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Please send all correspondence to the HOW journal:

Carrera 27 A # 53 – 06 Of. 405, Bogotá, Colombia.

Phone/Fax: 57(1) 2115018

E-mail: howjournalcolombia@gmail.com

Website: www.howjournalcolombia.org

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Contenido

Editorial

Edgar Lucero7

Research Reports

Linguistic Colonialism in the English Language Textbooks of Multinational Publishing Houses

Colonialismo lingüístico en los libros de texto de inglés de las editoriales multinacionales
Jairo Eduardo Soto-Molina; Pilar Méndez11

Authentic Materials and Tasks as Mediators to Develop EFL Students' Intercultural Competence

Materiales auténticos y tareas como mediadores para desarrollar competencias interculturales en estudiantes de inglés
Alix Norely Bernal Pinzón29

Debates about Educational Issues: A Pedagogical Strategy to Explore Argumentative Skills in the EFL Classroom

Debates acerca de aspectos educativos: una estrategia pedagógica para explorar las habilidades argumentativas en el salón de inglés como lengua extranjera
Ángela Vanesa Duarte Infante; Sandra Milena Fonseca Velandia; and Bertha Ramos Holguín49

Enhancing Reading Comprehension through an Intensive Reading Approach

Mejora de la comprensión lectora mediante un método de lectura intensiva
Andrés Insuasty Cárdenas69

Digital Storytelling: Boosting Literacy Practices in Students at A1-Level

4 Historias digitales: fomentando prácticas de alfabetización en estudiantes de nivel A1
Pedro Alejandro González Mesa,83

Iranian L2 Researchers' Perspectives on Research Ethics

Perspectivas de investigadores iraníes de segunda lengua sobre la ética de la investigación
Zhila Gharaveisi; Adel Dastgoshadeh107

Reflections and Revision of Themes

A Self-Dialogue with the Thoughts of Paulo Freire:

A Critical Pedagogy Encounter

Un diálogo personal con los pensamientos de Paulo Freire:

un encuentro de pedagogía crítica

Yolanda Samacá Bohórquez125



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Editorial

Edgar Lucero¹

New ways of thinking are constantly emerging in English language teachers around the world, new ways that open windows to other horizons in English language teaching and learning. In this first issue of HOW Journal in 2020, the English language teacher-authors articulate themes related to colonial issues, ethics in research, self-reflection, and novel implementations concerning teaching progress.

Raising awareness of colonial matters in the field of English language teaching is a relatively new horizon of research. Corresponding studies look essentially for exploring the process of knowledge construction in the global field of English language education to find particular ideological perspectives that may invisibilize and take away local linguistic and socio-cultural origins. These studies on colonial matters are progressively configuring a claim to recognize, respect, account for, and act more upon local multiple particularities of English language teaching and learning to transgress the belief of global or prevailing suggested, or superior, practices and approaches. These studies definitely invite one to scrutinize everyday classroom practices, for instance, their neutrality and naturality, ideological origins, and exercised relations of power.

This is what Jairo Eduardo Soto-Molina and Pilar Méndez looked for in their article. They examined and compared the concepts of linguistic colonialism and cultural alienation in university textbooks for teaching English as opposed to the theories about culture in the decolonial turn. They showed that the textbook contents dealt with high levels of alienation burden, superficial cultural components, and instrumentation that favor the dominant culture of English and do not offer possibilities to embrace interculturality in ELF teaching contexts.

Pedagogical implementations also require new ways of thinking. Novel implementations demand introspection and reflection on how teaching and learning should happen in the dynamics of a particular classroom. This is an action that teachers take to advance in

1 Edgar Lucero is a full-time teacher educator for Universidad de La Salle, Bogotá, Colombia. He currently studies a PhD in Education at Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Bogotá, Colombia. He holds an MA in Applied Linguistics. He is specialized in English language Teaching-Didactics. His research interests are in Classroom Interaction and Pedagogical Practicum. elucero@unisalle.edu.co
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2208-5124>

their teaching practices when they find that something different and innovative needs to be explored, planned, or developed for a specific context. The insights obtained from any implementation may turn, increasingly and on one hand, into a claim to be more aware of the results achieved from the realization of a curriculum; on the other hand, into a possible demand to upgrade that curriculum.

In this current issue, four action research works give evidence of progress in English language teaching and learning in their contexts. Alix Norely Bernal found that the role of authentic materials and tasks, based on cultural topics in the students' development of intercultural competence in a third-level English language course at a Colombian private university, allowed them to show respect for other cultures and to be interested in knowing about other societies. Ángela Vanesa Duarte Infante, Sandra Milena Fonseca Velandia, and Bertha Ramos Holguín implemented a series of debate workshops about educational issues with a group of pre-service English language teachers at a public university in Tunja, Colombia. They found that the participants' arguments in the debates were based on their personal experiences and their partners' opinions. This result aids in contributing to the understanding of what argumentation implies when debates are employed in English language education.

Action research in the field of literacy is also a window opening to other horizons in English language teaching and learning. Andrés Insuasty Cárdenas's article presents a study that, with a group of university students in Pasto, Colombia, explored the effectiveness of intensive reading to enhance text comprehension. He found that different reading strategies help the students improve text comprehension and tackle the reading and comprehension problems that they had experienced before the implementation. Pedro Alejandro González Mesa, by implementing digital storytelling in an English language class of eleventh graders at a private school in Mosquera, Colombia, developed in his students varied writing and speaking behaviors while they assumed different roles in planned classroom activities. By doing this, he also helped them improve their oral production without worrying about their classmates' opinion, a factor that previously constrained these students' oral production.

8 Likewise, thinking about ethics in doing research helps one to encompass related themes to language education. In this current issue, Zhilla Gharaveisi and Adel Dastgoshadeh present a study that explored second-language teacher-researchers' perspectives on research ethics in Iran. They found that the participants' self-expressed adherence to ethical considerations in plagiarism, data management, participant rights, and authorship rights was differential although they did not seem to have a clear understanding and definition of these themes.

A final theme that opens a window to other horizons in English language teaching and learning in this current issue of the journal is self-reflection. Based on a two-voiced self-dialogue with compelling ideals of critical pedagogy, Yolanda Samacá Bohórquez

exposes a process of self-criticism and self-recognition of understandings, experiences, constructions, co-constructions, and reconstructions of her practices as a language educator in Colombia. She concentrates on two evolving choices, one that comes from language as power to language as possibility, and the other that comes from instrumental-to-alternative critical pedagogy practices to more critical understandings and doings of language education. With this action-reflection-action self-analysis, she positions herself, and English language teachers in turn, as agents constructed from their teaching practices in time and place, and who are engaged in constant awareness-raising.

In this HOW Journal, we hope that these English language teachers' new ways of thinking do open windows to other horizons in English language teaching and learning.



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Linguistic Colonialism in the English Language Textbooks of Multinational Publishing Houses

Colonialismo lingüístico en los libros de texto de inglés de las editoriales multinacionales

**Soto-Molina, Jairo Eduardo¹,
Méndez, Pilar²**

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine and compare the concepts of linguistic colonialism and cultural alienation in University textbooks for teaching English as opposed to the theories about culture in the decolonial turn. Dichotomous categories were established based on the analysis of the cultural component of the textbooks for the teaching of English. The corpus consisted of six textbooks produced by multinational publishers and used in Colombia during the years 2006-2018. Documentary analysis procedures were used to discuss emergent themed contents in relation to cultural components from a critical perspective that unveiled imperialism practices. Results showed that the textbook contents dealt with high levels of alienation burden, superficial cultural components and instrumentation to the submissive person who favors the dominant culture of English and does not offer possibilities to embrace interculturality in ELF teaching contexts.

¹ Jairo Eduardo Soto-Molina studied Social Research at Newbury College, Massachusetts, USA. Postgraduate Diploma in Epistemological Paradigms of Qualitative and Quantitative Research at Instituto de Estudios Avanzados (IAEU). He studied Teaching English to children at the University of California, San Diego, California. Master in Education, University of Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia. PhD in Human Sciences, University of Zulia Maracaibo, Venezuela. languagecircle.re@hotmail.com
<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3378-0202>

² Pilar Méndez is a Doctor in Education from Universidad Santo Tomás, Bogotá, Colombia; Master in Linguistics from Caro y Cuervo Institute, Colombia. She holds a Bachelor Degree in Languages from Universidad del Atlántico, Colombia. She is currently a tenured lecturer at Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas at the Doctorado Interinstitucional en Educación (ELT Education) and the Bachelor of Arts in English as a foreign language. pilarmendezr@hotmail.com
<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9284-4611>

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Keywords: cultural alienation, English as a foreign language, linguistic colonialism, textbooks, teaching of culture.

Resumen

El propósito de este documento es examinar y comparar los conceptos de colonialismo lingüístico y alienación cultural en libros de texto universitarios para la enseñanza del inglés como opuestos a las teorías sobre cultura en el giro decolonial. Se establecieron categorías dicotómicas basadas en el análisis del componente cultural de los libros de texto para enseñar inglés. El corpus se centró en seis libros de texto de editoriales multinacionales, utilizados en Colombia durante el periodo 2006-2018. Se utilizaron procedimientos de análisis documental para discutir temas emergentes en relación con los componentes culturales desde una perspectiva crítica que devela prácticas imperialistas. Los resultados muestran que el contenido de los libros de texto maneja altos niveles de carga alienante, componentes superficiales de cultura e instrumentalización de la persona sumisa que favorece al inglés como cultura dominante y no ofrece posibilidades para acoger la interculturalidad en contextos de enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: alienación cultural, inglés como lengua extranjera, colonialismo lingüístico, libros de texto, enseñanza de la cultura.

Introduction

The recent contributions that intercultural studies have made to the teaching of languages have introduced the idea that intercultural competence develops communicative competences. Worldwide, this relation intercultural-communicative competence has been studied by teachers and researchers (Agudelo, 2007; Álvarez, 2014; Clouet, 2012; Gómez, 2015; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Meadows, 2016) showing that there are different ways to tackle cultural relations when teaching English in EFL settings. However, the teaching of English in EFL contexts is a complex endeavor that makes teachers face some problematic issues emerging in the form of (i) *dilemmas* to overcome the imbalance between the two cultures in contact (Stern, 1983), (ii) *contradictions* between the culturally related ideological components of materials and teachers' practices and discourses (Bonilla Medina, 2008; Gómez, 2015; Muhammad, 2015), and (iii) *challenges* to contest canonical and homogenizing ways to work on the local cultural context via policies (Fandiño, 2014; Macías, 2010) or to embrace critical pedagogies to work with intercultural approaches (Bonilla Medina, 2012).

12

Cultural components of textbooks and the ways these components are displayed to teach English can be instruments of a dominant cultural reproduction if these components are not intercultural oriented. Several works have dealt with materials and textbooks (Bonilla Medina, 2008; Castañeda Usaqué, 2012; Gómez, 2015; McConachy & Hata, 2013) to problematize the relation of intercultural competence and language in the ELT field. Their contributions are valid for denouncing power imbalance to the detriment of the stability between languages in contact. In this particular work, we will extend the discussion via

embracing some ideas from decolonial thought (Grosfoguel, 2011; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Macedo, 2000; Pennycook, 1998, 2006, 2008) in relation to linguistic colonialism, while contesting some imperialism practices identified in textbooks for English language teaching in Colombia.

Nowadays, the discussion of linguistic colonialism has regained resignification as regards the value of EFL teachers' lives and work experiences, along with the skills acquired from their practices to position their role as cultural actors and mediators in which their relation to language is paramount to the construction of their identities and teaching practices. At university levels, teachers are not the only ones who control the entire teaching-acquisition / learning process. There are other cultural agents at stake such as the students and the materials used for teaching English. Some universities in the country have privileged a type of material (textbooks, audio and visual material) oriented toward the acquisition of English as a target language. In doing so, the local context/culture has been disregarded and EFL teachers have been the ones adapting the material to cover intercultural features ignored in the textbooks. It means a move to create cultural awareness and tackle cultural displacements of local culture.

As Cortazzi and Jin (1999, pp. 209-210) point out, neither the teacher nor the students, the textbooks or materials, are subjects alien or passive concerning (or as regards) cultures. Personal views and constructions are confronted when texts or materials provide certain knowledge and certain values. The ways teachers and students respond to it might unveil colonization processes if they do not problematize the cultural component of textbooks taking into account their teaching-learning context.

In our view, forms of understanding cultures bear an undeniable ideological and political burden which influences the construction of identities and opinions that constrain the subject in transcendental determinations within students' society in which their own being is obscured. For instance, some textbooks emphasize the image of the native speaker (man, white, heterosexual) in a superior relation or position to other interactants in dialogues. Indeed, this type of constructions is conducive to consolidate certain deficient practices, prejudices and stereotypes while at the same time strengthening or weakening local or national awareness.

We analyzed the selection of contents for the EFL courses based on their intercultural relevance. It means English language textbooks were confronted as to their culture negotiation meaning to trace their treatment given to the cultural component, treatment given to persons, levels of alienation and interaction of cultures. Theoretically, these analytical categories are based on the dialectical relationship that underlies the binomial language-culture, which serves as a basis for didactic proposals tending to the integrative development of linguistic-cultural knowledge in EFL learners. In this sense, this article is pertinent because it analyzes

information collected from data as succinctly as possible, which allows applying a concept of interculturality in the variable of the changeable local context. We try to clamor for a better understanding of our local education in order to cast light upon the type of materials that universities have selected and their colonialism effects as consequences (Pennycook, 1998).

The Role of Multinational Publishers

Textbooks as materials to teach a content (English, science, religion, etc.) are value-laden approaches due to the selection and organization of content, the promotion of popular ideas over others, the layout of images and what these represent, linguistics codes and social norms, and the editors' and authors' personal agendas and sets of beliefs; aspects which depict a non-neutral domain of knowledge production. Having this in mind, we may see that English language textbooks have been considered signs of neo-colonial practices (Pennycook, 2007; Tollefson, 2000) that promote one-language-one-culture in relation to an idealized self and lifestyle close to the native linguistic model that teaches how to speak and what type of social and normalized rules and rituals must be respected and repeated.

For this reason, the role played by publishing houses in Colombia has been criticized by several scholars (Bonilla Medina, 2008; Castañeda Usaquén, 2012; Gómez, 2015, Ramos Holguín, 2013; Rico Troncoso, 2012, among others) that have raised awareness about the imbalance of power- cultural relations in textbooks. Despite the criticism, publishing houses remain deaf to these critiques and the materials sold still promote a one-language-one-culture curriculum approach. This resembles very closely the colonial discourses characteristic of linguistic imperialism. Indeed, colonialism as a consequence of linguistic imperialism (Pennycook, 1998) perpetuates a set of discourses and practices that produce a submissive or dependent culture (the ignored culture) while increasing their own set of cultural values (the valid culture).

Furthermore, in EFL contexts, the selection of English language textbooks and materials monoculturally-focused contradicts the political consideration of Colombia as a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation (De Mejía, 2006; Guerrero, 2010). It means that this decision is not only pedagogical but political and as a nation grants multinational publishing houses certain concessions to set linguistic and cultural principles for the languages education curricula. An alternative way to respond to this, from a decolonial viewpoint, is to design an emancipatory and decolonizing curriculum that respects the English-speaking culture but also respects the local (Colombian) culture, taking into account the political implications for teaching/ teacher education programs. It means an exercise of resistance to linguistic imperialism (Canagarajah, 2013) by appropriating the language and also by identifying and denouncing colonial situations and practices.

The following chart presents the way publishing houses introduce themselves to the public eye:

Table 1. Publishing Houses and Their Missions.

Publishing Houses
Cambridge UP /The oldest publishing house. We are Cambridge University Press, the oldest publishing house in the world and the University of Cambridge's own publishing company. In fact, we are actually one of the University's own departments. <u>Our mission is to filter through and give shape to all the knowledge the University generates: Sciences, Humanities, Linguistics, etc. We've been involved in teaching for five hundred years and, in the last century, we've become specialized in English language teaching courses.</u>
McGraw Hill / Our vision is to unlock the full potential of each learner. Our mission is to accelerate learning. We accomplish this by creating intuitive, engaging, efficient, and effective learning experiences — grounded in research. <u>We're helping create a brighter future for students worldwide by applying our deep understanding of how learning happens and how the mind develops.</u> Learning science is the key.
MacMillan /Macmillan Education is a global publisher with a local presence. You'll find us operating in over 120 countries worldwide, <u>but our global vision does not take away from our regional focus.</u> Working locally allows us to get close to the people who matter – the students, teachers, institutions and educational authorities who use our products and with whom we've developed real and lasting relationships. Today, Macmillan Education is a name synonymous with high-quality publishing around the world.
Pearson / Our vision is to have a direct relationship with millions of lifelong learners and to link education to the way people aspire to live and work every day. To do that, we'll collaborate with a wide group of <u>partners to help shape the future of learning.</u> We believe that we all need to embrace lifelong learning, continuously acquiring new knowledge and skills to thrive in an ever-changing and increasingly connected world.
Oxford / At Oxford University Press we have a clear mission which informs everything we do— to create the highest quality academic and educational resources and services and to make them available across the world. <u>We share the University's uncompromising standards, defining qualities, and belief in the transformative power of education to inspire progress and realize human potential.</u>

Source: Publishing houses main pages

As can now be seen, publishing houses' missions are clearly oriented to promoting English language and culture, even when the core definition given to English embraces it as an international language. Pay attention to the highlighted segments to see an overall idea of their political and cultural implications.

We would like to close with a final remark in this regard: in multicultural relationships, any one of the cultures or languages with which one has contact is not superior to any other. Each culture and, consequently, each language is valid and equal in importance to the others; being different does not imply superiority or inferiority, under any circumstances.

Linguistic Imperialism from a Decolonial View

An epistemological approach to learning that embraces justice must be emancipatory, decolonial, and liberating from linguistic and cultural imperialism. It means an effort to dismantle overt and covert practices in ELT which perpetuate a monolingual view of English teaching in contexts in which other languages and cultures co-exist. Much time has elapsed since English was imposed by various forces in colonial times (Barrantes-Montero, 2018), but currently, imposition of English operates with the awareness or not completely unaware alliances of governments, policies, and some English language teachers. In this section, we will refer to linguistic imperialism to tackle one of its consequences, linguistic colonialism (Farrel, 1994; Mendoza, 2002; Pennycook, 1998): a political and cultural process in which a majority language is imposed through acculturation practices that lead to the loss of local cultures and languages.

Linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) has had a dramatic impact on contemporary ELT, exposed worldwide to denounce injustice, discrimination, and culture assimilation (Agudelo, 2007; Álvarez, 2014; Clouet, 2012; Gómez, 2015; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Meadows, 2016; Phillipson, 1994, 1996, 2003, 2006, 2009). These denounced facts have served to identify other types of power, much more effective, used to colonize beings, knowledge, and actions (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), making possible the acceptance of English linguistic colonialism as natural and inevitable.

Phillipson (1992) has taken into account the original work done by two key academics in the field, such as Pennycook (1998) and Canagarajah (2000) who argue that the transfer of English is by no means a one-way process as, “The two levels, macro and micro, global and local, do not exclude each other, quite the opposite” (Phillipson, 2009, p. 16). This functioning can be identified in some Latin American countries (Colombia, Chile) at both macro and micro levels; for instance, the ways in which local policies accommodate a new form of understanding the bilingualism concept. This new comprehension of bilingualism allows the establishment of an English-only model, while the use of Spanish is restricted in most EFL classrooms. This approach is also supported by the use of textbooks produced by multinationals such as McGraw Hill, Prentice Hall, MacMillan, and Longman, among others, that “rule” the way local English language teachers have to teach. The content of textbooks is bloated with features of English culture (national symbolism, habits, and cultural ways of

problem solving) so that their cultural contents offer little or no space to negotiate other ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Although Phillipson's work came to light back in 1992 and many others since then have added to it, linguistic colonialism as a direct consequence of neo-colonial practices in education is still increasing. For this reason, the study of linguistic imperialism is still relevant and necessary (Becker, 2003; Calvet, 2005) in these times in which globalization is the lure for imperial purposes. The increase of university degrees earned in America, Africa, Oceania, Asia, and all of Europe, as well as the continuous migration to these zones for educational purposes are presented as some of the structural reasons why English continues to dominate other cultures. The ideology of the nation-state incorporates or promotes English as the language of business, technology, commerce, and even its status as a lingua franca (Crystal, 2003), which is needed to set conditions for a modern and globalized world. The ways universities and educational institutions have been organized to guarantee some conditions to strategically maintain the preference for English is a matter of strong criticism. Indeed, what has been known as the commercialization of education commodifies the conditions to perpetuate a linguistic colonialism to the detriment of minority languages and culture. These new forms of colonization (in the name of globalization, modernity, and productivity) are dangerous because these do not only affect educational practices in their attempt to homogenize a one-language-one-world nation, but they also affect learners' processes of identity (and difference) construction to affirm other conditions of existence within their own cultures.

Within a decolonial point of view, it is truly needed to decolonize people's minds, embracing a critical understanding of how ELT is made up of political and cultural forces which compel actions. It means being alert and responsive to the ways English language teachers can be used as instruments of these new forms of colonization because of their relational identification to the English language. So, questions of these kinds should be a constant preoccupation during lesson planning and teaching: What types of actions are recommended to resist linguistic colonialism while teaching English? What strategic decision-making process favors a just and equitable teaching style in regard to culture?

Linguistic Colonialism in Colombia and Latin America

17

Colombia and Latin America have lived through raw processes of decolonization since the arrival of the Spaniards. However, much of population is still learning to understand what decolonization means in relation to economics, politics, and social policies at a macro level dimension. It is still hard to spot colonial situations in daily practices when a discourse such as *English as the language of triumph and success* gains popularity and acceptance at a micro level dimension. The preference for English is not just a question of policy makers since people

as consumers of products also negotiate with the ideological set of values that surrounds its promotion as a lingua franca for business, socialization, and success.

Calvet (1981) addresses these linguistic facts throughout history to demonstrate the ideological preparation that allows the colonial discourse to be valid and produce lethal results such as glotophagy (a process of language acculturation), based on the belief that there are higher and lower languages to exercise linguistic colonialism over the speaking peoples of the languages devoured by the hegemonic language. His analysis reveals the existence of a brand of ideological dominance represented in the communities that guarantee a subsequent practice. For Calvet (1981), it is not a coincidence that the theory of language is at the service of the different forms of colonialization.

The multinational publishers have a clear colonial purpose in the production of their texts, according to Calvet (2005). These books bear a deep burden of cultural alienation because the cultural content is almost targeting the foreign culture while the students' own culture is ignored (Canagarajah, 2000; Ozdemir & Rahimi, 2013; Ryan, 1998, 2003). Indeed, processes of whitening in which race, language prestige, habits, and values from English dominant circles are used to universalize their identities to the detriment of minoritized languages' set of cultural values and identities (Castañeda-Peña, 2018). The alienating effects foster glotophagy and also the abandonment of difference. For that reason, English language classrooms are a site to either accept or resist these effects in order to embrace intercultural practices.

Moreover, the social struggle of languages has been a constant in developing countries in which "linguistic loan" has been an exercise to borrow, adapt, and receive more easily words coming from dominant languages to minor ones. Calvet (1981) disagrees with the term "linguistic loan". He sees it as a way to accept linguistic and cultural colonization. In his view, each language must create its repertoire of its own expressions as the Latinized pronunciation of the term "CD". In this process, a resistance to linguistic colonization can be observed.

Resistance to colonization has been indeed linguistically productive in prominent cases. *Creole*, for example, emerged as a new language because it resists the ravages of colonization, precisely because of the strength of culture. The *palenquero* language (in Colombia) is also a perfect example of resistance to Spanish colonization. It means that language users have found ways to exercise power to avoid being positioned as a submissive culture.

The role of English language teachers is very important to find ways to construct representations of target languages related cultures (Menard-Warwick, 2009). In doing so, (whether incorporating cultural topics, discursive resources, or intercultural material) a sense of one's own cultural appropriation must be activated while confronting textbooks

and materials culturally oriented toward English only. A way to do it is via embracing an intercultural pedagogy to gain a balance between interactions of cultures in contact.

Interculturality to Resist Linguistic Colonialism

Intercultural pedagogies have arisen as an epistemological situated response to ensure cultural balance and appropriation in societies in which struggles to co-exist depend on discourses and actions to contest practices of homogenization and universalization (Hrvatić, 2007). The rights to be different and preserve a people's own identities, languages, and cultural features in ELT education have been pedagogically tackled within multidisciplinary projects in which teachers not only raised awareness of the inadequacies of monolithic views of culture in existing approaches and means for teaching English, but also provided relevant knowledge to embrace equitable and non-discriminatory principles to relate to languages in contact.

In EFL contexts in which policies and institutional decisions favor an English-only cultural approach, most of the time teachers are forced to work and follow textbooks supporting that approach. In some cases, when there are opportunities to exercise autonomy, teachers adapt the contents to the Colombian culture, offering alternative ways to discuss deep cultural aspects in relation to superficial ones to target content languages (English & Spanish) or even other cultures. In other words, “they find ways of having an existential relationship in the pursuit of getting to be themselves³” (Márquez-Fernández, 2006, p. 154).

Interculturality as a political endeavor of education “increases awareness and respect of difference, as well as the socio-affective capacity to see oneself through the eyes of others” (Kramsch, 2005, p. 553). In this respect, it is necessary to analyze the debate about the global knowledge society and globalization as a homogenizing phenomenon of cultures and terminator of languages and dialects guided by a hermeneutical methodology promoted in textbooks and cultural materials monolithically oriented. Within a critical view of culture, based on intercultural philosophy as a theoretical and practical basis, the inclusion of minoritized cultures is an emancipatory expression (Burch, 2005).

According to Betancourt (1994), the goal of interculturality is to enrich, grow, and maintain cooperatively united the two cultures in contact; to be more flexible, tolerant, and effective citizens in communication based on cultural rights; without leaving aside the respect that must exist for other cultures (Taylor & Morales, 2006). For interculturality, all social action is expressed through discourse and its meaning to be described, manifested, reported, analyzed, and interpreted to make the world visible and understandable.

³ Original in Spanish. Our translation.

Materials and Methods

Documentary analysis procedures were implemented to read, revise, compare, and contrast the cultural content proposed in the six English language textbooks of multinational publishers. The analysis was done through the identification of coding content components (Bowen, 2009) that constitute some dichotomous notions in which some relations such as occurrence/presence/absence/repetition and content analysis are fundamental to question textbooks (O’Leary, 2014). In doing so, the following categories were constructed: presence of Colombian (or Latin American) student culture, incorporation of superficial or deep components of culture, levels of alienation burden, instrumentation to the submissive person, and interaction of cultures.

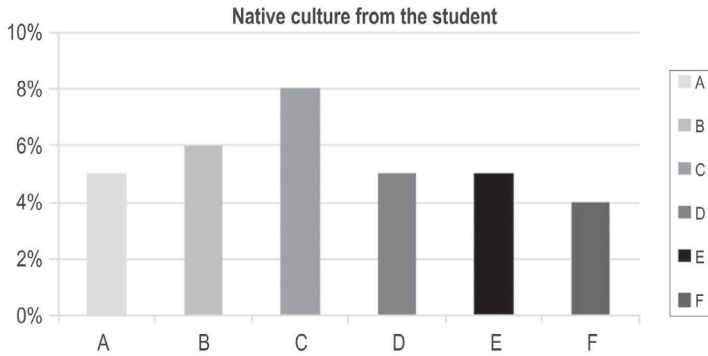
Corpus organization. To facilitate the identification process, textbooks of the multinational publishers were assigned a letter in their respective order **A:** Cambridge: Empower, **B:** McGraw Hill: Connect for English, **C:** MacMillan: Language Hub, **D:** Pearson: The Global Scale of English (GSE), **E:** Oxford: English File, **F:** Longman: Stand out.

Results and Discussion

Five thematic content components were identified and contrasted within content textbook analysis in relation to culture from a critical questioning in which local elements and intercultural principles we advocate for are integrated as part of the discussion. The main question for tackling cultural content in the six English language textbooks was formulated as follows: To what extent do the contents in these textbooks promote interculturality?

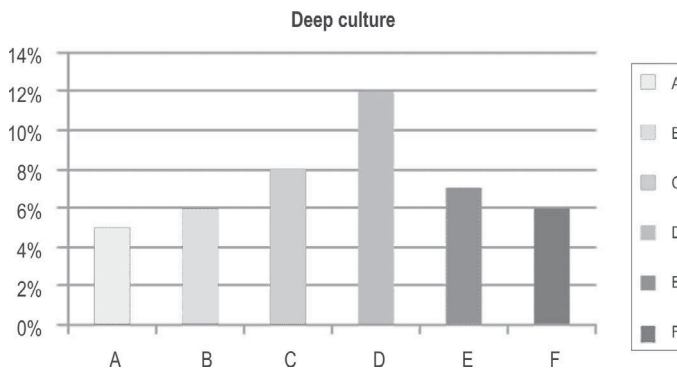
Presence of Colombian students’ local culture. The first data allowed us to compare and contrast the validity of the English language lessons incorporated in the textbooks in relation to aspects of Colombian or at least Latin American culture. In short, the data generated show that the local culture has little or no presence in the textbooks analyzed. If it is understood that English is a language for international communication, a description of different sociocultural contexts must be provided as an extension of the places, cities, and cultural devices presented in pictures and dialogues which belong to English language mainstream cultures. Most of the pictures and their descriptive and referred texts were introduced resembling the idea of the American dream with notions of freedom as well as economic and sociocultural prosperity.

