



Effective pedagogical practices to develop communicative competences in large EFL classrooms

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ABSTRACT

English as a foreign language teachers must apply engaging pedagogical activities to keep EFL learners interested and participative while working with the goal of improving their communicative skills. Teachers' pedagogical practices in large English classes correlate with the students' success or failure of developing English at a required level (Chuisaca, & Paucar 2010; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Burbano, 2011; Monks, Schmidt, 2010; Locastro, 2001). Hence, the right methodologies, strategies and techniques are important at the time of planning curriculum and instruction for this kind of environment appropriately (Herrera, Murry, 2011; Richards, 2006; Byrnes, 1998). For instance, monitoring students might be more challenging as the classroom space limits the teacher from moving between seats, or knowing the students and their background experience due to their number.

This review focused on the analysis of the informs published at the UNIVERSIDAD TECNICA DE AMBATO repository during the year 2013. This longitudinal bibliographical study determined the need of applying current methods, techniques and strategies for EFL processing in different settings. In fact, as it is concluded Ecuadorian teachers must be prepared for classroom distractions, noise, and technology shortages, lack of participation, or different proficiency levels resulting from crowded classrooms. Therefore, and to combat these issues, Ecuadorian teachers need to maintain effective pedagogical practices in their English classrooms in order to develop EFL communication effectively. This review aimed at suggesting the most appropriate theory-based pedagogical practices for teaching EF in large classrooms. It will include a description of the most appropriate theory-based pedagogical practices for teaching EFL in crowded groups in the Ecuadorian public system.

Keywords: Pedagogical activities, EFL learners, communicative skills, methodologies, strategies, techniques



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Prácticas pedagógicas efectivas para desarrollar las competencias comunicativas en clases de inglés numerosas.

RESUMEN

Los profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera deben aplicar actividades pedagógicas atractivas para mantener a los estudiantes EFL interesados y participativos en el proceso de desarrollo de las habilidades comunicativas de los estudiantes en clases numerosas. De ahí que estas prácticas pedagógicas se correlacionan con el éxito o el fracaso de los estudiantes y el alcance de los objetivos a los niveles establecidos en los Estándares de calidad (Chuisaca, & Paucar 2010, Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Burbano, 2011, Monks, Schmidt, 2010. Por lo tanto, las metodologías, estrategias y técnicas correctas son importantes a la hora de planificar apropiadamente el currículo y la instrucción para este tipo de ambientes (Herrera, Murry, 2011; Richards, 2006; Byrnes, 1998).

Esta revisión se centró en el análisis de los informes publicados en el repositorio UNIVERSIDAD TECNICA DE AMBATO durante el año 2013. Este estudio bibliográfico longitudinal determinó la necesidad de aplicar los métodos, técnicas y estrategias actuales para el procesamiento EFL en diferentes entornos. De acuerdo a los trabajos analizados, los maestros ecuatorianos deben estar preparados para las distracciones en el aula, el ruido y la escasez tecnológica, la falta de participación o los diferentes niveles de desarrollo que resultan de grupos numerosos. Esta realidad dificulta también el monitoreo de los estudiantes ya que el espacio de la clase limita al maestro a moverse entre asientos, o conocer las diferentes necesidades de los estudiantes. Por lo tanto, y para combatir estos problemas, los maestros ecuatorianos deben mantener prácticas pedagógicas efectivas en sus aulas de inglés para desarrollar la comunicación EFL de manera efectiva. Esta revisión tuvo como objetivo sugerir las prácticas pedagógicas teóricas más apropiadas para enseñar EF en las aulas numerosas. Incluye una descripción teórica de las prácticas pedagógicas más apropiadas para la enseñanza de EFL en grupos numerosos del sistema público ecuatoriano.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Prácticas pedagógicas, estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, destrezas del inglés, metodologías, técnicas.



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INTRODUCTION

. The Ecuadorian educational system in its public setting gives English educators the responsibility of working with forty to sixty students at the high school level (Aviles, Tigre, 2013; Chuisaca, Paucar, 2010; Cabrera, 2011). This fact along with the lame application of methods and techniques make teachers struggle with the processing of English as a foreign language in public and private institutions (Alban, 2010); (Guato, 2010); (Moreno, 2010); (Vargas, 2013); (Nuñez, 2013), (Chadan, 2013); (Lasluisa, 2013); (Santos, 2013); (Silva, 2013). Theory explains that class size is an important influence on the quality and educational effectiveness (Monks, Schmidt, 2010; Locastro, 2001); conversely, the Ecuadorian educational system, in its public institutions, presents this common characteristic that can represent a challenge at the time of reaching the language objectives stated in the National Standards. This may be especially true if teachers are not prepared with the right pedagogical tools that enable them to face this classroom reality in Ecuador

