EFL Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century:
Challenges and Opportunities

Experiences
from research at
UAM and UCLV

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EDITORS

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FOREWORD

As we move further into the 21st century, teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) continues to be an area of interest for practitioners and researchers everywhere. We are living an ever-growing global village, with practically no boundaries for communication, interconnection, and relationships. Thus, more and more persons perceive and feel the need of learning and using English as foreign language (EFL) in a diversity of communicative situations and contexts. As this trend continues, and new developments and complex challenges emerge, TEFL practitioners and researchers look forward to finding and creating spaces where they can interact, share, and discuss a broad range of issues related to TEFL research and practice. These academic exchanges definitely contribute to discovering, innovating, and implementing successful TEFL practices that will help learners successfully improve their EFL language skills and engage in international communication in our global village.

On the 25th anniversary of Universidad Americana and the 70th anniversary of Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, UAM-UCLV Scientific Meeting 2022 brought together TEFL practitioners from both universities, EFL teachers, TEFL undergraduate and postgraduate students, and other stakeholders in the future of EFL teaching and learning. This two-day virtual event provided a forum for the participants to meet, interact, and talk on contemporary issues related to new challenges, advances, and research findings in EFL teaching and learning theory and practice, as well as in translation theory and practice. UAM-UCLV Scientific Meeting 2022 was a rewarding and enriching space for the participants. This virtual event opened up an opportunity to discuss on a variety of topics related to EFL in higher education: new trends, approaches, and practices in the teaching and learning of EFL, use of emerging technologies in EFL teaching and learning, EFL teaching and learning from an intercultural perspective, as well as development of professional competencies in EFL pre-service teacher education.

This book looks forward to presenting challenges and opportunities in TEFL research and practice in the 21ˢᵗ century, from the perspective of research experiences at Universidad Americana, in Costa Rica, and Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, in Cuba. The book is divided into two parts. Part I covers a wide range of issues dealing with the teaching and learning of EFL language skills, the use of linguistic corpora for EFL and translation teaching applications, and the development of the linguistic dimension through content and language integrated learning in history and literature courses. Given the increasing presence of technology in the EFL classroom, especially online technologies and digital tools, Part II of the book focuses on innovations in the EFL classroom using different technological means, such as, learning management systems and multimedia resources. Furthermore, this part concludes with a paper on the development of digital competences of EFL instructors in higher education.

We sincerely hope that this book can make a contribution to the field of TEFL practice and research, in our quest for improving the way people learn and use EFL to effectively and successfully communicate in our modern world.

THE EDITORS

PART I: EFL TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES IN ACTION

Improving Academic Writing: The Case of Hedging Devices

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Abstract

Research has demonstrated that hedging plays an essential role as a powerful communicative strategy in academic writing. However, the ability to express doubt and certainty when writing academic texts becomes a complex task for foreign language learners because they often use hedges unconsciously, which are among the essential elements for supporting or rejecting hypotheses or theories in academic writing. The authors of this article have observed that students of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language, at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, experience some difficulties regarding the use and overuse of hedges in their academic writing. Therefore, the present article focuses on the proposal of a bank of useful phrases for hedging in English academic writing to help students of the aforementioned degree course improve their academic writing skills. For conducting the study, the authors used to a mixed-method research design inasmuch as quantitative and qualitative methods were applied. The sample involved a corpus made up of the Introduction and Discussion Sections of thirty theses/dissertations from three universities in English-speaking countries. The corpus was compiled and manually processed to ascertain whether a word functions as a hedge or not. The bank of phrases will be a very useful pedagogical tool in the teaching and learning process of academic writing, and it will allow EFL learners to be more confident and prepared, mainly when writing research papers, term papers, and diploma papers.

Keywords: hedging, hedging devices, academic writing

Introduction

The term *academic writing* can be used to describe an array of text types ranging from undergraduate essays produced under examination conditions, to laboratory reports, and further to dissertation and theses. Concerning the nature of academic writing, Hartley (2008) expressed that "academic writing is unnecessarily complicated, pompous, technical,

authoritative, humorless, and elitist and excludes outsiders (p. 14)." Moreover, some studies have shown that the language of academic texts is also the language of rhetoric and persuasion (Afful, 2016).

Regardless of the methodological framework and target audience, most academic texts require careful attention to some specific features; namely, complexity, formality, precision, objectivity, explicitness, accuracy, responsibility, planning and hedging. There have been many studies on that topic, and hedging has received much attention from scholars, especially in linguistic-oriented studies and similar fields.

Lakoff (1973) defined *hedges* as those words which are used to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy. This definition is used as a starting point in approaching hedging as a linguistic phenomenon. This concept was far from being concise and clear; it was developed further by other linguists, such as Swales (1990), Salager-Meyer (1994) and Hyland (1996). Swales (1990) sees hedging as linguistic devices which express "honesty, modesty and proper caution in self-reports" (p. 175).

Salager-Meyer (1994), in turn, considers hedges as "understatements used to convey (purposive) vagueness and tentativeness and to make sentences more acceptable to the hearer/reader, thus increasing their chance of ratification and reducing the risk of negation" (p. 2)" According to Hyland (1996), a hedge is any linguistic means used to indicate either a lack of complete commitment to the truth of an accompanying proposition or a desire not to express that commitment categorically. Therefore, it can be concluded that hedges are the means by which an author can present a statement as a personal opinion rather than a fact.

Several researchers have proposed taxonomies of hedges. Salager-Meyer's (1994) and Hyland's (1998) taxonomies are commonly used in a variety of studies on account of their sufficiency and usefulness. Salager-Meyer (1997) proposes seven strategic stereotypes through which, in her opinion, hedges are typically expressed in scientific English: 1) modal auxiliary verbs, 2) modal lexical verbs, 3) adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases, 4) approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time, 5) introductory phrase,s 6) if clauses, and 7) compound hedges.

However, Hyland (1996) proposes an alternative categorization of hedges. He suggests two main categories as principal realizations of hedges: lexical hedges and syntactic hedges/non-lexical hedges. Lexical hedges refer to the lexico-grammatical analysis of the most common realization of modality (modal verbs, lexical verbs, modal adjectives, adverbial constructions and modal nouns). In turn, the other category—syntactic hedges/non-lexical

hedges—often includes questions, conditional clauses, and contrast markers, as well as a limited range of formulaic phrases. They are divided with regard to the origin of their tentativeness and their functions into three groups.

The use of hedges in academic writing has not received the attention it deserves from researchers and scholars, despite their acknowledged importance and use in this type of writing. All of this has resulted in the general population being ignorant of this linguistic resource and, consequently, its underuse. Thus, the lack of knowledge of hedging has become a problem, and students of the English Language Degree Course with a Second Foreign Language, at the Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, are not alien to this situation. They sometimes have difficulty expressing their opinions in academic papers, or analyzing or criticizing the opinions of others, because they may not have received enough instruction on how to hedge properly. They also occasionally hedge without knowing they are doing it. Improving the use of hedges in these students' academic writing has, therefore, become a detected priority.

In this article, the authors report on a study that was conducted with a group of students from the above-mentioned degree course. Its purpose was to create a bank of useful hedging phrases in English academic writing to help students improve their academic writing skills.

Method

The methodology of the study herein reported considers a mixed-method approach since both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied.

Theoretical Methods

- Historical and logical: to analyze the logical and historical development of the main theoretical principles used as a basis for this research.

- Analysis and synthesis: to analyze, evaluate and generalize the existing tendencies and the collected data for the purpose of the research.

- Induction and deduction: to make deductions, analysis and abstractions which were subsequently used in the corpus analysis.

- Structural and systemic: to guide the authors in the whole research process and in the proposal from a logical and systematized view.

Empirical Methods

- Questionnaire: to determine students' opinions about hedging and its use.

- Corpus linguistics: to determine the frequency, occurrence and the examples of hedging phrases in the Discussion section of theses or dissertations published in websites of universities in three English-speaking countries.

- Content analysis: to determine the corpus information regularities used, and to identify the phrases that would be included in the bank of useful phrases for hedging in English academic writing.

- Participant observation: to gain a closer insight into students' practices with respect to the use of hedging in their academic writing.

Statistical and Mathematical Methods

- Percentage analysis: to process data obtained from the questionnaires and from the analysis of the corpus.

Findings

In order to conduct the study, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of fifteen fourth-year students of the 2019-2020 academic year to determine their opinions on hedging and its use. The findings obtained confirmed the need to create a tool for students to improve the use of hedges in academic writing. Therefore, the researchers decided to create a bank of useful phrases for hedging in English academic writing. The bank of hedging phrases was developed taking into account the theoretical foundations of the research, as well as the results of diagnosing the current situation of hedging in academic writing by students of the above-mentioned degree course. The design of the hedging phrase bank consisted of three interconnected phases: corpus compilation, identification of hedging phrases, and arrangement of the identified hedging phrases. Details on each phase are provided below.

Corpus Compilation

The corpus consisted of thirty theses/dissertations in the field of linguistics, originally written in English, randomly selected from theses available on the websites of three universities: Brigham Young University, Portland State University, and the University of Edinburgh. In addition, these theses were written from 2016 to 2020, which ensured the use of updated papers. The researchers made sure that both sections, Introduction and Discussion, were presented as a separate section in all selected theses/dissertations.

Identification of Hedging Phrases

The identification of hedges was based on the taxonomy proposed by Salager-Meyer (1994). This taxonomy was chosen because it better fits the purpose of the study. Indeed, it is a robust, explicit, and useful taxonomy of hedging. A word processing program was not used

since the semantic reference of the words can be recognized by manually scanning the corpora. Also, a word processor would provide only the statistical information about the words, but no semantic or pragmatic data. Therefore, manual scanning of the data was of great value to determine whether or not a hedging interpretation was possible.

Arrangement of the Identified Hedging Phrases

The organization of the bank was intended to be user-friendly; that is to say, easy to follow, clear, and easy to understand. The entries are organized under two main headings: "Examples of hedging phrases for Introduction sections" and "Examples of hedging phrases for Discussion sections." Each main heading, in turn, contains subheadings corresponding to the purposes or functions of the phrases listed in the bank, and all the phrases correspond indistinctly to one of the categories proposed by Salager-Meyer in her taxonomy of hedges. The user can look up a sentence directly by simply clicking on the heading or subheading that matches the purpose or function he/she is looking for. Figure 1 below shows a sample of the bank of phrases (cover and entries):

Figure 1

Sample of the Bank of Phrases (Cover and Entries)
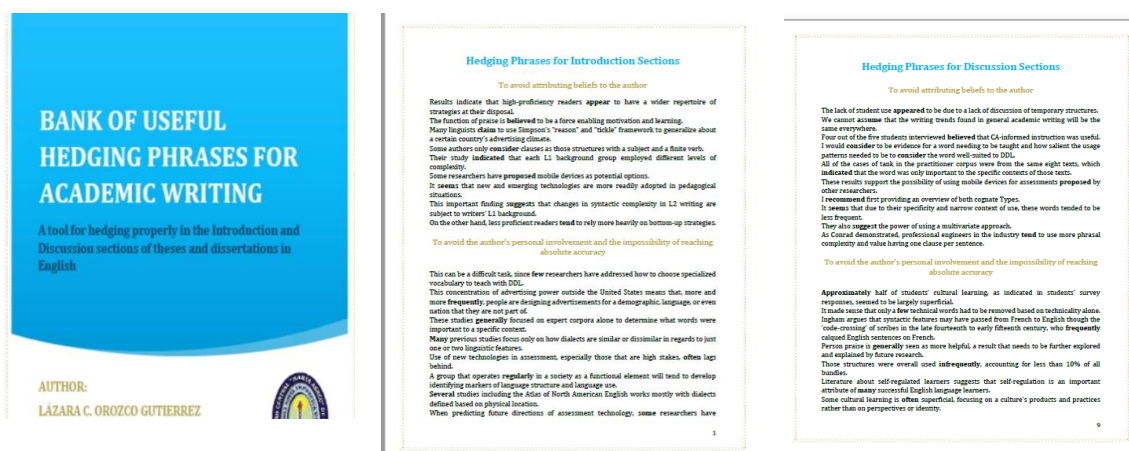
Discussion

The bank of hedging phrases herein proposed has three hundred twenty entries. The phrases are arranged according to their purposes or functions in the texts; however, all the examples included in the bank belong to the categories of hedges proposed by Salager-Meyer (1994) in her taxonomy of hedges. The above-mentioned taxonomy divides hedges into seven categories: 1) Modal auxiliary verbs, 2) Modal lexical verbs, 3) Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases, 4) Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time, 5) Introductory phrases, 6) If clauses, and 7) Compound hedges.

The categories that appear the most in the bank of phrases are modal auxiliary verbs (for example, "I wanted to examine whether more language exposure *might* have an effect of L1 transfer on Arabic ESL learners' error production."); the adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases (for example, "Research supports the theory that English language learners are more *likely* to interpret idioms literally than native speakers."); and the approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time (for example, "These studies *generally* suggested that collaborative writing offers opportunities for students to negotiate meanings."). These three categories seem to be the most commonly used among native English writers.

Since the findings of the study revealed that the students of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language, at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, have some difficulties when using hedges for expressing their ideas and arguments or when criticizing somebody else's opinions, the bank of phrases will allow them to be more confident and prepared when they continue their studies, mainly when writing research papers, term papers and diploma papers. In addition, it will be a very useful pedagogical tool in the process of teaching and learning academic writing.

Conclusions

In academic writing, authors must state their claims with accuracy and modesty to meet the readers' expectations and gain approval for their proposals. Precisely, hedging can act as an interactive element that serves as a bridge between the text and the author's interpretation. Therefore, as an adequate use of hedging devices is essential, the bank of hedging phrases proposed in this study can provide great benefits to students of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language, at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas. In order to hedge properly, students should be first introduced to the concept of hedging, its categories, purpose, and linguistic realization; to this end, bank of hedging phrases can be a valuable tool. It will assist them in writing course papers, term papers, and diploma papers throughout their academic years and future careers. Thus, it is an important step towards improving the process of teaching and learning to write academic texts in English, as it emphasizes the importance of hedging as a language tool in academic writing and functions as a guide to hedge in a correct manner.

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Graph Description Tasks for Improving Academic Writing Skills

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Abstract

Academic writing skills play a central role in the second year of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas. This paper deals with the development of graphs description tasks for helping students to improve writing skills in English for Academic Purposes. After a systematization of the theoretical and methodological foundations of graph description tasks, several theoretical and empirical methods were applied such as survey, interview, and document analysis to determine the weaknesses and strengths of the selected sample. The results revealed that graph description tasks are very difficult for students and they need more practice for mastering those skills.

Keywords: academic writing skills, English for Academic Purposes, graph description tasks, set of tasks

Introduction

Writing skills have always played a central role as a communication tool in several fields of study, and they are required in many contexts throughout life. Most academic institutions include writing as an important part of the curriculum; and this applies to all majors, with the aim of training students to write competently. Specifically, academic writing is studied to enhance learning or to assess course comprehension and it has its own set of rules and practices.

Kondrat (2009) states that a survey conducted among 64 American companies revealed that half of them pay attention to writing when considering a person for employment or promotion. Johnson (2010) also comments on the fact that the growing trend worldwide is oriented towards establishing stricter standards of writing proficiency, an issue that directly affects students who are non-native speakers of English. All types of academic papers, such as

essays, reports, presentations, research papers, publications, etc., need to be written using an appropriate style. When used appropriately, academic style reveals a polished and professional image. Another component to succeed in academic settings is the way academic content is presented, which implies using appropriate specialized vocabulary, grammatical structures, discourse structure, and function.

Writing skills are important to succeed in academic settings and in the labor market. For this reason, students need to be trained in academic environments: lectures, seminars, workshops, etc., using the task-based teaching approach. Different types of academic tasks are commonly implemented in higher education English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing classes. EAP writing lessons usually include authentic extended tasks that students complete independently. They are often supported with in-class teaching, guided practice, and individual tutoring. Any explicit teaching is strongly focused on what is needed for these tasks.

It is very difficult for students to listen to lectures, or even listen to other students, especially when they have to listen and take relevant notes at the same time. A typical approach to teaching listening for academic purposes would involve doing large amounts of in-class listening, probably pre-recorded, helping the students to be more aware of typical language used in lectures, giving them guided practice, as well as strategies for dealing with difficulties (Flowerdew, 1994).

Developing academic reading is similar. Students generally do large amounts of in-class and out-of-class reading, usually of authentic texts. While completing these tasks, the teacher helps them to be more aware of typical language used in academic texts, of text structure, and of strategies for reading critically and dealing with difficulties (Clark, 1993; Cobb & Horst, 2001).

Teaching speaking in academic settings is also of great importance for university students. A typical approach to teaching spoken EAP would also be tasked-based, with students doing short guided exercises, leading to taking part in realistic seminar discussions and giving oral presentations, both supported by class teaching and individual tutorials.

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020) describes the proficiency levels in all the skills of foreign language learning and establishes different descriptors for assessing writing skills at all levels. At the School of Humanities, in Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, academic English writing skills are usually assessed using different descriptors established in the CEFR, which represents an advantage in the assessment process.

Developing academic writing skills is beneficial for students because it helps develop a number of associated academic skills, such as analyzing, proving understanding, focusing on technique and style, and thinking critically and objectively. That is why "academic writing has always played a large and central role for students all over the world. School and university teachers spend many weeks of the year trying to pass on their knowledge and teach their students to write academically, as they know the benefits of acquiring this skill" (eWritingService, 2017, para. 1).

Not surprisingly, academic English differs from general English in a number of aspects. It is important to be able to distinguish a formal (academic) style from an informal style, and to understand that what may be acceptable in spoken language, may not be appropriate in writing an academic paper, thesis, research project, formal letter, etc. In academic writing, the writer's approach to the topic is objective (rather than subjective), intellectual (rather than emotional), and rational (rather than polemical). His/her tone is serious (not conversational), impersonal (not personal), and formal (not informal) (Borg, 2008).

Nga (2009) mentions six main features of academic writing that students should be aware of. According to this author, academic writing is complex, formal, objective, explicit, hedged, and responsible.

The complexity of academic English is evident in the use of grammar and lexis. In terms of grammar, it is characterized by the use of subordinate clauses, more "that/to" complement clauses, more long sequences of prepositional phrases, more attributive adjectives, and more passives than general purpose language. From a lexical point of view, words and phrases are long and complex because of nominalization, noun-based phrases, and lexical variation; also, there are more lexical words than grammatical words. The formality of academic writing is evident in the avoidance of colloquial words and expressions, contractions, and phrasal verbs. The objectivity is sustained on the fact that academic writing relies on evidence and facts, rather than opinions, feelings, and biases. Regarding explicitness, academic writing is explicit about relationships within the text, which is reflected through the clear organization of ideas that is achieved by means of signposting and linking words and phrases. Hedging, or the use of vague language, also characterizes academic writing, especially when the writer needs to be careful, but still critical, about the claims that are made. Finally, academic writers must take and demonstrate responsibility for any evidence or fact they present to support their assertions.

Method

The setting selected for this study was the English Language II course, taught in second year. In selecting the participants, an intentional and reasoned sampling criterion was employed. The sample was composed of 18 students from second year because, at the time of the study, they were taking the English Language II course, and 11 third-year students because they had already taken the course and knew the importance of academic writing for further courses. In addition, 4 members of the teaching staff also participated, which included the leading professor of the course and other professors who taught courses that had interdisciplinary relationships with English Language II. The instructional procedure included a set of graph description tasks, including useful vocabulary for each type of graph description tasks, useful tips for describing graphs, and a suggested structure to write an interpretation report (writing output).

In order to achieve the proposed research objectives, some theoretical and empirical level methods were used. Thus, theoretical methods included:

- historical-logical: to study the development of the use of the CEFRs' descriptors in the assessment of C1 level writing skills;

- synthetic-analytic: to analyze key documents describing the use of the descriptors included in the CEFR for writing skills, and

- structural-systemic: used throughout the whole research process and the design of the proposal.

On the other hand, empirical methods comprised:

- document analysis: to determine weaknesses in the syllabi;

- surveys: to find out about students' needs related to graph description tasks;

- interview: to detect, from the professors' point of view, the student's difficulties in describing graphs;

- students' writing output analysis: to detect students' errors when completing graph description tasks in EAP, and

- triangulation: to determine the convergent and divergent points of the data obtained.

Findings

Results of Document Analysis

The documents analyzed were the English Language Discipline syllabus and the syllabus of the English language II course.

The English Language Discipline is considered the pillar of the whole academic program. At the end of the academic program, students should be able to use the English language as a means of communication and as a working tool, to deal with written and oral texts in English language through different activities, to assess different life and cultural expressions of the English-speaking countries, based on the materialistic and dialectic approach, as well as to acquire study skills and self-preparation in the knowledge and system of the English language. The English Language Discipline integrates the contents and skills that students need for succeeding in the rest of the disciplines of the curriculum.

English Language II is one of the basic courses in the English Language Discipline. This course is taught during the second year of the academic program. The course is delivered in 256 hours, mainly through practical lessons. According to the objectives of the syllabus, students should integrate verbal and non-verbal communication through the development of linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences so as to be able to analyze and produce texts in the academic communication context.

The evaluation system considers the four language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), and it includes systematic assessment activities, a midterm exam, and a final exam. The assessment criteria take into account creativity, language use, accuracy, and spontaneity, and students are supposed to reach a C1 proficiency level.

The course basic bibliography is *Focus on IELTS*, by Sue O'Connell, and *Vocabulary for IELTS*, by Pauline Cullen. They contain some graph description tasks for students to practice, but they are still insufficient for mastering the skill.

Results of the Survey to the Students

A questionnaire with 5 questions was administered to the sample of second- and third-year students to gain an in-depth understanding of their needs related to graph description tasks and how these needs might affect students' academic achievement and proficiency.

The first question was aimed to determine how important graph description tasks are for the students' development as language learners and as future language professionals. Most of the students, that is, 93% of the total (29), recognized that the skill of describing graphs was essential for their term papers and their theses and, in the long run, for their growth as future professionals. Figure 1 shows the responses distribution about the relevance of graph description tasks in percentages.

Figure 1

Relevance of Graph Description Tasks
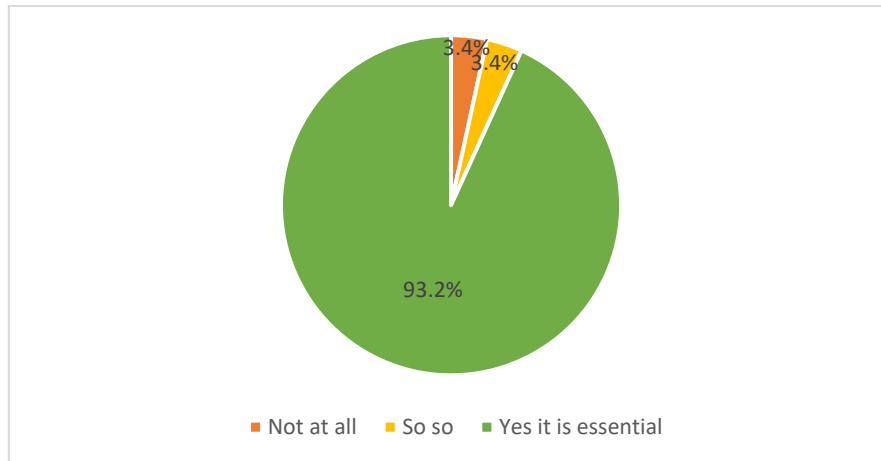
The second question addressed the level of difficulty of graph description tasks. The respondents were supposed to determine if they were easy, difficult, or very difficult. As Figure 2 shows, 55% of the respondents agreed that graph description tasks were very difficult, and only 14% agreed that they were easy. In respect to the degree of difficulty of the different types of graphs, the respondents considered that the most difficult tasks were process description tasks.

