

Universidad Nacional, Sede Regional Brunca

ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE BRUNCA REGION OF COSTA RICA:

A Collection of
Case Studies by
Undergraduate
Students

Editors

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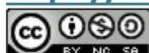
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Presentation

Since its foundation in 1973, the Universidad Nacional has developed initiatives around the teaching of English in the country. Initially, the English, Spanish, and French departments of the former Escuela Normal de Costa Rica and the Escuela Normal Superior joined forces and gave way to the creation of the School of Literature and Language Science. This academic unit has been offering the English Teaching Major (ETM) at the Omar Dengo Campus since 1977. Among the historical events to highlight, it is worth mentioning that between 1981 and 1984, the Major in Literature and Linguistics was offered and then gave way to the Major in Applied Linguistics with Emphasis in English, which was offered from 1985 to 2005. In spite of the efforts made to offer quality degrees that would have an important impact in the country, these were still insufficient to meet the demand for professionalization in language teaching. For this reason, in 1992, the UNA-MEP-BIRF-BID Agreement was signed, whose main objective was to prepare and train in-service teachers in the area of English who did not have a university degree through a teaching program in this area (CONARE, 2005, p. 7).

The previous agreement had a national scope by giving English language teachers from different areas of the country the opportunity to complete their formal education on the Omar Dengo Campus. However, it was not until 1996 that the School of Literature and Language Science and the Sede Regional Brunca (SRB) agreed to offer the ETM in the Southern Region. SRB has continuously offered this program for 27 years. Initially, the program was managed by the Social Development Area at Pérez Zeledón Campus. Due to its strong impact, in 2005, the Language Area was created to provide a more focused participation. With the foundation of Coto Campus in 2004, this program was eventually offered in 2011.

The implementation of this program contributes to the regionalization of higher education, to regional social development through humanistic training, and to the competitiveness of the Brunca Region through the substantive action in the hands of faculty and students. The opportunities this program provides not only respond to the economic realities of the student population, but also to the objectives of SRB at the regional level, by contributing to the critical and humanistic thinking of students.

This program offers courses in linguistics, literature, and applied linguistics originally developed by the School of Literature and Language Science and pedagogical component courses developed by the School of Education. Due to English not being an official language in Costa Rica, the program focuses on English as a Foreign Language (EFL). All of the courses are taught by the academic staff of the SRB. One of these courses is ELM 400 Seminar on innovation, field research, and educational design. This is the last pedagogical course in the program study plan. It provides opportunities for students to develop educational research in their teaching field by guiding students while conducting their own research project. As a main activity, in SRB students conduct a case study that pedagogically strengthens their teaching-learning process and their future professional skills. An ideal step in this process is that problems and challenges addressed in these proposals are preferably identified during their Teaching Practice and in light of the theoretical frameworks studied

during the previous courses of the curriculum. The course supports this process through the analysis of various currents of research in the English language education field. This course places emphasis on the analysis of cases, to allow students to apply concrete methodologies in field studies in the form of answers to the educational problems and challenges posed.

The Editors

About this Publication

This book is the culmination of research projects completed by undergraduate English teaching students from a public university. Each chapter is the result of the collaborative initiatives undertaken by the aspiring teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and the professors who guided them through the research process. This research process reflects the efforts made in one of the final courses of the English Teaching Major that allows undergraduate students to explore classroom realities through educational research. By participating in field research, students advance knowledge about the teaching and learning of EFL as they explore educational environments. The undergraduates seek answers to pedagogical challenges encountered in their teaching experiences while acquiring a deeper understanding of the educational phenomena of language teaching and learning.

Within these pages, readers will find a synthesis of original research, critical perspectives, and innovative approaches. This publication reflects the view that undergraduate research makes an original, intellectual and creative contribution to the discipline while contributing to student professional growth as they embark in a problem-solving task, explore new ideas based on theory and practice, expand their horizons of the discipline, and develop pioneering solutions to the educational issues in the language classrooms. All the research reports included in this book consist of case study designs where a thorough description of the reality encountered is offered and culminates in a pedagogical proposal to face the challenges in the context studied.

From the initial stages of inquiry to the final stages of synthesis, this book gathers the intellectual curiosity and scholarly rigor of undergraduate students. The research projects were grouped into three main topics: Teaching language skills, EFL classroom mediation, and realities beyond the EFL language classroom. These three topics make up the units of the book. A total of 30 students from two different campuses, Pérez Zeledón and Coto, participated as authors of the chapters in this book while they completed the course Seminar on Innovation, Field Research in English and Educational Production. While all research deals with the teaching of English as a foreign language, the educational level in the case studies ranged from a high school setting to a university one. All the projects took place in the southern region of Costa Rica.

Whether you are a fellow researcher, educator, or enthusiast eager to explore the complexities of language teaching and learning, we invite you to join the journey of discovery as experienced by university students. May this book inspire further exploration, inquiry, and interchange in the academic scholarship arising from undergraduate research.

Foreword

Foreign and second language teaching is characterized by constant evolution. Foreign and second language teachers must constantly reinvent and adapt to new challenges in technology, students' learning needs, and the specific demands of their unique teaching contexts. While such an ability to evolve is indeed part of the required profile for second and foreign language teaching professionals to be successful, pre-service and in-service teachers need a strong theoretical and practical foundation to help them adapt to the present demands and changes in the field. As stated by Mann (2005), in addition to a strong theoretical foundation and a space for practice, teachers also need to get involved in some form of classroom inquiry to help inform their beliefs. *English Teaching and Learning in the Brunca Region in Costa Rica: A Collection of Case Studies by Undergraduate Students* is a research compilation of case studies conducted by pre-service teachers to finely tune their teaching beliefs and better understand the demands of their unique teaching contexts. This collection represents one of the latest attempts by the teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) program at Universidad Nacional, Sede Regional Brunca Region (UNASRB) to provide their pre-service teachers with research experience that could help them craft the necessary tools to serve their future students in the best way.

The different studies presented in this collection were carried out by undergraduate students in the TEFL major at Universidad Nacional (Pérez Zeledón and Coto Campuses), and they were guided by Professor Lena Barrantes Elizondo, Professor Beatriz Gamboa Sanchez, and Professor Kevin Brand Fonseca. Throughout the years, professors Barrantes Elizondo, Gamboa Sanchez, and Brand Fonseca have been heavily involved in researching different aspects of foreign language teaching and learning in this context. They regularly disseminate their vast knowledge to their students and other colleagues through professional development events—both local and abroad. Their influence in this collection is seen in the variety of topics showcased in these studies: From innovative practices in the teaching of language skills like grammar and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the teaching of writing to case studies of interaction in the language class, or the impact of different types of materials and textbooks in teaching EFL. In addition, the collection also showcases studies analyzing critical issues such as EFL students' transition from secondary school to higher education, or possible causes of students dropping out of local EFL programs. It is important to mention that each case study presents an interesting final section with practical teaching implications and suggestions or an action plan for other practitioners to follow. It is good and pleasant to see the influence of these three academics on new generations of language teaching professionals and in moving the English teaching field forward in Costa Rica's southern region.

As someone who has closely witnessed the evolution of the TEFL major at UNASRB, I am delighted to see a renewed awareness in pre-service teachers about the benefits of classroom-based research in their professional development. In a similar manner, I would like to add that this is an exciting time for more pre-service teachers in the region to get involved

in research and disseminate their findings to other colleagues in similar or different teaching contexts. While the TEFL program at UNASRB, is characterized by providing pre-service teachers with strong foundational knowledge in different areas (e.g., linguistics, L2 acquisition, L2 pedagogy), the recent involvement of pre-service teachers in research represents a step forward in teacher preparation. Such an experience provides pre-service teachers with the tools to inquire about different types of phenomena in language teaching and find practical solutions to the everyday challenges that arise in their context. Readers of this compilation may identify similar situations that take place in other settings and specific solutions to deal with such issues. Finally, this compilation will set the bar for future research seminars in the program where pre-service teachers will carry out studies to investigate similar aspects in this context. As such, this compilation has already set up a good foundation for future pre-service teachers to engage in research endeavors that could showcase solutions to problems in language teaching and learning.

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THEME 1

Language Skills



Language Skills

With the rise of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1970s, the teaching and learning of language skills for communicative purposes have become the norm in the English language teaching field. As a result, more and more teachers and learners are opting for developing strategies to teach and/ or learn the skills of their interest. According to Kurniasih (2011), learners need to deal with the four skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—and the language system—structure and vocabulary to accomplish communication acts (p. 73). Scholars in Costa Rica have stressed the importance of intensifying efforts to improve the quality of English teaching in the Brunca Region to close the existing discrepancies between the language learning outcomes obtained in the metropolitan area and the peripheries (Brand-Fonseca et. al, 2023). Bridging such gaps requires further research on the teaching and learning practices about the language skills to be able to suggest more culturally relevant pedagogies for the benefit of the learner.

The case studies conducted for this section deal with issues such as the use of artificial intelligence for writing tasks, multimedia as a didactic resource for grammar learning, and the development of the writing skill at a public high school. In the end, the findings that undergraduate students from the Brunca Region can provide in this sense might help orient the efforts to enhance English language teaching and learning in this context by focusing on the proficiency developed in the students' language skills and system.

Professors' Perceptions of the Use of AI in Written Tasks for EFL Teaching in Higher Education

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Abstract

The massive increase of Artificial Intelligence (AI) platforms has impacted the educational field in a complex way and English language teaching and learning is not the exception. In the light of this view, this case study explored the perceptions of English language teachers in a public university towards the use of AI platforms for written tasks. To know this, five English language professors with experience in teaching writing courses and their students were participants in this study. Data from five classroom observations and six interviews about AI platforms used for writing courses were gathered. The study results revealed that no technological device for writing tasks is allowed in class work which prevents students from using any AI platform to develop writing skills. The results also showed benefits that AI may bring to teaching writing such as the development of sub-skills and the accessibility to a variety of resources. One key conclusion is that it is important to keep up with the upcoming AI technology in order to improve the quality of education. These findings may provide professors in higher education with a clear understanding of how to integrate AI into writing tasks while also identifying potential challenges in its implementation.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, AI platforms, writing tasks, English language education, higher education

Introduction

Since its very beginning, Chat GPT (an artificial intelligence program) has revolutionized how people search for information on the internet. According to Fritia (2023), Chat GPT has gotten more than one million users after its launch in 2022. This might show that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) has come to be part of humans' daily lives. In order

to understand artificial intelligence, Hasani et al. (2020) defined it as a computer system that gathers data from different sources to replicate human language abilities and cognition. The massive increase of AI platforms has impacted the educational field in a complex way. AI might have changed the way that written tasks are carried out in and out of the classrooms. For example, the use of grammar assistant programs based on AI like Grammarly, or chatbots such as Chat GPT are some of the AI platforms that might change how students write their tasks nowadays. These programs might have either a positive or negative impact on students' writing skills.

In English language programs, specifically at universities, the use of different AI platforms without proper guidance can lead to unethical use of technology. The concern lies in the capacity of a student to use an AI to generate an essay and solve tasks without the student actually learning how to create one for themselves. Some professors in English language programs may consider that AI platforms, such as chat GPT or Google Bard, do the writing assignments for the students. For example, AI can be assigned to write an argumentative paragraph and it will generate it in seconds. Students then could simply copy it and paste it. This situation might happen because of a lack of teachers and students reigning in AI use. Fritia (2023) exemplified how a chatbot can generate an essay by itself just by providing clear instructions.

AI programs are becoming more and more common in students' lives, which is why it is relevant to know some of the perceptions that university professors might have regarding its use in education, specifically, in written production tasks. Lack of knowledge or concern about their use might prevent professors from the possible benefits AI programs might bring to the production of written assignments. With these perceptions, higher education professors might have a clear idea of how to deal with AI when instructing writing along with some of the challenges that implementation might have. The purpose of this case study is to shed light on how English language professors in the English language programs on a regional campus at a public university perceived the use of AI for written production tasks. This study shares participants' perceptions of using AI for developing writing skills as well as the benefits that higher education professors might get from using it in written production tasks.

AI came to stay in people's lives. Students usually adapt easily to changes. For that reason, it is essential to understand the teacher's perceptions on the use of AI in education. This leads to the research question of this case study: how do English language professors in the English language programs at a regional campus at a public university perceive the use of artificial intelligence for written production tasks? To answer this question, it is necessary to analyze different aspects of the perceptions teachers have regarding AI. For that reason, three subsequent questions were posted: What are the challenges of using AI when developing writing skills? What are the benefits of using AI when developing writing skills? How can AI be implemented in a writing course?

Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence as a Tool for Education

AI is a tool that has emerged and spread rapidly in recent years. For that reason, it is crucial to understand what it is, what it can be used for, and its different types. AI can be defined, according to Hasanni et al. (2020) and Fritia (2023), as a program from computer science that is capable of replicating human intelligence to solve problems. Basically, AI is any type of software that imitates human behavior. The use of AI has been widely spread among a variety of disciplines. Hadidi and George (2023) reported some fields in which AI has been applied such as medicine, science, accounting, sales, auditing, and education. In medicine and science, researchers like Wang (2019) claimed that Google Academic, to give an example, provides a free and accessible platform where researchers can easily look for information, incentivizing more research. Other fields like accounting, sales, and auditing can benefit from AI platforms for the management of Big Data. Finally, education can use AI platforms as a gateway of information that is easily accessible for both students and teachers.

As AI appears in different disciplines, it takes different forms. According to Pokrivcakova (2019), some different types of AI present in the specific field of education are chatbots, machine translation tools, writing assistants, AI-powered language learning software (platforms and apps), intelligent tutoring systems, and virtual reality. Chatbots are software used to carry a conversation instead of speaking with another person (Ansari et al., 2021). In education, language students, for example, can practice with these applications by having conversations with a chatbot in case they do not have someone to practice with. Machine translation tools may help students to understand documents in a foreign language without having to learn that language. Also, it helps language learners to understand words or phrases that they do not know. Writing assistants, such as Grammarly, help students organize their ideas better and avoid grammatical mistakes when writing. According to Viktorivna et al. (2022), learning platforms and applications powered by AI “will solve traditional classroom problems” like diversity in the classroom, lack of attention and motivation, and students’ special needs (p. 264). Intelligent tutoring systems support students by providing them with specific feedback (Jacovina & McNamara, 2016). Panagiotidis (2021) explained that the “most important notion” of virtual reality is the feeling of being there; thus, students could replicate a situation where they use the language in real life.

The Influence of AI on Education

In recent years, new technologies and applications have been shaping and deconstructing the language education system to adapt it to this technological era. Under educational contexts, AI platforms and natural language processing (NLP), which according to Pokrivcakova (2019) is a subset of AI that understands human language and produces a spoken or written response, might bring potential benefits for English language students and professors. It might give opportunities to customize students' learning by enhancing a flexible and enjoyable process. It may be flexible and enjoyable because AI can provide feedback to students in just a few seconds avoiding frustration when carrying out written tasks. This tool may provide professors with new ways to teach. For example, professors can reduce their time when grading papers or giving feedback because of the ability of these platforms to

correct mistakes and detect plagiarism (Rudolph et al., 2023). Also, it may support students in their independent studies (Hadidi & George, 2023; Pokrivcakova, 2019).

Despite the advantages AI platforms may have for education, many professors have the tendency to reject their use in language learning tasks. In fact, they relate the use of AI with unethical behaviors (Pokrivcakova, 2019). Moreover, AI has impacted the way English language students write and has affected their writing skill development. AI platforms are fast and great at writing which some professors might see as a threat to written assignments because students can just copy and paste what the AI generates. In addition, if students misuse these platforms, their writing skills such as genuine work and critical and creative thinking will be neglected which affect their learning in a negative way (Rudolph et al., 2023). In this world, where technology is always one step forward in human skills, it is crucial for professors to embrace challenges, adapt to them, and transform them into opportunities.

AI in English Teaching and Learning

AI brings benefits and challenges to English Learning and Teaching (ELT). The implementation of AI in ELT might provide students and teachers with a variety of tools to improve their teaching and learning process. Sharadgah and Saidi (2022) suggested that AI is expected to produce positive changes. Some of these positive changes might be that it boosts students' autonomy because they can interact with AI platforms anytime and at any place. It also allows professors to create personalized teaching material and learning processes because of the algorithms used. Students may feel more comfortable when practicing their language skills with AI platforms, which might decrease the negative impact of a high affective filter. For example, Gayed et al. (2022) concluded that the use of a chatbot (AI KAKU) improved sentence fluency in students by increasing their ratio of clauses per minute, assisting the writing process, and making corrections in spelling and grammar structures in real time. Another benefit is that language students learn faster using AI because of real-time translation (Hadidi & George, 2023). This happens because students have the opportunity to correct their mistakes with real-time feedback, compare their writing tasks with ones created by AI platforms in order to monitor their progress, and ask the AI platforms to evaluate their papers. The implementation of AI on ELT has improved digital language learning because it creates personalized lessons for students and gives them the freedom to learn at their own pace (Pokrivcakova, 2019).

The impact of AI is not only positive but also negative. Anson and Straume (2022) indicated that some students prefer to copy and paste the generated compositions of AI without any attribution, which leads to committing plagiarism. The problem with students doing this is not only the fact that they are claiming information not written by themselves as their own, but they are not developing any writing skill to produce a written text. This is a serious problem in language learning because the main purpose of teaching, which is that students develop their language skills, remains unachieved. Additionally, AI may use unreliable information from the internet that students may use without questioning where this information came from. A challenge connected to this issue is the similarity of a composition created by AI and humans. Hadidi and George (2023) and Anson and Straum (2022) have

proven that it is difficult to differentiate between what is produced by humans and by AI. This becomes a problem because teachers do not know if students are producing their own writing pieces, or just copying and pasting the text from an AI platform. This situation challenges language learning as students' linguistic deficiencies cannot be identified or addressed.

Research Methodology

The current research is qualitative in nature. It aims at shedding light on the perceptions professors at a public university have regarding the use of AI when assigning written tasks. Qualitative research focuses on understanding a phenomenon in depth. According to Cresswell (2015), in qualitative research, researchers rely more on participants to learn and explore about an issue rather than the literature. This is why qualitative research gathers information from real-life contexts. The instruments used in this type of research such as interviews and observations allowed researchers to explore the problem in a natural setting which is the integration of AI platforms in writing tasks and collect data from participants' real experiences in the EFL classroom. As in any qualitative research, this case study learns from participants' opinions, beliefs, and behaviors. Moreover, the questions used can vary from person to person which gives more opportunity to understand a topic from different perspectives.

This research follows a case study design, which is defined, according to Baxter and Jack (2003), as an in-depth study in a real-life context that consists of one or more instances of a situation. Case studies are centered on the participants' perception on a specific phenomenon, as it is the case of this research. This research is carried out in a real-life context, and it is based on the perspective of the participants. The real-life context in this case study is EFL writing courses in an English Teaching Major (ETM) and an Associate's Program (AP) in a public university. Then, the perspective of the participants included the professors' perceptions on the use of AI in writing tasks. The unit of analysis of this case study is the perceptions on the use of AI platforms in written tasks of English language professors in the English language programs in a regional campus in a public university.

Context and Participants

The context for this case study is a regional campus of a public university in Southern Costa Rica. The research includes two language programs, an ETM and Associates' Program. These two programs have some differences. For example, ETM lasts four years while AP lasts two years. Also, ETM focuses on pedagogy and includes nine teaching courses while the AP is a minor that does not include any pedagogical course. However, in language learning and linguistic level goals, the two programs share similarities. Regarding writing courses, the ETM has a wider range, and they emphasize research and investigations through the courses Academic Reading and Bibliographic Research. On the other hand, AP has four courses to develop writing skills. Participants in this research include faculty students enrolled in writing courses of both programs, which were offered during the current semester. The courses were Integrated Skills 2 (grammar and writing), Essay, and the Writing Workshop.

The participants were four professors with a master's degree, one professor with a PhD, and the coordinator of the foreign language department with a master's degree. The five

professors vary in age from thirty to fifty years of age and vary in gender. All the professors share a similar educational background of being students in the same institution they now teach in. The coordinator has held the position since 2021 in the Foreign Languages department. The teaching experience of the professor participants varies from 27 to 11 years. Their teaching experience on the campus varies from 26 years to eight years. Similarly, the participants' experience teaching writing courses varies from 19 years to eight. The student participants were observed in different writing classes. Students were observed in a class of Integrated Skills 2, an essay writing course, and in a writing workshop. To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms throughout this study.

The sampling strategy used in this case study consisted of criterion sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). For that reason, the chosen participants shared three specific characteristics: their teaching experience, their educational background, and their workplace. First, the participants should have teaching experience on writing courses to ensure they have knowledge on how writing was taught in the past, so they know the methodologies used before access to AI became so common. By doing this, they can provide a perspective on the impact of AI on teaching writing in the present. Second, the participants should share the same educational background by having an English Teaching degree in English language teaching so that all of them experienced a very similar education preparation at some point. The last characteristic is the workplace environment since participants should work in the same campus of the same public university. By choosing this selection criterion, it was ensured that participants were familiarized with the language programs and the desired outcomes of the major.

Classroom Observation

The classroom observation collected information about the usage of AI platforms in English language writing tasks during class time. A total of five observations were carried out while the writing class was developed to three different groups. Each observation lasted one hour and forty minutes. The researchers observed the groups in pairs or alone. This data-gathering method was suitable for the research purpose because it gave the opportunity to observe the studied issue in its natural environment, which was the actual writing class. The observation guide consists of five parts. The first one aims to gather data and identify if AI platforms are used in class or not. The second one records how AI platforms are implemented in class. The third part helped understand how students are instructed regarding the use of AI. The fourth one aimed to record activities in which AI is used. Finally, the last item helped describe students' reactions regarding the use of AI.

Faculty Interview

With the purpose of learning some of the perceptions university professors have regarding the use of AI platforms in writing courses, an interview was conducted to five different professors. These interviews were conducted over a period of two weeks. The days and hours were scheduled as they best suited the professors' availability. These interviews were fundamental to this research because they gathered information from people who have taught these types of courses for many years. Also, the data collected provided detailed information on the professors' opinions about this matter. This information helps to learn

their various points of view. The interview guide consists of eight questions. The first six, focus on the knowledge, integration, effectiveness, and usage professors possess, perceive, and do related to these kinds of platforms. The last two focus on the challenges and benefits professors think can arise when using AI platforms in writing courses.

Coordinator Interview

The third interview collected information from the Foreign Languages Department coordinator's perception toward the use of AI platforms for writing tasks. The interview collected information about the understanding the coordinator has on AI platforms, the way in which they work, and the current variety of related resources. The interview also explored the major constraints AI can have and their negative impact on the development of writing skills. Finally, one last question refers to the decision-making process of the faculty when allowing or denying the free use of AI platforms in each course.

Trustworthiness

This research is reliable because key aspects provide trustworthiness. First, this research has credibility because the data were collected from multiple sources, such as interviews and classroom observations. Also, researchers have a high level of exposure to the phenomenon under study due to the observations and interviews made. Then, the investigation met dependability since the four researchers coded the data collected and followed inter-rater reliability. A decrease of possible bias in data analysis was achieved because of this feature. Finally, this research has transferability for its thick description and deep understanding of the issue. The researchers brought thick descriptions of the data collected that pictured every possible detail for the understanding of the reader. In addition, the careful description of the context and setting helped to get an in-depth comprehension of the use of AI in the context studied. Thanks to thick description, this investigation might be useful for other researchers in other locations who could be interested in understanding the phenomenon or conducting similar studies.

Findings

This section includes the findings of the data analysis process. It included all data from classroom observations, and interviews to address the research questions. Thematic analysis was used to organize and present the information obtained. Six main findings are explained as follows.

Variety of AI Resources When Developing Writing Skills

Findings in this study revealed that professors are informed about a wide variety of ways in which students can take advantage of the resources available when using AI platforms to improve their writing skills. Some informants explained how a chatbot, in this case Chat GPT, may provide a variety of resources students can make use of. Most professors in the interviews gave different examples of what they consider to be beneficial for students' writing skills. Robert, for example, suggested to his students that they could use ChatGPT to request samples of the writing work they had to produce to use as a guide. In this way, they can recognize the structure of the paragraph. Similarly, Jacob mentioned that AI platforms help students get input that native speakers use, which helps students learn natural

collocations and words, so they learn how to write in a more natural way. Thus, the data provided by the informants proposed that students can use AI platforms as a rich resource for references regarding words and specific structures.

