

Received: December 2023 Accepted: January 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58262/ks.v12i2.196>

Exposition of Colombian Students to an Authentic Language Learning Context

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Abstract

The current study aims at implementing online pedagogical strategies to foster quality education by exposing them to native language interactions. It was carried out in a mixed context; the first was Euclides Lizárazo departmental ethno-educational institution in Magdalena Colombia and the second was English Connect in Las Vegas, United states. The research population was 15 eleven graders at the official system in Colombia and sixth students from U.S.A. This investigation was experimental with a qualitative approach and a descriptive scope. Within this research, there were some unplanned findings throughout its implementation, which became important for the analysis phase, such as limited proficiency in the use of electronic devices, at least for academic purposes and/or interaction for English language development, employing collaborative language learning with native speakers and fostering self-confidence with technological resources, among others. Notwithstanding, this project had many positive results since it was possible to diagnose learners' English proficiency level, design the virtual pedagogical strategies, and analyze learners' perception regarding the intervention in order to track their progress and define the impact. To conclude, it is essential to mention that school learners in Colombia, who learn English as a mandatory requirement, especially the ones from the official system find the English learning useless, since, in most cases, they do not consider either work or travel with/ to English-speaking countries.

Keywords: *Teaching and learning process, authentic contexts, Learners' language exposition, English-native speakers, Technological resources.*

Exposición De Estudiantes Colombianos A Contextos Auténticos De Aprendizaje Del Idioma Inglés

Resumen

El presente estudio tiene como objetivo implementar estrategias pedagógicas en línea para fomentar una educación de calidad al exponerlos a interacciones en lengua materna. Se realizó en un contexto mixto; el primero fue la institución etnoeducativa departamental Euclides Lizárazo en Magdalena Colombia y el segundo fue English-Connect en Las Vegas, Estados Unidos. La población de la investigación fue de 15 estudiantes de grado once del sistema oficial en Colombia y estudiantes de grado sexto de Estados Unidos. Esta investigación fue experimental con un enfoque cualitativo y un alcance descriptivo. Dentro de esta investigación se encontraron algunos hallazgos no planeados a lo largo de su ejecución, los cuales cobraron importancia para la fase de análisis, tales como el limitado dominio en el uso de dispositivos electrónicos, al menos con fines académicos y/o de

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interacción para el desarrollo del idioma inglés, empleando el aprendizaje colaborativo del idioma con hablantes nativos y fomentando la autoconfianza con los recursos tecnológicos, entre otros. No obstante, este proyecto tuvo muchos resultados positivos, ya que fue posible diagnosticar el nivel de dominio del inglés de los estudiantes, diseñar las estrategias pedagógicas virtuales y analizar la percepción de los estudiantes con respecto a la intervención, con el fin de hacer un seguimiento de su progreso y definir el impacto. Para concluir, es fundamental mencionar que los estudiantes escolares en Colombia, que aprenden inglés como requisito obligatorio, especialmente los del sistema oficial encuentran inútil el aprendizaje del inglés, ya que, en la mayoría de los casos, no consideran ni trabajar ni viajar con/ hacia países de habla inglesa.

Palabras clave: *Proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje, contextos auténticos, Exposición lingüística de los alumnos, hablantes nativos del inglés, Uso de recursos tecnológicos.*

Introduction

Ensuring quality education should be everyone's responsibility, since achieving its quality should significantly improve people's lives, it is also essential that education acquires the value that corresponds, an inclusive and equitable education that promotes different learning opportunities throughout learners' lives; only in this way, teachers would be able to contribute to sustainable development. Otherwise, the current problematics about the Colombian students' lack of exposure to an authentic, native language and the passive learning processes on students are going to affect the teaching and learning process of English as a Foreign Language during much more time. Thus, this project aims at answering the question: How to generate an equitable English language education for Colombian students who lack the possibility to be exposed to authentic language contexts?