Figure 2

Level of Difficulty of Graph Description Tasks
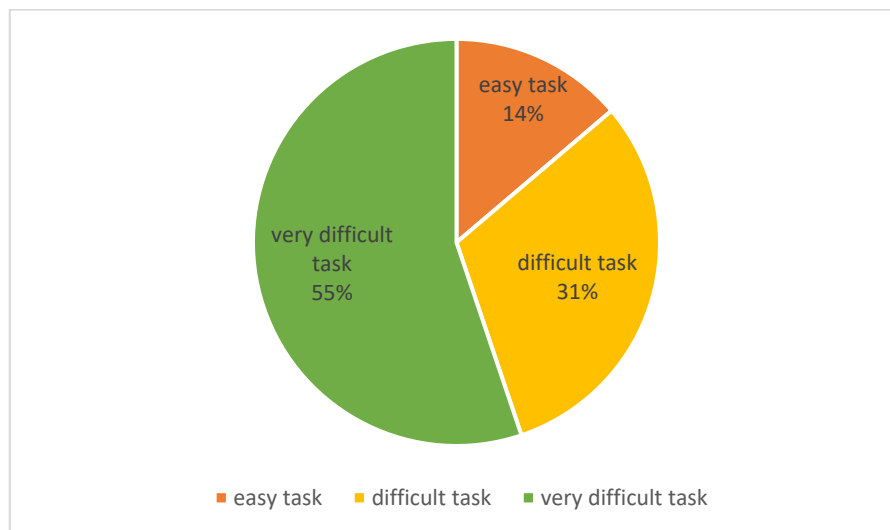
The third question was intended to determine students' motivation towards the process of completing graph description tasks. Figure 3 shows that, in general, the learners' level of motivation was high.

Figure 3

Level of Students' Motivation when Describing Graphs
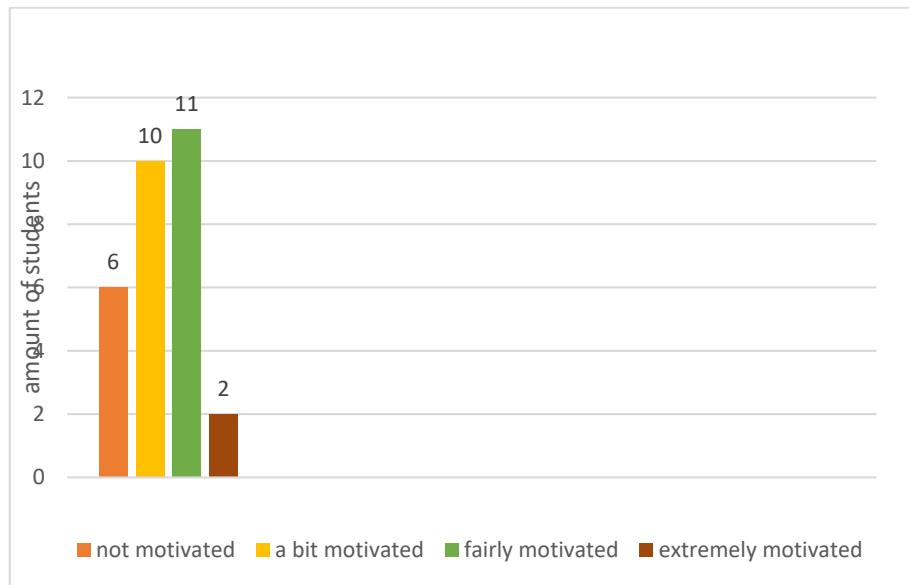
Question four was aimed at identifying the most common problems that students perceived when completing graph description tasks. They recognized problems related to task achievement, identifying main trends, writing accurate data, dealing with graph-specific vocabulary, describing time lines, task organization and conclusions, using verb tenses, dealing with the right collocations, choosing appropriate cohesive devices, and dealing with punctuation. Figure 4 shows that the most common difficulties for the participants were using verb tenses, identifying the main trends and the organization of the task description, followed by problems with task achievement. On the other hand, the least difficult tasks were related to the use of cohesive devices and punctuation.

Figure 4

Common Problems when Describing Graphs
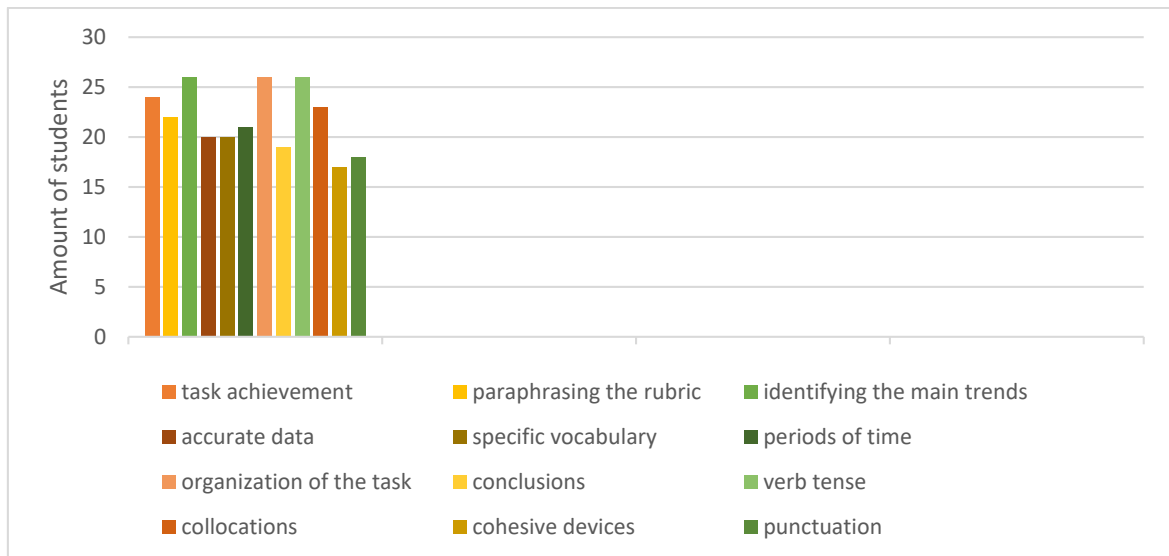
Finally, question five was meant to find out the learner's level of satisfaction with the amount of graph description practice they had had. As shown in Figure 5, 34% claimed that they had had enough graph description tasks in class, while 66% expressed they were willing to have more graph description practice because it was not sufficient. The units of the textbook that they claimed were in need of more task description activities were units 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, and 19.

Figure 5

Learner's Satisfaction with Graph Description Practice
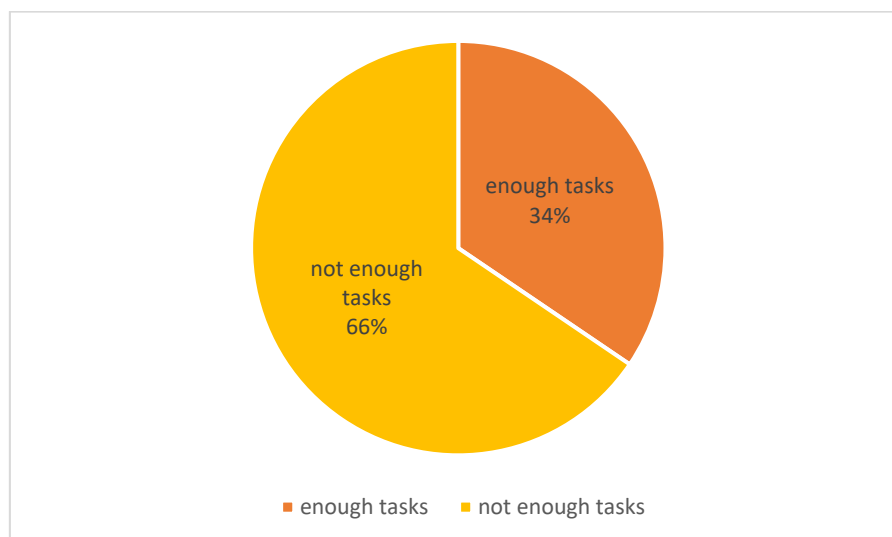
Results of Interview with the Teaching Staff

The interview looked forward to determining the teacher's perspectives on the role of graph description tasks in academic writing and the main difficulties that learners face when describing graphs. The interview questions addressed the role that graph description skills play in the development of EAP writing skills, as well as the difficulties students have to deal with in the learning process and the strategies that could be implemented to improve graph description skills and, consequently, EAP writing skills.

Teachers coincided with students' opinions in relation to the central role that graph description activities play in the development of academic writing, meeting language outcomes and succeeding in EAP learning. In relation to the main difficulties when dealing with graph description tasks, they also agreed with learner's opinions. Thus, identification of the main trends and organization of description task were the most common problems when assessing the learners.

Results of the Analysis of Students' Output

Also, a sample of graph description tasks completed by the learners was analyzed. The learners were asked to write a report including graph description instances. Several problems were detected, such as, issues with the organization of the report, language mistakes (wrong collocations and subject-verb agreement), and lack of accuracy of the information provided when describing the graphs. These problems affected the learner's task achievement.

The reports produced by the students displayed structure, size, organization, and accuracy problems. In relation to structure, when writing the introduction, some students failed to present a clear overview of the main trend of the most significant features of the chart, graph, table, etc. Regarding report size, in many of the graph descriptions, students tried to refer to basically every piece of information depicted in the graph, and they failed to write about the most relevant features. While others wrote too little, and the report resulted under length (less than 150 words), resulting in low mark. Concerning organization of ideas, some students did not organize ideas logically (not using connectors), and the reports were difficult to follow and read. In respect to accuracy in the described data, some students rendered wrongful information because they used wrong tenses; for example, they used past tense when referring to trends in the future, or they inconsistently used the past tense to talk about an extended period in the past. Additionally, some failed to compare and contrast graph features, and to describe general trends and changes in the graph data. Repetition and redundancy also affected the task outcomes in a large number of cases.

Discussion and Conclusions

Academic language includes the use of formal language, as well as vocabulary common to various disciplines and technical vocabulary inherent to each individual discipline, which can cause some difficulties to the students. Graph description tasks require knowledge about the content of the graph, structure of the report and specific vocabulary to interpret the most outstanding features.

From the previous analysis, it was evidenced that students were willing to have more practice in dealing and writing about graph description tasks. The document analysis showed that there were 11 units of the textbook that did not contain those tasks, so the practice for describing graphs was still insufficient. The most frequent difficulties students faced were related to the structure and size of the report, organization of ideas, accuracy in the described data, repetition of the same ideas, and lexical and grammar mistakes.

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Actions for Improving Medical Students' English Speaking and Writing Skills

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Abstract

Nowadays, English language is considered as the global language of communication worldwide. It has achieved an unquestionable status in health professionals' education, where students need to speak English properly. While English is taught in different medical universities worldwide, sometimes students encounter difficulties to speak and write efficiently in English. The authors of this paper have observed that students at Universidad Médica de Villa Clara "Serafín Ruiz de Zárate" experience some difficulties when speaking and writing in English because they do not have the required English proficiency level, and they tend to transfer the speaking and writing rhetorical conventions from their native language into their speaking and writing in English. The main objective of this paper is to propose a set of actions to enhance English speaking and writing skills of the aforementioned students. A mixed-method approach was used because this method focuses on collecting, analyzing and combining quantitative and qualitative data (Shorten and Smith, 2017). The findings obtained from the diagnosis stage revealed the necessity to improve medical students' English speaking and writing skills to meet their specific needs in different medical settings. Therefore, some actions for improving this situation were proposed. These actions represent an important step towards the improvement of the medical students' English speaking and writing skills since these are necessary for their training and upcoming medical careers.

Keywords: speaking skill, writing skill, medical English, teaching Medical English

Introduction

Currently, English is considered one of the most widely spread languages for international communication, with clear predominance over other modern languages spoken today. For decades, it has been used as a means to achieve communication among people

from different cultures. In addition, in today's globalized world, effective international communication is needed; so that individuals from different cultures can interact and cooperate effectively.

It is obvious that mutual understanding between parties can only be achieved by using a common medium, that is, a *lingua franca* that allows people to communicate when they do not share the same mother tongue. Today, English predominantly fulfills the role of this common medium; it is usually the *lingua franca* speakers from different countries widely use in different contexts (Frinculesco, 2009). English has become the common language in political conferences, as it is one of the working languages of a great number of political organizations, such as the United Nations, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and others; therefore, it is considered the language of business, entertainment, technology, the media, and education (Crystal, 2003).

In the medical field, the English language has also gained the status of *lingua franca* due to its widespread use by health professionals all over the world. This is evident in the fact that most medical journals are issued in English, and scientific contributions in medicine and science are also published in English (Kanoksilapatham, 2005). Nowadays, English is essential in the medical field, and the medical academic community has unanimously chosen it as one common language to communicate among themselves and with the rest of the world. There are different settings where using English is common among health care professionals, as they participate in lectures and health conferences, read medical literature published in English, review manuals of medical equipment, communicate with foreign patients, doctors and other health professionals, write medical purpose letters and medical prescriptions, present papers at academic conferences, and write short communications (Zdeněk, 2017). Therefore, it is essential for every medical student, doctor, or researcher in this field to write and publish papers in English to participate in international conferences, to communicate with English-speaking researchers and physicians, and to write articles and medical reports to be known worldwide.

However, it is not always easy for medical students, doctors, nurses, or researchers to properly and efficiently speak and write in English. This is specifically the case of EFL learners at Universidad Médica de Villa Clara "Serafín Ruiz de Zárate"; they generally experience some difficulties when speaking and writing in English because they do not have the required English proficiency level, and they tend to transfer the speaking and writing rhetorical conventions from their native language into English when speaking and writing. Hence, the main objective

of this study is to propose a set of actions to enhance the development of English speaking and writing skills of medical students at the university previously mentioned, since these are the productive skills which are essential for them to master.

Methods

To achieve the formulated objective, a mixed-method approach was used since this allows to collect, analyze and combine both quantitative and qualitative data (Shorten, & Smith, 2017). The quantitative data, obtained from surveys, were analyzed using simple percentage analysis, whereas qualitative data about learners' experiences and perceptions were analyzed using content analysis.

All second-year Medicine students at Universidad Médica de Villa Clara "Serafín Ruiz de Zárate" were considered as the population. The sampling was non-probabilistic, and a convenience sample was selected, which included 50 students enrolled in the English course taught by one of the researchers.

Theoretical Methods

- Historical and logical: This method made possible an analysis of the tendencies that have existed as well as the existing ones dealing with the problem.

- Analysis and synthesis: This method was employed to analyze, evaluate and generalize the theoretical information and the collected data.

- Induction and deduction: This method allowed the achievement of concluding elements related to the research topic to determine the general premises making deductions analysis and abstractions, which were subsequently used in the discussion section.

Empirical Methods

- Participant observation: The researchers identified, observed and analyzed the speaking and writing strengths and weaknesses of medical students when using English as a foreign language in the classroom.

- Survey: A survey was administered to a sample of 50 students in order to determine their experiences and perceptions regarding their English speaking and writing skills to meet their needs in different medical settings

Findings

The findings of the study revealed that medical students have some lacks or weaknesses when speaking and writing in English because English language textbooks are usually based on communicative knowledge, but the speaking and writing language skills,

sometimes, are not well-approached. In fact, in many situations medical students are not able to interact with people in English, which may be the result of a variety of reasons.

In the case of speaking, medical students showed that they were not fully competent to take part in spontaneous and fluent communication due to the lack of English vocabulary and the fewer opportunities to practice the language, which makes students unable and fearful of speaking. Nevertheless, the findings of this research showed the participants' interest in improving their speaking skills. In the case of vocabulary limitations, they may be due to the fact that, in English, the written form is different from the spoken one (Bouguenous, 2018). Moreover, these students need to learn many technical and non-technical words in English (which is not their mother tongue) in order to communicate efficiently in the classroom and other academic settings.

With regard to writing, medical learners also showed difficulties. According to the study, they sometimes use unconventional grammar, that is to say, changes in word order that can alter the entire meaning of a sentence because of the limited writing activities done in class and monitored by the teacher. Besides, medical students wrongly use colloquial and formal language indistinctively. It is important to highlight that formal language writing demands a formal tone characterized by careful language choices to convey ideas to readers as precisely as possible, while the writing of colloquial language is normally restricted to informal English, and does not satisfy this need for exactness of expression (Burchfield, 2004). Thus, medical students should gain awareness of the differences between written and oral language, for example, considering word choice, word order, sentence structure, etc.

Therefore, in order to accomplish the main goal of the research, a proposal of classroom actions is made to improve medical students' English speaking and writing skills. This actions looked to motivate medical students to participate in class and feel more comfortable and confident when they need to hold a conversation or write in English.

Actions to Improve Medical Students' English Speaking Skills

Developing medical students' speaking skills is a demanding task. Medical students feel the necessity to talk about what they think and take part in different medical meetings or professional and personal interaction; however, being fluent in a foreign language requires much self-confidence and more practice to develop speaking skills (Selcuk, 2015).

As Bouguenous (2018) states, to enable medical students to interact and speak English fluently, teachers have to involve them and raise their motivation to discuss scientific or medical issues in relation to their field of study or interest. Moreover, teachers should bear in

mind, when teaching speaking skills, that their students live in a social, cultural and linguistic context where the English language is not often the medium of interaction in their daily life; in other words, they do not have the most suitable conditions to reach the required level. Hence, teachers need to have their students discover opportunities for practicing their speaking skills. To this end, English teachers should find strategies to have them practice their speaking skills and provide appropriate feedback (Bouguenous, 2018).

In addition, teachers should implement classroom activities and tasks that seem appropriate to develop medical students' speaking skills; these activities and tasks could include discussions, free speeches, and role-plays. For example, it is by including a scientific or a medical topic for debate, generally after a listening or a reading session, that students are willing to take part in the discussion, and express their opinions either individually, in a group, or in a pair work activity (Bouguenous, 2018). Teachers should also have students summarize heard information from those discussions and free speeches, which allows them to practice a variety of language functions, such as describing, narrating, prescribing, or providing information.

Besides being sociable with students, teachers should choose subjects of general interest within the medical field. For example, teachers could encourage the students' discussion by showing a picture of a patient suffering from a certain disease, and then asking them to comment on the photo. This would make students in the classroom express their opinions about what they see, and describe the situation from different points of view.

Another way to raise successful conversation among learners is to provide them with a reading text on controversial medical issues, such as abortion, terminal care, drug abuse, etc., and then ask them to report what they have read to their partners (Bouguenous, 2018). It is important to say that, in this kind of activities, teachers should focus on meaning rather than on form; nevertheless, grammar analysis and other language explanations could be included by the end of the lesson.

Actions to Improve Medical Students' English Writing Skill

Writing has become an absolute necessity for medical learners, particularly for those who are in contact with foreign colleagues or interested in publishing articles. However, teaching writing is quite different from teaching the other skills (McLean, 2021). And of course, it is more difficult for students to write on medical topics. Therefore, for the writing skill, which has become essential for medical students, a set of actions is also proposed.

First of all, teachers should provide learners with efficient strategies to be good writers; for example, teaching learners how to come up with ideas from different experiences and oral discussions in class could be a good starting point to write about a medical topic. Teachers should design clear tasks, considering what it is wanted from the learners, and assign pair and group work to boost cooperative writing (Bouguenous, 2018).

Furthermore, teachers should choose writing tasks that make students emotionally and intellectually satisfied; that is to say, tasks which amuse them, make them feel good and give them a sense of purpose. This can be achieved through a variety of ways, such as using pictures, music, watching movies, among others (Bouguenous, 2018).

Moreover, teachers should assign more time to practice writing, so that students have enough opportunities to write about different topics in several situations. They should help students with ideas when they need it (by doing brainstorming activities), and they should move progressively in writing tasks, starting from sentence writing, moving to paragraph writing and ending with essay writing (McLean, 2021).

Generally speaking, teachers should encourage students and help them during brainstorming activities about a specific topic. Teachers should also provide feedback to students about their piece of writing concerning the way students organize the information and other linguistic issues, such as spelling, vocabulary, grammar, coherence, among others. At the same time, teachers should decide which feedback they should give to their students' writings; whether it is instructional or evaluative feedback (Bouguenous, 2018).

Finally, teachers should properly correct errors without affecting students' emotions because they are always fearful of making mistakes. Therefore, as Bouguenous (2018) states, responding positively towards their errors may help them to overcome their fear and help the process of learning as a whole. In general, teachers should correct students, and draw the attention to the language problems they have. On the other hand, students should learn to use feedback their mistakes, and correct themselves their own pieces of writing. Then, if students are not able to correct themselves, teachers should allow student-student correction, and finally, if students cannot find solutions to the language problems, then the teacher can check the written product and correct the mistakes.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that medical students had some weaknesses when writing and speaking in English. In the case of writing, the weaknesses include use of unconventional grammar, awkward phrasing, inappropriate use of colloquial and formal

language, etc. On the other hand, when speaking, sometimes students have limitations due to the lack of suitable vocabulary, the lack of confidence when speaking in public, and the difficulties expressing whole ideas in sentences. Therefore, a set of actions was proposed to improve the students' English speaking and writing skills to meet their specific needs in the different medical settings. These actions would represent an important step towards the improvement of the students' English speaking and writing skills since these are necessary for their training and upcoming medical careers.

The present study can be considered as a starting point for further research on the improvement of speaking and writing skills in the context of medical English teaching and learning. Therefore, similar research can be conducted as to the effectiveness of these actions, and, also, to propose actions to enhance the listening and reading skills of medical students. Similar further studies could also focus in other areas of ESP.

Conclusions

The teaching of the medical English, most of the time focused on grammatical explanations, has not fully reached the expected learning outcomes. The matter worsens when it comes to the teaching of speaking and writing because students do not have the required English proficiency level, and they tend to transfer the speaking and writing rhetorical conventions from their native language into speaking and writing in English. These skills are very important for medical students because they need to communicate properly with other health professionals worldwide in order to share professional knowledge and experience.

Thus, the present study was conducted to propose some actions to enhance the English speaking and writing skills of medical students at the Universidad Médica de Villa Clara "Serafín Ruiz de Zárate". For proposing the actions, the researchers took into account the theoretical foundations which guided the study, as well as the results of the needs analysis. The main objective of these actions is to help Medicine students to be more competent when speaking and writing in English. In general, the actions could be a very useful pedagogical tool in the teaching and learning process of Medical English in order to improve Medicine students' communication skills when speaking and writing. For further work, it will be advisable to assess the effectiveness of the proposed actions.

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Exploring the Use of PechaKucha Presentations in an EFL Speaking Course

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Abstract

EFL learners always face the challenge of developing their speaking skills, and giving oral presentations is one of the many teaching strategies that teachers use in their classroom to achieve this goal. By using the PechaKucha presentation format, learners can learn to create, not only visually engaging presentations, but also deliver concise and powerful presentations. This study is aimed at exploring, through the participants' perceptions, the implementation of the PechaKucha presentation format to improve the learners' speaking skills in an EFL speaking course in higher education. A questionnaire with open and closed-ended questions was administered to explore the participants' perception about the implementation of PechaKucha presentations in classroom activities. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the qualitative data through content analysis. The results of the study show that, in general, the participants perceived the use of PechaKucha presentations in positive way. They acknowledged the improvement of their speaking skills by bringing up issues such as fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and organization of ideas. It can be concluded that, as perceived by the participants, there is an improvement in their speaking skills. Thus, based on these study findings and on previous studies, the implementation of Pechakucha presentations can be said to be effective in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: PechaKucha, oral presentations, speaking skills, EFL

Introduction

Today, English is being considered as a global language, used as a means of communication in a diversity of fields and contexts around the world. That is why many higher education programs include English as a foreign language (EFL) as part of their curricula. In keeping with it, EFL instructors are continuously working towards improving classroom practices, and thus helping learners to make their foreign language learning process smoother, more engaging, and more efficient. In addition, speaking skills have always been at the heart of learners' concerns because it has widely and popularly been considered as the hardest

language skill to master. Thus, many EFL teachers spend a lot of time finding ways to enhance their students' speaking skills, among them public speaking. Thus, giving oral presentations is quite common as a classroom activity.

There are many ways to deliver an oral presentation, and there are many benefits for the learners, not only from the language-learning point of view. Giving oral presentations in the EFL classroom provides learners with the opportunity to use English meaningfully to communicate with others, as they develop their overall language skills, use English to obtain information, develop digital literacy skills, etc. In this context, EFL learners are usually asked to deliver presentations using a visual aid, which is commonly a PowerPoint, a Google Slides, or a Canva presentation. Thus, the challenge is to help students efficiently deliver oral presentations that are powerful and engaging for their audience. A suitable and effective presentation format to achieve this is PechaKucha.

