



**EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES OF PAR AND COMMUNICATIVE
COMPETENCE IN CURRICULAR NEGOTIATIONS IN COSTA RICAN
ENGLISH LEARNING COURSES**

ESTUDIANTE

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**Exploring the Possibilities of PAR and Communicative Competence in Curricular
Negotiations in Costa Rican English Learning Courses**

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Abstract

Exploring Participatory Action Research and communicative competence in democratic education and curricular negotiations allow delving into social dynamics, reflection and communication in the target language. As a result, this paper merges theoretical references and the experience acquired through the modules and products obtained when fostering communicative competence and curricular negotiations in my teaching-learning praxis. Since participation and documentation of the experience reflect on the instruments, contexts, and various dynamics in the classroom reality, communicative competence and PAR relate to the background and classroom dynamics, guiding learners and teachers to dialogic and democratic education. Therefore, these processes of constantly integrating needs, contexts, backgrounds, and curriculum present a series of options in the classroom to foster communication and to tailor language learning realities in the class, sharing insights on contexts and requirements when learning a language.

Keywords: PAR, curricular negotiations, communicative competence

Introduction

This essay presents a series of elements in education, communication, and exploration of communicative competence and language acquisition processes. The teaching-learning experience combines the phases of the individuals and collectivity in the classroom, highlighting essential roles of the teaching-learning scenarios. As a result, these elements display a process of transforming the classes into dynamic and participatory learning experiences. For example, implementing communicative competence in my English class as well as exploration and communication show diverse dynamics in societies, mirroring some such as sharing known information and setting other stages for language learning. Also, classroom dynamics through Participatory Action Research (PAR) and curricular negotiations provide additional learning spaces for discussing, exploring, reflecting on, and organizing the goals according to the requirements and contexts of learners and teachers. These educational elements encourage collaborative work between learners and educators in the classroom reality by fostering communication in the target language and achieving communicative competence.

In my experience, introducing English language learners to work with Participatory Action Research (PAR) projects produces communicative practices and active learning environments between learners and teachers to work together; consequently, the classes adopt individual needs and communicative competence through a less restrictive curriculum. As a result, teachers and learners become critical about the importance of backgrounds and contexts when learning a language. In addition, incorporating learning needs of different cultural groups inside the classroom display the relevance of individualized features, such as personality traits, learning styles, and background knowledge while promoting inclusive, culturally relevant, and flexible classes. To illustrate, participatory and inclusive classes have demonstrated interactions and language learning communities in my praxis since a practical use of the target language becomes fundamental when communicating experiences and sharing language learning processes.

As a result, this essay aims to delve into learners' participation, communication, and language acquisition processes through PAR, curricular negotiations and communicative competence. These transformative dynamics of the classroom and society reflect on the teaching-learning experience when constructing the curriculum, and including peculiarities, schemata, and other dynamic elements in language learning. Moreover, exploring the possibilities of Participatory Action Research and communicative competence in curricular negotiations at the Costa Rican English learning courses would prompt transformative and participatory learning communities which share needs, experiences, background and particular needs into dialogic and dynamic classes.