The education field in Colombia has some particularities, within the school curricula, English is used as a mandatory request at all levels and systems' types. This project relevancy is framed under the assumption that what matters is to comply with the minimum requirement of weekly class hours (which in most cases is insufficient and in some others: null) in secondary school, due to the fact that official schools do not have English classes in elementary levels. For this reason, most learners from the official sector are not achieving the minimum required level of English parametrized by the National Education Ministry (MEN, due to its meaning in Spanish). According to an article published by Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (2022) 49,8% of the tested students in Saber 11 at the end of 2021, were classified in most basic level, A1, when they should be in B1 level of the CEFR. Based on those results, it is possible to affirm that some actions developed on the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Colombia are not succeeding.

It is worldwide known that in the languages learning process, the time factor is essential; therefore, the different levels are achieved based on the number of hours spent in each. Thus, this research was looking for implementing virtual pedagogical strategies to achieve quality education and English proficiency of Colombian students who are in official school and lack the opportunity to practice English with native speakers. In order to it, the following specific objectives were delimited:

Characterize Colombian students' English proficiency levels

Design pedagogical strategies to guarantee quality education for students who are facing challenges in learning English as foreign language.

Analyze learners' perceptions regarding the pedagogical strategies implemented to track their progress.

Theoretical Framework

“Good language learners are made, not born. Anyone can become a good language learner, or a better language learner.” (Kaufmann, 2017). Usually, schoolteachers teach that to learn a new language you must focus on speaking, writing, listening, and reading the target language. However, Luca Campariello has found 4 different components to learn a different language and his learning skills are inspired. Following this amazing method, he became an outstanding polyglot. Luca knows 13 languages and he thinks he can keep learning more, his four components to learn a new language are listening, repeating, writing and speaking.

As well as the order, it is the hierarchical order of importance and how the study of the language begins for Campariello. Listening is important in learning a language because it is how our brain takes the information. In Colombia, students begin listening to English from their schoolteachers who are not native speakers and in most cases they don't have a correct pronunciation, students grow up listening to a language that is not pronounced properly. An example of this is the easy confusion that exists in the pronunciation of English between the word eat and it.

Listening is the entrance to have an accurate conversation, “Of all the major skills of language, listening skills require the most focus.” (Campariello, 2019). In comparison to the four basic language skills, Luca changed the speaking to repeating, therefore it gives more importance to listening again.

Another great example is Steve Kaufmann who spent at least one hour a day studying a different language, his study consists mostly of listening to mp3 files, in the audios he can dive into the new language and, he can notice different things after listening one or two times more. Kaufmann (2017) explains that each time we start a new language it's hard to notice much. Even though some aspects of pronunciation are explained to us, it isn't easy to notice very clearly at the beginning of listening or reading. However, after continuing to exercise our skills such as listening and pronunciation some of the most obvious things gets our attention. Setting a goal to learn a language requires attention, patience, and effort. You need to make the process something to live with. “The way to learn a language is to live it” (Lewis, pg4, 2014)

“The real benefit of surrounding yourself with the target language is that you stay engaged with it and develop knowledge of the country. In terms of the priming benefit, it will work magic. Plus, you get to do it while putting your feet up or driving.” (Cable, 2013).

Kerstin suggests that the first thing to do with the target language is related to listening, from listening to songs or watching movies, it's a way to train your ears. As Kerstin Cable, Maximilian Berlitz advises to the learners that they should find a native-speaking language pen pal, so that their listening skill is better acquired. According to Berlitz (2021) nowadays it is easy to find an online language exchange partner to master the target language. A native pen pal will help the student with sentence structure, grammar, translation, even colloquial sayings, and informal words.

Learning a new language has been a goal of millions of people, where most fail in their attempt this is due to many factors. Benny Lewis has studied throughout his life that learning a new language is an attainable goal for everybody, no matter the age, gender, economic status and

even if people think that, they do not have the language gene. An important aspect of the way that Lewis has learned different languages is that he doesn't wait until he has a full study of the language to have a conversation, in fact he tries to have a conversation the first day he starts to study a new language.

