed by teachers and coordinators based on the content grammar and topics of the course books. Applicants do not take a written test. The existing placement assessment consists of an individual interview, during which the teacher/evaluator holds a conversation with the student. The questions asked move progressively in difficulty while the student is able to keep providing answers. The teacher/evaluator takes notes of students' performance in terms of grammar use, vocabulary, comprehension, and pronunciation. Teachers/evaluators are instructed to take no longer than ten minutes to give the placement test. However, there are cases when this is not enough time to obtain precise information about students' level of English, and knowledge and use of structures and vocabulary.

Besides the limited time, there are other factors that must be taken into account when this test is applied and to explain why, as a rule, the test should take only a few minutes. First, both learners and teachers/evaluators are native Spanish speakers. This fact provides teachers/evaluators with crucial background information that makes it easier for them to identify common errors Spanish speakers make as beginners. Second, most teachers/evaluators have vast experience both as teachers and evaluators.

Nevertheless, due to the time, the test does not provide accurate information about students' specific needs. These needs are only noticeable once students start the course.

According to Brown (2004), well-designed tests are a source of relevant information that can be used to make decisions. In this case, the decision to be made is what is the most appropriate level for the applicant. Due to the importance of this decision for students, these placement tests should be more rigorous.

Applicants' micro-skills should be tested differently since they are part of the minimum basic background knowledge students are expected to have. A quick written test to determine students' knowledge on grammar should be designed. Tests can provide guidance for students to know what to expect from a course, how to approach it, how to improve their language skills, and what decisions to make. (Akhidenor-Bamidele, 2019). The results of this test can also help teachers determine students' weaknesses and strengths.

The information obtained from the written test, the oral test and the teachers' notes should be used as a corpus to create material that can be used to level up true beginners and help them learn fundamental concepts that will be essential for their learning process. In addition to the test, and once the course has started, teachers can carry out a needs analysis to gain more detailed information about students' language abilities.

The Needs Analysis

Due to the nature of the outreach program courses, teachers have to make decisions quickly. Each course level takes only eight weeks. And, in spite of the placement test, the student population of the courses is very heterogeneous in terms of English language skills. Very often, beginners and true beginners are placed in the same groups of what in the program is called first level or level one. This means that the teacher has to adapt to different kinds of learners with different language skills, which involves students who have some basic knowledge of English and others who do not. Identifying the needs of learners serves to match them with teachers' expectations (Hariyadi & Yanti, 2019). If there are significant differences that separate students in the same group, teachers and students should work together to reduce the gap.

In this context, the teacher should be able to assess learners' needs in the first two weeks in order to make recommendations and decisions that help students who typically struggle. One way to do this is to quickly scan students in a non-intrusive way during the first three or four sessions, depending on the size of the group. In an interview, Brown said that "integrating language teaching, classroom activities, and assessment practices requires matching learning and assessment to how humans communicate" (Lake & Holster, 2017, p. 24). The purpose of this assessment is to identify true beginners who may require special help. This type of assessment does not need to be too elaborate.

The teacher could create a simple table to record basic information about each student. The table can include items like students' educational background and field of work, also students' first language literacy skills and English language skills. The diagnosis can be carried out in different stages. The first part can be done on the first day of class. The teacher provides students some questions to introduce themselves as they would do in a casual conversation. The questions are:

- *What's your name?*
- *How old are you?*
- *Where are you from?*
- *Where do you live?*
- *Who do you live with?*
- *What do you do? Do you work? What's your job? Do you study? What do you study? Where?*
- *Provide any extra information: Are you married? Do you have children? Do you have pets? What do you like to do in your free time?*

With the answers to these questions, teachers can learn a lot about their students. Crucial personal information is obtained, like students' educational background, and their field of work, which gives the teacher an idea of literacy skills in their mother tongue. At the same time, the teacher will listen to students speak in English for the first time when answering the questions. The teacher can determine if students have some knowledge of the structures that are necessary to answer the questions, like personal pronouns, verb to be, numbers, countries and nationalities, prepositions, present simple. The teacher will know if the student is able to understand the questions and to respond or at least try to respond in English.

I would like to quickly mention here that, in my personal experience, when answering these questions, students usually provide revealing facts about themselves that may affect their learning process. Some information students mention about their lives is commonly linked to their performance in the course, besides their educational background and first language skills. I have noticed how students who work long hours usually look very tired when they are in class. Besides, some of these students who have strenuous, long working hours are women with children and they usually have to make an extraordinary effort in order to keep up with the rhythm of their life and the additional work derived from the English course. So, this first part of the needs analysis can help the teacher understand better the context and personal situations of their students which may be related to their individual difficulties as learners.

A second stage of the assessment is carried out as part of the activities to introduce the topics, subject matter and grammatical structures of the first unit of study. In the first sessions when introducing the first grammatical and content topics, the teacher can design simple exercises for students to show if they know some concepts, such as noun, pronoun, and subject. Exercises for this part can be as simple as fill in the blank, underline, multiple choice and even direct questions such as: *Do you remember from your Spanish classes in high school what a noun is? Who can tell me what a noun is?* Or ask them directly: *What is the subject of this sentence?*

In the third session, and after the teacher has presented the introductory topics and contents of the course, as a last stage of the needs analysis, the teacher can have students work in pairs and speak in the format of a conversation to introduce themselves and provide

some personal information. The teacher provides hints for students to ask the questions, wh-questions or yes/no-questions with the verb to be, for instance, *name, age, country/nationality/town, phone number, email address, job, student (yes/no), married (yes/no)*. With this activity, the teacher can find out how well students are processing the information. The results of this activity vary from one student to another. Some students find it easy to respond to the introductory sessions. Others struggle so much that they are not able to put a single whole sentence together and cling to Spanish.

This needs analysis can be easily and casually integrated to the activities of the first sessions. The results obtained from these activities validate teachers' assessment and resulting feedback. With the data collected, the teacher can make solid suggestions to students and proceed to the following strategy proposed in this paper. Needs analysis constitutes a preliminary stage before designing the supplementary material (Ulum, 2015). The aim of this material is to provide support to true beginners and students who struggle and need to study or review basic grammatical concepts that may make their understanding of the foreign language easier. The teacher can choose any format to design the material.

The Supplementary Material

Based on the needs of these true beginning learners, teachers can design supplementary material as a remedial strategy to help this population level up. As mentioned by Rodríguez (2009), meaningful, explicit form-focused or grammar-focused instruction helps learners achieve grammatical and lexical accuracy. Furthermore, she stated that “since learners with low literacy often struggle to comprehend form in their first language, it is not advisable to teach them grammar in the second language until they have advanced into higher stages of literacy” (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 2). Hence, the goals of this material would be to offer students of a beginning level the basic necessary knowledge to make their learning process less daunting and help them feel more confident.

With this material, teachers can provide explanations about meaning and use of parts of speech—even in their native language—; design practice for students to improve the production of their own speech with basic, simple statements; and find or create listening material that helps students understand basic spoken English related to specific tasks. This material can be designed in the form of a website or an online book by a team of teachers of the outreach program. The material and practice to be included on the supplementary resource should have different kinds of learning activities, such as didactic, active and collaborative. It should also be designed in accordance with the universal design for learning.

The first and a very important section of the material must include explanations, clarifications and examples of the structures and concepts of the grammar content. This information should be very concise and clear. There is no need for it to be too complex or elaborate. Learners do not need much specific technical information of linguistics and syntax. Presenting the subject matter in simple terms is necessary for students to acquire the knowledge or review contents in case they do not remember from primary or high school.

The starting point of the website or online book is the need of a percentage of the target population to level up with their peers in terms of background, necessary, specific knowledge of grammar. The main goal of the material is to provide the learners with the information they need in order to have better resources and knowledge at hand to help them during their learning process of the language and to produce their own speech using structures and vocabulary studied in the level. With this in mind, the material can be developed according to the traditional approach, in spite of its controversiality, where theoretical knowledge is transferred to learners (Rahimi & Rajaei, 2008) in the form of didactic activities.

Didactic activities provide a way of exposure to the subject matter, strengthen students' learning process, help organize contents, promote meta cognitive learning strategies through analysis, and help put structures in practice and understand the subject matter (Navarro & Piñeiro, 2013). In the didactic section, teachers should include the concepts, explanations and examples of parts of speech: noun, adjective, verb, adverb, preposition and article. Also, some basic syntactic concepts to be included in the didactic activities should be subject, object, possessive adjectives and their function, personal pronouns and possessive pronouns and their function, the concept of subject-verb agreement, number agreement, word order and basic sentence patterns.

Textbooks' grammar sections usually have subtitles like "Verb to be: positive and negative sentences," "Personal pronouns," "Possessive adjectives," "Countable and Uncountable nouns," "Indefinite articles," "Conjunctions and, but, or," "Adverbs of frequency." In my experience, true beginners usually need the teacher to explain what a noun, pronoun, article, adverb or adjective is. These explanations must be provided in class, which is time consuming. I have seen how it is more effective and time-saving for beginners and true beginners when these explanations are given in students' native language, which in this case is the same as the teachers'. When used with discretion, native language can be a good way to explain grammar and complex concepts, clarify meaning, avoid repetition, and it also avoids time waste (Spahiu, 2013). This is also the reason why I suggest including in the supplementary material the information of the explanations of complex concepts in Spanish, side by side with the explanations in English.

These explanations can be provided both in Spanish and English to make sure students will understand better and should be accompanied with hyperlinks to already existing materials online about each topic for extended personal study. As Richards and Reppen (2014) mentioned, when teaching grammar in language classrooms, sometimes focusing on form is necessary to speed up the learning process, which is absolutely necessary due to the circumstances of the outreach course program where each course takes only eight weeks.

The following sections of the remedial resource should include active learning activities where learners practice grammar concepts and structures, identify and use the parts of speech, and apply the basic concepts and structures explained in the first section. With these exercises, learners are also expected to practice other structures they have to

study during the course, like personal pronouns, possessive adjectives, articles, the verb to be, present simple, basic sentence patterns and word order. The practice can include content topics and vocabulary studied in the course. In this section, students are expected to start developing self-correction through error analysis.

Again, because of the level, exercises in this section do not need to be too elaborate or complex. The idea here is to reinforce what students have learned so far from the previous section. Also, they should be able to identify by themselves what or if they have learned something. “When learners are aware of their own capacities and limitations, they can efficiently adopt pathways to success that capitalize on strengths and compensate for weaknesses” (Brown & Lee, p. 52, 2015). Successful learners are able to develop self-awareness as well as personal skills that allow them to recognize what works best for them to learn something new. They learn to learn and are capable to use those metacognitive strategies to be more critical and honest about their own needs as learners and to act from there.

Exercises can move progressively in difficulty as a scaffolding strategy. Students can start with multiple choice exercises. Then, they can be asked to fill in the blanks to complete sentences with the correct word, nouns, pronouns, verbs, or others that were previously studied. More complex exercises can include answering questions with complete sentences, being provided hints and examples to ask their own questions, and even writing short paragraphs and producing their own audio-visual material or speech.

The last section of the material should promote collaborative learning. Here, the main purpose is that students produce and create their own speech by different means. They should develop and practice the content topics studied in the course while using the learned grammatical structures and vocabulary. Learners should be encouraged to work in pairs or in small groups, as well as to get creative when producing their own products. This section can also offer examples in the form of videos taken from different sources to illustrate the expected outcomes for each situation. Learners can also post and share real examples of a product created by them to exemplify the expected result of the learning process throughout the course and what students learned and are able to produce after working on the supplementary material or at the end of the course.

When working together, students put in practice the main reason for learning a language which is basic human communication. Cooperative work favors social interaction and helps students develop a sense of community and belonging. The “cooperative learning approach ... enable[s] active learning ... [and] gives a lot of opportunities for students to improve themselves in different aspects such as knowledge, skill, attitude, and achievement” (Wichadee, 2010, p. 6). This kind of learning brings about self-confidence and a sense of personal achievement among learners.

The material should integrate language skills “to enable the students to develop their communicative abilities and competencies,” such as Pardede (2017, p. 151) suggested. Also, it should be developed taking into account the universal design for learning (UDL). Among the elements of UDL Boothe et al. (2018) talked about are implementing multiple

means of engagement, and giving students time to work on their own and activities that agree with the objectives of the course.

The information should be presented in different formats to foster multiple means of representation. Hence, students can find audio files in English of the explanations recorded by the teachers/designers to tackle their difficulty of understanding the teacher when she speaks in English while practicing the listening skill. There should also be videos with closed captions from different sources as examples of the expected outcomes. Students can find information in the form of text for the grammar concepts. Teachers can include pictures and graphics to exemplify the grammar explanations. Also, the material should be easy to access, handle, navigate or explore and use.

Finally, the material should present multiple means of action and expression, as well as explanations and examples of the expected results. The last section can offer more varied opportunities through collaborative learning activities for students to express themselves in different ways. Here, students can be given the opportunity to present their products in the form of pair or group conversations or individual interventions using different formats such as audio recordings, videos, infographics or slide shows.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Such as I mentioned previously, in my own experience and through my own process of observation and analysis, I have been able to determine the most recurrent problems among the population of beginners and true beginners. Besides such problems as subject deletion, subject-verb agreement, misuse of auxiliaries, word order, number agreement, wrong use of the possessive adjectives, use of fragments and listing instead of full sentences, adult learners do not know basic concepts that are necessary for them when learning a new language. Most of them do not remember or know what a subject, a verb, an adjective, an adverb, or any other part of speech is.

During class, students come across explanations and mention of words such as nouns, adverbs, prepositions of place and so on. If students do not know those concepts or do not remember them from primary and secondary school, how can teachers move on in the course content without stopping to explain in detail to their students what a direct object or a transitive verb is? As established in the introduction of this paper, here is precisely where EFL teachers of outreach programs notice the repercussions of the decreased quality of high school education.

Students are expected to know these concepts because, supposedly, they studied them in school. The problem here for teachers and learners is having to deal with that lack of knowledge. Students' not knowing about parts of speech, grammar and syntax, not even in their mother tongue, is the issue they have to deal with and solve. Nevertheless, the subject matter, content topics and grammatical structures are studied under the assumption that students know these concepts. However, it should not be taken for granted that students know. In the last few years, it has been more recurring to find beginner learners who come from an educational public background that leaves them with a great lack of essential

knowledge indispensable in the process of learning a new language. Under these circumstances, teachers should develop some strategies that help these students cope with these difficulties.

The first strategy proposed here is designing a placement test that sheds the first light on students' English level. This test should be designed specifically based on the goals and expectations of the course program and it should include an oral part and a written part. Once students are placed after this preliminary stage, the teacher should carry out a needs analysis to give students sound feedback and further recommendations. Finally, depending on the results of the needs assessment, when giving the feedback to students, the teacher can recommend studying on their own using a set of supplementary materials, also designed by the teachers of the course program. The material should provide students with the basic knowledge they do not know or have forgotten in order to level up with the students who do know or remember.

These strategies can help students remedy that situation and make their English learning process less frustrating and more enjoyable. The identification of students' needs can help teachers and learners know what to do to catch up. The results of a well-designed placement test could also be the basis to design the supplementary material for true beginners to use when they start an A1 English course. The creation of this material and the tests should be done collaboratively among the teachers of the course program.

In addition to these strategies, there are other aspects that are necessary for this population of true beginners to succeed in their English learning process, such as learners' attitude, motivation and other individual characteristics like age, study habits, previous knowledge, as well as teachers' availability, usefulness and pertinence of the guidelines and developed supplementary material. All material created by the teachers should also promote collaborative learning and provide real life examples. Ideally, it should also offer scaffolding learning activities through the different exercises. In addition, it should be designed in accordance with the universal design for learning in order to integrate students' different language skills and learning styles.

Learning a new language is an investment, not only in terms of money, but also in the form of time and hard work. By means of developing metacognitive strategies, students become responsible for their own learning process. They become autonomous, self-aware learners who are capable of developing their own learning skills and strategies by practicing, monitoring and correcting themselves, identifying their own flaws and potential, and making their own decisions to become successful learners (Brown & Lee, 2015). The supplementary material that teachers create could help learners develop and acquire study habits. Practice and improvement take time and effort and that is another lesson students might need to learn.

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Pedagogical Strategies to Cater for Dyslexic Learners in the EFL Classroom

Rafael Núñez Soto¹
Universidad Nacional
Costa Rica
rafael.nunez.soto@est.una.ac.cr

Abstract

This essay seeks to help teachers reflect on the importance of catering for dyslexic individuals in the EFL classroom. For this purpose, a general review of the causes and manifestations of dyslexia will be presented, so that teachers can identify students that might have different learning needs. The discussion centers on the necessity of enforcing pedagogical tools that might serve dyslexic students. Hence, aspects such as using modern technology as an ally, providing individualized learning experiences, adapting material, and praising and motivating students will be analyzed. Besides the need to create an inclusive learning environment where students, teachers, relatives, and stockholders become aware of the needs of dyslexic individuals will be addressed. A final consideration of how teachers can offer additional support to dyslexic learners will be discussed.

Keywords: dyslexia, bilingualism, inclusion, EFL classroom

Introduction

One of the most important challenges that English as a Foreign Language (henceforth, EFL) teachers face in the classroom is catering for students with special learning needs. This challenge is multifactorial as several aspects combine to create a complex situation that teachers must navigate constantly. From my perspective, three main factors influence the way in which EFL teachers deal with students with learning difficulties. The first factor is lack of preparedness. Ahmad et al. (2018) have asserted that EFL teachers rarely have a solid formal training to teach students with special needs. From my experience, teacher training programs scarcely ever include specific courses or modules that prepare student teachers on how to deal with students with special learning needs.

Teachers usually have to resort to self-training, the advice of other colleagues, or taking additional training of their own device to fill this gap in the teacher training program. As a result, in general terms teachers do not have the tools and the confidence to teach students with special needs. Unfortunately, teaching students with special needs is a common situation that educators will face in their professional career, and the lack of preparedness will make it an extremely difficult problem to tackle.