PAR and Communicative Competence in Curricular Negotiations

Exploring the possibilities of Participatory Action Research and communicative competence in curricular negotiations at the Costa Rican English learning courses has taken different research routes due to methodological procedures, variety of contexts, and curricular scopes. To illustrate, authors have been working with action research and curricular negotiation to show the flexibility of the curriculum (Schlein et al., 2019). Also, some other researchers focused on curricular negotiations and communicative competence such as Chen (2020) in his research with Taiwanese primary teachers. However, the aforementioned methodologies did not implement a participatory or reflective process in their research. Brough (2012) examined the democratic principles of the curriculum in New Zealand, showing the increasing level of confidence and competence to collaboratively construct the curriculum, but this exploration did not include the principles of PAR. As a result, the constant balancing between participatory spaces for feedback and reflection as well as communication in the target language orient learning communities to monitor and contextualize diverse dynamics in the classroom and society by encouraging communication and collaboration in dialogic and flexible curricular negotiations. In short, learning about the flexibility and transformational features of language learning curricula prepares teachers and students to recognize, record, and analyze experiences as a language learning community.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) empowers teachers and students to explore and adopt ideas and proposals that connect to social analysis and social action, producing transformative and dynamic interactions. As Lawson et al. (2015) have stated, Participatory Action Research intends to modify unsatisfying practices and structures in education by leading actions and participation that could solve the difficulties stated in the learning environment. Thus, through participation and reflection of the participants, teachers and learners play an active role as critical participants who combine knowledge, experiences, and background with other stakeholders, enriching the educational research process. To illustrate, as a researcher following PAR, my teaching praxis has adopted the voice of the different participants in the language learning environment to foster communication and participation in the classes, so these dynamics in the class have evidenced individual and collective needs when the teacher and the learners exchange points of view and experiences as a language learning community. As a result, teachers and students have additional and familiar learning instances to discuss and negotiate based on contextualized needs. These participatory opportunities in the class have enriched the traditional learning environment since teachers and learners worked together on documenting, designing, and implementing familiar learning contexts and conditions.

Exploring the possibilities of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and communicative competence in curricular negotiations allows reflection and communication in the language learning process since they exemplify the dynamics of society. Due to documenting, participating, and reflecting on the teaching-learning experience, curricular negotiations and representations have fostered a sense of ownership, collaboration and familiarity when designing and negotiating the language learning processes in the curriculum. As stated by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), introducing PAR in the class has evidenced three particular attributes in the learning environment, and those attributes include the product of learning, the material, social, and historical circumstances, and everyday social interactions to transform educational practices. Through the different modules and proposals, my teaching

praxis has included the participation of learners and also other teachers who provided their individual knowledge: backgrounds, experiences, and agency to the immediate collective interactions, so the connection between theoretical references, practice, and the language learning contexts has highlighted the dynamism of the social process in educational research and communication instances in the class. Additionally, registering the feedback and the language learning experience has represented a process between changing lively learning conditions and interdependent elements in language learning, adopting flexible and inclusive actions through interviews, observations, and direct questioning in the language learning environment; hence, analysis and criticism of the teaching-learning praxis has evidenced the educational and social dynamics when teaching.

Due to the political responsibility of education in the country, these possibilities of transformation in the educational praxis must be framed by the national or standardized syllabus in a specific context; following the principles of PAR in language learning contexts, has provided the learning opportunities to document, reflect on and propose the incorporation of collaborative and participatory practices in the classroom. To illustrate, Freire and Shor (2014) have stated that the boundaries of democratic education and participatory classroom realities have stimulated liberating teaching and learning practices, so teachers and learners have worked together on their language learning journey by responding to the predetermined goals, needs and demands of society. Therefore, exploring these possibilities of PAR in the educational system contributes to the documentation, analysis, and reflection of democratic education supported by the experiences, background, and proposals from the language learning community and the theoretical framework on the decisions made by the participants. Similarly, this process of transformation in the language learning environment aims at connecting previous knowledge, language learning experiences, and theoretical background in the classroom to adopt the established setting towards incorporating various perspectives of educational research in terms of the ongoing and democratic language learning process.

In addition, fostering the use of the target language to share experiences and to include particular needs in a familiar learning environment promote both participatory and communicative stages in the class. To clarify, the flexibility and transformational features of language learning curricula and the principles of Participatory Action Research prepare teachers and learners to identify, record, and analyze their experiences in the language learning community through the tools, tasks and contexts in the class. As Noguera et al. (2006) have discussed, involving learners and educators in participatory learning spaces sets a theoretical and practical educational framework to familiar learning instances since they are directly influenced by the decisions made in the language learning process. To clarify, they discussed the results obtained in their study on social interactions, youth empowerment, and active negotiation in the learning community; thus, transforming and adopting PAR in the Costa Rican context contributes to liberating and determining the political, psychological and social components in language learning and in the curricula according to these participatory interactions. These negotiations based on PAR principles allow students and teacher to make informed decisions based on their educational needs. For example, exploring the possibilities of introducing learners to transformational practices in language learning has indicated the relevance of language learners' needs, contexts and responses towards my teaching praxis, so the information gathered in Participatory Action Research has represented a meaningful impact on the teaching - learning conditions, settings, and requirements directly from the classroom reality as stated through feedback and reflection procedures. As a result, PAR has shown familiar and informed decisions in my classes working together within the language learning community as well as fostering the flexibility of the curriculum due to the documentation and feedback provided in the class. Indeed, exploring the implementation of PAR in the Costa Rican reality transforms the language learning space into a cooperative, inclusive, and active learning environment for the participants and researchers, educationally, socially, and personally.