Another benefit that participants in this study mentioned regarding the use of AI is to use it as a proofreading tool. Two examples mentioned were Grammarly and Turnitin which can provide different ways to review a text. They brought up the existence of word processing applications that can assist students in the correction step of their draft. This can be used as a resource for correcting mistakes and learning how to avoid them. Kimberly said that if a person can afford the paid version of Grammarly, it even gives detailed explanations. This allows students to not only correct their mistakes but also understand them, ensuring that students use their own knowledge instead of solely relying on the application. Another tool that some informants mentioned was Turnitin. Jesús stated that Turnitin helps to “check their writing and make sure they don't have, they didn't, you know, commit plagiarism.” This tool provides feedback on aspects that are related to writing format; for example, issues with references or quotations that students may have which lead to plagiarism. Both AI platforms can be used as a reviewing tool that helps advanced learners to check mistakes while learning how to avoid them in the future.

Development of Accuracy and Sub-skills through the Use of AI

AI platforms help students develop accuracy when writing. In the interviews, two professors mentioned at least one way in which accuracy is enhanced. The two professors agreed on the benefits of AI platforms; while Robert said that it can work only as a guide for students and provide explanations (ChatGPT), Jacob reported that it helps students write more naturally (Grammarly). These AI features lead students to an improvement in their writing accuracy because they learn different structures in which they can formulate a sentence. In that way, they might be able to choose the most suitable option depending on the task. Moreover, students might achieve the capacity to organize their written ideas in a more straightforward way.

Under the same umbrella of benefits, AI platforms help students improve other sub-skills like grammar, vocabulary and spelling. In fact, three professors shared similar opinions about them. One of them, professor Jesús, said “they can use Grammarly to improve their grammar, vocabulary use and other aspects of the language, like conciseness and correct vocabulary and all that.” Then, Naomi agreed with the point that AI platforms work as an aid for students to expand their vocabulary and their grammatical structure knowledge. Lastly, Kimberly mentioned that some platforms like Grammarly or Word Processing may help students check their grammar, choose different words to express ideas and check their spelling. Spelling, grammar, and vocabulary are some of the sub-skills which AI helps students develop.

Professors' Lack of Training in Implementing AI for Writing Instruction

One of the most mentioned challenges by the participants was lack of AI implementation training. Actually, every professor expressed they needed training on the use of AI platforms in educational settings. They mentioned that what they know is due to their

own research on the topic. There is no training program offered by the university. As Jacob said, “many people are talking about that, but nobody has, I don't know, prepared like a training session on that or anything.” This shows that even though the use of AI platforms is a topic of concern in the institution, there still is no formal training set up to address it. Jacob said that this is because technology advances faster than education. For example, Robert mentioned that if a professor wants to use an AI platform, “you have to get to know it very well, right? So first you have to explore it.” However, it may be time-consuming to learn how to use a platform by oneself. By offering quality workshops and teaching about AI platforms, the institutions may be taking a step toward facing this challenge that professors encounter in the classroom and that might be limiting students’ knowledge on how to use them positively for their language learning.

Another concern regarding the lack of training mentioned by the professors is that students know more about AI platforms than them. If they do not know how to use them, students will learn faster than professors. Jacob said that “students know more about using those AIs than teachers do. So first we need to learn how to use them.” This means that it is necessary to know what they can do using those platforms. Jesús stated, “We [professors] have some vague ideas of how to use them, but we need more training on how to integrate those into the classroom.” While some professors have vague ideas of the platforms, students not only may know the platform very well but also, they may find a way to hide its use unethically. Some professors mentioned that the unethical way of using AI is asking it to do the tasks completely. For that reason, this lack of training is an enormous challenge that professors face.

Students Unethical Use of AI Platforms in Writing Tasks

Students' unethical use of AI platforms when developing writing tasks might generate some dependency from students and distrust from professors. Ana, the coordinator, pointed out that students are very dependent on technology which has brought about basic language learning problems such as the misspelling of words and having a poor lexicon to express ideas. Along with Ana, professor Jacob mentioned that if students use AI platforms every time that they write, they might not be able to write anything on their own. They will always need assistance when writing which will prevent them from becoming independent writers. This dependency would negatively impact students' language skill development in the target language because they would not increase their capabilities to the fullest. Another challenge that might arise is the distrust by professors to students. Professors Naomi and Jesús referred to this in the interview. Naomi explained that it is hard to determine if students are using AI platforms ethically. She said that there is always a little bit of distrust because students can go the easy way. In the same line, Jesús explained that when students are assigned to write at home, it is not easy to know if students used an AI platform or not. Trusting students with the vast range of AI platforms that exist is quite a challenge.

One more unethical use considered by some of the interviewees is that students copy and paste information to hand it in as their own work and production. From the interviews, three professors commented on this matter. Jacob noted that because of laziness students would not think on their own. They would just copy and paste what the AI creates. Then,

Robert said “what is wrong is to copy and plagiarize” indicating that he is not in favor of using AI platforms if the information is copied and pasted and not produced by the students. Lastly, Kimberly, remarked that students focus on getting good grades and being good students, not on actually making sure they are learning. This will have consequences later on when they have to work and put into practice the skills that they did not develop because of unethical use of AI. When students use AI platforms to copy and paste, they are just affecting themselves. By copying and pasting a text to hand in as an assignment, students prevent themselves from gaining and enriching their writing skills.

Professors’ Conflicting Perceptions toward AI Platforms

As the interviews were conducted, it became clear that the professors’ perception toward AI platforms not only vary from person to person, but their own opinion gave conflicting views. Most professors choose to give reasons as to why AI platforms can be good for the development of writing skills in their students while providing a list of counter points to this notion. Jesús for example said, “I have told them that they can use Grammarly to improve their grammar, vocabulary use and other aspects of the language, like conciseness and correct vocabulary.” Jesús favors Grammarly as an aiding tool to help students in those skills. At the same time, he later corrects himself saying, “If you are going to hand in an essay and you use Grammarly before handing it in, it’s going to be perfect in terms of grammar, vocabulary, probably punctuation, and conciseness.” Clarifying that letting Grammarly do all the corrections without the students having a part in it will not have the desired effect which is the development of the mentioned skills.

Lack of research on the field or availability of sources that disprove the professors’ perception could be the source of uncertainty regarding the use of AI platforms and their improvements of writing skills on students. Ana, for example, as coordinator, said that students can use AI in their drafting of the papers to correct mistakes. She also used AI herself, showing some knowledge of how AI platforms operate and what results students may get from using them. In contrast with a repeating answer in the interviews that is the lack of knowledge most professors have of how to use AI platforms; her experience gave another perspective from someone who uses AI platforms. In regard to the impact AI might have on students’ writing skills, Ana lacks a definitive answer for this question she explained, “So it’s always been this fight with how much of it is actually helping and how much isn’t. And that’s not an answer I have right at this moment.” Even understanding how AI platforms work and how to use them is not enough, the lack of evidence of correct usage causes a concern that professors cannot solve by themselves. More research about the effects of AI platforms in the development of writing skills is needed.

Implementation of AI in Writing Tasks

The interviews revealed that some professors decide whether to include AI platforms in writing tasks or not. Some professors mentioned that they would recommend AI platforms such as Grammarly or Turnitin to their students to improve their writing skills. In fact, professors Jesús and Kimberly agreed that Turnitin is a useful AI platform that helps students to check their pieces of writing and check for plagiarism. Even though they mentioned that they recommend it, they do not use it in writing tasks in their classes. As Kimberly said, “I

have never taught it in my classes”. Other two professors also reported that they did not integrate the AI platforms for the writing tasks. However, Robert commented that he had told their students that they can use AI platforms in their writing assignments if they do not just copy and paste what the AI says. His decision is supported by the coordinator's comment about how faculty professors are free to decide if they want to use AI platforms in their classes or not. Thus, it seems that the implementation of AI platforms in writing tasks is not prohibited, instead it depends on the professors.

The observations showed that there is no integration of AI platforms in the writing courses. In fact, AI platforms use was not allowed in the classrooms during writing activities. The students were asked to complete their writing assignments without technological devices. They used paper and pencil only. Also, the students used printed anthologies in the writing courses and completed the tasks inside the classroom. In fact, every writing task had to be done in the classroom, not at home so that the students did not have the chance to use any AI platform in their assignments. This leads to a noticeable preference for printed material inside the classroom. During evaluated tasks, such as writing an essay, the professors said that AI platforms were not allowed. This strategy was used because students would not develop the expected competence by using AI platforms because they tend to copy and paste information or even entire essays, so professors decided to do it that way to prevent this situation. In addition, because AI platforms were not part of the class, students were not instructed on how to use them. As a result, since the use of AI platforms and technological devices is not encouraged in class, students are not learning how to use them.

Writing Activities and AI Platforms

Most writing activities observed were about specific parts of the writing process while only one activity included the production of a complete text. Within the activities observed none of them included the use of AI platforms in any step of the learning process. The tasks were carried out by the professors in traditional ways using textbooks and a whiteboard. To perform the activities, students mainly used printed anthologies. For the explanation of the activities, the professors used varied methods like explaining on the whiteboard, directing students to the Virtual Classroom, and showing the instruction by projecting a Powerpoint presentation or a digital anthology on the whiteboard. Some professors expected the students to not use any technological device while performing a task. In fact, dictionaries used in class must be printed ones and all writing must be done with paper and pencil. All the tasks were explained and performed without a direct usage of AI platforms.

Some students used AI platforms in class on their own. The use of Google Translate was the most frequent, but this was not a widely spread practice. Many professors have clearly taken measures to avoid the usage of AI platforms in their classes to this regard Jacob expressed, “I prefer them to use their brains”. This professor had students write by hand and use print dictionaries. Some professors have mentioned their stance of not allowing technological devices when students have to perform writing tasks. Even with professors like Robert that showed a more positive opinion regarding the use of AI platforms for the development of writing skills, at the moment of observing his class, AI platforms were not

implemented. In conclusion, AI platforms are used by students without the open approval of the professors.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has shown that all participants mentioned at least one way in which AI platforms might be helpful for improving writing skills. Many informants suggested proofreading as a major use of AI platforms when writing. Moreover, some participants highlighted that AI platforms may help students develop their writing accuracy, and sub-skills such as grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. Even though all of them agreed that there might be some benefits, no one implemented AI in the classroom. Therefore, one recommendation drawn is that professors devote class time to instruct students on how to use AI when proofreading their work.

Another key conclusion is that professors have autonomy to decide whether to include AI platforms in writing tasks or not. However, some professors tend to avoid implementing AI due to printed material preference. In fact, writing tasks were all performed using paper, anthologies and pencils; in fact, professors do not allow the use of any technological device in class. Some professors reported that some reasons not to use AI platforms in writing tasks are because students may just generate the tasks with the help of AI and not write the tasks themselves. They also mentioned that they have witnessed a certain level of decrease in the linguistic competence of students in recent years. The results of this study suggest that the incorporation of AI platforms and technology in writing tasks requires clear guidelines to be part of the writing process. Taking into account these results, it would be advisable for professors to start integrating AI platforms that they think might be useful for writing courses. Furthermore, professors should instruct their students on how to use AI platforms as a guide for improving their writing and competence in the classroom.

Taken together, the results of the case study suggest that the main challenges professors face are distrust and lack of knowledge on AI platforms. The lack of trust is due to the usage students give to AI. The threat of students copying and pasting their assignments was mentioned multiple times. Controlling how students use AI outside of the classroom is almost impossible; however, professors can take some measures to control AI usage inside the classroom. Setting rules and introducing students to some AI platforms could help students in several ways. By setting clear boundaries students would be more aware of the consequences of the use, and at the same time, they will know how they can use them without getting into trouble.

The professors' uncertainty and lack of knowledge about AI was evident. Some professors provided conflicting opinions as they mentioned how they could apply AI platforms in the classroom but later claimed that AI platforms did not help students learn. Moreover, professors only knew most platforms by name and had actually never used them before. There is a clear lack of knowledge about the platforms and their effectiveness, which can only be solved with more research with concluding evidence about AI platforms and their impact on teaching and learning. Professors should consider trying these AI platforms and get more information about their effectiveness to understand how to address them, as AI is here to stay. One recommendation to the institution is to provide training sessions on ways to

implement AI platforms so that professors can incorporate them in writing courses. This training should consider AI platforms that may be more suitable for their classes, goals, and needs.