This analysis presents information regarding differentiation, cooperative learning, visuals, biography driven instruction (BDI), hands-on teaching and learning, and teaching to develop critical thinking in an effort to provide Ecuadorian teachers with adequate pedagogical strategies that benefit large classrooms in other settings. By disseminating such information, this work will help teachers improve the Ecuadorian English as a Second Language program by bringing teacher's attention to the issues within large classes and possible solutions. The audience of this proposal is secondary EFL teachers who guide language development in groups of students with different levels of English, meaning educators who are looking for different alternatives to reach out the students who are part of large classrooms.

This review is supported by the research reports published in the year 2013 at the Technical University of Ambato repository. The total of the research informs developed by Ecuadorian EFL student- teachers state the need for implementing effective theory-based pedagogical practices for teaching EFL (Romero, 2012; Cabrera, & Cabrera, 2005; Chuisaca, & Paucar, 2010; Rosero 2010, Portero 2013; De la Torre, 2013), and experts who propose the best pedagogical alternatives for these purposes (Gebhard, 2006 ; Herrera, Murry, 2011; Richards, 2006; Byrnes,



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1998). This analysis verifies the need of updating the teachers' pedagogical knowledge and urge teachers to apply skills and careful planning for supporting the English learning process.

METHODS.

This bibliographical research analyzed forty student – teacher informs published at the Technical University of Ambato repository during the year 2013. The purpose of this investigation was to explore the conclusions and recommendations for future pedagogical applications aiming at the development of future eclectic pedagogies based on current methodologies.

RESULTS

This descriptive research based on a bibliographical review determined that from 69 studies published by students- teachers at the UTA institutional repository 40 concentrated on pedagogical practices to develop communicative skills in EFL contexts. Additionally, From the 40 informs presented and published in the year 2013 all the research groups concluded in the use of traditional methods, lack of techniques, monotonous classes, and lack of varied strategies to motivate students in the language classroom. The researches published in the year 2013 at the UTA repository evidence that classrooms have limited applications of pedagogical practices which edge students to reach fluent effective communication (Alban, 2010; Nuñez, 2013; Moreno 2010; Medina 2013; Lasluisa 2013; Guato 2010; Chadan 2013; Cardenas 2013; Aviles, 2013; Vargas, 2013). Furthermore, all of the authors recommended the use of better pedagogical practices to improve the English language processing to face the challenges when implementing the communicative language principles and the constructivist theories proposed by the curriculum reform.

Current Approaches

The Ecuadorian Constitution, in its Article 26, establishes that education is a human right and a state priority promoting the development of individual and collective capacities and potentialities generating and using knowledge, techniques, skills, art and culture, in a flexible, dynamic, inclusive, efficient, and student-centered environment, within the mechanisms of sustainability (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, 2008; Good Living Plan, 2012-2017, p. 39). The educational system urges teachers the strengthening of the English language skills, which are



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listening, reading, and speaking production, speaking interaction and writing. The English Language Learning Standards were developed based on the TESOL Standards which stands for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). It is an organization that looks for effective and equitable education for ESOL students. The TESOL domains that are part of the English Language Learning Standards are listed under 5 categories: Language, Culture, Curriculum Development, Assessment, Professionalism and Ethical Commitment (Teacher Standards (2012). The English Language Learning Standards (ELLS) represent the expected students' outcomes and skills that students should show after students finish high school. (Estandares de Calidad Educativa, 2012; Acuerdo – 247 – 12; Ministerio de Educación el Ecuador, 2014)

The Ecuadorian Ministry of Education in-service English Teacher Standards require teachers to apply five pedagogical domains (Estandares de Calidad Educativa, 2012). The first domain, “Language” refers to the teachers' ability to develop students' language and literacy by applying theories and investigations related to the learning process. Additionally, ELLS are the students' estimated outcomes. The new English curriculum reform guidelines describe the students' level of achievement by the end of the term. The process of meaningful communication is related to the level of proficiency in the language. Students and teachers need to be able to listen, speak, read and write to a level where the people who are interacting comprehend and recognize messages and are able to reply conveying meaning effectively. Therefore, the goal of language teaching is to develop communicative competence. Richards (2006) goes into great detail to describe the communicative language teaching. It is a method under the communicative approach which promotes the development of communication in social context by facilitating the appropriacy of the language through the development of functional competence. (Estandares de Calidad Educativa, 2012; Acuerdo – 247 – 12; Ministerio de Educación el Ecuador, 2012)