Participatory Action Research and Curricular Negotiations

Learners and teachers evidence particular needs, contexts, and dynamics in the language learning environment that respond to an organized system plan, and this plan allows educators to achieve a better understanding on how to teach and why rather than focusing on what and the transmission of content. Han (2016) has declared that incorporating the decisions and outcomes of teachers and learners in the educational environment emphasizes negotiated pedagogies, cultural and contextual particularities, and the expected realization of communication in the target language; moreover, such processes guarantee flexibility, responsibility and professional judgement in language learning and the curriculum because they orient the pedagogical decisions to the formation and development of language learning identities. To illustrate, my teaching praxis changed once students were exposed to the possibilities of PAR since participation and dialogue have been closer to their feedback, particularly in the blended-learning reality we have been working on due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the design of structured and semi-structured interviews, observation, peer assessment, self-assessment, and feedback sessions in the instruments that the teacher and learners have been using, the organization of the curriculum has reported communicative competences and meaningful learning in my classes. As an example, the exchange of information: comments, discussions, interviews, among others, motivate students to use the target language and to negotiate with the teacher when completing the instruments based on their own perspective. In this regard, Money et al. (2016) have discussed the participation of learners when adopting blended realities in a module through collaborative approaches. They have studied the possibilities of co-creating experiences and planning options to embrace and engage the understanding and self-awareness in the classes by empowering student's voices. As a result, they have reported that language learning and collaborative approaches through the empowerment of learner's voices foster and support students on the responsibilities, decisions, and involvement in the

program (Money et al., 2016). Hence, exploring the possibilities of curricular negotiations through communicative - participatory opportunities, and PAR allow students and teachers to keep up with their language learning realities in a practical and contextualized experience and to work together in the engagement and understanding of the curricular decisions.

Through transformative and collaborative practices in the curriculum, instead of mere imitation or transferring of knowledge, curricular negotiation allows teachers and learners to develop agency in the language learning process. Tsafos (2009) has stated that negotiation of the curriculum contributes to the organization of concrete elements in the language learning process, relevant decision-making and reflection in teachers and students. In addition, the author has proposed the academic delimitations of PAR to express some of the educators' and learners' views, but this information also prompts continued reformation due to the personal participation and assessment of the data gathered in the process.

Consequently, teachers and students are to orient and facilitate the learning process, but the engagement should also respond to the established syllabus and requirements of society.

For example, language learning and communication might generate biased or disconnected information when constructing together educational opportunities in the class, but documenting and gathering information through PAR has displayed an organized guide contemplating learners' and teacher's voices in the classroom. As previously stated, the data gathered would orient the teacher and students towards a consensus in the learning environment, adopting and fostering needs and contexts from the learners, so the negotiation over curricular practices has been dialogic in my teaching praxis because of the communicative spaces provided in the class.