“Many of us feel we need to study first, until that glorious day when we are “ready” and have “enough” words to finally have a real conversation. The truth is that day will never come. You can always justify, even when you have all but mastered a language, that you are not ready” (Lewis, 2014)

Avoiding conversation in other languages that isn't our native language is something common of learners. “It's a vicious cycle that keeps many of us from opening our mouths for years.” (Lewis, 2014) The best way to know how much we can improve is in practice, as we speak to others, we can realize how accurate or wrong we are in the language. Conversations can help the learner to identify sayings, new vocabulary and pronunciation.

The learner's goals must be achieving enough knowledge in the language to understand and be understood by native speakers. To obtain that goal the students must practice all of them, and as if it was a sport, the learner must practice it. “Trying to learn a language in a traditional academic way is like trying to learn how to play soccer through a book instead of just going out on the field.” (Fotheringham, 2014).

John Fotheringham has spent a lot of time learning over eight languages at a great level, because of his knowledge he has been preparing the website -LanguageMastery.com where he publishes the results of his language study journey, especially Japanese and mandarin. Learning from his experience is a great advantage if someone wants to master a language. He emphasizes in being close to the language target “You DO need to maximize your exposure to the target language everyday through input (listening and reading) and active output (speaking and writing). If you put in the time on a consistent basis, your brain will do the rest.” (Fotheringham, 2018). Nowadays learning a language at school has been focused on books, which only let the students read and write, but it's missing the importance of half of the process Fotheringham recommends. At the end, it is a fact that there are various methods to learn a language, but not everyone has obtained the recognition and achievements like those polyglots who have shared their personal experience in learning a new language and it depends on learners' rhythms, learning styles, needs and preferences.

According to Restrepo, M.(2022), in her book ‘Improving EFL Teaching Methodology’, there is another extrinsic demotivation in Colombia; regarding the context which students are immersed in, since it is mentioned that learners do not find English useful or important and neither their parents at home. This quote denotes that the effort that must be made to expose learners to authentic language contexts is huge, since neither learners, not their parents promote this exposition consciously out of the EFL classroom.

Methodology

This section aims at describing the procedure, tools and instruments used in the current research. Listing the strategies implemented and their objectives throughout it. This study is qualitative in nature with a descriptive scope and a quasi-experimental design.

The population in which this study was carried out was six students in the U.S and 15 students in Colombia. The primer was taking the English-connect course for adults as a Foreign

Language (EFL) in the US. However, this study sample was 15 eleventh grade students from an official school, named Euclides Lizarazo departmental ethno-educational institution. This study carried out surveys and interviews as data collection tools.

The interviews were applied to learners in Colombia who were in eleventh grade and the satisfaction survey was implemented to both, students in Colombia and in the U.S; in order to track and analyze the improvement of the process. The analysis of its development determined their knowledge in English. Its scope was descriptive, through their English level was possible to identify the impact of these online classes without the speaking-partner's help. This research design was quasi-experimental, only Colombian learners taking the English course as English as a mandatory request were tracked until the end of the project.

At the same time, they are training their ears; they put in practice what they knew of the language through the speaking partner time. It was necessary that they could practice their English language since the beginning levels so that they could advance and significantly improve, due to this project took a self-taught approach, which must be developed intrinsically and requires motivation inherent to the process.

On the other hand, the current project was synchronously developed, the sessions were all recorded, for that effect, recording consents were delivered and signed by students in the U.S and students' parents in Colombia. These sessions were divided in three macro-phases: Before, during and post intervention; in order not only to track learners' progress but to focus on the categories of each project stage. Atlas.Ti was the software implemented to identify them.

Table 1: Learners' Development Through the Three Project Stages.

Stages/ Subject	Colombian Learners	Colombian Professors
Before	Shy They were too afraid of participating. They were dealing with ICT, negatively.	There was too much intervention. They were pushing learners to talk. Lack of a script
During	They were paying more attention. They developed strategies to deal with ICT (Arrived earlier)	They gave learners more space to participate, to commit mistakes and there were more clear commands.
Post	They were able to participate from the strategy with basic answers. They Could ask for repetition o the explanation when misunderstood.	They could even deal with different learners participating at the same time. There was an evident order or script

Results

To help students to set specific goals to achieve the 10 hours English practice plan (English connect pg. VIII), we will guide them to set a schedule where listening and practice conversations are the most.