Two architects created the PechaKucha presentation format in 2003, and since then it has become very popular worldwide because of its innovative style, simplicity, and communicative effectiveness. *PechaKucha* is a Japanese word, which means "chit-chat". Actually, the idea of PechaKucha is quite simple: The presentation has 20 slides, each slide is presented in 20 seconds. That means that a PechaKucha presentation always lasts 400 seconds, that is, 6 minutes 40 seconds. Finally, there is another important feature of PechaKucha: although they are powerful presentations from the visual point of view, the most important thing is the message conveyed by the speaker. Thus, PechaKucha presentations somehow force the presenters to develop and display good presentation skills, including good time management.

In general, by preparing and delivering PechaKucha presentations, people can learn to be concise, to think critically about the presentation content, to be more disciplined, to pay more attention to the presentation design, to practice more their presentation skills, and to become more confident (Integrated Consulting Group, 2019). Thus, because of their impact on learning, PechaKucha presentations are increasingly being used in many educational contexts.

The use of PechaKucha presentations has been explored in different contexts, and various researchers in the field of TEFL have recognized the benefits of PechaKucha for language learning: improves language skills (performance, fluency, language use) and public speaking skills (speech delivery, time management, speaking anxiety), increases confidence, develops critical thinking skills, encourages cooperative learning, and provides a fun language environment. (Abbass et al., 2021; Arniatika, 2019; Coskun, 2017; Mabuan, 2017; Nguyen,

2015; Rokhaniyah, 2019; Solmaz, 2019; Tonsi, 2016; Zhussupova, Zharkynbekova & Suleimenova, 2017) However, some disadvantages have also been identified, such as, time constraints and the rigidity of the format (Coskun, 2017; González Ruiz, 2017; Mabuan, 2017).

Although this is a relatively new presentation format, TEFL practitioners and researchers are increasingly resorting to PechaKucha, and there is already a body of research on the use of PechaKucha presentations in education and in language education in different educational levels, from primary school to higher education. In Costa Rica, there are references to the use of PechaKucha in social and professional events, such as PechaKucha Night San José; however, no evidence of studies on the use of PechaKucha in the context of TEFL was found.

Thus, the aim of this study was to explore, through the participants' perceptions, the implementation of the PechaKucha presentation format to improve the learners' speaking skills in an EFL speaking course in a Costa Rican University.

Method

The participants included 17 EFL learners of an EFL speaking course focused on academic English, with levels ranging to A2-B1 (according to the Common European Framework of Reference for the Teaching and Learning of Languages, CEFR). The course was part of the ELT Bachelor Program, at Universidad Americana.

The lesson modality was remote using Microsoft Teams. The instructional design included: exploration of PechaKucha presentations, information and reflection about PechaKucha, creation and delivery of three PechaKucha presentations as classroom activities and one as a final project. The creation and delivery of PechaKucha presentations was scaffolded, and progressed from controlled PechaKucha practice, where students were provided with premade PowerPoint presentations, which they had to use to deliver a presentation, to free practice, where they had to prepare and deliver their own PechaKucha presentations. This included both group and individual presentations. The participants also had the choice of optionally using the PechaKucha format in other classroom presentations where they were not specifically asked to use this presentation format.

A mixed-method research design was used in this study. In order to collect students´ perceptions, an online questionnaire was administered. The questionnaire consisted of nine items with a 5-level Likert scale (from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree) and eight open-ended questions concerning different aspects related to the use of PechaKucha presentations in the course. The questionnaire was designed using ideas from González Ruiz (2017) and

Mabuan (2017). The collected data was analyzed using frequency analysis, for quantitative data, and thematic content analysis, for qualitative data.

Findings and Discussion

Fourteen students responded the questionnaire at the end of the course. The findings about the participants' perceptions on the use of PechaKucha presentations in the oral communication course are discussed below. Items 1 to 9 in the questionnaire inquired about oral presentation skills, critical thinking, collaboration, motivation, PechaKucha preparation and practice compared to traditional presentations, improvement over time, satisfaction with PechaKucha presentations, and usefulness of PechaKucha presentations.

As Figure 1 shows, most responses were on the Strongly agree and Agree side, which is in line with what is described in prior similar studies.

Figure 1

Participants' Perceptions About the Use of PechaKucha
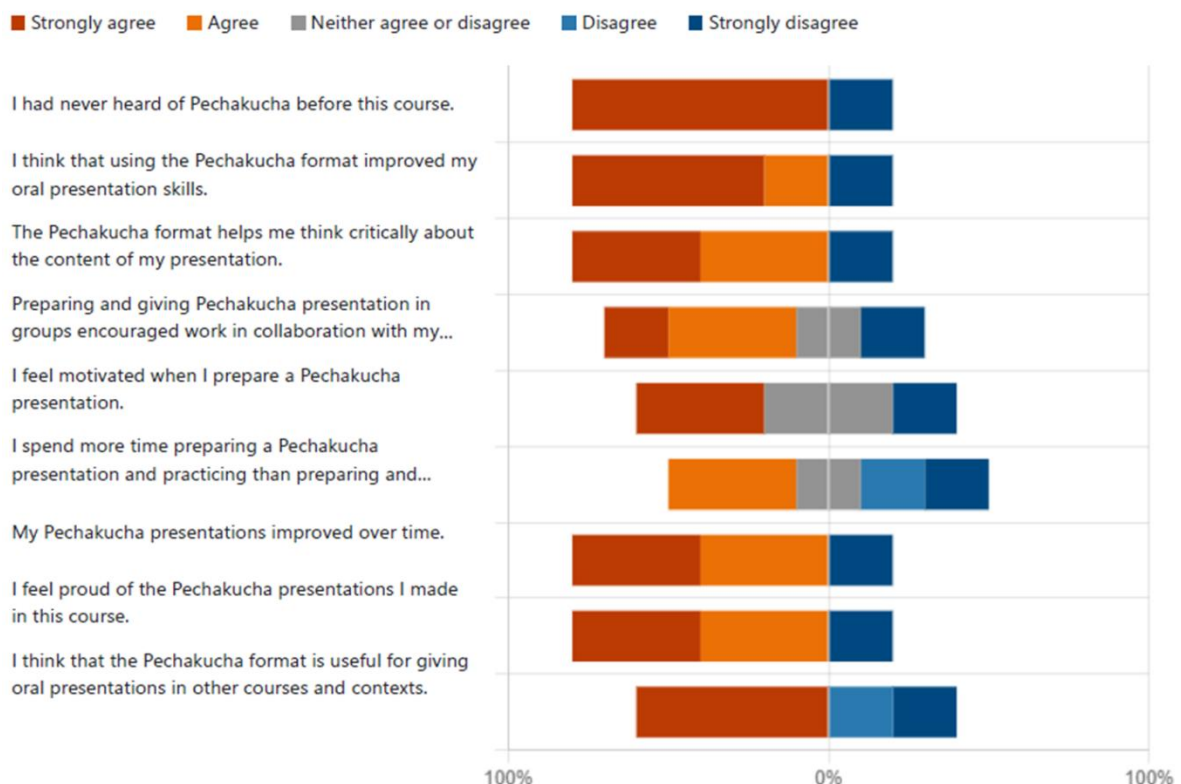
It is interesting to notice that in the statement related to motivation, there is a different tendency, 40 percent of participants neither agreed nor disagree, whereas 20 percent (3 participants) strongly disagreed. This seems to be in contradiction with what has been reported in previous studies in relation to the motivational factor of this practice (Coskun,

2017; Hayashi & Holland, 2017; Rokhaniyah, 2019). Previous studies report higher motivation about language learning, in some cases, in relation to the use of body language (Mabuan, 2017), and in other cases, related to the fact that the students play a more active role (Arniatika, 2018; Rokhaniyah, 2019). The previously cited studies were carried in face-to-face contexts, unlike this study that was carried out in a remote learning setting. Thus, it might be worth studying whether the lesson modality would affect learner's motivation when using PechaKucha in EFL contexts.

From the gathered data, it is possible to see that participants were proud of their work and perceived skills improvement. Another significant fact is that they recognized that this presentation format might be useful in other courses and contexts, which is evidence of the potential of PechaKucha presentations in a variety of educational settings, as perceived by the learners.

The open-ended questions of the questionnaire looked to validate and expand on the quantitative findings. The participants were questioned about perceived improvement, benefits of PechaKucha presentations, what they liked and disliked about PechaKucha presentations, challenges, etc. A thematic analysis was carried out by identifying codes in the texts provided by the respondents, then patterns were found among them, to finally come up with themes.

The following themes were generated: speaking skills (fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary), organization of ideas and precision, time management, confidence, practice, research skills, format efficiency, and design (use of images, selecting the images, not using text in the slides). Many of the generated themes corroborate the findings related to the quantitative data. Some other relevant issues came up such as confidence and time management, which are also reported in prior studies, such as Coskun (2017).

As positive points, they considered that this presentation format is more efficient in terms of time and concision, and qualified the PechaKucha presentation format as "entertaining", "excellent", "great", and even "fun." Several participants recognized the fact that PechaKucha presentations contribute to concentrate on the content of the presentation, looking for information while preparing, and focusing on the main ideas while delivering the presentation. Two students also acknowledged that they enjoyed working together with their classmates. Designing the presentation and choosing appropriate images to support the delivery were also identified as enjoyable, even choosing the right things to say was considered as pleasurable. These positive points can be considered as triggers of motivation,

even though it was not explicitly recognized by the students in the closed-ended question related to motivation. According to Liu (2022), enjoyment in a language classroom generates student engagement and motivation, as essential ingredients of effective teaching and learning, and thus of academic success.

Another relevant issued that emerged from the open-ended questions was related to the development of digital literacy skills. The participants were not only required to use PowerPoint for creating slides, but they also used other features, like adding voice-over for prerecorded presentations or converting a PowerPoint presentation into a video presentation. In this sense, they recognized an enhancement of their digital literacy skills, which is an added benefit of using PechaKucha in the EFL classroom (Coskun, 2017; Mabuan, 2017; Nguyen, 2015; Warmuth, 2021).

Interestingly, in this part, when asked about what they especially disliked about Pechakucha presentations, some participants recognized that they needed more time to create and prepare for a Pechakucha presentation, which contradicts the quantitative results, but coincides with the findings in previous studies. The most common drawback identified was time management, especially, as one participant stated, when "making sure to only use the 20 seconds for each slide." This is a confirmation of the quantitative data and the findings in previous studies. This limitation may be addressed in the classroom by providing the students with opportunities to rehearse their oral presentations, and reflect on the process and the outcomes of the rehearsal, and on how to improve their time management skills.

Conclusions

Based on this exploration of the use of PechaKucha in an EFL oral communication course, it is possible to conclude that, in general, participants perceived the use of PechaKucha presentations in a positive way. They acknowledged the improvement of their speaking skills by bringing up issues such as fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and organization of ideas. As perceived by the participants, time management is an issue that should be paid attention to when dealing with PechaKucha in the classroom.

In general, PechaKucha presentations can be effectively used in the EFL classroom, not only to improve language skills, but also to help learners to develop skills in organizing content, improving concision and precision, managing presentation time, creating powerful visual designs to support delivery, searching for information, and gaining confidence. However, when designing and planning the lessons, it is important to consider those issues that may be

challenging for the students, such as, time management and providing plenty of time for preparation and rehearsal.

In relation to the study limitations, a larger sample size would provide more insights on the issues revealed in this study. Further research should expand on the motivational factors, as well as consider differences in face-to-face and remote EFL lessons. Since the study is only focused on EFL learners' self-perception, further studies could address language performance and learning outcomes to provide a more comprehensive examination of the role and impact of PechaKucha presentations in the EFL classroom.

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Using an English-Spanish Sentence-Aligned Parallel Corpus to Foster Translation Competence

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Abstract

This paper describes a proposal to foster translation competence using an English-Spanish parallel corpus of science and technology Texts. This tool is intended for fourth-year students of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language, at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, who have difficulties related to the acquisition and development of translation competences. For this purpose, a corpus of 50 English science and technology texts and their translations into Spanish was compiled, including the domains of medicine, physics, chemistry, and artificial intelligence. The dataset was collected and processed using corpus tools, such as *OmegaT* aligner and *Xbench* software. It provides a wide range of lexical, syntactical and textual examples found in the English texts, with their equivalents in Spanish, in order to help students to integrate the necessary knowledge and skills for the successful translation of science and technology texts.

Keywords: alignment, parallel corpus, science and technology texts, translation competence

Introduction

Today's multicultural and multilingual society demands effective, efficient, and empathetic communication between languages and cultures. In this sense, translation has always been an important factor in life from unmemorable times until today (Kaur, 2005). Translation is a courier for the transmission of knowledge, a protector of cultural heritage and essential to the development of global economy (Burrow-Goldhahn, 2018). In addition, the demands for competent translators are rapidly growing. Translation professionals with linguistic expertise, appreciation for other cultures, background knowledge on specialized areas, and who master translation strategies, are of great importance in society. However, the

acquisition of translation competence starts from the very process of language learning and professional training, mainly at university level. As complex and difficult though it may seem, the aim of translation trainers is to provide their trainees with as rich and thorough translation education as possible. (Eser, 2015)

According to the web site of Statista, the number of scientific and technical articles published yearly in 2018 was 2,555,959. This number, needless to say, is a considerable amount (McCarthy, 2019). With more and more papers on science and technology published in English, and their level of lexical complexity, the need to enhance the competence of the translators is imperious since they are the bridge between the scientists and their readers.

In the case of English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language, at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, students still have difficulties when translating specialized texts, specifically science and technology texts. With the objective of finding out about the status of the translation competence acquired by fourth-year students taking the Translation of Science and Technology Texts course, a diagnosis was first carried to examine their translation competence.

The implementation of the diagnostic research methods revealed some difficulties that students face when translating science and technology texts; these difficulties included insufficient amount of offline bilingual consulting sources to enhance the translation competence in the classroom. Also, the students showed difficulties when selecting appropriate equivalents in Spanish for scientific or technical terms in English since they barely knew the specialized vocabulary, and did not have enough background knowledge on science and technology related topics. Therefore, the students' translation competence did not evidence an optimal level, and consequently, the need to propose new pedagogical and interdisciplinary alternatives to contribute to the enhancement of this crucial competence was perceived.

In response to the evidenced problem, the main objective of this research was to propose and to explain the design of an English-Spanish sentence-aligned parallel corpus of science and technology texts, created with the aim of enhancing the translation competence of translation students in this academic program at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas. The process of compilation and processing of this parallel corpus will be explained in more detail further in this paper, as well as the theoretical foundations that support this research.

Translation Competence

The concept of translation competence covers various skills and knowledge that a translator needs to have in order to translate effectively. One of the primary purposes of translation education is to measure and assess the acquisition of translation competence, thus paving the way for more effective translator education required to meet the expectations in the translation sector (Eser, 2015).

In translation education, there are models of translation competence drawn up by individual researchers and research groups, like PACTE (Process in the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation that is settled in the Translation Department at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. PACTE (2003) defines translation competence as

> the ability to carry out the transfer process from the comprehension of the source text to the re-expression of the target text, taking into account the purpose of the translation and the characteristics of the target text readers. It is made up of five sub-competencies (p. 60).

The five sub-competences to which the PACTE Group makes reference are: bilingual sub-competence (correct use of the two languages), extra-linguistic sub-competence (knowledge about both, the target and the source culture), knowledge about translation sub-competence (methods and procedures, general rules of translation as a profession), instrumental sub-competence (correct use of documentation sources and information and communication technologies applied to translation), and strategic sub-competence (procedural knowledge to guarantee the efficiency of the translation process and solve the problems encountered). Predominantly procedural knowledge needed to communicate in two languages.

PACTE Group also includes a psycho-physiological component in their translation competence model, which comprises cognitive and attitudinal components, such as (1) cognitive components, that is, memory, perception, attention, and emotion; (2) attitudinal aspects, including intellectual curiosity, perseverance, rigor, critical spirit, knowledge of and confidence in one's own abilities, the ability to measure one's own abilities, motivations, etc.; (3) abilities, such as creativity, logical reasoning, analysis and synthesis, etc. (p. 60)

In this respect, Oraki and Gholam-Reza (2020) state that it is very important to develop and enhance this competence from the very start of the training process because the professional exercise of translation will certainly be demanding; hence, the need of integrating

disciplines in the translation education process, and proposing innovative ways of acquiring and enhancing translation competence.

Therefore, the next logical questions would be: What tools are available to enhance the students' translation competence? Considering the academic curriculum, what disciplines could be integrated to come out with an innovative and effective proposal to foster translation competence?

Corpus Linguistics and Translation

Corpus linguistics has been long established as a significant paradigm in translation theory and practice since Mona Baker put forward her belief that corpora could be a suitable methodology for translation studies (Fantinuoli & Zanettin, 2015). Corpus linguistics is a set of procedures, or methods, for studying language through large collections of machine-readable texts (McEnery and Hardie, 2011). A corpus is defined as "a finite collection of texts, machine readable, automatically or semi-automatically analized, selected according to explicit linguistic criteria in order to be used as a sample of the language or to represent a language variety" (Rodríguez-Inés, 2008, p. 17).

In the last two decades, there has been a significant number of researchers who have tried to demonstrate the multiple benefits of using corpora in translation training. In the specific case of translation, there is a particular type of corpus that is widely used in translation studies, namely, the parallel corpus, which comprises texts in one language aligned with their translations in another. Both texts need to be aligned by first identifying corresponding segments, usually sentences or paragraphs, which need to be matched through a corpus tool. (Zanettin, 2002)

Translation scholars believe that a parallel corpus can serve as a tool for the improvement of translation competence in a classroom, where not only the product is important, but also the process, the acquisition of appropriate strategies, and lexical input. With the help of a parallel corpus, the translator can find examples of how to translate a specific syntactic structure or terminology, and create word banks to summarize and learn vocabulary within a specific field. Moreover, a parallel corpus provides a useful complementary resource that allows translators to see terms in a variety of contexts simultaneously, enabling them to choose the best equivalents for each context (Shen, 2010).

One of the main advantages of translation teaching with parallel corpora is the fact that its use reduces the role of the teacher's intuition in the translation classroom, and at the same time assigns more importance to the students and their documentation skills

(instrumental competence). This is very important in contexts of online learning and independent study (Rodríguez-Inés, 2008). And this is exactly what happened during the pandemic in 2020, when lockdown restrictions gave rise to the need for self-preparation and autonomous learning.

As Bausela (2016) strongly affirms, the use of a parallel corpus in the translations lessons favors the learning of specific vocabulary, the analysis of solutions given by other translators, and the identification of the best equivalent in specific contexts when translating. In this way, students can integrate the knowledge and strategies acquired and developed in the classroom through the use of the parallel corpus. This integration will be very useful to enhance the students' translation competence.

In views of the need to enhance the translation competence of translation students, and the benefits of using parallel corpora in translation training, the proposal of an English-Spanish parallel corpus of science and technology texts arose to complement the teaching of one specific translation course in the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language academic program, especially during these times when technologies have become a fundamental supporting tool for learning and working.

Method

The present study is aimed at analyzing the situation of fourth-year translation students concerning the acquisition and enhancement of their translation competence when translating science and technology texts, as well as exploring the benefits of integrating a corpus-based approach to translation lessons through the creation of a parallel corpus of science and technology texts. Therefore, for the design of the present research, a mixed-method approach was adopted, including qualitative aspects, such as expert opinion about the combination of corpus linguistics and translation, and more specifically, about the positive impact of using parallel corpora as aiding tools to enhance translation competence in the classroom. Another aspect taken into account was the domains and topics related to science and technology that are commonly used in the academic curriculum for translation teaching, which guided the selection of the texts for the compiled parallel corpus. Moreover, the opinion of the students was also considered in order to evaluate the pertinence of the research problem and, based on that, to strategically elaborate the corpus. As for the quantitative data, a questionnaire was used to determine the corpus users (participants)' opinions, and simple percentage analysis was conducted. Corpus linguistics also has a strong statistical component since it is necessary to count the tokens in a particular text, as well as the number of texts in a

corpus, and the most repeated words in the corpus. This would eventually lead to further elaboration of word banks and other products derived from the corpus itself.

The study was conducted in three main stages. The first stage entailed a bibliographic review in order to construct a theoretical framework to systematize the main concepts associated with the topic of the research and their relationships. The second stage was devoted to the analysis of the methodology used for diagnosing the students' needs concerning the enhancement of translation competence. Therefore, a group of fourth-year English Language students were surveyed to determine their difficulties concerning the translation process of science and technology texts, and the importance they confer to the incorporation of new input sources (a parallel corpus) to enhance their translation competence. The third stage of the research process consisted of the compilation of the English-Spanish parallel corpus of science and technology texts to foster translation competence.

Results

In this section, the practical steps involved in the compilation of the English-Spanish sentence-aligned parallel corpus of science and technology texts, the process of texts selection, alignment, and manual processing of the corpus will be described.

As previously stated, in the second stage of the research, a survey was conducted with 20 fourth-year students of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language in the 2019-2020 academic year.

The majority of students (90 percent) perceived some difficulties hindering the translation process:

- insufficient offline bilingual reference sources for translation practice during the lessons,
- insufficient time for translating during class,
- need of more tutoring hours with their professors,
- most translation work is relegated to independent study, and
- insufficient background information on the topics of science and technology before translating texts related to these topics.

Additionally, over half of the participants declared insufficient prior knowledge or background information, as well as limited vocabulary related to the text topics, and many recognized that they relied on online translators for choosing lexical equivalence and precise information. Overall, they referred to lacking the necessary knowledge and skills for the

translation process. Table 1 displays the quantitative data derived from the survey on the difficulties.

Table 1

Survey Data: Students Perceptions about the Translation of Science and Technology Texts Course

Availability of bilingual reference sources	Enough	Little	Insufficient
	7.69%	46.15%	38.46%
Prior knowledge or background information, vocabulary and possible solutions to translation difficulties	Enough	Little	Insufficient
	23.07%	23.07%	53.84%
Dependence on online translators	Very little dependent	More or less dependent	Very dependent
	23.07%	30.76%	46.15%
Using only online translators is enough to improve translation competence.	Yes		No
	7.69%		92.3%
Students who have used a bilingual corpus as an aiding tool to translate	0		100%

In the third stage, the English-Spanish sentence-aligned parallel corpus of science and technology texts was compiled and processed using a variety of corpus tools. The corpus comprised 50 texts written English and their respective translations into Spanish, for a total of 100 texts (125 860-word tokens), retrieved from the WHO (World Health Organization) official website, the Nobel Prize official website, and the Encarta Encyclopedia Student Premium 2009. Some of these texts had already been used for teaching and learning purposes by fourth-year students and professors of the English Language with French as a Second Foreign Language academic program in translation lessons, and had already been corrected in groups with the help of the professor.

The texts covered the specific domains of medicine and scientific discoveries on physics, chemistry, and artificial intelligence. These domains are, in turn, subdivided into more specific topics, such as, communicable and non-communicable diseases, artificial intelligence models, and Nobel Prizes. Due to the recent impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was considered relevant to include a number of texts dealing with this topic in the corpus, in the domain of medicine.

Through the use of user-friendly corpus tools, such as OmegaT Aligner (Godfrey, 2019), the corpus was aligned by "finding correspondences, in bilingual parallel corpora, between

textual segments that are translation equivalents" (Kraif, 2001, p. 2). The texts were uploaded one by one to this software, and each sentence was matched with its equivalent in the other language automatically. The process was corrected manually. Once all the texts had been aligned, they were stored as a translation memory and displayed in *Xbench* software (ApSIC, 2022). This tool allows users to carry out word search and see on the screen all the possible examples highlighted in two blocks: to the left, the English texts, and to the right, the Spanish equivalents.

Conclusions

A translator must be, above all, efficient and should have the necessary set of knowledge and skills to successfully perform their task in a society that is every day more multicultural. Therefore, the role of translation trainers is essential in fostering translation competence. In some cases, the time to practice in the classroom is not enough; while in others, novice translators have insufficient background knowledge on the topics of science and technology texts, lack bilingual skills, and have poor knowledge of translation techniques. The use of bilingual corpora in translation has proved to be highly beneficial as a methodological tool in teaching and learning translation, by providing translation examples that can help students fill the gap of background knowledge on the topic, deal with lexical inaccuracy, and refine the necessary translation techniques to produce better translations. In this context, an English-Spanish parallel corpus of science and technology texts is a useful tool for enhancing translation competence in the field of science and technology of fourth-year translation students at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas. It is expected that this tool would be the reflection of the potential benefits of implementing an interdisciplinary teaching approach and an advance in the efforts to prepare efficient translators.