Additionally, meaningful, contextualized, and motivational classes would provide positive spaces for sharing any modification in the praxis and classroom dynamic, trying to incorporate and enrich the learning environment for the teachers and students. Shultz and Oyler (2006) have indicated that teacher stimulation on the learners' responses could involve social action, communicative skills and democracy to the class. For instance, adopting learning needs, aesthetic principles, and technological resources have helped my praxis to

keep track of individual and collective learning contexts and to appeal to various learning experiences in the target language. Due to the adaptation of the resources based on the feedback shared by the learners (direct users), my classes are very dynamic and participatory because my students have expressed they feel listened to when the teacher adopts their previous knowledge and contexts in the class. Additionally, Ozer et al. (2010) have pointed out the flexibility and efforts of PAR across the constant improvement in the participation of the learning environments, so communication skills and Participatory Action Research have reinforced learning standards in the curriculum. Indeed, implementing PAR and communication skills in the language learning community has shown freedom and exchange of information in the language learning settings based on the contexts and needs of the learning community.

Curricular Negotiations and Language Learning

Once learners and teachers introduce curricular negotiations in the classroom, the segregation of pedagogical and curricular requirements meet the individual and collective needs of the students and teachers in the class, generating a descriptive and local curriculum which focuses on the process and the product. Urcid (2018) has stated the relevance of understanding the socio-cultural and psychological premise in curricular flexibility, and he has declared that the transformation in the learning process involves a strategic learning context which exemplifies social dynamics, decision-making process, and multi-dimensional relations, such as collaboration, discussion, and reflection. Consequently, these negotiations in the curriculum raise awareness and ownership in the analysis of social, educational and particular situations in the language learning process and curriculum because of the understanding, production, and dynamics in the class. Therefore, promoting these interactions set the language learning intentions and conditions to reproducing and orienting learning communities and language learning participation. In addition, Tsafos (2009) has declared in his research that the students' participation in a 'negotiating-the-curriculum' process develops a culture of constant interaction, research, and reflection in the

educational environment. To clarify, proposals of transforming my teaching praxis, the inclusion of feedback in the resources and the informal interviews with the learners have demonstrated the involvement and interest of the students to identify purposes and courses of action when learning the target language. In short, curricular flexibility could be achieved in different participatory spaces such as specific assessment instruments, learning strategies, class dynamics or tailored resources in the classroom to negotiate and foster language learning.

However, incorporating the assessment and adaptation to the curriculum in the various ideologies require constant negotiation and curricular monitoring in the language learning process. As a result, the teacher has been able to include a section for comments promoting reflection and critical thinking in the curricular adaptations when fostering students' participation, and learners use the language in meaningful and real contexts since they are constantly exchanging information with the teacher and their peers. Nonetheless, Handsfield et al. (2010) have stated the constant need of standardizing curriculums to reduce or avoid ideological tensions in the resources and language learning process, but they also addressed the theoretical and analytical nature of assessing and adapting multiple ideologies and resources for educators and learners. Thus, when I introduced PAR in my classes, learners' characteristics and backgrounds have incorporated communicative spaces, dialogic and reflective instances in the target language and the standardized syllabi as a base, so the constant exchange of information and experiences in the class have oriented the transformative and participatory realities to flexible and familiar curricula in the documentation of experiences and reflections on their adaptations.

These curricular negotiations integrate dialogic education since teachers and learners are constantly exchanging information, experiences, and knowledge from language learning contexts. To illustrate, Kemmis et al. (2014) have declared that changing practices in schools challenge common understandings and praxis since there is a need to create learning spaces for discussing, transforming and building leadership and negotiations. Also, they have discussed some of the findings on positional leading, creative conditions, and

shared responsibilities at work and life in the school, acknowledging the leadership and transformative nature in these dynamics. Likewise, the experiences in the different modules shed light on reflecting on the teaching learning praxis and assessment in language learning opportunities as teaching - learning opportunities to build agency and autonomy in the learners and the teacher based on a common language learning context by including social interactions in the class, contextualized resources, and shaped up goals and procedures. As Nha (2011) has studied in a class of second-year English majors in a university, the dialogic principles in curriculum could evidence difficulties when negotiating, owing to different ideas and agreeing on educational decisions, but teachers also need to prepare themselves with a wide range of teaching-learning alternatives, including methodologies and materials, and praxis flexibility when adopting these participatory practices in the class. As experienced through the instruments and procedures in my classes and modules, the individual and language learning needs of students and the teacher after curricular negotiations are introduced in the classroom constantly through reflection, assessment, and observations. Besides, through communicative competence, the educator and learners tailor the learning needs to fit their needs and keep track of the educational decisions when learning a language.