Action Plan: Institutional Training to Integrate AI for Writing Tasks in the EFL Classroom

The evidence from this study suggests that the main challenge is professors' lack of training on the use of AI for writing tasks. Because of this situation, it is necessary to create an action plan in the form of workshops on the implementation of AI in writing tasks. The objective of these workshops is to inform professors on how to implement certain AI platforms in their writing classes. The target audience for this workshop is professors from a regional campus in a public university. These workshops consist of three different sessions, one per week. Each session will cover two AI platforms. Each workshop should last three hours. These sessions are developed by the researchers and an expert on the use of technology for EFL teaching. The methodology for each workshop is divided into three stages. The first stage is to learn about each platform in general and what can be done with them. The second stage is to learn how to use the platform. Finally, attendees will be asked to design an instructional activity for writing tasks using any of the platforms explained during the workshop. The platforms to be included in the workshop are: Grammarly, Turnitin, Sudowrite, ChatGPT, Consensus and Research Rabbit.

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A Case Study on the Role of Multimedia as a Didactic Resource for English Grammar Learning

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Abstract

Multimedia as a didactic resource refers to both the compilation of sources of text, audio, and video and the creation of software and hardware for teaching purposes. In the English language classroom, multimedia might benefit the process of learning by making it a goal-oriented, participatory space. This study investigated the role of multimedia as a didactic resource for high school students' when learning grammar. Through a qualitative approach, a group of ninth grade students and the teacher were recruited in a public high school in Corredores. The results showed that the teacher is aware that using multimedia when teaching can make the process of learning the language easier. Additionally, the students agreed that there is a significant number of digital tools that can help teachers create and innovate their teaching process for students to benefit from multimedia. Both students and teachers consider that the implementation of this type of materials and resources is useful to enhance and enrich their teaching and learning. Unfortunately, learners do not have the necessary internet connectivity in their institution or homes which, eventually, might lead to unequal learning conditions.

Keywords: Multimedia use, learning grammar, students' proficiency, didactic resources, technology

Introduction

Several methods and strategies to teach different language skills have arisen within the English language instruction. Grammar is not an exception, even more when it highlights the importance of the skill to build the target language. Among the strategies to enhance the learning of this sub-language skill, multimedia takes a role as a didactic resource. Qosimova (2022) shared that multimedia presentations have entertainment value for students; videos provide extra stimulation, and photocopiers allow content to be quickly reproduced and distributed. Also, he shared that numerous studies show that digital-based multimedia can improve learning and retention of the material presented during an individual or session class, as compared to traditional lectures or study materials that do not use multimedia materials. Qosimova explained how multimedia resources have been useful for teaching purposes as they increase the interest level of students, their memorability, and the students' study capacity. It is not hard to look at the fact that multimedia enhances the learning process of any

skill, considering grammar as one of it. In fact, de la Cruz et al. (2014) explained that language learners seem to obtain advantage from the use of multimedia for educational purposes. By means of input and output-based multimedia programs, multimedia features enhanced L2 vocabulary and grammar.

Multimedia use has recently increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which made people around the world live and learn through technology. Due to the number of patients infected with the coronavirus, many countries and institutions started offering remote classes by using online platforms such as Google or Zoom. Renu (2021) affirmed that students engaged in distance learning are getting skilled in several internet-based technologies, helping them think critically and become innovative. Consequently, life changes and technological devices have become more fundamental in people's lives. This technological change in education has made students feel more comfortable with and interested in their studies through the implementation of tools and audiovisual (AV) elements that boost their learning process. Mensah (2022) claimed that the AV materials used in teaching makes learning more interesting and effective. Consequently, AV materials can be provided and applied in the classroom by technological tools that open numerous options for teachers and students. These tools indicate that the AV input improves the role of multimedia resources in the teaching and learning process to make it more relevant for visual students. On the other hand, although there are increasing resources of multimedia and technological tools, there are still gaps in educational settings regarding the implementation of technology in many institutes that might incise the students' learning. Charpentier (2013) investigated that there is a growing need to integrate technology into all areas of education, and the field of language teaching is not an exception.

The importance of this case study is key, firstly, to get a deep understanding of how the use of multimedia resources might improve student grammar competence. Secondly, it provides an overview for the Ministry of Education (MEP), in which they might set down educational approaches concerning how multimedia can be used for learning the second language. Thirdly, the study allows gathering data directly from students' experiences while studying grammar with multimedia. Accordingly, the purpose of this qualitative case study is to research the role of multimedia in the ninth graders' grammar learning process at a public high school in Corredores. Therefore, it is important to identify the use of multimedia in the institutional setting. Additionally, this paper explored the usefulness of multimedia to teach grammar from the teacher's perspective, as well as to know the teacher's preparation regarding the use of multimedia as a didactic resource. Finally, the study sought to know about the participants' perspective about the efficiency of multimedia and its impact on the student's proficiency.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

Central Research Question

What is the role of multimedia resources in the learning of grammar in a ninth grade group at a public high school in Corredores?

Subordinated Questions

1. How are multimedia resources used for learning grammar?
2. What perspectives do the students have regarding the contribution of multimedia in their proficiency?
3. What recommendations do the participants provide to use multimedia as didactic resources in the grammar learning process?

Literature Review

The following section includes a literature review that contributes to identifying, analyzing, and synthesizing the role of multimedia for grammar learning. The information, which is closely related to the topic, was taken from primary and secondary sources from databases such as ProQuest, Ebooks Central, Academic Search Ultimate, and Google Scholar. Some information was also taken from websites and journals that provided the necessary documentation for the research.

Multimedia Contribution to Grammar Learning

Multimedia has contributed to the quality of English language teaching and learning process, adding new and dynamic tools that enhance the procedure of developing a theme or a skill such as grammar. Patel (2022) defined multimedia not only as the compilation and mixed media sources of text, audio, and video, but also as creations of software and hardware for teaching purposes. Additionally, he explained the concept of educational technology as the study and ethical practice for the students to improve their abilities by using appropriate technological processes and resources. However, the implementation of new resources does not guarantee a high effectiveness in the classroom development and teaching process. What multimedia can offer to lessons and students is well explained by Pattemore (2022), who claimed that “with multimedia, the process of learning can become more goal oriented, more participatory, flexible in time and space, unaffected by distance and tailored to individual learning style, and increase collaboration between teachers and students” (p. 3). In fact, the classroom becomes more dynamic with the implementation of new technologies and tools while teaching a sometimes challenging theme or skill, such as grammar.

Multimedia includes an open and wide range of materials and tools; one of them is applications. While some applications can be adapted and transformed for teaching purposes, there are some specific applications designed and created specifically for teaching. Gunawardhana (2017) remarked that AV applications can be used for educational reasons, obtaining positive effects in students. Teaching difficult subjects and skills are enriched by the effects of using multimedia resources. In fact, several applications and websites help learners to improve their skills. One element to consider when using this resource is that if applications are not available, the most common tools of multimedia, such as films, can be adapted for teaching purposes. Even though, in the case of grammar, the options can be perceived as limited, if a teacher selects multimedia material, it can help improve this demanding skill. Actually, Atakul (2022) claimed that films can contribute to the process of learning grammar structures if the resource is implemented carefully. Due to the accessibility and variety of multimedia, there are options for grammar teaching which can eventually

change traditional teaching approaches to more interactive ones.

Audiovisual Input as Multimedia for Grammar Learning

AV input in teaching is used in a vast number of manners in the classroom environment. In teaching, it is possible to use different processes, strategies, and methods to teach as well as to learn. AV learning is closely related to the use of multimedia that involves sound (auditory stimuli) and sight (visual stimuli) in the learning process. Dressman (2020, as cited in Plotnikova, 2022) shared that an important characteristic of AV input that makes it different from other kinds of input (e.g. textual, audio) is its multi-modality; it is defined as a blend of multiple different systems or significations to convey a single or unified message or meaning. AV input might involve playing a video by using imagery and sound to foster communication. AV input can be implied in the learning process through experiences involving the audio and gathering of images.

To refer to some strategies that use AV input, Plotnikova (2022) explained that the strategy of using multi-modality highlights the use of a third element in the AV input process, the on-screen text that mirrors the audio. It does not only have to do with audio and image but also with text. In fact, there are two modalities of on-screen text. One contains the video as textual support in the same language as the audio while the second one has the video as textual support translated into a language that is not the audio language; this AV input strategy used for education purposes can stimulate L2 development. On the other hand, another strategy in relation to AV input is the bimodal input. Long (2020) referred to bimodal input as input that is given in oral and written form at the same time as reading a story while listening to a recording. One example of this is an audiobook. Second, it might include a combination of oral and visual input such as watching a video. Third, it might be the written and visual elements combined such as a silent movie with subtitles, or the (tri-modally) oral, written, and visual such as a movie with sound and subtitles. Moreover, studies by Webb et al. (2013) and Malone (2018) have obtained promising results for bimodal (oral and written) input, but additional research is required.

Learners' grammar learning might be influenced by the effective use of AV input aids. Plotnikova (2022) argued that very little research has specifically addressed grammar learning through AV input, and even fewer through original version materials. Nevertheless, there are findings that reveal the efficiency of AV input in education. Kuppens (2010) and Matielo et al. (2015, as cited in Plotnikova, 2022) addressed that subtitles may have the potential to lead to grammar uptake after an extended exposure to AV input. In addition, Lee et al. (2020) contrasted that subtitles may also facilitate development in the use of L2 grammatical features. They explained that access to captions is expected to ease demands on word recognition processes, in which learners get more attentional resources available to allocate to the grammatical features entailed in the input. Consequently, they can learn more of the target grammatical constructions. To emphasize the effectiveness of AV input, Duchesne et al. (2022) shared Charlie's case, a boy that had difficulty with fine motor coordination which made handwriting laborious and slow. Charlie's teacher decided to try assistive technology to support Charlie in his writing. In this case, it was a computer that read back (auditory) to him what he wrote so that he could hear the errors that were not visually evident to him. After two

months working with the program, there were actually positive results. Charlie's performance revealed complex sentences, advanced vocabulary, and considerable pride in his work, in which a program about assistive technology that involved reading as auditory stimuli from written input made it possible for Charlie to continue improving in his learning process.

In conclusion, there are key contributions multimedia resources provide to English language education. This information enriched and guided this research. Different sources and researchers showed a strong opinion about multimedia in the educational sector which seems to be highly relevant for their uses and adaptability. The existing information covers and specifies overarching aspects that can help new researchers and teachers to find conclusions and opinions about the topic. Unfortunately, information about grammar was scarce, and there were very few research studies specifically addressing grammar learning through multimedia; as a result, one of the main reasons for this paper was to provide relevant information to fill this gap and add a new perspective and opinion about the use of multimedia to teach grammar in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

Research Methodology

This section introduces the methodological steps used to answer the research questions of the study. The following section describes the research approach, which also introduces and explains the design of the study. The participant and context section tackles a description of the site and educational setting and provides information about the participants of the study: their age, level of education, linguistic level, gender, number of students in the groups, the type of program, curriculum, and the criterion sampling. Finally, the data collection includes a description of the instruments used, their purpose, and suitability.

Research Approach

This study followed a qualitative approach which as defined by Small (2021, as cited in Aspers and Corte, 2019) as “an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied” (p. 547). Accordingly, the qualitative approach aims to discover a deep understanding of the topic under study and relatively significant findings which was the aim of this study. Additionally, the research design used was a case study because it involves an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively confined phenomenon); the case study is a particular approach for defining cases, not a way of analyzing cases or a way of modeling causal linkages (Gerring, 2004, p. 341). In this sense, this case study's purpose was to define the case which aligned with the qualitative nature, scope, or meaning of the study.

Participants and Context

The participants of this case study were 34 ninth graders in a public high school in Corredores, which belongs to the borderline area of the province of Puntarenas. In 2022, this community had a population of 500 166 habitants (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, 2022). The number of students that attend this institution is around 1200. The institution curriculum includes subjects that cover different areas of knowledge like administration, systems engineering, tourism, and agriculture. The English language level of the group is low,

and their ages range from 13 to 15 years old. The participants of this group are 20 males and 14 females. The criteria used to select the participants was based on students and teachers' experience. A highly experienced teacher was required to share information about the phenomena. To administer the instruments, students were in their natural environment, which was their English language learning process in their high school. Additionally, as McCombes (2023) remarked, the significance of meticulously selecting the sample considering the purposes of the investigation was acknowledged. The participants were recruited through a formal letter sent to the institution's principal and the teacher in charge of the group.