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Genre-Based Approach for the Translation of Research Articles

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Abstract

This study focuses on the move analysis of research articles, the most widespread genre for scientific publication, which are also of academic interest for students enrolled in the Scientific Translation course of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language, at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas. An analysis of Discussion section of artificial intelligence research articles was carried out by identifying and describing the moves and their key linguistic features. For this purpose, a special corpus of thirty-five research articles from two specialized artificial intelligence journals was compiled. To determine the moves characterizing Discussion sections, Yang and Allison's rhetorical move model (2003) was applied. The linguistic features were determined by using AntConc, a corpus analysis software which helps analyze frequency patterns of words sequences in a specific context. As a result, six moves were found in the Discussion section: 1) introducing the discussion, 2) reporting results, 3) commenting on the results, 4) summarizing the study, 5) indicating significance/advantage and 6) recommending further research. AntConc allowed determining the co-occurrence of linguistic elements of moves, tense variations, and the specialized language characterizing the compiled corpus. The study results provided a genre based-approach to the teaching and learning of scientific translation, which can help students to improve the text comprehension stage of scientific text translation.

Keywords: genre analysis, moves, research article, translation

Introduction

In recent decades, we have witnessed a growth in the scientific community, and English has been established as the international language of science, particularly in research articles published in specialized journals for the international scientific community. The adoption of English as a *lingua franca* in science has had a considerable impact on scientific communication: the universal use of English has

allowed the exchange between specialists from all over the world and their access to a wide range of scientific literature.

The research article is considered one of the most influential and well-known channels of distributing and advancing scientific knowledge among scholars and professionals world-wide. However, writing a research article in English represents a challenge for native and non-native speakers of the language. In the case of the latter, the challenge is even greater because they must become familiar with the conventions that characterize the research article as a genre, that is, its rhetorical structure and linguistic patterns (González Madariaga, 2017; Treto, 2020).

Genre

Firstly, it is necessary to address the concept of genre. According to Bajtin (1982), one of the most prominent language theorists, the use of language is realized through individual utterances (oral or written) by the participants of several spheres of human activity. Moreover, these utterances reflect a specific thematic content, style and composition, elements that together express the communicative situation of the text (cited in Zayas, 2011). Swales (1990) emphasizes the notion of communicative purpose to the concept of genre. According to this author, a genre represents a communicative situation that is characterized by a set of communicative purposes, identifiable for the discursive community where it takes place (Swales, 1990).

Genre Analysis and Research Articles

Genre analysis has become one of the most widespread linguistic tools for describing the rhetorical structure of research articles (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993; Dudley Evans, 1994; Brett, 1994; Holmes, 1997; Nwogu, 1997; Kanoksilapatham, 2005). The purpose of this approach is to analyze the elements that characterize the research article and to contribute to improving research article writing skills.

According to Swales (2004), the notion of move is fundamental for defining a genre. For this author, a move means a discoursal segment that performs a particular communicative function in a written or spoken discourse. Nonetheless, he distinguishes move from step by defining the latter as a smaller unit than the former. Hence, step is placed on a subordinate level to move. Furthermore, moves reflect the patterns of rhetorical organization of texts and allow the identification and analysis of the different strategies used by writers to account for scientific knowledge (Espejo, 2006). These strategies of a rhetorical nature are present in the different sections of academic reports, i.e., introduction, development and conclusion. In the case of the research article, the rhetorical patterns are included in the Introduction,

Methodology (materials and methods), Results and Discussion sections. In other words, rhetorical moves constitute a tool for describing a type of genre.

Genre Analysis and Translation

Genre analysis represents a valuable tool for teaching and learning languages, and translation is one of the areas where this approach is highly relevant, since identifying the features of the genre to be translated facilitates text comprehension. However, in Cuba, there is little evidence related to the analysis of discursive genre and its implication in translation, in particular, scientific translation.

According to some theories, target language text may be correct according to the rules of the language system, but this does not essentially mean that the text as a whole appropriately accomplishes its communicative function in the target language situation and culture. For this reason, the linguistic elements and the structure of the target text will not only be determined by the source text but also by other factors, including the text type and/or genre conventions (Schäffner, 2002, as cited in Wen, 2004).

Genre analysis offers several advantages for the translation activity because it can help the translators become aware of generic features of the target text before the actual translation work. For instance, it provides the necessary elements for the textual comprehension stage in the translation process. These elements are related to the communicative situation (participants, their interests, relationship among them, communicative intention, institutional context, etc.), to the structure by which the contents are organized, i.e., intertextuality and the order of ideas; to the linguistic and pragmatic elements that determine the text, as well as the stylistic, morphosyntactic and lexical means the author uses (Zayas, 2012). In the case of the translation of scientific texts, genre analysis is a very useful tool because it helps the translator to better understand texts that are characterized by the complexity of scientific discourse (Domínguez, 2009).

Several authors (Flowerdew, 1993; Wen, 2004; Biel, 2018) have described various procedures than can followed when planning translation lessons. Some are detailed as follows:

- To familiarize the student with the notion of genre and genre analysis.
- To provide the student with samples of various scientific genres (monograph, report, summary, research article, etc.) and have them compare these genres taking into

account the communicative situation (participants, interests, purpose, objectives, institutional sphere, etc.).

- To analyze a particular scientific genre and identify the conventions characterizing such genre, as well as its rhetorical structure in terms of moves.

- To conduct a lexical-grammatical analysis of a specific genre through the use of the concordance tool of the Antconc software, or a similar one. In this way, the student will be able to identify the most frequently used verbs, as well as their tense and their functions.

- Create a corpus of a genre (e.g., research article) in different languages (Spanish-English), with a comparative purpose.

Context of the Research

The translation into Spanish of research articles originally written in English is part of the content of the Translation of Scientific Texts course. The course is taken by fourth-year students of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language, at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas (UCLV). However, these students have insufficient tools for describing the rhetorical structure of research articles, particularly the Discussion section of research articles on artificial intelligence, one of the scientific fields addressed in this translation course. Thus, the main objective of the present study is to analyze the rhetorical moves and the key linguistic elements characterizing the Discussion section of research articles on artificial intelligence, originally written in English, that are used in the Translation of Scientific Texts course of the English Language with French as a Second Foreign Language academic program, at UCLV.

Method

The Study

This study is based on a mixed-method approach because it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data. For qualitative data, participant observation allowed a better understanding of research problems. As for quantitative data, lexicometric techniques were employed for analyzing frequency and identifying the lexical similarities in the collected corpus. These techniques made possible the identification of regularities as to the rhetorical uses of English speakers when writing the Discussion section of Artificial Intelligence research articles.

The identification and description of rhetorical moves in the Discussion section of research articles on artificial intelligence consisted of four main stages: (1) compilation of the

corpus, (2) corpus tagging, (3) corpus processing and (4) move analysis of the Discussion section.

Compilation of the Corpus

The corpus compiled consisted of 20 Discussion sections of published articles from two specialized artificial intelligence journals: *Expert System with Applications* and *Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research*. Both journals focus on exchanging information related to expert and intelligent systems applied in industry, government, universities, laws, marketing, finances, accounting, human resources, and chemistry, among others. In this case, the artificial intelligence specialist is the sender of this type of articles and the receiver will depend on the discipline this science applies to.

Several elements were considered for building the corpus. First, all articles were originally written in English using the IMRD organizational structure (Swales, 1990). In respect to this, the authors of this study ensured that all sections were labeled and the Discussion section appeared as an independent one in all of the selected articles. Second, compilation criteria for specialized corpus building were also taken into account (Treto, 2020). As shown in Table 1, elements such as size, transmission mode, level of specialization, type of texts, authorship, language of the corpus, and date of publication were considered for corpus building.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Compiled Corpus for Analyzing the Moves in the Discussion Section

Size	31 424 words
Transmission mode	Written transformed into .txt format
Level of specialization	Specialized texts of specific domain of artificial intelligence
Type of texts	Published research articles
Authorship	All articles were created by specialists on artificial intelligence
Language of the corpus	Texts originally written in English
Date of publication	Texts published from 2014 to 2019

Note. These characteristics followed Vargas (2005) and Pearson (2002) corpus compilation criteria.

Corpus tagging

The identification of moves characterizing the Discussion section of research articles was based on the move model created by Yang and Allison (2003). They proposed a seven-move model, which includes a group of steps as well. Despite the fact that their model was proposed for analyzing the Discussion section of research articles on applied linguistics, this model was chosen for the study herein presented because it provides seven distinct and comprehensive moves which can be applied to other disciplines, such as artificial intelligence, in this case.

Yang and Allison's (2003) move model is structured as follows:

Move 1: Background information. The aims, theories, objective and research questions are stated.

Move 2: Reporting results. It provides data commentary, numerical values, tables and comments on the expectedness and unexpectedness of outcomes.

Move 3: Summarizing results. The information is presented as a summary of results.

Move 4: Commenting on results. Comparison of the results of the study with previous work is provided. The following steps are included:

Step 1: Interpreting results

Step 2: Comparing results with literature

Step 3: Accounting for results

Step 4: Evaluating results

Move 5: Summarizing the study. It is usually found in the final part of the discussion. The author uses signals, such as present perfect tense, and words, such as "study" and "research".

Move 6: Evaluating the study. It evaluates the significance, novelty, and generalizability of the study. Limitations, strengths and weaknesses of the study could be as well included.

Step 1: Indicating limitations

Step 2: Indicating significance/advantage

Step 3: Evaluating methodology

Move 7: Deductions from the research. Suggestions for further research or solutions to certain problems and implications for teaching are discussed.

Step 1: Making suggestions

Step 2: Recommending further research

Step 3: Drawing pedagogic implication

After selecting the rhetorical models for conducting the genre analysis of the corpus, it was necessary to code the text samples composing Discussion sections. As a result, each text was assigned a unique code (e.g., D1...D35). Subsequently, the tagging of the corpus was carried out in order to identify the rhetorical structure characterizing these sections of research articles on artificial intelligences.

As Figure 1 illustrates, textual fragments of a coded Discussion section were analyzed and tagged with different moves.

Figure 1

Tagging of Textual Fragments Presented in a Coded Discussion Section
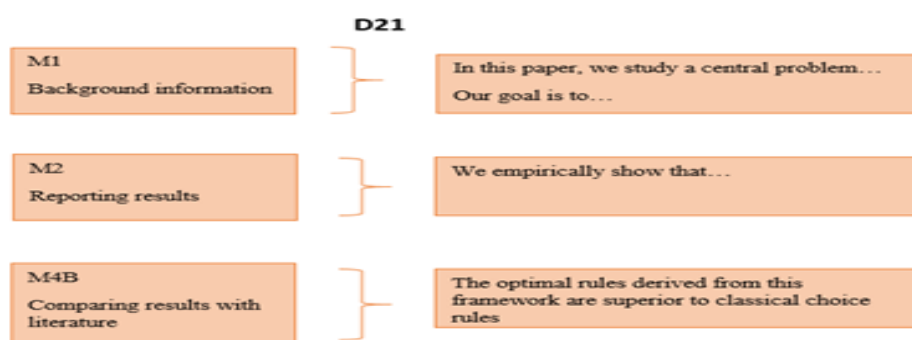

Note. The figure shows the moves presented in a fragment of a coded Discussion section where M1 stands for *Background information*, M2 for *Reporting results* and M4B refers to *Commenting on results*, Step 2: *Comparing results with literature.* As can be seen, not all the moves are present in the texts and, in some cases, they were not orderly represented.

Corpus Processing

Once the texts were coded, they were saved as a *.txt file to be processed with AntConc 3.4.3w (Windows) 2014 in order to analyze the frequency of linguistic elements. AntConc is a concordance program which was designed to be user friendly and efficient for performing tasks, such as word lists, concordance analysis, co-occurrences, and key word lists, among others. Therefore, this software can facilitate the learning of vocabulary, collocations, grammar, and writing styles (Anthony, 2004). The AntConc software tools were particularly useful for identifying the most recurrent linguistic elements of the moves identified in each coded section (Figure 2, 3 and 4).

Figure 2

Concordance Tool Applied to a Recurrent Linguistic Element in the Corpus Composed by the Discussion Sections
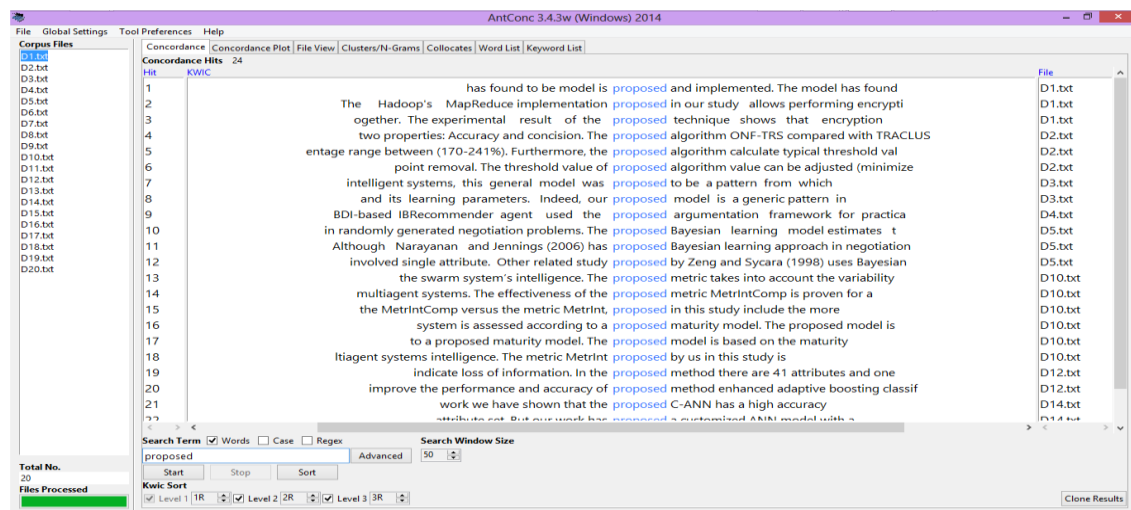
Note. The figure shows the corpus files in which the *.txt files are displayed. Concordance Hits refers to the frequency of appearance of the key word *proposed* (Hit), the key words in context (KWIC) and the file where this word is located.

Figure 3

Word List Tool Applied to the Discussion Sections for Determining the Most Frequent Words
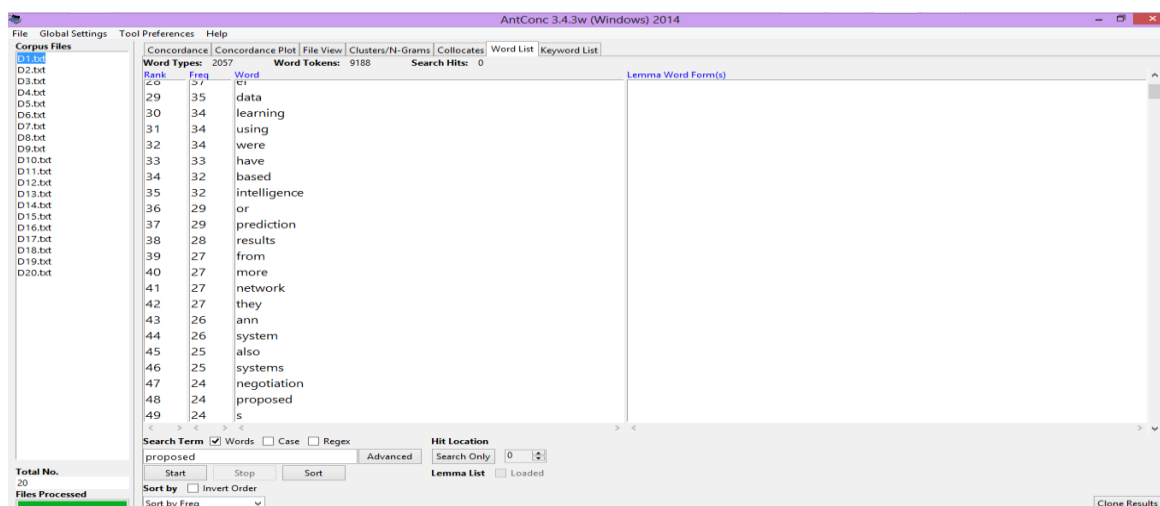
Note. This figure illustrates the frequency list of the words identified in the discussion section. It also shows the word types (2057) and word tokens (9188) of the corpus.

Figure 4

Word Clusters /NGrams Tool Applied to the Discussion Sections for Determining the Most Frequent Lexical Bundles

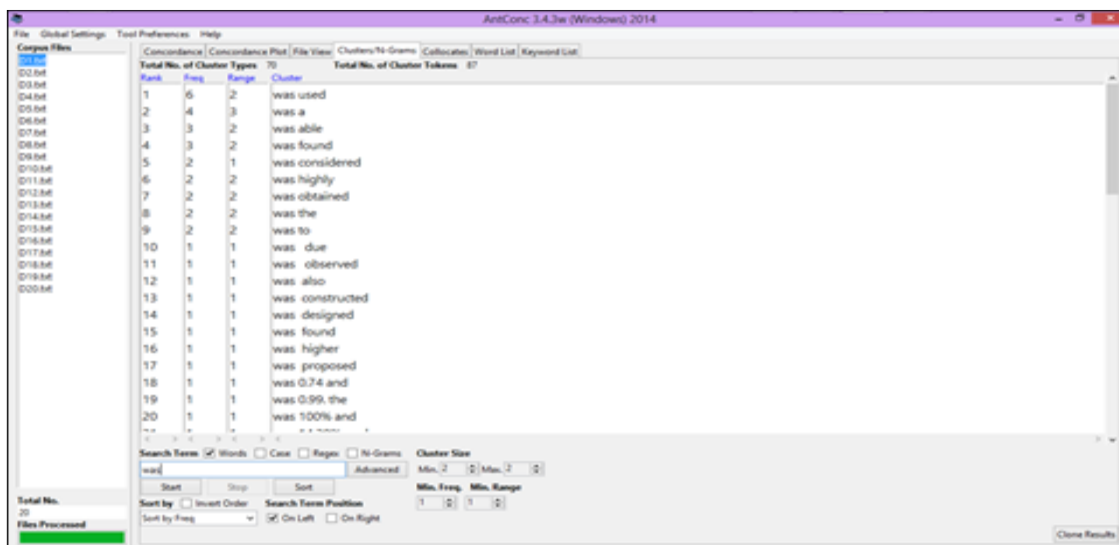Note. In this figure, some lexical bundles of the search term *was* are shown. The figure also illustrates the rank of each lexical bundle as well as its frequency and range (the number of files in which the clusters appears).

Findings

Move Analysis

After the process of tagging the Discussion sections following the rhetorical model by Yang and Allison (2003), it was concluded that the Discussion section of the analyzed research articles on artificial intelligence comprises six moves:

Move 1: Introducing the discussion.

Move 2: Reporting results.

Move 3: Commenting on the results. It includes the steps:

Step 1: Comparing results with literature and previous studies.

Step 2: Interpreting results.

Move 4: Summarizing the study.

Move 5: Indicating significance/advantage.

Move 6: Recommending further research.

The following moves were found in the compiled corpus:

Move 1: Introducing the discussion

Examples:

In this paper, we propose an approach that utilizes the slope difference distribution of the image histogram to calculate (…)

(…) evaluate the truth of the machine-generated sentences, the central objective of our work.

The paper provides a detailed treatment of the combinatorial optimization approach (…)

Recurrent linguistic elements:

In this paper, we propose…

X, the central objective of our work.

In this paper, we study a central problem in…

In this work we conduct a study of…

Building on previous research….

We presented a new approach to…

Move 2: Reporting results

Examples:

In these experiments, the maximum average classification accuracy achieved by JMIM with the Parkinson dataset was 90.77%.

An important result that emerges from our analysis is that the worst-case scenarios depicted in the Appendix are very rare (…)

Recurrent linguistic elements:

Our generalization experiments show that…

The experimental results show…

X, as reported in Tables 1-3.

We obtained X by….

An important result that emerges from our analysis is that

Move 3: Summarizing the study.

It includes the steps:

Step 1: Comparing results with literature and previous studies.

Examples:

Unlike prior work, our method deals with video labeled with whole sentences, instead of individual words.

In contrast to earlier approaches, our collision checks operate on a bounding convex decomposition of the geometry.

Recurrent linguistic elements:

The X is also higher than that reported in literature by other filter methods.

Unlike prior work, our method deals with …

In contrast to earlier approaches, our….

Our approach showed significantly better performance compared to the X proposed by…

Step 2: Interpreting results.

Examples:

The results demonstrate that the methods employing 'maximum of the minimum' criterion, such as CMIM, JMIM, and NJMIM, show less average stability than the methods which employ(…)

These results inform us about the capabilities of these languages to encode sets of two-valued interpretations (…)

The results for the uncovered set in Section 4.4 imply that this problem cannot be reduced in polynomial time (…)

Recurrent linguistic elements:

The results for X imply that …

As our experimental results clearly demonstrate…

This is a promising result, as it suggests that…

It follows from our results in X that…

Move 4: Summarizing the study

Examples:

We have presented a new model for resource allocation with multiple resources in dynamic environments that, we believe, can spark (…)

In a broader context, this paper has explored the notion of general intelligence as performance for a range of tasks…

Recurrent linguistic elements:

In this article we studied…

In this paper we presented…

In this work, we provided…

This paper has explored the notion of…

We have presented an analysis of...

Move 5: Indicating significance/advantage

Examples:

Our approach succeeds in finding relevant content without using specific elements of a social network.

The central novel contribution of this work is the sentence tracker in Equation 10, a method for overcoming the severe limitations of (…)

Recurrent linguistic elements:

Our method has an important advantage…

Our approach succeeds in…

This is a distinguishing, novel, and unique aspect of our approach.

This work makes two main contributions…

Move 6: Recommending further research

Examples:

All these features merit further investigation.

An interesting avenue of future research would be to investigate, both theoretically and empirically, the relative order of (…)

Recurrent linguistic elements:

We leave X for future work.

Further research is required to determine …

There are a number of possible extensions to this work…

…suggest a pathway for future study…

An interesting avenue of future research would be to investigate…

The AntConc software allowed the observation of tense variation in the different moves (Table 2).

Table 2

Tense Variation of the Six Moves Found in the Discussion Sections

Move	Tense	Purpose
1	Simple present	To make reference to the aims of the study, its focus, and research questions
2	Simple present	To report results
	Simple past	To refer to the data, experiments, and tables
3	Simple past	To interpret results
	Simple present	
4	Present perfect	To present information as a summary of the research
	Simple past	
5	Simple present	To indicate significance/advantage
6	Simple present	To make recommendations
	Passive voice	To talk about the focus of the future research

Note. In some cases, the tenses observed for a move respond to the same purpose as in Moves 3 and 4.

AntConc also allowed determining the words that appeared the most (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Most Frequently Used Words in the Corpus

of (1133), and (784), to (758), in (683), a (634), is (527), for (417), be (269), we (267), as (257), this (252), with (241), are (234), can (201), on (200), by (192), it (185), our (168), model (161), not (159), problem (147), such (134), more (132), which (132), action (110), approach (113), planning (103), also (102), time (98), have (91), method (90), algorithm (85), one (85), task (85), agent (84), results (84), these (83), may (80), other (73), work (71), different (70), could (69), all (68), state (68), however (65), has (64), only (64), use (63), was (63), using (62), some (60), based (59), there (58), used (58), number (57), data (56), general (56), when (56), human (54), performance (54), where (54), would (54), if (53), object (53), system (52), learning (48), their (48), between (47), same (47), search (47), any (46), both (46), case (46), possible (46), while (45), robot (43), set (43), video (43), most (41), they (40), example (39), over (39), each (38), even (37), way (37), first (36), given (36), many (36),

Note. The figure shows the specialized language used in research articles on artificial intelligence. The number in brackets represents the words frequency.

Discussion

The proposed model slightly differs from Yang and Allison's model (2003) because their model consisted of seven moves and nine steps, whereas, the one herein proposed comprises six moves and two steps only. Moreover, AntConc software was useful to determine the co-occurrence of linguistic features of moves and steps, as well as tense variations for each move.