Garcia (2003) explains that the communicative approach converges in the constructivist paradigm as it focuses on the construction of meaning integrating the new knowledge to what the learner already knows. According to Vygotsky's constructivism, the human brain has the capability to draw meaning from experience (Herrera & Murry 2011). Language comprehension and production are a result of social interaction with the learners' mind. This social adaptation promotes higher order thinking as the human brain combines language and cognitive



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development in this process (Herrera, 2010; Herrera, 2012). That is to say the human brain synthesizes the information from the environment transforming it into personal ideas (Herrera and Murry, 2011; Garcia, 2003). Educators must nurture learners with a language rich environment and social interaction to promote meaningful construction of knowledge Kagan 2009; Perez, 2012). Ideally, Ecuadorian teachers could apply theory based pedagogical practices shadowed by the communicative approach and constructivism to develop language instruction. Herrera and Murry (2011) claim that thinking skills and meaning should be integrated in the teaching process for the development of communication. This gives learners the opportunity to construct language for themselves (Herrera, Murry, 2011; Garcia, 2003; Cook, 2001). As supported by the law, the Ecuadorian English teaching system is working theoretically under the communicative approach; however, it requires teachers to apply these principles and take effective pedagogical practices to develop communicative competences in the EFL classrooms to the classrooms.

The English teaching educational system in Ecuador is moving from the old paradigms of grammar emphasis to a more communicative and constructivist approach. The application of the grammar translation method under the behaviorist theory, where the teacher is the center of the learning process is called for a change (Alban, 2010; Nuñez, 2013; Moreno 2010; Medina 2013; Lasluisa 2013; Guato 2010; Chadan 2013; Cardenas 2013; Aviles, 2013; Vargas, 2013). The new National Curriculum and the Ecuadorian English Teaching standards (2012) sponsor a new student-centered approach which promotes more interaction and communication. It is based on the communicative language teaching and the social-constructivist theory of learning. The goal of the Ecuadorian English teaching standards is to enable the students to reach the level B1 (intermediate level – CEF) by the end of high school. For this reason, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education has established a set of official documents to norm the new communicative English curriculum and pedagogy. However, within this transitional phase, several studies have demonstrated that traditional practices from the 50's, 60's and 70's are still present in our schools. (Romero, 2012; Cabrera, & Cabrera, 2005; Chuisaca, & Paucar, 2010; Rosero 2010, Portero 2013; De la Torre, 2013).

Ecuadorian studies have evidenced that the lack of effective methods, strategies, and techniques are affecting the reaching of the Ecuadorian English Standards. Chuisaca & Paucar (2010) state



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that “teachers performance has great influence on the process of learning and teaching” and also “teachers should update their methodologies and techniques” (Chuisaca & Paucar, 2010 p. 167).

These pedagogical limitations result in poor teaching quality and students’ passiveness. It also demonstrated that students are not engaged, motivated, interested, or active in English class.

(Romero, 2012; Cabrera, & Cabrera, 2005; Chuisaca, & Paucar, 2010; Rosero 2010, Portero 2013; De la Torre, 2013; Alban, 2010; Chadan, 2013). In addition, De la Torre (2013) states that some Ecuadorian teachers are not open to accept the innovative ideas proposed by the curriculum reform. The author also argues that the ineffective pedagogical practice is one of the reasons why the curriculum reform has not achieved the curricular goals (De la Torre, 2013).

The two English Curriculum Reforms aiming at improving the process of EFL instruction in Ecuador have changed the way English teachers see education through time. The bilateral agreement called Curriculum Reform Aiming for the Development for the Learning of English (CRADLE) project with Great Britain in 1992 started a process of structural innovation. The objective was to improve the learning-teaching process of English in schools. The project provided teachers with training, text books production, and examinations. The program attempted to develop EFL education and set the stage for continued improvement until today However, it was not successful due to several reasons supported by researches carried out in Ecuador (Chuisaca, & Paucar 2010; Calle, Calle, Argudo, Moscoso, Cabrera, 2012). One such report, Chuisaca and Paucar (2010), analyzed *Our World Through English*, the first nationally accepted English textbook, and criticized the program for emphasizing linguistic competence and having teachers teach grammar in isolation. They also stated that the teacher training program was not adequately developing and presenting Constructivist Theory and the Communicative Approach. Over all, the key factor affecting EFL instruction was the quality of teaching evidenced in effective pedagogical practices for developing EFL communication (Chuisaca, & Paucar 2010; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005).