Data Collection Procedures

For this research, the instruments aimed at providing reliable and specific information to analyze it critically and answer the research questions for this case study. Such instruments were: a questionnaire for the students and a semi-structured interview with the teacher. The questionnaire and the interview included questions about participants' perceptions, knowledge, and experiences with the multimedia resources.

Questionnaire.

The first instrument designed was a questionnaire. It was designed with the goal to provide information about students' experiences regarding multimedia resources used for teaching grammar. They also shared their opinion about the resources. The questionnaire has nine questions, both open and close ended. Additionally, a Likert scale was used to evaluate students' feelings and perceptions. The questionnaire was administered face-to-face to each student recruited. Each participant completed an individual print copy.

Interview.

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview with eleven questions. It was designed with the purpose of collecting information from the teacher's perspective and experiences about the multimedia resources used for teaching grammar. The interview was conducted face-to-face in the high school. It included a semi-structured format to allow flexibility when asking questions. Likewise, the two researchers conducted the interview together.

Findings and Discussion

This section includes the type of process and the qualitative data analysis procedures behind this case study. The findings emerged from the codes, which later organized the qualitative data through themes. The findings include excerpts from participants and figures to support the data gathered and provide a more complete and concise description of each theme.

Data Analysis

The data obtained followed a thematic analysis that "move(s) beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focus(es) on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, theme" (Guest et al., 2019, p. 10). This process demanded focusing on what was directly and indirectly expressed by the participants to obtain the data. Full transcriptions of the interview were generated. The transcriptions of the interview and the questionnaire were coded. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) explained coding

in qualitative research as an analytical process of organizing raw data into themes that aid in interpretation. They add that codes are “names or symbols used to stand for a group of similar items, ideas, or phenomena that the researcher has noticed in their data set” (p. 55). This procedure enriched the reliability of the results obtained. Additionally, both researchers checked the data together to assure the reliability of the procedure.

The Use of Multimedia in the Classroom

A key finding was that multimedia resources for teaching can make the process of learning the language easier. The first concern about the use of the resource is its relevance in the process; in this part, the teacher shared that the use of multimedia resources can benefit English language learning. Additionally, now that technology is present in all areas of life, the teacher shared that the process of learning cannot ignore technology; in contrast, its use demands the implementation of multimedia resources. Keeping a close relationship with technology may help EFL teachers focus on students’ interest and motivation in the process of learning a new language. However, the participants highlighted a limitation based on their experiences about the resources that the institution has, more specifically about connectivity. Learners do not have reliable internet connectivity in the institution and their homes. As a result, using activities that require internet connection cannot be assertive for all students; for that reason, bringing online activities to class or assigning them homework might create unequal learning conditions since not all the learners might have the same level of participation.

Working with digital materials and resources can provide learners with knowledge that allows them to connect with their surroundings. The participants said that they need to be aware of the tools that multimedia resources can offer. The relevance of this aspect lies in the need to know about innovation and constant changes so that they can manage social and language demands. This includes English learning activities and performance. In the interview, the teacher shared that the implementation of new resources is important. Also, the participant claimed that there is a significant number of digital tools that can help teachers to create and innovate while teaching. Some of the tools provided by the participants were “*ESL collective.com, Pinterest. com, Live Worksheets.com, ESL printables.com.*” They are useful tools to explore and implement ways to teach grammar and provide new ways to engage students. In this view, the teacher needs to constantly analyze what learners need for their classrooms and what tools are useful for their needs. Moreover, it is important to constantly explore new tools that can contribute to the teaching and learning process. One important benefit that participants identified was multimedia accessibility through the internet. The internet is now a more common reality, and it is common for students to connect on a daily basis. Learning a new language can be an effective process as long as assertive implementation and use of resources is ensured.

Students' Perspective on the Impact of Multimedia

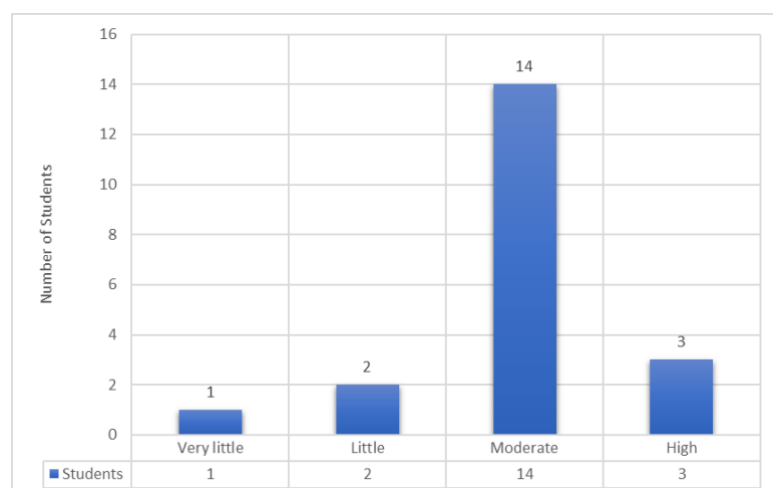
For many students, comprehension was enhanced when multimedia was used to learn grammar. Eight student-participants referred to visual aids as multimedia such as drawings, images, videos, and auditory and remote tools that helped learning, understanding and interacting significantly. Furthermore, regarding linguistic competence concerning

grammatical and lexical performance, two of the students agreed and considered that multimedia can help students' skills in regard to their linguistic proficiency. Two students noted that multimedia can help their linguistic understanding and bring about positive effects in grammar context. On the other hand, two students agreed that student autonomy needs to be fostered during the learning process to benefit from multimedia. Also, two students shared that multimedia could impact their skills, although they emphasized it is up to students' willingness to learn.

Two students stated that multimedia made it possible for them to learn because it facilitated the process in terms of manner, place, and time. Two students shared that multimedia makes the learning process easier because of its remote feature that facilitates accessibility to learning wherever and whenever they wanted. Moreover, two students stressed not having or knowing any perspective regarding multimedia or the contribution of multimedia to students' competence. Likewise, in the questionnaire, fourteen students pointed out that the level of knowledge about materials or multimedia resources could be considered *moderate*. In other words, out of 20 students, 14 highlighted that their knowledge regarding multimedia is moderate (See Figure 1). Finally, the creative impact that multimedia has on learning was mentioned. Three students noted the fact that multimedia can enhance the divergent thinking skills of the students and acknowledged that multimedia might boost learning creatively. Instead of having boring classes, multimedia provides catchy tools that unleash creativity.

Figure 1

The students' knowledge level about multimedia resources



Note. The answers gathered from participants' questionnaire of their level of knowledge about materials or multimedia resources.

As a result, it is possible to add that few students did not know about multimedia and its contributions to building language skills. Consequently, some students remarked that their knowledge about multimedia is moderate. On the other hand, most of the participants agreed that multimedia can contribute to their learning process by identifying different benefits. Some of these benefits include the ability to understand the teacher's explanation better,

quicker, easier and more enjoyable. Some students pointed out that multimedia helped them with their ability to use and understand language in different contexts. On the contrary, some students mentioned that multimedia provides flexible tools that vary and facilitate the students' processes. This information agrees with Pattemore's (2022) idea that, with multimedia, there is time and location flexibility that do not affect distance and can suit individual learning styles. In addition, in terms of adaptability, Duchesne (2022) explained that involving reading as auditory writing stimuli could be highly relevant because of the use and adaptability.

Gunawardhana (2017) explained that AV applications can be used for educational purposes, resulting in favorable benefits for students. The results confirm that multimedia benefited students' competence when it is applied in the learning process because of its AV feature. Moreover, an important finding was that with visual aids, students can better understand the teacher's explanation and be involved in learning creatively. This information confirmed Dressman's (2020) contribution that AV input makes it different from other kinds of input and that if used as a strategy for language education purposes, it can stimulate L2 development.

Recommendations for the Use of Multimedia when Teaching Grammar

One important recommendation from the teacher was to organize class time so that if students do not get the answer in their first try, the teacher can take some extra time to have a second round or exercise for them to reach it. Having enough time in class is important to reach language goals. In this same vein, when teaching grammar, having different options to explain to students is helpful and beneficial for it can increase the level of understanding. The participants shared interesting insights about other aspects of the process of learning the language. More specifically, it is difficult for learners to produce sounds that they do not have in their mother tongue. As a result, participants mentioned that it would be helpful to apply new tools and activities to work on the pronunciation of new words that they are trying to learn. This idea also connects with the process of teaching and learning grammar because students mentioned they feel more comfortable if they have enough time to practice new content. In fact, they reported that what made them feel unprepared was the fact that there was no follow-up activity in which they could practice the new topic explained. Additionally, this relates to students' confidence because the more confident students feel, the more they want to participate and feel engaged.

For some students, games are catalysts of dynamic processes, eight student-participants answered that multimedia games should be recommended as part of grammar learning. These students commented that games can work as visual aids and joyful tools to boost and get a fun learning environment. They even mentioned some characteristics of these games: recreational, collaborative, dynamic, and entertaining. Moreover, some students added that videos, audios, and PowerPoint presentations are also part of a list of resources they recommend. Using videos that teach English in real life situations, from their point of view, should be included in teaching. When using games in the classroom, teachers promote relationship building. These ideas relate to some statements made in the literature review.

First, Patel. (2022) stated that multimedia increases collaboration between teachers and students and the process of learning can become more goal oriented.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The data analysis made us conclude that multimedia resources can have a considerable impact in the process of learning and teaching grammar. It means that students and the English language teacher consider that the implementation of this type of materials and resources enhances and enriches learning. This finding connects with the idea that multimedia resources can have a relevant role in the EFL classroom not only for the teachers but also for the students, who reported to feel more interested in the content by using this type of resource. EFL teachers and learners can benefit from the findings in this paper by acknowledging the relevance and the key role that multimedia resources have in the classroom to teach not only grammar but any other English skill.

It is important to mention that the implementation of these new materials does not always guarantee a positive impact in the classroom because there might be some limitations. Even though these resources are useful, helpful, and interesting, this can vary depending on the setting where multimedia is implemented. Another important conclusion is that although there was a minority of students who did not know about multimedia and its contribution to their skills, there was a big majority who agreed that multimedia can contribute to their learning. Therefore, there are numerous students who are aware of the importance of multimedia because of its impact in their proficiency. This can be key to making it possible for teachers and institutions to understand that current and future students demand an updated focus on students' processes.

The data showed that the teacher is aware of the positive experience of adding multimedia resources to the teaching process in spite of some drawbacks. First, the teacher remarked that they should consider implementing these resources but, at the same time, create a well-structured plan with follow-up activities in order to help their learners reach the objectives that they could not in their first try. Teachers are also aware of the limitations. The significance of this information is crucial to discard any idea that teachers do not want to innovate in their classrooms. On the contrary, teachers have identified external limitations like lack of connectivity. Even though they know technology makes it possible for the high school to implement multimedia as a resource, there are connectivity limitations. Thus, the teacher and the principal are advised to find a solution for this problem. Another recommendation is to provide teachers with workshops or strategies to get updated information about new resources and tools. However, preparing them is not enough if they do not have the required materials. As a result, institutions are also advised to provide the teacher with the necessary tools to put into practice all the knowledge gained from their preparation.

Action Plan

Drawing on the conclusions, we suggest organizing a workshop for teachers and a workshop for students to promote awareness and knowledge of multimedia use. The workshop for students could be moderated by the teacher. In this workshop, the teacher explains relevant information about multimedia and some general aspects so that students feel

acquainted with multimedia and its benefits. As a result, we propose to create a short workshop that contains two parts, a PowerPoint presentation (PPT) and a handout (print and digital). With these resources, the teacher explains to students' what multimedia resources are about, uses, benefits, and limitations. In addition, the handout includes grammar exercises with resources that integrate it with other language skills like vocabulary, listening, reading, and speaking. The resources presented in this workshop are: Vocaroo (an interweb), Google Drive platform (a cloud-based storage service that enables them to store and access files online), and Mentimeter (a presentation tool that is designed to work digitally). The workshop for teachers includes training on the use of these same resources. They generate ideas about the uses, benefits, and disadvantages that these resources have. More specifically, the teachers use these resources to create activities to teach grammar. They reflect on the implications of their use for English language learning.