The results of this study can help students to better identify the rhetorical structure of Discussion section of research articles in the field of artificial intelligence since students are provided with generic features, such as thematic content, structure, and style.

Conclusions

The study herein presented provided a description of the moves and the most recurrent linguistic elements used in the Discussion section of research articles on artificial intelligence. Therefore, it will facilitate the text comprehension stage of the translation of the Discussion section of this type of articles that are used in the Scientific Translation course of the English Language with French as a Second Foreign Language academic program, at UCLV. The analysis of moves and the linguistic elements is going to permit the addressing of the text comprehension, starting from a textual conception in which the internal relations established

in the text and the ideas are shown depending on the communicative aim. Furthermore, this study will contribute to better recognize the rhetorical structure of artificial intelligence research articles, which will be very useful for specialists of this field. It will also provide useful authentic material for the teaching and learning of English writing, contributing to the enrichment of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) pedagogy.

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The Linguistic Dimension in the Curricular Course on US History for Cuban University Students Majoring in English

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Abstract

English language training is a fundamental in human behavior and relationships, participation, cooperation, interaction, and spread of academic as well as scientific knowledge. Hence, a superior management of such studies at university level becomes peremptory given the social commitment in rendering a competent professional to meet up with the standards of contemporary demands worldwide. Thus, the present study aims to support the need to find a balance between teaching English language content and the content of the curricular course on history of the United States of America, targeted for the English Language Major with a Second Foreign Language, through Content and Language Integrating Learning (CLIL) and contextualized for the Cuban university. To approach the problem, this paper suggests deepening into the linguistic dimension of US History teaching. As a result, procedural suggestions are provided to cross boundaries of traditional language teaching in curricular courses at tertiary level, contribute to CLIL theory by tailoring it to the Cuban context, and incorporate the development of critical thinking skills, together with linguistic and intercultural competence. It is decisive, then, to rightfully choose the language contents to be integrated and also to accurately plan the skills to be developed.

Keywords: language teaching, history teaching, academic discourse, CLIL, intercultural competence

Introduction

Few nations worldwide need a more significantly proficient teaching and learning process of curricular courses on US history the way Cuba does, given the historic differences between both countries. As educators, it is necessary to train learners who can take responsibility for their own work, who can collaborate with other people, and who can think for themselves.

University studies educate and train students to become contributing and responsible members of society, whatever their profession, and to work with commitment for its betterment. Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel has repeatedly emphasized on the teacher's role and responsibility of never overlooking the teaching and protection of languages, as vehicle to communication, as he openly supports the idea that all teachers are language teachers of each of their academic subjects. This idea emerged from the exchange with the Spanish Language and Literature staff from Universidad de Ciencias Pedagógicas "Enrique José Varona" back in 2020 (Perera, 2020). Even when the President refers to the mother tongue (Spanish), this idea can be interpreted that it also applies to communicative competence in foreign languages as well. Communicative competence is a fundamental tool in human relations, business, academic and scientific collaboration, etc., and foreign language proficiency influence professionals' performance in the betterment of society and the advancement of sustainable human development.

In this scenario, the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas (UCLV), in Cuba, trains their students to work successfully as translators and interpreters, but also as language researchers and foreign language teachers. The future professionals are trained in a peculiar environment where Spanish is the official language. Thus, foreign language teachers are nationals who have never been abroad, who have been trained by other national teachers in the same situation, using most largely self-generated teaching materials, including bibliographical sources, and pursuing specific state-driven goals.

Within this same scenario, History of the United States of America (US History) is a curricular academic subject designed to provide the students with the necessary historic, social, and cultural background of this English-speaking country and its people. According to the latest national guidelines (MEP, 2017), it embraces a Marxist-based historiography approach and analyzes capitalism in its fast-moving transition to imperialism in the target country. The US History course is included in the fourth year of the academic program, and also contributes to the understanding of the literary cycle, which is considered as basic in the sociolinguistic and intercultural training of the prospective teachers, interpreters, translators, and researchers. This is particularly relevant in the task of accurately translating the message from one language into another, by considering linguistic and extralinguistic elements and trustworthily interpreting the surrounding reality. Consequently, this academic subject plays a paramount role in the future specialists' ideological and cultural preparation, which will pave

the way towards a more efficient, creative, and educated professional performance. However, according to Torres (2003), the traditional didactic procedure in US History course focuses more on content than on the way to talk about that particular content. Therefore, in spite of being primarily and ultimately language students, there is no coherent integration of communicative skills development to the specific academic content learning process. This is the problem that is meant to be addressed with this literature review paper.

This literature review deepens into the linguistic dimension of US History teaching, with the aim of enhancing the training of English language majors at a Cuban university Cuba, through Content and Language Integrating Learning (CLIL). The adoption of this teaching approach would represent a major breakthrough within the academic curriculum of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language.

Method

The idea of this qualitative study with descriptive features has been in progress since 2015, at UCLV. Throughout the years, a revision of relevant sources and the recollection of practical experience from over 15 years of teaching history courses in the English Language Major has set the foundations for this paper, which will eventually lead to a teaching and learning proposal intended to embrace CLIL practice and experiences and expand the language learning horizons of English language majors in Cuba (Maza, 2015). This literature review comprises the analysis and synthesis of relevant bibliographical resources on the matter, as well as reference materials, official documents and academic guidelines.

From the dialectical materialism approach, the following methods were used: document analysis, systematization, and historical-logical analysis. Documents analysis made it possible to identify and systematize theoretical and reference materials about history teaching, linguistic competence, CLIL, and intercultural communication. It also included the revision of present and past curricula nationwide for English language studies in Cuban higher education institutions, and national methodological guidelines directing the teaching-learning process of the courses related to the history of English-speaking countries and their peoples, as primary elements to the theoretical foundations of the research. Opinions, tendencies, and viewpoints about the topic were systematized. Whereas, historical-logical analysis allowed for the evaluation of the target research topic evolution, by considering different theoretical positions from both national and foreign researchers and scholars.

Findings and Discussion

From the analysis of relevant sources, the following points can be made:

- In Cuba, the English Language Major with a Second Foreign Language curriculum includes not only language learning courses, but also content-related subjects, such as literature and history of English-speaking countries and peoples. These courses are totally delivered in the foreign language and taught by Cuban foreign language teachers.

- In Cuba, foreign language teachers are not trained in the didactics of content-related subjects, such as history, literature, grammar, etc. They engage in the teaching process without any formal or proper training in this matter. They use their own teachers as reference, and they adopt their teaching styles and procedures, as they pass on the content to their own classes.

- There are no formal didactic guidelines intended for teaching literature and history courses to foreign language majors; instead, national guidelines focus on language skills development, with content as the means to an end.

To overcome the previously described situation, prior studies on the matter of history teaching procedures to foreign language students in Cuba have contributed proposals to develop creativity, critical thinking, intercultural, and communicative skills. In relation to relevant research related to the teaching of literature and history courses in English language studies in Cuba, some studies have been conducted; most of them are concerned with pedagogical issues and implications, and just one, in the area of linguistics. For example, González (2012) addressed the stimulation of creativity in the teaching-learning process of the history of the culture of the English-speaking peoples. Whereas Torres Beltrán (2003) studied the development of intercultural communicative competence by the English with a Second Foreign Language students through the course Historical-Cultural Overview of the United States. This shows that there are limited studies, from a language perspective, about the teaching and learning of the literature and history of the English-speaking people as part of the English language studies curriculum in Cuba.

According to the current national academic curriculum for the English Language Major with a Second Foreign Language in Cuba, the US History course has been included in the curriculum to provide a historical, social, and cultural characterization of this nation and its people. This subject offers fundamental historical knowledge to understand the evolution of

this country through the different stages of its history, the cultural and social bases of its development as a nation, as well as the imprint of these phenomena on the idiosyncrasies of their people.

The language learning goals of the literature and history courses in the curriculum pursue the mastery in the foreign language of concepts and categories related to history and society of the target culture. They are explicitly intended for students to enrich their linguistic and socio-cultural competence about the United States of America from the study of its history, and to develop their study skills in English through reading materials, note taking in lectures, and their active participation in discussion sessions. According to Cummins (1981), the cognitive demand changes with experience and depends on prior knowledge. Taking this idea into account, and based on the students' previous learning experience and outcomes in previous courses, it is suggested that they should be able to use academic discourse in US history lessons, specifically, argumentation as a discursive strategy.

The ultimate professional goal of the English language academic program in Cuba is using the English language, as well as the second foreign language, and the native language, Spanish, as means of linguistic and interlinguistic communication. This would help the graduates meet the demands of the labor market, continuous training and academic mobility, by

- mediating in communication between Spanish speakers and non-Spanish speakers, from English or the second foreign language to Spanish and vice versa;
- teaching English or the second foreign language at tertiary level, as well as Spanish to non-Spanish speakers; and
- investigating in the spheres of linguistic sciences and the didactics of foreign languages.

In relation to the role and training of the US history teaching, there are also some concerns. There is a shared criterion, arising from the professional practice of this researcher and from the exchange with other educational practitioners in undergraduate literature and history courses, that history teachers may not necessarily be the most knowledgeable, but they certainly need to be the best storytellers and primarily the one who teach it best. Consequently, US history teachers need to have not only content-related to knowledge, but also knowledge and skills in one of the oldest arts, the art of speaking well to be able to persuade and inspire. This art, known as rhetoric, can be innate, but can also be educated,

through the development of knowledge and language skills, and proper training. In this sense, the rhetoric of any history lesson must be synchronized to the moment in which it is taught, and suit that surrounding reality. Additionally, in general, students belong to different generations, with different discourse styles, as well as different referents, perspectives, attitudes and academic profiles.

Studying US History in a non-native language is challenging for both teachers and learners. It involves developing knowledge and understanding of events, people, structures and changes in the past, how the past influences the present, chronology, interpreting and evaluating sources, explaining cause and consequence, comparing and contrasting interpretations of the past, making links across historical periods, reaching conclusions. In addition, learners need to be able to communicate their understanding of the past.

For the reasons listed above, this paper claims the relevance of revisiting the rhetoric of History as a social science in this research, and to the specific value of what in ancient times, among the Greeks was one of their strategies, *logos* or what we call today argumentation as a discursive strategy, considered by rhetoric as the essential element of discourse and its academic study in the teaching of the History of the United States of America in the Foreign Language Studies in Cuba, precisely because of its social impact in culture, in the professional performance, in the learning of the language based on of historical documents devised and written in that language.

Argumentation as a discursive strategy has been theorized in numerous investigations. This is the case, for example, of Ortega (2001), who claims that argumentation is an effective discursive strategy thanks to which the teacher can present the different points of view from what has been considered a certain fact, to take party for someone, and try to convince those who listen, or to help better understand such opinions. This strategy consists fundamentally of arguments and conclusion, and its structures are varied, as well as the linguistic resources on which they are based. Likewise, Cross (2003) affirms that argumentation is a discursive activity oriented towards the purpose of influencing beliefs, the values, attitudes, knowledge of the recipients, in order to modify them, if necessary, and put them in agreement with those of the enunciator.

In relation to argumentation in the educational context, Villada Salazar and Ruiz Ortega (2018) have acknowledged that argumentation constitutes a fundamental component in the teaching and learning processes; it is considered an essential competence in the social,

cultural, and linguistic environment, which favors the development of new ways of thinking and supports the construction of scientific knowledge. On the other hand, Fernando Henríquez and Fuentes Cortés (2018) made it clear that argument in history class is the particular interpretation of the past based on evidence. In this case, the argumentative genres involve a higher cognitive stage since they can use all other genres, such as recount, explanatory, and argumentative.

These theories about argumentation basically contribute to strengthen the possibilities of the history teacher in higher education, and to expand the horizons of the potential of the history lesson for English language majors. In the case of this investigation, bringing such theory into practice and conjunction to the targeted teaching and learning process represents the main focus of attention and its final destination.

According to Oliveras Vilaseca and Llobera Cànaves (2000), learning a foreign language is not just learning its grammar, its pronunciation, or its vocabulary. For these authors, learning a foreign language is a continuous lesson in interculturality. It is learning the way of seeing the world, of approaching it, of behaving towards others that your culture entails.

Accordingly, in the Cuban context, the foreign language teacher must first resolve the sociolinguistic contradiction of teaching a foreign language, as a reflection of a foreign culture, and transferring and interpreting that foreign culture. This situation arises due to the fact that most foreign language teachers in Cuba are Spanish speakers who are non-native speakers of English, who have never experienced using the foreign language in a natural English-speaking context. Another point is that they have been trained by other Cuban teachers in similar circumstances, using fundamentally materials, means, and bibliography produced by themselves by other Cuban teachers from previous generations, to achieve the objectives established by the national education system, for which follows a teaching basically inherited from generations of previous teachers.

The professional performance activity of teaching the US History course, then, is the focus of attention of this study, as well as the need to study the use of argumentation as a discursive strategy in the oral academic discourse of the class of this subject, to help enhance its linguistic dimension and better articulate it with the graduate profile of the English Language professional. The acquisition of disciplinary academic language by history teachers is decisive for accessing to the meanings of the texts and their subsequent use in the elaboration

of arguments and opinions. This is based on the theory of systemic functional linguistics (LFS) and the methodology of content and language integrated learning (CLIL).

As any language student knows, it is part of the curriculum to study not only the grammar and vocabulary of the language, but also the culture and history of the people who speak that language. Understanding the history of these places would help them understand how their language works, since language is a social phenomenon.

Every discourse contains a rhetorical dimension that is directed, by way of argumentation, towards conviction or persuasion of the receiver. This persuasive function can be said to be the same from ancient oratory to the classroom of today. The academic discourse of the curricular course on US History for Cuban university students majoring in English in English studies is, in this sense, heir to ancient oratory with the nuances required by adaptation to the demands pedagogical and the road to the plain fulfillment of its curricular goals.

The traditional view is that language is only important in language lessons. Nevertheless, no language is ever taught in isolation from content. Today language is no longer seen as a goal in itself, but also as a tool through which students interact with friends and peers in schools, and through which they learn content matters in subjects like science, geography, history and mathematics.

To achieve advanced literacy and disciplinary knowledge, students need to be able to understand how language construes meanings in content-area texts and how the important meanings and concepts of school subjects are realized in language. In other words, disciplinary knowledge is not taught in isolation from language. A focus on language provides students with tools for reflecting on how historians construe meanings, helping them develop critical language awareness. Within the vast realm of language learning, developing a lexical competence in English will endow the future translators, interpreters, language researchers, and teachers with the necessary tools to perform their duties in excellence.

The development of linguistic competence in English is a primary tool in the training of translators, interpreters and language specialists in general. Such competence might be approached through the history of language, and the thorough study of the specific discourse features of History as a social science and academic subject contributing to enhance their training. Within this dimension, the development of a lexical competence highlights the professional competence of language specialists.

CLIL is not just about teaching content, but also about introducing a target language, developing oral communication skills, getting a deeper awareness of both mother tongue and target language, developing multilingual interests and attitudes, and improving overall target language competence. That is precisely what makes it ideal as the heart of this proposal.

The language that students learn in a CLIL lesson is not the typical language learnt in a traditional language lesson, but language relevant to their future. It is a tool for communicating within the framework of the content. Since the primary aim is to communicate and not learn merely the grammar and syntax of a language, students realize that they can use the language without an in-depth knowledge of it first. CLIL helps students simultaneously use the targeted language and gain knowledge of content.

To cross the boundaries of traditional language teaching of content courses at tertiary level, enrich the CLIL theory by tailoring it to the Cuban context, and embed the dynamics of its linguistic dimension so that it allows for the development of critical thinking skills, linguistic and intercultural competence, it is decisive then to rightfully choose the language contents to be integrated and also to accurately plan the skills to develop, apart from a careful attention to the suggested approach.

Conclusions

In relation to the teaching of history courses, particularly the US History course within the general context of English language studies in Cuba, some limitations were identified:

- The linguistic dimension of learning content is not effectively and consistently addressed in the US History course.
- The training of the academic staff responsible for teaching the courses is not homogeneous.
- The course has a high personal and cultural component, which is often not taken into consideration.

Based on the previous findings, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn. The US History course for students majoring in English language studies in Cuba does not effectively and consistently address language learning through content; thus, it is necessary to enhance the linguistic dimension of learning the course content, and take advantage of the language learning opportunities that such course can offer to the students. With more emphasis on the linguistic dimension of content learning, better articulation between the course and the graduate profile can be achieved. With the aim of facilitating the learning process, the course

could better encourage and develop cognitive skills, from lower-order skills to higher-order skills, and it could progress from the development of basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) to cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). To this end, it is important to provide formal homogenous training to teachers responsible for delivering the US History course, including methodological and linguistic preparation to meet the demands of using oral academic discourse, especially using argumentative discourse.

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Developing Linguistic Skills in English language Teaching Students through English Literature and its Cultural Understanding

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Abstract

Literature, in addition to being considered an art, is also an element to be considered in the training of English language teachers. In Costa Rica, the teaching of literature has been the work of Spanish teachers since many literary works studied in schools are written by Spanish speaking authors, or by non-Spanish speakers whose work has been translated into Spanish. For English language teachers, it is important to know about literature written in English, and also about the origins of the English language and its defining features, which will provide them, not only with general knowledge, but also ensure better cultural understanding of the English language, and the countries where it is spoken, as well as their culture. That is why, the English Language Teaching (ELT) program at Universidad Americana (UAM) includes literature-related courses, such as Poetry, Narrative, and Drama, where the students can become familiar with and learn about important details related to the evolution of English language literature, culture, history, and linguistics. However, most students, by the time they graduate, fail to remember the contents learned in these courses, feel badly-prepared to teach literature, or consider that the courses are just a means to graduate without any real effect on their professional development. So, the aim of this paper is to approach these issues in order to improve the training of undergraduate students in the ELT academic program at UAM.

Keywords: teaching literature, linguistic skills, cultural understanding

Introduction

According to Surkamp and Viebrock (2018), the teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) should develop general characteristics in three dimensions, which are language proficiency, content knowledge, and teaching skills; however, in different perspectives of the evolutionary approach to teaching and learning, the experience of learning other subjects, for

example, literature and linguistics, through a non-native language could be developed. This aspect may produce a concern in the training of the future EFL teachers if it is analyzed in the acquired competences compared to Spanish language teachers, that is, their knowledge of literature in general.

Through English literature, the student might get to know not only the origin of the language and its evolution in history, but also the cultural context. Beach et al. (2011) describes some methods, approaches, and theories for teaching English literature, but he also mentions its importance, description and recommendations. For this reason, the question is, does the study of English literature and its cultural understanding help the development of language skills of ELT students? The answer needs a complete and well-developed research for the benefit of students enrolled in the ELT academic program at Universidad Americana, in Costa Rica.

Method

The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. The participants are students enrolled in the Introduction to Literature course during the first term of 2022, at UAM, and EFL teachers from Dirección Regional San José Norte, from the Ministry of Education (MEP). An online questionnaire has been used to collect the data.[1]

Preliminary Findings

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[1] This paper describes a study in progress. That is why only preliminary findings are presented. It has been included here due to its relevance for the improvement of the ELT academic curriculum at UAM.

It is important to note that this research is still in progress; so, complete results should be available at the end of October. At the moment, the study is in the stage of data collection through an online questionnaire. So far, data related to knowledge about English literature, techniques for teaching literature, and the linguistic component of literature teaching have been collected.

Preliminary findings show the participants' view of what teaching literature is. The answers provided by the participants are interesting and relevant for this study, and future proposals aimed at teaching literature. Figure 1 shows that there are varied views about what teaching literature means among the participants.

Figure 1

Results of the Question Related to Teaching Literature
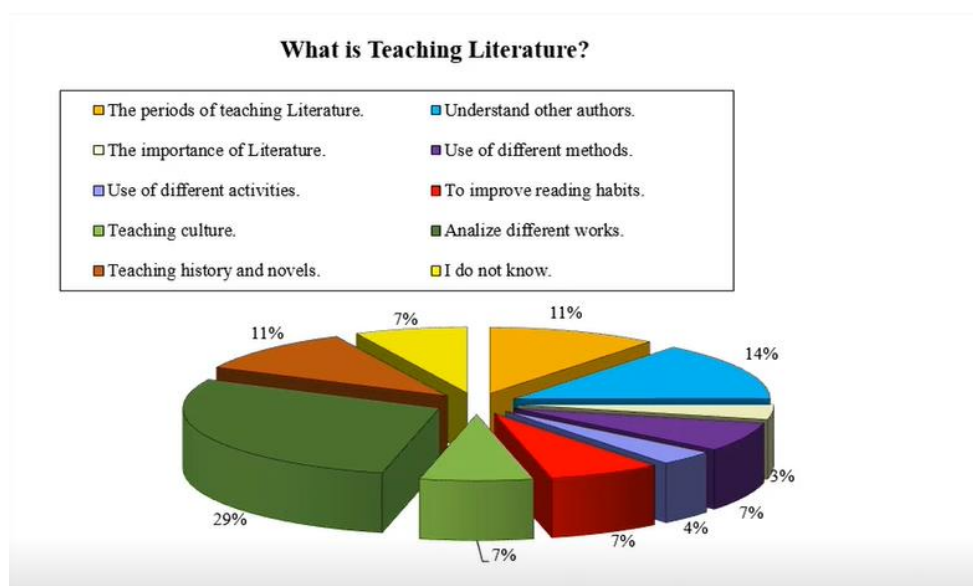
Significance

The current research project could have a significant impact on aspects related to the knowledge and teaching of literature, as well as its role in the process of language learning and teaching, with the inclusion of linguistics-related content. This would help improve the training of ELT students at UAM.

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PART II: TECHNOLOGY-BASED INNOVATION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Analysis of the Implementation of Schoology in the Technical English Course of Don Bosco Technical High School

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Abstract

This experimental research aimed to analyze the implementation of Schoology in the Technical English course from the perspective of the students, their parents and the school coordinators to corroborate its effectiveness in the language learning process. The research method used was deductive. Based on the data interpretation and the analysis of the results, the researcher concluded that students created their accounts as requested and checked their profile frequently. Some students know other LMS and they even used them with other teachers; however, most of them considered Schoology better. Students described Schoology as a useful platform, a tool for communication and a guide. It lets them get organized with the class activities and they can have access to the documents as many times as necessary. The majority of the students knew the most important features, that is, downloading resources, accessing assessment records, practicing at home what was done in class, and being able to communicate with their teacher. For the institution, Schoology represents paper saving because many students work directly with the digital version of the documents. Many parents were not informed that their children used Schoology in the Technical English classes; therefore, parents did not know about the different options their children had with the implementation of Schoology. The coordinators were aware of the implementation of Schoology. They agreed about the benefits of using this tool for the students.

Keywords: LMS, Schoology, technical English

Introduction

Language acquisition is the main goal of most English courses. The problem is that learners acquire language in different ways. Therefore, teachers must find a balance between theories and experience to develop the most appropriate approach for their students to acquire knowledge and develop skills in the best possible way. Not only the role of the teacher

is fundamental in this process, but the tools used in the mediation process also represent a significant contribution. Technology is an essential part of modern teaching; however, teachers who have access to technological tools not always take advantage of them. In the same way, a significant number of learners have access to these options, but do not use them appropriately.

Learning management systems (LMS) have changed learning processes in a drastic way. According to Lonn and Teasley (2009), LMS "are web-based systems that allow instructors and/or students to share materials, submit and return assignments, and communicate online" (p. 687). These digital platforms offer significant benefits to all the participants of the process. As a result, traditional learning methods can be combined with blended and digital learning, allowing the reduction of paper waste. Today, there are many different options of LMS, and most of them are user-friendly and have web-based environments. There are many different LMS, some of them are free, and some others charge the users a fee. Some of these platforms are also open source, which allow the administrators to adapt them to their necessities.

Educational institutions are implementing LMSs to improve their performance in different courses; for that reason, it is easy to demonstrate that a great amount of research about this topic has been developed. Swan (2001) focused on how instructors and students value various features and functions of technology when used for distance learning. In Costa Rica, a very popular LMS is Moodle, and Gutiérrez (2010), Angulo (2011), and Zúñiga (2011) carried out studies related to the use of this LMS at Universidad Americana.

Schoology is an LMS that offers a great variety of options for teachers, students, parents, and school administrators. Schlager (2016) recommends using Schoology because it allows teachers "to share resources and create educational experiences in a manner that has never been seen before. Discussions, formative assessment, video assignments, and electronic worksheets are just a few of the resources now at a teacher's disposal". (p.40). Taking into account these benefits and many of the features and partnerships of this platform, Schoology was considered the best option to implement in the Technical English course at Don Bosco Technical High School.