The presence of local or Latin American culture is very scarce as can be seen from the percentages of each text in the above graph, in which Language Hub was the textbook with the highest Latin American cultural reference.



Graph 1. The student's native culture.

Superficial and deep components of culture. All units and pages of the textbooks were examined to detect those activities in which culture was incorporated. Each topic was classified according to surface culture (emblematic and representative elements) and deep culture features (beliefs, values, and ideologies) (Gómez, 2015). Topics superficially addressed were extensive in comparison to those with a deeper cultural treatment. Topics such as holidays, different sites, food, and famous people were classified taking into account their static, neutral, and homogeneous introduction. In addition, topics that seemed to be more complex were examined according to their possibilities to create controversial or congratulatory agreements, heterogeneous options of reactions, and transformative features

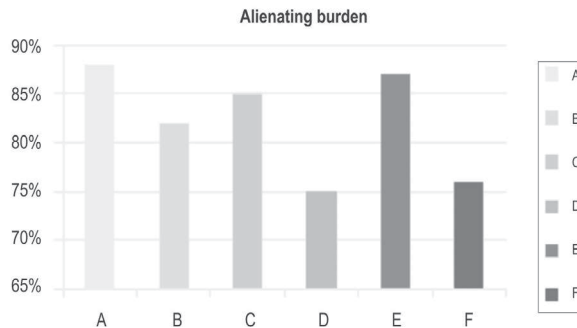


Graph 2. Deep culture.

during their presentation. These topics dealt with family ties, ethics, ownership, space and proxemics, sex roles, ceremonies and rituals, as well as values and ideologies.

As can be observed, the textbook GSE had a majority presence of topics of the kind, followed by the Language Hub textbook. In general terms, the overall percentage of topics dedicated to fostering intercultural discussions based on a deep treatment of culture is low. It means that teachers who embrace intercultural approaches must integrate or complement the material to extend the discussion.

Levels of alienation burden. The alienating burden that underlies these textbooks is extremely high given the percentage of topics and interactions in which, for example, appropriate phrases and behaviors are portrayed as the rule. Some role plays were aligned to sustain men's leadership roles while interacting with women. Other dialogues were constructed to determine cultural patterns or rituals (to give compliments, apologize for everything, to show encouragement, etc.). In some topics about tourism and marketing,



Graph 3. Alienating burden.

some generalizations were made about the supremacy of the US dollar as the currency for international trade and marketing, and English language use to communicate with others in touristic places. Also, some symbols and cultural artifacts (signs, objects) were introduced with a sense of cultural superiority, hence to be emulated and recognized worldwide.

22

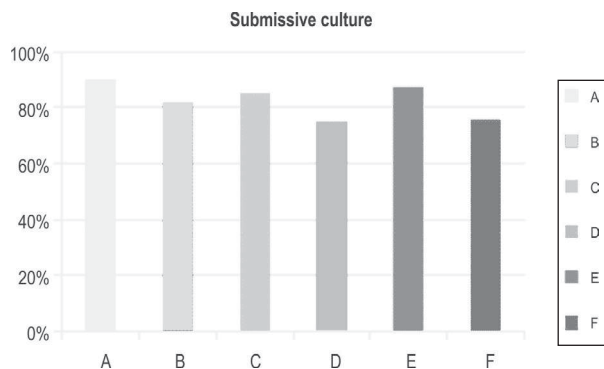
Some situations in which learners had to imagine how the future could be were located in cities such as New York, Washington D.C., London, Australia (to mention a few), depicting an illusionary reality for English language learners.

Alienation as the sense of (self) estrangement can be experienced by English language learners who do not recognize themselves in social situations or conventionally established

values from the cultural components of English taught in textbook lessons. The absence of the learners' own culture can be experienced also as a lack of context-based reality to react or respond to the target language without experiencing an acculturation process.

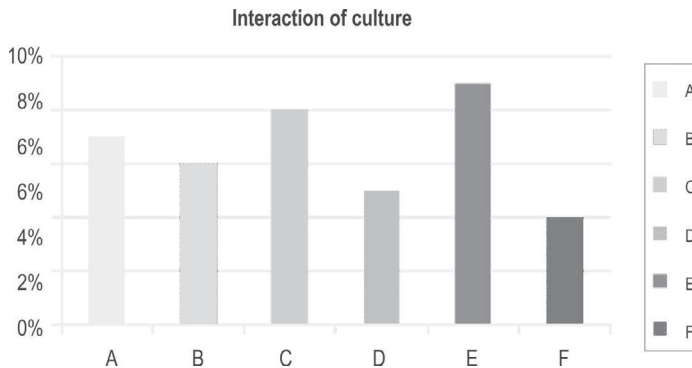
This category, alienating burden, was the second highest category among the others. Graph 3 above showed that four of the textbooks have more than 80% of alienating oriented content to impose a set of values, habits, rituals, and behaviors as norms. The ways these contents are presented in the textbooks articulate tacitly arguments that can be classified into three groups (Phillipson 1992), related to skills (intrinsic arguments to English: what English is), resources (extrinsic arguments to English: what English has), and uses (arguments in English), regarding the functionality of English: (what English does).

Instrumentation to the submissive person. The textbooks promote a submissive culture of the possible emigrant to English-speaking countries. In general, submissive people tend to avoid discrepancies, no matter how minimal. They usually make sacrifices to avoid these “clashes of wills”, dedicating time, effort, and resources in order not to antagonize others, or simply feeling impatient or angry. In this way, an instrumentation is made to the submissive person who seeks the protection or influence of the native of English and even mental dependence. Some work and academic situations represented in dialogues and readings were guided to replicate behaviors in which native English speakers were in control of situations. Also, these situations included ritualized patterns in which working conflicts were closed with a redundancy notice as something normal and culturally acceptable. In psychology, it is called theory of submission or learned helplessness. Learned (impotence) is a term emerging from psychology that refers to the condition of a human or animal that has “learned” to behave passively, with the subjective feeling of not having the capacity to do anything and not responding even though there are real opportunities available to change the



Graph 4. Submissive culture.

aversive situation. “That is the way it is” became a norm based on an idealized English-native culture. In this way, the submissive person tries not to attract the attention of others in order to avoid conflicts and humiliating situations.



Graph 5. Interaction of cultures.

This graph showed the highest percentages of repetition in ruling people’s behaviors as submissive to the English language dominant-culture model. Each textbook reached nearly 80% of recurrence in this aspect.

Interaction of cultures. It is worth mentioning that this final category goes hand in hand with the first one (presence of Colombian or Latin American culture). From an intercultural point of view, the possibilities to give both cultures (foreign and native) the same dimension of deep cultural treatment are scarce. Even when some Latin American places are introduced, the possibilities to make comparisons at the same level of abstraction and coverage are dissimilar.

That is to say that an effective interaction between cultures as Graph 5 indicates is not represented. The native culture of English—whether British, American, Canadian or Australian—is given prevalence and superiority.

Conclusion

This research article analyzed the cultural components of six English language textbooks used in Colombian universities to pinpoint their monolingual cultural approach as detrimental to embracing intercultural pedagogy. Although this fact can be illustrated through the categories discussed above, these research results are an invitation to English

language teachers and university curricula administrators/designers to favor multicultural textbooks or the inclusion of a balanced intercultural-oriented content of both languages (Spanish and English) to contribute to the development of a bilingual education curricula. The role of English language teachers is of paramount importance to extend the intercultural dimension of languages teaching in scenarios where textbooks are culturally biased and used as acculturation instruments that favor linguistic colonialism.

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Authentic Materials and Tasks as Mediators to Develop EFL Students' Intercultural Competence

Materiales auténticos y tareas como mediadores para desarrollar competencias interculturales en estudiantes de inglés

Bernal Pinzón, Alix Norely¹

Abstract

This article reports on a study carried out in a foreign language course at a private Colombian university. Its purpose was to identify the role of authentic materials and tasks, based on cultural topics, in the development of intercultural competence in third-level English students. The pedagogical implementation of the activities was designed under criteria proposed by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) to evaluate the material with cultural content. In regard to intercultural competence, Byram's (2002) dimension of intercultural communicative competence was the support for planning and implementing the tasks. In this qualitative action research study, two surveys, one interview, and teacher field notes were used to collect data. Findings indicate that students were able to understand interculturality, to show respect for other cultures, and to demonstrate interest in getting to know other societies. Likewise, the students reported their willingness to be open to discussing topics related to cultural aspects.

Keywords: authentic materials, authentic tasks, cultural content, intercultural competence.

Resumen

Este artículo reporta un estudio desarrollado en un curso de lengua extranjera en una universidad privada colombiana. El propósito principal era identificar el rol que los materiales auténticos y las tareas basadas en contenidos culturales tienen en el desarrollo de competencias interculturales en estudiantes de inglés de tercer nivel. La implementación pedagógica de las actividades fue diseñada bajo el criterio propuesto por Cortazzi y Jin (1999) para evaluar el material con contenido cultural. En lo que respecta

¹ Alix Norely Bernal Pinzón is an English teacher, she currently works at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia in the Faculty of Distance Studies. She holds an MA in language teaching. alix.bernal@uptc.edu.co
<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9732-6028>

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a la competencia intercultural, planeación e implementación de las tareas, se tomó como referencia el modelo de las dimensiones de la competencia comunicativa intercultural de Byram (2002). En esta investigación acción dos encuestas, una entrevista y los diarios de campo de la docente fueron usados para la recolección de datos. Los hallazgos indican que los estudiantes son capaces de entender la interculturalidad, de demostrar respeto por otras culturas y manifestar interés para aprender sobre estas. De la misma manera, mostraron una actitud abierta para discutir temas relacionados con la cultura.

Palabras clave: material auténtico, tareas auténticas, contenidos culturales, competencia intercultural.

Introduction

According to Hymes (1996), language plays a crucial role in the social life of a community; a lack of cultural understanding among members of several communities often leads to social inequality that has yet to be recognized. This statement should make language teachers reflect upon the importance of knowing how to communicate with a member from a different culture; understanding that different culture does not mean only the target language culture but also students' culture, bearing in mind that they bring to the classroom their own beliefs, their conceptions about life, etc. Likewise, English language teachers need to have in mind that learning a foreign language goes beyond acquiring linguistics habits and grammar structures; it is also about learning how to communicate with others by using the target language, interacting with others, and also recognizing the value of their own culture.

English language classes ought to be a space to develop intercultural competence in students in regard to making language teaching an interdisciplinary matter in which culture is a fundamental component. For instance, Agudelo (2007) reports his experience teaching a course titled "Language, Culture, and Diversity" at a language teacher preparation program in Medellín with seventh-semester students. His purpose was to find out the impact of the use of an intercultural approach. Agudelo (2007) claimed that the implementation of an intercultural approach for language teaching sought to help future language teachers understand not only the multiple socio-cultural factors implied in teaching a foreign language, but also the importance of critical cultural awareness to be able to understand other cultures without losing perspective of the local reality. Thus, from this perspective, the exploration of the local culture was as valid and necessary as that of the target culture.

30

To explore this topic in more depth, I took into consideration my previous knowledge from teaching the English language; I started to consider other ways to address the topics to call students' attention and to offer them means to become respectful subjects able to interact effectively in an ever changing society. Research questions and objectives were set under a qualitative action research; two surveys, a semi-structured interview, and teacher field notes were used to collect data with the purpose of answering the question: *What is the role*

of authentic materials and tasks, based on cultural topics, in the development of intercultural competences in third-level English students at a private university?

Literature Review

In this section the main constructs that ground this experience are presented. They are: authentic materials, and tasks, culture in an EFL classroom, and intercultural competence.

Authentic materials. The use of authentic materials in EFL classrooms may be useful for teachers and students to develop not only grammatical skills but also to reinforce students' ability to understand and contextualize the language used in the classroom and the language people use in other social contexts. Furthermore, English language teachers can develop their creativity when designing and adapting material to promote more learning of the target language and its use.

For the development of this project, authentic materials are taken as the material that is not designed for teaching purposes; it means that the material utilized is not commercially produced to teach a target language itself, which can include EFL/ESL textbooks, audiotapes, workbooks, worksheets, etc. As a matter of fact, the authentic material utilized was American and Colombian currency (bills and coins), movies, and history texts about religions. Furthermore, the students participating in the study had the opportunity to share what they had learnt from those tasks with their classmates. These students designed and used posters, brochures, and videos for sharing what they had learnt from the tasks developed.

Porter and Roberts (1981) show several differences between authentic materials and non-authentic materials in terms of spoken language. For example, conversations recorded for language texts often have a slow pace, have particular structures which recur with obtrusive frequency, and have very distinct turn-taking of speakers. Also, hesitations (such as “uh’s” and “mm’s”) are often missing, and sentences are very well-formed with few if any mistakes. In other words, what the language learners hear in class is different from the language in other social contexts.

In one of the semi-structured interviews, for instance, the participating students claimed feeling nervous when speaking in English due to feeling afraid of making mistakes or misusing the grammar rules. In many cases, the language heard in EFL classrooms is a stilted use of spoken English; the real objective of teaching this language is lost because of a need to teach specific language points in a method that some teachers may feel would be more understandable for learners.

Nunan (1999) also defines authentic materials as spoken or written language data that have been produced in the course of genuine communication, and not specifically written

for purposes of language teaching. In fact, in his teaching practices, he encourages students to bring into the classroom their own samples of authentic language data from “real-world” contexts outside of the classroom. In this sense, the use of authentic materials to address cultural topics in an EFL classroom allows students to practice “real” language, to listen to different accents, understand their classmates, and make themselves understood.

The main idea for developing this research project was then to encourage the participating students to develop their intercultural competence by using English as a means to express ideas, feelings, and opinions; and to bring the “real world” into the classroom in terms not only of the English language but also as a space to exchange intercultural encounters. This purpose looked to help the participating students become more critical about happenings in our country and the world.

Contradictorily, authors as Kilickaya (2004) claim that authentic materials add a burden on teachers as these may contain difficult vocabulary and structures that need more effort to be simplified to make them appropriate for their learners. This statement helped me, as the researcher, to analyze the role of authentic materials on the participating students before, during, and after developing the task, and also to think about the questions students should be asked.

I always asked my students how they felt using that kind of material, how hard it was to read and understand, and to write about. During the development of the tasks, I became a support for my students i.e. I always made sure that they understood the materials. Using authentic materials in an EFL classroom is not an easy task, but time consuming; however, English language teachers should support language learning and help learners value their own culture and avoid generalizations among other cultures.

Authentic tasks. Scholars such as Brown and Menasche (as cited in Shoomossi & Ketabi, 2007, p. 152) provide a controversial view of authentic tasks by noting that “there is probably no such thing as ‘real task authenticity’ since classrooms are, by nature artificial.” However, Widdowson (as cited in Mishan, 2005, p. 98) claims that “it is the relationship between the learner and the input text, and the learner’s response to it, that should be characterised as authentic, rather than the input text itself.” Thus in foreign language learning contexts, where exposure to the language being learned is scarce, English language teachers should create spaces within the classrooms with the objective of making students have access to authentic tasks that permit them to study the language structure and to focus on more than one skill at the same time.

Through my experience, it was common to assign pedagogical tasks to students to grade them about a single grammatical structure and almost always by using only one skill per task; as a result, students came to believe that the English language was something they learned by pieces and not being able to use it to know or talk about their own culture and others’.

Thus, there was an imperative need to implement tasks which would facilitate learners to meaningfully and purposefully use English within varied contexts and contents, valuing these rather than merely grammar structures.

Language and culture in an EFL classroom. The integration of culture in language teaching is based on the assumption that one cannot be explored without the other; they are interrelated (Kramsch, 1998; Lesow-Hurley, 2000; Sellami, 2000). Teaching culture is certainly not a recent idea; on the contrary, there is a history of the use of culture while teaching a foreign language. According to Lessard-Clouston (as cited in Thanasoulas, 2001, p. 3), “In the past, people learnt a foreign language to study its literature, and this was the medium of culture.” This is why language learners had to read extensive literary books such as *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet*. By reading these literary books, they were supposed to learn the structures of the target language and the expressions that speakers of that language were more likely to use.

Nowadays, in Colombia, in the Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) field, there have been studies related to addressing culture and interculturality. Those studies cover materials to develop ICC (Rico, 2012), the development of intercultural competence skills (Ramos, 2013), critical intercultural learning through topics of deep culture in an EFL classroom (Gómez Rodríguez, 2015, and the cultural content in EFL textbooks (Granados-Beltrán, 2016). Although the topic of intercultural competence has interested English language teachers in Colombia, the reality of these teachers' practices may be different; the teaching of language forms may continue being the focus (Alonso & Fernández, 2013).

That is the case of the private university where this current study took place. According to the design of its syllabus, English language is still seen as a subject to be taken for graduation requirements, learners focus on studying grammar structures and getting ready to take a test that assesses their knowledge about those grammar rules learnt in the English language classes. Thus, culture in this context is not in their goals as addressing culture in the English language classroom. As a consequence, learners give much priority to test scores since passing the courses is a requisite for their degree.

Considering the Colombian Ministry of Education, one can say there is no teaching of a language without teaching the culture of that language. Language teachers may sometimes forget the real necessity of learning a target language: the importance of using languages to know the differences and commonalities that people have around the world by becoming more respectful and responsible citizens.

Intercultural competence. I understand this concept mainly from the definition given by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) and from a teacher's guide to IC (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). The reason for using these sources is that they both have nurtured this research project on how to address culture in

an EFL classroom. When looking at what the CEFR says on intercultural competence, it first mentions *intercultural awareness*. It means that an individual is aware of the fact that people belong to many social communities, wherein national culture is one of these (Council of Europe, 2001). Intercultural awareness refers to “an understanding that two people from the same country do not share the exact beliefs or traditions because of merely sharing the same national culture” (p. 103). This type of thinking promotes the perception of people from other countries as complex individuals and aims to inhibit a way of thinking in which people are perceived through national stereotypes.

Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) give a more detailed definition of intercultural competence (IC) by first explaining the concept and by mentioning the component of IC; hence, we understand or see what is needed in order to say that someone is intercultural competent. These authors describe IC communication as based on respect and understanding of different cultures without only judging the conversational partner from the culture he or she comes from. To be able to perform this type of communication, they argue that “the individual needs to develop a competence within three components, which are considered to be IC components: Skills, knowledge and attitudes” (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002, p. 10).

The knowledge component refers to knowledge about cultural aspects of the target culture (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002, p. 12). The attitudes refer to the willingness of the individual to understand, which is the basis of achieving IC, since negative attitudes towards exploring and familiarizing oneself with different cultures will result in not actually understanding them. The third component, skills, refers to the procedural knowledge of IC that an individual needs to develop. It includes the competence of being able to relate to different aspects in the target culture, and in that way get a better understanding of the target culture.

For this research project the three concepts of intercultural competence were taken into consideration. Those concepts supported me, as the researcher, at the time of deciding about the tasks carried out during the period of the development of the tasks. At the pre-task, the participating students were exposed to cultural aspects from the target culture and their own home culture so that they were able to get more familiar with the topics; then, during the task, the students could address cultural topics through oral presentations and written reports. Likewise, during the post tasks, they had the opportunity to include some sort of reflection on what was studied.

Research Participants and Context

This project research was carried out in an English language class with students from sixth semester, third level, at a private university in Tunja, Colombia. There were 22 students, 13 females and 9 males. The university offers three mandatory levels of English

in its 21 academic programs. After taking the three levels of English, students ought to take a proficiency test that is designed by the language department, based on its syllabus, as a requisite for the attainment of their degree.

A series of tasks adapted from the taxonomy of intercultural activities proposed by Alonso and Fernández (2013), based on Byram's ICC model (2002), was designed for the study (see Table 1 above). This design also considered theories about authentic materials in an EFL classroom, as the ones by Brinton (1991) and Gebhard (1996), who see authentic materials as a way to bring real language into the English classroom. For this study, authentic tasks were taken into consideration as an approach to include the participants in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting within the target language, while their attention was on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge to express meaning (Nunan, 1999, p. 25).

The English language classes are heterogeneous; students come from different backgrounds and their ages range from twenty to twenty-six years old. They have medium socio economic status. This level of English was created with the aim of helping students to reinforce what they had learnt during the previous two levels of English. The syllabus is designed based on the two previous levels.

Research Methodology

The activities proposed to find an answer to the research question of this study were planned for development over a month and a half. The tasks were adapted from the taxonomy of intercultural activities proposed by Alonso and Fernández (2013), based on Byram's (2002) model of ICC, as seen in Table 1 below. The activities also follow the model for EFL materials development and the use of authentic materials for beginner students (Guariento & Morely, 2001).

Instruments and procedures for data collection. Two surveys were applied, one at the beginning of the course and the other at the end of the course; also, an oral semi-structured interview and teacher's field notes were used to collect data. These instruments compiled the students' insights and the teacher's perceptions about the activities carried out during the study. Furthermore, these instruments were a great support for identifying the most suitable information that was oriented toward giving an answer to the question and reaching the objectives of the present study.

By taking the research question into consideration, the data were analyzed through the coding process suggested by Patton (2002). This process helped identify the participants' production of similar opinions, themes, and thoughts that gradually became representative patterns in the whole data. That is to say, the coding process is a grounded approach method

(Freeman, 1999) that prompts one to examine the data several times with the objective of triangulating the information collected and defining patterns.

In this sense, the analysis of data was done following the Grounded Theory data analysis (Freeman, 1999). It is a data analysis procedure in which the theory emerges from the data. Afterwards, making notes about the researcher's first impressions, labeling relevant words, phrases, sentences or sections were necessary. Subsequently, deciding which codes were the most important to create categories by bringing several codes together was done. Two categories emerged. To ensure trustworthiness, the information was triangulated by dragging information from all the sources to the categories previously identified "to minimize the danger of a one-sided representation" (Richards, 2003, p. 251).

Once the patterns were identified from the participants' responses about the tasks developed and the material used, the statement of themes took place in such a way that those categories represented the students' insights about the target language culture, their home culture, the tasks, and the topics. The participants' names were kept confidential by using fictional names in the findings.

Findings

Data collected demonstrated that the implementation of authentic materials and tasks constructed on cultural aspects promoted the development of certain behaviors and attitudes surrounding interculturality. For instance, the participating students were able to compare other cultures, practices, and representations with their own. They pinpointed stereotyped representations that other cultures may have towards us, and that Colombians may have towards other cultures. Also, they manifested willingness to find out more information of their own culture and other cultures (this is more elaborated on below).

Tudor (2001) affirms that teaching materials cannot be neutral because they have to reflect a "set of social and cultural values which are inherent in their make-up... and explain a value system, implicitly and explicitly" (p. 73). In the process of carrying out the tasks, it was visible that despite learners not having the sufficient level of vocabulary to give their opinions in English, they had developed their thoughts about specific topics. For instance, when one of the students asserted that it is common to find on the bills only politicians, not "regular" people. That comment made other learners realize a common feature that the United States and Colombia currency have. And also it made them wonder about an item they probably had not thought about before.

Next, I present the three main categories that emerged during data analysis to answer the research question: What is the role of authentic materials and tasks, based on cultural topics, in the development of intercultural competences in third-level English students at a private university?

Table 1. *Implemented Tasks*

Criteria	Tasks	Intercultural Component	Authentic Material
1. Beliefs and behavior: moral, religious beliefs, daily routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Getting to know some of the greatest religions in the world. ✓ Students read one of the religions in groups of four and learners will find information as a short background of the religion, rituals, beliefs and traditions. ✓ Students also talk about their experiences about their religious beliefs, why they believe or not. 	<p>Knowledge (savoir)</p> <p>Attitudes (savoir être)</p>	<p>Excerpts from a book called: <i>The Greatest Religions in the World</i></p>
2. National History: historical and contemporary events seen as makers of national identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ States from the USA. ✓ Students were given a coin from the United States, then, they have to look up for specific information about a state. 	<p>Knowledge (savoir)</p>	<p>Currency from the United States (coins)</p>
3. National History: historical and contemporary events seen as makers of national identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Coins and bills from Colombia. ✓ Students had to investigate some historical facts about the person who appears on the bill as well as the representative animal that are on the coins. 	<p>Knowledge (savoir)</p> <p>Skills (savoir engager)</p>	<p>Currency from Colombia. (coins and bills)</p>
4. Social Identity and Social groups: social class, regional identity and ethnic minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Students watched a movie related to a tribe in Somalia and its traditions. ✓ Students were exposed to African and English accents. 	<p>Knowledge (savoir)</p> <p>Skills (savoir engager)</p>	<p>Movie: <i>The Desert Flower</i></p>
5. Social Identity and Social groups: social class, regional identity and ethnic minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Students watched a movie about a Latin woman who is a guest in a business dinner. ✓ They saw types of interaction among people as to how they treat each other that belong to the same circle and how they treat a woman who does not belong to that circle. 	<p>Attitude (savoir être)</p>	<p>Movie: <i>Beatriz at Dinner</i></p>

The first category refers to how the participating students demonstrated their understanding of interculturality as something different in all cultures and how they recognized others and valued their home culture. That first category was named *Towards Understanding Interculturality*. Two subcategories emerged: *Appraising students' homes* and *establishing relationships*. The second category denotes *Thinking from another perspective* towards other cultures and their home culture; a subcategory belonging to this category is *evaluating differences*.

Category 1: Towards understanding interculturality. The participating students began to notice that there were many things they did not know about their own culture. Schools and universities sometimes do not contribute to addressing those topics in class, exploiting the resources they have access to, debating about history, and sharing students' backgrounds with the aim of making students think in their culture. The importance of having those sorts of topics in an English language class was evident in a question about the intercultural topics carried out in the English class²:

Maria: I found the tasks interesting, I have known about my culture. For example, the coins and bills, we do not pay attention to those things, we just talk about the new coins, but we are not interested in getting to know what they symbolize. Until someone comes and says, look what you have. Then, we start thinking about what we have. (Interview 1. Q1)

In this sense, the students started recognizing the lack of knowledge about their home cultures in an English language classroom and outside of it; furthermore, they commented that some topics which they thought were familiar to them due to the use they give them every day as are the bills and the coins; they realized they were unfamiliar when asked for first time about the characters and the symbols that were on them. As Maria mentioned the coins and bills as something that everybody had in their hands, but it was like nobody was interested in looking at them and investigating who those people were printed on the bills, or those animals on the coins. The use of authentic materials in the English classes not only provided new vocabulary and presented the grammatical rules to the students, but also they permitted the participants to explore topics about which they probably had no idea. It can be evident in the following excerpts.

Carolina: It think is good to have this topics in the English class because we learned many things about other countries and our country. For instance; I did not know about the Guacari tree, that the five-hundred-peso coin has, I did not know that it paid homage to it. I did not know it was a Colombian tree and neither knew about the spectacled bear, that it lives in Boyacá. (Interview1. Q1).

Lina: When I read about the spectacled bear; I found that it is in danger of extinction, after reading that I realized ... I did not know he was in danger of extinction. And, what are we doing wrong for this to happen? (Interview 1. Q5).

² Students' responses were translated for publication purposes.

In the same way, in the task related to coins and bills from the United States and Colombia, the students said:

It was good to know about the USA coins but was also important to know about our coins; we have never done an activity in which we talk about our country in an English class. (Teacher's field notes # 4).

Along with the statement above, English language teachers can certainly utilize more authentic materials inside the language classrooms, to let students not merely use the target language but also learn new things about their own context, all by using the target language as a mediator to increase their knowledge and develop their curiosity.

Mauricio: It was nice to know about other cultures but also to know about my department; there were many things I did not know about my department. (Survey 2. Q3)

Maria: I rned things I did not know about my department, and I was born there in Casanare. (Interview 1 Q5)

Additionally, the use of authentic materials in an EFL classroom permits students to learn culture in depth and to avoid stereotypes; also to comprehend their history and to value their cultural backgrounds. The utilization of authentic materials is not an easy task, it is time consuming; however, it is worthy to see learners being motivated trying to use the language, learning not only new words but also learning facts that make them feel important, as was seen in Mauricio's and Maria's responses above when they said that they did not know many things about their hometowns.