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Students' Development of the Writing Skill at a Public High School in Corredores

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Abstract

Writing is a fundamental skill when learning English as a foreign language. Unfortunately, most high school students tend to be reluctant to develop their writing skill because they might be unaware of its importance. In this sense, the purpose of this qualitative research is to explore eighth graders' development of the writing skill at a public high school in Corredores. In addition, this research was carried out by gathering data through three different instruments: observations, questionnaires, and documentary evidence to answer the research questions. Also, we described the natural setting, classroom environment, participants, and collaborative teacher to provide a contextual description of the unit of analysis of this research. An essential part of this research was to understand students' awareness and willingness toward their writing development process. After collecting the data, we analyzed the information by coding and using graphs and images to illustrate the main findings. Finally, we provided conclusions and recommendations. One of the recommendations was actually an action plan that includes different technological tools that the teacher can implement to plan interactive writing classes.

Keywords: Writing development, qualitative, awareness, willingness

Introduction

Writing is the practice of expressing thoughts through symbols because it is a method or system for representing words visually or tangibly. The fourth language skill that students need a lot of effort to master is writing (Al-Jumaily, 2015). Writing is also a useful skill, an expressive exercise and, occasionally, a way of assessing students; writing is also the most complex kind of expression. Writing can be a tool for persuasion, attention getting, information sending, idea and feeling transmission, and maintaining relationships with others (Peter & Singaravelu, 2021). Unfortunately, learners in high school might be reluctant to develop the writing skill because they might be unaware of the importance of writing production in English classes. There might be some reasons behind this negative perception. One might be English language programs that do not fulfill learners' writing needs. This might cause lack of interest or desmotivation. For this reason, the aim of this article is to explore students' development of writing skills at a public high school in Corredores.

It is essential to recognize that students' learning process of interpreting, reacting, and understanding might be different, even when presented with the same situations. Students' attitude toward a particular development is influenced by their beliefs about the outcomes of that action and their evaluations of those outcomes (Petric, 2002). This is why, depending on the circumstances by which learners are surrounded, their behaviors when working on writing skills might have an impact on their development not only in a positive but also in a negative way. On repetitive occasions, during our teaching practicum, we observed that most of the students portrayed a lack of interest, motivation and knowledge when writing occurred. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the students' development of writing skill in a group of eighth grade students at a public high school in Corredores.

By doing this research, we intended to find the reasons why learners are facing different behaviors when developing writing skills and also possible causes and consequences of those behaviors by conducting interviews and observations. Furthermore, the study might also be beneficial to those teachers or student-teachers who want to learn about the different circumstances faced in the classroom.

Research Questions

In view of the research topic, the purpose of this study was to answer the following questions:

Central Question

How do the students develop writing skills in a group of eighth graders at a public high school in Corredores?

Associated Sub Questions

1. What are the strategies that students use to develop their writing skills?
2. What are the students' perceptions of the way in which writing is developed?
3. What recommendations do the participants provide to better develop writing skills?

Literature Review

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of theories and research about the development of students' writing performance, strategies, and perceptions. The information related to this topic was taken from different sources such as Google Scholar, SIDUNA and JSTOR databases, and academic journals such as TESOL Journal.

Students' Awareness of Writing Development

Students' awareness of their writing development is essential in their writing progress. Students' positive perceptions of writing development plays a fundamental role in the classroom environment; the significance of English writing proficiency for academic study and future employment is usually highly valued by students (Ismail, 2011) as it has demonstrated to be beneficial in their future. For example, academic writing is so crucial that a student's chances of receiving scholarships and success are heavily influenced by the quality of their written work (Kaivanpanah et al., 2019). Students' perception of their own writing brings benefits because they might be aware of their specific needs to achieve their goals. In

this sense, self-awareness promotes language progress as it helps identify strengths and weaknesses.

Self-awareness of language learners considerably increases writing abilities. This includes self-assessment which is helpful in creating a student-centered and productive learning environment since it empowers learners to take control of their writing, writing process, and learning (Schendel & O'Neil, 1999; Rezai et al., 2022). Furthermore, once students are aware of their writing process, they might consider the benefits of identifying and following writing stages that would eventually help them avoid basic mistakes. Written composition can be organized through three stages. They include transitioning, transforming and crafting. Transitioning at a beginner's stage uses writing to tell what a person knows; it moves to the intermediate stage which is transforming what someone knows for the benefit of the author, and the final stage of crafting includes what an individual knows. For the benefit of the reader, this process requires at least twenty years of maturation, instruction, and training (Kellogg, 2008). By being self-aware of the different stages of writing, students might improve their writing performance and take advantage of it.

The gap identified for this research was the need to recognize the students' writing skill development in high school. The gap emerged from our teaching practicum experience and entailed aspects such as students' willingness to develop writing in the classroom (motivation and low stake writing assessments) and the students' awareness of writing development (students' perception and self-awareness). Writing abilities can be enhanced when learners' interests are taken into consideration, and they are exposed to circumstances in which they can generate genuine writing (Ismail, 2011). Furthermore, authentic writing is a product of well performed ability in the classroom. Writing is a skill that can be learned in accordance with the current approach to education that emphasizes both the process and the output of learning (Nunan, 1991; Pitoyo et al., 2014; Tompskis, 201). In this case, the work that students perform in the classroom and the homework that they are required to perform as part of their output learning is essential. The students' awareness in writing development is essential as well as the students' willingness to develop their writing task.

Students' Willingness to Develop Writing in the Classroom

To recognize the learner's process when writing, it is relevant to consider the willingness that students have because it might have an impact on the development of the writing tasks in the classroom. In addition, aspects such as motivation and the inclusion of low stake writing assignments are key in students' willingness to complete writing tasks. First, there is a link between motivation and an individual's willingness to start writing. Additionally, it has been discovered that motivating elements are closely related to how students improve their writing process and the quality of the final work (Rafiee & Abbasian-Naghneh, 2020). Considering this, motivation plays an important role as it is an internal force that can arise from either the inside or the outside of a student to help to achieve language goals. It also serves as a motivating force or attitude for learning to write, particularly when it comes to considering that assistance is crucial (Aryanika, 2016). For this reason, students' willingness to develop their writing skill is fundamental because enthusiasm increases performance.

Another key point is that including low stake writing assignments is essential because a major factor is improving writers' attitudes. When students are comfortable in the performance of the writing skill and assignments because of lack of pressure of doing a writing assignment to obtain a higher grade, they tend to achieve more positive results as opposed to writing exercises that are test-driven (Bustamante & Eom, 2017; Lin, 2013; Rafiee & Abbasian-Naghneh, 2020). Additionally, incorporating formative assessments can also positively influence their writing performance.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this section is to provide a description about the instruments of the qualitative questions of this study. This section describes the research approach used for the methodology and explains some relevant aspects. Also, there is a general description of the institution and educational setting. Therefore, there will be a description of the participants of the study, who are the students and the collaborative teacher. This part will explain the different procedures of the data collection instruments used.

Research Approach

The approach used in this qualitative research followed a descriptive scope and entailed the analysis and interpretation of texts and interviews to identify significant patterns that are indicative of a specific phenomenon (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2009). This research is qualitative because it focused on providing an in-depth description of the analyses and the data collected. The purpose of the data collection was to portray the reality of students' writing development. The design of this research is a case study which is an in-depth analysis of one individual, group, circumstance, or community. In most cases, it can be considered an in-depth study of a single unit as an individual or group with an emphasis on environmental elements that affect growth (Flyvbjerg, 2011). In this sense, this research is based on a phenomenon occurring at a high school in Corredores. The suitability of the research approach allowed researchers to provide the audience interested in knowing about students' development of the writing skill with in-depth information by reflecting about this complex situation and how to manage it.

Participants and Context

The high school in which this research was conducted is in La Cuesta. The participants of this research were thirteen-to-fourteen high schoolers in eighth grade. Their linguistic level ranges from A1 to A2, and there were eight girls and seven boys among the class participants. The teacher who participated in this research has been teaching in public high schools for sixteen years. In addition, she taught classes under the Conversational English curriculum provided by the Ministry of Public Education (MEP). According to the information provided by the principal's office in this high school, the mission of the institution is to "completely support learners by imparting knowledge and facilitating meaningful learning. The means, awareness, and standards of morality, visual appeal, and citizenship to allow people to critically and methodically establish themselves in a city that is changing." Therefore, its vision establishes the high school as a model institution that shapes citizens who are aware of their rights and obligations.

The criterion sampling method of this research was centered on students and teachers. The researcher started the process of directly gathering data from respondents, either individually or in groups, after obtaining their approval (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Furthermore, when selecting the participants, many aspects were considered such as the familiarity the researchers had during the teaching practicum in which they observed not only the students' performance in the classroom but also the collaborative teacher. In addition, the collaborative teacher is known for promoting interactive learning and encouraging students to be part of the class. During the teaching practicum, students' positive attitude toward writing was also observed. In this sense, the criteria used to choose participants were based on their relationship with the researchers, their performance in the classroom and demographic characteristics such as age, school level, and linguistic level. The recruitment process began by directly contacting the collaborative educator who gave the first approval to observe and administer a questionnaire to her students.

Data Collection Procedures

The data gathering methods used in this case study were three instruments: an observation and a questionnaire. researchers visited students' classrooms to collect data. The class observation was developed from 12:10 p.m. to 2:10 p.m., and the questionnaire was administered from 2:30 p.m. to 4: 30 p.m. which corresponded to English class time.

Instrument 1: Classroom observation.

The purpose of this instrument was to observe students' writing development. The observation, which is qualitative in nature, was carried out in the students and teacher's natural setting. Furthermore, the instrument was used to observe if the students were able to complete the writing task, if they were participating in the process, if they were interested and showed a good attitude while performing the tasks. Also, it was fundamental to observe if students made use of the target language and the different strategies that they applied during their writing performance (taking notes, highlighting, among others). In this observation, the researchers took general notes on remarks, drawbacks, and aspects to improve. This observation was designed with two different sections where the first one contains eight items and the second one six items.

Instrument 2: Questionnaire.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain information about the students' development of their writing skill from their own perspective. The questionnaire had eight questions that students answered in the classroom. The platform used to design the questionnaire was Google Forms. The questions were asked to answer based on students' English learning experience. One of the researchers shared the questionnaire with the collaborative teacher, and she distributed it to the students. The students completed a Likert scale where they chose options. The questionnaire also included open-ended questions to collect information.

Instrument 3: Documentary evidence.

The purpose of the documentary evidence was to collect data about teaching materials. In this sense, the teacher facilitated the researchers with her lesson plans, worksheets, and videos used during class. The analysis of documents included classroom observation behavior collected during the class observation. In this sense, with this documentary evidence, students' reality in their learning development was analyzed through a natural lens.

Findings and Discussion

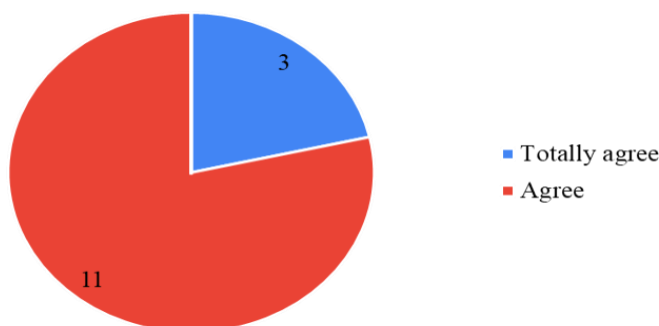
The purpose of this section is to report the findings obtained after analyzing all the data collected. These findings helped answer the research questions posed for this case study. The data obtained from the three different instruments collected students and teacher's performance and perceptions.

Data Analysis

The type of qualitative analysis used was thematic considering that meaningful patterns in qualitative data can be found, examined, and decoded using the thematic analysis technique. In contrast to other qualitative analytic approaches, which offer methods, tools, or techniques that are not limited by theoretical commitments, thematic analysis offers a methodology (Clarke et al., 2015). The codification process was deductive; in this research, deductive codification was implemented because, before the coding process, a predetermined "coding frame" was prepared (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The information was coded with the answers gathered from the three different instruments, whose data we analyzed and compared to provide strong findings. One strategy used to analyze the information of this research was triangulation because there were three different instruments. Then, another strategy used was the coding system because we coded the information obtained from two different observations.