The second factor is the lack of resources. As Nijakowska (2019) has explained, students with special learning needs require special material, special resources, and the use

1. Rafael Núñez Soto currently works as an EFL teacher in Cursos de Conversación at Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR). He has a Bachelor's Degree in English from the Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR).

of special technological tools. Again, it is my opinion that teachers do not receive the training to adapt or prepare that material. Besides, teachers usually do not have the time and the resources to adapt or create special materials. The majority of the institutions use textbooks or resources that are intended for learners with standard abilities neglecting students with special needs. In this sense, teachers confront an additional challenge as they have to adapt traditional materials and teaching technologies, or create new materials, to be able to meet the needs of those students. This could result in a frustrating process of material creation that adds up to the heavy workload that teachers usually have.

A third aspect to consider is the lack of support of the institutions and stockholders. Coughlan et al. (2019) have argued that programs and course syllabi usually follow a standardized format that does not contemplate the needs of students with learning disabilities. Once again, I strongly believe that the burden falls on the shoulders of the teachers who have to propitiate the adequate changes so that students with special needs have the same opportunities to access the learning process as the other learners do.

Therefore, teachers have to adapt programs and syllabi to meet the needs of all students, which is something that institutions and stockholders should have considered beforehand. Hence, teachers see themselves immersed in this intricate web of problems in which they have to keep their focus on the ultimate goal, which is to help the learners. To do so, teachers need to reflect on their teaching practices, their students' needs, and the resources they may implement.

One of the most common disabilities that teachers will have to deal with in the EFL classroom is dyslexia. The International Dyslexia Association (2002) has stated that this learning disability impacts reading and writing directly:

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (Para. 1)

Oftentimes, dyslexia is considered as an occult learning disability as learners, teachers, relatives, and other people involved in the learning process fail to recognize its existence, which has serious implications for the students as they are labeled as slow learners and do not receive the appropriate help they need.

In the context of the EFL classroom, dyslexic learners face a daunting task. Cimermanova (2015) explained that scholars have divided opinions about the participation of dyslexic learners in the EFL classroom. While some scholars think that they should not study a foreign language, others think that studying a second language could be of great benefit for them if they are provided with an appropriate learning environment. I strongly agree with the second opinion, and I believe that dyslexic students should be catered for in

the EFL classroom. As Cimermanova (2015) argued, inclusion in a foreign language class is much more than being exposed to the foreign language. It also has to do with feeling accepted and involved in a meaningful learning environment regardless of the level that can be achieved.

Therefore, dyslexic learners deserve attention, and they deserve to participate in inclusive learning environments because they can have additional benefits out of the participative activities such as enhanced social development, no matter the level of language proficiency that they would eventually achieve. Learning a second language can be extremely difficult for dyslexic learners. Specific areas such as reading and writing can be challenging for them and as Cimermanova (2015) suggested; associated problems such as short working memory and problems with automaticity in language will impact directly their learning process.

However, with the appropriate help and support of teachers, relatives, and stockholders, dyslexic learners can successfully participate in the EFL classroom. Consequently, EFL teachers should address the problem of dyslexia in the classroom, and they should be prepared to recognize and help students with special needs. Besides, students with dyslexia need to feel part of the classroom. Therefore, the teacher should adapt and develop tools, materials, and activities that help these learners. Moreover, teachers should empower these students to make them become active participants in their learning process in spite of their learning disability.

Recognizing and Dealing with Dyslexic Learners

The first step to develop effective pedagogical tools to cater for dyslexic learners in the EFL classroom is to recognize dyslexia. As stated earlier, many times dyslexia is an occult disability, and the EFL teacher needs to develop a trained eye to recognize it. Evidently, teachers should avoid the pitfall of diagnosing dyslexia, as they lack the training and the expertise to do so. However, they should work close to students, relatives and stockholders to detect the signs that may indicate dyslexia and that may help teachers to better understand the pedagogical path to follow. In a similar manner, teachers should ignore common myths about dyslexia.

Cimermanova (2015) has argued that people believe that dyslexic learners cannot read, that they have a vision or auditory problem, that dyslexia is a rare condition, and that dyslexic learners see things backwards. Fighting those myths will enable teachers to have an educated and informed approach to the problem and make important decisions to improve the student's situation in the EFL classroom. Additionally, it is important to consider that dyslexia is a chronic, lifelong condition that cannot be cured, and therefore, should be addressed accordingly.

Nijakowska (2019) has presented a wide range of signs that dyslexic learners may show, among which the most relevant are difficulties in learning, remembering, and distinguishing the sounds of L2, mainly those which do not exist in L1. Besides that, dyslexic individuals have difficulty in acquiring sound-letter relations, problems in

comprehending and processing spoken language, especially when it is presented in rapid speech, issues in speed and accuracy of processing information presented in oral form, challenges in acquiring different aspects of L2 (applying grammar rules, for example). These learners may also present smaller vocabulary ranges, struggle with reading and spelling, as well as reduced attention span, working memory capacity, internalization of new knowledge, and poor organization and time management skills.

Teachers should be alert to these signs of dyslexia, as students will show some or most of them to a higher or lesser degree, according to the level of their learning disability. What really matters is that teachers, parents, stockholders and the students themselves should be aware that these warning signs are indicators of a learning disability. Moreover, everyone involved should avoid labeling and categorizing dislexic learners, which will make matters worse adding to the already challenging nature of the learning disability. Being pigeonholed may have a negative effect on the self-perception of the learners and affect not only their academic performance but also their social life. Teachers should be aware that the main point of recognizing dyslexia is to develop and implement adequate pedagogical strategies and tools to cater for those students.

Owen (2016) also pointed out other important pitfalls to avoid. For example, overreacting when correcting works of dyslexic learners is counterproductive as it may be greatly discouraging for them to receive a paper all marked in red. Instead, teachers should focus on specific mistakes and correct those errors. Teachers should avoid giving long instructions for activities. As an option, they can number the instructions on the board.

Additionally, teachers should refrain from considering dislexic learners as lazy students because in reality, they are trying very hard to overcome their learning disabilities and that takes a lot of effort. Learning disabilities are usually misunderstood. Besides, there is a social stigma around them. People with learning disabilities generally are ashamed of their condition and need a helping hand when facing the challenges of learning a foreign language. It is part of the teacher's roles to provide help and support for dyslexic learners and make sure that they have a safe learning environment that accommodates their needs.

Enforcing Pedagogical Tools to Cater for Learners with Dyslexia

The next challenge that EFL teachers face is implementing pedagogical tools to cater for learners with dyslexia. First, it is important to define the concept of pedagogical tools. McGrath (2013) has explained that a pedagogical tool is basically anything that a person uses to learn or teach. The most traditional tool that learners rely on is the textbook, but pedagogical tools involve other types of materials like newspapers articles, songs, videos, worksheets and quizzes, realia, among many others. The way teachers and learners approach pedagogical tools varies depending on their interests, age, educational level, learning goals, among other factors. For example, building blocks can be a very useful tool for kids or young learners but it may be inappropriate for adult learners. Depending on the subject to be taught, the context of the class, and the goals of the instruction, building blocks can be a useful tool for adult learners as well.

Traditional pedagogical tools include textbooks, handouts, worksheets, and many others. However, the incorporation of technology in the classroom has impacted the use of pedagogical tools enormously. More and more, teachers and students use technological resources to teach and learn. Thus, new pedagogical tools such as ebooks, podcasts, websites, mobile apps, among many others have become a constant in the learning process. Yet, it is important to highlight that no matter the pedagogical tool being used, it has to make a connection with what is being taught. Using pedagogical tools at random may actually have a contrary effect, as students may lose focus of what they are supposed to learn. Besides, the ultimate goal of a pedagogical tool is to meet learners' needs also considering the different learning styles.

Importantly, teachers need to accommodate the classroom to meet the needs of dyslexic learners. This could be achieved by individualizing the learning experience of students with learning differences. Kormos (2012) explained different ways in which teachers can help dyslexic learners. To begin, teachers can modify and adapt material for dyslexic learners by using shorter reading texts, or dividing them into shorter sections, by using illustrations and glossaries of unknown words, by preparing quick and easy comprehension questions, and by assigning easier reading tasks.

Also, by recognizing and targeting the difficulties of learners, teachers can help students to learn to overcome those obstacles, which will make the class environment friendlier. In addition, teachers should praise the learners often for their achievements, even if they seem small. Teachers should encourage learners with different needs all along the way. Most importantly, teachers have to motivate dyslexic learners by setting up clear and achievable goals.

Moreover, teachers, relatives, stockholders, and other people involved in the learning process should be aware of other implications of dyslexia. Martínez and Belmonte (2020) explained that the needs of dyslexic students could have serious consequences if not addressed properly. They argued that dyslexic students could be trapped in a vicious cycle that involves lack of motivation, low self-esteem, which in turn affect the family and social life of the students, and could even provoke bullying or school alienation. For this reason, They proposed that it is absolutely necessary to visibilize dyslexic students and cater for their needs when planning the teaching and learning processes, having in mind the necessary adaptations, as they are entitled to the right of an education that is suitable for them.

Thus, teachers should be made aware of the implications for dyslexic learners in the ESL classroom in terms of programs, assessments, and materials. Catering for dyslexic students is a very important issue, and with the correct tools, materials, spaces, people and times adapted, they can achieve the objectives and competences of the stage without this resulting in a negative experience that could have repercussions on later learning practices, thus avoiding both school failure and the difficulties that continue to grow and limit the opportunities of many students. Since dyslexia is a learning disability that has multifactorial components and implications, the response to it should be consequent and it should target

not only the merely pedagogical goals but also the inclusion of the student in a friendly learning environment. Educators should strive to empower dyslexic students so that they can gain autonomy and control over their learning process.

In the context of dyslexic learners, pedagogical tools acquire a whole new dimension. Teachers need to adapt, change, modify, or implement the pedagogical tools to cater for their needs. In the EFL classroom, teachers usually rely on traditional materials such as handouts, worksheets, and textbooks. They may also complement the class material with some additional technological resources that come with the textbook, or that they research or create themselves.

However, some or many of the materials in these resources may not be apt for students with special needs. Along with adapted materials, teachers need to adopt other techniques that will help students with different learning needs. For instance, Owen (2016) explained that overlearning may be a useful technique to help students with dyslexia. It consists of practicing newly acquired skills over and over again until they become automatic. Overlearning can be helpful with repeating concepts, grammatical explanations, vocabulary, and anything else that will help students acquire the knowledge of the language.

Educators can use several techniques in the EFL classroom to cater for students with dyslexia. For example, teachers can use mnemonics to help students learn tricky words by making them funny or memorable. They can use words within words to help students memorize spelling. Also, teachers may resort to fun and gamification to make learning memorable, as most dyslexic students have short-term memory issues. It is easier to remember things if you are having fun. Besides, teachers should use a multi-sensory approach by including music, games, or videos in the classroom and also kinetics, making students stand up and move around, not simply sit still and listen to the teacher.

Also, the use of mind-maps can be helpful for students with dyslexia to recall vocabulary, especially for written tasks like an essay. In addition, teachers should allow students in general (and students with dyslexia in particular) some thinking time. Teachers should let students formulate their ideas before they answer. Moreover, the author pointed out the importance of pair and group work. Small groups and pair work may be the ideal interaction for dyslexic learners who may feel shy to participate in whole class activities. Another helpful resource to cater for dyslexic learners suggested is storyboards. Storyboards are especially helpful for written assignments because they help the student organize the text before they actually write it as some dyslexic learners may have problems following chronological order.

Along with these techniques, which may prove very useful for every EFL classroom indeed, teachers need to think of other pedagogical strategies and accommodations to implement. Nikajowska (2019) has explained that special accommodations for dyslexic learners involve enabling solutions and arrangements to respond to their special educational needs, so that they can show their potential, develop and demonstrate attainment. Eight different areas have been identified as important to provide a suitable class environment. First, assessment and special conditions during exams as students may require help with

instructions and what is required in the different exercises, or even oral instructions to perform a task, which may imply that they will take longer solving a test or completing an assessment.

Second, aspects of classroom management such as grouping, routines, and pace must be closely monitored. Teachers may need to slow down the pace of the class and use different grouping strategies as dyslexic learners perform better in smaller groups. Third, feedback becomes an important part of catering for dyslexic learners. Teachers should be aware to use different ways to deliver feedback. For instance, written feedback may not be the most suitable option for a dyslexic learner. Instead of that, the teacher may provide oral feedback, which may result as a more appropriate way to reach the learner.

In addition, instruction becomes an important aspect to keep in mind. Giving instructions is particularly important, as dyslexic learners may have trouble remembering instructions, or following the order of instructions. Teachers should apply different methods to provide instructions like, repeating instructions, writing them on the board, or asking the students to repeat the instructions to verify they have understood. Besides, the use of materials has also an important role in accommodating dyslexic learners in the EFL classroom. As stated before, pedagogical tools and materials need to be apt for learners with special needs. It is necessary to implement materials that target different types of learning, that are visually engaging, and that have a manageable amount of text.

Teachers need to pay attention to the curriculum as well, in terms of how they organize the subject matter and task types. For example, it is convenient to organize items in an exercise, tasks, and activities in a gradual way where easier tasks come first and they evolve to more difficult and complex ones. Classroom environment is important, too. Aspects such as light, furniture, equipment, among others may have a direct impact on the learning experience of students with special needs. For instance, a dyslexic learner may perform better in a well-lit room, sitting on a comfy chair close to the whiteboard, as this seat arrangement will reduce the stress of not being able to see the written material clearly.

Finally, teachers need to adapt the areas of students' performance such as timing, setting assignments, and homework. Timing is especially important since dyslexic learners need to process information in a slower way. Teachers should be careful because this fact contributes to the myth of perceiving dyslexic learners as slow learners. Teachers should provide accommodations so as to not make them feel they are dragging behind the rest of the class.

Perhaps implementing more conscientious timing in the activities, or providing extra time if required will be helpful. The same applies to homework and setting assignments as teachers need to foresee any difficulties students with special needs may face. Nijakowska (2019) explained that adjusting, altering, and differentiating teaching practices promotes the participation and involvement of dyslexic learners in classroom activities allowing them to demonstrate their potential. All in all it sounds like a daunting task; however, training and practice will make it easier for teachers to cater for dyslexic learners as most of the accommodations are not difficult to implement, are free of cost, and may benefit all

learners in general.

Implementing Pedagogical Practices to Cater for Dyslexic Learners

Ahmad et al. (2018), Akbasli (2017), Nijakowska (2019), Owen (2018), and Owen (2016) have established diverse pedagogical approaches and practices to cater for dyslexic learners and help them overcome common challenges they may encounter during the learning process. One of the first steps to implement is adapting material. Teachers should avoid text cluttered pages and difficult to read fonts like the serif types. Instead, they should use easy-to-read text type material with easy-to-follow instructions, avoid copying from the whiteboard exercises, and assign exercises according to students' abilities. Nowadays, technology serves as a powerful ally for dyslexic learners. Whenever possible, teachers should implement and allow the use of technology in class. Tools like laptops, spell checkers, specialized computer software, reading aids to read text back, listening devices equipped with headset and microphone, among many others, can make a big difference in the learning experience of the students and they make the teacher's job easier.

Another important aspect to have into account is the implementation of different teaching methods. Nijakowska (2019) has proposed several approaches that may help in a day-to-day teaching basis. For instance, foster repetition and revision of material using creative and innovative means. Also, it is important to set achievable goals according to the students' needs and performance. Setting too high goals may result in frustration both on the part of the teacher and the learner. Provide clear, step-by-step instructions. Summarize contents using a variety of visual aids like charts, mind maps, tables, graphics, or illustrations. Elicit students to create their own summarizing and studying strategies, which will help them engage in the learning process and become autonomous and independent learners.

Teachers should favor oral performance over written tasks, as the former may be more suitable for dyslexic learners. Ahmad (2018) also proposed a buddy system in which strong learners collaborate with dyslexic students to guide them and support them through the activities. I consider this is an especially useful technique as it will result in less work for the teacher, mainly considering large groups.

The way the teacher manages the classroom has to adapt to the particular needs of dyslexic learners. Again, small changes can go a long way. For example, teachers should establish routines and maintain them, and in that way learners will know what to expect. Also, teachers will need to allow more time for students to complete the tasks and assignments in class. Providing constant feedback may prove especially helpful, as dyslexic learners will have input of their performance. Teachers must praise achievement frequently and when it is deserved, which will result in a positive self-image and may impact both their academic performance and also their social life. Besides that, teachers may need to adapt and vary the test conditions providing a special distraction-free environment, giving more time to complete the tests, and using alternative task types, like take-home tests. All these useful techniques will help dyslexic students in their learning process as they will be able to

participate in a more friendly learning environment.

It is my thesis that teaching methodology must be oriented to meet the needs of all students, including dyslexic learners. Nijakowska (2019) has argued that the most effective way to teach dyslexic EFL learners is the Multisensory Structured Language Learning (henceforth MSL) approach. I consider that this approach is highly valuable in that it involves diverse elements of the learning process and may be used to teach grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, reading, speaking, and listening. I also think that a complex condition like dyslexia requires a multifactorial solution like MSL. Teachers may implement some of the MSL components according to their learners' needs. Importantly, MSL is easy to adapt and implement and can add pedagogical value to any class, even if dyslexic learners are not present. In that way, teachers do not need to have different plans in case they are teaching in other learning environments where accommodation for learners with special needs is not necessary.

The main elements of MSL relate to diverse aspects of the learning process and it is specifically linked to language learning. The first recommendation is to implement a highly structured teaching where contents, exercises, and activities are progressive and go from simple to complex. In that way, students have a chance to prepare for the more demanding tasks. Second, teachers should strive for direct explicit instruction and clear explanations of the different rules of the target language. Vague or difficult explanations help are hard to grasp, especially for learners with special needs. A third aspect to consider is training students in different learning strategies. This training will add value to their learning process as they will reap the benefits in different learning areas, not only language learning. Besides, learning strategies are useful for all learners and not exclusively for learners with dyslexia.