Appraising students' home. This subcategory emerged from the repetition of patterns in the survey, interview, and teacher's field notes. When the students reacted to the culture-based materials, they challenged home culture policies, acknowledged some aspects of the foreign culture represented in the materials, reshaped their beliefs, expressed surprise, reshaped views of the foreign cultures, compared the cultures they were exposed to, and valued the richness of their own culture. Some examples are the following:

[After watching the movie Beatriz at Dinner one student commented:]

I liked that she feels so proud of her culture and her background. I thought about us as Colombians, we sometimes feel embarrassed about many things; for example: to dance Carranguera music or to say that we are farmers or that we are poor... Most of us try to be another person. (Teacher's field notes # 5)

This movie caused the students to reflect upon the role Latin people play in a country as the United States. They could see themselves reflected in the main character; a person who was a hard worker, took care of the environment, and had a dissimilar way to see life from those who were her guests. The main character was raised in Mexico with very similar values as people from Colombia, whereas wealthy people were raised to have the power, to have a recognizable status in society. That is why there were comments as:

"I liked that she feels so proud of her culture and her background."

This shows that the students, by watching this movie, recognized the worth of their home culture in relation to its values and family nearness; they made comparisons with the American culture, especially with the family in the movie; they recognized the qualities and the richness their home culture had. In addition, a student illustrated:

"I thought about us as Colombians, we sometimes feel embarrassed about many things; for example: to dance Carranguera music or to say that we are farmers or that we are poor... Most of us try to be another person."

He included himself as part of those Colombians who sometimes feel embarrassed of accepting their backgrounds. Certainly, the movie, one way or another, made the students appreciate their roots and culture more; they thought that their culture probably had other valuable things that probably other cultures lacked.

Along the same lines are Maria's and Mauricio's opinions:

Maria: We sometimes try to follow stereotypes, I mean to copy things from other cultures, and we don't know the beautiful things that our country has... ah there are many things we feel embarrassed about... (Interview 1 Q2).

Mauricio: To value what I am and who I am. (Survey 2 Q5).

They completely approved the opinion above; they started comparing their home culture with the one represented in that wealthy family in the movie: that most of the time showed a family that cared a lot about showing off in a consumer society. Those types of families are rarely presented in textbooks or contrived material. Exposing learners to this kind of materials makes them think critically about other cultures and their home culture. They increase not only students' knowledge about vocabulary and grammar, but also other perspectives and ways of living.

Establishing relationships. By means of reading the data, it was seen that when the students began understanding interculturality, they started thinking more openly about other cultures. It was represented in their opinions about respecting other cultures and other points of view. In addition, they showed their intention to investigate their home cultures and other cultures with the purpose of understanding the world as a place that is full of practices, beliefs, thoughts, and diverse peoples. This can be visible in the students' responses to the questions about what they had taken or learned from the tasks based on culture:

Berenice: To respect the differences, to see that there are many people in the world that think differently and that live different. (Survey 2. Q5)

Carolina: I have always thought that one must respect other ways to think and believe in order for them to respect our beliefs too. As I read about the Amish, they believe in God but in an old manner; and that they believe that way ummm it is ok, they come from another culture. (Interview 1 Q4)

During the round table discussion, when the students were discussing religions; one of the students commented:

It is important to respect those beliefs, because our parents believed that, because of our ancestors.” (Teacher’s field notes # 1)

As is evident in Carolina’s opinion, when she said, *“They come from another culture,”* one can infer that what she tried to explain was the fact that people come from different social groups, which shape the way they think, feel, or behave. Also, this student’s comment during the development of a task reinforced that idea (*Because our parents believed that, because of our ancestors” [Teacher’s field notes # 1]*). By having in mind the students’ opinions in regard to how they saw others, the data showed that they were developing their awareness of similarities and differences among themselves.

As Stern (as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 216) claims: “One of the most important aims of culture teaching is to help the learner gain an understanding of the native speaker’s perspective.” It is a matter of the L2 learner “becoming sensitive to the state of mind of individuals and groups within the target language community” (p. 217). In the study, all of the participating students commented in their responses on the importance to investigate whenever a topic is not well known.

This clearly demonstrates that, when students are exposed to intercultural topics and have the opportunity to talk and see themselves from another perspective, they begin developing an understanding and a sense of respect together with tolerance in the direction of others as unique individuals. They also think about their own beliefs as a way to continue with their traditions and belong to a certain social group. Those opinions can be verified in the teacher’s field notes; when the students were sharing their knowledge about religions in a round table discussion, there was a comment by one of the students:

“Most religious people do not know with certainty why they belong to a specific religion” (Teacher’s field notes # 4).

This opinion was given when the student asserted that he did not belong to any religion because he did not know why people had religions. The interesting point here is that, at the beginning, they just started sharing what they had found in the readings and talking about what had surprised them. Then, when this student gave his outlook about religions and the reason why he did not believe in any religion, they started talking among themselves, analyzing wars and how human beings took advantage of people’s beliefs to sometimes discriminate against others:

Mauricio: One starts to understand that each religion has a supreme being and it is seen from different perspectives; and start understanding better the problematic situation that is caused by religions; it should be

that way, since the human being should be more comprehensive and instead of being excluded being included. (Interview 1, Q4).

As Cope and Kalantzis (2000, p. 18) assert: “learning to be intercultural involves much more than just knowing about another culture, it involves learning to understand how one’s culture shapes perceptions of oneself, of the world, and our relationship with others.” English language teachers ought to comprehend the importance of giving students the opportunity to recognize their own culture, to value and to understand how the place where they were born, their families’ beliefs and customs have shaped their identity and the way they interact with others.

That evidence of understanding culture was not only demonstrated in the students’ responses to a set of questions asked by the teacher, but also in the development of the classes, when they had to work in groups of three or four, and had to cope with classmates that had different opinions or understood differently what they were trying to extract from the material. In these cases, most of the students showed respect towards different estimations since they saw their partners as representatives of dissimilar cultural backgrounds.

Category 2: Thinking from other perspectives. This category appears after one notices the participating students’ repetition about the importance of trying to see different perspectives before judging others. It was remarkable, overall, after watching the movie *Beatriz at Dinner*; they had to represent one of the characters of the movie and be in his/her shoes. This task allowed them to analyze why people think, act, and are different depending on their backgrounds and past experiences. Hearing some of the students identify their own feelings through the main character’s emotions about a particular situation was remarkable. It implies that the students started to develop empathy since, in their opinions, they did not seem to judge the behavior of anybody in the movie; instead, they tried to think from their perspectives without judging. There were opinions as:

It was interesting being in Beatriz’ and Frank’s shoes. It was difficult to analyze the whole situation, because we give opinions about people, but we do not know what is behind them; or we do not give them the opportunity to know them just because we do not like them, as Beatriz did with Frank. (Teacher’s field notes # 5).

Berenice: “It is important to analyze the situations and analyze people, above all when we do not know them very well, because we only see a little part of those people” (Interview 1 Q 3).

Mauricio: We could see from the activities we developed that all of us are different, we Colombians or Boyacenses are different, and we should not judge others. Instead of doing that, we must know and accept others’ opinions without judging (Survey 2 Q 5).

These comments show that most of the students were able to identify problematic representations that people in the movie held of other cultures and of their own. Importantly, the students did not assume the role of judges when developing the tasks in which they had to put themselves in the shoes of one of the two main characters of the movie. Their

attitude towards others was flexible and they concluded (or agreed?) on the importance to be open to other opinions, to be strong when defending their thoughts; they mostly talked about the need to not judge without thinking.

Most of the students seemed motivated to participate and give their opinions. For this task, the students worked in groups of four people; they chose a character and prepared their presentations. The teacher helped them in constructing their sentences and pronunciation. Moreover, the teacher and students negotiated language: they were allowed to use Spanish when they wanted to clarify something or to make themselves understood. In one of the group discussions, the students were talking about situations or contexts in which they could see people behaving like Beatriz or Frank. And one of them said:

"There are people very insistent in trying to convince others to think the way they think. That happens with religions and politics". (Teacher's field notes # 5)

This kind of data confirms that when learners are exposed to authentic materials and cultural tasks, they use those opportunities to be critical, to express and understand the diverse points of view which enhance their perspectives, make them analyze and accept differences, and be able to recognize commonalities among other cultures. As Kramsch (1999) clarifies, an intercultural speaker is a tolerant and open-minded person who is able to interact with other cultures by taking into account cultural differences.

English language teachers thus need to use their classrooms to approach this sort of situations that people may experience every day, especially in university contexts. This practice can provide learners with the development of other skills, not only the ones proposed by the syllabus, but the ones they need to have to become integral people, be respectful and tolerant, listen to others, and act according to their principles. This is possible to do if teachers distribute their classes teaching what the program claims.

Robinson (1998) and Cheung (2001) state two types of knowledge that take place inside schools: one is related to the subject matter and the other is concerned with the world. English language teachers are faced with the need to support developing intercultural competence in the classrooms. For the development of this study both types of knowledge were kept in mind when applying the tasks.

Conclusions

The present study revealed that when students are exposed to authentic materials and also to tasks based on culture, they have the opportunity to develop their intercultural competence, to expand their knowledge not merely in the language as a code but also to be exposed to real language, to real situations that happen in their contexts. As a matter of fact, there are changes on how students perceive the learning of a language and how important it

is having something to say in that foreign language, not only to know how to label things in the English language but actually to put together vocabulary to express ideas.

English language teachers play a relevant role in helping students understand the reality they are living and reshaping regarding their ways of thinking or the way they perceive the world. Throughout my experience, it was always a concern how I could support students in their growth as human beings and professionals. There was a need to provide different English language lesson plans to permit students to develop their curiosity, be better listeners and, overall, recognize themselves as part of a society that needs more respectful, tolerant and critical social beings.

Based on experiences throughout the course, the use of authentic materials should begin when students are in their first level of English language learning, so that this practice can enable them to develop the habit of using different sorts of materials. In fact, English language teachers ought to begin with short stories, comics, recipes, menus, songs or excerpts taken from books to get students accustomed to having contact with “real” language. As a result, when they get in higher levels, the use of this material can increase their contact with the target language and culture.

Learners’ insights showed that if they feel challenged, they will find the way to solve the grammatical abundance from the authentic material. Nonetheless, English language teachers need to take the time to read the material before bringing it to the classroom. They need to see if it requires adaptation for students so that they will not feel overwhelmed with the richness of the vocabulary. In addition, English language teachers need to have clear objectives for using this type of material so that they will choose the correct one for teaching different issues, as vocabulary for example. There is sometimes much vocabulary that is not relevant due to the scarce use of that terminology in real life.

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Debates about Educational Issues: A Pedagogical Strategy to Explore Argumentative Skills in the EFL Classroom

Debates acerca de aspectos educativos: una estrategia pedagógica para explorar las habilidades argumentativas en el salón de inglés como lengua extranjera

Duarte Infante, Ángela Vanesa¹, Fonseca Velandia, Sandra Milena² and Ramos Holguín, Bertha³

Abstract

This article describes a pedagogical proposal, based on debates, to determine the type of arguments that pre-service English language teachers constructed at a public university in Tunja, Colombia. We implemented a series of debate workshops about educational issues. Thirteen modern languages pre-service teachers in their sixth semester participated in the debates. In each debate, we collected data through recordings, focus groups, and field notes to understand the impact of the pedagogical intervention. Findings suggest that the arguments pre-service teachers built were based on examples. In this sense, the arguments built were based on their personal experiences and their partners' opinions. We argue for the need to implement more research proposals that will contribute to the understanding and awareness of what argumentation implies.

- 1 Ángela Vanesa Duarte Infante is a tenth-semester student in the Foreign Language Program at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC). She is also a member of the research group TONGUE at UPTC. angela.duarte@uptc.edu.co
- 2 Sandra Milena Fonseca Velandia is a tenth-semester student in the Foreign Language Program at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC). She is also a member of the research group TONGUE at UPTC. sandra.fonseca01@gmail.com
- 3 Bertha Ramos Holguín holds a PhD in Education Sciences from Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC), an MA in Applied Linguistics to the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language. She is currently a researcher and an English language professor at the School of Languages at UPTC. bertha.ramos@uptc.edu.co <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4468-1402>

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Keywords: argumentation, debates, educational issues, pre-service teachers.

Resumen

Las habilidades para argumentar han desempeñado un papel primordial en las sociedades actuales. Este artículo describe una experiencia pedagógica, enfocada en debates, como una manera de determinar los tipos de argumentos construidos por futuros profesores en una universidad pública en Tunja, Colombia. Trece futuros profesores de Lenguas Modernas de sexto semestre formaron parte de una serie de debates relacionados con aspectos educativos. En cada debate se recolectó información por medio de grabaciones, grupos focales y notas de campo, a fin de entender el impacto de esta intervención. Los resultados sugieren que los argumentos que los futuros profesores construyen están permeados por sus experiencias personales y la opinión de sus compañeros. Vemos la necesidad de implementar más propuestas investigativas que permitan contribuir al entendimiento y concienciación de lo que implica la argumentación.

Palabras clave: argumentación, debates, aspectos educativos, futuros profesores.

Introduction

Nowadays, education represents more than just transmitting knowledge, administering tests, and assessing grades (Miller, 1996; Narve, 2001). The need to enhance argumentative skills through education has become increasingly evident during the past 20 years. In fact, “promoting argumentative reasoning is considered to be a fundamental feature in Higher Education” (Mouraz, Leite, Trindade, Martins, Faustino, & Villate, 2014, p. 279). From this perspective, we consider debates as a way to engage students in a dialogical relationship, as well as to develop argumentative skills.

Colombian educational policies demand that university students develop higher intellectual abilities, so that they can transfer them to their academic, professional, and personal life. Likewise, students will be able to face situations that could imply decision-making processes in a multicultural environment. Argumentative skills are, without a doubt, one of the abilities that future teachers need to foster. As part of their future teaching professions, they will have to make decisions that will affect their contexts.

The modern languages program at the public university where this proposal took place shares the same vision of fostering critical and argumentative skills. Undergraduates from this language teaching program are recognized as human beings who are capable of developing skills as critical thinking, socio-cultural awareness, responsibility, and consciousness of being an educator. Besides that, students are required to critically analyze information based on pertinent, relevant, and factual evidence. Given the focus of the program, implementing activities that help students develop the mentioned skills becomes necessary. According to Aguirre and Ramos (2011), “as teacher-educators we cannot expect to develop competent and

critical future teachers if we do not promote and expose pre-service teachers to situations where they can analyze critical issues they may face in their real teaching experiences” (p. 187).

We decided to develop a pedagogical proposal of debate workshops with a group of pre-service English language teachers. We sought to understand the type of arguments they create in the workshops. By comprehending how and what types of arguments are constructed, the pre-service teachers could become more aware of their argumentative skills. As Lau (2011) stated, when one is able to understand how arguments are built, one can translate theoretical knowledge into actual ability and adopt a reflective and open-minded attitude.

Conceptual Framework

Argumentation and Argumentative Skills. In the words of Emeren, Grootendorst, and Henkemans (1996, p. 5), argumentation is a verbal and social activity of reason aimed at increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader by putting forward a constellation of propositions intended to justify (or refute) the standpoint before a rational judge. The latter means that argumentation happens when propositions need to be explained or defended by, for, or against making decisions and arriving at a conclusion.

We understand argumentation as an activity of social interaction where people assume a position in facing a controversial issue. A person can take on a perspective to persuade others by constructing a strong argument and finding commonalities. In this way, argumentation appears as a relevant element that can regulate social interaction.

A participant’s main objective in a debate is to present standpoints (for or against). The quality of the argument will depend on the participant’s discourse skills, which have to take into account the audience’s backgrounds and interests to convince them. According to Houtlosser (2001), a standpoint is defined as a statement that other arguments try to support, rebut, justify, or refute. To clarify the role of the standpoint in argumentation, Houtlosser (2001) makes a comparison among equivalent terms, such as point of view, thesis, attitude, belief, opinion, conclusion, claim or debate proposition, which are the basis of an argument. Following the previous ideas, we use the term argumentative skills to refer to the capacity an individual has to construct solid arguments.

Argument. According to Freely and Steinberg (2009), “an argument is a set of claims in which one or more of them are put forward to offer reasons for another claim. The culmination of these claims is known as the conclusion;” (p. 150) in that sense, an argument is a set of statements that support a hypothesis. Freely and Steinberg (2009) further assert that an argument may have several premises, or it may have only one. Likewise, they present six

elements that compose an argument: (a) statements: conclusions, that we hope to pursue with the argument; (b) grounds of foundations: ideas or reasons that support or validate statements; (c) guarantees: proof, or evidence to support the foundation or ground; (d) additional proof: to further support the statement; (e) qualifications: to express the degree of cohesion in a statement; and (f) counter arguments: based on new evidences presented to weaken or destroy the statements presented by the other side (Freely & Steinberg, 2009, p. 163).

Characteristics of the argument. A meaningful argument is usually guided by the conscious ways debaters choose to discuss. A valid argument is not just based on reasons and evidence; it is also founded on beliefs and values that are shared with the audience. Weston (2004) stated, “Arguments are made to support certain opinions with reasons” (p. 3). To build an argument, Weston (2004) offered rules for participants to consider during a debate. First of all, he proposed making a distinction between conclusions and premises, or reasons; the latter explains the conclusion. Secondly, ideas need to be presented in a natural order. Next, the premise that participants present should be reliable and plausible. Then, to express their standpoints in a better way, participants should use concrete and specific language employing accurate terms consistent with each idea. Finally, the conclusion and premise will be closely connected. In addition, when the participants are immersed in a debate session, they can express themselves by using different types of arguments. In this case, Weston (2004) classified arguments and presented their main characteristics, which are illustrated in the following chart.

Debates. According to Freely and Steinberg (2009), a debate is a process of inquiry and advocacy. It is a way of arriving at a reasoned judgment on a proposition. Individuals may use debate to reach a decision in their own minds. Alternatively, individuals or groups may use it to persuade others to agree with their arguments. Núñez and Téllez (2012) assert that a debate is a practice that implies generating controversy about a specific issue. The authors further explained that debates help learners improve their argumentative skills.

A debate provides reasoned arguments for and against a proposition because it requires that listeners and opposing participants comparatively evaluate competing choices. Additionally, a debate demands critical thinking. According to Parcher (1998), “debating develops research, critical thinking, evidence, problem resolution and communicative abilities. Society, like individuals, must have an effective method of making decisions; debate pervades our society at decision-making levels” (p. 2). In other words, we understand that a debate is a formal and structured discussion about an issue where three parts are involved: The first supports the main hypothesis, the second opposes the hypothesis, and the last has the objective of judging the quality of arguments and performances during the debate session.

Table 1. *Types of arguments proposed by Weston (2004).*

Arguments	Characteristics
Arguments based on examples	All claims are supported by plausible examples. In order to prove something, using more than one example is necessary. Participant needs to obtain background information and use counterexamples to strengthen the argument or disprove someone.
Analogical argument	There is a similarity between two examples, which supports one of the standpoints. Analogies require a relevant example.
Arguments from authority	This is an argument supported by a qualified authority or a reliable source. Sources should be cited and informed. Sources need to be impartial. Sources need to be independent, neutral, and objective in their view of the position being argued.
Causal arguments	The relationships between two events are presented, in which one is the effect of the other. The argument needs to explain how the cause leads to the effect and its correlation. If there are many possible causes, the most likely cause must be identified.
Deductive Argument	Truthful premises are presented in order to obtain a reliable conclusion Deductive arguments offer an effective way of organizing an argument.

A good debate is characterized by participants' ability to present logical and complete information to make sure the audience understands the facts. Thus, the audience must be provided with enough evidence to convince and allow them to learn and contribute to the motion of the debate. During the debate, questions may emerge, which leads to the conclusion of the presented issues. These questions must be clarified, answered, and analyzed. For the purpose of having a dynamic debate, participants' speeches should be organized in a methodological form. Additionally, a maximum time is allotted for each participant. In this sense, these aspects must contribute and respond to the requirements and necessities of the debate.

The Pedagogical Proposal

Context of the experience. This pedagogical proposal took place at a public university in Tunja, Colombia. We worked with sixth semester students, who were pursuing a degree in Modern Languages. We carried out this study with 13 students. There were 5 male and 8

female participants. Their ages ranged from 22 to 28 years. The name of the course in which this pedagogical proposal was implemented was English VI. The course emphasized the exploration and development of the students' communicative competence in English.

We applied an English language proficiency test at the beginning of the course. We found that the majority of the students had an intermediate level. In regard to their attitude, they were positive and active in each debate session. Despite having their own personalities, such as being extroverted or introverted, they were friendly, understanding, and respectful with each other.

Objective of the pedagogical proposal. The main objective of this pedagogical proposal was to determine the type of arguments that pre-service English language teachers constructed at a public university in Tunja, Colombia, during the implementation of workshops about current educational issues. The specific objectives were to create respectful environments to conduct in-class debates about educational issues, to promote students' participation, and to make the learning of English a more meaningful experience.

Conditions of the implementation. The implementation consisted of a series of workshops carried out with the participating pre-service English language teachers. We began by asking these participants and teachers to select the topics related to educational issues. Then, we designed the workshops. Finally, we implemented the workshops and collected data on the types of arguments constructed during the debates.

Since we involved the participants before creating the workshops, we were able to account for issues that were closer to the participants' reality. In this sense, the topics also allowed them to discuss future situations that they might face in their teaching profession. Together, we came up with the following topics for the debates: the use of guns at school, homework is harmful, gender stereotypes at school, and whether religion should be taught in public schools. Each debate was based on a workshop that lasted three hours. We encouraged the participants to take a position and participate by intervening during each session.

When designing the workshops, we made sure to use reliable sources such as news reports, articles, videos, and images. These sources came from experts on the topics. These sources also gave the participants the opportunity to contrast both sides of an idea and to make decisions and express their ideas regarding the topics. In that sense, we designed four workshops in which the participants followed five steps: pre-reading, during-reading, post-reading, video analysis, and debate. These steps guided them in building their discussions from beginning to end.

The first step was called a pre-reading process analysis. In this step, we presented the topic to the participants by using pictures, texts, and videos. This helped them answer questions related to the topic, as well as analyze the information using previous knowledge.

Additionally, they could open their minds to other possibilities and make a decision on what position they would take as the main objective of the pre-debate stage.

The second step was the during-reading analysis. After reading about the topic, the participants worked collaboratively to identify the main ideas, key words, and meanings in the text. They also discussed their own contexts and the one provided in the text. Because of this, they were allowed to reflect on the issue about which they were reading. In this order of ideas, they were contextualized enough to express their opinions and their thoughts to their partners, as well as to recognize their partners' ideas in the construction of their arguments.

The third step was the post-reading analysis. In this step, the participants were allowed to make inferences regarding the topic and compare their standpoints. This helped them answer some of the questions they had posed before and during the reading. Their inferences were based on their own background knowledge, as well as some factual information that was useful in the next step.

The fourth step was a video analysis. We played a video related to the topic, keeping in mind that it had to come from a reliable source. This gave the participants the opportunity to analyze the topic from a different perspective. At this point, they gained further awareness on the diversity of thoughts and positions one can take in regard to the same issue.

The fifth step was part of the debate step, and we called it the "Let's Debate Analysis". In this step, the participants continued to work together by answering questions that allowed them to change and/or reinforce their positions on the topic. On the other hand, each workshop presented a part for them to remember. It provided them with the essential information to argue properly, which included the concept, types and parts of an argument, key words, and expressions that corresponded to a suitable argument.

The following chart summarizes the workshops and the types of arguments that were presented.

Table 2. *Workshops: Topics and types of arguments*

Workshop number	Topic	Types of arguments
1	The use of guns at school	Arguments based on examples/ analogical arguments
2	Homework is harmful	Arguments from authority
3	Gender stereotypes at school	Causal arguments
4	Should religion be taught in public schools?	Deductive arguments

Teachers' and students' roles. When the discussions took place, the teachers acted like guides and moderators. They followed the order and pace of the debate thus creating a suitable environment. The participants were encouraged to contribute actively in the debate sessions. They worked collaboratively with their partners in order to share their opinions and points of view regarding the different topics and issues. In addition, they were able to analyze the information provided by their partners and by the workshops. This aided them in building valid and effective arguments in order to defend their position and make decisions about the most relevant information. They took into account their backgrounds, values, and beliefs to answer the questions posed by the teacher and to come to agreements and conclusions. Consequently, the debate sessions were developed in a respectful and understanding environment, where all the opinions were listened to and considered relevant for the discussion.

Data analysis. We followed the steps proposed by the grounded approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The grounded approach for data treatment is considered an appropriate way to analyze and explain human behavior in social contexts. In that sense, and according to Freeman (1998), the data were collected “to look for meanings that surface through the process of naming, grouping the names into categories, and finding relationships among them” (p. 108).

We gathered the information during the course in which we applied the four workshops on educational issues. First, the information was collected through audio recording, which we transcribed. Second, we collected the observation formats of each session and its comments. Third, we applied a focus group interview, which we also transcribed at the end of the implementation. After this process, we developed an analytical framework in which we read the data several times to look for commonalities and themes or patterns (Freeman, 1998).

For this phase, we read and reread the information in the transcripts and field notes. We also underlined useful data that told us about the types of arguments that the participating pre-service English language teachers had constructed. After that, we named our initial findings, categorized them, and found relationships among them. In this way, we found that the arguments used by the participants were mainly based on examples (Weston, 2004) and, as such, they were permeated by their personal experiences and their partners' opinions.

Findings

The participating pre-service English language teachers argued based on their points of view, personal experiences, examples from their daily life, and previous knowledge about the topic. They used this kind of knowledge as a strategy to build their arguments and support their claims. It helped the participants build clearer ideas, develop understandable arguments,

and persuade their listeners. The previous activities or steps also suggested that the participants became more conscious of what they were saying and how they were constructing their own opinions, including opportunities to bring up their personal experiences, thus, making their arguments more convincing. Miller (2011) explained this better by saying that the argument a person provides is a specific instance of a larger phenomenon. A person might use his/her own personal experience to make wider generalization. For example, if a person is giving a speech about the need for public libraries, that person can use his/her own personal experience about using the public library, such as using the internet, checking out a book, or having a quiet place to work. Based on that personal experience (one's own data) of needing the library, the person generalizes (via reasoning) to make the argument that libraries are an important facet of the community (one's own claim).

Arguments based on examples and personal experiences. The participants became aware of the importance of using honest and personal examples to construct their arguments and defend their points of view in the debates about educational issues. The previous analysis was evidenced in the third workshop about gender stereotypes. In this debate, a participating pre-service English language teacher gave examples about the perceptions people had about women in certain careers at the university. The participant mentioned the following:

It is the same with the program degree in the university, a woman who is studying engineering. She is seen like a man...or a macho, for example. For example when a man is studying psycho pedagogy or kindergarten...Or nursery... things like that. [sic] (Participant one, Sixth semester, Second audio track, Second debate session Gender stereotypes)

In the argument above, we could observe that the participant perceived gender stereotypes using another point of view, in which the educational programs were also categorized. When he said the word “*macho*”, he criticized the way university students and their cultures have been nurturing these stereotypes, in which women and men must act a certain way to fit into society's standards. Otherwise, they might be judged. We can then say that when the participants assumed a critical position, they were also demonstrating their critical thinking skills. By providing an argument to the current issue, this participant was breaking down barriers that society imposes on women and men to follow certain behaviors. Furthermore, this participant used “for example”, which perhaps demonstrated a reference to some experience he had probably lived to support his claim. Therefore, he presented his disagreement against this imposition with the aid of his background knowledge. As Weston (2004) affirmed, a person needs to use examples to strengthen arguments.

Another sample was taken from the fourth workshop about teaching religion in public schools, where a participant states,

Ok, I studied in a private and public school, and in the private school is more, [sic] is more like a subject, because we have to take into account that before entering to [sic] a primary school, we have to follow the rules.

Rules are imposed. For example, going to the church [sic]. In fact, I had to go to mass every Friday. It is like that, if you want to study in that school, you need to follow their rules not your rules, not your religion or your beliefs. [sic] (Participant two, Sixth semester, Third-audio track, Should religion be taught in public schools)

In the previous statement, the participant, based on her own experience, talked about the way religion was imposed at schools. Despite having her own position and beliefs about the topic, she emphasized the rules some schools have in regard to religion. In that sense, the participant's argument demonstrated a critical and analytical position toward the issue because she presented her position, personal experience, and information to back up her claim. As she mentioned, she was in disagreement with the educational system that infringes upon the freedom of religion to be part of an educational institution. Grootendors and Henkenmas (1996) state: a central notion of argumentation is disagreement or difference of opinion (explicit or implicit). In this sense, it can be presented as an argument (as cited in Drid, 2016, p.55).

The next argument was taken from the gender stereotypes workshop in which a participant proffered a personal experience as an example.