Communicative Competence and Curricular Negotiations

The learning process begins in the EFL class but continues in the different circumstances which the learners are exposed to. This demonstrates the functions of learning a language to deal with daily life situations with real people in a non-pre-established environment. To illustrate, Heras(2014) stated that communicative competence depends on the participants' abilities on understanding a series of repertoires and using them on a series of created concepts. Therefore, students and teachers may take advantage of socio-linguistic elements in communicative competence in speaking interaction through dynamism and community identity because teachers and learners comprehend social norms and dynamics of their

classes. To illustrate, the observations, interviews, resources, and reflection exercises in my praxis have demonstrated real life situation, discussions, and negotiations that echoed social, cultural, and educational dynamics they would face when the courses are completed, so these negotiations and the communication process to achieve those agreements mirror language learning instances where the communicative competence in the target language is the means for adopting their claims, backgrounds, and contexts in the class.

Additionally, creating the necessary connections between speaking interaction in a class would assist learners in the local adaptation of information based on their needs, so socio-linguistic competences align in the EFL class towards providing an educational community for the individual but at the same time promoting interactions between the members of this group. Jiang (2016) has argued that engaging students in the decision making process and in curricular negotiation improves the pedagogical choices and increases the ownership in the language learning process. Accordingly, the negotiation process between teachers and students considers the educational goals and content established in the syllabi, but also the participation and discussion between learners and educators include needs and particularities from the learning environment such as activities, techniques, and assessment. Thus, the interactions between teachers and students as well as democratic principles in education orient the learning environment to achieving a common goal together as a learning community with specific routines and dynamics in their language learning process.

Furthermore, communicative competence in language learning has been reinforced through reflection and participation in the class due to the constant exchange of experiences and adaptations between learners and teachers. In this regard, Fielding (2001) has evidenced the transformation of 21st century schooling because students and teachers need to discover their own voices. He has stated that eliciting their statements, learners and educators explore the possibilities of a clear and stronger language learning process on mutual achievement when deciding on the learning pathways. In my experience, once students are introduced to reflection and participatory opportunities, they are willing to use

the target language to negotiate and adopt the language learning environment based on their needs and backgrounds. These voices of teachers and students transform the classroom because fostering communication in the target language and agreeing on the language learning curriculum requires building collaborative learning spaces because learners reported being active participants in this process.

Also, reporting on these collaborative spaces and the information gathered through the learning process merges the opportunities to share and legitimize knowledge because personal and collective needs guide teachers and learners in their classes. Halliday et al. (2018) have highlighted the relevance and appropriateness of PAR in the language learning process as a promising approach for a beneficial, accessible, and evidenced-based platform to positive education and the well-being of learners and educators. Consequently, as stated in their case study, involving participation, competence, and confidence in their learning process develop a series of skills that aid particular and contextual curricular organizations at the school. In my teaching praxis, reflection and learning agency have included particular needs and participatory classroom environments through the implementation and documentation of learners' and teacher's experiences, so validating the discussion, negotiation, and adaptation in language learning contexts allows informed decisions and personal experiences in the class. Moreover, Urcid (2018) has mentioned the adaptation in the learning process from transferring to appropriation of knowledge after learners and teachers guide their language acquisition process through strategic assumptions based on their needs, backgrounds, and experiences. As a consequence, my students reported to be empowered by the learning spaces for negotiation, and also I feel empowered to make educational decisions with my students because we can work together on the feedback provided, individual needs, and participatory contexts built through the different learning spaces since we have been leading and exploring the possibilities of managing our teaching-learning realities.