In this experimental research, the implementation of Schoology in the Technical English course of 2018 was analyzed to corroborate its effectiveness in the language learning process from the perspective of the students, their parents and the school coordinators. The deductive research method was used to explain relationships between concepts and variables, measure concepts quantitatively and generalize findings.

Method

Participants

The sample for this research consisted of 306 students enrolled in the Technical English course at Don Bosco Technical High School in the year 2018. Since it is located in Alajuelita, most of them come from the neighborhoods of the South of San José, Costa Rica. The Technical Area coordinator and the English Department Coordinator, and a total of 195 parents of the students also participated in this research.

Data Collection

The quantitative approach was used to collect and analyze data obtained from different sources in a structured way. The sources of information consulted for this research included primary sources such as students, their parents, and the high school coordinators, who provided first hand evidence with their opinion based on their experience. Additionally, secondary sources were used, including books and other relevant literature, such as thesis and reports. In the classification of the results, there were three variables that considered the opinion of both the coordinators and the students about the implementation of Schoology, and the perception of the parents about its benefits. In the present research, students completed an anonymous questionnaire of 17 questions, parents completed a similar one of 15 questions, and both coordinators were individually interviewed. The sample included 97% of the total number of students, the two school coordinators involved, and 68% of the total number of parents.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using frequency distribution, considering both number of occurrences and percentages. The exploratory type of research was selected due to the fact that it allows further research, it's flexible and adaptable to change, and leaves the basis for future researches.

Results and Discussion

In the students' questionnaire, there were eleven closed-answer questions, two semi-open and four open questions. The first two questions summarized demographic information about the sample of students who participated in the questionnaire, which was divided in eighteen different groups, from three different levels (tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades) and five different specialties (Electromechanics, Software Development, Networking, Architectural Drawing, and Precision Mechanics.)

Students related Schoology with words such as "guide", "information", "technical English", "communication", "TOEIC®", and others. In general terms, students described Schoology as a useful platform and highlighted some of its advantages. They believed that Schoology had simplified and facilitated their learning process. With the implementation of this platform, students reported to be able to download resources and get fast assistance, as well as, to save some paper and money. For that reason, some students related Schoology with the institutional program CEDES Verde, which promotes the reduction and recycling of paper and other materials. When students were asked about what they liked the most about Schoology, the majority agreed that the information they found there allowed them to be organized and updated with the assignments of the Technical English course. They also pointed to the easy access to different educational resources. When students were asked about how much they took advantage of Schoology, 77% of the total population considered that they make good use of it, as shown in the Figure 1.

Figure 1

Students' Responses about Taking Advantage of Schoology
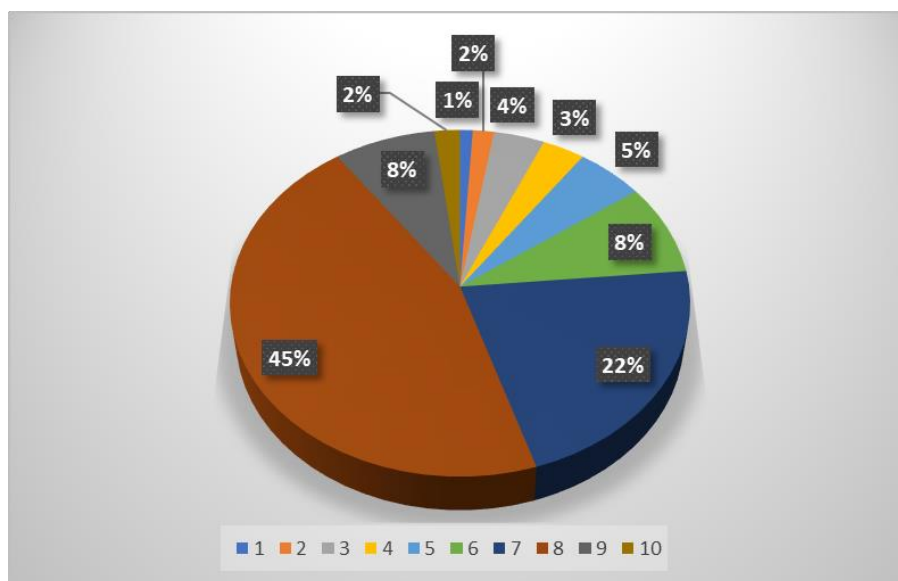
They believed that they effectively had taken advantage of the resources shared and the benefits of having a virtual class for the Technical English course. These students evaluated their performance with a score of seven or more. In contrast, only 7% of the students answered the question in a range of three or less. Taking into account the student's questionnaires, students definitely wanted to continue working with Schoology because 84% of the sample selected a range of seven or more in the scale. While only 5% of them chose

three or less. The answers to this question reinforced the opinion of the students regarding Schoology. They described that it was a useful tool which helped them to get better results in the Technical English course.

All the students from tenth and eleventh grade were asked to take the parents' questionnaire to their homes. From 285 parents, the total number who completed the questionnaire was 195. When analyzing the parents' answers, it was fundamental to take into account that many of them were not really involved in the educational process of their children because of different factors, including their age and social situation. The population of students involved in this research ranged from 15 to 18 years old. For that reason, many parents let their children be more independent in their studies.

Regarding their social situation, in many cases both parents worked, or they were single parents. There were students who did not live with any of their parents. Only 38%, representing 75 parents declared to know about the use of Schoology. It was essential to take this factor into account in the analysis of the results of the questionnaire because if they were not aware of the use of this LMS, it was highly probable that they could not answer the rest of the questions in the questionnaire. Many students recognized that their parents asked them about Schoology in order to complete the questionnaire.

Parents were required to determine how much their children took advantage of the resources and benefits provided by Schoology. The majority of the answers ranged from seven to ten, but a significant group of parents evaluated it with five and six. Then, parents were consulted if they would like their children to continue working with Schoology in the Technical English course. The answers of the majority ranged from eight to ten, which means that, in general, they liked the work developed in the platform. Taking into account the fact that parents barely knew it and they still wanted their children to keep working with it, arises the doubt of which results could be achieved with the commitment of the parents in the learning process and appropriate use of Schoology.

The English Department coordinator was an English teacher with more than fifteen years of experience at CEDES Don Bosco. He also had had experience at university level. He had worked with other platforms, such as Moodle. Then, he was familiarized with the structure of the courses, the possible uses of a virtual course, the resources that could be uploaded, and the benefits and limitations of it. At CEDES Don Bosco, there is also a language academy which is open to the public, and he was in charge of it as well. In this academy, teachers and students used a similar platform called Edmodo. He assured that through the use

of Schoology students had access to the different resources needed for the Technical English course, and that they could consult them at any moment and in any place. In this way, they did not need to look for the teacher as the first or only option to clear up doubts about the resources, instructions, assignments, or different evaluations. The coordinator said that these days, teenagers used a lot of technological tools; therefore, they felt better working in this type of environment. Implementing technology definitely called their attention, but teachers needed to keep updating and implementing innovative methodologies to be able to understand what students liked and preferred to do.

The Technical Area coordinator was a former student of Don Bosco Technical High School. He had more than twenty years of experience at CEDES Don Bosco, and before becoming the Technical Area coordinator, he was first the coordinator of the Computer Science specialty. Therefore, he had knowledge about this topic; in fact, he implemented the use of Moodle platform in the Computer Science Department. Among the advantages mentioned by him, he stated that Schoology facilitated communication, access to information, and made everything easier. He assured that this was a resource that students could reach at any moment, as long as they had Internet access. So, students could have access, work with the resources, handle, and study them as much as they needed. Additionally, he believed that it enriched the lessons because students could be exposed to a whole world of resources, including native speakers. But at the same time, it could be frustrating if they did not have the right tools and guidance.

Conclusions

Students created their Schoology accounts as requested by the teacher, most of them checked their profile every other week or monthly. They described Schoology with positive words; it represented for them a useful platform, a tool for communication, and a guide to know what to do and how to do it. Schoology let them get organized with the class activities, and they could have access to the documents as many times as necessary. Students assured that they took good advantage of Schoology, and that they would like to continue working with this platform in the Technical English course. Most of them knew the most important functionalities that Schoology offered for improving their learning experiences, that is, downloading resources, having access to assessment information of the trimester, practicing at home what was done in class, doing additional practices, and being able to communicate with their teacher.

Many parents were not informed that their children used Schoology in the Technical English courses; therefore, these parents did not know about this alternative option their children had with the implementation of Schoology. Even though parents were not totally aware of the implementation of Schoology in the Technical English course, thanks to the questionnaire, many parents became acquainted about it. They asked their children about Schoology and, in many cases, the questionnaires ended up as an informative tool for the parents. Despite the fact that parents were not aware of the use of Schoology, they believed their children took good advantage of this tool, and they would like them to continue working with this LMS.

The coordinators were aware of the implementation of Schoology as expected from their responsibilities; they both agreed about the benefits of using this tool for the students. Both coordinators accepted that the use of Schoology represented some extra work for the teacher, and that the Internet connection was the major limitation at an institutional level. For the institution, Schoology represented paper saving because many students worked directly with the digital version of the documents. This was a contribution to the *CEDES Verde* program, saving not only environmental resources, but also financial resources for both the students and the institution.

To take full advantage of the implementation of an LMS, it was recommended, as an institutional guideline, that all the teachers should use the same LMS. Consequently, both students and parents could feel more familiar with the platform. A tutorial or training session should be provided in first term for students and for the parents who required it. In this training or tutorial, general aspects related to the use of Schoology should be included, as well as the application for mobile phones and the organization of the information in the course. The teacher could set reminders or notifications for the different assignments. Schoology could also be promoted as a means of communication among the teachers of the English Department to communicate and share resources and feedback about different activities. In the case of the Technical English courses, the coordinators of each specialty and the teachers in charge of the level should have access in order to accompany their students in the learning process.

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Histomedia: A Multimedia Proposal for Improving the Bibliography of History of English-Speaking Countries I

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Abstract

Recent studies have proven that the effective acquisition of a language entails not only the linguistic aspect, but the understanding of history as a socio-cultural component. This is particularly vital for English language specialists, who rely on their view of the English-speaking world to establish imminent intercultural communication. However, in English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language academic program, at the Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, some shortage concerning availability of basic and complementary bibliography of the History of English-Speaking Countries I course has been evidenced. This research, therefore, reports on the design of HistoMedia multimedia as an ICT tool to improve the existing bibliography of the abovementioned subject, in an attempt to support its teaching and learning process. The study used a qualitative methodology, by means of which an analysis of needs based on students and professors' observations made possible to confirm some limitations regarding quantity, quality, and variety of bibliographical resources. It was found that these deficiencies resulted in poor motivation towards the contents of the subject. In the light of these findings, the multimedia proposal was evaluated by experts on the teaching and learning of the history of the United Kingdom, taking into consideration its didactic and technological design. These experts agreed that HistoMedia would be a practical and enriching alternative for the improvement of the teaching and learning process of the subject.

Keywords: bibliography, multimedia, history of English-speaking countries, information and communication technologies

Introduction

English has become increasingly dominant as a world language for communication in higher education. The simultaneous impact of globalization, the spread of English, and technological development have transformed the learning and teaching methods of English as a *lingua franca* in an unprecedented way (Warschauer, 2004). Consequently, being able to speak English has become crucial in the current professional world. That is why students, whose mother tongue is not English, often have to develop a high level of competence in this language to pursue their studies. This requirement is especially imperative for students majoring in English in Cuba, who will have to perform as translators and interpreters in different contexts: tourism, business, commerce, international affairs, academic programs, and scientific communication, among others.

Nevertheless, a good command of English also entails the understanding of history as a parameter of the culture of English-speaking countries, in order to acquire a more complete overview of the English-speaking world. In line with this idea, Kramsch (2000) said, "there is only one way of viewing culture: one that examines cultures from a historical aspect". (p. 3)

Moreover, the increasing development of information and communication technologies (ICT) has led to the dominance of English as a *lingua franca* in many contexts. Terms such as e-learning, mobile learning, blended learning are now emerging in educational environments. This last modality of learning is conceived as "learning models that combine traditional classroom practice through ICTs in and out of classroom contexts with e-learning solutions" (Ibáñez, 2012). This means that students face both, different styles of instruction. "Traditional face-to-face instruction works together with ICTs tools in order to foster the acquisition of knowledge through different ways" (Ibáñez, 2012)

Various are the advantages of including multimedia materials in the pedagogical scenarios. These advantages go from making the whole process more interesting for students to making it easier for teachers to keep their attention and improve their ability to retain information. ICTs can improve the quality of education and bring better outcomes by making information accessible to students, helping to gain knowledge and skills easily and making trainings more available for teachers (Milea, 2013).

Therefore, higher education institutions should lead in drawing on the advantages and potential of the ICTs, ensuring quality and maintaining high standards for education practices and outcomes in a spirit of openness, equity and international co-operation. In Cuba, universities actively interact with ITCs at a social and institutional level, which is expressed in a

new vision regarding its use, availability, and access in order to fulfill their mission. The Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas is also engaged in these goals. Academic faculty and students use Moodle platform to facilitate access to various sources of information for different courses.

However, in the context of the teaching and learning process of the History of English-Speaking Countries I subject, devoted to the study of British history, taught in the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language academic program, some difficulties related to the bibliography have been evidenced. Thus, teachers and learners demand more bibliographical resources and interactive environments to meet students' needs and eventually enable life-long learning.

In the light of this problem, the present research focuses on a study to propose a multimedia product (HistoMedia) to support the teaching and learning process of the History of English- Speaking Countries I subject in the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language degree program. This multimedia product includes more and varied bibliographical materials, as well as a set of self-assessment tasks, to support the teaching and learning process of the subject.

Method

Research Methodological Approach and Stages of The Research

Considering the real situation related to the bibliography of the subject, and the participants of the research, the use of a qualitative methodology was deemed to be the most apt in the accomplishment of the research purposes. Moreover, descriptive research was carried out in to ensure the bibliography of the subject History of English-Speaking Countries I could be improved.

This section provides the essential components in the description of the research process and the methods used for collecting and processing data to attain the outcomes. The researcher focused on the needs analysis concerning the bibliography of the History of English-Speaking Countries I subject, as well as the availability of ICTs resources in the research context for both professors and fourth-year students of the English Language Major with French as Second Foreign Language academic program. This way, the specific objective of the study was attained. During this stage, the research instruments for collecting information were designed and applied. Then, the analysis of the data obtained was developed through content analysis, along with some other methods from the statistical level. From this, the results were stated demonstrating the need for the proposal of the multimedia product.

Description of the Sample and Research Methods

The research was carried in the context of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language academic program, at the Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas. This academic program is intended for students to deal with real communicative situations by means of interpreting and translation of texts, as well as the teaching and learning process of English and French languages. The program duration is six years, and provides an extensive professional training for students as translators, interpreters and English as foreign language instructors.

The History of English-Speaking Countries I subject was the setting chosen for this study, and the selection of participants was carefully considered through an intentional and reasoned sampling criterion. The sample was composed of 17 students of fourth year, since they were enrolled in the course. Moreover, 5 professors also participated, which included the authorities' department, the leading professor of the subject, and others who had taught the subject, or had had interdisciplinary relationships with History of English-Speaking Countries I. Hence, the total number of participants was 22.

Survey to the Students

A survey was administered to 17 students in order to determine the situation regarding the bibliography of the subject History of English-Speaking Countries I. The questionnaire used in the survey demanded Yes or No, and Sufficient or Insufficient responses, as well as multiple choice questions, delimited answers decided in advance in order to facilitate the frequency analysis of the given information. Open-ended questions were also included with the purpose of getting a deeper comprehension of the respondents' opinions and suggestions. In order to obtain precise results in relation to the research objectives, simple percentage analysis, as a relative frequency calculation, was deemed the most appropriate method for analyzing the obtained data.

The first question of the subject was intended to verify students' knowledge about the bibliography of the History of English-Speaking Countries I subject, more specifically whether there was basic or complementary bibliography in the folder or not. The second question was aimed at the characterization of the bibliography of the aforementioned subject. The respondents were given two choices: the bibliography of the subject being sufficient (it covered the basic needs of the subject) and the bibliography being insufficient (it did not cover the basic needs of the subject.) The third question was aimed at determining whether the bibliographic limitations of the subject affected the students' motivation towards it. This question led to question 4, including a multiple-choice question and an open-ended question,

in order to make respondents suggest some possible solutions to the limitations of the bibliography. This method proved to be useful for identifying the deficiencies and best solutions to the problem.

Interview to Professors

An interview was conducted taking into consideration the views of the department authorities, of the former professor of the History of English-Speaking Countries I subject, as well as of the current professor of both, the subject under study and the interdisciplinary subject English Literature, closely related to the setting chosen for this study. The purpose of this interview was to know professor's insights on the importance of History of English-Speaking Countries I for the students' professional development. Professors were also asked to offer suggestions concerning the inclusion of instructional and supplementary materials in the subject. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for a detailed analysis of the information.

The content analysis of the interview allowed the researcher to identify the following resulting categories:

- Importance of History of English-Speaking Countries I for students' professional development.
- History of English-Speaking Countries I relationship with some other subjects of the History of English-Speaking Countries Discipline, such as English Literature.
- Knowledge about the existing bibliography in the subject History of English-Speaking Countries I.
- Suggestions for improvement.

Finally, the proposal of the multimedia product, HistoMedia, suggested by the researcher due to the confirmed limitations regarding the subject's bibliographical resources-was assessed by specialists from the area of UK's history.

Findings

Results of the Survey to the Students

A survey was administered to 17 students in order to determine the situation regarding the bibliography of the subject History of English-Speaking Countries I. Percentage analysis, as a relative frequency calculation, was deemed the most appropriate to use to obtain precise results in the different questions.

The first question of the survey was intended to verify students' knowledge with respect to the bibliography of the subject History of English-Speaking Countries I, more

specifically whether there was basic or complementary bibliography in the folder or not. Most of the students (13 students), who represented 76% of the total, recognized that there was complementary bibliography. However, it caught the researcher´s attention that 3 students (24%) seemed to believe that the subject´s folder included its basic bibliography (Table 1).

Table 1

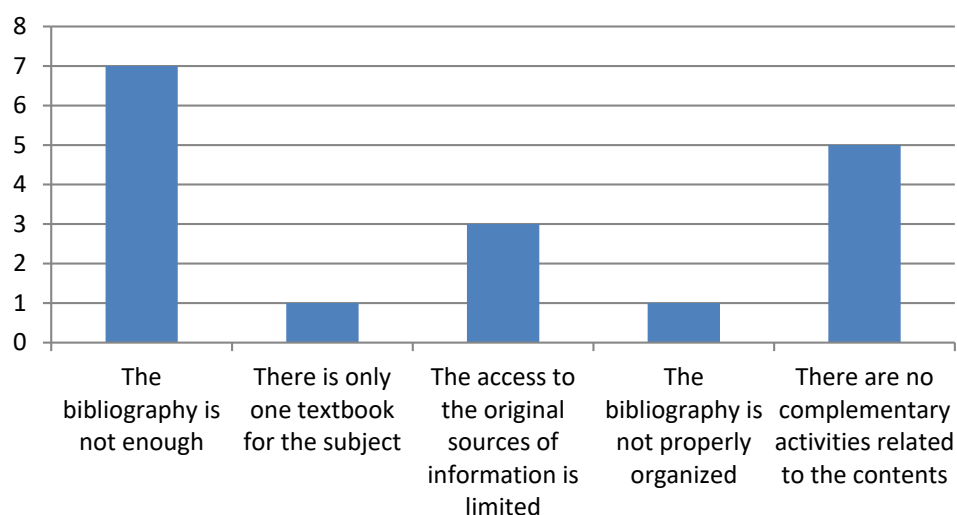*Situation Regarding the Bibliography of the Subject History of English-Speaking Countries I*

Bibliography of History of English-Speaking Countries I	Number of Students	%
Basic Bibliography	3	24
Complementary Bibliography	13	76
None of the previous ones	-	-

The second question was aimed at the characterization of the bibliography of the aforementioned subject. The respondents were given two choices: the bibliography of the subject being sufficient and the bibliography being insufficient. In this case, 82% of the respondents considered that the bibliography was not enough, and only 18% acknowledged that it was in fact sufficient for the development of the teaching learning process.

These opinions were justified through the results of question 2, which was addressed to define the limitations in the bibliography of the folder. The highest marked options in the graph were the first choice, which stated that the bibliography was not enough for the teaching and learning process in the subject History of English-Speaking Countries I, and the fifth choice (There were no complementary activities related to the different contents of the subject.) (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Limitations of the Bibliography in the Subject History of English-Speaking Countries I

The third question was aimed to determine whether the limitations with respect to the bibliography of the subject affected the students' motivation towards the subject History of English-Speaking Countries I. Most of the students (15 students), who represented 88% of the total, considered that these weaknesses resulted in the lack of motivation towards the subject. While, only 2 students held that this phenomenon did not affect students' motivation. This question led to the question where respondents were asked to suggest some possible solutions for the limitations of the bibliography (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Possible Solutions to the Limitations in History of English-Speaking Countries I
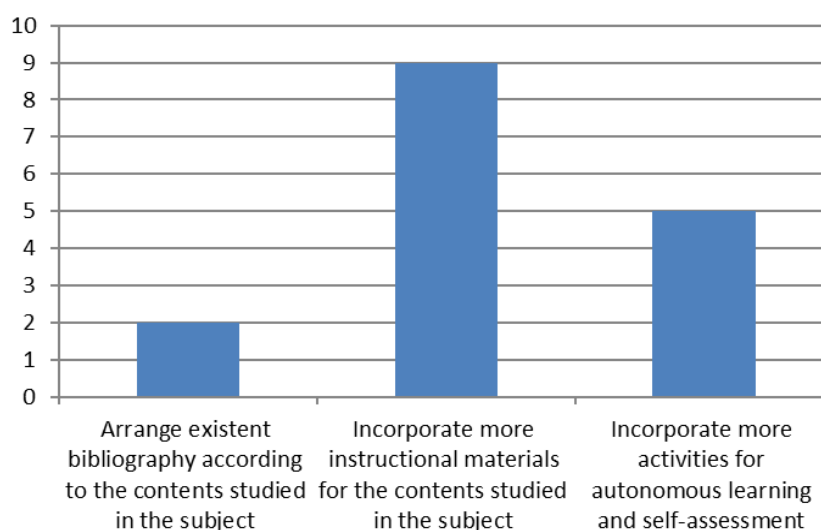
The graph shows that most of the students (52%) agreed to include more instructional materials from different sources. Some other students (29%) believed it was essential to

incorporate interactive activities for self-assessment and autonomous learning for each content studied in the subject History of English-Speaking Countries I. In addition, 11% of respondents considered the arrangement of existing bibliography according to the contents studied in the different historical periods to be the best solution. Finally, one student made some additional suggestions such as to incorporate workbooks, historical timelines, maps, and videos related to the most relevant events in the United Kingdom history.

Results of the Interview to Professors

In the first category, all professors agreed on the significance of History of English-Speaking Countries I for students' academic success, claiming that this course is essential for the enrichment of students' linguistic and socio-cultural competence. The following statement illustrates this finding: "History of English-Speaking Countries I provides a background for understanding the culture behind the target language (English) along with new vocabulary, comprehension, etc."

In respect to the second category, once again, all the professors underscored the role of History of English-Speaking Countries I as a complementary and closely-related subject with respect to English Literature. One of their arguments was the following: "English Literature and History of English-Speaking Countries I are closely related, and one cannot be taught separately from the other. Literature greatly depends on the historical context developing around it, and in other cases History can be reflected by a given piece of writing."

In the third category, related to the bibliography of the subject, the professors agreed that the contents would be more easily understood and studied with the incorporation of more efficient auxiliary materials in any form, as well as activities that stimulate students' autonomous learning. The following statement summarizes their view: "Students do not have enough bibliography and not always have access to Internet. Therefore, I would include videos, recordings, original documents and whatever material could be useful in order to make learning more instructive."

This interview to the professors and department authorities complemented the student' opinions and allowed to appreciate the role of the subject History of English-Speaking Countries in the students' professional growth. The information obtained confirmed the limitations of the current bibliography in History of English-Speaking Countries I, resulting in the multimedia product proposal for attaining the research overall aim.