Using drills, frameworks, and models may prove especially helpful as teachers need to give structure to their lessons. I find drills very appropriate for language learning, mainly when teaching pronunciation or difficult grammar structures. Drills and overpractice may appear quite obsolete but they definitely work. In addition, teachers should aim for small cumulative steps. I believe this should be a ground rule for every language class. Going slow may be key to the progress of students. Lessons that include lots of activities, different types of material, and several topics usually do not have the desired objectives. Keeping it simple and working in small cumulative steps may have better results.

It is recommended for teachers to use multi-sensory activities that involve all types of learners. From my point of view, this is especially important in language learning where teachers have the opportunity to be creative and innovative in the implementation of materials and resources. Teachers can use colorful charts, visuals, and videos for visual learners. They can include music and songs for auditory learners. Logical and mathematical learners will be especially interested in grammar drills and other activities that involve logical thinking.

The teacher should be careful to adapt those activities to the needs of students with dyslexia. Teachers may also have games and activities that involve moving around or

physical expression, such as playing charades, to include kinesthetic learners. Also, pair or group activities are relevant for interpersonal learners. In language teaching/learning grouping is fundamental as it helps develop the social skills that students will need to practice the target language in a real interaction. Usually, role-plays, group work, and dialogues are an integral part of any EFL classroom. Teachers also need to cater for solitary and intrapersonal learners by providing activities, like reading exercises, adapted to meet the needs of dyslexic learners. Finally, the triad of frequent repetition, ample practice, and revision assures the effectiveness of the MSL approach in the classroom to cater not only for students with special needs but also for the achievement of the goals of the whole group.

Including Dyslexic Learners in the EFL Classroom

One of the main reasons to cater for dyslexic learners in the EFL classroom is to promote inclusion. Although this may prove a big challenge for teachers, especially in large groups, educators need to be aware of the situation of students with different learning needs. Kormos (2020) stated that inclusion is a process that starts with the analysis of the barriers in the institution and the educational system and policies that can obstruct the participation of all students. In inclusive learning environments, diversity is perceived as an enriching aspect and not as an obstacle to learning.

González et al. (2005) have noted that in our country, since 1997, the Ministry of Public Education through the law 7600 established a regulation and created the document Policies, Regulations and Procedures for the Access to Education for Students with Special Educational Needs [*Normas y procedimientos para el manejo técnico y administrativo de los servicios educativos para estudiantes con problemas de aprendizaje*], which contemplates different aspects of inclusion for students with learning disabilities, and therefore, with different learning needs. The establishment of this legislation implies that students have the right to learn in an inclusive environment and that educators must provide such conditions for all individuals.

In the specific context of dyslexic learners in the EFL classroom, Ahmad et al. (2018) have emphasized that to be competitive individuals in modern society, people need to learn at least one additional language. Being English a global language, it is only natural that more and more students choose to learn it to fulfill their personal, professional, and career goals. This situation is particularly true of Spanish speaking countries where people need to learn English to have access to a better education, better career options, and better job opportunities, among many other benefits. Hence, discouraging dyslexic people to learn English as a Foreign Language puts them in clear disadvantage with the rest of the population. In like manner, Owen (2018) argued that all students have the right to attend and participate in foreign language classes and, for this reason, foreign language educators face the challenge to accommodate their individual needs in an environment that does not restrict them.

The main purpose should be to include students with dyslexia in a differentiated classroom, which takes into account different learner capabilities, needs, and learning styles.

I agree with Owen (2018) when he stated that including dyslexic learners in a language classroom may be a daunting task. However, by implementing some basic strategies and pedagogical tools the educator can ensure that students with dyslexia reach their full potential. Moreover, Ranaldi (2003) also explained that language teachers should guarantee that dyslexic learners have the help, attention and encouragement that they need to make up for any deficiencies they may have. Motivation is a key factor in the success of students with learning differences. Teachers, parents, colleagues, and stockholders need to understand the titanic effort these students make to learn and they should be emphatic and supportive all along the way. In this sense, Owen (2018) proposed that teachers must become motivators and make clear that they expect dyslexic students to reach the same goals as their non-dyslexic peers.

Important Steps for Inclusion

Education professionals have outlined steps to take to promote an inclusive learning environment in the EFL classroom. From my perspective, some are feasible and others may be harder to adapt according to the specific situation of each teaching environment. However, the simple fact of creating awareness and adopting some changes can make a big difference for dyslexic learners. Kormos (2021) and Owen (2018) proposed different ways in which teachers can create an inclusive environment in the EFL classroom. Basically, there are three different areas that teachers need to target in order to include learners with different needs in their classrooms. First, teachers must pay attention to communication and interaction: not only student to student communication and interaction but also teacher to student communication and interaction.

Kormos (2021) argued that grouping or pairing students with different skills may prove highly beneficial for students with dyslexia. Thus, the student to student interaction may be a key tool that teachers can use to optimize the performance of dyslexic learners. However, Owen (2018) asserted that language teachers should consider the talents and difficulties learners have to make sure that the pairs or groups work well together. For instance, pairing two students with reading difficulties may not be a good idea. But pairing a student with reading difficulties but with writing abilities with a student who finds it difficult to write but is a good reader, may prove a successful collaboration as they will help and complement each other. Besides, teachers should be aware that students with dyslexia may find these interactions stressful. Hence, through close and sensitive observation, teachers need to find the most effective pairing or grouping strategies.

Moreover, the teacher to student interaction and communication needs to be clear and effective. For instance, Kormos (2021) argued that providing summaries at the end of the lesson may prove really helpful not only for dyslexic learners but also for other learners who may have difficulties taking notes during the class. In addition, breaking down big tasks into smaller tasks may help dyslexic learners to concentrate better and focus on a specific task. I find this particularly useful for all learners as they will be able to complete their tasks and have a sense of accomplishment and increase their motivation.

Nijakowska (2019) recommended reducing the amount of work by eliminating redundant tasks, which will help reduce the levels of anxiety in all learners. Teachers can present contents in smaller assignments, avoiding in this way, to dishearten learners with long complicated tasks and the amount of work to complete. Instructions and feedback are fundamental in second language teaching/learning. Therefore, teachers should strive for clear and easy to follow instructions and straightforward and motivating feedback. Kormos (2021) explained that both instructions and feedback need to be clear and unambiguous.

Besides, the feedback has to motivate students and help boost their self-esteem; having in mind that dyslexic learners are making a tremendous effort to learn a second language. Again, this practice will help not only the dyslexic individuals but also all students in general. Additionally, Kormos (2021) suggested that teachers should focus on the progress and improvements that dyslexic learners have made rather than on the issues that need to be worked on. I consider that focusing on the gains instead of focusing on the errors changes the perspective of the learning process completely. Focusing on progress and gains gives a positive insight and fosters a good attitude on the part of the learners promoting, in this way, a constructive and inclusive learning environment. Yet, the teacher should be skillful enough to develop concrete strategies to target the issues that need work.

The second area to consider is the classroom environment. Kormos and Smith (2012) explained that dyslexic individuals might be sensitive to different external factors such as temperature, light, noise, among others. Conditions that teachers and other students consider normal and acceptable could be distracting or distressing for dyslexic learners. For this reason, it is important for teachers to know each individual's needs and try to meet those needs as far as possible. Obviously, this will depend greatly on the availability of resources such as physical space, furniture, technology, among others. However, sometimes a simple and slight change like moving a student to a well-lit ventilated area, closer to the whiteboard, or away from the noise and distractions can have a positive impact.

Besides, Owen (2016) explained that texts or spaces cramped with visual information may be overwhelming for dyslexic students. Teachers tend to include lots of visual aids both in their texts and in the classroom as a way to catch the students' attention. However, this might prove distracting for some learners. The experts recommend keeping the area near the board and screen free of visual distractions, and also provide texts, charts, handouts, and materials that are simple and neat without a lot of visual clutter. Sometimes less is more. Moreover, these simple adaptations of material could benefit students in general and not only students with different learning needs.

The third aspect to consider in the inclusion in the EFL classroom is the content of the language course. Although most of the time teachers have to follow specific plans or programs for the courses they have to teach, they can make some adaptations that will have a positive impact on the learning experience of dyslexic individuals. For instance, Kormos and Smith (2012) proposed that teachers can modify the material appearance in order to avoid anxiety that dyslexic learners experience when exposed to visual disturbances. Materials should be uncluttered and easy to navigate.

Furthermore, teachers have the challenge to maintain a class pace that is engaging and challenging for students but also that learners can follow with ease. It is important to emphasize that most dyslexic learners have issues with short-time memory and may need extra time to process information, and think through issues and concepts, especially when learning a new language. Aspects such as learning new vocabulary, new sounds, or new grammar rules may prove highly challenging. Kormos (2020) also explained that not all dyslexic individuals show the same difficulties, or the same level of difficulty when learning a second language. Each case is unique and different. For this reason, I consider that teachers need to observe, analyze and take action to modify, present, and implement the content of the language course in a way that best benefits all the students.

Providing Additional Support

Another way teachers can help dyslexic students thrive in the EFL classroom is by providing additional support. For instance, teaching study techniques will have a big impact on the learning process of dyslexic individuals. It is important to emphasize that dyslexic students make a big effort to learn and giving them learning opportunities can ease their burden. Kormos and Smith (2012) have identified different easy-to-follow study strategies that used in the specific learning context may improve the students performance in the classroom. For example, using color coding may help dyslexic students to remember important information like dates or to organize material at a macro level and at micro level, using different colors for different parts of speech may help them see patterns in language in an easier way. Importantly, these techniques may be introduced to the whole class and will be useful for all students regardless of whether they have a different learning need or not.

Besides, time management is a skill that usually is not included in course programs and that dyslexic learners may find difficult to control. Thus, teachers need to provide coaching in work organization and time management using different means like timetables, personal organizers, mobile phones, or any other methods that both teachers and students find suitable. Luckily, nowadays there are many technological tools that can be utilized like apps, voice recorders, digital planners, among many others that are useful and effective. In addition, for important assessment tasks it might be necessary to provide a timetable or mind map that clearly specifies the deadline and the stages to be completed. Also, learning styles and preferences should be considered, allowing dyslexic students to work in their comfort zone at first, and then gradually introducing new techniques that draw from different learning styles.

Kormos and Smith (2012) also have emphasized the importance of metacognitive thinking skills. Teachers can help dyslexic students develop self-awareness and self-monitoring of the learning process, and in that way, they will have agency and they will be able to gain control over their instruction. Developing metacognitive thinking processes may help students solve different problems they encounter while learning the language and also may help teachers discover which areas need improvement.

The specialists have suggested that metacognitive thinking may start as a “thinking-

out-loud” process in which students analyze the problem they encounter taking into account what they already know until they develop the automatization to solve the problem eventually. Besides, students can learn other memorization techniques like mnemonics and visualization, which help them remember their previous knowledge, establish connections with the new contents, and see patterns in the language that they had not noticed before. These techniques not only will influence their progress positively but also will increase their sense of achievement, self-esteem, and motivation.

Concluding Remarks

From my perspective, a complex, multifactorial learning difference like dyslexia may represent an important challenge for EFL teachers. However, they need to be reassured that by adopting some elemental pedagogical strategies they will be able to cater for dyslexic learners in the classroom. Some aspects are important to consider. The first aspect to acknowledge is that dyslexia is quite common, which means that it is highly probable that teachers will encounter dyslexic individuals in their teaching practice eventually. The International Dyslexia Association (2002) has estimated that one in ten individuals has some sort of learning difference associated with dyslexia, which means that in a group of twenty students a teacher is likely to have two pupils with different learning needs. Although the studies were carried out in the UK and the US, experts confirm that these numbers may be very similar for other countries.

The second aspect is to realize that dyslexia is a learning difference and not a learning disability, which means that with the appropriate coaching and instruction dyslexic individuals can learn a second language. The third aspect is to understand the concept of dyslexia: its origin, characteristics, and possible consequences for learners, considering that this is a life-long condition that requires constant mentoring and support during the learning process. The fourth aspect is to recognize the different manifestations of dyslexia in the students, remembering that all individuals are unique and that they may have different levels of this learning difference. Having all these aspects in mind, teachers can provide the help, assistance, and motivation that students with different learning needs require.

Thus, enforcing pedagogical tools is basic to cater for learners with dyslexia in the EFL classroom. By incorporating different teaching strategies and pedagogical tools like the adaptation of materials, the use of constant praise, the implementation of mnemonics and overteaching, the application of effective pairing and grouping techniques, and the utilization of multisensory learning approaches, among others, educators can make a big difference. As a matter of fact, in this way, teachers can optimize the learning experience of dyslexic individuals. Importantly, teachers, students, stockholders, and anyone involved in the learning process of a dyslexic pupil should commit to support and motivate the learner during the process.

Other accommodations may be necessary to cater for dyslexic learners in the EFL classroom. For instance, providing special conditions for assessments and exams may be really helpful for dyslexic learners. Also, keeping a class routine and a balanced pace will

positively impact the performance of students with different learning needs. In addition, giving instructions and providing feedback, as fundamental activities in language learning environments, should be adapted to meet the needs of these students. Besides, implementing effective time management tools for important activities like tests and assignments will help dyslexic students perform better in the EFL classroom.

Teachers also have to be careful to implement pedagogical practices that guide dyslexic individuals throughout the learning process. For example, the use of technological tools serves as a powerful ally for teachers and students alike. The use of different teaching materials fosters a productive learning environment. Setting achievable goals helps teachers have a realistic perspective of the learning outcomes. Helping students create their own study strategies gives them agency and fosters independent learning. Finally, including a Multisensory Language Learning Approach results beneficial not only for learners with different needs but also for other learners.

Inclusion has a pivotal role in the environment of the EFL classroom as it is a vested right of all students. Teachers should analyze the possible barriers that they may encounter when catering for dyslexic learners. Moreover, the premise that must inform the learning process is that denying a student the opportunity to learn a second language is to put them at a distinct disadvantage compared to their peers. Hence, educators have practical ways to implement inclusion in the EFL classroom. For example, teachers can promote effective teacher-student, student-student communication and interaction. Teachers can reduce the anxiety of dyslexic learners by eliminating redundant tasks. They can provide easy to follow instructions and straightforward feedback. Teachers can modify the classroom environment to better suit the needs of dyslexic individuals. Besides that, they can modify and adapt the content of the language course to make it more suitable for students with different learning needs.

Finally, educators can provide additional support to dyslexic learners. One tool that may go a long way is teaching students different study techniques, which will give them agency and make them independent learners. Moreover, students will feel more supported and guided, boosting, in this way, their self-image as learners, their motivation, and their performance. Additionally, teachers can provide coaching in time management techniques, as time management is usually an overlooked skill, which represents a major burden for dyslexic individuals. Finally, teachers may emphasize the importance of metacognitive thinking skills and train learners to practice them and implement them as part of their learning strategies.

Recommendations

Educators need to bear in mind important aspects when catering for dyslexic learners in the EFL classroom. One main element they should consider is the individualization and personalization of the learning experience. As it has been noted before in this paper, all dyslexic learners are unique and different, and they may need different accommodations in the classroom. Thus, one-size-fits-all type of solutions may not help learners grow and learn.

Implementing special pedagogical strategies for specific learners may appear as a big challenge and a lot of work for teachers. However, as specialists have pointed out, sometimes small changes and accommodations that do not involve a lot of time investment, cost, and effort for the teacher can make a big difference for the learner. Hence, the recommendation is to apply pedagogical tools that seek to help dyslexic learners as individuals to reach achievable goals in the ESL classroom.

The second recommendation has to do with research and teaching training. One of the problems highlighted during this project is the lack of information, resources and adequate training for teachers to effectively cater for students with dyslexia. Thus, this problematic implicates a call for action for teachers in which they should become teacher-researchers. As part of their professional development, teachers should be constantly investigating, researching, and studying new teaching methods, tools, and techniques that help them do their job better.

Therefore, part of that research should make up for the lack of proper training and information in regards to catering for dyslexic learners in the EFL classroom. In other words, the recommendation is that teachers should develop a sense of curiosity directed towards research that will lead them to expand their knowledge, improve their professional career, and help dyslexic learners thrive in the EFL classroom. Although educators' lack of time and heavy workloads often prevent them from becoming teacher-researchers, small actions like taking a free online course, reading blogs and articles related to the topic of dyslexia, or participating in discussion forums may provide the input they need.

Finally, the third recommendation involves peer support and sharing advice, experience and resources. Teachers tend to isolate themselves in their own practice. Complicated working schedules, heavy workload, and failure to build rapport with their colleagues makes it difficult for teachers to establish meaningful connections. However, teachers need to look for the support of their colleagues, especially when dealing with challenging situations like catering for dyslexic learners. In this way, they can share useful information, pedagogical tools, teaching techniques, resources, materials among other things that may be helpful. Besides, teachers can share their experiences and learn from one another. Sharing stories of failure and success can prevent them from going down the wrong path.

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Educational Praxis: An Emerging Model of Creative Pedagogy to Foster Motivation in the EFL classroom

Roberto Mesén-Hidalgo¹

Universidad Nacional

Costa Rica

roberto.mesen.hidalgo@est.una.ac.cr

Abstract

This paper aims to reflect on educational praxis concerning the importance of implementing an emerging model of creative pedagogy to foster motivation in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom to reduce authoritarian teaching styles. This paper approaches the reflection by expanding on three pillars: 1) an evaluation of teachers' beliefs about creative teaching skills is elaborated since motivation may result from instructors' skills, 2) a discussion of the relevance of creative teaching and creative learning to promote motivation in the EFL classroom and reduce the employment of authoritarian teaching styles, and 3) a review of pedagogy's components to promote creativity and creative learning to increase motivation in the EFL classroom. The conclusion suggests that language instructors have misconceptions and dilemmas in understanding how creativity's scopes can help teach and favor learners' motivation effectively. The conclusion also invites language instructors to know how essential a creative pedagogy model based on creativity and creative learning favors learners' motivation and minimizes an authoritarian teaching style's use.