Methods Employed by Students

The method used in the classrooms helped students improve their writing skills. It was noticed that students were aware that the methods implemented in the classroom help to improve their writing skills (See Figure 1). Some of the participants mentioned in the questionnaire that one favorable method was "*to teach us how to brainstorm*". Most students showed awareness in the implementation of new strategies that can help in their development of their writing skill. During the observation, the students occasionally used the target language when interacting with the teacher and their classmates. We could observe that the students rarely used different strategies to develop their writing skills such as highlighting and taking notes. Instead of using different strategies, they just copied the information provided. In the documentary evidence analysis, we could notice that the collaborative teacher used different materials such as videos, worksheets, and whiteboards to develop the writing tasks.

Figure 1*Opinions about the Methods to Improve Writing*

Note. Results gathered were from the students' opinion based on the questionnaire. Fourteen out of 15 responses were collected in total.

We could analyze that students do not apply any strategies when performing their writing tasks even though they show awareness of the different methods that help to improve their skills. For this reason, it is important that students are encouraged to make use of the different strategies to enhance their writing skills. In this sense, these findings confirm the idea that “self-assessment is also highly helpful in creating a student-centered and productive learning environment by empowering L2 learners to take control of their writing, writing process, and learning” (Rezai, et al., 2022; Schendel & O'Neil, 1999). These findings show students are not taking advantage of the different methods that they can use to improve and learn when performing their writing tasks.

Students' Perceptions About Writing Instruction

One of the important aspects in this research is the students' perception regarding their own writing development. Eleven students believed that the writing development was necessary for them. However, most of them shared that they do not feel completely comfortable when performing writing tasks. Almost all of the students believed that it is important to improve their writing skills, but thirteen of them shared that they occasionally have problems developing their writing tasks. It was shown that the development of writing skills is often promoted in class. The findings from the observation showed that the students occasionally show interest when performing their writing tasks. Most of the students at times show a good attitude when developing their writing tasks. Also, all the students scarcely showed interest in its importance when developing the writing tasks while the teacher frequently encouraged them to participate in the writing tasks.

From the observation and the documentary evidence, we could conclude that even though the teacher provided them with supplementary material (See Figure 2), she offered different material to develop the writing skill. In this sense, students did not take advantage of materials available even though most of them are aware of its importance. Instead of this, the students were only copying the information from other classmates or from the worksheets. In this sense, students showed a negative attitude and lack of interest when performing their

activities. As stated previously, it was confirmed that “in the classroom, students' perceptions of writing progress are crucial; also, they placed a high value on the importance of ESL writing ability for academic studies and future employment” (Ismail, 2011, p. 4). On the other hand, the students communicated that they need to improve their writing skills, but that they are not showing any interest in it. The next figure illustrates a sample activity used in class.

Figure 2

Sample of a Student Activity

Instructions: fill in the following chart with the requested information about Tourism, follow the given example. Later, write five sentences based on one of them.

Note: I would like to= I'd like to (Me gustaría)/ you will need= you'll need (Usted necesitará)/ I will need/go = I'll need/go (yo necesitaré/iré).

Country	Places to visit	Facilities and accommodations	Activities	Things you'll need
1) Turkey	1) Bo drum, Uskudar.	1) Hotel, breakfast, Wi-Fi.	1) Sunbathing and swimming.	1) Swim suit, hat and glasses.
2)	2)	2)	2)	2)
3)	3)	3)	3)	3)
4)	4)	4)	4)	4)

- 1) I would like to go to China
- 2) There I'd like to visit Bo drum.
- 3) I will need a hotel to stay there.
- 4) I will go sunbathing and swimming.
- 5) I'll need a swimsuit, hat and sunglasses.

Note. This is a sample activity from the activities implemented by the teacher to develop writing tasks.

Suggestions Provided by the Participants to the High School

Students gave some recommendations to teachers or future teachers when developing students' writing skills such as choosing catching activities that incorporate technology and interaction. One of the participants mentioned in the questionnaire that they want teachers to give a good explanation to understand content better. For this reason, we considered that EFL teachers might push students to engage consistently and independently when developing their writing tasks. During the observations, we could notice that students, when performing their writing tasks, were used to working by reading the whiteboard and copying down most of the

the teacher's ideas in their notebooks. In addition, with documentary evidence, we realized that, before doing the writing tasks, the collaborative teacher projected a video which was based on the worksheets that they needed to complete in the writing tasks; the teacher gave them her own examples and did not notice that students just copied the same information she shared. For this reason, it was analyzed that students were not using their competencies, but just imitating.

The findings obtained in this section confirm what a student stated, “*authentic writing is a product of the well performed ability in the classroom*” (Julia, 2023). We realized that students' point of view should be heard to have better results when developing classes. Also, the teacher might be careful with the students' performance because it involves not only encouraging students but also giving them the opportunity to develop their own critical thinking when writing. After analyzing the observations, we noticed that making assertive use of the material may be essential when teaching writing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The researchers concluded that students are not interested in the development of writing skills. The researchers could observe that the participants were not involved in the class because of the way in which they acted, spoke, and performed during the different writing tasks. This situation implies that students are not taking advantage of the classroom experience to develop their writing skills. Instead, the students were inattentive using their cellphones, interrupting, and copying from their classmates' work. For this reason, it is important to remark that the teacher needs to stimulate students' interest when developing their writing tasks. Based on the previous conclusion, we recommend teachers to use different strategies such as implementing the use of technological activities and incorporating authentic materials to motivate students in the development of the writing tasks.

The second major conclusion was that students need improvement in their writing development; however, they do not feel engaged. The researchers concluded that students are not completing the writing assignments. Students are not making the necessary improvements, even though they are aware of the importance of writing. This implies that students might be affected in their future writing tasks as they are not attaining the expected linguistic outcomes which would eventually affect their academic achievement. If this happens, students might fall behind in their next school years in this area. In this case, we recommend teachers to consider developing student autonomy by giving them more responsibility; it might even motivate them. Students tended to just write everything from the whiteboard without any original idea; in this case, they were not developing their own writing tasks, and their performance was not observed.

One of the most significant conclusions that emerged from this study is that the materials used in the classes were not authentic. This implies that students showed little interest in the materials used to develop their writing task because they usually only completed worksheets. On the other hand, it is important to remark that the teacher should vary class material and implement different tools and activities. Also, it is recommended that teachers hear students' opinions and interests.

For future researchers, we suggest focusing on classroom management because it could affect students' development of their writing skills. Also, it is recommended that researchers analyze student-student and teacher-student interactions because we consider that peer-assessment and peer-group feedback are not being implemented. Lastly, we advise researching time management of writing tasks because, during our case study, we noticed that inappropriate time management during class impeded students' full completion of the writing tasks. This situation even affected the research process.

Action Plan

To improve the development of the writing tasks in the classroom, the researchers proposed to design a digital document that includes a guideline of five different technological tools that can be used to teach writing. This document provides the collaborative teacher with information to implement and innovate in the classroom. This document includes a description and tutorial video that explains how to use each tool in the classroom. Each of the tools chosen promotes interaction between student-student and teacher-student. Ideally, this material might promote engaging classes.

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THEME 2

Classroom Mediation



Classroom Mediation

Only if English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers understand that their role in the language classroom is to facilitate learning can language learning take place in this setting; this is achieved as a result of classroom mediation. From Sundari's viewpoint (2019), this concept involves "all objects delivered by the teacher to mediate the students to bring their current ability to the targeted performance" (p. 35). Beyond such definition, Regina-Sanceverino (2016), stressed that mediation encompasses "more than a simple interaction" as it can transcend in individuals. Grounded on these two conceptualizations of mediation in the classroom, it is necessary that teachers of English in Costa Rica's Brunca Region be equipped with suitable tools to be able to engage learners in long-lasting and meaningful learning experience.

The case studies in this section address the issue of classroom mediation through topics such as the use of off-task class interactions in student's language development, in-class participation in an EFL group at a public high school, the role of CALL in EFL high school learners, and the use of ELT textbooks in a pre-university high school. Generating a better understanding of these research problems can bring about better teaching and learning practices that can shape the classroom mediation through a research-informed pedagogical praxis.

The Use of Off-Task Class Interactions for Language Learning

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Abstract

Off-task interactions between students during classes is a common practice to which students' resort, which usually is seen as a useless and non-language related activity. As teachers often see students not using the target language in these spaces, they may tend to blame students for not using the target language in these occasions and only for on-task activities. In this sense, research on this phenomenon had to be explored to analyze the causes and consequences of such a problem in language learning. This document presents a case study on how off-task interaction is relevant for language learning development when used effectively. It also intends to raise awareness of the need to take advantage of off-task interactional spaces for language and make it a part of the class. The following research was conducted with eleventh grade students in a public high school in the southern region of Costa Rica. While conducting the research, we could notice how the receptive skills were developed and not the productive skills, concluding that the lack of language production affected students negatively in their learning.

Keywords: off-task interactions, aural-oral skills, second language learning, target language,

Introduction

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, off-task interactions between learners is an inevitable part of the class. Such interaction barely involves the use of the target language as a means of communication and in most of the cases it comes with distracting behaviors. Mayo and Soler (2013, as cited in Sundry, 2017) noted how, when interacting for negotiation purposes in the learning stage, the message is transmitted through the combination of language already acquired and modified linguistic elements implemented to convey a clear message (p. 147). In this sense, either chunks of language commands or phrases of the target language already learned by students or student's native language are more likely to be used in such spontaneous situations. Also, in these informal conversational activities that are not part of the current task in the class, students prefer to use their native language, as it simplifies the process of communication. Noticing that language learners' off-task class interaction is language based, and that learners rely on their native language instead of the target language for such communication, it is important to reckon to what extent the language used in this type of interaction affects the target language development. How important it should be for teachers to set limits in the use of native language for off-task

interactions is another aspect to consider in order to benefit the development of the target language.

During our teaching practicum we worked with high school students. A noticeable aspect of classroom behavior observed was that students seemed to stick to the teacher's role as a guide, instructor, or leader, on whom they highly relied for their language development. Sundari (2017) referred that what starts the interaction within the classroom is mainly the teacher through the use of oral communication, normally combining the first and the target language, as well as giving directions and bringing materials, formulating questions, teaching the grammar of the language, and giving feedback to their possible mistakes (p. 153). Language instructors do not only have control over the task-based interaction of students, but with commanding students, they can also shape the off-task interaction of students, which they might not consider a part of the language development or either an essential part of it. Acting according to the teacher's commands is what students understand as the learning process of the language, which is task-based or controlled interactions. Meanwhile, in the off-task interactions they have during class time, they tend to use their native language often. For students' limited use of the target language, especially listening comprehension and speaking production during off-task classroom interaction, a lack in the study of these skills appears.

In the field of language learning and teaching, the following research aims at benefiting and enlarging the existing knowledge of what has been studied about classroom interaction and development, specifically in the case of off-task interactions. In this sense, the urge to demonstrate to what extent students' off-task class interactions are relevant to the development of the target language gives importance to this research project. Not only language instructors and learners but also future researchers are able to benefit from the qualitative information collected alongside the development of this research work. The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore the relevance of the off-task spaces in students' use of the English language during the development of a regular lesson in the classroom by conducting the interviews and observation with a group of eleventh graders at public high school in the southern region of Costa Rica.

Research Questions

The research questions include a central question and three associated ones.

Central Question

1. Why is off-task class interaction relevant in the development of the target language of a group of eleventh grade students at a public high school in the southern region of Costa Rica?

Associated Questions

1. How do students use off-task interactions to develop the target language?
2. How can language instructors implement off-task class interaction in language learning?
3. What are some recommendations to maximize the use of the target language in off-task interactions?

Literature Review

Due to the social interaction that is constantly present in learning environments, off-task classroom interaction is a part of the class as students find an urge to interact verbally or nonverbally to classmates with whom they have developed a relationship. Jia (2013) stated how the fundamental base between learners-learner interaction is the degree of socialization between either side, which in the same way regulates the level of interaction. Also, the analysis of this interaction shows how the level of communication desired takes students to use more variety of language elements, which is not common in teacher-student communication (p. 209). Teachers usually tend to categorize the different student interactions produced while in class into two: on-task interaction, which is the interaction that is produced between learners as the teacher controls it and off-task interaction, which for teachers is just a collateral consequence of human socialization and that is conducted out of class purpose. However, off-task interaction, as well as on-task interaction is conducted around similar necessities. Jia (2013) referred to how, in the interaction that learners develop in small or large groups, learners face many opportunities to apply and develop language use while the space in which such interaction occurs is not being restricted and pressured; consequently, learners end up with a natural use of linguistic elements (p. 209).