We see how society influences so much in children... for example, they come to the world... clear... pure, with no prejudices but then, they start dressing and behaving in certain ways depending on the places where they are. I saw that with my daughter. Now that she is at school she behaves differently, she criticize my tattoos, for example. [sic] (Participant three, Sixth semester, Third audio track, Worksheet 2, Gender stereotypes)

From the excerpt presented above, we can see that the participant emphasized the influence of society over children, who learn to build prejudices about the roles men and women perform. To support this claim, the other participants said that children came into the world clear, pure, without prejudices. The participant of the excerpt spoke from his own experience and said that the influence over children was something that everyone could see. He generalized society's influence as something bad, with which he did not agree. In this type of argument, we noticed that the participant provided a claim and a reason. According to Freely and Steinberg (2009), this is proof or evidence to support and validate statements, as with the participant, who offered reasons to support his statements, while allowing his partners to go deeper into the issue.

58 Arguments based on partners' opinions. According to Harrington, Lebeau and Lubetsky (1999),

The nice thing about debate is that debates lead towards a more natural discussion. First, I give my position and then you give your position, and then I would address each of the points in your position and comment on them. And then you would have the opportunity to address each point in my position and comment on it. (p. 53)

In this case, the data revealed that at the moment of arguing in the debate sessions, the participating pre-service English language teachers analyzed their partners' opinions

to strengthen their own ideas. In the example below, a participant gave her opinion about teaching religion at school. She suggested that it should be taught in our context by example, and she emphasized that religion was imposed by society.

Instead of teaching religion we can change it to something cultural. For example, we can change that subject about religion for something like cultural awareness because religion is very close to culture. So in that way, for example, the teacher could present the characteristics, or maybe the history about religion. You can learn how religions were born and how they are represented. [sic] (Participant four, Sixth semester, Third audio recording, Should religion be taught in public schools)

In this example, the participant mentioned that religion was imposed at public schools. Additionally, she presented her own ideas about how religion should be taught. In her argument, the participant suggested that religion could be taught from a cultural standpoint since it was closely related to culture. Her ideas seemed to be based on her own experiences, such as having to learn religion as something imposed upon her. Thus, her previous knowledge helped her create her own opinion about the topic. That is why she proposed teaching cultural awareness as an argument against imposing religion as a subject. As we mentioned previously, the participant presented reasons to support her claim. According to Freely and Steinberg (2009), the counterarguments are based on new evidences presented to weaken or destroy the statements presented by the other side.

Likewise, the next example showed how another participant provided information to counter-argue.

I think that the problem is not religion but the way we teach it, because you can see it as a science, not as something that has values... that is the problem, I think that religion is very interesting as a science... you can learn a lot about it, and I think that people are not very literate about why they don't believe in something. [sic] (Participant 6, Sixth semester, Third audio track, Should religion be taught at school)

We can observe another perspective on whether religion should or should not be taught at schools. This participant expressed her point of view in regard to how religion should be taught. We noticed that it was her opinion because she used expressions as “I think” to present her ideas. In this case, the participant compared religion to a science. One of her reasons to support her opinion was that “people are not very literate about why they don't believe in something.” From this statement, the proposal to compare religion to a science emerged. For this participant, the problem with the way religion was taught could be related to how it was connected to values. She used this as a fact to support her claim. According to the Department of Communications of Pittsburgh University, facts refer to statements that can be verified. In this way, facts need to be analyzed in order for one to be able to arrive at a conclusion. In addition to analyzing the fact she proposed, she also had an open mind when it came to perceiving religion based on her own experiences. This allowed her to have her own criteria apart from the beliefs of society.

The next argument was taken from the second workshop about homework assignments. In the following argument, a participant stated that the job of educating children corresponded not only to the teachers but also to the parents.

Yes, but education is not only at school, you as a parent you must pay attention to how your child is developing. What is important is not the tests because if you want your children to be singers or an actors, you need to reinforce that because many of these things do not happen at school. [sic] (Participant 3, Sixth semester, Fourth audio track, Homework is harmful)

In this excerpt, the participant based his argument on a reasoned opinion, where he expressed critical and personal thoughts based on logical reasoning. Taking into account that the participant (as a pre-service English language teacher) had certain knowledge that supported his argument, he expressed that the education of students was a joint effort where parents, as well as teachers, had to strive to contribute to the development of children. In relation to this argument, Weston (2004) states that the premises presented should be reliable and plausible. When the participants gave an opinion, considering their experience, it resulted in a reliable experience that allowed them to reach a decision in their own mind during the debate.

The argument below was taken from the second workshop about homework assignments. In this argument, a participant analyzed her partner's opinion in order to employ some of her standpoints to adjust her own arguments.

I agreed with Alejandra, because I think, sometimes extensive homework is unhealthy; I saw many cases. That... parents do their children's homework because sometimes children say... "I don't understand" or "I don't like homework". So they prefer to do their homework. [sic] (Participant 4, Sixth semester, Fourth audio track, Homework is harmful)

In this argument, the participant (based on her partner's opinion) showed how excessive homework could be harmful for children. The participant's argument demonstrated a critical and analytical position towards the educational issue. She, as a future teacher, understood the importance of homework. She also demonstrated her disagreement on the excessive demand (or allocation?) of home study.

60 Conclusions

In this pedagogical proposal, the participating pre-service English language teachers' arguments were divided into three types: examples, personal experiences, and opinions. They used these types of arguments to express their standpoints about educational issues during the debate workshops. These pre-service teachers regularly used examples as a way to establish a direct link between the topic and local context, thus achieving a more meaningful and effective communication (Pineda, 2003; Pineda, Núñez, & Téllez, 2004). The arguments they

built were permeated by their own experiences, e.g. examples they obtained from situations in their daily life, and the previous knowledge they had already possessed about the issue. In addition, they resorted to their partners' opinions to validate or shape their own arguments.

In terms of implications, the participants were motivated to contribute in the debate exercises. They used their own personal skills, such as communication, decision making, conflict resolution, logical thinking, understanding, reasoning, previous knowledge, life experiences, background information, and analysis. Thus, they utilized both communicative and paralinguistic elements in order to construct their own arguments. These elements were the main tools used to understand and interpret issues, which brought them closer to their own contexts.

We saw that the participants' argumentative process was influenced by their linguistic development, passive and active roles in the discussions, individual reflections, degree of educational issues awareness, relationships between each other, collaborative work, and mutual support. Because of this, each participant's argumentative process was different, which is why we became aware of the importance of valuing students' diversity. In fact, the participants' multiplicity of thoughts helped one another enrich their arguments. We also realized that a learning environment full of comradeship, understanding, and respect facilitates the communication, self-confidence, and active participation of the students. In turn, this favored the debate sessions and strengthened the participants' speaking skills.

When arguing their points of view, the participants needed to assume a position and defend it. According to the International Institution of Debate (2013), the debate offers a good environment to learn how to listen to people while learning about other topics. Based on what a participant might be defending, the others must also provide a reasonable response. We noticed this in the workshops, where the participants demonstrated reasoning and open-mindedness when they discussed their own and their partners' opinions. In fact, the classroom, in this proposal, became an ideal place to foster and establish good relationships.

Additionally, the participants had to accept the fact that their opinions were not always the right ones. These are qualities that allowed them to listen to others to complement and strengthen their own defense. Despite the fact that not all of their viewpoints were supported by facts, the participants used their own personal experiences and opinions to defend their positions. In this way, their arguments were valid because they were based on their realities.

In terms of the challenges we faced while working on this pedagogical proposal, we noticed that the participants could get emotional or heated during the debates. Thus, we believe their feelings might have interfered with their language performance and reasoning process. In this stance, we considered Harmer (2007), who highlighted the need for teachers to create a

non-intimidating environment, motivate the participants, and engage them in learning activities to express feelings, desires, preferences, interests, and values in a respectful way.

The development of the debate sessions allowed us to notice that this is also a strategy that helps students in general to organize their thoughts and become confident when speaking. We realized that throughout the debate sessions, the participants talked more than before. However, another challenge was the fact that they had diverse English language proficiency levels. Although most of them had an intermediate level, some of them lacked confidence in speaking and taking a proactive role in the classroom. This is relevant to be considered; as teacher educators, we should not pressure or force students to express themselves, nor demand a high level of communication in the target language. This would be counterproductive to the purpose of the activity.

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Workshop Sample

Student's name: _____ **Date:** _____

TOPIC:

Homework is harmful

Before reading:

Watch the video and answer the following questions. You can take your own experiences into account.

How could you define homework?

Do you think that homework supports the student's learning process?

Should homework be done at school?

While reading:

Work in groups. Read the following article and reflect on for and against arguments that you find in it. You can underline them if you want.

Is homework a good idea or not?

Why is it a good idea?

While giving homework to pupils in secondary schools is generally seen as a good idea, some don't think that kids in primary schools should have to do it. For the last 100 years or so, experts have been trying to work out if it is beneficial to give homework to kids in primary schools.

In the UK, the government says it's up to the head teacher to decide whether or not their school will set extra work like this. Many think that giving homework to primary school children is an important part of their learning.

They believe it helps them to practice what that they have learnt in lessons, in order to get better at things like spelling and handwriting.

They say it helps to teach children how to work on their own and be disciplined with themselves - both skills that are useful later in life.

It can also allow parents or guardians to get involved in their children's learning.

Chris told Newsround: "If you like learning, homework helps to support your learning. It's really important to go back afterwards and think about what you're learning in class. Practice makes perfect."

Why is it not a good idea?

Some people think that giving homework to children in primary school is not necessary.

They think it puts too much pressure on them and that the time spent doing homework could be used to do other activities.

"The trouble with homework is that it gets in the way of all of those good things that you could be doing and it doesn't necessarily help you with your school work."

Sometimes parents or guardians try to help with homework and, if they have been taught differently, it can end up being confusing for the child doing the homework. They can also end up doing too much of the work themselves!

"Teachers set homework for you to get better at your learning - that seems like a really good reason. But actually, the evidence isn't clear that even that's true."

Another expert Rosamond McNeil, from a teachers' organization called the NUT, said: "Pupils in Finland are assigned very little homework yet they remain one of the most educationally successful countries in the world." from: BBC NewsRound

After reading:

Take into consideration the following words for the next task.

Homework	Skills	
Stress	Discipline	
Extra work Activities	Pressure	
Children	Unnecessary	Confusing
Learning	Teacher	Primary School
Practice	Parents	Support

According to the information that you gathered, build your own for or against argument related to homework.

Let's Debate



...A Systems of Equations Activity to get
Students to Analyze Methods

5. Now that you have your own arguments in mind, express them in a debate session. Remember that all the arguments have an important value, so be respectful at the moment of arguing.

Ángela Vanesa Duarte Infante, Sandra Milena Fonseca Velandia,
and Bertha Ramos Holguín

After having expressed your arguments and listened to your partners, think the following question over: How could you change the traditional homework concept at school if you were a teacher?



Remember!

An argument of authority is a form of defeasible argument in which a claimed authority's support is used as evidence for an argument's conclusion. It is well known as a fallacy, though it is used in a cogent form when all sides of a discussion agree on the reliability of the authority in the given context.

question over: How could you change the traditional homework concept at school if you were a teacher?

These are the five parts of an argument: claim, reasons, evidence, warrant, acknowledgement and response

What is a claim?	What your argument is based on and a statement that readers do not already accept it and will not accept it without good reason.
What are reasons?	Support your claim and its statements that give readers a basis for accepting your claim.
What is evidence?	Statements that support your reasons. It is statements, numbers, photographs, and other representations of states of affairs that your readers accept without question, at least for the purposes of an argument
What is a warrant?	The general principle usually drawn from background knowledge shared by you and your reader that connects your reasons to your claim.
What is it acknowledgement and response?	When the reader has counterclaims you must acknowledge the reader's skepticism and respond to it.

Note. Information taken from Quizlet (2018). The five parts of the argument. Retrieved from <https://quizlet.com/65870528/the-5-parts-of-an-argument-flash-cards>

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Enhancing Reading Comprehension through an Intensive Reading Approach

Mejora de la comprensión lectora mediante un método de lectura intensiva

Insuasty Cárdenas, Andrés¹

Abstract

This article presents a project that explored the effectiveness of intensive reading to enhance reading comprehension with a group of university students in Pasto, Colombia. At the initial stage, a diagnostic test, field notes, and three questionnaires allowed the identification of the students' needs. During the intervention stage, a set of workshops and reading tests were implemented to reveal the impact of the reading comprehension strategies. In the evaluation stage, four instruments (reading tests, teacher's journal, students' questionnaires and pre- and post-tests) were used to collect the students' opinions and state the results. At the end, findings show that the reading comprehension strategies improved students' comprehension because it helped them tackle the problems they had before the intervention stage.

Keywords: intensive reading, reading comprehension, reading process, reading strategies, reading techniques.

Resumen

Este artículo trata de un proyecto que explora la efectividad de la lectura intensiva para mejorar la comprensión lectora de un grupo de estudiantes universitarios en Pasto (Colombia). En el estado inicial, un examen diagnóstico, diario de campo y tres encuestas permitieron identificar las necesidades

¹ Andrés Insuasty Cárdenas holds a BA in English and French from Universidad de Nariño, Colombia, and an MA in English Didactics from Universidad de Caldas, Colombia. He is a parttime English language teacher at different universities in Pasto. He is interested in teaching reading and writing to university students. aginsuasty@iucsmag.edu.co
<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4491-5627>

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de los estudiantes. Durante la fase de intervención, se aplicaron talleres y exámenes que mostraron el impacto de las estrategias de comprensión de lectura. En la fase de evaluación, se analizaron cuatro instrumentos (exámenes de lectura, diario del profesor, cuestionarios a estudiantes y un pre y post test) para revisar los resultados y opiniones de los estudiantes. Al finalizar este proyecto, los resultados muestran que las estrategias mejoraron la comprensión lectora porque les permitió sortear los problemas encontrados antes de la fase de intervención.

Palabras clave: lectura intensiva, comprensión lectora, proceso de lectura, estrategias de lectura, técnicas de lectura.

Introduction

Learning a foreign language has become a common trend nowadays. In a globalized world, people need to learn a language for many reasons. Traveling to other countries, getting good job opportunities and having a good professional status are among the most common reasons to learn a language. Nonetheless, learning a foreign language at university level is deemed as a requirement to graduate and to take the Saber PRO test². This is why reading is one of the most important skills in any language class because it is not only a source of information and a pleasurable activity but also a means of consolidating and extending personal knowledge of the language. According to Johnson (2008), reading is a constant process that needs to be improved through practice. By continuously practicing, readers are expected to comprehend the content of a text and the textual meaning by using strategies to identify main ideas and specific information, comprehend grammar structures, and learn new vocabulary. Furthermore, students need to understand what a passage is about and the extent of the information that is given by the teacher.

In general, the importance of reading helps students to be reflective and move from a classical teacher-centered view to a more analytical and comprehensive view. Both teachers and students have to work together to make the reading process something meaningful to their lives. This study then explores the impact of intensive reading with undergraduate students who have not had the opportunity to use reading strategies in the English courses that they take in their majors. In these English courses, teachers focus on grammar most of the time and the main skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) are scarcely used. Thus, implementing intensive reading appears as a means to improve learning among students. Through reading, students are expected to enhance both productive (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (reading and listening) and to develop literacy which enables them to be more critical thinkers at the moment of expressing their opinions.

² Saber PRO is a standardized test taken by undergraduate students as a requirement to graduate and to measure the quality of tertiary education programs.

Literature Review

Teaching reading comprehension by intensive reading. Taking into account that reading is not an isolated process because it is linked to the other main skills, Alyousef (2005) defines reading as something interactive. This interaction happens when a reader is in contact with any type of passage and starts a process of analyzing and classifying important information which can be shared and discussed with their peers. Besides, Alyousef (2005) states that reading is something that can help a reader to develop automaticity because the reader can look for relevant information and express their opinions and ideas after reading a text. This is why language teaching approaches have been developed to foster reading comprehension via intensive reading.

According to Mart (2015), intensive reading allows a reader to carry out a detailed analysis inside the class, led by the teacher, in which vocabulary and grammar points are studied in a short passage. Additionally, Brown (2000) calls intensive reading “narrow reading” because it gets students to analyze several texts about the same or different topic. The purpose of intensive reading is to focus on content and grammatical structures. Teachers can also take part in the process by means of reading aloud, asking questions, and having students predict information of texts. In this way, students get opportunities to understand the meaning of a text. Brown (2000) says that the key to intensive reading is to give students more opportunities to be in contact with a text; in this way, the more familiar the reader is with the text, the more comprehension is promoted.

Harmer (2004) asserts that reading is a kind of “springboard” that allows a person to develop the other language skills. He emphasizes that reading is placed in the core of learning; the results might be beneficial for students. Moreover, Evans, Hartshorn, and Anderson (2010) believe that reading can be beneficial if placed as the main base of learning the other language skills. These authors also state that through reading, vocabulary and grammar are developed; consequently, the main skills are possible to be learned.

Anderson’s (2008) concept of reading is important to foster reading among students because they can develop literacy if they are exposed to a variety of readings. Nonetheless, other factors (as time, availability of materials, and effective instruction) are necessary to ensure that reading comprehension takes place. Furthermore, Kuhn and Stahl (2003) establish a relationship between intensive reading activities and overall language proficiency. When readers start to read following an intensive reading approach, they can improve both grammar and vocabulary and consequently improve the other main language skills (writing, listening, and speaking).

According to Paran (2003), teachers can make use of intensive reading to maximize students’ learning process going through the three phases of the reading process: pre-

, while-, and post-reading. These phases search for better language preparation, analysis, and activation strategies. In addition, Paran (2003) explains that intensive reading itself is effective for developing reading skills because students in an EFL context can comprehend a text step by step and not as whole. In conclusion, intensive reading is deemed as an effective tool for improving reading comprehension.

Reading process. In the booklet *The Professional Development Service for Teachers*³ (2014), the reading process is defined as something complex and multi-dimensional. Thus, teachers who are assertive when fostering reading comprehension in their classes must know about its complexity. Teachers can make use of a range of teaching approaches that enable students to be confident and independent readers. Aspects to consider in the teaching of reading towards recognizing this complexity are the variety and richness of vocabulary, providing a framework for teaching comprehension strategies, ensuring that students feel motivated, and finding reading as something pleasurable. Each aspect is essential because it provides guidance for understanding how the reading process should be taught.

Carter and Long (1991) explain that these three phases of reading are useful since students have opportunities to follow a reading passage in a more organized and detailed way. Also, each phase has a series of strategies that teachers could use in order to help students understand what they are reading. In the before-reading stage, Paran (2003) argues that teachers need to motivate students through activities that may attract their interest (e.g. book talks, dramatic readings, or pictures related to the text). The goal is to make the text relevant to students in some way. Another strategy suggested by Paran (2003) is by activating students' background knowledge and discussing what students will read, what they already know about the topic, and about the text organization. In this manner, students might establish a purpose for reading, identify and discuss difficult words, phrases, and concepts in the text, preview the text (by surveying the title, illustrations, and unusual text structures), and make predictions about its content.

In the while-reading stage, the teacher takes a role as a guide. They should encourage students to use comprehension strategies as they read, and to monitor their understanding. In this stage, teachers ask students questions to keep track of the reading and to focus their attention on main ideas and important parts of the text. Also, teachers ask their students to pay attention to parts in a text that require making inferences, and students summarize key sections or events. Finally, teachers need to encourage students to confirm the predictions made before. Pang et al. (2003) proposes other strategies that can be used in this stage. These include making connections between and among important ideas in the text, integrating new ideas with existing background knowledge, sequencing events and ideas in the text, checking

³ This booklet contains detailed information about the reading process and covers many topics regarding reading instruction (reading fluency, comprehension strategies, vocabulary, and assessment).

understanding by paraphrasing or restating events found in the reading, and identifying characters, settings, or events in a text.

In the post-reading stage, Toprak (2009) expresses that all the ideas are concluded in this stage. This is the summary of the reading material. Here, teachers can make a discussion from the reading, and summarize important ideas as well as supportive details. Also, students recall and tell important parts of the text in their own words. Also, students could respond to the reading in a variety of ways (e.g. by writing, role-playing, music, posters, videos, debate, or pantomime). Other activities that teachers could apply in this stage are evaluating and discussing the ideas found in the text, plus applying and contextualizing ideas in real life situations.

Instructional reading strategies. In order to reinforce the use of intensive reading, instructional strategies which allow students to understand a reading in steps are necessary. These strategies not only provide students with a framework to work when they start comprehending a text but also help consolidate information relevant for the text. Stoller et al. (2013) highlight the importance of using strategies that allow students to understand a text in a more analytical way. They propose strategies that include activating prior knowledge, interacting with the text, and paying attention to details such as vocabulary. In addition, Lewis and Hill (1992) express that it is necessary to activate students' reading comprehension by means of activities implemented before going directly to the reading text. They suggest that teachers should pose questions related to the text or let students brainstorm ideas about the text. Stricklin (2011) also proposes four steps to follow when reading a text: predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing.

Therefore, the use of instructional reading strategies is important because these enable students to know what to do in every reading stage. The reading strategies implemented in this study are shown below.

Know, Want, and Learn (KWL) chart. This reading strategy proposed by Ogle (1986) helps students organize their ideas in a more detailed way. This strategy elicits students' prior knowledge of the topic of the text, establishes a purpose for reading, and helps students to monitor their comprehension.

Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review (SQ3R). This is a five-phase reading strategy in which students can make a structural process when reading a passage. Biringkanee (2018) explains that SQ3R helps students understand a text while reading it. Firstly, students need to *Survey*, it means that they skim through the pages assigned in order to get a "general idea" about what the chapter, section, or article is about. In this part, students organize their ideas about the text and predict what it will be about. In *Question*, students ask questions based on the titles, headings, or subheadings surveyed in the first stage. In the third stage, students have the chance to *Read*. This stage is the most important because the goal is to answer the

stated questions after reading. In this stage, additionally, students may highlight unknown vocabulary, jot down relevant information in the passage, and ask further questions to discuss after reading. Once students have read the passage, in the *Recite* stage, students put away their notes and organize their ideas either on paper or out loud. In this stage, students organize the information gathered in the previous section on their own. Finally, students *Review* the text by using all the information they collected; they also create something different with the information gathered (e.g. create flashcards, make a map, table, and diagram, make a timeline or tell someone else their ideas).

Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA). According to Behroozizad (2018), it is a reading technique in which students ask questions about a text, make predictions, then read to confirm or modify their predictions. The DRTA technique guides students to be active and thoughtful readers by enhancing their comprehension. This strategy enables students to monitor their understanding of the text as they are reading; in this way, they can reinforce their reading and critical thinking skills. In this strategy, teachers present the reading material and ask questions about the text. The goal is to activate students' prior knowledge and give opinions about the text. Then, they give their prediction about what would happen in the text in the next section. Also, teachers can ask questions in order to have students think and predict. Finally, after reading each pre-selected section, they confirm and modify their predictions based on the supporting statements in the text.

Vocabulary Self-selection Strategy (VSS). Antonacci and O'Callaghan (2011) assert that this strategy allows students to collect and learn new words that they may encounter in texts and in the oral language that surrounds them every day. The goal is to develop word consciousness. As described by Ruddell and Shearer (2002), the method can be implemented in this way: First, teachers select a reading passage and read it aloud; then, a determined word is selected to be shown to students by highlighting its importance in the text. After that, teachers share out a reading passage and ask students to read it. At the end, students choose a certain number of unknown words, write them on the vocabulary sheet and justify why they are important for them.

74 **Story Maps.** Adler (2004) states that the use of story maps allows students to organize and learn the elements of a story since those are graphic organizers. In the story maps, students identify story characters, plot, setting, problem, and solution. Therefore, students should read carefully to learn the details. Of course, there are many different types of story map graphic organizers. This strategy is useful when students want to organize a story in parts to have a better understanding and identify the main parts of a reading passage.

Compare and Contrast Diagrams. Praveen and Rajan (2013) explain that this strategy has to do with establishing similarities and differences between two people, places, animals, etc. by fostering deep thinking among students when comparing two concepts. Students

could use many templates; the most common is a Venn diagram. Teachers can use other diagrams to apply in class. According to Dreher and Gray (2009), the use of diagrams in reading is beneficial because students need to scan a text to summarize and write down important ideas by completing a diagram. The role of teachers is to model by reading a similar text aloud and showing students how the diagrams work. In that way, students can understand the purpose of the task they are going to work.

Method

Action research was carried out in order to get both teachers and students involved in that practice, with the aim to change and improve aspects found in a determined context (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 1992). Action research is therefore a process of enquiry carried out as a practitioner as to the effectiveness of one's own teaching and students' learning. Research is more systematic and collaborative in collecting evidence on which to base theories and reflections. This involves problem-posing, not just problem-solving. It does not start from a view of 'problems' as something impossible to solve, but motivated by a search to improve and understand the world by changing it and learning how to improve it from the effects of the changes made.

Context of the study. This study was developed with a group of undergraduate students taking the English level III course as a requirement for graduation at a private university in Pasto, Colombia. There are four faculties at this institution; each of them offers two programs. Students are required to take elective courses such as ethics, institutional philosophy, and English. Regarding the English area, the courses are offered by the University's Language Center that offers four levels. Each level varies according to the academic program. There are over 15 teachers, and the majority holds a master's degree and works as adjunct teachers.

Participants. The participants of this project were sixteen students of third semester from the Computer Engineering Program, fourteen males and two females. Their ages ranged from 19 to 24 years old. They took the English courses as a requirement to graduate in their major. Their level of English language proficiency was between A1 and A2. They consider English as something important both in their major and in their professional life. In fact, the implementation of this project with this group was to see the impact of intensive reading for future accounts in the English language teaching at this institution.

Data collection and analysis. Mathison (1988) highlights the importance of using different data collection procedures in a study to obtain reliable data from a variety of sources simultaneously. During the diagnostic stage, different instruments were implemented in order to know about the strengths and difficulties of the English language teaching process in the context of study. First, the questionnaires given to the students, university

language center coordinator, and English language teachers' staff gave evidence of not only relevant information about the students' beliefs and the teachers' views regarding English instruction but also a set of the students' problems with the four language skills. Second, a diagnostic test was applied to see the strengths and weaknesses in the four language skills. Third, a teacher's journal revealed information regarding instruction inside the English language classes. In the action stage, six workshops were implemented using the different reading instructional strategies mentioned above in the literature review. These implemented strategies contributed to check how well the students learned and applied the strategies. During the evaluation stage, four different instruments were applied: three reading tests, three questionnaires, a pre- and post-test and a teacher's journal to check both performance and opinions coming from the students.

Diagnostic stage. After analyzing the questionnaires and tests, several aspects needed to be improved regarding language teaching. During the analysis, the instruments were revised to find categories and codes to identify the problem. The following figure provides information about the categories encountered:

<p>Positive attitude toward English</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students consider the practice of English as something useful in their professional lives (Ss questionnaire) • It was evident that students felt motivated to learn English, they liked the activities and showed interest and participated in class (journal)
<p>Need for reading practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the teachers expressed that reading practice might be possible if there was more time for instruction. (teachers questionnaire) • "...after reading the article, the students had problems understanding the general idea of the paragraph..." (journal)
<p>Lack of vocabulary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students expressed the have problems comprehending texts due to the lack of vocabulary (Ss questionnaire) • The low results in both reading and writing tests inticate that studens need much more practice in reading and vocabulary (Diagnostic Test)

Figure 1. Issues identified during diagnostic stage.

The previous figure displays the main issues attended during the intervention stage. Despite the fact that the students had a positive view of English, some adjustments were necessary to improve their learning process through implementing intensive reading.

Action stage. Taking into account the issues found in the diagnostic stage, six workshops, including instructional reading strategies based on the intensive reading approach, were

proposed to teach students how to read and comprehend texts in a more analytic way. The time devoted for each workshop was 3 hours, making a total of 30 hours of intervention approximately. The reading materials used in this project included stories, a comic strip, articles, and a fairy tale to expose the students to different types of readings. According to Khoshtakht and Gorjian (2017), language teachers can implement different reading materials other than books into their lessons because they can catch students' attention, increase their comprehension skills, and make them good readers.

In addition, the workshops that followed the reading process stages were divided into pre-, while-, and post-reading tasks. Each task allowed the students to understand every part of the reading passages. The development of the workshops was guided by the teacher who explained the strategies and provided examples to the students before doing each workshop. Finally, after the students did two workshops, they took a reading test including one of the instructional reading strategies seen in class. The results obtained on the tests were analyzed to revise students' use of reading. The following table shows a brief summary of the action stage:

Table 1. Action stage outline.

Workshop	Strategy	Type of Reading	Evaluation
1. Is reality stranger than fiction?	Know, Want and Learn (KWL) Chart	Short Story	Reading Test 1
2. Reading is fun	Survey, Question, Read, Revise, Review (SQ3R)	Comic	
3. Computer crimes	Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA)	Newspaper Article	Reading Test 2
4. Getting into the habit of reading	Vocabulary Self-Selection Strategy (VSS)	Magazine Article	
5. ...and they lived happily ever after	Story Mapping	Fairy Tale	Reading Test 3
6. Brilliant minds	Compare and Contrast charts	Course book Reading	

The graph below shows the reading process and the strategies used in each of the reading stages. Each workshop contained the mentioned strategies, assuring that the students learned to understand the readings step by step.