Results of the Assessment of HistoMedia by Specialists' Criteria from the Area of UK's History

After designing the multimedia product, that was called HistoMedia, the proposal was presented to specialists from the area of History of English-Speaking Countries, in this case, the

current and previous professors of the subject. They were given a questionnaire that focused on the following descriptors: validity, content, organization, consistency, applicability and reliability. In the survey, the specialists had to select in a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 was the lowest category and 5 was the highest. In addition, they were asked to provide suggestions if the assessment was lower than 5. They were also encouraged to provide additional recommendations given their expertise as educators. The results of this survey were the following:

- Validity: All participants marked 5 in this category, agreeing that HistoMedia successfully met the objective for which it has been created.

- Content and consistency: After a thoughtful analysis of the materials and exercises provided in HistoMedia, and taking into account both the syllabus of the subject and students' needs, these categories were assessed with 5 by 100% of the specialists.

- Organization and reliability: Both categories were assessed with the highest value, showing the quality of the materials incorporated in the HistoMedia, which were obtained from updated and reliable sources, as well as the coherent and articulate organization of the information in the software.

- Applicability: All participating language specialists also marked 5 in this criterion.

One of the specialists' recommendations taken into consideration was the incorporation of the basic bibliography of the subject as a valid source when providing information. The researcher then broadened the content of each period, facilitating additional materials and information from this source.

Discussion and Conclusions

A study was carried out in the context of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language academic program, at the Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, to diagnose the needs concerning the bibliography of the subject, and the availability of ICT resources for both professors and learners.

The subject History of English-Speaking Countries I was the setting chosen for this study, and the selection of participants was carefully considered through an intentional and reasoned sampling criterion. The sample was composed by 17 fourth-year students since they were taking the aforementioned subject. Moreover, 5 professors also participated, which included the authorities' department, the main professor of the subject, and others who had taught the subject or had had interdisciplinary relationships with History of English-Speaking Countries I. Hence, the total number of participants was 22.

The survey administered to the 17 students revealed that 82% of the respondents considered that the bibliography was not enough for the development of the teaching and learning process. The explanation for this may be twofold. First of all, there was only one copy of the subject's basic bibliography available in printed version. Secondly, there were fewer audiovisual materials on the subject's folder than expected. When asked about the possible solutions to this problem, most of the students (52%) agreed that including more instructional materials from different sources was necessary, while some other students (29%) granted to incorporate interactive activities for self-assessment and autonomous learning for each content studied in History of English-Speaking Countries I. The results obtained are consistent with the initial claims regarding the limitations of bibliographical resources.

As for the interview made to the professors and the authorities´ department, the five professors agreed that the contents of the subject would be more easily understood and studied with the incorporation of more efficient auxiliary materials in any form, as well as activities that stimulate students' autonomous learning. These methods proved to be useful for identifying the deficiencies and best solutions regarding the resources and materials for History of English-Speaking Countries I, from which the researcher confirmed that the required bibliography of the aforementioned subject was still insufficient, and it needed to be improved.

It was also found that the limitations regarding the bibliography and some other audiovisual materials might have affected the students' motivation towards History of English-Speaking Countries I. In response, the researcher proposed a multimedia product (HistoMedia) to support the teaching and learning process of the subject. This proposal was assessed by experts from the area of the United Kingdom history, who agreed that this multimedia tool was a valid proposal for the improvement of the teaching and learning process of the course under study. Nonetheless, further validation on the effectiveness of the multimedia after one academic year benchmarking by specialists would be needed.

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A Virtual Classroom for Enhancing English Language Students' Intercultural Competence during the Internship Period

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Abstract

English language teachers should prepare students for contact with people from other cultures and effective intercultural communication. Therefore, it is desirable that foreign language teaching embraces, not only the development of language skills, but also intercultural training. Specifically, students of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language, at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas (UCLV), have some difficulties trying to attain intercultural competence to deal with the professional demands during their internship period in the tourism sector. This paper discusses an original research project in the area of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to enable intercultural competence through the syllabus renewal of the English language academic program through an intercultural approach. It uses a qualitative research approach including some empirical methods to collect information. A virtual classroom for the subject *Práctica Laboral* was proposed and was published in the Moodle platform. Its design included a set of contents, digital tools, and tasks selected and/or created to develop students' intercultural skills and attitudes and to enhance students' intercultural knowledge of the Canadian tourism visiting Cuba. The proposal is intended for students to meet the professional profile demands and serve as an extended experience of virtual multicultural environment.

Keywords: intercultural competence, internship period, information and communication technologies, distance learning, virtual classroom

Introduction

In today's world, distinguished by the phenomenon of globalization, the concurrence of different cultures in a single scenery is increasingly frequent. This process of interaction and integration among people, groups of people, companies and governments has been

generalized due to the advance of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the spread of virtual learning environments in education. In accordance with this reality, the use of a *lingua franca* imposes itself as a necessity and therefore, foreign languages instruction and learning must be focused towards an intercultural dimension to allow learners to become intercultural mediators in communication.

As de Grève and Van Passel (1971) stated, language represents essentially, one of the main aspects of a given community culture. Therefore, the language learning process cannot be apart from the studied language's cultural background since mastering a language implies a social use knowledge. Consequently, foreign language students need to master not only the four language skills (speaking, writing, reading, and listening), but also the social conventions of language use to be competent. Thus, foreign language degree courses need to adopt an approach towards intercultural learning to prepare students to communicate effectively with various cultures.

Specifically, students of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language degree course, at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas (UCLV), need to acquire intercultural competence to deal with the professional demands during the internship period. The internship period is the time when students face professional demands for the first time as part of their training program. It is specially designed to provide students with real life working experience in work-related contexts. Placements can vary from tourism agencies and airports to translation and interpreting services, where students are expected to gain an in-depth knowledge and to develop skills to perform successfully in professional settings. In the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language degree course, at UCLV, the internship is part of the *Práctica Laboral e Investigativa* discipline program in version D of the curriculum, which includes different courses taught from second year until fifth year to attain different learning outcomes.

In this context, it is vital for students to acquire intercultural competence since they have to use the foreign language as a working tool in a professional setting where they, depending on the task, will interact with people from different countries, process texts in a foreign language and/or teach other students under the principles of intercultural awareness. Therefore, mastering this dimension is the cornerstone for the successful fulfillment of the internship requirements and the future development of students as interculturally competent mediators in communication. To fulfil the internship objectives, students need to develop intercultural competence since the very beginning of the degree course, and to do so, the

syllabus contents of subjects taught until second year should be renewed with this intercultural approach, and the use of ICT is considered a suitable tool for enhancing motivation towards cultural contents.

Virtual learning environments are increasingly being used in higher education due to the advantages they have for distant education. Language learning is one of the areas where ICT represent a major technological aid to give learners access to information, promote interaction and communication, and enhance digital literacy skills. Nowadays, "language classrooms are increasingly turning into blended learning environments (…) blended language learning uses multiple teaching and guiding methods by combining face- to-face sessions with online activities and utilizing a mix of technology-based materials" (Kumar & Maija, 2014, p. 5). Furthermore, virtual learning and ICT offer various advantages for developing communicative skills in foreign language learning through simulated environments or real-life situations depicted in videos and other resources that will certainly contribute to developing students' intercultural awareness to succeed in intercultural environments.

Facing the increasing demand of tour guides in the northern keys' resorts in Villa Clara province, English language students at UCLV generally work for Gaviota Tours Agency during their internship period. However, it has been evidenced that the students usually have some difficulties understanding other people's cultures and behaviors, specifically Canadian people from French speaking regions and, as a consequence, some misunderstandings may occur due to their insufficient cultural knowledge of the tourism market they are supposed to interact with. Consequently, the overall aim of this paper was to propose a virtual classroom for enhancing intercultural competence of English Language students to cope with the demands of the Canadian tourism during the internship period in Gaviota Tours Agency.

Theoretical Considerations on Intercultural Competence

In a conversation between people from different countries, one or both of them might be speaking in a foreign or second language, a *lingua franca*, in many cases. They might be aware of their national identities, which influences what they say and how they say it since they see the other as a representative of another nation and its culture. However, this focus on national identity may be accompanied by the risk of relying on stereotypes reducing the notion of the other from a complex human being to a mere representation of a country or culture. This phenomenon termed by Byram et al. (2002) as *simplification* seems to be reinforced by the assumed notion that learning a foreign language involves becoming as a person from another country.

Contrary to what it is thought, the inclusion of the intercultural dimension in language teaching intends to develop learners as "intercultural speakers" or "mediators" able to engage satisfactorily with multiple identities and, at the same time, avoid the stereotyping that comes when someone is perceived through a single identity. It is laid on the basis of perceiving the interlocutor as "an individual whose qualities are to be discovered rather than as a representative of an externally ascribed identity" (Byram et al., 2002, p. 9).

Nonetheless, the intercultural approach is aimed to lead learners to acquire linguistic competence so that they can communicate and express themselves orally or in written form. But is also intends to develop intercultural competence, understood as "the ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and the ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality" (Byram et al., 2002, p. 10).

Therefore, the language teaching process must be focused on developing learners' awareness of the relationships between other cultures and their own, helping them acquire interest in and curiosity about the 'otherness' as well as consciousness of themselves and their own cultures, as seen from other people's perspectives. That is, in other words, to form intercultural speakers who are aware of the fact that there is much more to be known from the other's perspective and that there are skills, attitudes and values involved in a multicultural interaction which realization and assumption are crucial to attain a deeper understanding of intercultural human relationships and to succeed in the communication process.

Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes and Values Involved in Intercultural Competence

According to Deardorff (2006), intercultural competence is "the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions". Based on this definition, the components of intercultural competence are: knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values one holds because of one's belonging to a number of social groups.

Intercultural attitudes (*savoir être*) are curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own. This means willingness to relativize one's own values, beliefs and behaviors, not to assume that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones, and to be able to see how they might look from an outsider's perspective who has a different set of values, beliefs and behaviors. According to Byram et al. (2002), this can be called the ability to 'decenter'.

Another crucial component is knowledge (*saviors*) understood, according to Byram et al. (2002), not as primary knowledge about a specific culture, but as knowledge of how social groups function and what intercultural interaction involves. It includes the knowledge of social groups and their practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and the knowledge of the general processes of societal and individual interaction. Hence, knowledge includes cultural self- awareness, which is the ability to articulate how one's own culture has shaped one's identity and world view and culture specific knowledge seen as the analysis of basic information about other cultures (history, values, politics, economics, communication styles, beliefs and practices). Besides, it comprises the sociolinguistic awareness which means acquiring basic local language skills, articulating differences in verbal/ non-verbal communication and adjusting one's speech to accommodate nationals from other cultures.

Skills are as relevant as attitudes and knowledge in the acquisition of intercultural competence since intercultural mediators need to be able to see how misunderstandings can arise as well as to resolve them. Byram et al. (2002) classifies them as follows:

- Skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) include the ability to interpret an event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to events from one's own. It is possible by putting events, ideas or documents from various cultures side by side and analyzing how they might look from the other culture's perspective.

- Skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*) are the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction. It is core since no intercultural mediator can anticipate all the knowledge they are going to need in an intercultural interaction.

- Critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) is the ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries. No matter how open towards, curious about and tolerant of other people's behaviors our own beliefs, behavior and values are so rooted that can provoke reaction or rejection. Because of that natural and unavoidable response intercultural mediators need to become aware of their own values and of its influence on their view of other people's values, that is, to develop critical awareness of themselves and their values, as well as those of other people.

The above knowledge, skills and attitudes lead to internal outcomes which refer to an individual who learns to be flexible, adaptable and empathetic, and adopts an ethno-relative

perspective. These qualities are reflected in external outcomes which refer to the observable behavior and communication styles of the individual. They are the visible evidence that the individual is, or is learning to be, interculturally competent.

Method

Description of the Sample and Research Methods

The research was conducted in the context of the English Language Major with French as a Second Foreign Language degree course, at UCLV, in the 2019-2020 academic year. This major is designed to train students to cope with the demands of a twofold professional profile that includes working as interpreters and translators, or foreign language teachers and collaborators in linguistic research.

The sample was composed of thirty-seven students and four professors from the English Language Department, including the supervisors of the subject English Language II (2nd year) and Interpreting (4th year), and the head professor of the discipline Práctica Laboral e Investigativa. To complete the sample, a group of five tour guides and executives from Gaviota Tours Agency were included. Thus, forty-six participants were to constitute the sample.

The academic year was a criterium to be considered since it was necessary to select students from the second and fourth year who were doing their internship and their academic supervisors (professors with a direct relationship to this period). When selecting the participants, an intentional and reasoned sampling criterion was used based on the following:

- Participants should be linked to the internship in Gaviota Tours Agency.
- Participants were willing to participate.

The students were willing to cooperate since they felt they needed to improve their communicative competences; whereas professors voluntarily participated because they were aware of the need of improving student's intercultural competence, and company supervisors (professionals or representatives) from Gaviota Tours Agency consented to participate as they were interested in the students' work and in their quality performance as tour guides.

The research was divided into three stages. Within the first stage, the focus was placed upon the theoretical background essential to systematize the main concepts and state their interrelation. As part of the second stage, a needs analysis regarding intercultural competence among second-year and fourth-year students, as well as the availability of ICT resources in the context was carried out. It included the following empirical methods:

- Document analysis: It included the analysis of the English Language Majora academic curricula, versions D and E, the curricula of the disciplines English Language and Práctica Laboral e Investigativa, and the syllabus of the subject English Language III.

- Participant observation: It was carried out to analyze the object of study in context; in this case, students' intercultural competence during their internship period in Gaviota Tours Agency, which included transfers and other duties and tasks involving Canadian tourists.

- Survey: It was administered to the sample of students to find out about their needs in respect to intercultural competence during the internship period in Gaviota Tours Agency while working with Canadian tourism.

- Interview: It was conducted with the sample of teachers to determine their conceptions and viewpoints about intercultural competence and the demands of the students' professional profile. Also, it helped clarify their points of view about the needs of English language students' intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes during the internship period in Gaviota Tours Agency while working with Canadian tourism.

- Interview: It was conducted with the sample of employers and tour guides from Gaviota Tours Agency to identify the needs of the students related to job requirements and specifically to intercultural aspects related to Canadian tourism during the internship period.

- Triangulation: It helped determine the convergent and divergent points of the information from the triangulated methods and sources to arrive at conclusions.

The third stage was devoted to the actual design of the virtual classroom. It was based on the needs analysis results and supported by the bibliographical review on the subject, and the options offered by the Moodle platform.

Findings and Results

The analysis of the data obtained after applying the research methods showed that, despite the efforts made by professors in training students to successfully cope with the demands of the internship, they still had some difficulties by the time they faced the realities of a real-world professional setting. These difficulties were, on one hand, a result of an insufficient presence of the components of intercultural competence in the curriculum of the academic program, mainly those aspects related to the Canadian culture, and on the other hand, the English language degree course was not designed for training students to perform as

tour guides and the internship period was the first working experience they had in that field. Therefore, students needed to develop problem-solving and decision-making abilities, as well as develop creativity, adaptability, responsibility, tolerance and teamwork skills, and they must develop those skills during this on-site experience. Those professional competencies should be fostered as well as intercultural competence.

Based on the previous bibliographic review and on the results of the needs analysis, a virtual classroom was designed to enhance the students' intercultural competence to meet the professional demands during the internship in Gaviota Tours Agency. This virtual classroom was intended to contribute to renew the syllabus of the subject English Language III through an intercultural approach, and serve as a tool to acquire knowledge of the Canadian culture, reinforce knowledge of the Cuban culture, and develop intercultural attitudes and skills that are essential in the students' training to become mediators in communication.

The virtual classroom of the subject Práctica Laboral was built considering instructional and technological guidelines. Regarding the instructional aspects, it included varied cultural information about Cuba and Canada, and a set of tasks to prepare students to cope with the internship demands related to intercultural competence development. Regarding the technological aspects, some principles like accessibility, navigation, simplicity, and interactivity were considered in order to provide them with intuitive and user-friendly support.

The virtual classroom design combined the possibilities the Moodle platform provided with the potentialities of a group of selected digital tools. It was structured into 7 sections, comprising a total of 8 informative documents and 5 meaningful and authentic tasks. Since these technological resources suited the principles applied in the design of the proposal and the selected contents met the students' needs and suggestions, the virtual classroom was deemed as suitable for the purpose it was created: to serve as a distance learning support to help students meet the demands of intercultural communication during the internship period in Gaviota Tours Agency.

Conclusions

Intercultural competence goes beyond linguistic competence to refer to the ability of ensuring a shared understanding and interaction among people of different social background as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality.

The needs analysis showed that, when students do the internship in Gaviota Tours Agency, they usually have some difficulties related to cultural and linguistic aspects that sometimes interfere in the process of communication. They considered they needed to master

the English- and French-Canadian language variants in order to succeed in their task. They suggested to include contents related to history, geography, politics, economy, and society of Cuba and Canada within the discipline, as well as general information about Gaviota Tours Agency. Besides, they pointed out the need to get acquainted with the behavior of Canadian people from French- and English-speaking areas to communicate effectively.

The design of the virtual classroom included an instructional and a technological design. The instructional design included aspects of the Canadian and Cuban cultures, and a set of tasks to accomplish subject-related communicative functions leading to simulations to improve students' intercultural competence. The technological design was supported by the Moodle platform and some interactive digital tools. The virtual classroom of the subject Práctica Laboral was considered both pertinent and suitable for the purpose it was created.

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Digital Competences of the University Teachers of the English Language Teaching Program at Universidad Americana of Costa Rica

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Abstract

Technology has come to society bringing with it an endless number of new applications and accessories that have facilitated the daily life of many at work, school and family level. These technologies have impacted all spheres of society, so the process of education is permeated by these changes, and therefore, all levels of education. In the case of university teaching, the role of the teacher is in a period of change, in which the teacher must have the adequate and effective technological knowledge and skills to achieve the objective of their courses, in addition to integrating these new technologies. So, the objective of this article is to identify the digital competences of university staff, in this case the teachers of the English Language Teaching major of Universidad Americana, through a qualitative study.

Keywords: Digital competences, teachers' competences, didactical resources use, technological competences, Information and Communication Technologies

Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), defined as technological resources composed of equipment, devices, programs and applications necessary for the storage and transmission of information through the Internet interface, have impacted most spheres of society, due to the need for acceleration and efficiency in the so-called digital society (Borromeo & Ramírez, 2016; Echeverría, 2014). Education is one of the spheres of society that has been influenced and permeated by these new technologies transforming the educational field and its actors. Teachers are an essential part of the teaching process and greatly influence learning, so it is vital that they have the appropriate skills, knowledge, and competences to promote and establish suitable spaces for knowledge creation and skills development through the use of ICT, according to the demands of the 21st century (Carballo et al., 2015).

When competence is dimensioned to the actions of the teacher, we obtain a variety of teaching competences linked to the interdisciplinary field, covering pedagogical, curricular, didactic aspects, among others. Within the multiplicity of existing competences involved in teaching, digital teaching competences turn out to be a derivation, defined as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the teaching staff on the use and management of information and communication technologies in their work.

Through the *Common Digital Competence Framework for Teachers* (INTEF, 2017), issued in Spain in 2017, there is a basis for digital teaching competences in the context of higher education. To reinforce the previous statement, the study of Salinas et al. (2014), within its definition of components that must include teaching competences are both technological knowledge, and the pedagogical aspect, and the effect of technological devices both on people and on the teaching process. The teacher does not only need to be literate in the use of technologies, but to combine different teaching skills and adapt them to an integral use of technologies. In addition, the teacher must be a companion of learning, requiring skills that allow the development of a complex set of tasks and skills that involve support in the cognitive, socio-affective and didactic planes (Begoña, 2011).

Based on this premise, the purpose of this research is to recognize the digital skills possessed by university teachers of the English Language Teaching (ELT) Major, both at the Bachelor and Licentiate degree programs, on the three campuses of Universidad Americana, in Costa Rica. The research seeks, first of all, to identify the digital competences possessed by university teachers of the ELT major of the Universidad Americana of Costa Rica, and then to later understand these competences and how they influence their teaching practice. This research represents a starting point, not only at the level of university teaching, but also at the national level, for research on the topic of digital teaching competences towards a possible improvement and guide in the teaching profession.

Background on Models and Frameworks of Digital Teaching Competences

On the state of the art related to the background of digital teaching skills, it should be emphasized that there is a variety of proposals, models, and frameworks used at different levels of education and in different regions of the world, each sharing similarities and differences between since they respond to different contexts and particular needs. In some cases, the consulted documents provided a very general overview and did not specifically address higher education, or pertain to specific contexts in different countries. In addition, several positions were identified from the work of theorists, being that some include

pedagogical, didactic and methodological elements within the use of technologies, and others focus more on the technical aspects.

Digital competences are described by Sánchez et al. (2015) as the knowledge and management of ICT by users, and according to UNESCO (2008), these competences are generated through the management of ICT, such as the use of technology, the search and evaluation of information on the web, and the solution of problems by technological means. Through digital competences, the teacher is able to design both materials and instructional strategies according to the needs of the current century, adapting to the technological boom of the time (Aguirre & Ruiz, 2012).

Within the great diversity of models on digital teaching competences, the following were analyzed:

- The iSkills (2007) model, developed by the Educational Testing Service, hereinafter ETS, measures the ability to think critically in a digital environment through a series of real-world tasks.

- The National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers model (NETST, 2008) developed by the International Society for Technology in Education, hereinafter ISTE, specifies the conditions for an adequate integration of technology in education, as well as the standards that teachers must develop.

- The TPACK model (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge), by Koehler and Mishra (2008), updated in 2016 with a second edition, focuses on the knowledge and skills teachers need to meaningfully integrate technology into instruction in specific content areas.

- The model of the ACTIC project (Accreditation of Competences in Information and Communication Technologies), developed jointly by various departments of the government of Catalunya, highlights eight competences broken down in turn into competency actions.

- The model by Pozos (2010) focuses on the integration of the digital competence of university professors in their professional teaching development.

- The model named "Competencias TIC para la docencia en la Universidad Pública Española", by Prendes (2010), allows the analysis of competences exclusively within the university context.

- The framework called the *UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers* is an update of the original version published in 2008 by UNESCO in collaboration with

CISCO, INTEL, ISTE, and Microsoft. This framework encompasses both the technological aspects in conjunction with the aspects related to the pedagogical work, within the term competence.

- The model by Carrera y Coiduras (2012) focuses on inquiring about the components of digital competence that are common to teachers and students.

- The model developed by Larraz (2013), called *Digital Competence at the University*, defines the concept of digital competence and proposes a rubric to work around four literacies: informational, technological, multimedia, and communicative.

- The DIGCOMP model (Ferrari, 2013), developed by the Institute for Prospective Technology (IPTS) of the European Commission, is a project on digital competence to improve the understanding and development of this competence at European level. In this project, a total of 21 competences organized in five dimensions are specified.

- The DigiLit Leicester framework (Fraser et al., 2013), created with the collaboration of the Department of Education of Leicester (United Kingdom), Montfort University, and 25 schools in the city, distinguishes 6 areas of competence.

- Ramírez and Casillas (2014) in their book *Háblame de Tic. Tecnología Digital en la Educación Superior*, talk about new skills and digital knowledge for university teachers.

- In 2015, Rangel (2015) presents the proposal of a profile of digital teaching competences and describes thirteen competences grouped into three dimensions: technological, informational and pedagogical.

- The model *Marco Común de Competencia Digital Docente*, developed by Instituto Nacional de Tecnologías Educativa y de Formación del Profesorado (INTEF) from Spain (INTEF, 2017), makes a proposal that specifies digital competence through 21 sub-competences organized into 3 levels of domain and five competence areas.

- The Spiral Development Model of TICTACTEP Competences, by Pinto et al. (2017). focuses on teaching practices, on the flexible and genuine use of digital technology, beyond its instrumental use and its pedagogical articulation, oriented to educational innovation.

The previous models contemplate a number of different competences according to the different contexts of their implementation and development. For the purposes of this study, they are analyzed considering their similarities and differences to understand their components, elements, and obtain different perspectives. In addition, the study by Durán et al. (2016) is of great help to understand the different models or frameworks of digital teaching

competences and to analyze how these competences are grouped into dimensions or areas of work. Table 1 synthetizes the dimensions and competences identified in the previously mentioned models and frameworks adapted from Durán et al.'s proposal (2016).