Recent Ecuadorian studies shed new light on the reasons why students struggle at reaching the level B1 according to what is required by the National Standards Burbano, (2011) considers that it is difficult to develop communicative competences in EFL students. This investigation demonstrated that the Ecuadorian educational system doesn’t provide enough input for developing socio-cultural, socio-linguistics and socio-pragmatics competences in an acceptable



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way. The research concluded that the interaction in class based on socio-cultural topics is the main classroom characteristic for developing English fluency; a condition that the Ecuadorian EFL classrooms lack at present due to inappropriate pedagogical practices (Burbano, 2011). The uses of traditional approaches affect the process of learning English as a foreign language. Students do not have interest in studying English because of unmotivating methods. It results in a lack of students' engagement causing boredom and apathy in the learning process (Romero, 2012; Cardenas, 2013; Carrasco, 2018; Faican, 2011; Guaminga, 2011; Guato; 2010; Lasluisa, 2013; Medina 2013; Moreno, 2010; Pintado 2012; Nuñez 2013; Alban, 2010; Nuñez, 2013; Moreno 2010; Medina 2013; Lasluisa 2013; Guato 2010; Chadan 2013; Cardenas 2013; Aviles, 2013; Vargas, 2013)

Moreover, Cabrera & Cabrera (2005) consider that Ecuadorian teachers "require to improve the teaching quality" because students are inhibited to participate in oral exercises due to the anxiety and fear to make mistakes in front of their classmates and teacher (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005, p. 1). Rosero (2010) conducted a study to analyze translation as one of the problems that affects effective communication. He demonstrated that it is the traditional method that does not allow students to acquire fluency during EFL instruction. This research demonstrated that the frequent correction during instruction time impeded the development of communication with meaningful purposes. Along the same line, De la Torre (2013) found that Ecuadorian teachers, more often than not, maintain monotonous classes as a result of their traditional methodologies creating passive learners. These outdated pedagogies affect the process of developing English as a foreign language in the Ecuadorian classrooms (Rosero, 2010; De la Torre, 2013).

Thus, as it is discussed in this analysis, the limited effective pedagogical practices resulting in the use of traditional methods, instructional strategies, techniques, and materials determine that the teachers find difficulties for managing their large multilevel groups. This common characteristic challenges teachers to provide appropriate differentiated instruction, organize grouping configurations, develop cognitive skills, and meet the students' needs.

CONCLUSIONS

The challenges and benefits of communicative language teaching could give language educators a broad range of pedagogical possibilities. Admittedly, the combination of the communicative approach strategies and techniques with differentiated practices, cooperative learning and



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Biography Driven Instruction gives teachers the tools to address the difficulties and limitations created by the large multi-proficiency level classrooms. It might look puzzling to start differentiating in the Ecuadorian setting, where students' variance is present, the students' objectives don't necessarily match the learning objectives, and where the varied levels of students are extra elements to consider. It might also be challenging to organize grouping configurations as the limited space and the infrastructure bounds possibilities. It might take more time and effort to know the students background knowledge by applying Biography Driven Instructions. It might be a constraint to consider the students learning styles and types of intelligences in order to plan strategies to meet students' needs. It is vital to make connections between previous learning, the new content and future applications to give sense to the process of education.

The multiple challenges of large multilevel classes can be overcome with the application of appropriate pedagogical practices for teaching EFL. Teachers need to take action, there are no limitations to the human brain and his/her heart. The implementation of effective pedagogical practices regardless of the students' abilities, interests, socioeconomic status, language, gender, and motivations will make a difference in the Ecuadorian Socio- educational revolution. This is the way to achieve the Ecuadorian English Language Standards aiming for the development of communicative skills. The Ecuadorian transformation and the improvement of the educational system require teachers' commitment and defensibility of practice. Teachers need to be aware that students learn better if they are actively engaged in the process of instruction. The pedagogical practices related to social-constructivist and communicative approach like realia, visual aids, guarded vocabulary, cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, and BDI strategies can support the language and cognitive development in a more effective way. In summation, the use of theory pedagogical practices can elevate language development in large multi-proficiency classrooms.

It is time to move forward, the teachers' commitment to education requires both espoused and practical readiness. Effective pedagogical practices will give teachers and students different routes to get to the same goals. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the theory of effective pedagogical practices as ways to help students keep their funds of knowledge. It is our responsibility as educators to look for the best alternatives to meet the Ecuadorian reality. We have to provide our students with equity and quality education (Good living plan, 2014). EFL



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teachers need to implement the most appropriate pedagogical practices like communicative approach strategies and techniques, differentiated instruction, cooperative learning and Biography Driven Instruction to develop language at the level B1 required by the National Standards (Estandares de Calidad Educativa, 2012).

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