Evaluation stage. In this stage, three reading tests, three questionnaires, a pre- and post-test, and a teacher's journal were applied to check both performance and opinions coming from the students. After having collected and analyzed data from these instruments, the following students' performances and opinions were obtained:

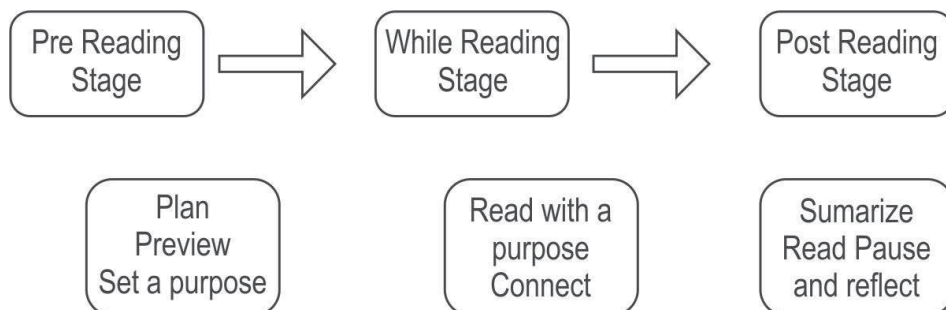


Figure 2. The reading process.

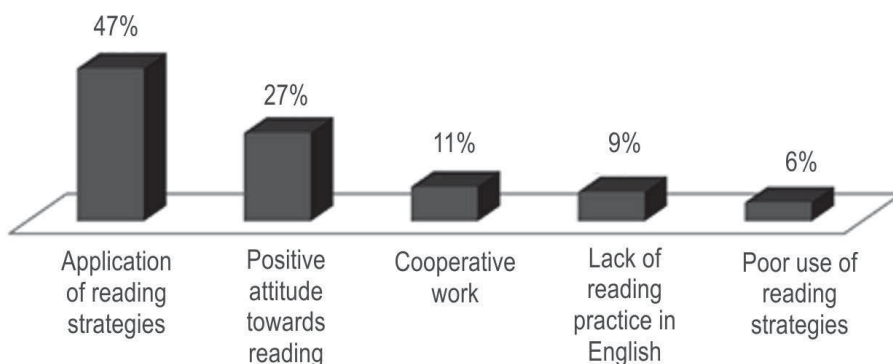


Figure 3. Students' performances and opinions in the Evaluation Stage.

Findings

After the implementation and the analysis of data from the instruments, the participants believed that the intensive reading approach improved their reading ability and changed their attitude positively. Reading turned into an enjoyable activity for them as they believed that the implemented strategies were useful. Also, the students were able to make predictions before reading, they wrote questions to know the author's purpose, and summarized the ideas after reading. Thus, these results revealed that intensive reading, when it is conducted with the use of comprehension strategies, gave the students a sense of achievement as positive attitude towards reading was enhanced. Some samples are included and identified as follows: SQ1 (Students' questionnaire 1), SQ2 (Students' questionnaire 2), SQ3 (Students' questionnaire 3), *TJ* (Teacher's Journal entries) and the results obtained on the RT (reading tests, a pretest, three reading tests using the strategies taught and a posttest).

Positive attitude towards reading. Learning to read by applying the implemented strategies helped the students understand a variety of texts during the course. According to Nation (2001) intensive reading is a gradual process that needs to be done for long-term purposes in which learning and applying the strategies are learnt through a continuous process. The fact that intensive reading is teacher-centered can help students analyze and comprehend a text in depth. Moreover, the workshops helped the students to notice the grammar and vocabulary as they had opportunities to reading different kinds of texts. Consequently, the intensive reading approach was effective to apply it with these students, because they understood what they read. Some of the students' opinions were:

- *“me parece que las lecturas están adecuadas al nivel”* SQ2
[I think the texts are suitable for our level]
- *“las lecturas me parecen interesantes ya que se aprende un poco más”* SQ3
- [The texts are interesting because I learn more]
- *“Las lecturas han sido interesantes y mejoran nuestro conocimiento”* SQ1
[The texts have been interesting and improve our knowledge]

Application of reading strategies. The instructional strategies used in the workshops allowed the students to activate their prior knowledge, to brainstorm ideas, and to become active participants during the workshop. The activities presented in the post-reading stage let the students propose something new that changed the traditional conception of just reading a text without using comprehension strategies. Authentic tasks such as presentations, posters, or graphic organizers allowed the students to summarize what they read. Some of the ideas and opinions taken from the instruments were:

- *“The workshop allowed students to summarize and make a whole analysis of the reading passage and increase their vocabulary...”* TJ entry 5
- *“los talleres de lectura me han ayudado a entender más vocabulario y aplicar estrategias”* SQ3
- [The reading workshops helped me understand more vocabulary and apply the strategies]
- *“The reading tests helped students to use the strategies in a more structured way following the parts of the text...”* RT post-test

Cooperative work. It can be said that intensive reading approach and comprehension strategies had a positive effect on the students' performance regarding making predictions, summarizing, checking for vocabulary, and contextualizing unknown words. Thus, it can be inferred that intensive reading comprehension positively impacted the students' reading comprehension because they improved since they started the reading workshops. A positive change was achieved because the texts were structured following the reading process model to help the students integrate previously existing background knowledge with newly incoming

data. Another aspect was that the students did collaborative homework in which they had the chance to share important ideas and discuss the texts, despite the fact that they had to work on their own. Some of the ideas and opinions taken about this issue were:

- “*me gustó el taller por que el tema me sirvió para aplicar las estrategias, me ha ayudado a entenderlas*” SQ2
- [I liked the workshop because it helped me apply and understand the strategies]
- “Students had no problem consolidating and summarizing the story and they felt motivated to doing the workshop” TJ entry 2
- “Students had the chance to apply different strategies during the reading tests and it was beneficial for them” RT

Poor use of reading strategies and lack of reading practice in English. Although the previous findings showed positive results, the students needed more instruction and time when processing the reading material. There were cases in which the students needed more time to analyze a workshop, presumably because of lack of vocabulary and overall language skills. This aspect implies that the students needed more time or a deeper analysis of the strategies to process newly incoming data. For future research, this consideration becomes relevant. Teachers should give students more input, make activities in which they activate their previous knowledge, and bridge the gaps between their reading comprehension and their previous experiences.

Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

This action research project offers an alternative for English language teachers to move from a grammar-focused view to a more demanding approach in which students can be more analytical and participative in class. In the meantime, this research has opened a path for reflection, to improve pedagogical practice and further exploration.

Impact of intensive reading among students. The results of this study indicate that the application of intensive reading with university students taking English language classes can be an alternative to involve and motivate students in reading. It also gives teachers in the field the opportunity to increase students’ interest about general topics by reading different kinds of texts related to their real lives. At the same time, English language students may reinforce important information about their experiences and account for different sections of a text. Consequently, if students have the chance of reading authentic material, they activate their previous knowledge and increase the amount of vocabulary they need to comprehend unknown vocabulary they may encounter in other contexts. In addition, the use of different reading strategies can help them determine the meaning of the words by using context clues to have a clear understanding of a text, which means that students’ interest and motivation for reading in English will be significant.

Importance of intensive reading among teachers. English language teachers should implement different reading strategies with students to facilitate the reading and understanding process. This becomes significant because teachers may not usually use reading texts in the class. They should realize that reading can be useful inside the class because the strategies of interpreting, connecting, and predicting can help identify both specific and general elements in a text. If teachers implement reading strategies and explain the benefits of reading more and more, students will start using them and be able to comprehend and analyze a text better.

Implementation of reading materials in the class. In addition, it is necessary to foster the use of readings inside the English language classrooms to make students more autonomous and independent readers. Therefore, teachers in the field should go beyond the traditional role of knowledge provider with a grammar-based approach to a more analytical view of language teaching. Students need to learn how to use learning strategies so that they can understand a variety of contexts and be more critical thinkers. As Nyikos and Oxford (1993) state, if students are more aware of the use of a strategy, it is likely they will be able to use it in any real context. In that way, they can overcome their general learning style limitations and use a lot of strategies to process and use new language information.

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Digital Storytelling: Boosting Literacy Practices in Students at A1-Level

Historias digitales: fomentando prácticas de alfabetización en estudiantes de nivel A1

González Mesa, Pedro Alejandro¹

Abstract

This article describes the implementation of digital storytelling in an English language class of eleventh graders at a private school in Mosquera, Colombia. It is a descriptive qualitative study, carried out for about six months by using digital tools to foster language production in the language learners. The implementation contained digital storytelling as a pedagogical strategy for developing the writing literacy practice. The personal stories and media literacy allowed the participants to combine both narratives and digital elements when writing in English in a collaborative work-group in which they co-constructed their stories. The data collected was analyzed by using ATLAS ti. Open questions looked for information about the writing process and the digital tools implemented when creating the stories. The findings revealed that the participants developed writing and speaking manners while assuming different roles. In addition, the digitalization of stories strengthened their multi-literacies. The participants' recordings of their voices helped them improve their oral production without worrying about their classmates' opinion. Finally, negotiation in the group roles, as writer, designer and media creator, played an important role when working in groups.

Keywords: collaborative learning, digital storytelling, digital tools, EFL, literacy practices, speaking, writing.

¹ Pedro Alejandro González Mesa holds a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics to TEFL and has taught English and trained teachers for more than 10 years. He currently works at Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios, Bogotá, Colombia. His research interests include critical discourse analysis and contextualized practices. pedro.gonzalez@uniminuto.edu
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5882-5871>

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Resumen

El presente artículo evidencia los resultados de un proyecto de investigación desarrollado en un colegio privado del municipio de Mosquera (Colombia) en el que los estudiantes de grado once fueron los participantes. El estudio cualitativo descriptivo tomó seis meses de implementación y tuvo como base el uso de herramientas digitales para fomentar el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera. Se utilizó la creación de historias digitales como la herramienta pedagógica para desarrollar su competencia literaria en escritura; esto se debió a que esta herramienta permitía a los estudiantes combinar la narrativa con la tecnología en un idioma extranjero. Además de las ventajas ya mencionadas, se debe decir que los estudiantes trabajaron en grupo en la construcción de historias. Los instrumentos utilizados para la recolección de datos fueron documentos, entrevistas y productos de los estudiantes. Los resultados de la investigación revelan que los participantes desarrollaron las habilidades de escritura y producción oral de una manera colaborativa. El investigador creó preguntas abiertas con la finalidad de obtener información acerca del proceso de escritura y el uso de las herramientas digitales. Luego de la recolección de la información, esta fue analizada en el programa ATLAS ti y los resultados muestran que los estudiantes, al crear historias digitales, mejoraron sus competencias lectoescritoras multimodales, y al grabar sus voces mejoraron su producción oral y confianza. Finalmente, es importante mencionar que la toma de decisiones en conjunto es clave para este trabajo en términos de los roles que cada uno cumplía, como el que escribía la historia, el que diseñaba y el que finalmente le agregaba lo audiovisual.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje colaborativo, historias digitales, herramientas digitales, inglés como lengua extranjera, prácticas de alfabetización, oralidad, escritura.

Introduction

This study shows the way literacy practices can be boosted when writing digital stories. As a language teacher, I have faced different challenges when teaching English as a foreign language to students in high school, especially when trying to guide them in both writing and speaking processes. As a result, I realized that some of my students had difficulties when writing and speaking in English not only in face to face interactions but also in virtual environments such as Facebook. Therefore, I decided to carry out a research study to look for new alternatives to use information and communications technologies (here after ICTs) to help students express their ideas and opinions in English.

84 On the one hand, the students were lacking coherence and cohesion when developing tasks related to writing skills because they were not able to express their ideas without using a translator or the teacher's help. In addition, the pieces of evidence gathered in an online written activity showed that the students' written texts faced issues in terms of coherence and cohesion. For example, some of them had problems using the subject pronouns, or they were using translating programs instead of relying on their own writing process. Despite this, the students were interested in developing face to face or virtual writing and speaking activities, such as posting comments on social webs or carrying out voice recordings and

videos to be posted on those virtual environments too. Finally, I could notice that the students felt more comfortable when working in groups in a collaborative manner, because they felt confident with their classmates to develop parts of the activities rather than working alone on the whole activity.

Therefore, the study that this article presents focuses on literacy practices, writing, and digital storytelling. A local researcher such as Lopez (2011) has looked for digital literacy practices with a project in which students created blogs. She found that,

Students increased their practical knowledge [...] by using multiple literacies to express in a new way of writing: blogging. Moreover, students communicate not only through a written language, but also through a visual one which include photos, images and videos. That helped them to increase and complement the meaning of their texts” (p. 67).

Lopez (2011) says that the social situated practices were, basically, a real fact in the project in the sense that students’ interactions in the classroom were a reason to promote the spoken and written foreign language as a means of communication with the reader. Therefore, local studies remark on the digital literacy as a way that may improve some social and individual practices. It can be concluded that learners may foster communication by using visual aids when blogging. In Lopez’s study, the students received help by images and videos in their blogs to understand better what the topic was about.

Additionally, Valderrama (2012) found that, in online literacies, learners create “a socially constructed meaning to the online community” (p. 78). They construct meaning based on social interactions when creating dialogues and scripts. He also found that “Students tend to perceive the activities proposed in the online community as a valuable opportunity to put their English into practice” (p. 78). Thus, my study looks for students to put language into practice when using digital tools to create stories, by providing them an opportunity to use a different environment from the classroom.

Others as Myers and Beach (2004) state that using ICTs in the classroom has become not only an opportunity to boost language learning but also a way to build up community practices (p. 257). Then, when putting together literacies and ICTs, learners have the possibility to be motivated and engaged in learning a language.

For this study, writing and ICTs are joined to improve language learning. To be more specific, writing practices have not been changed as Cross (2007) notes: “A hundred years ago modern languages were taught in the same way as the classics, through the written translation of texts” (p. 268). Cross (2007) also affirms that “writing is the least used skill” (p. 268) because it implies not only knowledge about a language but also multiple and dynamic facts that end in a textual composition. Complementarily, Prada (2011) states that “writing from a communicative perspective is seen [...] as the textual composition for issues of real

life for a real audience, the act of writing being one that emerges from reading, decoding, and understanding an authentic text” (p. 11). In the same line, Rojas (2011) affirms that “writing (as in not copying), requires thinking, understanding, interpreting” (p. 13). Considering those authors, writing is a process in which the author must involve the reader, digital stories, and multimodal texts such as images, sounds, and videos.

The terms literacy practices, ICTs, and writing process help introduce the term digital storytelling. In that respect, Bayon et al. (2003) propose that “storytelling can benefit children in multiple, diverse ways which support academic success. Storytelling facilitates the recall of content/facts, assists in comprehension, and contributes to listening and concentration skills. Storytelling offers an opportunity for creative/artistic expression” (p. 54). This means that digital environments will be useful not only for learning a language but also for face to face interactions in classroom in which students’ voices and stories can be presented by themselves in a free manner as an excuse to mediate between the creative/ artistic expression (developing the digital stories) and language learning. In their research study, Malkawi and Davies (2012) conclude that, “As a result of the research undertaken it has been identified that the use of multimedia technologies in the learning process have recently been included as a method of improving students’ reflective skills” (p. 2). Besides the fact of increasing those reflective skills, these authors highlight the importance of workgroups when creating and writing digital stories because students “re-tell” stories to their classmates to provide linguistic and content feedback.

Similarly, Aguirre (2010) defends the benefits of group work when writing by stating that writing is not an isolated practice. That is why collaborative learning plays a crucial role for my study because it shows the way students negotiate not only meaning but also the roles they have when writing. Accordingly, Rojas (2011) affirms that, “The students are not only passive recipients of knowledge, but creators of their own mechanisms for working, sometimes self-directed and sometimes working collaboratively” (p. 12).

Conceptual Framework

86

Literacy practices. These are all the textual productions and interpretations given by a person or a group of people; hence, they are everywhere and are performed by community members all the time. Myers and Beach (2004) say that a literacy practice is a communicative practice which involves multiple interactions between the members of a community (p. 262). The implications are for teachers that care more for the linguistic aspect of the language, rather than the way people interact; they have to promote the use of the language in a given context instead of teaching the language as an isolated element of human communication, as happens in social networks where interaction becomes an interesting environment to work on literacy practices. Besides, Myers (2006) emphasizes the idea that teachers must work with

digital elements to boost literacy practices in the classroom. In the author's words, "literacy and learning [...] [have] the greatest potential for grounding our work as English teachers and our integration of digital tools and multimodal representations is the conception of literacy as multiple socially constructed practices" (p. 62).

This concept has been changing through time, from pictorial representations to alphabetical vocabulary (Crystal, 2010, p. 46). White and Arndt (1991) affirm that writing is the ability to "transcend time and space, that makes teaching and learning of writing such an important experience" (p. 1). They also state that writing is an ability that allows expressing ideas, feelings, and insights in order to convince or inform people. In that sense, the purpose of writing is to convince or to inform a reader. When people write, they can create different and varied types of texts according to their intention. For White and Arndt (1991), writing is about words that represent a mental process which "demands conscious intellectual effort" (p. 3).

Media literacy. Nowadays, the big challenges for researchers have been the new literacies developed in virtual environments and for teachers the attention that they need to pay to the new generations of learners with respect to the way they address ICTs for reading and writing. In that sense, Kellner and Share (2005) define literacy as "the faculty to acquire reading, listening, writing, and speaking competences to comprehend and communicate with the world around us" (p. 369). Thus, literacy is a situated practice in which members of a community do varied activities for communicating, creating social relationships and systems of values, and identities (Myers & Beach, 2004, p. 257).

In the same line of thought, it is necessary to talk about traditional media as newspapers, books, television, and new media, such as videos, podcasts, websites, and social networks because they are concepts that together with literacy and media literacy share certain similarities in language terms; for example, the use of written and spoken forms and the language itself as a means of communication. Perhaps the most remarkable difference would be the channel or the environment in which the communication takes place. For instance, Asthana (2008) claims that "the media world is a world where powerful images, words and sounds create reality" (p. 130). By comparing this definition with Kellner and Share's (2005, p. 371), the deduction is that one precedes the other by modifying, somehow, the environment where interactions are developed.

Additionally, Kellner (as cited in Alvermann & Hagood, 2000, p. 194) considers media literacy to have serious implications in the development of literacy practices, due to the possibilities it presents to the users. He points out that "our culture is a media culture." In addition, he states that media is the primary vehicle for the distribution and dissemination of culture and it has supplanted previous modes of culture like the book or spoken word. As a

result of this media invasion, new educators' proposals have combined literacy, writing, and media literacy. One of these proposals is digital storytelling.

Digital storytelling. Storytelling comes from the need of humans to express their thoughts and their vision about the world around them. Ancient people used to paint hieroglyphs, with which they showed and told stories about animals and customs (Malkawi & Davies, 2012, p. 4). Those traditions changed when people and cultures developed more complex sounds and elaborated languages. Then, they started to transmit those stories in an oral way. Later, advantages in printing and writing forms allowed humans to write down their beliefs, thoughts, and ideas. Nowadays, with digital tools, there is an increasing era of digital stories, which fluctuate according to storytellers' needs.

Kenny (2008) describes the (or some) pedagogical implications of digital storytelling. He suggests that, "Digital students need to be taught literacy skills through more creative and diverse pedagogical instructional strategies" (p. 4). Therefore, digital storytelling is a tool for creating environments where learners can open their mind to new ways of expression while learning a foreign language. Besides the fact of increasing those reflective skills, Kenny states the importance of using workgroups within digital storytelling; he says that learners' activities of creating scripts and taking decisions in groups are important for their language learning.

To sum up, digital storytelling is a strategy that improves teaching and learning practices and an excuse for using virtual environments to empower students to create and use technologies as a medium and the language as a vehicle for second language learning. Czarnecki (2009) mentions that as students will gain new information and literacy skills through digital storytelling, then, those communication skills will be studied and fostered by teachers (p. 8).

Collaborative learning. These previous ideas are complemented by the concept of collaborative learning. Bruffe (1984) states that "The primary aim of collaborative learning [...] is to help students test the quality and value of what they know by trying to make sense of it to other people like themselves-their peers" (p. 640). Therefore, the goal of collaborative work is to make learners aware of peer-working benefits in the sense that they can be part of a group by contributing what they have previously learnt. Complementarily, Alavi (1994) draws attention to the development of the roles in collaborative learning saying that "Team members can monitor individual thinking, opinions, and beliefs and provide feedback for clarification and change" (p. 161). Then, the aim of collaborative work is not just to collaborate but also to create and boost other abilities that help the teaching-learning process among students.

One branch that has garnered the attention of different authors is online collaborative learning. According to Mei and Griffith (2014), "Online collaborative learning environments

can have cognitive, sociocultural, and psychological advantages, including enhancing writing skills, critical thinking skills, and knowledge construction, while increasing participation, interaction, motivation, and reducing anxiety” (p. 303). These authors support the idea of creating activities that engage both virtual environments and collaborative work to help learners build up their confidence and strengthen cognitive and practical skills.

Methodology

A descriptive qualitative research study was selected. According to Vaismoradi (2013),

“The value of qualitative description lies not only in the knowledge that can originate from it, but also because it is a vehicle for presenting and treating research methods as living entities that resist simple classification and can result in establishing meaning and solid findings” (p. 399).

My study was based on the creation of stories in a collaborative manner. Those stories were also digitalized so that the manner in which this process fostered literacy practices was described. Additionally, this study implements a qualitative research approach because it is seen from the participants’ perspective, taking into consideration the collaborative work developed by the students along the project (Creswell, 2014, p. 18). Thus, it seeks the literacy practices that the participating students gain when writing digital stories during English language classes.

Participants and sampling. The participating students were 48 eleventh graders whose English language proficiency level may be equal to the A1 level of the CEFR; they were selected from a classroom where I was the English language teacher. The students were from 14 to 16 years old. This sampling is known as a natural setting because of the interaction that I, as a teacher researcher, had with my students over the time and space (Creswell, 2014, p. 175). Although the institution is in Mosquera, most learners lived in Bogota; others were from other small towns around Mosquera. The participants were selected by using convenient sampling of the students who were previously assigned to the teacher-researcher that year. According to Nisha (2012), “in convenience sampling, subjects are included in the study because they happened to be in the right place at the right time” (p. 5).

Setting. This project took place at a private school located in Mosquera, a town close to the Colombian capital Bogota. The school offers technical education in which its students take English language classes six hours weekly. When the project was implemented, participating students had both the requested textbook and workbook. Subsequently, the language course topics and themes were based on these books; language teachers followed the scope and sequence proposed in these two books. A preliminary exam on English as a foreign language is not a requirement for students’ admission to the institution. Therefore,

the students' English language proficiency level was assorted. When developing this project, the participating students were asked to take their electronic devices, as smartphones and laptops, into the classroom. In addition, for the project the school provided an exclusive internet connection for the English language area.

The implementation had three pedagogical objectives: (1) to enable students to write stories, (2) to allow them to work in a collaborative way, and (3) to foster the students' literacy practices. The implementation was composed of seven different stages, named as (1) Getting ready to start, (2) introducing stories, (3) story stimulus, (4) story circle – peer to peer story creation, (5) technical lessons, (6) technical work sessions, and (7) peer evaluations. The implementation took about three months and a half by having English language sessions of six hours per week. The content stages took about two to three weeks for their implementation. Two stories were created along the implementation. Face-to-face interactions and computer-mediated sessions were at the school where the creative and productive stages were done.

Data collection instruments and procedures. Three instruments were used to gather data. The first was document data. It refers to special personal documents on which the students wrote their thoughts and insights about the intended learning process. In addition, they wrote about their beliefs and perceptions before and after the implementation. There were two written pieces collected per participant, and in each I had the opportunity to manage the “language and the words of the participants” (Creswell, 2014, p. 181). Because the first piece collected was the first story draft, that document had multiple issues in terms of structure, language, accuracy and content that all helped me to take decisions before the students created the second and final story. The second piece was collected at the end of the project; this piece provided qualitative information about the whole writing and digital process of the stories.

The second instrument was a collection of digital stories. Creswell (2014) names those as “qualitative audio and visual materials” (p. 182). He states that this is an instrument that can be used to loudly extract the reality. Digital stories were helpful for collecting information to attain the research objective of identifying the literacy practices fostered.

90 The third instrument was interviews, with open-ended questions, which allowed (1) keeping track of the process that the students followed when creating the stories and of their strengths and weaknesses when doing so; and (2) accounting for the collaborative work and the literacy practices that the students developed when creating the digital stories. Interviews were a valuable instrument in this study because they helped control the students' line of development within the study (Creswell, 2014, p. 182). We also share Lankshear and Knobel's view (2004) of open-ended questionnaires when they affirm that these are “useful for identifying trends or preferences across a large number of people” (p. 36). For this study,

two interviews were used. The first asked about the digital practices that the students had engaged in during the implementation; the second questioned the students about the process that they carried out in terms of design, group work, and literacy practices when creating the digital stories.

Data Analysis and Results

ATLAS.ti 5.2 software was used to organize, select, and work on the information collected and to organize the understanding and coding of the data. Open and axial coding were used to build the categories and subcategories presented in this section of the manuscript. From the data gathered, three categories emerged which describe the development of the digital stories and how it fitted with the idea of showing how literacies were boosted through the implementation of digital story-telling.

Figure 1 below shows the correlated categories and the connection as regards writing a digital story, literacy practices, learning awareness, and collaborative writing.

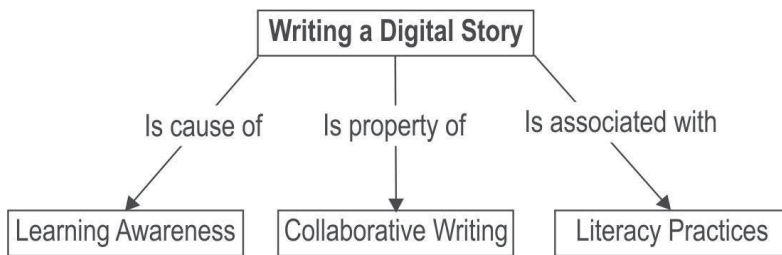


Figure 1. Writing a digital story.

A number of sub-categories belong to each of these three main categories. The sub-categories describe the writing process when creating a digital story in an ampler manner. “*Collaborative writing*” is the most robust category from the analysis.

Category 1, Collaborative writing. This describes the way learners were able to work as a group for producing a written piece. Figure 2 below shows the collaborative work carried out by learners along the whole process. Codes that complement this construct are: students’ initial ideas when creating a story; students’ authoring skills; students’ collective thinking on the reader engagement and students’ collaboration traces. As a result of this category we can find most of the writing foundations implemented by the students at the beginning, in the middle and in the end processes.

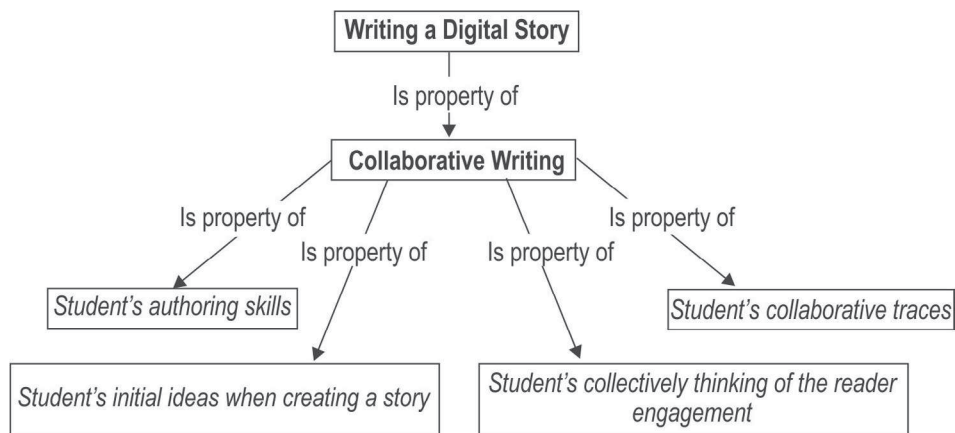


Figure 2. Collaborative writing category.

To start with the analysis of the codes, it is worth saying that authors of stories cannot start a story if they do not have an idea in mind of the topic to be worked. Hence, the authors of stories, in this case, the student participants, were authentic writers as they had an initial idea or ideas in mind about the topic of their writings. The code was named “*students’ initial ideas when creating a story.*” Excerpt number 1 is an example of that.

Excerpt 1: Interview of the students’ group about the story writing process.
 Question 4: What were the main problems you had when creating the story?