Keywords: authoritarian teaching style, creative pedagogy model, educational praxis, motivation, teachers' beliefs

Introduction

There are different factors that influence learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Among such factors, motivation may be considered the main element that affects EFL because it includes the attitudes toward the target language (Escobar et al., 2019). In this view, teaching English as a Foreign Language requires instructors who evaluate and determine what is crucial to motivate students when learning. As a result, Instructors who keep positive and humanistic attitudes toward creative behavior and design match this professional profile in request to engage learners with learning. These characteristics oppose an authoritarian teaching style and value instructors who think independently to make teaching models flexible to suit learners' needs (Lin, 2011).

Authoritarian teaching styles are less effective and receptive than flexible styles to motivate learners in the EFL classroom (Shawer, 2017). These authoritarian instructional

1. Language instructor at *Universidad de Costa Rica* (UCR). Master in Applied Linguistics, *Universidad Europea del Atlántico*, Barcelona, Spain. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9318-7569>

styles tackle opportunities for instructors to be more creative in behavior and teaching design. In correspondence to this issue, teaching and mediation should show more elements of creativity to promote learners' motivation. For this paper's purpose, three salient concepts are understood based on the model proposed by (Akyıldız & Çelik, 2020):

1. Creativity involves changing students' attitudes to engage with those subjects they study.
2. Creative teaching refers to how creativity and learning are connected.
3. Creative learning takes place when learners construct knowledge and develop an understanding of new things critically.

Creative teaching and creative learning become crucial as the main elements to tackle authoritarian teaching styles that do not motivate nor engage students with EFL learning. In this respect, both features require to be expanded in meaning and characterized. First, creative teaching includes teaching creatively and teaching for creativity. Teaching creatively involves using innovative teaching methods to engage students with learning. Then, teaching for creativity, which is adopted for this study, includes teaching approaches to increase learners' critical thinking (Wang & Kokotsaki, 2018). Finally, creative learning is characterized by opposing learning by the authority because students question, search, manipulate, and experiment to develop critical thinking (Lin, 2011).

This essay has the purpose of reflecting on educational praxis toward the importance of implementing an emerging model of creative pedagogy to foster motivation in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. For approaching the topic, three subtopics become relevant: (1) an evaluation of teachers' beliefs about creative teaching skills, (2) a discussion of the relevance of creative teaching and creative learning, and (3) a review of pedagogy's components to promote teaching for creativity and creative learning to foster motivation in the EFL classroom.

Teachers' beliefs play a salient role in learners' motivation and learning engagement. Language teachers puzzle themselves in implementing techniques to achieve success; however, many fail in their attempts. Bereczki and Kárpáti (2018) identified a lack of teachers' awareness about the accurate features of pedagogical practices that may respond to creativity in different teaching levels. This lack of knowledge turns into misconceptions of originality that become part of the set of teachers' beliefs. In this way, language instructors do not promote teaching techniques that boost learners' motivation to engage in learning.

In terms of creative teaching, Liao et al. (2018) conducted a study to understand its impact in the EFL classroom. Based on the results, they highlighted how learning motivation improved in response to teachers' creative pedagogical techniques. Besides, it was also made evident that learners' English learning performance turned better. Liao et al. (2018) said that creativity promoted learners' commitment during their learning and increased their motivation. They are quite right in their appreciation. If language teachers evaluate alternative and emerging pedagogical models to implement in their classrooms, the results may show effectiveness for improving particular teaching and learning drawbacks.

Teaching for creativity and creative learning becomes essential to have learners motivated and engaged with learning. Rus (2020) aimed at how vital creativity and innovation have progressively become necessary to improve the 21st-century civilization's knowledge. In line with this, teachers should understand that “innovative teaching is the process leading to creative learning, the implementation of new methods, tools, and contents which could benefit learners and their creative potential” (Rus, 2020, p. 340). An accelerated society that advances quickly in different areas requires developing individual skills that help them succeed in their academic context and society. These skills should result from the creative process of teaching and learning to prepare learners for modern societies. Learners' creativity helps them make decisions and be more critical of their learning and context. This requires teaching and learning professionals who have the necessary tools to provide these new generations with a survival kit to face and live in modern society.

Understanding that there is an evident call for implementing a creative pedagogy model becomes essential to respond to society's new generation. However, for achieving this, instructors should clearly change some of their beliefs, understand the concept of creative teaching, and train on teaching for creativity and creative learning to foster motivation in the EFL classroom.

Evaluation of Teachers' Beliefs about Creative Teaching Skills

Teachers' beliefs determine what they do and achieve in the language classroom. This is important because to nurture creativity in the EFL classroom, “it is necessary to obtain an in-depth understanding of teachers' views regarding creative pedagogy and their teaching practices” (Li & Li, 2019, p. 18). Having attained this understanding, instructors' achievements might be interpreted as the result of their elucidation of different teaching trends based on personal perception; however, before exploring how these beliefs influence instructors' praxis, examining the concept teacher's beliefs is required. Ham and Dekkers (2019) have argued that teacher beliefs result from mental and multifaceted constructs. It means that these constructs are solid and hard to alter. It happens because the instructor has grounded them through experience, the development of ideas, and their conceptualizations. Teachers' beliefs clearly run what is done in the classroom, and they also determine whether instructors adopt or reject new techniques, strategies, or trends in their praxis.

Now, one's epistemic or explicit beliefs also have a remarkable impact on accepting or rejecting whole or part of new trends in the teaching praxis. For example, in terms of creativity, teachers address themselves through their epistemic beliefs to decide whether a method or approach includes creativity in the process of teaching. Then, instructors also make judgments based on their knowledge to decide whether creativity should be requested as an option to determine learning success. In this concern, the essence and presence of creativity seem to have been eradicated from schools (Katz-Buonincontro et al., 2020). In line with this, it can be shown how instructors have vanished the implementation of creativity in their classrooms as a skill to help learners to achieve academic and language

success. This is a serious issue because creativity skills make teachers and learners improve and drive metacognition (Katz-Buonincontro et al., 2020). As has been shown, instructors' epistemic beliefs have cooperated tremendously to tackle the opportunities for developing creative skills for teachers and students.

Teachers' general and epistemic beliefs strongly influence the conceptualization or construct of creativity principles. In this concern, Bereczki and Kárpáti (2018) stated that "creativity beliefs refer to a specific set of beliefs that teachers have about creativity, its nature, and nurture" (p. 27). However, as previously discussed, teachers must trust more in a pedagogy that responds to authority and contents rather than generating creativity opportunities. In understanding this, instructors rarely rely on creative pedagogy to boost learners' academic and language success. For example, Li and Li (2019) have referred to how creative pedagogy cannot be merely addressed by "issuing policy documents alone" (p. 17). Unfortunately, instructors teaching approaches have made most of the learners finish university "unquestioning, dogmatic, and lacking problem-solving skills (Amponsah et al., 2019, p. 13). Nonetheless, creative pedagogy goes beyond. In short, as long as language instructors continue believing that teaching should only follow what is on the official documents (programs, syllabi, books), the opportunity for creative pedagogy is kept to a minimum affecting learners' creative skills and critical thinking.

Discussion of the Relevance of Creative Teaching and Creative Learning

As was discussed before, the opportunities to implement a creative pedagogy are determined by the instructors' general and epistemic beliefs. These teachers' views can be dogmatic and only respond to what is defined in official teaching documents to not aim at creative teaching. In reviewing this, an authoritarian role may be identified as one of the main issues that challenge fostering creative pedagogy in the EFL classroom. Most learners seem to be withdrawn from classes because of extreme teacher control (Pawlak et al., 2020). In the EFL classroom, the instructor knows, and learners are receivers of what the teacher knows. In addition, the instructor orchestrates activities and learning opportunities in response to teaching guidance derived from official documents; learning is by authority.

On the contrary, autonomy is required to boost creativity. In environments where the teacher is an authority, the teaching process lacks chances to favor learners' creativity. The latter must be carried out by having teachers with "the capacity and experience to lead, direct and accompany" (Gil-Madrona et al., 2020, p. 1). These requirements address learners' independence and oppose authority. Consequently, in having these elements, the possibilities for a creative pedagogy will be more accessible. This perception is consistent with what Lin (2011) stated:

Children learn by authority when they are told what they should learn and accept the ideas from the authority (e.g. teachers, books); whereas in the other process, children learn by means such as questioning, inquiring, searching, manipulating, experimenting, and even aimless play. (p. 152)

This opposition to authority brings light to creative pedagogy and its positive implications for helping learners achieve autonomy and creativity.

As previously understood, language instructors should become leaders who direct and accompany learners to foster questioning, inquiring, searching, manipulating, and experimenting to achieve learner's creativity in the EFL classroom. In achieving this, an opportunity for creative pedagogy takes place. "Creative pedagogy is put forward to describe a practice that enhances creative development through three interrelated elements—creative teaching, teaching for creativity, and creative learning" (Lin, 2011, p. 151). This concept of creative pedagogy defines that creative teaching requires instructors to improve their teaching practice with creative approaches or methods that also help learners engage when learning. Besides, in regards to teaching for creativity, teachers are expected to employ activities that demand learners' creative thinking skills. Then, creative learning addresses that instructors should implement mediation strategies or activities that make students question, search, manipulate, and experiment to develop critical thinking. A concept of creative pedagogy that bases its framework on these three unified elements may suit learners with better opportunities to respond to learning tasks more effectively in the EFL classroom.

In having the previous commitment to boost creativity, language instructors should be more careful and monitor or scrutinize their methods to ensure the interrelated elements above mentioned are part of their pedagogical mediation. That is because creative teaching is related to methodology. It has been discussed that creative teaching involves strategies that motivate learners, which ends in effective learning (Rus, 2020). In this concern, a study (Rus, 2020) showed that creative teaching is used to create "pleasant atmospheres, boost students' self-confidence, create opportunities for teamwork, experiment a wide range of teaching strategies, and help learners and teachers to develop a sense of personal fulfillment" (p. 341). In short, a creative pedagogy may address an instructor's commitment to providing learners with a vast number of learning opportunities that require their creativity and critical thinking to approach tasks in positive learning environments for academic, language, and personal growth.

Once instructors develop an appropriate methodology to boost creative teaching, creative learning will occur. Creative learning takes place by the interaction of a creative facilitator and an active learner. To achieve this active learner, the instructor must ensure a methodology that includes playfulness, cooperation, imagination and thinking opportunities, and a supportive context (Lin, 2011). These features become relevant to make sure the learner is active in the process of learning rather than a passive recipient of contents.

Now, for teachers to become creative and make sure their learners become active in the EFL classroom, some problems arise. For example, Cheng (2010) pointed out that there are "substantial tensions and dilemmas in creativity education, which mainly came from the change in learning style, time constraints, knowledge-orientated examination, high demand in thinking, and lack of task-specific skills" (p. 121). As is shown, these challenges contribute to strengthening teachers' beliefs, which avoid aiming at a creative pedagogy to

motivate and engage students with creative learning. However, once instructors overcome these dilemmas, the context will be suitable for creative teaching models.

In line with the aspects discussed above and aiming to liberate creativity, instructors must also be clear with the relevance of dialogue to establish understanding. The former may derive from liberating creativity, which is also crucial for learners to become more critical of their world. For example, Knijnik et al. (2019) have mentioned that teachers' "first step is to acknowledge that any social actor has prior knowledge that they can use to make their world meaningful. Therefore, educators need to create strategies to enable participants' voices to become part of the co-constructed reality" (p. 43). In implementing this, instructors may also provide learners with opportunities to have a more straightforward interpretation of their reality, which goes beyond the mere instruction of contents.

To sum up, there is an evident call for boosting creative teaching in the EFL classroom. For starting soon, instructors must understand that most of the dilemmas mentioned here should be overcome. In having instructors who ensure a creative pedagogy model based on creativity principles and liberating creativity, learners will become more innovative and critical thinkers. Finally, these creative learners can be more motivated to learn, question, and use their new knowledge to face the world they live in.

Pedagogy's Components to Promote Teaching for Creativity and Creative Learning to Foster Motivation in the EFL Classroom

In response to the need for an emerging model of effective creative pedagogy, different components should be scrutinized to understand their scopes to promote teaching for creativity and creative learning in the EFL classroom. The latter is to aim at how the proposed model can foster motivation in the EFL classroom. As background, it was discussed how authority runs the teaching practice, and language teachers are not an exception to this. Most language teachers tend to base their classes on what official documents state. In doing this, learners seem to be banned from creativity, making learners less motivated to learn a second language. In line with this, the following proposal responds to the criteria presented by Hernández and Uribe (2011), who argued that developing learners' competencies require innovation (creativity) in the teaching practice. This innovation should include the use of new strategies to foster learning. These changes should be based on grounded theories and organized principles that serve the designing of pedagogical models, including a course of action and methodology in the teaching praxis and learning process. As mentioned before, if learners respond to authoritarian instruction, their motivation and sense of creativity will not be promoted. Consequently, the need for an emerging creative pedagogy becomes essential.

On the other hand, after considering the need for an innovative pedagogy that should motivate learners in the EFL classroom, some vital conceptualizations must reach a creative pedagogy. First, in the focus of creativity, when it comes to education and the EFL classroom, Amponsah et al. (2019) stated that "creativity is all about liberating human energy for useful progress which should be the overarching motivation for educating

children” (p. 2). This vision is the following model to improve language learning in the classroom. The main objective of implementing creativity in the class is to motivate students to learn and become more autonomous in the process.

The following model of creative pedagogy is also grounded on the argument stated by Liao et al. (2018), who said that “the development of creativity is ‘standing back; providing opportunities for learners to initiate activities or make choices, and giving them time and space to develop new ideas” (p. 213). These appreciations become relevant to respond to the purpose of promoting autonomy, decision-making, and critical thinking. The EFL classroom should be an environment where the said elements are promoted. Consequently, language learners will improve their language and academic performance and personal growth.

Based on the previous grounded theories and organized principles, the creative pedagogy proposed includes the following components and characteristics. First, the role of the language teacher is defined by Akyıldız and Çelik (2020) who stated that

Teachers are always role models for their students. If they think out-of-the-box, their students may start to think similarly. If they think inside the box, then their students may continue to think in a similar way and never learn to think creatively. In this respect, at schools, creative thinking should be encouraged by teachers not only through subjects like art, music, science, literature, etc. but also in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes. (p. 2)

As was viewed above, the language instructor should be a promoter of creativity, so learners may be motivated to learn. Besides that, the language instructor should also guide the learning process through learners’ autonomy, aiming to achieve learners’ creativity for decision-making and criticism. It is a must for the language instructor to promote pleasant environments where learners can develop self-confidence.

In creative pedagogy, learners need to become more autonomous and disconnect from the authoritarian teaching styles when it comes to their role. Learners have to develop their potential (Amponsah et al., 2019). Learners may work in teams or individually to deal with different language tasks. Learners must be able to make choices and also to develop their thoughts and conceptions of what is being learned. They should be able to develop and improve self-confidence to achieve what was previously mentioned through pleasant atmospheres.

Creative teaching to foster motivation is necessary for this model. A pleasant atmosphere where learners feel comfortable is the key starter for creative teaching. Once the language instructor promotes the said atmosphere, language learning activities should be strategically devised by aiming at learners’ autonomy. Learners should be able to analyze the task, scaffold their learning, make decisions, and entertain their thoughts to become more critical.

If language instructors achieve creative teaching in the EFL classroom, then teaching for creativity and creative learning can foster learners’ motivation. Language

learners' motivation is essential because it makes learners engage with language learning. Once learners understand the purpose of what they are learning, their interest to learn it increases. Creative learning turns vital because it increases the development and well-being of the language learner. Consequently, the learner's well-being as an individual, in the end, leads to a society's well-being (Amponsah et al., 2019).

As shown, the emerging creative pedagogy derives from justified theory and principles. The principles that embody the model require a creative language instructor who can create learning opportunities to achieve autonomous and engaged learners. Besides, the framework of creative pedagogy includes the approaches of creative teaching, teaching for creativity, and creative learning.

Conclusion

This essay had the purpose of reflecting on an educational praxis that responds to an authoritarian teaching style that has been implemented during the last decades in the EFL classroom. Besides, the essay's main objective was to determine how a change in the instructor's praxis is needed to foster the learners' creativity and critical thinking in the EFL classroom. In this attempt, it was argued that a creative pedagogy was essential to achieve this change from an authoritarian view to a new conceptualization of creativity to motivate and engage learners with learning. It was argued that creativity's scopes are not only for arts and music, but its possibilities also entail the EFL field.

Teachers' beliefs were explored, and it was determined how language instructors deal with misconceptions and dilemmas that do not allow them to understand the creativity's opportunities in the EFL classroom. For example, it was made evident how an authoritarian teaching style becomes more appropriate for teachers because it derives from an official teaching document (program or syllabus) that orchestrates what they have to do in the EFL classroom. It means syllabi and programs are devised by stakeholders who determine what is suitable and appropriate, so it is less complicated for instructors when designing their teaching plans.

Lastly, in response to the main issue addressed, a creative pedagogy model is proposed. The said model grounds its framework on creative teaching approaches, teaching for creativity, and creative learning. These three model components are defined as essential to tackling authoritarian teaching styles. Once they are linked to a creative language teacher and autonomous learning in a pleasant language classroom, learning opportunities are boosted. It means learners become more motivated and engaged with learning the language.

In short, a model of creative pedagogy that embodies grounded theory and organized principles can foster motivation in the EFL classroom. Consequently, learners can approach language learning and personal issues with better tools to be part of a modern and challenging society.