In order to train the listening comprehension ability different tools were used as Google podcasts, which are free, and students can adjust their speed at 0.5x. It is important that the podcast has an interesting topic for the student such as health, fiction, sports, politic, nutrition, comedy, and so on. Google podcast and Youtube videos or audios can be adjusted, for students to have millions of options to practice their listening at their level. Listening to music and watching tv or movies are a fun way to improve listening skills, too.

On the other hand, the ability to talk with a native speaker is something they must do. Through the Tandem app students could find a native speaking partner and practice with them every conversation given in the lessons. As they practice the English language with native speakers, they will significantly improve their listening and speaking skills. They need to set a specific time with their partners so that they really do it, they will practice listening and speaking through video calls, they will practice reading and writing through text and emails. The English connect program also has the help of missionaries who are native English speakers and students can practice with them sometimes.

Table 2: Evidence of the Speaking Partner Through Videocalls.

Student's names	Links
Maria Fernanda Cardona	https://youtu.be/IR3So3uWQuQ
Gabriel Larios	https://youtu.be/uUsfqmA7rOE
Lauren Camila and Danna Garcia	https://youtu.be/JIL3spRQ7rQ
Ronal Romero Torres	https://youtu.be/UjBck7jTa94
Students from Euclides Lizarazo departmental ethno-educational institution 11th grade.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpXwPEHNvdw
Students from Euclides Lizarazo departmental ethno-educational institution 11th grade.	https://youtu.be/xCG1W6uZ2Rg

Source: Authors' Elaboration.

Table 3: Evidence of the Speaking Partner Through Tandem App.

Student's names	Links
Maria Fernanda Cardona (Tandem profile)	https://www.linkpicture.com/q/WhatsApp-Image-2022-05-20-at-8.38.42-AM.jpeg
Gabriel Larios (Tandem Profile)	https://www.linkpicture.com/q/Screenshot_20220520-100942.png
Ronal Romero Torres (Tandem Profile)	https://www.linkpicture.com/q/Ronal.jpg
Maria Cardona, Ronal Romero, Gabriel Larios	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3yzVIAyD4Y

Source: Authors' Elaboration.

Results Analysis

This section aims to describe the strengthens and the aspects to improve during this research, since there are diverse factors to consider. On the first phase to the study, the diagnosis section revealed that most of the tested students were in the first level of CEFR and some of them, even below it. Some sessions were intended to foster quality education by forming moral and

ethical values and some other strategies to foster quality education from Euclides Lizarazo departmental ethno-educational institution, 11th grade. (See annexes A)

However, it was evidenced that learners were motivated to receive these classes in English with people in the U.S; also, they could feel themselves as part of an important project design with and for them, which was quite positive for their process.

Another essential analysis for this implementation was that the knowledge on how to use ICT was low on students, and it could affect the appropriate implementation of the strategy. Notwithstanding some prior actions were taken and it was possible to solve it on time.

According to the results found throughout this project, we can conclude that quality education is a sustainable development objective that goes beyond the academic margins; a quality education encloses the construction of ethical and moral values for society. The results we have obtained were achieved by thinking and acting from the love of the vocation as future teachers.

A significant improvement was revealed among the young people from Euclides Lizarazo departmental ethno-educational institution, 11th grade, since many of them expressed they learned more than they imagined they would learn. In this experience, we noticed that having appropriate strategies makes it possible to overcome the obstacles that prevent a quality education, such as the scarce economic resources faced by the population of the Reten, Magdalena and the discouragement of some students.

The adult students of English-connect expressed having seen many improvements in their English learning process, having implemented English practices with a native speaker helped them to have a better understanding of the accent and the natural pronunciation of the language itself. Several students identified this tool as a fundamental support in their confidence.