Original version	English
“Si fue como si porque en la primera nosotros quisimos hacer como videos de “YouTube” por decirlo así, subir algo narrar la historia, pero no hablar ni expresarnos ni contar un cuento por decir así como fabula o algo narrativo. No. Sino hacer la narración de una película como de nuestras vidas y esas cosas.” Excerpt P1:24. Student 1.	“At first, we wanted to produce some videos to publish in YouTube. We wanted to narrate a story. We didn’t want to tell a story or tell a fable, but we wanted to narrate a short movie about our lives, or something like that.” Excerpt P1: 24. Student 1.

92

This first excerpt shows that the students took elements from their experiences and put them into practice, elements from what they see, know, and use every day. Not only did they think about creating a story but also they wanted to post their lives in one. Also, they had an idea of the tool to be worked because they mentioned “YouTube,” which is a big reference to create or post digital videos, tutorials, and stories.

Indeed, the sub-category of “students’ authoring skills” emerged along the process that the students faced to produce a piece of writing. Excerpt 2 exemplifies how participants started to contribute all together when creating the story. This excerpt was taken from an interview done of the whole group at the end of the process. Raimes (1983) claims that a “composition means expressing ideas, conveying ideas” (p. 261). Hence, as the teacher-researcher, I never imposed a topic; the students were able to choose and create their stories in a free manner.

Excerpt 2: Interview. Question 1: How did you as a group decide what to write about? Describe that process.

Original version	English
<i>Después decidimos que era de terror, fuimos complementando la historia hasta llegar a un punto donde ya dijimos que pues el tema de terror nos pareció buena idea ese tema y nos quedamos con ese. [Excerpt P3:6. Student 1]</i>	Later, we decided that we wanted to tell a horror story. We mentioned some ideas until we reached a point to decide that a horror story seemed a good idea; so we chose it.

When taking decisions, the students talked about social issues, globalization, and lifestyles although choosing the topics was relevant in their authoring process. One important aspect was that they were aware of the reader engagement. This is because they were looking for some topics that motivate others to read their story; that is when the following code emerged: “Students’ collectively thinking of the reader engagement.” Excerpt 3 and 4 were taken from the interviews done at the middle of the implementation.

Excerpt 3: Interview open ended questions of a students’ group at the end of the process. Question 1: How did you as a group decide what to write about? Describe that process.

Original version	English
Decidimos como hacer una historia que hiciera como más que entender desde las pequeñas generaciones que son los niños, pues le podrían ir cuidando el medio ambiente. [Excerpt P1:1. Student 1]	We decided to create a story to help young generations (children) to understand how to take care of the environment.

Excerpt 4: Interview of the students’ group about the story writing process. Question 2: Who wrote the script?

Original versión	English
Que fuera que escribiéramos algo así como lo de la película, y para pues que era una historia real, y aparte, al final había una moraleja, que las personas no deben perder su humildad por más de que prosperen. [Excerpt P31:5. Student 3]	We wanted to write a real story for a short movie with a moral: stay humble, no matter how much you prosper.

The above excerpts support Myers and Beach’s (2004) ideas about literacy practices, in the sense that the students were not only creating a story by themselves but thinking about how the story was going to be read by someone else and how it could be an example for a community (p. 262). In addition, this idea is similar to Mei and Griffith’s (2014) view about collaborative writing because it enhances “critical thinking [...] and knowledge construction” (p. 303). Accordingly, being read has to do with a cognitivist theory mentioned by Johns (1990), who claims that writers become more mature when they write for someone else, moving from “writer based... to... reader based” (p. 30). Thus, the participating students were able to create a story from a free topic by thinking about the reader engagement rather than a final score.

Another aspect that was pillar in the writing process was the “*students’ collaborative traces.*” Next, Excerpt 5 presents learner roles when creating the digital stories. Here, the students were able to differentiate their own skills from others’ and to contribute to the whole process of writing a digital story according to their abilities. Thus, creating a digital story and writing it includes not only being a writer but also an artist, to combine multimodal texts in one. The students’ insights, as the following one, can exemplify better the last idea. The excerpt was taken from a group at the end of the implementation.

Excerpt 5: Interview of the students’ group about the story writing process.

Question 3: As a group, how was the script parts written? How did you divide the work?

Original version	English
Eh, por ejemplo, la persona que más tenía como más imaginación referente, no se a un diálogo, entonces empezó a escribir el guion. La persona que manejó más imaginación para atrapar a las personas fue la que hizo la hipnosis, eh, la persona pues que tenía más creatividad pues hizo la parte artística. [Excerpt P2:4. Student 3]	Eh, for example, the person who was more creative writing dialogues wrote the script; the person who was more creative to engage people in it was the one in charge of the ‘hypnosis,’ and the most creative person was in charge of the artistic issues.

94 This Excerpt 5 shows the way some of the students were aware when creating the stories. The excerpt mentions the way they divided some specific tasks such as writing a script, the artistic part, and doing the abstract.

Category 2, learning awareness. This category presents the students’ insights about their learning process in terms of writing and the factors that influence them in the process of creating a story. The sub-categories that belong to “learning awareness” are *students’ agency in the creative process* and *collective voice* (see Figure 3 below). These sub-categories show

the students' perceptions and feelings in terms of knowing about new tools and ways of collaborating among themselves.

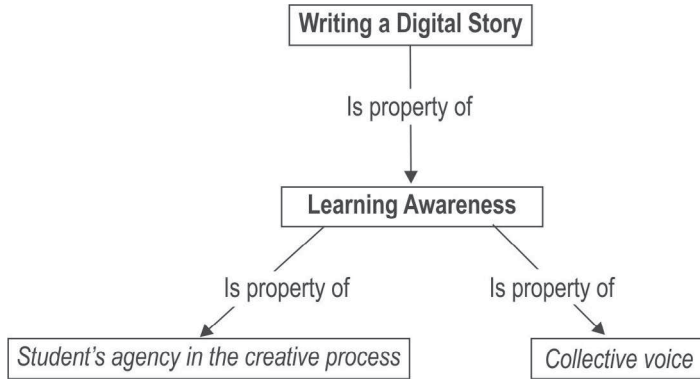


Figure 3. Learning awareness category.

The following code, “*students’ agency in the creative process,*” has to do with the students’ strengths and weaknesses when creating the stories. This code also bears a close relation to the negotiation process in which the students were involved. This subcategory shows changes in the students’ attitudes and weaknesses, trying to improve their final products and contributing to the group. As an example of this, Excerpt 6 was taken from an interview done with a group of the students.

Excerpt 6: Interview of a students’ group about the story writing process.

Question 8: At the end of the process, what do you think the difference is between the two stories you created?

Original version	English
<p>Pues la primera [historia] nos dio como más experiencia ya como en manejar algunos programas, digamos el ambiente en que vamos a grabar las voces, hacer las cosas antes de planear de pronto para que no nos quede digamos todo a última hora y que por el afán sí que nos salga mal, hacer las cosas con dedicación y pues de esta manera nos salga mejor todo [Excerpt P2:27. Student 3]</p>	<p>After writing the first story, we had more experience about using programs to record our voices. We planned in advance to avoid doing everything at the last minute and to prevent making mistakes. We wanted to do things with dedication, thus, everything goes well.</p>

This opinion shows the students’ processes when creating the stories, the participation and investment they experienced. The students, first, had an idea about what they wanted to

write. That stage is an initial writing stage, or pre-writing, in which the author takes decisions about the purpose of their constructions. Regarding this process, the following code “*collective voice*,” shows the evolution gained during the whole creative stage. The students passed from taking decisions to constructing their stories collectively. Considering Guasch et al. (2013), collaborative writing emerges from different factors as the number of elements as ideas, critical thinking, opinions, and different interactions presented during the process (p. 325). In that respect, before starting the digital part, the students walked through the process of discussing, sharing, giving opinions, and negotiating meaning to create a final script. In addition, they said that they had had the opportunity not only to learn English but also to develop some skills when looking for information. They concluded that they had strengthened some attitudes towards language learning.

In addition, “*collective voice*” shows the agreements and disagreements that the students had throughout the implementation. The way they assumed the discourse by taking over the representations of the group in the Spanish first person plural form (-mos, nos, os) expresses the students’ voices about the decisions taken and the different challenges they faced across the implementation. The main characteristics of this code are, first, that the student participants manifested writing with a purpose. They also evidenced reaching agreement in writing ideas and that collective voice was shaped by the ideas and self-identification shown in the process of co-construction of the story. This also has a strong relation to the micro-political theories of learning that occur as a reason of the social interaction and negotiation of meaning. Furthermore, (we can say) the collective voice explains the construction of a literacy practice in the classroom. Excerpt 7 exemplifies it. This was taken when interviewing the students at the end of the study.

Excerpt 7: Interview of a students’ group at the end of the process using open-ended questions. Question 1: How did you as group decide what to write about?
Describe that process.

96

Original version	English
Fue basándonos en las ciudades que pensábamos que nuestros compañeros tenían. Pensamos que todos lo demás lo iban a hacer de un tema fácil, como digamos lo es digamos el amor, o temas que no son necesarios usar tanto sonido o imágenes diferentes. Entonces buscamos el tema de terror para poder hacer, o sea, hacer un trabajo más elaborado y mejor hecho [Excerpt P3:3. Student 3]	We took into account the cities that we thought our partners had. We thought that others were going to choose an easy topic like love or topics that do not require the use of sounds or different images. Then, we chose the topic of horror to make a better and more complex work.

The above exemplifies the way the students were working in groups for creating digital stories. They were rationalizing the process in terms of the collective construction. In addition we saw, for the students, how selecting a topic implied not only a simple decision but a democratic and analytical revision of their own ideas.

Category 3, literacy practices. The final category shows the way literacy practices are seen and worked by the students along the project. Figure 4 below presents the relation that media literacy and language development have with the creation of a story. This figure also presents the way the students fostered their literacy practices in a foreign language when implementing digital tools.

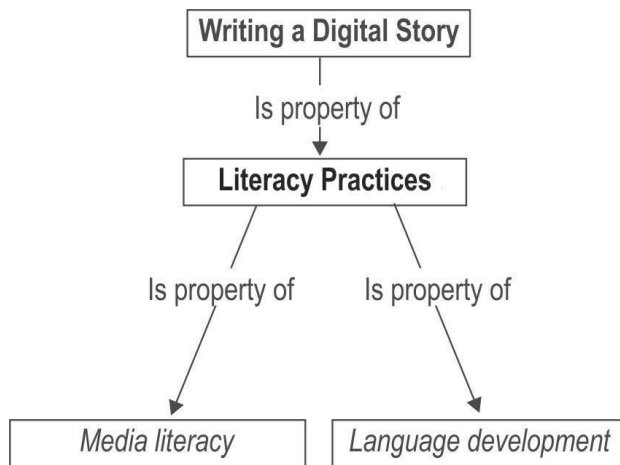


Figure 4. Literacy practices category.

Media literacy is the faculty of using the different communicative and linguistic skills in connection with a digital source. Asthana (2008) claims that “the media [...] is a world where powerful images, words and sounds create reality” (p. 130). Thus, some web pages and sources were used by the students to use images and sounds as part of the process, which means that most of the stories had images previously created, adapted, and posted according to the content of the stories. Furthermore, it has strong connection with the elements mentioned by Czarnecki (2009) about visual literacy (p. 16). These elements are clearly shown in the final products that the students mentioned in excerpts 8 and 9, for example. These excerpts were taken from interviews with different students.

Excerpt 8: Interview of a students’ group about the story writing process. Question 5: When creating the storyboarding, how did you decide on the images and sounds to be included in the story?

Original version	English
Pues las imágenes las elegimos, pues fuimos buscando pues en internet, por lo que nuestra historia pues es en silueta; entonces entre todas, estuvimos eligiendo las imágenes y la que editó todo y los unió pues fue Juana. [Excerpt P4:8. Student 2]	Well, we searched in the Internet to choose the images because we used silhouettes to tell our story. We all helped to choose the images and Juana edited them all.

Excerpt 9: Student insight about his written process. Question 1: What are the positive and negative aspects of the use of digital story telling? Describe each.

Original version	English
Programas como “Crazy talk” son de un manejo muy sencillo, simplemente se deben seguir los pasos que nos proponen; en los programas como “Movie Maker” y “Sony Vegas Pro” es un poco más complejo, ya que contiene muchas más herramientas que se deben aprender a controlar. [Excerpt P10:2. Student 2].	Programs as “Crazy talk” are very easy to use; you simply have to follow the steps that they propose. In programs as “Movie Maker” and “Sony Vegas Pro,” editing a movie is a bit more complex, as it contains many more tools to learn how to use.

In the last comment, the participating student talks about the uses of different tools. In addition, more comments describe the advantages and disadvantages of using those programs. But there were also worthy ideas of collaborative learning when they decided what tools to use to carry out their project in a better way.

As media literacy talks about the ability that people have when using technology to complement their learning skills, the next comment shows how another participating student used the tools to point out the implementation of those technological elements in the construction of the stories. The excerpt was taken from a group of learners who finished their story.

Excerpt 10: Interview of a students’ group about the story writing process. Question 10: When the story was submitted, did you consider that something could be missing in it?

Original version	English
Digamos, en la otra historia, incluso en la que estamos haciendo, estamos buscando la manera de poner animaciones u otra herramienta que nos ayude a que no solo sean imágenes sino también además la parte de video a contar la historia no solo hablado. [Excerpt P27:21. Student 2]	Let’s say that, in the other story, even the one we are doing, we are looking for ways to put animation or another tool that will help us not only to use images but also video to tell the story, not just to use audio.

The student mentioned that it was helpful to use the images and the sounds because they only have their voices. But the idea of using them was to complement the story in order to make it easy for an audience to be understood.

To conclude the data analysis, the way language was seen by the participants at the end of the implementation is important to highlight. Most of the opinions gave an account of students' experiences about creating the digital stories in their language learning process. Therefore, the code "*language development*" and the following excerpts support the ideas above. Excerpts 11 and 12 were taken from the students at the end of the process of writing a story.

Excerpt 11: Student insight about his written process. Question 1: What are the positive and negative aspects of the use of digital story telling? Describe each.

Original version	English
Esto nos anima a practicar el inglés, lo cual nos ayuda a que este idioma sea más fluido en nosotros pues no solo practicamos un solo ítem ² de los 5 que vemos en inglés, podemos hablar mediante la caracterización, escribir el guion, leer, escuchar y entender al momento de ver las historias. [Excerpt P11:2. Student 2]	This encourages us to practice English which in turn helps us to be more fluent because not only do we practice a single item of the 5 that we see in English, but also we can speak through characterization, write the script, read, listen and understand when someone sees the stories.

Excerpt 12: Student insight about his written process. Question 1: What are the positive and negative aspects of the use of digital story telling? Describe each.

Original version	English
Creo que esta forma de enseñar inglés es muy buena ya que es algo diferente de lo que estamos acostumbrados a recibir como clase de inglés. Es algo más motivante hacia el estudiante por que hace que investiguemos más, queramos cada vez más tener mejor vocabulario. [Excerpt P13:5. Student 2]	I think this way of teaching English is very good because it is something different from the way we usually study in class. It is something more motivating for the students because it makes us investigate more to have more vocabulary.

At the end of the implementation, the student considered that he had learnt more from the project than from the "typical class" in which the course book was used to practice

² "Item" refers to the language skills worked in the syllabus by the teachers in the school e.g. reading and speaking.

learning skills. Moreover, the students in general felt that, at some stages in the process, they had learned without any help when to look for information and sources for their stories. That shows a sense of autonomy ratifying that, despite being involved in collaborative work, a few of the students acquired a self-identity when working in groups.

The final excerpt below, taken from a student reflexion done at the end of the process, shows that the students liked recording their voices more than speaking in front of their classmates. Furthermore, the students started to see English in a different manner; they saw it as a language in use, not just as a requirement without sense. Finally, they used their literacy without pressure; then, they were able to improve their authoring skills and, in terms of writing, the paragraphs construction and digitalization of the stories in a foreign language.

Excerpt 13: Student insight about his written process. Question 1: What are the positive and negative aspects of the use of digital story telling? Describe each.

Original version	English
<p>Cambió drásticamente la forma de aprender fluidez al hablar debido a que no fue como siempre, que es pararse frente de sus compañeros a hablar un idioma el cual apenas conocemos, y lógicamente eso va a generar una presión muy alta para el estudiante. Con este proyecto podíamos practicar la fluidez desde la comodidad de su casa mientras grabara las voces sin ningún tipo de presión y hablara más fluido. [Excerpt P21:9. Student 2]</p>	<p>It drastically changed the way to practice fluency because it was not as it used to be, standing in front of their classmates to speak a language which we barely know. Logically, that will generate a very high pressure for the student. With this project, I could practice fluency from the comfort of my home while recording voices without any pressure to speak fluently.</p>

Therefore, Excerpt 13 shows that the students' ideas go beyond simple language learning because they assume that digital stories comprised a good element to be used in different subjects. This fact was exemplified in the cross-curricular relations they made. Some of the students considered more options like learning to manage new programs, autonomy, second language acquisition, and narrative skills.

Conclusions

Firstly, the student-participants had the possibility of implementing the target language for different purposes such as informing or leaving a message. For example, one group wrote about contamination in the world, another about football, and others about love and superheroes. Data showed that negotiation of meaning and content was an important element when the students created their stories. In addition, the students acquired better

understanding of their process as writers and authors. They worried about the idea of improving from the first to the third story. When they assessed their work in terms of accuracy, content, and process, they showed that they were aware of their literacy practices, and how much these had improved by the use of the target language in each of their digital stories. Furthermore, digital story telling allowed the students to create different texts, communicate their ideas, express their thoughts and insights, and tell their stories², not only in a written form but through images, sounds, and media texts.

Secondly, writing is a process that requires thinking about the text and reader (Johns (1990, p. 27). That process was part of this study because in almost all the stories created, the students were thinking about the reader's engagement. That means that the students were worried about the readers' opinions and beliefs, then they decided to develop different stories to be read and understood by any kind of readers.

Thirdly, collaborative work is defined by Salinas (2014) as "essential in any learning context because we are social human beings who construct knowledge together" (p. 33). Working by groups was an important element in the development of the students' literacies and in the creation of digital stories. Thus, the students constructed their writings by negotiating and giving ideas in the process. Moreover, they assumed certain roles according to their abilities. For example, some students were skilled in the use of digital tools; others were good at writing; others at editing. All members of the group intervened in the process. Then writing and speaking were not isolated tasks.

Pedagogical Implications

Mainly, feedback plays an important role in the writing process and in the creation of digital stories. This is part of the roles that English language teachers should play when their students carry out writing activities. This feedback can have a focus on both linguistic aspects and contents. Furthermore, beginners need an outline that guides them throughout the construction of their texts. This could be a description of writing stages or simply a number of parameters to follow. This is an initial stage to make students better writers.

This research project and the students' comments were a great opportunity to identify their likes, dislikes, and expectations about the curriculum, not only in the English language field but also in other subjects. I consider digital story telling as part of the curriculum

² As an example, different artifacts collected are available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCEY-5Uu9Tw&feature=youtu.be>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bl3v5iQX3yo&list=UU0my6nUkb6xPoTP2Aze6Ahw>
<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=410402805749829&set=o.176054915916238&type=2&theater>

in many schools because of the different possibilities it offers. Including technological tools in the classroom and curriculum has demonstrated that this is a means of motivation for students when writing and developing their literacy. In the current study, the use of technological tools helped the participating students improve their coherence and cohesion when expressing their ideas. Also, they started to use more vocabulary in their final scripts. However, the writing process should be continual since students are always learning the language.

Some additional examples of motivation when implementing digital tools were the research projects carried out by Lopez (2011), Valderrama (2012), Prada (2011), Clavijo et al. (2011) and Vera et al. (2011). All agree on the importance of integrating ICTs to the curriculum of language learning because people around the world are living in a digital era. Therefore, they need language teachers to focus on the implementation of digital instruments in teaching. What I identified with the students' attitudes and opinions in the current study was that digital storytelling could allow language teachers to motivate its use and take advantage of it to change the explanations and the involvement that students may have in class somehow.

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Iranian L2 Researchers' Perspectives on Research Ethics

Perspectivas de investigadores iraníes de segunda lengua sobre la ética de la investigación

Gharaveisi, Zhila¹;
Dastgoshadeh, Adel²

Abstract

This study aims at exploring L2 researchers' perspectives on research ethics in Iran. A total of ten teacher researchers were selected among a larger group of researchers based on the criteria of academic degree and familiarity with research principles. They were interviewed about different aspects of research ethics. Their responses were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Finally, the emerging themes were extracted from the responses which showed plagiarism, data management, participant rights, and authorship rights as the most frequent themes discussed by the respondents. Furthermore, the extent of the participants' self-expressed adherence to ethical considerations in research was differential, ranging from a minimum amount of adherence to an acceptable degree of adherence and commitment to research ethics. In addition, the results showed that not all participants had a clear understanding and definition of the four major themes which emerged from the results.

Keywords: ethical principles, perspectives of ethics, research ethics, themes of ethics.

Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objeto explorar las perspectivas de investigadores de segunda lengua sobre la ética de la investigación en Irán. Un total de diez profesores-investigadores se seleccionaron entre un grupo mayor, con base en los criterios de grado académico y familiaridad con los principios

¹ Zhila Gharaveisi has received her MA in TEFL from Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj Branch, Iran. She has taught English language in different institutes for more than nine years. gharaveisi.zhila@iausdj.ac.ir

² Adel Dastgoshadeh is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj Branch, Iran. He holds a Ph.D in TEFL. He has published and presented a number of articles in different journals and conferences. His areas of interest include discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and teacher education. adastgoshadeh@iausdj.ac.ir

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de la investigación. A los profesores-investigadores se les entrevistó sobre diferentes aspectos de la ética de la investigación. Sus respuestas fueron grabadas y transcritas por el investigador. Finalmente, los temas emergentes se extrajeron de las respuestas de los participantes referentes a plagio, manejo de datos, derechos de los participantes y derechos de autor. Además, la adherencia a las consideraciones éticas de la investigación de los participantes fue diferencial, la cual oscila entre una cantidad mínima y aceptable. De igual manera, los resultados muestran que no todos los participantes tuvieron un claro entendimiento ni una clara definición de los cuatro temas que emergieron de los resultados.

Palabras clave: principios éticos, perspectivas de la ética, ética de la investigación, temas de ética.

Background

In their book, *Second Language Research, Methodology and Design*, Mackey and Gass (2005) review the history of ethical considerations in second language research. They present a principled discussion of why adhering to ethics in research involving human subjects is necessary. Ethical issues in research have also been attested across committees and organizations in charge of ethics in social sciences research as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Office of Human Subjects Research (OHSR), the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), the U.S. Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), and the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) of various universities, which provide guidelines for writing informed consent documents, for example, Harvard's *The Intelligent Scholar's Guide to the Use of Human Subjects in Research* (2000) (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Despite the great verity in social sciences and humanities research methods, all researchers have to recognize and take into consideration a number of fundamental ethical principles while conducting research tasks or projects which are considered equally applicable to all areas of enquiry. Among such ethical considerations, reference can be made to the documentation of the sources from which a researcher borrows oral and/or written materials including words, phrases, clauses, sentences and beyond. This is because crediting sources is ethically necessary since obtaining others' permission is required when one is quoting their words.

Newman and Ratliff (2001) have compared linguistics with anthropology and sociology and expressed concern about the little awareness that the former gives about ethical considerations. Second language acquisition (SLA) seems to share this orientation with linguistics in general. Such unawareness of ethical matters in the field of SLA has been attributed by Ortega (2005, p. 429) to an "illusion that somehow neutrality is inherent in the concerns of the field".

If ethical issues in SLA research are important and should be taken seriously by SLA researchers while doing research, sufficient attention should be paid to familiarizing L2 researchers with the fundamental principles of ethics and ethicality in conducting L2 research studies. Only then can one expect a healthy atmosphere in which useful and well-

grounded research studies will be carried out without being muddled with the inconsistencies and inadequacies created by lack of adherence to and compliance with ethics and ethicality.

However, before trying to make L2 researchers familiar with ethical issues in second language research, it is worth exploring their perspectives on ethics in second language research in order to learn their attitudes and perceptions about research ethics and the extent to which they agree on the importance of ethics in conducting L2 research to understand how much they are ethics-oriented. Previous studies on ethical matters in research in Iran have addressed research ethics from such perspectives as plagiarism as an instance of academic dishonesty (Rezanejad & Rezaei, 2013), the reasons behind plagiarism (Bamford & Sergiou, 2005), academic cheating (Ahmadi, 2012), and perceptions of plagiarism (Mahdavi-Zafarghandi, Khoshroo, & Barkat, 2012). However, no study seems to have addressed the researchers' perspectives of ethical issues in second language research in Iran.

Non-ethicality in SLA research can cause problems which certainly obstruct reaching dependable conclusions about the teaching and learning of a second language and consequently, misguide the profession from obtaining reliable findings. Furthermore, undue attention to ethical considerations will undoubtedly cause a lot of harm to the rights of other researchers and scholars in the field as their ownership rights and trustworthiness rights might be violated and ignored. Obviously, many codes of ethics have been proposed and implemented across the world, and L2 researchers in many parts of the world are already familiar with these codes of ethics and have internalized the habit of following them while conducting research. Instances of these codes of ethics can be honest crediting of sources, avoiding plagiarism, observing authorship rights, etc. The important point to be highly taken seriously is to explore the Iranian L2 researchers' perspectives about these ethical issues and the extent to which they are willing and determined to follow them in their research studies. In other words, the problem relates to whether SLA researchers in the Iranian context are familiar with and careful about ethical considerations for conducting research in addition to their specialized and technical knowledge, which is taken for granted as the sole basis for being a researcher in our context.

The significance of ethicality for researchers in all contexts in general, and for those in the Iranian context in particular, relates to the fact that both contexts are highly dependent on the outcomes of research, and such dependence makes sense only if researchers follow those principles which guarantee the reliability of research findings. Ethicality is one of these principles. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate how L2 (English language) researchers in Iran, within the scope of current study, conceptualize research ethics, and what their perspectives and priorities of ethical issues in research are.

Review of Literature

As Kelman (2007) observes, the emergence of systematic ethical awareness in the behavioral sciences dates back to as early as the 1960s. Kelman (2007) ponders the ethical considerations as “an integral component of the research process itself, on a par with theoretical and methodological concerns – based on the proposition that what we learn through our research is intimately linked to how we learn it” (p. xiv). Similarly, Kimmel (2007) emphasizes the importance of ethical decision-making in modern research and sketches such issues as notorious cases of ethical misconduct which have either misrepresented research results, caused research participants much harm and inconvenience, and ruined the researchers’ reputations, or negatively changed public opinion and tolerance for social sciences research.

Ethics in applied linguistics research. In spite of the differences in the nature, definition, and consequences of ethical issues across different scientific domains including applied linguistics, it is generally agreed that ethics forms an integral ingredient of any piece of research of whatever type and focus. SLA is no exception. Suffice it to say here that Allwright (2005) counts ethical issues as one of the three major considerations of exploratory practice or research when he argues that technical, epistemological, and ethical dimensions of research on second language learning form the three main issues to be considered by L2 researchers. In so doing, Allwright (2005) suggests that the ethical dimension of research is just as important and worthy of attention as are the technical and epistemological dimensions of research, which are normally the subject matter of technical texts on research and research methodology.

Specifically, with reference to SLA research, there seems to be a paucity of literature on ethics, however. Even the works of such leading figures and scholars as Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), Ellis (1994), Gass and Selinker (2007), and VanPatten and Williams (2007), as prestigious textbooks on SLA methods, lack any reference to ethics, which is really surprising considering the significance of ethics in doing research. SLA seems to be inheriting this tradition from its relative discipline, linguistics, which also lacks any concern with ethical issues compared to anthropology and sociology. Ortega (2005, p. 429) argues that this reluctance to apply ethics in SLA research stems from the “illusion that somehow neutrality is inherent in the concerns of the field” and questions this position by arguing that “value-free research is impossible” (p. 432).

Gottlieb (1997) also rejects the assumption that all research including ESL research is being carried out ethically, transparently, and unproblematically. Rather, he recommends investigating the beliefs and practices of ESL researchers to find out what ethical issues are involved.

Researchers' perspectives on research ethics inside Iran. Perspectives, perceptions, and conceptualizations about ethical issues in research as well as degrees of adherence to research ethics may vary from individual to individual and culture to culture. Consequently, it is worth discussing the perceptions of research ethics and amount of adherence and dedication to ethical issues inside the Iranian setting. Regarding the differences in views about research ethics and adherence to ethical considerations in research, Aba-Sha'ar (2017) comments that, "Research ethics is an important part of [the] professional life of every researcher and it influences society in multiple ways. However, perception of ethics, its principles and its importance may significantly vary between individuals, disciplines, and countries" (p. 2).