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The Myth of Native Speakers and Native Speakerism in Costa Rica

Stephanie Solis Sequeira¹
Universidad Nacional
Costa Rica
stephanie.solis1281@gmail.com

Abstract

English has become the universal language which people use to communicate, nonetheless to what extent do second language learners should master English to the point of having “Native” like mastery. This essay inquires the problematic of native speakers and native speakerism and how it affects Second Language Learners (SLL) and Second Language Teachers (SLT). Also this essay describes some of the myths that exist behind the Native Speaker’s teaching methodology and sheds light on how these myths reproduce discrimination towards SLL/SLT.

Keywords: native speakers , non-native speakers , native speakerism, English teaching

Introduction

Speaking English has become a necessity for Costa Rican people nowadays due to the requirements national and international companies currently have regarding proficiency in this language. Due to this need, people have started to invest even more in their education, such as private schools, bilingual schools, and language institutes so that they can learn good English easily and fast. Nonetheless, there have been some assumptions that have affected non-native speakers (NNSs) few of them include: learning from native speakers (NSs) would be much better than NNS, good English and good practices come from NS, and learning will be better because natives know more, thus linguistic aspects are better if they come from them.

With this in mind, three possible statements will be discussed: First, the concept of what good English is will be questioned. Second, some of the myths hidden behind the terminology of Native Speakers and its definition will be discussed, and third, the definition of native speakerism, how it started, positive and negative repercussions in the non-native community, and non-native teachers’ discrimination will be addressed.

The Native Speaker

The first recorded description of the native speaker is mentioned by Davies (1993) who stated that “the first language a human being learns to speak in his native language; he is native of this language” (p. 9). Pennycook (1994) also described a native speaker as the “idealized person with the complete possible innate competence in the language” (p. 175).

1. Stephanie holds a Bachelor’s Degree in English Teaching for Primary School from Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica, a certification in Teaching English of Speakers of Other Languages from International TEFL & TESOL training, and a certification in E-learning from LinkedIn. She has been teaching to different types of populations for almost seven years. She has worked in the public and private sector; right now, she is an English Teacher at SYKES, Moravia, San Jose, Costa Rica.

Notwithstanding, a more simplistic definition of NS and NNS is offered by Braine (2010), who described the NS as someone who can speak the language as their first language and the NNS as the one who uses the language as a second or foreign tongue.

The native/non-native dichotomy is a complex area in linguistics due to the connotations it contains; as Braine (2010) explained, the term native does have a positive and better connotation: it denotes “birthright, fluency, cultural affinity, and sociolinguistic competence,” while the term “non-native” denotes “minority, or marginalization and stigmatization, with the result of discrimination in terms of employability and professional advancement” (p. 9). Nonetheless, Murti (2002) made an interesting observation in recent history which describes how the “native” terminology was used as a negative connotation to refer to “uncivilized” or “barbaric” people (p. 27).

Competence and credibility given to non-native teachers and students are some of the negative aspects that the native speaker’s myth encloses. Widdowson (1994) reinforced this thought of the NS stating that native speakers are the “authentic owners” (p. 387) of the English language, and, therefore, they are linguistically competent. In the same line, Suarez (2000) argued that native speakers are certainly considered more competent than non-native speakers; they are more trusted and less questioned in terms of language. This ideology causes non-native teachers to feel inferior to native teachers. This same thought is supported by Todd (2006), as mentioned above: NNS teachers are even discriminated against from hiring processes just by the fact of not being NS of English. This problem not only happens to NNTs in their country but also in English Speaking countries even though they are certified as English teachers or if they have degrees in English Teaching.

What is Good English?

When thinking about good English, people usually think about native speakers (NSs) -people from the USA, for example- whose grammar and pronunciation are (apparently) impeccable. In fact, whenever people talk about good English, they mostly refer to accurate use of linguistic aspects, such as pronunciation (phonetics), words (morphology), phrases, sentences (syntax), the meaning of phrases and sentences (semantics), and meaning of the context of discourse (pragmatics). And usually, people think these linguistic aspects only come in better if it is from NSs; even without any argument that supports it; many people believe in that. This idea has been so widespread that even many language schools explicitly state in their hiring posts that they only employ NS teachers (Todd, 2006), which discriminates against non-native speakers (NNS) as well as reinforcing Native Speakerism.

In the same line, another assumption people have is that “good” English comes from NS because “they provide a better model of English” (Todd, 2006, p. 1). Nonetheless, as Todd (2006) stated, NSs “do not provide a truly proficient model of English” (p. 1), and he even affirmed that based on analysis of a corpus of informal NS teacher writing, their English proficiency is dubious. In this article, Todd (2006) quoted some of the answers received in some letters that came in the Bangkok post; here are some of them:

“Native speakers are the best teachers of their own language,” “Almost all parents

would rather their child be taught English by a native English speaker and are only concerned with that person's knowledge of the target language," "It is absolutely not necessary, or even advantageous, to be taught by a bilingual teacher." (p. 1)

One of the first aspects that make the term “good English” even more questionable is its usage. Almost a century ago, Fries (1925), a language teacher and a structural linguist, debated that it was often taken for granted that language is correct only if it complies with the rules and that these rules were accepted as a measure of good and wrong, meaning that if they were used by many, then it would be considered correct (even more if it was used by scholars at that time).

In addition, in his article Fries (1925) argued, for example, whether the use of “he don’t” should be condemned as correct or incorrect which normally would be thought that is incorrect. Nonetheless, nowadays correct or incorrect it is used by many people native and non-native regardless of their academic background and the reason why of its use.

Another aspect that makes us doubt the definition of good English is the accent and English variation that exists around the globe. This variation exists according to the state or community you belong to; as Crystal (2017) stated, people’s accent is usually influenced by some sort of local variation and even more when people move around the country, so they accommodate it to the place and people they are surrounded by, he referred to the actors and actresses that were influenced by the need of knowing more accents and variations so they could get roles either in movies or plays. Crystal (2012) also stated that English will open to new winds in linguistics due to its own global spread as well as the emergence of new varieties of English in the different territories where the language has taken root.

Taken from this perspective, good English does not really exist. Good English is only part of an ambiguous ideology in favor of those in power. When these aspects are questioned Good English becomes part of the myth that there is only one kind of English and that it is more valuable than the variations that exist. As Crystal (2012) mentioned there are many variations in English and there will be even more variations and New Englishes due to globalization as well as having English as a lingua franca.

The Myth of the Native Speaker and Arguments that Support It

Some of the arguments educational schools and people that support NSs are that their English is better than that of NNSs in terms of pronunciation, their use of vocabulary is better and more accurate, and they do not make mistakes (Todd, 2006). However, the questions that arise with these assumptions are if they really do not make mistakes or if their pronunciation really is the best one. As Crystal (2017) stated, pronunciation has always changed due to the variations that exist in the USA as well as in other parts of the world where English is predominant. Crystal (2017) also mentions in his article that not only do we need to highlight the existence of language variation but also the nature of language change.

Another question pointed out is if NNSs really have to learn the native

pronunciation (Timmis, 2002; Todd, 2016). As teachers, we find students that face difficulties in pronunciation and others for whom it is easier. We also find students wishing to sound, to be like a native and some others that do not want to fit in those two categories, therefore, as Cook (1999) stated students should not become an imitation of the native speakers but someone that can be between both languages using them when appropriate. This should be the focus when teaching a second language, giving the students the opportunity to stand between both languages without pressuring them to sound or being like *natives*.

Native Speakerism

Regarding native speakerism, it is a disruptive force that arises within educational cultures in the English-speaking West as well as “an established belief that ‘native speaker’ teachers represent a ‘Western culture’ from which spring the ideals of both the English language and English language teaching methodology” (Holliday, 2006, p. 385). Lowe and Kiczkowiak (2016) described native speakerism as a widespread ideology in English Language Teaching (ELT), in which those who are “native” speakers of English are perceived as better language models as well as exhibit a superior Western teaching methodology than the ones that are ‘non-native speakers’ (p. 2).

Lowe and Kiczkowiak (2016) also claimed that native speakerism makes use of an “us” and “them” dichotomy, in which non-native speakers are taken culturally inferior and where they need training into the “correct” method, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary which is led by NSs. Native speakerism also makes great use of what Holiday (2013) defined as “a cultural disbelief,” which is the distrust that ‘non-native speakers’ can make meaningful contributions to ELT. Therefore, this ideology focuses on the benefit of native speakers which also uses bias and stereotypes to group people in native or native speaker side (Holiday, 2015).

The impact of native speakerism as Holiday (2006) stated can be seen from many aspects of “professional life, employment policy to the representation of language” (p. 385). This is also supported by Todd (2006) when he stated that in Thailand, even for kindergarten levels, many schools only employ NS teachers. This also happens in Costa Rica; we can find many posts in which they are looking for NSs only, or they state that a “native-like” proficiency is required. Moreover, many teachers are asked to have a C1 performance level on the TOEIC exam (Test of English for International Communication), which has become a requirement to apply to most teaching positions. This C1 certification gives you a standard and value as a teacher; it means that your linguistic skills have this so-called native-like control in the language, which again, is necessary to apply to many of the jobs posted and sometimes not even with the certification.

As a teacher, there have been several times in which I was rejected by some institutes because I was not a native speaker; therefore, I was taken out of the hiring process. I have also received comments from native teachers about my accent, and there have been some times in which Costa Rican teachers stated that I must get the C1;

otherwise, I will not get the job because even though my teaching skills are great and my speaking skills too, they need the certification saying I have the “native-like” proficiency or so almost like a certification that validates me and gives me the value as a teacher.

The problem that arises is that these thoughts and categorization have seemed to penetrate NNS teachers and students’ minds as well as language schools and with no fundament stating what is good and what is not, what is valuable and what is not. Therefore, it is not enough four or six years to get the degree that certifies people as teachers, but they have to go to a private institution, pay a high amount of money, –that not all people can afford- try to get the C1 and renew it every two years.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Almost every day, students ask me how they can get that “native-like” level which really seems to worry them, and my question has always been why? What is the core reason for my students’ desire to have a “native-like” level? And what does it mean to have that level? Students seem to be more anxious about being/sounding like a native more than focusing on good communication. Based on this issue, it is recommendable for teachers to focus more on teaching how to effectively communicate rather than trying to sound like “native speakers”. Notwithstanding, there should not be any bias or imposture from teachers towards any of the sides, the student solely has to decide whether to practice and study hard to get the native-like proficiency or learn proficient English for communication purposes.

It is also advisable for teachers to open paths for different kinds of Englishes as well as accents, exposing students to these varieties that exist, and teaching them what really matters, which is communication. Also, making students aware of the fact that the English accents people have is relevant since that reflects part of their identity and their cultural background, and as Crystal (2017) stated, imitating natives only bereaves our culture, our personality, and who we really are. With this, it is not implied that linguistics is not important; it is indeed, but as long as variation does not get in the way of intelligibility, it is also correct, valuable, and proper. Thus, everyone should know and explain to people that students may not get that “native-like” level, but a good proficiency in communication, using the language in real contexts.

Moreover, any discrimination should not be upon students because of accent or the misconceptions mentioned below, as educators, we are in charge of motivating our students, equip them to succeed, and to think critically. However, some of the implications these topics may have are the imposition and pressure students and teachers have to achieve this level and pronunciation according to different native speakerism’s views.

All in all, native speakerism is an issue that affects us all and that blinds us from the main goal when learning another language. While it is true that English is now essential to have better opportunities, we need to make sure these opportunities are open to everyone equally regardless of their nationality or accent. Educating people as well as opening spaces to talk about these problems can have a huge positive impact on how English learning is perceived, not to mention that we will be building more self-confident students.

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The Importance of Promoting Self-Reflection in the Pedagogical Practice of Teachers

Stephanie Víquez Fernández¹
Universidad Nacional
Costa Rica
stwife@hotmail.com

Abstract

Teaching is not an easy task because teachers have many and different roles in the class. Part of these roles is to self-reflect about their teaching practice to improve as a teacher and with this to help students to succeed. Some aspects may improve the process of self-reflection. This is crucial for personal growth since teachers can recognize their strengths and weaknesses by the observations and analysis of themselves. The different models of self-reflection will allow the teachers to be guided during the process of reflection. Moreover, these processes have almost the same stages: awareness of the need for self-reflection, the feelings, evaluation of the experiences, analysis of situations, conclusions, and action plans. The diverse strategies that may help to self-reflect on your own teaching practice are going to be explained in order to demonstrate that there are different ways to self-reflect and teachers need to select the one better fits for them. Therefore, self-reflection makes people more conscious about what needs to be changed or modified when teaching.

Keywords: models of self-reflection, teaching improvement, teaching praxis, self-reflection

Introduction

Teaching students is really challenging. Moreover, when you teach, you need to realize that there are aspects that can be improved in the process and others that require changes at all. By teaching, teachers can guide learners, find their purpose, and inspire them to succeed. However, sometimes educators face some difficulties and challenges or gaps that can discourage them. Instead of feeling bad or dismayed, they should find a way to bridge those gaps. Therefore, teachers demand self-reflection because that allows them to teach themselves since they may learn from experience; this involves their personal growth. For doing this, it is crucial for them to question themselves whether what they are doing is working or not and what they can do to improve after the process of reflection. Moreover, self-reflecting instructors are effective since they are in constant improvement to move their careers forward to achieve their personal goals.

On the other hand, it is relevant to explore the term reflection. Bengtsson (1995) talked about the origin of the word reflection which in Latin means to *bend* or *turn*. The

1. Stephanie Víquez Fernández is an English teacher. She studied her Bachelor's Degree at the University of Costa Rica (UCR). Additionally, she is finishing her thesis for *licenciatura* at UCR. While she was beginning her thesis, she had the opportunity to start her Master's program at Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica. She has worked as a teacher for three years in both public and private institutions.

term is used to describe the reflection of light against a mirror. This concept in the human context is used literally with the meaning of physical self-mirroring. He also mentioned that a person is able to examine his mental activities and to inspect the existential aspects of his life (Bengtsson, 1995). Consequently, to reflect for teachers means to think of, analyze, and contemplate their performance and then to identify their strengths and to recognize their weaknesses to improve them.

Further, Matherson and Windle (2017) pointed out four desires of teachers in relation to their personal development. The first one is associated with learning opportunities which can be actively engaged in the practice of skills, strategies, and techniques. The second one is to learn the opportunities that can show them a more practical way to deliver content to students meaningfully. Third, they want some learning opportunities that are teacher-driven which can offer professional development sessions, which will allow them to improve their practices and change classroom environments. Finally, the fourth one is to learn opportunities that are sustained over time which will make them better for a long time.

Even so, reflecting is not an easy task. Some people may think that it is not necessary to reflect because they do not consider that some aspects need to be changed; it means that they do not admit their mistakes or that just those ones are not important enough. Moreover, it is quite difficult for people to see their own mistakes. For this reason, it is crucial for people to have the ability to analyze themselves and try to look beyond to be aware of their weaknesses. Thus, they have to contemplate their beliefs, thoughts, expectations, and their goals. Besides, self-reflection requires objectivity. This implies that people need to separate their feelings and thoughts from their real goals; staying focused is the main purpose.

Evidently, self-reflection is the competence to be aware of ourselves, our own thoughts, emotions, decisions, and behaviors. Whether something goes wrong, it is essential to look for the reasons that make that challenging and, from that, to look for the actions that can be done to change those situations, and finally, to seek personal development. Some aspects such as the importance of self-reflection to improve as a teacher, the different models of self-reflection, and the diverse strategies that may help to self-reflect on your own teaching practice are crucial when a teacher wants to go through self reflection.

The Importance of Self Reflection

The first aspect is related to the importance of self-reflection not only for the teacher but also for students. To decide what is going well and what is not sometimes is not an easy task because it requires analyzing and evaluating your own actions, thoughts, and behaviors. Sometimes, some teachers do not stop to reflect on their praxis because they may think that they do not have time or it is not necessary. In other words, they continue doing the same, and they do not pay attention to details. However, self-reflecting is not just thinking about mistakes, errors, or gaps, but it is also about virtues and strengths. Therefore, self-reflecting is crucial for everybody but especially for teachers for self-improvement.

Olaya (2018) stated that “teachers need reflection not only to change their everyday routines within a classroom but also to realize what problems are arising should become a current belief for language teachers” (p. 152). It means that some teachers tend to implement routinized teaching methods that they may think work, but maybe they do not for everybody or all topics. Consequently, it is relevant for teachers to not get into routines and try to change and look for different alternatives when teaching. Additionally, Olaya (2018) also remarked that

Reflection should involve more than a simple reflective session or training. It is suggested that teachers should be able to accept and consider other current teaching ideas which can be found by reading recent research reports or by participating in any professional development program. (p. 152)

Based on this, it can be said that self-reflection is elemental for teachers since they need to constantly state and achieve class goals. For doing this, teachers need to adapt their teaching techniques, methods, or activities to students. Therefore, teachers need to observe, analyze, and evaluate whether or not what they are doing is working. Evidently, these actions can lead to effective teacher professional development which is a key component that teachers need to become excellent at.

For this purpose, it is pertinent for teachers to stay competitive with the new generations, and they need to try to accommodate their own skills to students' needs. In this path, Novozhenina and Lopez (2018) suggested that “Professional development thus becomes the bridge that will connect the point where they are now to the point where they need to be” (p. 144). Additionally, they mentioned that professional development has two crucial aspects, “first, the need of learning through experience rather than from mere memorization of literature, and second, the importance of reflecting about one’s own performance” (Novozhenina & Lopez, 2018, p. 116). Indeed, reflection can be the key to evaluate their professional practice, and this leads to professional growth which is the same to take ownership of the professional development to improve.

As well, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stated, “The quality of an education system is only as good as the quality of its teachers. It is not enough just to want to teach. People should enter the profession having received a good education themselves” (2015, p. 4). As a result, teachers are required to keep updated and innovate their techniques for finding the best way for teaching. As a consequence, reflecting on this empowers teachers to appraise new ideas to be successful and help students to succeed. Certainly, Matherson and Windle (2017) pointed out that professional development considers active teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection. Moreover, they mentioned that by taking into account these elements, teachers will increase their pedagogical skills to cause a profound effect on students’ learning.