Most of the students who practiced English with native speakers and actively participated in the tandem application became much more fluent, they realized that they had to think less to speak, they reached a level where they could understand without making much effort because they became familiar with the accent and the most appropriate pronunciation of English. Unfortunately, not all the students with whom the project began finished it, some of them expressed that they had other occupations that did not allow them to dedicate the necessary time and their interest waned.

Finally, it is advisable to say that providing quality education for teaching English brings much more positive effects than just focusing on teaching. As future teachers, we know that this project will continue in our classrooms, as will the virtual meetings with native speakers.

Discussion

This research aimed at analyzing the implementation of virtual pedagogical strategies to foster quality education and improve English proficiency of Colombian students who are studying at official schools and lack the opportunity to practice a foreign language with native speakers, characterizing, designing and analyzing its implementation. Additionally, while the project was under development, there was an extra encounter, which had not been taken into account before, related to the use of technology for academic purposes and finally, a section to discuss the most important findings will be displayed at the end.

From the most relevant findings of this project, it is important to say that more than 90 per cent of the intervened population in Colombia lacks self-learning skills, evidenced in the

inconvenient they faced throughout the process from the early stages even to schedule a meeting for practicing speaking and listening or the cultural aspect to arrive late, since the ones who always arrived first were the population in the U.S. The fact that at the moment of implementing the strategy was observed these problematics, is a powerful evidence that these skills must be fostered on learners, transversally.

On the same line, another unplanned aspect found was the lack of knowledge regarding technology usage from Colombian students; essential elements as the light exposition, the background noise, the internet quality, how to appear in front of a camera, the time they spent to get ready to start, among others, were just some of the challenges faced by them during this strategy implementation.

With this in mind, it is advisable to suggest a deep revision to the Colombian school curricula, because, to what extent this 'important areas' are providing learners with the necessary competences, skills and abilities of a 21st century global citizen and a competent professional. This analysis could seem useless, notwithstanding, once professors and researchers use to implement strategies to improve the quality education, they will face these troubles which, undoubtedly, negatively affect the results of arduous and well-founded investigations.

From this study results, it is possible to conclude that there are two main factors that mainly influence students' learning process of EFL; the primer is the exposure to authentic contexts for talking to natives since it was evidenced the huge improvement of learners ability to talk in English after this strategy implementation and the latter, the mandatory proficiency level of teachers at school. Furthermore, although ambitious, this research suggests to those in charge of educational administration in Colombia, especially on the subject of bilingualism, that any public policy designed and implemented to improve Colombian students' English proficiency level must have a well-qualified teaching staff, due to language teachers must be at least, one level above the course target one.

From all collected information, it is possible to conclude that school learners in Colombia, who must learn English as a mandatory requirement, especially the ones from the official system find it useless and with little chance of use, since, in most cases, they do not consider either work or travel with/to English-speaking countries.

As an essential part of this research, it was planned to study students' perceptions regarding the learning-teaching process of English in Colombia and the reasons why most Colombians at school levels struggle with its process. Finally, after an in-depth study of these two populations; it was found that there are two principal items to take into account: first, the possibility students have to earn an scholarship as soon as they finish their studies, also the possibility to apply to an internship abroad or to apply to a job with an American multinational, even working from home and second, the importance that a subject like EFL has for the government since, interaction with authentic contexts and qualified teachers based on CEFR (Common European Framework) levels require specific untouchable budgets and in most cases it is a complicate decision to make for governors.

Annexes

A. Student's experiences through the implementation of strategies to optimize quality education.

<https://youtu.be/q36mR7rmv8U>

<https://youtu.be/H6uKuc3v7Ao>

<https://youtu.be/BPIZEK2l118>

<https://youtu.be/kBeuVFNavE8>

<https://youtu.be/dOMSvP5tY4A>

<https://youtube.com/shorts/15Rr9K1MhpE?feature=share>

<https://youtube.com/shorts/zfwjnl7xgJo?feature=share>

<https://youtu.be/sZyufYa30QA>

These YouTube links are the evidence session learners had between these two different contexts. They were also recorded within the teaching and learning process and were, are and will be used only for academic purposes and its corresponding aims.

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