Mahdavi-Zafarghandi, *et al.* (2012) investigated Iranian EFL masters students' perceptions and understanding of the concept of plagiarism, their perceived seriousness of plagiarism, and the rates of the prevalence of different forms of plagiarism. Through a survey study using a questionnaire, they found that plagiarism was a common phenomenon among the students and that they had an inadequate conceptualization of different forms of plagiarism. They also found that "prevalence rates of plagiarism were negatively correlated with both perceived seriousness and understanding of plagiarism at significant levels. Third, perceived seriousness of plagiarism was a predictor of prevalence rates of plagiarism among Iranian EFL Masters students" (p. 69). The authors did not observe any significant relationship between the participants' understanding of plagiarism and their years of study, which they interpreted as suggesting that they were experiencing serious challenges with accurately recognizing the different forms of plagiarism in their academic lives.

Rezanejad and Rezaei (2013) examined Iranian EFL learners' perceptions and familiarity with plagiarism, their attitudes toward their professors with respect to plagiarism, and their proposed justification and reasons for committing plagiarism. The subjects of the study were 122 undergraduate and graduate EFL students of English literature, linguistics, translation, and TEFL. They responded to a questionnaire measuring these constructs which had been piloted and validated by the researchers. The results of their study revealed that the students had different conceptualizations and perceptions of plagiarism, and that plagiarism was mostly considered by them as the use of someone else's words as one's own, but they did not consider it to mean taking someone's ideas without permission. The authors also found that the students considered copying their classmates' and friends' assignments as instances of academic dishonesty in their academic career. According to this study, the students believed that their instructors and professors only made guesses and suppositions about their students having committed plagiarism rather than actually checking and controlling the submitted assignments to find out who has really plagiarized. The results also showed that Iranian EFL learners had different reasons and justifications for plagiarizing, the most important one of which was the ease of doing their assignments through plagiarism. Finally,

the study indicated that the majority of the subjects had been made familiar with the concept of plagiarism and the different forms of its realization by their professors at university.

Due to the scarcity of studies exploring the perspectives held by Iranian L2 researchers about research ethics, and the need for elaborating and explicating such perspectives in an attempt to provide a more comprehensive view of these perspectives, the present study has aimed at further investigating Iranian L2 researchers' perspectives on ethical considerations in conducting research. Inspired by the above general aim, this study has specifically aimed at providing the answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the Iranian L2 researchers' perspectives on ethics in SLA research?

RQ2: To what extent do Iranian L2 researchers converge on the nature and significance of ethics in L2 research?

Method

Research approach and design. It is believed that quantitative studies distinctly situate the researcher on the periphery. Therefore, to get a deeper understanding and a more comprehensive picture of the question under investigation, some researchers prefer to conduct contextually sensitive case studies through which they can come up with a more profound understanding and awareness of the different angles of the problem being addressed (Hoy, 2008; Seferoğlu, Korkmazgil, & Ölçü, 2009). This view of research is in line with the definition of qualitative research as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Because of this, qualitative methods of research are more appropriate in situations in which quantitative measures cannot adequately describe or interpret the issue being investigated (Hoepfl, 1997) and – as in this specific case – where the research questions are open-ended e.g. ‘what’, ‘how’, or ‘why’ questions. Qualitative research studies have also been claimed to have the “ability of elucidating situations that are otherwise enigmatic or confusing” (Hiver, 2010, p. 25). This study is descriptive in nature and follows a qualitative design.

112 Research sample. This study used criterion sampling as participants all met some “specific predetermined criteria” (Dörnyei, 2007, p.128). Initial selection of participants for this study was from a cohort of private institute and public school English teachers in Sanandaj and some other neighboring cities in the Kurdistan Province, where they were teaching English. Those living in Sanandaj were invited to participate in a session held in a conference hall where the researcher elaborated on the nature, purpose, and implementation of the research project. Those living out of Sanandaj were provided with a detailed descriptive statement explaining the same details about the research project plus a letter of invitation,

delivered to the relevant school principals who were asked to inform their fellow teachers about the statement.

Also, the criteria for participating in the study were explained to the participants. A total of 15 teacher researchers from those attending the session in person and 7 teacher researchers among those receiving the written statements and invitation letter completed the total of 22 researchers, who considered themselves as enrolled for actual participation and announced their cooperation in the subsequent phases of the study. Then, an initial screening interview was administered from which 15 researchers were selected. They held at least a master's degree in TEFL and had a minimum of 4 research papers published in creditable journals accepted by the Iranian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology.

These participants were selected for the next phase of the interview. This phase aimed at assessing their familiarity with the principles of research, publication procedures, ethical considerations in conducting research, reviewing processes of journals, statistical analysis and data collection procedures, participants' rights, as well as aim and significance of conducting research. In addition, they were interviewed on the extent to which they used to read published papers in their field of specialization. Finally, as allowed by considerations of practicality, a total of 10 teacher researchers (6 females: 2 Ph.D., 4 M.A. – 4 males: 1 Ph.D., 3 M.A.) were selected as the ultimate participants of the study. Below, a brief description of each of the participants will be presented with their own chosen pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Instrumentation. The instrument used in this study was a guided interview, following Mehrani (2015), aimed at assessing the participants' perspectives on research ethics. In line with an extensive review of the literature on research ethics, some frequently recurring themes could be extracted as the basis of interview questions; for example, plagiarism, truthfulness in representing research data, authorship in publishing research papers, confidentiality and anonymity, reporting research results, interference, conflict of interest, conscientiousness, accurate citation, and referencing. However, in order to tap into the participants' genuine ideas and perspectives, the interview was designed in an open-ended format to allow for freedom of opinion and a wider scope of data elicitation aimed at identifying the most frequent patterns of responses, then coming up with emergent themes out of those responses. Therefore, the initial draft of the interview consisted of eight questions and was submitted to the judgment of a panel of experts including my research supervisor, who was an experienced interviewer specialized in educational assessment, for further scrutiny until they agreed on the following five open-ended questions:

1. What do you think about research ethics?
2. What ethical considerations do you think are worth paying attention to by L2 researchers?

3. What is the significance of research ethics in conducting L2 research?
4. To what extent do you think L2 researchers in our Iranian context adhere to ethical considerations while conducting research?
5. To what extent do you yourself adhere to ethical considerations while conducting research?

Data elicitation procedure. The guided interviews were conducted in a classroom at one of the schools in Sanandaj and were conducted entirely in English, as the participants were researchers with high levels of proficiency in using English. The interviewees' responses were audio-recorded by an MP3 recorder placed to the side of the interview area within a feasible distance of the interview location. The interviewer began with a brief preliminary warm-up to establish a non-threatening environment and put the interviewees at ease. The subjects, given guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity, were requested to sign the consent form designed for this purpose, and ask any questions they had in mind about this project or their data. Once being 'on-topic', the interviewer requested that the interviewees press the record button themselves feeling free to pause or switch the device off whenever they liked for any possible reason. None of the subjects chose to pause or stop the recording device, but this option was introduced to further minimize any stress, gap, or distance between the interviewer and the interviewee. It took almost 30 minutes to administer each interview, including the warm-up phase.

Data analysis. After administering the interviews, the researcher transcribed the audio-recorded scripts using a traditional *listen-pause-type* method, following Hiver (2010). Each audio script produced almost 4 to 5 pages of single-spaced written transcription data. As the content of the interview was of interest to the researcher, it was decided to edit out slight speech imperfections and other surface phenomena to concentrate on the actual words of the interviewees. As the researcher was seeking to extract the most frequently-recurring perspectives and themes out of the transcribed data, she devised a coding scheme to code the data. To ensure the reliability of the rating, she asked a colleague for "peer checking" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 61). To this end, a briefing session was scheduled to discuss the coding categories and settle any possible inconsistencies in the coding. Then, the colleague performed a coding reliability test by coding two randomly selected passages from each participant's interview transcript. To check the inter-rater reliability of the coding, the correlation between the two raters' codes was calculated which showed a high index of reliability, that is, .87.

Findings

Definition and significance of research ethics from the participants' perspective.

As regards the first and third research questions, four of the teacher researchers did not show

any strong seriousness about how ethics and ethical considerations and their significance should be defined and elaborated upon, as they thought almost nothing of the significance of such matters in conducting scientific research.

What research does bring for us and society is important and not how it is done. We are concerned about findings and outcomes not about ethical points.

This was how one participant defined and thought about the definition and significance of research ethics. S/he was thinking in a radically positivistic (objective) way focusing on the consequences of research not procedures and processes, in some way believing that 'the end justifies the means'.

Here is another participant's response:

If we get confined within the ethical limits, we will never obtain our scientific goals. It is often impossible to make progress while seeking spirituality issues.

The above quote belongs to one of the respondents who believed that ethicality was getting in the way of scientific development. S/he was considering ethicality to be confining and restricting. Still, another participant viewed research ethics as devastating and embarrassing to a successful researcher, as s/he believed that the tremendous scientific developments in the West were due to their having passed over or skipped such ethical boundaries and limitations.

Let us forget about such good-for-nothing questions as ethics and humanitarian outlook on phenomena. Unless one decides to part with big claims of legality and ethic, they will do no good to the society and people.

Six participants, however, valued research ethics and ethical matters. They viewed ethicality as the most determining factor for doing research, arguing that unless a researcher does everything right, his/her research will do no good to humanity. They held the attitude that, unlike some people's beliefs, lack of progress and development is mainly due to the fact that researchers do not act ethically, that they do not adhere to ethical considerations in conducting research, and that misrepresentations of research findings and research data, which result in destructive consequences, are all due to unethical research procedures.

Research without ethics is scarcely ever called research. It should be named malpractice and wrongdoing. Ethics is defined as the cornerstone of everything including research. Ethics is the goal of even research itself. The significance of ethics is so far as we can claim that even the outcomes of research which are to the benefit of society are for reaching ethical goals by the researcher. To do research is to solve problems of mankind and to solve problems of mankind is to be ethical. Therefore, ethics is the end-product of research, not the means of doing research.

Four others believed something in between, arguing that ethics can be considered neither the final goal of research nor as a trivial matter. On the contrary, they believed that ethics is at least a means to an end. The end refers to the development of human knowledge

and the means is whatever helps achieve this purpose. If ethics is not present in scientific enquiries, they may be destructive rather than constructive because they may be, at the very least, misleading; the results cannot be objective and real without a researcher's adherence to ethical principles of research.

We can say that ethics is neither everything in research and boast about its significance nor totally disregard it. To me, it is defined as honesty and truthfulness in all steps of research, be it from the formulation of a genuine research question, the collection of research data, statistical steps, or to the reporting and interpretation of the research results.

In a similar vein, there were six respondents who held a balanced position about research ethics. They argued that research ethics can be defined in the same way as it is defined in real life practices and behaviors, i.e., following what is morally right. Ethics in research is not a new concept in comparison to ethics in everyday life activities. Ethics forms the basis of every bit of human activities, beliefs, and so forth. Ethics is integrated into every aspect of good practice and behavior. Below is the transcription of one of the participants' responses in this regard.

No one can separate ethics from what s/he does both in everyday real-life activities and in academic endeavors. Ethics should be the basis of everything by the layman and the scholars in scientific circles. Otherwise, no piece of action will lead to useful results. Ethics is an evidentiary concept which needs no definition even. It is part of our being. It is self-evident. And research is no exception.

The above extracts and the interpretations preceding or following them constitute the main section of the responses relating to research questions 1 and 3. In the following section, a description of the responses in terms of the emerging themes will be presented together with the researcher's own elaboration and explication of the responses. As stated above, the four emergent themes will be presented one by one. Plagiarism is the first of these themes.

The four emerging themes. Along similar lines, a corresponding pattern of responses and perspectives about the four major emerging themes was found similar to the one emerging for research questions 1 and 3. The participants who were indifferent towards ethics in research either made little reference to instances of research ethics or turned out to be reluctant to consider the issues which happened to be the major themes in this study. Below, a pattern of responses with increasing attention to ethical considerations has been provided which shows in a stepwise fashion the degree to which the participants referred to and valued ethical themes. Overall, four major themes were drawn out of the responses, namely, plagiarism, data management and representation, participant rights, and authorship. These have been discussed and interpreted with reference to research questions 2, 4, and 5. The following transcriptions are instances of the participants' responses given during the interviews with the researcher.

I believe that the major ethical responsibility of a researcher is to find the answer to a research question. If s/he manages to do this s/he has done his/her duty completely. What can be more important and useful than solving human problems? What ethical considerations can outweigh such an accomplishment? Therefore, the researcher's main job is to do research and provide people with knowledge. The rest do not seem to be as important. Ethical issues proposed (or found?) in research sources are only theoretical discussions which do not impinge upon and concern the researcher in practice.

Another participant stated:

As I said before, ethical considerations play no role in conducting research. If I am going to talk about any ethical points, it will be the permission to take another person's words, though it would not make much difference whether to be honest in quoting others or not because the most important point is to do research and help the society even if one has reported others' words as one's own. What change will this make in the essence of the research being done? Who cares about morality or immorality in citations and referencing while the goal is to be scientific and knowledgeable? To help people is the matter, not pretending to be ethical and moral. A researcher's role is to provide evidence, to answer questions, to solve problems. Research data can also be collected and interpreted in any way because research subjects rarely ever respond enthusiastically and honestly. Especially in social sciences research such as SLA research; nobody ever is fixed and careful in his/her responses. Second language learners are changing moment by moment and show different patterns of language behavior. So how can we obtain reliable linguistic responses? How can we add up all of a researcher's duties to ethical issues while we know that these are all nonsense words that some people say? Personally, I don't think researchers in Iran or other parts of the world stick to ethical regulations for conducting research. Otherwise, they would get little or nothing out of their studies. What does it matter if authorship conventions are or are not followed while the aim is to provide the world with new insights? Being first or second author, of course, matters to the authors, but not to the vast audience benefiting from the findings of the research. Whose interests to be primary in a published paper might be important to the authors but not significant to the whole universe? Seldom do I care about such things in doing my research except some vital ones such as matching discussions to the statistical results. I see no point in recommending fellow researchers to adhere to such ethical rules because I believe that researchers have other more important things to do.

The above quotes indicate radically indifferent orientations towards ethics in conducting research. Those participants, while being involved in doing research and publishing high-quality research papers, did not seem to be concerned about the way they get things done and the way they get papers published. The section which follows shows a more appreciative approach to research ethics by another participant.

I think the ethical considerations to care about include the honesty and objectivity of referring to somebody else's phrases and sentences without mixing them with one's own words and statements in the papers or other research reports. Also, I should refer to the clarity in expressing and explaining everything to those who take part in your research because they have the right to know everything in detail and be aware of whatever is going to happen during the research process. They should also be made familiar with the objectives and aims of the study so that they would be more collaborative and have sufficient motivation for collaborating with the researcher. The order of appearance of the researchers' names on a research manuscript should be according to the role each of them had been playing in the accomplishment of the task. Otherwise, it would harm

fairness and equity. I prefer to be an ethical researcher than an unethical one, but I really do not think every researcher has the same idea about adhering to ethical considerations in conducting research. The Iranians seem to be ethical people because of their religious orientations to things and to life. So, I guess many Iranian L2 researchers and even researchers from other fields of study adhere to ethics in research.

As can be seen in the preceding transcription, reference has been made to such ethical concerns as plagiarism, participant rights, and authorship rights. Of course, the respondent's tone in expressing the ethical considerations is a mild one which indicates an average sensitivity to adherence to these ethical issues while conducting research. Below, there is a more serious approach to ethical concerns and the extent to which they should be followed and adhered to by researchers.

We Iranians are extremely careful about not harming others and this is a motto in our religious sources. Despite the authority that university professors have over their students and despite the cultural habit of respecting teachers and professors, professors should strictly avoid exerting influence and power over their students by forcing them to place their professors' names before their own names although they have done the lion's share of the job. The next issue to be pointed out here is the importance of accurate and truthful representation of research data and the statistical analyses relating to the data. Manipulating even a small part of the data will render everything different and drastically change the direction of the findings. So, misrepresenting the data is a deadly act of unethicality. If the researcher tries to do so, why does s/he conduct research at all? This is against ethical principles in research. It seems unlikely that the majority of researchers, at least as far as our own Iranian context is concerned, pay any attention to many of the ethical considerations and standards. But, I can assure you that I stick to ethical principles as far I can, though, frankly, there have been some occasions where I have failed to do so perfectly.

Explicitly stated in the preceding transcription are the ethical issues of authorship rights and data management. This participating teacher researcher was vividly concerned about university professors' misdeeds in mistreating their students by illegally and unethically forcing them into putting their professors' names as the primary author without claiming primary authorship for themselves who are usually the major contributors to a scientific work, be it published research papers or other types of scholarly works such as books, etc. Also, this participant was clearly expressing concern about mismanagement of research data, whether in the form of data falsification or data fabrication. The former refers to the wrong representation and interpretation of research data, while the latter indicates instances of reporting data without actually having conducted any research and/or having collected any data. Further transcriptions of the participants' responses are presented below.

118

Many researchers take much of participants' time by requiring them to answer lengthy questionnaires or attend long hours or even many sessions of experimental treatment without informing them what all these are good for. Sometimes, this unwarranted participation can be at the expense of the subjects' own educational goals and routine work because they are detached from their usual classroom settings and deprived of their normal instruction to save time for the research experiments and treatments. The poor subjects do not even know what is going on and why they are being engaged in the research project. Actually, this is not ethically

warranted. Complete justification for their participation in the research along with the benefits and goals of the research being conducted should be explained to the participants. Equally important is the issue of data faking and data falsification which should strictly be avoided even though no pattern of results would be obtained. I try my best to follow such ethical considerations whenever I carry out research. This is because I consider these pieces of knowledge no less important than a researcher's technical knowledge and professional research qualification. As for other researchers in the field, I think few people apply ethical principles to their research, which I regret a lot.

The above transcription emphasizes the research participant's rights and data management. The participant's self-expressed adherence to research ethics seems to go hand in hand with the extent to which s/he values and prioritizes ethical considerations. In other words, in the majority of cases, those researchers who are concerned about ethical issues in conducting research seem to be adhering to such issues, while those who do not take ethical considerations seriously do not show any commitment to applying ethical principles to their research studies and do not even recommend other researchers inside the country to care about ethical matters in research. A final instance of participants' perspectives on research ethics will be presented below with the hope of providing an exhaustive sample of the results.

I believe plagiarism is a critical ethical consideration to be dealt with and taken seriously by researchers and other scholars in the field of SLA research. Violations of ethical citation will demotivate many writers because they observe their authorship rights ruined by other novice or unprofessional writers and/or researchers. I strongly condemn plagiarism as a severe case of academic misconduct. It includes not only unlawful use of other people's words as one's own but also their ideas as well as the unacknowledged paraphrasing of their words and/or ideas. I think there exists an even more severe case of plagiarism whereby an author illegally becomes the number one author and claims primary responsibility for a work even though this is not really the case.

The above quote emphasizes plagiarism and authorship rights as two important instances of ethical considerations in conducting research. It foretells or highlights the significance of crediting other researchers' beliefs, statements, and empirical findings so as to guarantee both their authorship rights and the validity of the subsequent claims based on them.

Some peripheral instances of ethical considerations, which were sporadically mentioned by some participants but failed to become emerging themes, will be presented below.

A researcher must try his best to acknowledge any possible misconduct and whatever shortcoming, limitation and delimitation which are likely to negatively affect the research results.

An ethical issue relates to researchers' honesty in submitting a manuscript only to one journal to be considered for publication. But, unfortunately some researchers simultaneously submit a work to more than one journal, which is sometimes a waste of time and energy put into the job for reviewing.

The nonstandard review criteria and sometimes contradictory comments by the same reviewer across resubmission or by different reviewers across different journals should be prevented.

These miscellaneous views address different positions about research ethics which are not necessarily covered under the four emerging themes, but each one relates to a subsidiary ethical priority. Their views do not directly tap into the four emerging themes, but they also relate to the general principles of research ethics and can generally be considered as belonging to ethical considerations in doing research.

Discussion

This study explores the perspectives and perceptions of Iranian English language teachers about ethical considerations in conducting SLA research. It centered around five questions about the definition, significance, instances, and adherence of ethical considerations of EFL teacher researchers in the Iranian context. Generally, a two-sided pattern of perspectives on research ethics came out of the participants' responses during the interviews. On the one hand are those teacher researchers who believed that ethics does not constitute an integral part of research and it need not be considered as a criterion for evaluating the quality of research studies. They were of the opinion that ethics is not important because it is not what the present society needs. Rather, it is the scientific contribution of a piece of research which is urgently needed by a society and its people. Such a conceptualization had probably prevented them from envisaging a clear definition of ethics in research studies. Their arguments against ethics centered upon the premise that ethics is not a technical and scientific component of research and does not contribute very much to the development of human knowledge in research studies. They imagined ethics as a trivial matter in the domain of scientific enquiry in which the aim is to add to world knowledge and solve scientific problems. In more precise terms, they conceived of ethics as a personal characteristic of human beings which has nothing to do with the realm of science. This seems, indeed, to be too positivistic an idea.

On the other hand, some researchers viewed awareness of research ethics as important as the technical knowledge of the underlying principles and premises of research methodology. They held the view that any research study which is not premised on sound ethical considerations cannot satisfy the requirements of scientific enquiry and fulfill its scientific functions. For them, ethics is interwoven into any aspect, step, and procedure of conducting research without which no part of the study can be guaranteed in terms of truthfulness, objectivity, originality, genuineness, reliability, and usefulness. Such a view does not leave room for violating the principles of commitment, misrepresentation, and misconduct. Interestingly, the researchers in this latter group did have clear-cut definitions for research ethics and its significance in SLA research. This, in itself, reflects some degree of

association between having a clear conceptualization of research ethics and being committed to it in practice.

Overall, four major themes came out of the researchers' perspectives and perceptions about ethical considerations in conducting research: namely, *plagiarism, data management and representation, participant rights, and authorship rights*. This finding, within the limits of this study, indicates that some of the L2 researchers in the Iranian context follow these four major themes of ethics in research. In other words, these appear to be the main ethical concerns to L2 researchers in Iran.

These four emergent themes were extracted from the responses of those researchers who showed more interest in and concern about ethical issues in research. Other researchers showed indifference towards which theme to take into account, parallel to their indifference towards proposing a definition of research ethics and elaborating on its role and significance. On the contrary, the other group of researchers exhibited much enthusiasm about the discussion of ethics out of which the four major themes emerged. The degree of importance attached to research ethics and its significance by each group of researchers was paralleled by an indication of their commitment and adherence to ethical matters in research.

The interested and committed group seemed to know in their responses what the concepts of plagiarism, data management, participant rights, and authorship rights mean. They also indicated their recognition and admittance of these concepts and acknowledged their significance in conducting research. Of course, not all of them equally highlighted and mentioned all four themes. Rather, each of them reflected on a number of the four major themes, which indicated that there was not a unanimous agreement about the significance of the four themes among all researchers in this group. Eventually, each of the researchers in this group referred to some of these themes while there was some degree of convergence among their perspectives so as to denote a general orientation. This shows that the four themes mentioned above constituted the major ethical concerns of the majority of the participants in the present study.

The findings of this study, both in terms of the four major themes and also the few additional ones, are in accord with a number of theoretical accounts of the ethical issues and also empirical studies on research ethics in the literature. For instance, they are in line with Aba-Sha'ar's (2017, p. 2) view that "... perception of ethics, its principles and its importance may significantly vary between individuals, disciplines, and countries". This view reflects the differences in opinion among the participants in this study. This study also agrees with the one by Mahdavi-Zafarghandi, *et al.* (2012) who found that Iranian masters students had an inadequate conceptualization of different forms of plagiarism. It also reflects Rezaejad and Rezaei's (2013) finding that students had different conceptualizations and perceptions of plagiarism, and plagiarism was mostly considered by them as the use of someone else's words

as one's own, but they did not consider it to mean taking someone's ideas without permission. Furthermore, the four themes emerging in the present study show considerable overlap with the ones proposed in the publication manual by the American Psychological Association and Aba Sha'ar's (2017) list of codes of ethics. The view held by some researchers in this study in favor of the knowledge-producing function of research at the expense of ethics reminds one of the Iranian EFL teachers' commonly held beliefs that the aim of research is to produce new knowledge and address the practical problems of society (Mehrani, 2015).

Generally, the results suggest that L2 researchers in the Iranian context show an interest in and commitment to ethical codes and principles while conducting research. An additional point which is worth being considered is that the results of this study should be interpreted and generalized upon with caution, as it has been conducted on a relatively small sample of researchers and in only one geographical setting. Therefore, the representativeness of the sample and, consequently, the generalizability of the findings merit particular attention and caution.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Ethical considerations in research do not seem to be unanimously conceptualized and perceived by all researchers. Therefore, they do not have the same definition for every researcher in general, and the L2 researcher in particular. This is because different researchers have different perspectives on both research and ethical issues in conducting research. This difference in perspective may relate either to their views about the significance of ethical considerations or to their adherence to those considerations. For example, one characteristic of the teacher researchers participating in this study, which distinguished them in one respect, was their academic education degree. Interestingly, in the majority of cases, those researchers who had higher academic degrees held more positive and committed views about research ethics than those with lower academic degrees. The former group even declared higher levels of commitment and adherence to research ethics than the latter. Almost no pattern could be drawn vis-a-vis the responses of the latter group, as they did not think much of research ethics and were not willing to appear very committed to ethical principles because they conceived of ethics as a subsidiary aspect of research which need not concern a researcher too much.

122

Therefore, this study suggests that, unlike technical knowledge of research principles and methodology that are commonly considered as important throughout the world such as reliability, validity, and acceptability, ethical matters are not equally interpreted and followed by all researchers.

In sum, L2 researchers in the context of Iran, like those in any other context, do not appear to have the same perceptions of ethical issues in research. Furthermore, the extent to which they adhere to ethical considerations conceptually or while conducting research in

practice differs across different researchers, at least in the SLA field, which is the focus of the present study. Due to such diversity in the views about research ethics, we cannot simply expect all research studies to be equally grounded in sound principles and, consequently, merit attention and positive evaluation, because any study violating ethical concerns and principles cannot be guaranteed in terms of other aspects of research principles and criteria.

The findings of this study have implications for those in charge of language teacher development programs in that they encourage and motivate them to incorporate ethical issues into their teacher training courses and programs. L2 researchers can also benefit from the findings of this study and come to recognize the significance of all aspects and dimensions of ethicality and ethical practice in conducting research. They should draw on the implications of such studies in realizing that all parties addressed by a research study, who in some way benefit from it, should be taken into consideration while conducting research, and this necessitates adhering to ethical principles of research.

Replications of this study with larger numbers of teacher researchers will be needed to provide more extensive explorations of the topic under investigation. This will increase the generalizability of the findings. The study can be replicated on teacher researchers from different parts of the Iranian context to see whether the results would be the same or different in terms of a wider coverage of areas instead of a specific geographical area of the country. The study can also be replicated quantitatively to provide statistical evidence for the results obtained.

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A Self-Dialogue with the Thoughts of Paulo Freire: A Critical Pedagogy Encounter

Un diálogo personal con los pensamientos de Paulo Freire: un encuentro de pedagogía crítica

Samacá Bohórquez, Yolanda¹

Abstract

This paper develops a two-voiced self-dialogue with some compelling ideals of critical pedagogy advocated by Paulo Freire: reflection, dialogue, *conscientização*, (conscientization) praxis, critical engagement, and transformation. This dialogue, as a critical pedagogy encounter, has allowed me to go through a process of self-criticism or hopefully a self-recognition of understandings, experiences, constructions, co-constructions, and reconstructions of my practices as a language educator. I will address the following evolving choices: On dialogue and critical pedagogy, from language as power to language as possibility, from instrumental to alternative critical pedagogy practices towards more critical understandings and doings of education.

Keywords: *conscientização*, critical engagement, praxis, self-dialogue, reflection.

Resumen

Este documento desarrolla un diálogo personal a dos voces con algunos ideales de la pedagogía crítica defendidos por Paulo Freire: reflexión, diálogo, *concienciación*, praxis, compromiso crítico y transformación. Este diálogo, como encuentro pedagógico crítico, me ha permitido atravesar un proceso de autocrítica o, con suerte, un autorreconocimiento de comprensiones, experiencias, construcciones,

¹ Yolanda Samacá Bohórquez is a teacher educator at Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Bogotá, Colombia. She holds a BEd (Spanish-English) from Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, UPTC, Tunja, a graduate degree in Pedagogy of Written Processes from Universidad Santo Tomás, Bogotá, and an MA in Applied Linguistics to the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language from Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas. At present, she is a Doctorate student in the ELT Emphasis at the Interinstitutional Ph.D. Education Program from the same university. ysamacab@udistrital.edu.co
<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0072-073X>

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co-construcciones y reconstrucciones de mis prácticas como educadora de idiomas. Abordaré las siguientes opciones en evolución: sobre el diálogo y la pedagogía crítica, del lenguaje como poder al lenguaje como posibilidad, de las prácticas instrumentales a las alternativas de la pedagogía crítica hacia las comprensiones y las actividades educativas más importantes.