Overall, self-reflection lets teachers be more engaged in the process of teaching and learning since they will analyze and learn from their own experiences to improve what they consider is needed. In other words, reflective teaching allows teachers to contemplate their

teaching practices, examine how something is being taught, determine how the practice can be improved, and apply the changes to get better learning outcomes.

As was mentioned before, reflecting on their own praxis is beneficial for teachers. Nevertheless, it is not easy for them to stop and reflect on it. First of all, self-reflection takes time; teachers need to question themselves about their values, their thoughts, their feelings, their weaknesses, their strengths, etc. All of this will help them to become more autonomous, and they will feel more confident when teaching. Additionally, teachers can go deeper into themselves to more easily identify their values and strengths that maybe are there, but they do not know they have them. This can help them to see their potential and focus on the actions that work to continue doing them and to change the ones that do not work. Of course, teachers need to be aware of the circumstances and contexts students are involved in and their needs. Another benefit is that reflection helps teachers to be more aware of themselves; this means that they can think more openly, be more creative, be neutral at feelings or emotions, build self-confidence, feel less worried, change some behaviors that do not help them, and feel engaged in the process of teaching.

On the contrary, teachers may face some challenges that make them feel discouraged to self reflect. In this case, Fook and Askeland (2007) mentioned that confronting situations constitute one of the major challenges of critical reflection. This can be a challenge since it can be interpreted as a ‘double-edged sword’: “it can be a very potent way of confronting ‘sticking points’ or previously unresolvable dilemmas; but its effectiveness may be limited because of the misunderstanding, resistance and anxiety which can result when deepseated assumptions are questioned” (p. 2). Indeed, it is difficult to change something that is not clearly identified as a need for adjustment and that it can be challenging for teachers because they are full of work, so they concentrate just on teaching without stopping and thinking whether their methods or techniques are adequate for students. That is to say, time is a crucial element to reflect; many teachers may say that they do not have time to do it.

Models of Self Reflection

The second aspect is about the different models or cycles of self-reflection. The models of reflection are a guide to help the teachers through the process of reflection since each one contributes different alternatives per each person. Models can be combined or adapted, Kolb et al. (2014) introduced the cycle of experiential learning which is the base of different models for reflective practice. He affirmed that when a person wants to learn from something that has happened, this individual has to recall the observations that she/he made from the event and then reflect on it. This process has four stages, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. For that reason, it requires to describe and analyze the experience for coming to a deeper understanding of what happened and frame some actions, as a result, to learn from that experience to take future actions from it (Jasper, 2003). It means that a person who is in the reflection process needs to start with an experience; then, to reflect; after, to develop ideas about why that might be; and finally, to apply the changes to different situations to see

whether it works and try not to repeat that action in the future.

Further, Jasper (2013) also remarked on the ERA cycle; this one has three main stages which are experience, reflection, and action. This cycle is based on positive and negative experiences. This is very similar to Kolb's cycle since Jasper (2013) asserted that people start with an experience and think through that to check whether it is acceptable or not, and then, analyze if the experience will be different.

Additionally, Driscoll and Teh (2001) proposed the model “The what”. This model is based on three main questions, “1. WHAT? A description of the event. 2. SO WHAT? An analysis of the event. 3. NOW WHAT? Proposed actions following the event” (p. 99). These questions assist individuals to analyze experiences, good and bad ones, and learn from them. The last question, now what? will allow people to see if the aspect needs to be changed, if they can try something new, or if they can keep it as it is.

Further, another model is the Gibbs’ reflective cycle; this one is more complex than the others. This cycle contains six stages: to describe what happened, to see what you are thinking and feeling about it, to evaluate what was good or bad, to analyze the facts, to make conclusions about what could have been done, and the action plan for the future (Gibbs et al., 2005). Similar to the previous models, this one contains experience, analysis, and plan for the future; however, this model includes the person's point of view to focus on the feelings about the experience. Regarding the process of self reflection to examine practice in detail, Anderson et al. (2004) confirmed that

such examination may lead to feelings of discomfort or vulnerability, but if reflective practitioners are committed to improving practice, then challenging thoughts and emotions should ultimately enable them to learn from their experiences and understand the context of their practice (p. 192).

To summarize, there are different models with diverse stages that allow the person who wants to reflect to choose the one that better suits his/her necessities. These models can be a guide; nevertheless, the process can be really different for everyone. Additionally, the models offer stages to lead the individual; all of them have a starting point to aid the person to know where to start, and the cycle of each model can be repeated until the individual is sure that the process is ended.

Besides, it is important to take into account that there are two ways of reflecting. Cirkovic-Miladinovic and Dimitrijevic (2020) reported that they are reflection in action and reflection on action. Moreover, they stated, “Throughout reflection in action, the teacher reflects on an activity that is in progress and makes on the spot decision to modify or maintain the activity” (p. 48). For this reason, in-action reflection is based on some problems or situations immediately occurring; thus, teachers have to think about their actions while they are developing the activity. It permits them to redesign what they are doing while it is being done. Additionally, they also mentioned that “Reflection on action takes place out of the activity of practice. It is considered of more conscious and reasoned process” (Cirkovic-Miladinovic & Dimitrijevic, 2020, p. 48). In this case, reflection occurs

after completing a task. Here, teachers collect information and analyze it in order to solve the problem that is presented. In such a way, the information is converted into knowledge by learning from experience.

Strategies to Self Reflect

The last aspect to take into account is the strategies that may help teachers to self-reflect on their own teaching practice. This reflection can be achieved by different strategies which release the teacher to collect the information, such as journals, recordings, observations, portfolios, lesson reports, questionnaires, analyzing critical incidents, case analysis, and generated questions (Mathew et al., 2017; Olaya, 2018). The first strategy is the journals; they allow the teacher to get their feelings, emotions, and thoughts by writing experiences in a diary. The most important aspect is to be honest with yourself and get out of your comfort zone to evaluate, analyze, and assess what and how you are doing your job. In Mathew et al.'s view (2017), a journal “ is purely personal. Student teachers encounter many issues in classroom settings. After each activity/ practice lesson, the student-teacher has to write in a notebook about what happened” (p. 129). Moreover, the journal can include good and bad experiences which support teachers to learn from their own experiences. For this reason, it is relevant for teachers to be honest to themselves for a better understanding of the real reasons for an action to happen.

Another strategy is the use of recordings, video or audio. These recordings would allow the teacher to watch or listen to themselves when teaching. Furthermore, “ teachers can connect their teaching planning to their real teaching experiences” (Olaya, 2018, p. 157). For instance, teachers can look back at their lessons and question themselves whether any aspect could be changed or improved. As well, Mathew et al. (2017) remarked that “ A classroom video can vividly picture the whole process of teaching. It can trigger teachers’ reflective thinking, reflect on their weaknesses and help them get some inspiration and ideas for their teaching improvement” (p. 129). Therefore, this strategy will help teachers to have an unbiased point of view of their teaching practice.

The following strategy has to do with observations; they can be done by a colleague or by the students. Inviting a peer to observe the class can be an excellent option to have a distinct perspective of your instruction by someone else who knows the realities of a teacher. Therefore, receiving feedback from another person would provide some insights about the aspects that you really need to change or improve. “Peer observation is the process of colleagues observing others in their teaching, with the overall aim of improving teaching practice” (Hendry & Oliver, 2012, p. 1). Peer observation benefits teachers by improving the quality of teaching because they are receiving feedback from a prepared person in the same field using some instruments which leads to an open discussion about the insights of teaching practice. Moreover, both teachers can share experiences that provide the opportunity to improve in their pedagogical praxis. However, being observed can be a bit frightening because some people are not used to being criticized even when these critics are positive and can help us to be better teachers. Concerning the students' observations, they

are the ones who are directly affected by teachers' performance. For this reason, they can give valuable feedback. For doing this, teachers can implement some questionnaires or ask students for a report or ask for some recommendations to improve the class.

Conclusions

To conclude, reflective practice is a cycle. The most important aspects are to identify a need, to analyze the situation, and to make some conclusions to see what can be done after that. Teachers are faced with various challenges and problems when teaching that sometimes are difficult to identify or they just do not know how to manage it. Self reflection can be the key for handling those situations. Besides, reflecting is a complicated task that does not have the value that it should have. When teachers give the relevance it deserves, reflection is a significant tool when teaching.

Moreover, reflection allows teachers to determine the weaknesses that require to be changed or modified and to recognize their strengths to enhance them in class. Self-reflection has some challenges and benefits. Some of the challenges are lack of time, ignorance about the topic, or disinterest in it. On the other hand, the benefits are an improvement of practice, an increase of self-awareness, professional development, and more engagement in the process of teaching.

Additionally, there are different kinds of self-reflection and diverse strategies to carry it out. The main purpose of all of them is to improve the teaching practice. Therefore, teachers need to look for the one that better suits them and that gives the best insights about it. Of course, all this process has the impact it should have whether the teachers take action after completing the process. Some authors such as Kolb et al. (2014), Jasper (2013), Driscoll and Teh (2001), and Gibbs (2005) have illustrated the different cycles of self reflection. All of them offered an opportunity to assess and improve the teachers' personal development. The different models will contribute to the personal process of reflection since all of them have a different aspect that better suits some circumstances.

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The Integration of Technological Sources Through Online Activities Used for Educational Purposes in Order to Promote Critical Thinking Skills Among Students in High School

*Wendell Araya Córdoba*¹
Universidad Nacional
Costa Rica
jonathan03wac@gmail.com

Abstract

Education is an essential pillar that is constantly changing and evolving according to society's needs. Therefore, teachers need to be learning new strategies and methods to help students acquire the knowledge and skills they will eventually need once they become adults and look for a job. An example of a skill that needs to be mastered nowadays by the students is critical thinking. In other words, students need to improve their ability to analyze, synthesize, judge, and debate the information they come across in order to set connections between ideas and facts. Therefore, teachers have the challenging duty to find out ways to foster critical thinking among students and that is where technology takes place as a tool to lighten the load. Hence, the use of technology can help teachers catch students' attention and make the classes more appealing for them, not to mention that their participation can be boosted which will also contribute to foster critical thinking. Lastly, some proposals that incorporate the use of technology and can be used to foster critical thinking are online discussion forums, Online PBLs (Project based learning), WebQuest as well as the use of YouTube and Web based learning software such as Blackboard.

Keywords: critical thinking, education, proposals, technological tools

Introduction

Education is undoubtedly a key element in a society because it provides people with knowledge and tools to grow intellectually, morally, and creatively in order to become fully capable of contributing positively to it. It is a teacher's duty to promote content and material that can help the students foster the necessary skills for them to succeed in society as well as in life. As a matter of fact, it is imperative to highlight that nowadays, we live in a globalized society that demands people to master new abilities (21st Century Skills) that encompass critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, among others.

Therefore, considering that each student will hopefully become a professional at some point of their lives, it is highly valuable for them to have an integral formation in order to stimulate and promote critical thinking skills that will eventually become mandatory to operate and fit into this modern society. Therefore, teachers need to rethink

1. English teacher at Saint Margaret School in Heredia, Costa Rica. Licentiate in English Teaching as a Foreign Language, University of Costa Rica (UCR).

new strategies and methodologies that can trigger such skill in the classroom because the traditional strategies and approaches seem not to be working efficiently to promote critical thinking skills since they are usually teacher-centered. June et al. (2014) highlighted how when classes are teacher-centered, students tend to depend a great deal on their teachers because they are usually guided closely not to mention that the teacher is the one who provides the answer and/or solution to the problems, which limits the students' self-discovery and ability to be independent and able to think critically.

Masduqi (2006) also emphasized the problem of the teacher-centered approach since it is the reason why students in Indonesia are often ineffective when exchanging ideas and writing in English critically due to the lack of meaningful activities that limit the use of critical thinking skills among the students. On the other hand, Masduki (2006) also mentioned how students tend to accept opinions, especially on the current news of politics, corruption, and education, without an appropriate evaluation. Therefore, there is no doubt that it is extremely important to find ways to foster critical thinking skills due to its importance in the students' learning process, and a way to achieve it can be if teachers incorporate collaborative activities, pair work and group work (Masduki, 2006).

However, before promoting such skills through those activities, teachers need to tackle a problem faced in the classroom which is clearly stated by Mandernach (2006), when he mentioned how teachers usually have a limited amount of contact time with students since groups are large and diverse; thus, teachers are forced to come up with activities and strategies that only guide the students through pre-arranged content material that does not foster opportunities for individual interaction nor critical analysis. Hence, finding good strategies that can avoid this problem is a challenging task that requires a lot of work, research, and time from the teachers.

According to Mandernach (2006), the use of online instructional technology can help teachers in the pursuit of fostering critical thinking skills by providing a means of moving lower-level learning activities outside of the classroom, and that way, the student contact which is limited can be invested and used more effectively to higher-order critical thinking activities. In other words, teachers will have the possibility to distribute the activities more wisely and prioritize in the classroom the ones that can foster critical thinking skills to a large degree. Moreover, another benefit of using online instructional technology is that it promotes the use of constructivist teaching philosophies since the teachers will have more sources to implement activities apart from the traditional that can not only be more individualized but also suitable to promote in-depth interaction with the course material.

On the other hand, Mwalongo (2018) conducted a study in which he was able to demonstrate how the interaction between students, teachers and resources is significant in order to promote critical thinking since it facilitates students to share their ideas which can lead to a more open-minded mindset. In addition, this interaction can also help students review their beliefs, discover new ones, and even accommodate different points of view while acknowledging and appreciating their peers' ideas. Lastly the combination of authentic and up-to-date online resources, interaction, and the use of clear and simple

language is potentially appropriate when fostering critical thinking skills. Therefore, this paper aims to propose that technological sources used for educational purposes can be a good alternative to foster critical thinking skills not only for its advantages and benefits but also for the array of possibilities teachers can have through online activities to make classes more appealing and meaningful for the students.

Online Discussion Forums

An activity that incorporates the advantages of technology is discussion forums. Arend (2019) conducted a study in which students highlighted how beneficial online discussions had been since they helped them not only learn from their peers but also reflect on the value of learning to tolerate different opinions. In addition, Arend (2019) mentioned how the discussions were a place in which words, such as debate, justify, and defend were frequently used when challenging their peer ideas as well as when supporting theirs. Moreover, the students from his research also stated how the discussion provided an in-depth perspective since they had to think carefully about what to say due to the nature of online discussions in which everybody will be eager and ready to challenge your thoughts and ideas. Lastly, another benefit of online discussions is that “the informal and asynchronous nature of online discussions means students have the time and space to reflect and think about their ideas and contributions” (Arend, 2010, p. 16). Thus, students will eventually reinforce their critical thinking skills by analyzing carefully and deeply what and how to respond towards certain topics and ideas.

Similarly, Chung et al. (2011) also conducted a study to determine the levels of critical thinking promoted during online discussion. However, in their study, students were the ones in charge of facilitating the space to carry out the online discussions. As a matter of fact, their online discussions were carried out through forums using the platform Blackboard. Also, the students had to create some instructional multimedia source and then upload it to their discussion forum. Regarding the findings, it was concluded that to fully foster critical thinking in online discussion, the facilitators must focus especially on intellectual types of facilitation techniques, such as questioning, providing explanation as well as opinions and expressing agreements instead of just providing appreciation, acknowledgment, feedback or just mere comments. Lasty, Chung et al. (2011) reinforced the idea that “challenging or aggressive questioning by participants should draw more critical response from the online participants”(p. 62).

On the other hand, Afify (2019) conducted a study to prove the importance of the number of students that take part in an online discussion. He said that the group size is a variable that might affect not only the participation of the students but also their interaction with each other. According to his findings, students tended to be more interested in small and medium sized online discussion forums. In addition, when the size is bigger, students’ responses are more superficial and not deep enough to foster critical thinking skills. Moreover, the author highlighted that when group size is small “there is a certain need for teachers’ participation in small groups to enhance the discussion” (p. 149). Thus, there is no

doubt that teachers need to take into account the group size when deciding whether or not online discussions are the most suitable activity to foster critical thinking skills.

Finally, Macknight (2000) reinforced the idea that online discussions allow not only giving feedback but also accepting it and thus, boosting reflection among the students. Hence, she said that it is crucial for participants to understand the importance of their responses and also to learn how to ask proper questions to elicit such responses. However, Macknight (2000) also highlighted that in order to achieve those goals and “to escape the superficiality of classroom talk” (p. 41), teachers must provide the proper modeling, questioning, coaching and task structuring before carrying out the online discussions.

Web-Based Software and Tools

Another way in which technology can be used for educational purposes is by incorporating online web-based software that can undoubtedly foster students' interest that will eventually have a positive impact on their critical thinking skills. As a matter of fact, there is no doubt that students have raised a significant interest in technology and how they are increasingly attached to multimedia. Therefore, Bailey (2014) acknowledged that teachers need to be creative when coming up with methods in order to “to lead our media connected students into engaging with literature in useful and meaningful ways that can assure their literacy in this technology driven global society” (p. 18). Hence, teachers have a challenging job of finding ways to make students feel engaged to the point in which they can not only be interested in learning and as a result; they will start thinking critically and reflectively which will be evidenced in the quality and depth of their work.

In relation to this, there is no doubt that teachers in charge of courses such as literature, have to face the challenge of such courses that because of its nature, students might perceive it as boring and tedious. For this reason, multimedia sources could be the key to more meaningful classes for students that will boost their interest. Bailey (2014) proposed three technological activities that can boost students; critical thinking and reflection which are *The Critical Reading Log*, *Exploring the Novel*, and *Post It*.