Table 1

Dimensions and Competences Identified in the Models and Frameworks

Dimensions	Authors	Identified Competences
Technical knowledge of devices, applications, networks, among other ICTs	Koehler and Mishra (2008)	The technological competences described as knowledge about technological capabilities and applications.
	ACTIC model (2009)	They coincide about the knowledge, management and use of devices, operating systems, processing of text, image, numerical, data, audio and video files, as well as navigation and communication through the network
	Prendes (2010)	
	UNESCO (2011)	They coincide about the knowledge about devices, computer tools and network applications, and ability to evaluate their didactic potential. There is an informational dimension that includes localization and retrieval skills, effective, ethical and legal analysis and selection of information.
	Carrera and Coiduras (2012)	
	Rangel (2015)	
	Larraz (2013)	Considers two categories, the technological one that includes competences such as digital citizenship, the organization and management of hardware and software, the processing of data in different formats and network communication and the second category called multimedia that includes competences such as analysis and creation of multimedia messages from a critical dimension.
	Ramírez and Casillas (2014)	Digital knowledge in terms of technological appropriation by teachers, instead of digital skills, since they include skills as part of practical knowledge. The knowledge, management and use of devices, applications, files, software, tools and accessories.
Communication and information	Larraz (2013)	Communication of knowledge from an international approach, then technological communication, digital citizenship and the creation of multimedia messages.
	Ramírez and Casillas (2014)	Includes elements of communication, such as: the use of WhatsApp, chat, email, social networks, distributed learning platforms, blogs, video calls and text messages, the use of social web services to subscribe, read, publish (in blog), participate in forums, consult wikis and use social networks.
	ETS (2007)	Knowledge to collect and / or retrieve information from the network.
	ACTIC model (2009)	They coincide on the efficient treatment and management of the information existing in the web encourages collaboration, creation and participation in virtual media.
	Ferrari (2013)	
	Carreras and Coiduras (2012)	
	Fraser et al. (2013).	

	Koehler and Mishra (2008)	It includes two categories, one of pedagogical competences and another of disciplinary competences.
	UNESCO (2011)	It includes the categories of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy.
	Pozos (2010)	The didactic, curricular and pedagogical aspect around the use of ICT, which contemplates the planning and design of learning experiences in face-to-face, virtual and hybrid environments.
Pedagogical, methodological, didactic and evaluative elements	Carrera and Coiduras (2012)	The design of activities and situations of learning and evaluation that incorporate ICT according to their didactic potential, with the students and with their context is contemplated.
	Rangel (2015)	It includes the pedagogical dimension in its profile of digital competences, which is structured of competences such as critical and favorable attitude to the possibility of integrating ICT in teaching practice, design and implementation of teaching and learning strategies mediated by ICT, of educational materials or resources, and technologies for the exchange of ideas, information, experiences or knowledge with the community.
	Pinto, Cortés and Alfaro, (2017)	Composed of technological, pedagogical, communicative, management and research competences, whose spiral format allows enriching the educational process based on the potential impact on innovation processes and social appropriation of knowledge.
	ISTE (2008)	They coincide in promoting responsibility and digital citizenship.
Cybersecurity, access to adequate and updated equipment, instruction, digital identity, legality and ethics around the use of ICT	ACTIC model (2009)	
	Fraser et al. (2013)	
	Pozos (2010)	It includes diversity, ethics and responsible use of ICT and awareness about the environment, health and occupational safety with the use of ICT in the teaching profession.
	Ramírez and Casillas (2014)	Digital citizenship composed of more specific elements to reflect on the duty of safety, access and instruction for both the teacher and the educational community
Teacher training on the use of ICT	Prendes (2010)	Teacher training and innovation with ICT for the performance of its tasks.
	Fraser et al. (2013)	Technology that supports professional development.
	UNESCO (2008)	The ability to create, distribute, share and use new knowledge by integrating technological skills in all its contexts, including university teaching.

Note. Based on Durán et al. (2016).

This table allows to understand the contributions of the different models analyzed considering the types of competences existing in other contexts, and how they can be structured according to different categories or dimensions, depending on the different educational scenarios where they were developed.

Use of ICT in University Education

In the area of university teaching, topics such as the use of technological support tools in the teaching function are addressed (Echeverría, 2014, Hernández et al., 2014), as well as a large number of tools, resources, media, and formats that enable didactic strategies to facilitate the construction of knowledge according to the needs of students in the educational environment and of the 21st century (Basantes et al., 2017). In order to identify areas for improvement related to the didactic use of ICT in the field of university teaching practice, an analysis of research articles that provide experiences on this topic was carried out.

First, Clavijo and Quintero (2012), through a mixed methodology, identified areas of improvement, such as the pedagogical training on the use of ICT, and the multiplicity of teaching requirements and challenges to achieve an efficient and appropriate integration of these technologies. Similarly, Echeverría (2014), through a quantitative study, based on the opinion of the teachers from the School of Orientation and Special Education, in the University of Costa Rica, highlighted teacher training in the didactic use of ICT. Additionally, the quantitative research by Ramírez and Borromeo (2016) showed the results of two postgraduate studies identifying the teacher training in the use of ICT and the underutilization of resources as a weakness generated from the lack of training. This coincides with the research by Rodríguez et al. (2017), of quantitative nature, that highlighted the underutilization of technological resources by teachers due to lack of appropriate teacher training in the use of ICT.

Considering the above cases, it is identified that the use of ICT is not only about the management and technical knowledge of applications, capabilities, networks, and software. It is important to complement the technical knowledge with didactic aspects in the case of the university education, and these routes must coincide with the curriculum of each course and program. The mixed study of Fallas (2014) allowed to consolidate ICT competences, and identified that the dedication and interest in ICT by teachers and the reflective use focused on the design and development of learning experiences that apply a creative and productive use are necessary. A very interesting case on interest and teaching commitment to the use of ICT occurs in the qualitative study carried out by Chaves et al. (2015), when identifying and analyzing as areas of improvement the optimal level of use of ICT by teachers and breaking the gap in terms of the physical technological resources existing on campus and the wide range that exists in the market. Whereas, in the quantitative study of Sánchez et al. (2015), within the identified areas of improvement, they highlighted the lack of promotion of the production

and management of digital resources by both students and teachers, as well as the continuous updating and teacher training in using different ICTs, and finally the need for digital skills in relation to the teaching profession.

The analysis carried out allowed to understand that there is indeed an underuse of ICT, as well as its potentialities in the context of university teaching. Relevant elements such as training, the didactic route, technical knowledge, as well as the teaching commitment in updating devices, applications and characteristics of these resources, and even the need for digital skills in university teachers are identified.

Competences in English Language Teaching

According to the research findings on which competences should be developed in the process of learning English as a foreign language, the communicative competence is primarily mentioned. It is defined by Holguín (2016), as the knowledge of using language as an instrument of communication in a given context. This communicative competence, according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), includes three types of competences: linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, and sociolinguistic competence. Linguistic competence focuses on knowledge of the linguistic rules and forms of the language, such as lexical, phonological, syntactic, and orthographic knowledge and skills. On the other hand, pragmatic competence is governed by attitudes, beliefs, and the functional use of language by the actors in the communication process. Finally, the sociolinguistic competence that is composed of the sociocultural conditions where language is used. Additionally, Holguín (2016) mentions that, in recent years, there is an additional competence to be added to the previous three, being intercultural competence, defined as the acquisition of the foreign language, both in cognitive and attitudinal aspects, such as in a constant dialogue with individuals from another community and different contexts.

In the case of ELT competences, the basis for learning English language as a foreign language is taken as the development of the skills corresponding to the communicative competence composed of the oral and written production skills, as well as the listening and reading comprehension skills. In the case of the speaking skill, according to Holguín (2016), linguistic components should be considered, such as pronunciation, fluency, phonology, lexicon, but also the functional use of language to achieve an objective, the management of interactions, and the appropriate morphology and organization of the discourse according to the context. Second, regarding written skill, the following components are considered: syntax,

elaboration of texts, rhetorical patterns and organization of ideas, conventions, and the writing process that involves planning, development, revision, and editing of texts. On the listening skill, its components are the perception of pronunciation, contractions, connections, and intonation, the distinction of sounds, the interpretation of the context, the processing of information and the interaction and understanding of accents. Finally, the reading skill can be broken down into correspondence between sounds and words, knowledge of literary genres, inference, obtaining information and prediction (Holguín, 2016; Quintana, 2019).

In addition, the Council of Europe (2019) provides further competences related to the ELT context, besides communicative competences. Thus, competence is considered as a dynamic process that involves the selection, activation, organization, and coordination of psychological resources applied to reaction and behavior in specific situations. Within their taxonomy, they group the competences of language teachers into eight dimensions, such as:

- Professional values and principles, related to the contribution of a quality education, through the defense of human rights, democracy, and equality before the law of each citizen.
- Communicative competences, as a transversal dimension of the linguistic repertoire of the professional context of the English teacher, such as multilingualism, multiculturalism, intercomprehension and interculturality, linguistic varieties, among others.
- IT skills, related to cooperation through the use of ICT.
- Metalinguistic, metadiscoursal, and metacultural competences, related to analyzing and relating topics with languages, culture, and discourses according to themes, context, and student needs.
- Teaching competences, including the planning, design, preparation, organization, execution and evaluation of activities and resources within the class.
- Competences for cooperation, related to the relationship between the actors in the teaching and learning process, students, colleagues, teachers, members of the community, among others.
- Competences for initial education and a lifelong career, related to pedagogical professional development.
- Professional learning opportunities.

Therefore, it is considered appropriate to carry out this research focused on the digital competences of university teachers of the ELT major at Universidad Americana, in Costa Rica,

as they identify these digital competences in their working environment. This would represent a contribution to the university education in ELT academic programs at the national level in Costa Rica.

Context and Approach to the Research Problem

At this point, the following guiding doubt arises for this study, to know what digital competences university teachers of the ELT degree program at Universidad Americana have. To clear up this doubt, the ELT academic program was considered. The researcher's experience in this higher education institution for more than six years was important to address this issue. The knowledge about this educational context and the review of research carried out in the institution allowed to conclude that no research has been carried out to date on the issue of digital competences of university teachers in ELT programs. Thus, the following research question was formulated: What are the digital competences possessed by university teachers of the ELT academic program, at Universidad Americana, in Costa Rica?

General Objective

To ascertain the digital competences possessed by university teachers of the ELT academic program at Universidad Americana, Costa Rica.

Specific Objectives

- To identify the digital competences possessed by university teachers of the ELT program.

- To understand the digital competences possessed by university teachers of the ELT program.

Method

Research Focus

This study, due to the nature of the problem of knowing the digital competences that university teachers possess, was designed as a case study in the context of the ELT academic program at the Universidad Americana. This is based on the elements of qualitative research, of a phenomenological type, since it seeks to know the reality about the digital competences that university teachers possess. The case study is defined as a technique in which experiential situations are analyzed, and a search for effective solutions is carried out, which will allow digital competences to be manifested in university teachers of a particular group, being the teachers in the ELT Major. As Martínez (2006), indicates "the case study method is a valuable research tool, and its greatest strength lies in the fact that it measures and records the behavior of the people involved in a certain context" (p. 167); therefore, it can also record the participants' perspectives of a certain reality.

Considering that it is a phenomenological study, it is intended to know, from a qualitative perspective, the participants' assessments of the study problem, manifesting their management and knowledge about the use of new technologies. Being a study with an interpretative approach, as defined by Ceballos-Herrera (2009), who considers that reality is constructed by the people involved in the problem being studied, taking into consideration their appreciation of reality converging in the same dimension, defining the ontological character of the object of study. Ceballos-Herrera (2009) also maintains that the interpretative qualitative paradigm seeks to reduce and reduce the separation between the object of study and the individuals involved in the study of this object, through observation, this defines the epistemological character of the research. Regarding the axiological character of the study, Ceballos-Herrera (2009) considers knowledge as a personal elaboration and the same importance is not given to the reality of each informer, so it varies. Therefore, the researcher must indicate his experience or intention regarding the object of study so as not to skew the process.

Selection of Data Collection Strategy and Justification

The research process was divided into stages, displaying interrelation with each other. The first stage consisted of the bibliographic review, to delimit and define the object of study, that is, the concept of digital competences, as well as possible dimensions. This bibliographic review was also carried out to know the state of the art in relation to the research problem to determine what previous research has been carried out on this topic. A second stage was defined by the elaboration of the research design through the definition of the problem, the general and specific objectives, and therefore the methodology that was to be used for the most appropriate approach to the research topic. In the third stage, fieldwork was carried out in the selected institution to collect data through in-depth interviews conducted with five teachers of the ELT Major at Universidad Americana. The fourth stage implied the transcription and processing of data, through the categories defined by the information obtained in the bibliographic review on digital competences and through the collection of data, and thus fulfilling the first specific objective.

Participants

To develop this research, Universidad Americana of Costa Rica was selected, specifically the university teachers of the ELT academic program from the three existing venues in the national territory. Being that recently this career is in the process of reaccreditation by the National Accreditation System of Higher Education in Costa Rica, it is

interesting to analyze this phenomenon to know the digital competences that these individuals possess.

The selection of individuals was made through voluntary participation. Several teachers were offered the opportunity to participate, and due to differences in schedules and working hours dedicated to the university, it was difficult to agree on an appropriate time to meet. Consequently, convenience sampling was used (Tamayo, 2001), based on criteria such as representativeness of each venue, the type of course taught, age group, among others. Thus, the sample included teachers representing the target population from the three university campuses: San José, Cartago, and Heredia.

Data Collection and Analysis

According to Vargas (2012), the interview is one of the most popular instruments, the choice of this tool is essential to know information that otherwise could not be obtained; in this case, understand digital competences from the real perspective and how they are understood and used by the university teachers who were interviewed. Research interviews allow the collection of detailed information in view of the fact that the person who reports shares with the researcher what concerns a specific topic, and provide necessary perspectives from multiple actors to understand how the study problem develops. As Robles (2011) indicates, the in-depth interview is the ideal instrument since it follows the model of conversation between equals to enter the context of the object of study. This instrument also allows to obtain characteristics and basic aspects of the interviewees involved with the object of study.

The interview was structured in two sections. The first section included the introduction and collection of personal data, such as name, years of experience, academic degree, among others. Then, the questions of interest for the research were posed. These questions were organized according to the categories subject to study, and each category contained questions related to the dimensions to be studied. The following dimensions were considered: teacher training in the use of ICT (four items), appropriation and teaching experience (four items), digital literacy (seven items), and challenges and teaching commitment (five items).

It should be noted that, for the validation of the instrument, it was submitted to be evaluated by experts in the field. Three expert teachers, who had experience on the use and appropriation of ICT in the field of university teaching, provided their observations to validate the interview instrument.

The interviews were carried out in 2020. The participant teachers were asked to meet in a virtual meeting room on Microsoft Teams. This provided an appropriate environment to conduct the interview, abiding by the health protocols of Universidad Americana in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interviews were recorded, and then transcribed. The transcribed data was saved as a text file, and analyzed using Atlas.ti. This is a software that performs qualitative data analysis by categorizing the obtained data, encoding it, relating it, and organizing it into data families. Through Atlas.ti, it is possible to identify keywords that generate inputs. In addition, this software allows the interview data to be captured by categories in semantic networks for better understanding, which allows the relevant information to be displayed graphically.

Preliminary findings

The information obtained from the interviews generated interesting data. The first section provided information regarding the characteristics of the interviewed individuals, such as age, which ranged from thirty to forty-nine years old. This first characteristic allowed to determine that this was a young faculty that was within the time span of both digital transition and digital natives. All participants shared the profession of English teachers in higher education; some of them have other jobs, either in the Ministry of Public Education or in private educational institutions, and even in other fields, like sociology and finance analysis. This second characteristic reflects the reality for many in the country, that is, the need to have more than one job, either for economic, professional, or experience reasons. Regarding the years of teaching experience in higher education, the time ranged from five to twenty-three years. In relation to the maximum academic degree attained, three of them have licentiate degrees in ELT, and the other three have master's degrees. These characteristics are important because they demonstrate that the ELT program at Universidad Americana has a teaching staff that is young, prepared, and experienced in ELT in the context of university education, which allows the complementation between teachers acquiring technological skills as well as experience.

Within the second section of the interview, about teacher training in the use of ICT, the most interviewees knew the term *digital teaching competence*, agreeing that is the knowledge, skills and strategies for implementing ICT, such as the use of technological tools for the creation of learning environments, promoting communication, and improving the teaching process.

The interviewed teachers manifested to have acquired their ICT digital skills, both empirically and through online training in other institutions. In addition, it should be emphasized that all interviewees agreed on being self-taught; they acknowledged that they liked to experiment with new digital tools by themselves, and they had specifically done it through the pandemic.

Regarding the description of their training process in the use of ICT, different criteria were found. In some cases, they described it as simple, as some of them are digital natives and had had previous experience in the use of ICT tools, as well as the attitudes involved in the process of experimentation and integration, like the patience and care that must be considered to maximize the use of these new technologies. In other cases, they indicated that it was a complicated process due to the lack of vision, training, and follow-up by the institutions in matters of methodologies and techniques integrating the use of ICT, such as the creation of learning environments, new perspectives, and virtual models, or distance learning.

Following with the digital competences that ELT university teachers must have, they indicated that it was essential to know about theoretical aspects of ICT, as well as the tools and the objectives of these, the creation and use of digital platforms, use of forums, Quizziz, Kahoot and ebooks. Several agreed that basic technical knowledge about ICT was important, such as knowing the hardware and devices to use, browsing the Internet, and promoting students' empowerment through ICT.

Other relevant ideas were related to the definition of rules and limits on the use of these tools, respecting service hours, communication and personal spaces, as well as the definition of new methodologies, the use of Office packages, the use of IOs, Linux and free software, the use of digital platforms, and the constant updating of knowledge about these tools.

The third section of the interview dealt with ICT appropriation and teaching experience. Regarding the use and incorporation of ICT in their courses, the participant teachers had varied criteria since some focused on their methodology, but others focused on which tools they used. For example, some pointed out that they encouraged collaboration, the use of Internet, the use of reliable sources, and the use of virtual environments. Others focused on which tools they used to develop their courses, but did not describe the methodologies or techniques they implemented, or for what purpose. Some of the tools mentioned are Moodle, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, online quizzes, digital platforms, video podcasts, Kahoot, interactive boards, recordings, and the university's virtual campus.

Among the reasons for incorporating ICT, in addition to the mandatory transition to virtual education due to health protocols and the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviewed teachers recognized innovation, access, ease, and practical use provided by the use of ICT in aspects related to rules, organization and evaluation, and updated teaching knowledge, as well as the ecological use in favor of the environment.

Speaking about the main barriers the participants had faced regarding the use of ICT in university teaching, there was the limited access and connectivity to the Internet by students who live in remote rural areas, as well as the lack of enthusiasm and motivation, the students' reluctance to participate in virtual environments due to a lack of appropriate education and digital culture. Another relevant aspect is the lack of diversity in the use of ICT by students, as well as adaptation processes, and the lack of suitable and controlled equipment and spaces to receive virtual classes.

Following with changes or modifications made in the didactic activities mediated by the use of ICT, in some cases the interview teachers recognized that the changes made were minimal, since they had had some training or experience in the use of ICT and felt confident in using them. They also noted a transition from traditional methods to new ones including ICT. In other cases, they granted that this digital transition has had accelerated certain actions, such as evaluation, data tabulation, automatic checks, and, in addition, a habit of not using paper in favor of the environment is promoted. These being the greatest changes that had been adopted in their courses.

In other cases, the changes revolved around trial and error in the ICT integration process, as well as the activities and resources to be used, the different conditions of the students, the gaps and digital gaps between the students and the lack of support from educational institutions. In addition, there was talk of changes generated by the inclusion of videos, audios, digital platforms, and other novelties, such as videos being recorded by students using puppets and scripts.

Regarding the digital literacy, the participant teachers indicated that, among the tools they used, were Office programs, such as Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint, Word, and Outlook, as well as other word processors, websites to create presentations, such as Canva and Prezi, including the use of infographics, PowToon, Kahoot, Quizziz, Quizzlet, Nitro, Edpuzzle, podcasts, Adobe Reader, and YouTube for video creation and editing.

Among the virtual spaces and collaboration communication platforms with educational purposes used by the interviewed teachers to promote communication are Microsoft Teams

and Moodle, which are the official media of the university, but they also included the use of email and Teams and Moodle instant messaging applications. The tools and resources identified to communicate between members of the student and academic community are WhatsApp groups, forums and announcements in Moodle, Google Meet and Zoom, social networks, video calls, and even experiences with Google Classroom were identified.

Regarding the use of learning management systems, it is interesting to note that none of the interviewed teachers mentioned the use of Cambridge LMS or Cambridge One, even when the use of these platforms is part of the academic requirements in the oral communication courses of the ELT program and in the English courses taught to students of other academic programs at Universidad Americana.

Among the technological devices used by the interviewed teachers are personal computers, both desktop and laptop, the smartphones and, in very few cases, tablets and iPad. Regarding the use of ICT in their own professional development, in some cases, teachers mentioned attending training courses, and those who considered themselves self-taught indicated that they read online material, such as academic publications and magazines, about previous experiences, also manuals and even online videos that turned out to be helpful.

The reflection that they carried out on the use of ICT and on which ICT they thought they should improve their knowledge and application to improve as teachers, the participant teachers emphasized that reflection was indeed extremely necessary to be able to guide the process of didactic planning. According to the participants, didactic planning was the ideal time to evaluate experiences with the use of ICT, both tools and materials, as well as recommendations from other colleagues that are very productive. In relation to ICT skills or knowledge which they considered could improve, they mentioned the use of advanced commands in Moodle, as well as the feedback obtained from students on areas of improvement implemented through Google Forms.

In the last section regarding challenges and teaching commitment, the interviewed teachers mentioned that among the factors to motivate the use of ICT to support the teaching process were mandatory and updated courses or training in the use of ICT and the methodologies and techniques that this entail, as well as the intrinsic motivation in the duty to use ICT in class. These new technologies should be seen as allies that facilitate the teaching process, as well as the awareness of students and the institution about the use of these technologies. At this point, it was mentioned that the changes must come from the academic administration, who are the leaders of the university, promoting training and support for both

teachers and students, since it has been minimal. Virtuality has come to synchronize with the current context, even if the community returns to face-to-face classes.

Within the responsibilities that the use of ICT entails, the teachers indicated that clear rules and instructions to be followed must be stipulated, to avoid distractions, such as social networks or chats in the development of classes, also respecting privacy, since students must be responsible for their own learning process and the teacher is only a facilitator. Other points to consider were that the didactic tools must have a purpose, and both the teacher and the student must understand it, interaction and participation in class must be promoted by turning on the camera and using the microphone.

Among the benefits that teachers have obtained from the use of ICT were the efficient development of work, experimentation and implementation, the speed and agility to search for tool options on the Internet, the tabulation of information, the opportunity to customize activities according to the level of English of the students, instant communication, access to materials and information, economic savings and time for transportation and meals in the university facilities and finally, innovation.

The teachers mentioned that among the challenges they had to face during the adaptation of their courses to a completely virtual environment, due to the pandemic lockdowns, were the search for digital tools, methodologies, defining responsibilities in the students regarding the appropriation of the learning process, empowerment of students, establish rules and limits in virtual environments. Other challenges of great importance were the search for an ideal physical space to teach, preparing the work area, increasing the speed of the internet connection, buying accessories and additional equipment, which resulted in economic expenses for teachers. The transition to the virtual environment was unexpected and the university promoted a drastic change to virtuality, with no further preparation for the teachers due to the pandemic situation.

The last question of the interview about the support from the university in terms of infrastructure and preparation in the use of ICT, the teachers indicated that the university provides the technological infrastructure online through Microsoft Office 365, which includes Microsoft Teams, Moodle, and the virtual campus, but the equipment and the connection are provided by the teacher, being an economic expense paid by the teacher. In addition, it was indicated that extensive preparation or training in the use of technologies was not provided, although short courses were provided to address this problem, but these short training

sessions would be much more effective in a face-to-face or hybrid model in which the practical part is developed and not only the theoretical part.

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