Similarly, providing spaces for co-construction of language learning curriculum has emphasized the flexibility and the continuum when learning a language because the

exchange of information in the target language is not limited to only tasks, strategies or approaches. To illustrate, Ahmadian and Rad (2014) have declared that the road map course of syllabus involves not only asking learners about their backgrounds and contexts but also highlights the social interaction, reflection, and negotiation through communication, focusing on the content and the procedures to achieve the goals in language learning. This characteristic of stating different educational elements in language learning applies also to both teachers and students when stimulating participatory environments and reflection instances due to the links created and re-created in the language learning experience.

Certainly, when reflecting on and sharing experiences from the language learning contexts, the students and the teacher have built various channels of communication in the target language, so the opportunities for using the target language go beyond the curricular arrangements to involving learners' and teacher's realities and previous knowledge in the class. Moreover, Martin and Cárdenas (2014) carried out a research project developing supportive alliances in the classroom by being more open minded, making decisions and being aware of the teachers and students roles through decision-making practices, curricular negotiation and collaborative techniques. They have shown the positive impact of curricular negotiation and the decision making process in this research concluding that the role of communication is fundamental in the classroom. Particularly, my reflection and transformative teaching-learning praxis has demonstrated that communication improves since students look for spaces to provide and receive feedback of their language learning contexts and also they use other skills to expand their opportunities to express themselves. This participation and interaction to negotiate curricular organizations impact positively the voice of students and the teacher in the language learning process since classroom dynamics are open to merge different contexts and backgrounds in the class.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Participatory Action Research and curricular negotiations benefit from communicative competence to dynamize language learning environments through participation,

documentation and reflection from teachers and learners. These instances explore diverse settings where social interaction, dialogue, and democratic education reflect the dynamics in society, providing real and familiar contexts to the students. Through the implementation of different strategies in the module, the information gathered and the reflection exercises between the teacher and the students, exploring the possibilities of PAR and curricular negotiations in Costa Rica allow an additional learning instance by discussing, exploring, reflecting, and organizing the goals according to the requirements and contexts of learners and teachers. As a result, teachers and learners must be aware of the importance of the background and contexts when learning a language, particularly when introducing transformative and participatory learning communities to share needs, experiences, background and particular needs into dialogic and dynamic classes.

Once learners and teachers are given the opportunity to build communication channels for exchanging their experiences and background, the voices of both represent an active element in the class, and these dynamics of the classroom reflect upon the teaching-learning flexibility when constructing the curriculum. Therefore, agency, collaboration, and organization of knowledge transcend the activities, strategies or resources within the class to other areas for using the target language in the negotiating and construction of language learning environments. By fostering communication and negotiation in the target language, learners and teachers set their educational goals, contents and procedures to accomplish the standards in the national curricula, allowing interaction and curricular negotiations in a participatory learning environment. In my opinion, creating those spaces for implementing PAR and curricular negotiations through communicative competence might require some training from teachers and learners, but transforming the classes into reflective and participatory instances allow students and teachers to work collaboratively and to use the language in various social scenarios, which would be very familiar and meaningful to the language learning experience.


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DECLARACIÓN JURADA

Yo, Rodrigo Josué Cano Morales, cédula de identidad 304540685, estudiante de la Universidad Nacional, declaro bajo fe de juramento y consciente de la responsabilidades penales de este acto, que soy autor intelectual del Trabajo Final de Graduación Titulado **“Exploring the Possibilities of PAR and Communicative Competence in Curricular Negotiations in Costa Rican English Learning Courses”**, para optar por el grado de Maestría en Educación con énfasis en el Aprendizaje del Inglés.



Firma

Heredia, a los 04 días del mes de setiembre del año 2021.

Refrendo

Los abajo firmantes avalamos el Trabajo de Graduación del estudiante Rodrigo Cano Morales, cédula 3 0454 0685, que lleva como título **Exploring the Possibilities of PAR and Communicative Competence in Curricular Negotiations in Costa Rican English Learning Courses**, dado que cumple con las disposiciones vigentes y la calidad académica requerida por el posgrado.

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Fecha: 2021.09.15
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M. Ed Rita Arguedas Víquez
Coordinadora
Maestría en Educación