In regard to *The Critical Reading Log* activity, Bailey (2014) explained how the purpose of such activity was to encourage to keep record of their reactions, interpretations and analysis when reading literacy through Blackboard, which is a virtual learning resource that allows to add online elements to be used in a face to face class. As a matter of fact, by using it, students who are not used to working with technological tools can have the possibility to reinforce such skills through being exposed. Moreover, this activity collects students' responses based on questions that go from the basic ones to deeper ones in order for them to boost their level of understanding and allow them “to practice their critical analysis skills while simultaneously reflecting on the learning process” (Bailey, 2014, p. 22). Finally, the application of this activity through a technological resource (Blackboard) facilitates teachers' duties since it is more practical for them to provide feedback and comments electronically, and thus, the time-consuming element is addressed properly.

Another strategy stated by Bailey (2014) is *Exploring the Novel*, which is an activity

in which students are required to incorporate visual aids through online tools in order to present certain parts of a novel in a creative way. Students are encouraged to use tools such as YouTube or more elaborated ones such as the web-based site Prezi in which they can incorporate several multimedia sources such as images and music hyperlinks. However, the author pointed out some students went the extra mile and utilized multimedia tools to create poetry and even short videos to act out some scenes of the novel. Therefore, “this activity encourages both critical thinking and reflective writing while also drawing from the technological intelligence that students already possess” (Bailey, 2014, p. 24). In other words, this activity is suitable in the pursuit of promoting critical thinking since students are able not only to feel more engaged but also appreciate the connection between the piece of literature and the work they carried out.

Finally, the last activity suggested by Bailey (2014) is *Post it*, which is basically using social media (Twitter, Instagram) to share what they have learned through a collage that reflects a part of a novel, theme, characters, or symbol. In order to do this, students must have been able to read carefully, think critically, and analyze deeply the information they are given. Thus, it is evident that students can foster their critical thinking skills when carrying out tasks that raise their interest and incorporate technology they usually use in non-academic ways.

On the other hand, Pattanapichet and Wichadee (2015) also emphasized the importance social media such as Facebook can have in learning. They explained how this platform promotes collaborative learning, not to mention that it also allows students to express their thoughts. In addition, by promoting collaborative learning and interaction, students will broaden their viewpoints. As a matter of fact, they stated that students feel comfortable when using such platforms, and thus, that creates a more active and engaging learning environment that will foster critical thinking skills among the students. Lastly, Pattanapichet and Wichadee (2015) ensured that using this kind of website “is the best way to encourage expressing opinions and thoughts which enable them to develop deeper critical thinking skills” (p. 46).

Video-Based Learning and Reflection

Another way to foster critical thinking skills is through Video-Based Learning. Budiarti et al. (2020) mentioned the impact learning videos can have in students’ interest and understanding of certain topics due to its facility to be displayed at other places and times. In regard to this, Budiarti et al. (2020) conducted a study in which students from Microbiology were introduced to Video-based learning to foster critical thinking skills. They mentioned how the use of such videos helped students construct meaning, dialogue, and discourse, which lead to a better connection between their experiences and what they have learned. Also, when students have the opportunity to learn by watching videos that display work procedures, they can reflect on them and thus the knowledge that is constructed will be easy to remember and long lasting.

On the other hand, Video-based Learning can also be used through AIEVM

(Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media), which is designed to promote learners' critical engagement through countless images from all over the world that reflect what they encounter every day. In addition, AIEVM follows a structure of questions and prompts related to a sequence of videos that allow participants to deeply analyze aspects of the images and the cultural context of the people that are shown in them. Lindner and Mendez (2014) explained how the participants who are exposed to AIEVM are guided through a process of critical reflection towards a sequence of images that portray people from a certain culture. Moreover, the participants were required to record their reflections which helped them become aware of the implicit messages that are transmitted through visuals. As mentioned before, those visuals portrayed people from other cultures whose main goal is to influence the participants' thoughts as well as to make them reflect about their own cultural identity (Lindner & Méndez, 2014).

In regard to this tool, Erdem (2020) also conducted a study in which students were exposed to AIEVM to reflect on their intercultural encounters. Therefore, the main purpose was to prove whether critical thinking skills can be fostered through this tool. As a matter of fact, during this study, students were exposed to five videos in order for them to reflect on the themes mentioned before and then, answer some prompts and questions online. Moreover, the author highlighted how the last three videos were more focused on triggering deeper cognitive analysis since they enabled discussions that address issues such as essentialism, discrimination, and racism. To conclude, the author found out that the selection of sensitive topics that help students relate to their own lives as well as the use of videos as a powerful type of visual media, had an impact on the fostering of the affective and cognitive dimension of critical cultural awareness. Likewise, this result is also supported by Lindner and Mendez (2014) since they emphasized that the use of AIEVM provides students with an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between visual media and perspectives of culture.

YouTube

As mentioned in the previous section, the use of visual media material can be beneficial in the pursuit of fostering critical thinking skills, and thus, it is important to address another tool that is famous for hosting a countless number of videos which is YouTube. Regardless of what people might consider a place only for entertainment and fun, YouTube can be a great academic one for its number of sources that can help teachers in their classes.

According to Clifton and Mann (2010), in order to foster deeper learning, the first step is to change students' role from passive to active since they need to be actively comparing, analyzing, and relating ideas. Therefore, the use of YouTube can help address this goal since it is an alternative that provides countless viewpoints to be compared and analyzed in a lecture environment, and thus, "it opens the door to find alternative representations of anything you might want to say" (p. 312). In addition, they stated the importance of this source when keeping students focused in the classroom because; unlike

traditional materials, the use of visual methods such as videos on YouTube can be beneficial for students since it is easier to remember something you have seen than something you have only heard and thus, the content can be more memorable and long-lasting.

On the other hand, June et al. (2014) conducted a study in which they found out that students tended to participate more actively and show more interest when the use of video and supporting activities were implemented during classes. As a matter of fact, the researchers also mentioned how the use of YouTube "can somewhat induce the formation of critical thinking abilities among the students" (p. 62). Thus, teachers can rely on YouTube as a tool to encourage students to provide more critical as well as constructive comments during classes. As a matter of fact, the researchers found out that students like the idea of using YouTube since the use of technological resources in learning is exciting, not to mention that it helps reduce the element of boredom that lectures in class usually have.

Similarly, Bastos and Ramos (2009) were able to find out that by incorporating the use of YouTube in the classroom, students began to feel more encouraged to participate and thus, discuss the subjects and provide their viewpoints. Also, they stated that after using YouTube "students were better informed, ideas were clearer, and the contents introduced seemed more meaningful" (p. 2090). Another benefit of using YouTube in the classroom and highlighted by them is that its videos incorporate sounds, animations, graphics and images that display more advantages towards worksheets and textbooks (Bastos & Ramos, 2009). There is no doubt that students feel more engaged and interested. Nevertheless, Bastos and Ramos (2009) emphasized that "the potential of YouTube as an effective pedagogic resource lies in the way it is used rather than in itself as a technological tool" (p. 2089). Therefore, it is important for teachers to understand the success of using YouTube depends on the activities that are implemented along with the videos.

Finally, it is relevant to note that achieving the goal is not that simple and that is why there are some good techniques that can be considered such as "presenting alternative sides or arguments and allowing discussions about the appropriateness of choices" (Clifton & Mann, 2010, p. 312). Therefore, critical thinking skills can be fostered among the students through YouTube videos and supporting activities that will elicit not only discussions and debates but also deep analysis and evaluation among the students.

Online PBL

Another way to promote critical thinking skills among the students is through activities that are based on Project Based Learning (PBL). Duch et al. (2001) claimed how with the use of a Project-Based Approach, students are encouraged to investigate and identify concepts they need to know in order to solve real -world problems. Moreover, they mentioned how this can help address skills, such as thinking critically since they have to analyze and solve complex problems, finding out, by evaluating and using correctly learning resources, among others. As a matter of fact, they highlighted how the use of PBL helps students fosters their skills not only to spot the information they need but also to identify where and how to do it to end up organizing it meaningfully and then share it with others.

Likewise, Sulaiman (2013) highlighted how in PBL, students are required to determine their learning issues and thus, find out their own approach to solve it. As a matter of fact, the members of the team get to learn how to distribute tasks, not to mention that they have to develop peer teaching as well as organizational abilities. In addition, students acquire skills in analyzing their own learning process while being engaged in real life problems. Therefore, it can be concluded that PBL is suitable to foster key skills such as team work , problem- solving, critical thinking and self-directing learning.

After exploring the advantages of PBL, it is time to tackle the use of technology when using PBL, and thus, understand how online PBL can provide even more benefits than the PBL by itself. Watson (2002) stated that the use of a website can help organize and display the PBL in a better way because it allows teachers to keep control and order of the syllabus, the group members and students' projects and reports. Besides the organization of the PBL, Watson (2002) also highlighted the availability websites can provide as well as the chance to adapt and incorporate any material found on the internet with the appropriate recognition to the original authors. Finally, he stated the use of online resources can support PBL by providing not only teachers with inspiration for a problem design but also students with information for solving such problems. In other words, teachers and students can rely on sources such as newspapers available online, encyclopedias, journals, films, web sites or even networked databases from universities' databases.

On the other hand, Hsu et al. (2011) conducted a study in which students were introduced to some problem solving activities with the use of both open-resource network and selected-resource network. They found out that "either the open-resource network or the selected-resource network, low-achievement students made remarkable progress" (p. 1). However, they claimed that students who use open resources spent more time since they needed to browse and determine which web pages to use in order to get the information they needed. Therefore, they stated an alternative which is the prepared Web-quest libraries that "can be viewed as a treasure hunt trial, especially for novices" (Kun Hsu et alt., 2011, p. 15). Hence, students who are not used to locating precise information through the websites can rely on this alternative to achieve their learning goals.

Web Quest

As stated in the previous section, websites are a great place full of information and sources for the students, but there is no doubt that there are many risks when letting our students access it. However, there is an alternative that might be the solution for teachers who are afraid of the risks students may face and it is Webquests. This resource is teacher-constructed and not only fosters critical thinking skills but also incorporates the benefits of technology. According to Vidoni and Maddux (2002), there are two types of them which are short term and long term. They mentioned how the short term takes around one and three days which its main purpose is to expose students to new ideas whereas the long term WebQuests rely on students' background knowledge to add and build knowledge and may take longer.

Moreover, Vidoni and Maddux (2002) explained how web quests are divided in sections in which the first one aims to catch students' attention. The second one's purpose is to let students know what the task will be as well as the guidelines that include the expected result. Moreover, in this section, teachers provide students with some advice and tips for students to organize their ideas. The third section is to provide students with the links to the sources they will need to use to carry out the task. To conclude, the last section includes the evaluation criteria that can be a matrix for students to know they will be assessed.

On the other hand, a great advantage of web quests is that the web sites are already determined by the teacher or the designer which avoids certain problems students can stumble onto such as countless results for a single research that could lead them to frustration due to the overwhelming amount of information or even worse, websites that can lead to inappropriate content. Summerville (2000) stated that the advantage of using this tool is that unlike using print materials that might be old and outdated, web quest provides information that is updated and relevant. Therefore, students can have the possibility to encounter interesting facts and events as they happen. Likewise, another advantage of web quest is that they require students to synthesize information from several sources and then come up with their own analysis and conclusions which then, will be shared with their classmates through projects and activities that they will have to carry out.

As a matter of fact, Averkieva et al. (2015) stated how crucial the creation of interdisciplinary links is when fostering critical thinking skills. Such links are easily addressed through web quests when students are required to establish logical subject links as well as transfer their knowledge through different contexts. In order to achieve this, teachers need to provide students with hyperlinks to different kinds of sources that might include information that is barely related. Hence, students need to critically analyze the sources in order to connect ideas and establish bonds.

Finally, Vidoni and Maddux (2002) stated how web quests can be a useful tool for teachers who feel skeptical and scared about letting their students browse the Website due to the fact that web quests make the Web an environment that can be meaningful and structured as well as a safe place for students to explore. Hence, there is no excuse for teachers to stay away from technology since they are useful tools such as web quests that not only incorporate the assets of technology but also reduce the risks involved in using the internet and technology.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Undoubtedly, Education has changed through time, and teachers have had to adapt to new methodologies and strategies to fit into today's society needs. As a matter of fact, with the emergence of technology, students have become more independent and autonomous, not to mention their strong interest towards technological gadgets and apps. Therefore, teachers are currently facing the challenge to come up with strategies and ideas to make classes more engaging and interesting for their students that seem to reject everything that is not related to technology. Therefore, teachers need to come up with new strategies to catch students'

attention and make the class more engaging as well as more meaningful.

On the other hand, teachers also need to struggle with the fact that their students need to master more than academic content. Companies are requiring their professionals to master skills such as teamwork, problem-solving and critical thinking. Hence, it is evident that teaching has become more challenging than ever before. However, as it was proved in the previous sections, teachers can take advantage of technology and use it for their benefit not only to boost students' interest but also to foster skills such as critical thinking. Little and Feldhaus (2015) mentioned that since students are daily exposed to multimedia such as images and videos through their phones, computers, and other gadgets; teachers must consider the impact that using multimedia might have on their students' learning when promoting critical thinking.

Moreover, Wang et al. (2005) claimed how Information and Communication Technology (ICT) "has the potential to engage students in a range of activities that contribute to critical thinking development and collaborative knowledge construction" (p. 95). For that reason, teachers who are struggling to come up with activities that are engaging and appealing for students, can rely on technology as a tool not only to incorporate variety in their classes but also to contribute in fostering critical thinking skills among the students. Likewise, activities implemented with the use of technology are more likely to boost interaction and collaboration among the students and thus, students can not only help but also learn from each other.

Likewise, Little and Feldhaus (2015) highlighted the fact that there are a countless number of technological sources available for instructors not to be limited in their instructional framework when aiming to foster critical thinking skills in their course. In addition, they mentioned some ideas which can be the use of blogs and wikis that can be used promote interaction among the students, online journals for them to do research as well as contrast ideas, and social media which can surprisingly be used as an academic source to encourage students share critically their ideas and opinions towards certain topics. Thus, technology enables an array of possibilities for teachers to incorporate in their classes according to the goals they want to achieve with their students and the skills they want to focus on.

To sum up, teachers need understand that technology has come to stay and even though it might be hard for some teachers to leave their comfort zone, once they take the risk, they will encounter with new possibilities to improve their praxis and make it more attractive for students who are increasingly more attached to technology as well as more demanding towards their learning process. As a matter of fact, the incorporation of technological sources in online activities can help teachers who are struggling with fostering critical thinking skills can rely on technological sources as a tool to boost it due to its variety and versatility they have. Lastly, this analysis proves that there is no reason for teachers to be scared and avoid using technology in their classes and thus, they are encouraged to embrace technology and discover the array of assets they can benefit from when using it properly along with academic activities.

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Using TBLT to Teach the Speaking Skill through E-learning

Saiden Ortiz-Gómez¹
Universidad Nacional
Costa Rica
SAIDEN.ORTIZ@ucr.ac.cr

Abstract

This essay is aimed at analyzing the teaching of speaking through e-learning due to the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19, which has changed the manner how lessons are taught nowadays in normal face-to-face classes in institutions. To ascertain the effectiveness of instruction through the Internet of the former skill, three issues are examined: 1) the implementation of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as an approach to teach speaking and its advantages, 2) the effectiveness of learning through the Internet, and 3) the combination of TBLT's methodology with the use of the Internet for teaching speaking. After such an analysis, strong assumptions indicate that e-learning is an effective modality for developing communicative competence, and that by selecting an approach such as the TBLT to frame both asynchronous and synchronous lessons, students can improve speaking without having to attend traditional classrooms.

Keywords: speaking, e-learning, internet, task-based language teaching, asynchronous lessons, synchronous lessons

Introduction

Speaking has a great importance in second language learning. In fact, learners feel successful depending on how well they speak the target language more than how good they are at writing, listening, or reading. However, developing this skill is no easy task. There is a combination of types of knowledge, such as “phonological, grammatical, lexical, and discourse” that learners need to master to be able to communicate in the L2 (Burns, 2017, p. 243). Nonetheless, for students to speak effectively, they require much more than having mastery in those four areas (Goh & Burns, 2012; Burns, 2017). In line with this, Hughes (2011) has argued that effective communication also requires managing aspects such as “culture, social interaction, and the politeness norms that exist in the target language” (p. 9). This means that speaking entails not just to have knowledge but to be able to put it into practice. In this respect, Nunan (2015) has stated that learners need to develop not only linguistic competence but also communicative competence. The difference between both terms lies in the fact that the former refers to knowing about the language, while the latter means being able to use different knowledge to communicate. In other words, identifying

1. Professor at the University of Costa Rica, Caribbean Campus and the Ministry of Public Education of Costa Rica; he holds a Master's Degree in Education Sciences with an Emphasis on English Teaching from *Universidad Latina*, Costa Rica, a Master's Degree in Linguistics Applied to English Teaching as a Foreign Language from *Universidad Europea del Atlántico*, Barcelona, Spain, and a Master's Degree in Education with an Emphasis on English Learning from *Universidad Nacional*, Costa Rica.

the rules of the L2 is not enough to speak. Hence, finding how one attains communicative competence through a formal learning process is essential to say one speaks a language.

The history of language teaching is paved with an array of different methods and approaches. They all have influenced more or less a certain period, and how each one has developed has depended on views of how a language should be better taught in contrast to a predecessor methodology. For instance, the origins of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can be traced back to the works of Prabhu in the Communicational Teaching Project during five years in India in the 1980s. The reason for embarking on such a project was the different perception that he had regarding how a second language should be taught. Prabhu (1987) has explained his different perception of language learning by stating the following: "... the development of competence in a second language requires not systematization of language inputs or maximization of planned practice, but rather the creation of conditions in which learners engage in an effort to cope with communication" (p. 1). This new idea contrasted with the Structural-Oral-Situational method being used in India at the time of the Communicational Teaching Project. Prabhu (1987) reported that the methodology of the said method was being questioned, since learners did not make any progress after many years of instruction. He has explained that the correct structures learners were able to apply in the classroom did not result in communication outside of it; on the contrary, he felt that the focus on a particular structure could have led learners to overgeneralization.