Palabras clave: *concienciación*, compromiso crítico, praxis, diálogo personal, reflexión.

Introduction

Reflection, dialogue, *conscientização*, praxis, critical engagement, and transformation are compelling ideals that critical pedagogy (henceforth CP) advocates. CP seeks praxis, constituted in “action and reflection” (Freire, 1985). CP involves “thinking about what and why you’re going to do before you do it and then reflecting on what you did, how you did it, and how it turned out” (Monchinski, 2008, p. 1). Freire’s passion for social justice is a principle underlying critical pedagogy. This principle is revealed when teaching and learning become human experiences; when personal, social, political, and cultural dimensions also take a place in educational contexts, and when all these are extended to communities to unveil their oppressions. Thus, in Freire’s social pedagogy: “education is one place where the individual and society are constructed, a social action which can either empower or domesticate students” (Shor, 1993, p. 25).

CP as a form of life entails a never-ending constant dialogical relationship with ourselves, our students, and our colleagues within our educational, social, and political contexts, everything with the purpose to inform and situate our practices. All this is insightful but challenging, because no matter how difficult the panorama sometimes looks in education with this neoliberal system², which domesticates, homogenizes, and objectifies people, I always find someone, something, or somewhere that inspires me to do things differently and to become more sensitive and critical of what I do, or intend to do, as a language teacher educator.

This is my experience when having critical encounters³ with friends, students, colleagues, professors, and sources of inspiration, who have taken seriously the idea of understanding, interpreting, and challenging our educational practices, or trying new ways of doing things

² Neoliberalism in higher education, for example, undergoes tremendous control from the government in the accreditation processes in Colombia, using a subtle discourse to provide freedom but at the same time reducing that academic freedom when teacher researchers’ work needs to suit the demands of the educational policies for a ‘globalized’ world.

³ I have used the word ‘critical’ because these encounters have provoked changes in perspectives, actions, and ways to envision education. For Pennycook (2001), critical is “doing something with careful analysis” and being critical as “being engaged with social change” (p. 11). Freire (2005) thought of dialogue as “the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (p. 88). In Samacá (2012), critical is interpreted as a permanent inquiry about what teachers have been, what they are, and what they will become in the future as teachers as well as how pre-service teacher education might support them in this goal.

on a daily basis. Then, this paper expresses a two-voiced self-dialogue as a process of self-criticism or hopefully a self-recognition of understandings, experiences, constructions, co-constructions, and reconstructions of my practices as a language educator, supported by the critical pedagogy thought of dialogue and *conscientização* in Paulo Freire. I will discuss the following evolving choices: dialogue and critical pedagogy, from language as power to language as possibility, from instrumental to alternative CP practices towards more critical understandings and doings of education.

On Dialogue and Critical Pedagogy

“Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s “depositing” ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be “consumed” by the discussants.” (Freire, 2005, pp. 88-89)

Freire (2005) claims that dialogue is a human phenomenon; the *word* is the essence of dialogue. This *word* has two dimensions: reflection and action. For him, “There is no true word that is not at the same time praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.” (p. 87). This entails that action and reflection take people to action (praxis); however, reflection without action is verbalism. From this Freirean perspective, the *dialogue* is the encounter between humans (Freire, 2005); it is through dialogue that we, people, can reflect and make decisions about how to transform our own communities through the communicative and pedagogical encounters that we, English language teachers, have with our students and colleagues. Education in this perspective opens the possibility to rethink, critically situate our educational contexts, classrooms, as well as practices, and take risks in our own teaching and learning. In the *dialogue* that I intend to develop here, I talk with myself, a dialogue between “I and me,” where the *word* is used to illustrate how critical pedagogy has nurtured the forms of seeing education from a more sensitive and local perspective in my life as a language educator.

Shaw (2001) asserts that self-dialogue is a fundamental process of expression, a conversation among different identity perspectives within oneself “containing one’s idealized state of affairs, perceived image of reality, and intended scheme of action, as well as intercommunications between and among those mental domains of mind” (p. 279). These are valuable ideas that take me to look at self-dialogue as a conscious expression when I think about myself, my desires, my dreams, my struggles, my existence, my relationships with others; when I expect to portray some hegemonic forces⁴ that exist in our profession and that are not easy to recognize because they have been naturalized. This is what Freire names *conscientização*, a process of self-

⁴ These hegemonic forces relate to the dynamics of oppression that Shor & Freire (1987) identify, and how these dynamics are present in teaching and learning processes that are extended to “many forms of social oppressions that play out in the lives of students” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 25).

affirmation and recognition of social, cultural, political, and economical contradictions that influence the forms in which education has been conceived at all levels.

In this regard, Freire (2005) states that educators should reject the banking model of education, in which teachers are the ones who possess knowledge and deposit it in students. We, educators, cannot impose our own view of the world on people, nor can we assume dialogue as a simple “exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’” (p. 89), but rather we can share together the views of our world through a dialogue that represents a dialogical, practical, and reflexive action upon our immediate worlds.

In an earlier study, Samacá & Bonilla (forthcoming) have argued that to assume a perspective and act critically in education, thinking of dialogue as a horizontal relationship is necessary to share ideas and experiences that enable teachers’ construction and pedagogical knowledges that underlie the nature of being and becoming a teacher. This entails a dialogue that acknowledges the other, that documents how we, teachers, assume the teaching and learning processes in our educational contexts. This understanding of dialogue might also endorse teachers’ voices, address problems from different perspectives, re-signify what happens in our contexts and promote new forms of work, interaction or positioning, and a dialogue that informs our decisions.

These tenets of CP acknowledge multiple understandings of relating to education and pedagogy. Therefore, a dialectical perspective recognizes the existence of power relationships that can find a place for people to speak and to be heard through dialogue and dialectical interactions. In this relationship, everyone has diverse ways of understanding their realities, because no one knows everything, no one ignores everything. From a more political and pedagogical perspective, Giroux (2007) has declared that “It is impossible to separate what we do in the classroom from the economic and political conditions that shape our work, and that means that pedagogy has to be understood as a form of academic labor in which questions of time, autonomy, freedom, and power become as central to the classroom as what is taught” (p. 3).

This idea engages teachers and learners in thinking about what happens outside our classrooms and institutions, or if we think about those happenings, what views are we assuming? Do we intend to understand ourselves as political? If so, what decisions do we make in relation to that political dimension in our curriculums, in our research studies? How do we create relationships with the real world out there? How do we see ourselves in our communities? Giroux (2007) clearly affirms that pedagogy cannot be “a merely methodological consideration... but, the cornerstone of democracy is that which provides the very foundation for students to learn not merely how to be governed, but also how to be capable of governing” (p. 3). Thus, empower students and teachers to intervene in our own self-formation processes and care about our cultural, social, and political history.

CP has influenced my experience in language teaching and learning; it has given more situated meaning to make sense of who I am as a language educator, and what my profession embraces. I have evolved from a very interesting pedagogical formation both in my school formation as a 'Normalista'⁵ and in my B. Ed. Program, to a more critical stage of what I do; from my experience in the Master's Program, through the critical dialogues, encounters, and research projects in which I have been involved. CP has definitely influenced the ways in which I understand teaching and learning, because CP is not a theory, but rather a way of 'being' a language educator, a way of 'doing' learning and teaching, and a way of 'knowing' through this pedagogical process, a philosophy of life, or as I have named it, a 'reevaluation of what we teachers are doing in our classrooms, expanding it to continually redefining myself and the contexts'⁶ in which I am involved in. This entails a personal analysis of who I am and am becoming, because the ways I think about education today are totally different from what I used to think and do as a language teacher. I think that it is about an academic growth that is shaped, challenged, and transformed through my years of experience, something that I cannot save my student teachers, for example. They will walk and live their paths and will continuously deconstruct the meanings of teaching through their experiences.

I am becoming even more sensitive to the realities of my country, where all that matters seems to be power to undermine others, where transformations driven by a neoliberal framework have potentially generated a discourse of growth that people usually believe in, and which has taken us to compete, produce, and follow standardized processes, as if everyone needed to do the same, even worse, be the same. I am becoming more responsive to the challenges we face and struggle in education and becoming more conscious of different oppressive and pervasive ways of the system. It has been through readings, critical dialogues in our courses, research groups, and conferences that we understand the subtle-hidden agenda: empty vessels filled with basic information to do a job, without thinking, that in the field of language teaching, all this is even simpler, but at the same time pervasive: learning English, certifying it and teaching it, being a language instructor, and having a good salary, not from experience, studies, but from an English level; all this by ignoring the particularities and specificities of situated contexts and communities.

For those who think that reflections about critical pedagogy need to go beyond the ideals, it is true; but these understandings and practical realizations of CP are becoming more visible in the language teaching profession. Nonetheless, another idea comes to mind... How can language teachers move beyond when people do not even realize that they have been oppressed?

By the same token, McLaren (2003) defines CP as “a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state” (p. 345). Paulo Freire’s CP seeks to “make oppression

⁵ *Normalista* is the title I received at school, because I was prepared to teach in elementary school. This program in Colombia is known as “Escuelas Normales”.

⁶ Contexts are schools, classrooms, teacher education programs, and communities in and from which teachers are naming themselves and so, they should not be passive anymore.

and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed” with the hope that “from that reflection will come liberation” (2005, p. 46). CP is inspiring when, day by day, no matter if issues of hurt, despair, nonconformity, or indifference take place in our educational contexts we, parents, teachers, and students, assume a more determined attitude and ways of doing things to challenge and transform them, simple actions that can change a life.

CP then as a philosophy of life entices teachers into a more sensitive, more contextualized, and more engaged discussion in order to understand what second language pedagogy encompasses and to unmask the oppressive agendas affecting our beliefs and practices. *From the perspective of CP, I see myself as an educator, a learner, and a facilitator in the teaching and learning process, as both are relevant, both have implications for teachers and students, and their contexts...*

From Language as Power to Language as Possibility

“Who says that this accent or this way of thinking is the cultivated one? If there is one that is cultivated, it is because there is another which is not, it is impossible to think about language, without thinking of ideology and power. I defend the duty of the teachers to teach the cultivated pattern and I defend the rights of the kids or of the adults to learn the dominant pattern... it is necessary to explain, to make clear to the kids or the adults, that their way of speaking is as beautiful as our way of speaking.” Freire (1996)⁷

A first point I want to address is the power of English in our contexts. I would affirm, in connection to the insights by Tollefson (2000, as cited in Pennycook, 2007), that English has represented social and economic development for nations. *By the time I started to learn English at the university, I was astonished about what this language represented: the possibility to speak the language, to know about other cultures, other people, to travel to English speaking countries mainly, to sound native-like, because speaking the way they do would give me a higher status and a higher salary. I felt fascinated about my career. My English language teachers, with quite different ideologies, I remember, encouraged us to learn and use the language. Everything that was asserted in regard to learning English was accepted. We thought it was normal that by that time people had to learn English and communications technology, and our peers choosing French were not making a good decision...*

English represented, and still does, power, opportunity, and development. It has been conceived as the most important language to learn here in Colombia and in other Latin American countries, because of the neoliberal practices that have ruled education⁸. Everyone might see this on the mass media or when walking on the streets; English is the passport to

⁷ An incredible conversation? Interview with Paulo Freire at the World Conference on Literacy organized by the International Literacy Institute (ILI) in Philadelphia, USA. An interview available at the <http://www.freire.org/paulo-freire>

⁸ In this regard, Giroux (2007) argues that “memory is erased and the political relevance of education is dismissed in the language of measurement and quantification.” (p. 3)

success, the key to advancement in our professional lives, to have better jobs, better salaries in an endless desire to be competent.

This fact has embraced, from the perspective of Phillipson (2003), the idea that “the use of one language generally implies the exclusion of others” (p. 17); a homogenizing position that has definitely oppressed⁹ other languages and communities on behalf of the spread of English, positions that people in general would defend when they have not considered the power behind what this language represents. It is an increasing monolingualism in English speaking countries, and a conflicting understanding of bilingualism in English speaking peripheral countries¹⁰. Thus, I might affirm that English and English language teaching seem to be normalized in this contemporary world. It is important to learn English, but other languages too, to have the real and equal opportunity to interact in a multidimensional world through different languages to achieve “significance as human beings” (Freire, 2005, p. 86). It is insightful and may be contradictory for me to find myself in a dialogue that allows me to dig into the implications of using a language that might deny others, as Freire pointed out, “whose right to speak their world has been denied to them” (p. 86) because they do not speak the language of domination.

...They need to learn the so-called dominant syntax for different reasons; that I, the more the oppressed, the poor people, grasp the dominant syntax, the more they can articulate their voices and their speech in the struggle against injustice.” (Freire, 1996)¹¹

A second point, derived from what has been mentioned above, is the native-like model that is implicitly assumed when teaching and learning English. It seems to be a matter of high achievement, demonstrating the so-called proficiency. I have felt that, in some stages in our lives, it was necessary to avoid our Colombian accent when speaking to people in English; we might have felt nervous and anxious when talking to native speakers of this language. What does it mean to give up an accent or to suppress it?” (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 63) It might mean that the ideology¹² of everything that comes from that “native-ideal” is better, but natives from the inner circle (the USA, England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), that ideology of not giving our languages(s) the place it (they) deserve(s) needs to be contested and redefined, because sometimes in our society, some people think and feel that our language(s) is/are less significant, exclude us from the social world, and that the discourse of growth leads us to standardization processes. We, educators, are all invited to

⁹ Recognizing oppression as harmful dispositions is relevant to denounce, contest and little by little redefine the role English plays in our communities.

¹⁰ Term used by Phillipson (2003) to illustrate countries that follow the linguistic norms of the core English speaking countries (p. 17).

¹¹ Freire, P. (1996). ‘An incredible conversation’. Interview with Paulo Freire at the World Conference on Literacy organized by the International Literacy Institute in Philadelphia, USA. Available at: <http://www.freire.org/paulo-freire>

¹² Forms of understanding the world that shapes our actions.

demonstrate that English cannot be assumed for certification only¹³ and that by no means teaching and learning processes can be reduced to this valid but limited way.

Time passed and, as a professional, I found there was a desire to travel. People told me that I had to travel, because I was going to learn the language in a real context. However, I did not see that as my main purpose, but to learn more about the North American culture and its people. This became a significant experience, because I could gain evidence that I had been able to learn English in my own country. What I did in the USA and Canada was to have an intercultural experience; however, contradictions were present... I ended up enrolled in an English course there, receiving a certificate that would give me more chances to find a better job when I came back. It happened. I remember that a first question in my first job interview was about my experience in an English speaking country. I felt fascinated because I met schools' expectations. I must say that when these memories come alive today, I know what it feels like when being absorbed by the system. Why did I feel fascinated because of this? I needed a job, as someone else did, and it gave me comfort, apparent stability, and commodities. Something the neoliberal system today proclaims with technical programs and English language certifications, making people feel that it is what they need... I worked for private schools where English had a tremendous impact on the curriculum and class materials. I worked with a wonderful native English-speaking teacher who knew about education; the teachers belonging to the English department were all working together, even my boss. He had taken seriously the implications of teaching and learning English from a socio-cultural perspective. However, it was not fair when I noticed that native English-speaking teachers, with no idea about pedagogy, earned higher salaries. Once again, the native English speaker would get a higher status at these private schools. What is even more dramatic is that in an indirect form local people also acknowledge that status... I claim this is not fair, because English language teachers in Colombia have prepared professionally to be English language teachers, ever better, to be 'educators', we are conscious of the responsibility we have in our hands, guiding students in their life projects, dealing with students' personal, academic, and life situations, in which the language that we speak is the language of possibility, communication, understanding... I claim that this is not fair, because the higher status that people may most of the times give the native English-speaking teachers, who are not possibly a professional in education, is denied to us. I do not mean to assume a position against them, but to our pervasive system and beliefs that seem to measure and hierarchize everything, denying again the richness of what we are.

The demand for learning English and having native-like models to teach or learn it are salient aspects manifested on a daily basis because of the socio-economic and political demands of neoliberalism¹⁴. This is what Lippi-Green (1997) calls the standard language ideology, defined as a “bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogeneous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language” (p. 64), and which, in my point of view, intends to deny other Englishes

¹³ This is what Magrini (2014) describes as technical, instrumental approaches that aim at the production of knowledge.

¹⁴ A neoliberalism that has focused on three fundamental aspects: Political economy of educational financing; links between education and work, and standards of academic excellence (Mayo, 2015).

in a world where there are more non-native English speakers than native ones. In a pluralistic world, we should have the right to speak the way we do; that, for sure, represents where we are proudly coming from. What I have learned through all these years is to acknowledge people's contributions and ideas rather than their accent.

In my experience throughout those initial years, and at the time of starting to work at the university level, the pressure was harder and harder. On the one hand, I was supposed to teach English at the very beginning of classes; on the other, I was working with those who once were my teachers. What a challenging experience it was...

From Instrumental to Alternative CP Practices

"A critical understanding of education, thinking about experience... the more I think about what I did and what I proposed, the more I understand myself." (Freire, 1996)

Freire is one of those inspiring sources who have given meaning to what CP represents: self-reflection, critical engagement, identifying and denouncing forms of oppression, and looking for ways of social transformation that should start being forged in our educational institutions. His ideas represent a challenge mainly when the technical perspectives are the ones that the system always favors; just to name a few of them: following the standard teaching methods and textbooks that have intended to homogenize ELT classroom practices, learnings, and interactions; use of the language to have a near native-like control; and believing in language certification as the only form to demonstrate language proficiency. These ideas have definitely maintained a pedagogical knowledge that is expanded by Western thinking, showing, apparently, that there are limited ways to teach and learn a language. The challenge is to start by recognizing that there are forms of oppression, but through experiences and encounters with inspiring sources in the field that nurture education, we can grow as persons, teachers, learners, and citizens, and through the understanding that education and our profession are based on the principles of acknowledging others, lessening the inequalities present in our educational systems, and being responsive to pluricultural, plurilingual, antiracist, inclusive agendas in our local contexts, reflected in our actions.

At the same time, I was enrolled in a Master's Program that transformed my perspective towards English and ELT; it was thought-provoking and invited me to recognize those dominant ideologies that have not allowed us to be who we really are. It was a seminar on CP that provoked reactions and attitudes that have taken me to rethink, relearn, and redefine not only myself as a Spanish-English speaker but also as a language teacher educator, then, in an initial language teacher education program. These encounters with pre-service teachers were really significant for getting to know more about them and why they had made the decision to become teachers. A few of them, I remember, had thought of becoming teachers; however, some others at the very beginning were enrolled in the program because of English, but ended up loving this profession and confronting the social and cultural contexts they came from and would like to go back to, assuming and taking with them that critical understanding of education. That was revealed in the research study I conducted in

the MA program, a study in which I also confronted the ways to think about ELT, positioning myself as an educator, more than as an instructor.

Teaching a language from an instrumental perspective entails methods, memorization, test-taking, and normalized classroom practices given by ‘experts’ around the world, as if teachers and learners were the same and had the same economic, social, cultural and political contexts everywhere. This means that we have not been given the chance to think about other forms of learning and teaching English, because the didactic framework that indoctrinates teachers and students has already been conceived in our area and these are the discourses we have been exposed to. Once again, these subtle ways of oppression are present to tell us that our purpose is to be conforming and passive technicians (Crandall, 2000; Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

Dismantling these issues, we might start with initial and plural¹⁵ practices where language is a means for students and teachers to locate their understandings about the world; a pedagogical practice oriented more towards the recognition of diversity and aspects influencing students’ lives and relationships, as we all feel, think and act differently, a pedagogical pluralism that empowers teachers to trust in what we are-know-do and make visible their experiences. I call this ‘critical academic maturity’ that is co-constructed and re-constructed through the years of experience and of the dialogues¹⁶ on those experiences that shed light on new understandings. There is not only one way, but multiple ways. This is what CP advocates, situated encounters with students, colleagues, and friends that make us think about ways others¹⁷ to deconstruct the areas and homogenizing practices of ELT most of the time.

The legacy of Paulo Freire is revealed in his testimonies, in his personal and pedagogical projects, in his passion to develop a consciousness of freedom, to read the word and the world as inherent to the struggle for justice and democracy. Not only did he impregnate the world with his visionary contributions in his critical pedagogy practice, but he also positioned himself as a social agent that develops a tremendous alternative in Latin American contexts. It was in those incredible dialogues that he defended change

¹⁵ I use this term to pertain to one’s own pedagogies as different from the universal ones.

¹⁶ Dialogues then become an essential component in the process of transforming our views and actions on a daily basis.

¹⁷ The decolonial turn as an epistemological south stance has precisely advocated for ways ‘other’ of being, knowing and doing, as the critical thoughts that seek to transform the conditions in which Eurocentrism and the coloniality in the world system undermine human beings (coloniality of being), marginalize and invisibilize the plurality of knowledges (coloniality of knowledge) and hierarchize human groups and places in a global power pattern for their exploitation for the sake of the expanded accumulation of capital (coloniality of power). Restrepo & Rojas (2010). Likewise, Kumashiro (2000) explains that “the term ‘other’ refers to those groups that are traditionally marginalized in society.” (p. 26)

through self-reflection. He invited us to reflect upon banking education, and from there, he questioned our understanding of teaching and learning acts, because as educators we need to be sensitive, ethical, and respectful with our students' dreams and fears, for them to be able to break their silence and assume a more co-responsible role in this pedagogical process. He clearly stated that there are no recipes, as the path or paths are uncertain. These paths are leading to praxis, to some alternative pedagogical practices in different latitudes.

CP has enabled me to confront the mainstream Western practices that perpetuate models which look at teachers and students as objects and not as subjects, who need to assume more leading roles, entering into contradictions, deciphering what is happening in our school contexts.

Dialogues and simple actions with my student-teachers, for example, in different classes have caused me to reflect and change the forms in which I have been constructing a sense of an educator. As mentioned above, every day I become more responsive to what is happening in our Colombian contexts, more concerned about the formation processes students go through in initial language teacher education and master's programs. It has been through dialogue that I have been closer to my student-teachers, getting to know more about them, the way they think and act towards teaching and learning, as well as life and schooling. Their experiences and perspectives have become potential tools to engage in a critical recognition of who we are, what we do, what we envision, moving towards a more authentic representation of our lives in our educational contexts. I have learned not to control everything, not to have everything ready, not to have the perfect answer at the perfect time, but rather to give my students the co-responsibility to co-construct our forms of teaching that would definitely transcend to the younger students we have at schools, lovely kids that more important than just learning English or other subjects, need to be listened, loved, and valued. Giving ourselves the path to situate our teaching and to be conscious of the fact that what we name, plan and do as alternative practices, are challenging but amazing in that process of keeping distance from the only-method vision in language teaching. Our common goal has been to believe in ourselves and to make sense of more human pedagogical and research proposals in which language is a means to continue knowing about ourselves and our communities. I think that pedagogical and research practices and encounters, at a personal and professional level, have given meaning to the educator I am becoming, to my doings and what will continue nourishing this meaning in the relationships I am constructing...

Alternative CP practices in our contexts are concerned with offering teachers and students new possibilities to critically understand teaching and learning. They deal with proposing options for students to expand our capacities to question assumptions about what teaching practices are and intervening in our classroom settings where different visions of the world are shared (Samacá, 2012), and where the understandings of their worlds enable both parties to confront our knowledges, our diverse ways of learning how to learn, and our ways of coping with struggles, engagement, and hope.

Some of these alternative practices have taken different forms; the ones I am addressing here have a special and personal value for the teachings of these teachers and researchers who have considered transcending the instructional dimension of teaching relevant by listening to their students' voices and using the language as a means to recognize themselves and the others. For example, Umbarilla (2010), reported how she engaged students in CP practices that promoted social reflection and cultural recognition in the multicultural scenario of the classroom in order to construct the sense of the other. Gutiérrez (2015) shared her interest in understanding the beliefs, attitudes and reflections of EFL pre-service teachers when exploring critical literacy theories to prepare and implement critical lessons.

Along the same line, Calderón (2017) intended to unveil how tenth graders' life histories gave them the opportunity to understand their difficult life conditions (family, socioeconomic, and academic aspects), to reflect on them and tackle personal problems from a different viewpoint, taking action towards it. This was an insightful study that impacted both the students, the researcher and her mentor, and gave value to what being an 'educator' entails. Peñaloza (2017) revealed how eleventh graders, despite their social and personal issues, (re)constructed their social identity through life stories. Ortega (2009) was intrigued with practices and challenges of CP in the Colombian contexts, from the speeches, projects and scenarios of popular education. López (2016) conducted a study on CP that coped with one of the Freirean tenets of CP: education is a masterpiece, from a phenomenological perspective looking at emotions, love, imagination, and affiliation, as a contribution in the configuration of subjectivities. The ethical view that Ramírez (2008) has given to CP is one that visualizes the epistemological foundation of critical pedagogy and curriculum, and their influence on didactics. These pedagogical and research practices have started to give real meaning to CP in Colombia.

My forms of being, doing, and knowing have started with a deep responsibility to my students, my university, and my program; have underlined a self-reflexivity that takes place in my everyday encounters and actions, and the relationships I construct around the educational contexts I am in contact with.... Forms that help my student-teachers and me not only conceive methodologies to tap into the realities to inquiry, but also to contest and redefine educational practices located in different social, cultural, and economic domains; all this certainly deconstructs the meanings of teaching processes. Thus, we, might continue exploring pedagogies that create spaces for mutual recognition, multiple perspectives towards students' and teachers' conscious growth.

In the Path towards *Conscientização* ... Some Concluding Thoughts

As I have mentioned throughout this paper, I am continually redefining myself and the contexts¹⁸ that I experience on a daily basis, while being engaged with CP. To those who

¹⁸ Contexts are our schools, our classrooms, our teacher education programs, our communities in and from which we are naming ourselves and toward which we should not be passive anymore.

think that critical pedagogy is a utopia, I would say it is not. Nowadays, we can see initial, attentive, shy discourses and practices that I expect to irradiate more from the periphery to enlighten and value local and plural pedagogies that should resound over those mainstream Western theories, considering the reality of Colombian contexts.

CP is happening and taking several forms; one of these forms is self-reflexivity and self-recognition, looking at myself and inviting my students to look at themselves to reconsider previous assumptions associated with ELT. Their real classrooms and school contexts might also contribute to question conventional understandings of theory versus practice, as well as our roles and positionings in education that cannot be legitimized through the reproduction of only Western theories. This realization entails a more complex interaction and dialogues around teachers and students in the diversity of our local contexts. Colombian initial language teacher education programs can contribute to develop a deeper and more situated understandings of second language pedagogy with critical lenses that oppose reinforcing the status quo. These are steps in a larger life and educational project. They will add continuant self/selves-reflexivity and meaning to the decisions that we, teachers, are making and as to how they impact our own teaching, ourselves, and our students' lives and learnings.

My experience through critical pedagogy illustrates somehow significant challenges in self-reflexivity because CP challenges habitual forms of thinking about the relationships with the world. Hopefully, it will have an impact on my future teaching and research agendas in collaborative learning spaces, as it has contributed to my being more respectful, and more self-conscious of others' discourses and practices.

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Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice Statement

The purpose of this declaration is to clarify the expected duties and ethical behavior for all the parties involved in the process of submission, evaluation, and selection of manuscripts sent to the *HOW* journal.

Duties Expected of the Editor

- The Editor is responsible for maintaining the quality of the contents of the journal and, as such, has the final say on whether to accept or reject a manuscript.
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HOW Journal is a biannual publication by and for teachers of English who wish to share outcomes of educational and research experiences intended to add understanding to English language teaching practices (ELT). Therefore, the journal falls within the field of education and, specifically, the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language (ESL, EFL).

HOW Journal is an academic publication led by ASOCOPI, the Colombian Association of Teachers of English. The journal is indexed in the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Latindex, Redalyc, SciELO Colombia, and Publindex-Colciencias, classified in **category C**.

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Our journal's main objective is to maintain communication among English teachers both in Colombia and abroad by offering opportunities for the dissemination of knowledge resulting from educational and research practices that concern English language teaching issues.

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The deadline for submissions of manuscripts for the first issue (published in January) is **April 1st** of the previous year. Submissions for the second issue (published in July) will be received until **October 1st** of the previous year.

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American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *APAStyle.org: Electronic references*. Retrieved from <http://www.apastyle.org/manual/index.aspx>

Conference Presentations

Rodríguez, M., Cárdenas M. L., & Aldana, C. (2008). *The design of Alex virtual courses: Challenges and implications for ELT* [PowerPoint Slides]. Plenary Session 8 at ASOCOPI Conference, Tunja, 2008.

Unpublished Master's Thesis

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148

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