Teaching the speaking skill in a classroom has been the norm, and not the exception, by English teachers around the world. However, the possibility of using other modalities that are not traditional to teach English, such as e-learning, is something that has been seriously considered in our educational system due to the latest pandemic (COVID-19) that has affected our country and how teaching could be viewed after this international emergency. Basically, the concept of e-learning can be understood as the use of technology, computers, the Internet, besides other means commonly utilized by information and communication technology (ICT), to learn (Sandars, 2006; Donnelly et al., 2012; Clark & Mayer, 2016; Mui, 2016; Klačnja-Milićević et al., 2017; Singh & Hussain, 2020). Regarding this form of learning, Brenton (2009) has stated that there is no doubt about its efficiency. On the contrary, he has mentioned that learners are already using diverse tools and applications in their everyday life. Besides that, Mikropoulos and Bellou (2010) have advocated the strong power that ICT has due to its characteristics to support learning.

Further, Beetham (2007) has explained that it is essential for modern learners to be skillful in the use of information. More and more people now depend on technology and applications to deal with normal tasks. It is clear that there are no more options to teach the speaking skill than to venture into e-learning, since physical classrooms may not be available at the moment and because education must be modernized even more after this pandemic. This means that e-learning is ready to take the role of traditional classrooms due to its development. Having access to the Internet should now be enough to study a language without any limitation.

Notwithstanding, three questions arise when considering the teaching of speaking

via e-learning: is it possible to teach speaking by using e-learning? What is a good approach or method to design speaking lessons that are aimed at improving learners' communicative competence? If there is any method or approach which can improve learners' communicative competence, is it compatible with e-learning? This essay intends to answer these doubts by analyzing the implementation of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as an opportunity to provide learners with an appealing methodology for learning speaking, the effectiveness of learning through the Internet, and the combination of TBLT's methodology with the use of the Internet for teaching speaking.

The Implementation of TBLT as an Approach to Teach the Speaking Skill

Using Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) for developing speaking provides many opportunities to engage in conversation. The reason is that the emphasis of this approach is on tasks rather than on topics. Thus, learners find a purpose for speaking to each other. Ur (2012) has mentioned that this approach yields more positive results because in real life people usually discuss to reach a goal, and not because they are interested in a certain topic. Besides that, having tasks as the main component of a class means that students use language for a purpose without first thinking if what they are producing is correct (Ellis, 2003). In other words, the most important issue is that learners focus on meaning. That is what people normally do when they communicate in their first language. They speak without considering if they are using the appropriate prepositions, for example. There are probably few instances in a person's life when he or she thinks about each word and sentence to be expressed.

Advocating the use of the TBLT for developing learners' speaking skill also implies having a clear framework to structure classes. Ellis and Shintani (2014) have reported that different authors agree on a pre-task phase, a main-task phase and a post-task phase. One of those authors who has supported these three phases is Willis (1996). She has defended that each stage has a function. In fact, she has developed a task cycle with a clear role for students and teachers. Thus, the purpose of the pre-task is to introduce the topic and task by clarifying doubts or specific aspects about it. This part also functions to activate students' previous knowledge about the topic that they are going to focus on in the task. The teacher, not the students, is in charge of this part, so it could be stated that it is more teacher-centered. There are more activities that could be done in this first phase; for example, besides introducing the topic, the teacher can include new language, or to call it differently as to separate from a behaviorist view such as the Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) framework, new words and phrases can be highlighted (Willis, 1998).

The next phase, after the pre-task, is the task cycle, which is divided into three different steps, each having a specific function. In the task, students work collaboratively with others. This is very positive since there is a social participation which is commonly favored by Willis and Willis (2007). This group work is beneficial because there is a change from the common teacher-centered class to class work where learners are involved (Masuram & Sripada, 2020).

After discussing and having carried out the task, the learners have some preparation time to reach agreements and get ready for the next phase. Here, teachers can be actively participating, clarifying doubts of how they can say something, for example. This planning step is essential in Willis's (1996) task cycle as learners have to be more concerned about accuracy in comparison to the task phase (Rozati, 2014). Now, once learners reach an agreement on what to report, they present it. Here, the purpose is not just listening to what learners say but to provide comments about their work (Willis, 1998).

After finishing the pre-task and task cycle, learners have to delve into the language they used before. This part corresponds to the language focus, and contrary to what learners do in the task, in this stage they do pay attention to form. In this respect, Willis and Willis (2007) have considered that teaching isolated linguistic forms taken from either the task or the learners' performance to complete the task is one option for teachers once the task cycle has finished. The purpose of focusing on form at this stage is, of course, not at the expense of meaning, this being the main aim of the TBLT (Ellis et al., 2020). Furthermore, even when there is a language focus at the end, it conveniently matches students' needs in that the grammar, syntax, pronunciation, etc., that is reviewed or brought up relates to what they had trouble with when doing the task or what they already faced in the materials.

Another advantage of using the TBLT is that even though meaning is primary, that does indicate that there is no room for considering form. In fact, the TBLT does not entail just having tasks. In this respect, Willis (1996) believed that completing tasks without paying attention to form could make learners fluent but inaccurate. Thus, this approach has a twofold benefit in that speaking can be developed without thinking that grammar has to be known first for communication and that even though form is not the emphasis in classes, it has a moment to review it. This idea has been considered by Long (2015), who has coined the terms *Focus on Form* (FonF) and *Focus on Forms* (FonFs). The former means that learners' attention to "grammar, lexis, collocation, and so on" needs to be addressed appropriately in "communicative lessons" so that they can take advantage of "the psychological state [which] is more likely to be optimal" (Long, 2015, p. 27). On the contrary, an approach that relies on FonFs would be more like the traditional teaching of explicit rules, which considers that grammar precedes production.

A benefit of using the approach of FonF with the learners of any speaking course is that any specific micro skill can be highlighted explicitly based on any task already done or about to be done by learners. Long (2015) has defended the teaching of any explicit form because focusing on an implicit approach may not work for all students due to their ages and because that would be a longer process. However, the emphasis of any micro skill in a speaking class has a purpose to help learners deal with any topic that could prevent them from having a better performance.

In respect to the appropriate moment in the speaking class to introduce any form, Ellis (2018) has supported the view that focusing on this can be done before or while the task is carried out. Thus, in the teaching of speaking, any form can be practiced or highlighted at any time of the class either because the teacher has decided to call the

attention of any particular aspect to help learners cope more easily with the task or because students express the need of focusing on something that they consider important to communicate more effectively. In any case, pupils are not left alone with all their errors and mistakes when communicating, since there is also a moment to explain and even practice something that may be incorrect.

E-Learning as a Means to Learn a Language

Every person trying to learn a language needs to be considered as someone who has different needs in comparison to the rest of the learners who may be involved in the same process. Thus, by implementing e-learning in the teaching of speaking, classes may be focused on the students as individuals. Personalized lessons may give learners the opportunity to change their passive role and be in charge of their own decisions (Oliver et al., 2007). Moreover, since it is possible to create classes for each student, teachers now do not have to plan identical activities for all the learners as if they were in the same classroom sharing equal likes and needs; on the contrary, due to the vast resources that can be found on the Internet, the options to provide learners with specific tasks according to particular interests are abundant. In this respect, Lam et al. (2021) have claimed that e-learning provides not only “personalized learning” but also “active learning”, “student-centered learning”, “peer learning” as well as “differentiated learning” according to modern studies (p. 97). This only means that instruction over the Internet has changed the traditional classroom where everyone must start and finish the same activities at the same time for an environment in which there is “self-paced learning” and “opportunities to speed up or slow down as necessary” (Keengwe et al., 2014, p. 888). Flexibility is definitely an advantage that pupils may experience in such an educational experience due to the absence of constraints that are commonly present when having face-to-face classes in a classroom. In fact, Reid-Martinez and Grooms (2018) have argued that this learning is “just for you” and “just with you” due to technological advances (p. 2592).

By implementing e-learning, different learning styles can be taken into account (Thornett & Davey, 2006). Thus, this is no different from what teachers do when planning for a group of learners in a classroom. In fact, Klačnja-Milićević et al. (2017) have reported how there are studies that support the use of e-learning to focus on any learning style. The applications and websites that are at hand to teach, for example, can focus on learners’ visual or oral preferences. In this respect, Costello (2016) has explained that “an individual may learn through seeing visual objects, hearing an oration, reflecting on past experiences and through practical problem solving” (p. 49). This means that when teachers develop any class on e-learning, it has to be a priority to consider how pupils better understand and learn. By doing so, instructors can obtain better results, since learners are actively involved in a process in which they are strong and in which they can show their innate capacities.

Due to the methodology that is possible to implement by using technology, e-learning can promote social constructivism (Sandars, 2006). This theory departs from more traditional behaviorist classrooms in which students are required to repeat what they hear

without analyzing or questioning what teachers give them in favor of a more collaborative environment. This is more advantageous because learning happens in collaboration with others (Vygotsky, 1978). However personalized the study of a language may be with e-learning, that does not entail that students must work in isolation. On the contrary, pupils are encouraged to work with others to improve and learn from other classmates. According to Brown (2014), constructivism means for learners to “change their outlook from one that is individual-oriented to one that is community-oriented” (p. 4). By doing so, there is a benefit because knowledge resides in everyone, and it may be constructed with the interaction of learners. The opportunities to share and learn from others online help to develop different skills, since what someone does not know can be compensated by others’ experiences and knowledge. But in order for this type of education to be present, “creating learning communities” has to be an objective in this type of learning (Lehmann & Chamberlin, 2009, p. 139).

Moreover, there are other benefits that learners can have with e-learning. With the development and slow but constant introduction of this new modality to the educational process, there has been a change from common instructionism in which pupils are passive receptors of knowledge to a freer learning where teachers are not the ones who know everything and must impart all that sacred information to be learned by empty minds. Thus, by using the appropriate strategies and resources available on e-learning, students can migrate from what Freire (1970) called the “banking” concept of education to a process in which there are no formulas to be swallowed without understanding what they mean and/or what they are for. However weird it may seem for traditional supporters of instructionism, Siemens (2005) has even gone further with his new theory called connectivism, for he believed that “learning may reside in non-human appliances” (para. 25) as opposed to what behaviorism, cognitivism, or constructivism have supported so far. In any case, adhering to either constructivism or connectivism, it is evident that knowledge does not reside solely on the teacher’s mind; accordingly, e-learning and ICT have come to support this change that has begun in the traditional classroom with dedicated instructors wishing to get rid of traditional methodology.

Even though e-learning may evidently represent constructivist practices, they must be carefully planned by instructors and learners. Technology, the web, applications, just to name a few, do not reflect constructivism per se. There could also be an inappropriate use in which learners and teachers may be using state-of-the-art devices but with no purpose at all. In this respect, Schifter and Stewart (2010) have stated that there is a difference between instructivist pedagogy and constructivist pedagogies in that the former implies “‘learning ‘from’ technology,’” which means that the student is a relatively passive participant in the process’ and the latter which entails “‘learning ‘with’ or ‘through’ technology,’” this being the true transformation that really needs to be evidenced in the learning and teaching process. This can be better understood by citing Howland et al. (2014), who have analyzed how technologies can be used more effectively to have significant learning. Thus, pupils must be involved in “knowledge construction, not reproduction; conversation, not reception;

articulation, not repetition; collaboration, not competition; and reflection, not prescription” (Howland et al., 2014, pp. 16-17).

The Relationship between TBLT and e-Learning and its Benefits to Teach Speaking

Due to the different uses of technology, there is no room for any controversy about its implementation in language teaching (Chapelle, 2014). Hence, when it comes to using TBLT, it has been considered feasible for language learning to take advantage of technology (Lai & Li, 2011). In this respect, Gonzalez-Lloret and Ortega (2014) have devised a new term that describes the use of TBLT and technology: *technology-mediated TBLT*. These authors have defended that both technology and TBLT should support each other. The rationale for endorsing such a position is rooted in the fact that there are activities in tasks that can only be done with technology and not in the classroom (Doughty & Long, 2003; Gonzalez-Lloret & Ortega, 2014). For example, in real life, a normal task when planning vacations would be to use the Internet to browse different websites and then book a room or a trip. Thus, if a similar task is planned for language learners, the use of technology is essential. Trying to have a class without real components would make it artificial, and it would deprive learners from having a real task with real technology. In fact, Chapelle (2014) has stated that technology and TBLT have to be integrated because this approach aims at using tasks from real life. Moreover, according to González-Lloret (2015), certain “technologies fit perfectly within TBLT principles of learning by doing, task authenticity, and meaning and goal orientation” (p. 7).

The means to teach speaking using tasks to be carried out online are varied. There are many applications on the Internet that can be employed. For example, Kervin and Derewianka (2011) have analyzed how technology allows people to interact without the need to be in the same place. Nowadays, learners can use Skype, Zoom, Facebook Live, Google Meet, etc. to communicate with anyone in any part. In respect to these tools, Motteram (2011) has considered that speaking practices are easier to have because learners can be motivated to interact with others who are in different parts of the world. Speaking can improve if there is a desire to communicate with others in informal conditions or conversations either planned or unplanned by a teacher. In fact, Blake (2017) has supported the idea that speaking does not have to include necessarily the teacher’s intervention.

Using a framework such as the one proposed by Willis (1996) in which the pre-task and task are carried out in an asynchronous session by learners can prove to be valuable. First, since students are assigned what to do for them to work and follow their own pace, there is more time so that they can do the task and prepare for the report. There are no time limits that may put some extra pressure on students, which could have a lower performance when reporting if they could not prepare or feel anxiety because of the little amount of time given in a normal classroom. In line with this, Weiss (2010) has supported asynchronous conversation because of the time it provides to reflect before learners can reply. Second, more time to organize and carry out the task means that pupils have opportunities to plan and prepare for the report, which can result in more chances to develop metacognitive

strategies. This is necessary because according to Goh and Burns (2012), “learners should be encouraged to plan, monitor, and evaluate their speaking development” (p. 142). Hence, asynchronous discussion between learners could perfectly work as a springboard for strategy development. Third, using the TBLT approach in combination with technology and the Internet can provide both negotiation and active learning. Having to discuss and reach agreements before presenting a final report via asynchronous sessions allow learners to express diverse opinions and immerse in negotiation through the computer and/or cell phones, which contribute not just to make this learning active and real-like but more meaningful in terms of speaking. In fact, different authors such as Keengwe et al. (2014), Kala et al. (2010), and Ziegler (2016) have strongly believed that tasks carried out by computer and applications can result in active learning and negotiation.

Not only can asynchronous sessions work to complete the pre-task and task stages, but they can also make learners more autonomous and responsible. By providing instructions and assigning what task to complete, learners have to face that they are not in a classroom with the teacher around. They are just a group of classmates that are at the same level, regarding authority, with the responsibility to collaborate to complete a task. The teacher is no longer the center to which students may resort to resolve all their doubts. This of course could be seen as negative if analyzed from a traditional perspective, since teachers seem to be in charge of teaching and learning at the same time. Yet, once pupils discover that they all can work together to reach a goal in which there are no correct answers, they can certainly find out that they have the skills to improve in language learning without depending on a teacher’s intervention at every moment. This does not imply that teachers disappear from education due to the learners’ full independence, but it puts instructors as counsellors. In this respect, Reid-Martinez and Grooms (2018) have considered that the instructor is not someone whose students must wait to see the next class but “the *guide on the side*” who can be reached in any platform as a tutor (p. 2592).

After completing the asynchronous stage and then meeting with the teacher and other classmates in a synchronous session to report and have the language focus, students can be said to have participated actively in a process that has yielded both input and output, which are essential for speaking to improve as stated by Krashen (1982) and Swain (1985, 2005), respectively. Accordingly, e-learning and the TBLT can provide the necessary opportunities and goals for pupils to participate in both types of sessions. In respect to the benefits of this modality, Nielson (2014) reported after having implemented the TBLT in an online course to teach Chinese for a year to a class in contrast to a second control group that did not participate in this course that the proficiency of the former did improve after the course in comparison to the latter. Nevertheless, the use of the TBLT in combination with e-learning can benefit not just the speaking skill but other abilities that students need to be successful at in their everyday life. In line with this, Lai and Li (2011) have stressed that this modality also helps “learners’ ability to collaborate and communicate effectively online with peers and intercultural partners, the development of their intercultural competency and digital literacy skills, and the formation and development of their L2 identity” (p. 11). It is

evident that there is much more than language learning with the implementation of TBLT and e-learning. Consequently, learners' possibilities to excel in speaking and a range of other skills can be assured.

Conclusion

Using the Task-Based Language Teaching approach to develop learners' speaking skill provides many advantages. Having speaking classes based upon tasks gives students much to talk about, since there is a clear purpose for speaking which reflects what they do in their native language. This means that learners have to focus on meaning when communicating. They can express ideas freely without being concerned with forms. Hence, TBLT promotes communication by using any means. That motivates because students are not punished by what they do not know; on the contrary, they are motivated to say what they can. This obviously implies that forms are not the center of the class. However, there is also time at the end of the task to pay attention explicitly to any form they could encounter during the task (Willis, 1996).

E-learning can certainly be used to teach speaking. There are diverse online tools that students may already be using in their everyday life that can be taken into account to teach them a language. Moreover, having a variety of options on the web allows teachers to personalize lessons and make learners the center of the process, since they can have more control without having to resort to the teacher to everything. There are also benefits regarding the learning styles as e-learning provides many opportunities for students to focus on the different forms of learning rather than following the same recipe that can be normally given in a more traditional class. Furthermore, having students interacting with other people online can enhance collaboration; as a result, the implementation of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) can be greatly beneficial, as learning does not occur in isolation but in a social process in which everyone can contribute.

TBLT is compatible with e-learning. There are many tasks that people do in real life in which they have to use technology or the web. Thus, by taking advantage of the Internet, for example, learners can practice speaking and see a purpose in what they do. It means that technology gives more authenticity to the activities students do for improving speaking. Moreover, there is an array of applications which can serve learners to practice with other people around the world without the need to wait for the teacher's direct intervention in a class.

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