A difference between both types of interaction should hereby not be drawn apart but considered interactions developed in two different spaces of the class. In this literature review, the focus will be given to present and discuss the information already studied about the problem of the present research, which is the off-task classroom spontaneous interactions that barely had to do with the improvement of their target language skills development. Such compilation of published information will be retrieved through bibliographical research of the information available in databases. The two main databases used for the retrieval of articles related to the topic of research were EBSCOhost and JSTORE. Thanks to information stored in these databases, a clear existing gap between previews, and this present study is able to be portrayed.

Students' Role in Off-task Interaction

The off-task interactions by the students within the development of an everyday class of any subject has been a common phenomenon that appears within the classroom of any educational institution; this is linked to the interactions that students have with each other during the time in which the completion of a task or a requested performance is not being developed. Despite classroom off-task interactions occurring as frequently or even more repetitive than in-task classroom interactions, both types of communication have different purposes. Hoffer (2010, as cited in Killian et al., 2012) stated that for trying to reach an extracurricular goal aside from the ones they want to achieve during their learning process, students portray an off-task behavior. This is because they are facing two alternatives that cannot be reached at the same moment (p. 78). Taking the previous statement into account, the development of an off-task behavior in students during the class time is being caused by the view that students have on separating the time during the on-task performance stage and the off-task period that appears regularly during a normal class. Vollmer and Northup (1996, as cited in Shumate and Wills, 2012) stated that three regular sources that reinforce

problematic behaviors, such as lack of attention to the teacher and peers and also escaping from instructional demands are present in the classroom (p. 25). In this sense, students' habit of committing to off-task conversation may be addressed as a consequence of having a low learning experience and turning the situation into a snowball effect that will delay students' development of the target language.

As the off-task interaction is present in the teaching-learning environment, and a dynamic approach to learn the English language has been implemented, the role of the off-task interaction between students affects the development and domain of the language as students do not make use of the language in neither an oral or written way. Thus, the use of the English language to establish communication during the time of the target language classes is essential in the new way to the teaching and learning process of this language. Students develop their speaking and listening skills during tasks as requested by the teacher. They aim to understand and produce in the target language during on-task completion. On the other hand, during the off-task stage, students stop getting in touch with the language, using Spanish to interact with their classmates, and disconnecting themselves from on-going activities in the class. As Jaffal (2019) commented, off-task behavior is seen as daydreaming, speaking with classmates, talking when not allowed, touching classmates, fidgeting with objects, getting out of seats when not permitted, and laying heads down on the table (p. 709). Off-task behavior and interaction have been associated with activities not related to the purpose of the class. However, not only on-task interaction, but off-task interaction in the EFL lessons can increase the development of the target language through the use of aural-oral skills during class time due to the communicative and interactive approach that these two skills have.

Teachers' Role in Off-task Classroom Interaction

Teachers, in their educational role, also play a big role in off-task classroom interaction in terms of controlling and conducting exchanges. Jia (2013) acknowledged how EFL learners' problems with willingness to make use of spoken English towards their classmates or language instructors are mostly influenced by learners' social characteristics, language domain, and learning interest (p. 211). In this sense, the range of variables that influence learners to act reluctant towards positive class behavior and that, in this way, lead students to produce off-task interaction in the classroom is not only attached to the students' needs but also to the environment and learning experiences to which learners are exposed. Babkie (2006, as cited in Jaffal, 2019) claimed that teachers constitute an important part in the off-task behavior, for their inability to pay attention can be directed by the difficulty of understanding the information presented. He commented that, as students with less participation in the class are prone to be involved in off-task activities, once they become off-task participants, the process to retrieve onboard tasks becomes difficult (p. 705). Consequently, the range of analysis of off-task interactions causes and problems also needs to include teachers and the environments predisposed for students learning in order to reduce possibilities of students involving in off-task interactions.

Taking into account that the class develops all its stages as a previously planned process, learners' possible behaviors towards each task implemented in the class should also

be considered. In the sense of students' possible reactions, methods with great relevance on controlling students previous to tasks are the behaviorist theories. Staddon (2006) made reference to how methods on behavior controlling tend to be successful and fruitful when the purpose is to promote an expected and based behavior while the emphasis is on “reinforcement-selection” (p. 556). While language instructors may find the space of off-task interaction uncontrollable, reinforcement selection may be used to promote positive behaviors in this space. Staddon (2006) mentioned how positive reinforcement has been associated with “shaping” and how this method has been advocated as an important part of education, having its beginning in the so called “time-outs” as a punishing method to assure a positive effect that could lead to changes in behavior (p. 557). In this sense, the theories of behaviorism have provided language instructors with tools to deal with learners' inappropriate behaviors by giving instructors the opportunity to shape learners' in-class behaviors until the positive reinforcement can do its work on polishing students behaviors and obtaining a desirable behavior. It is important to note that theories of behaviorism in teaching are usually used by teachers to model students' bad behaviors for better class management. Such theories are barely used in the modeling of students' linguistic skills, in this sense not considering its potential for language development of students through positive reinforcement of off-task communication interactions.

Taking the information that has been staged so far, off-task interactions during class time has been linked to the dissociation of student's learning aims and goals and the switching of behavior existing in students between the student-student interactions during on-task and off-task stages. Most of the approaches to the off-task interactions and behaviors existing within the students in a classroom environment look for an explanation for this phenomenon and to the dissociation of the students from one stage to another. Making a relationship between off-task interaction and English learning, it is important to look for new approaches to make use of the off-task interactions in students' aural-oral skills development, as it has a tremendous importance for future off-task student-student interactions that promote cooperative learning while interacting during off-task time. Jia (2013) stated in his article that if every member of the group is included, and the differences present among the group members are solved by the group members, that is what you might call cooperative learning (p. 211). Taking this into consideration, having a cooperative approach from students will make much easier and enjoyable the process of incorporating the practice and exposure to the second language under study while having an off-task interaction. Hence, observing the behavior of a particular group of students is a determining factor in analyzing the behavior of the students and their reactions upon the incorporation of the language skills during the off-task interactions happening within the classroom.

Research Methodology

The following section includes the procedures used for the data gathering of this research. The purpose of this section is to state and clarify the different procedures selected to answer how relevant off-task interaction becomes in EFL classroom regarding language skills development in students. This section explains

the research approach, characteristics about population of study, and the data gathering instruments used.

Research Approach

In this research project, the approach selected is qualitative. According to Polit et al. (2001, as cited in Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004), “qualitative research is a way of knowing and learning about different experiences from the perspective of the individual” (para. 5). In this sense, opinions and comments from participants about their experiences with the topic are fundamental to derive new subtopics of study and finally state possible solutions or answers for the research questions. The purpose of the qualitative approach is to reveal how participants' answers point out specific aspects to focus attention in order to find the information that answers the research questions. Also, the design of this research is a case study. Helale and Twycross (2018) noted how a case study focuses on investigating a certain number of populations in their natural environment through an in-depth focus that is redirected in order to obtain certain related variables which have a relationship with a specific phenomenon being observed (p. 7). As noticed from what a case study is, a specific event is fundamental in order to analyze how the different aspects relate to the same event and what the connection between them is. In the same way, the phenomenon happening at the moment, which is off-task classroom interaction, is expected to be better analyzed through this design.

Participants and Context

The collection of the information to understand and analyze the phenomenon was gathered at a bilingual public high school in the southern region of Costa Rica. As the high school is a bilingual public institution, its curriculum of teaching is focused on developing a second language acquisition through the implementation of the English language in its subjects. In terms of the specific group chosen for the development of this research, 11th graders were the focus. Aside from whose age ranged from 16 to 17 years old, the language instructor in charge of the group participated in an interview. It is important to mention that the assessment of the other two instruments, the group observation and student interview, were conducted with half of one group, which was around 6 to 7 students. This happened because in the modality of conversational English, which was the teaching modality in this case, the group is usually divided with the purpose of a better learning experience and connection between teacher and students.

Finally, criterion sampling was used as the sampling method. Patton (2002, as cited in Suri, 2011) mentioned that criterion sampling reviews and selects all cases that meet some criterion. If one as a researcher considers quality assurance issues, this strategy is of a typical application. The criteria used to choose the specific population that could fit in the parameters of this research were based on the exposure to EFL and the availability to be in a classroom environment in which student-to-student interaction could be developed, for it is important to conduct the research in an environment where target language off-task interaction has more probability to occur. On the other hand, the recruitment process for the participants, and most importantly the permission to work with these high school students was coordinated by obtaining permission from the adult in charge of the student and the language instructor in charge of the group.

Data Collection Procedures

For the collection of the information needed as part of the data gathering procedures, three instruments answered our research questions. The three data gathering methods used were a series of observations, interviews with students and a teacher interview.

Interview for students.

This instrument consisted of a set of eight questions used to collect information that allowed us to get a clearer picture about the perceptions, thoughts, attitudes, and recommendations of the students interviewed about the relevance of the target language use in off-task interactions. This instrument was implemented by the researchers leading this investigation with the students in a face-to-face modality and took around 10 minutes to complete each interview.

Observation instrument.

This instrument consisted of a chart in which the observers checked criteria about classroom off-task interactions providing information about the participants' behaviors. The purpose of this instrument was to record how classroom off-task interaction is relevant in language learning. This instrument is composed of eight statements or criteria, and each statement is categorized into three levels. Also, a section for comments is included in order to add further insights and other behavior noted during the observation.

Interview with teacher.

The following instrument is an interview with the teacher in charge of the group. Through this interview, specific aspects regarding language teaching were consulted by using a qualitative approach that included open-ended questions. This was a semi-structured interview with a guide that included five questions.

Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this section is to present the data analysis that guided the process of establishing the findings discovered. The instruments and its corresponding collected data are presented into subheadings that respond to an overarching theme that was taken from the research questions created for this case study. Also, the data collected is discussed and analyzed in depth in the corresponding subheadings. With the analysis of the data collected in this section, we aim at synthesizing the information collected with the instruments to find answers to this case study.

Data Analysis

To carefully analyze the information collected with the instruments for this case study, a qualitative thematic analysis (TA) was implemented as the type of analysis selected to process the information. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) described thematic analysis as a process in which patterns or themes of qualitative data are identified (p. 3352). Having this concept of TA in mind, we focus this research on identifying those themes with the data collected in this section. Braun and Clarke (2014) also mentioned that TA is appropriate for researchers with robust and sophisticated qualitative data in mind, but still focusing on

presenting the data in a way in which can be readily accessible to those who are not part of an academic community.

In addition, this qualitative case study presents a deductive data codification process. Zalaghi (2016) commented that the deductive approach starts with specifying the objective in constructing the theory of reckoning. When the objective is specified, the assumption and definitions must be already clarified. This leads to the development of a logical structure based on the assumptions and definitions proposed by the researcher to reach the objective (p. 228). The analysis will be explored in depth in the following subheadings based on their themes.

Avoidance of Target Language Use in Off-Task Interactions

Regarding the lack of target language use in the off-task interactions in this bilingual institution, students showed almost no initiative to use the target language in the spaces that were given to share answers or ask questions in the target language during the task. Despite the students' level and vocabulary, they should have by 11th grade, they did not show willingness to use their target language, not even basic phrases or transactional communications as asking for the answer to a question; instead of this, students chatted in Spanish by murmuring to each other. They did not use the target language at all during their interactions unless it was a question, or a comment related to what was being studied. Despite students being able to produce basic phrases already encouraged to be implemented by the professor, students prefer the Spanish language in their interactions because they feel more comfortable.

It was noticeable that despite students having a good level of understanding and perhaps vocabulary, their use of the language was limited by their willingness to implement it in the different opportunities outside class activities. In this sense, it was observed that students tend to avoid the use of the target language in order to not fall into shaming situations that a misuse of the target language could cause. Also, when analyzing why students restrained themselves from using the target language in off-task interactions, it is important to note the role of language and social negative impact that influence this avoidance of language use. Vollmer and Northup (1996, as cited in Shumate and Wills, 2012) stated that three regular sources that reinforce problem behaviors, such as attention from the teacher, peers, and escape from instructional demands are present in the classroom (p. 25). In this regard, negative reinforcement has been promoted by other students towards the use of English language in off-task conversations as the students mentioned that the use of the target language leads to shaming situations when making constant language mistakes.

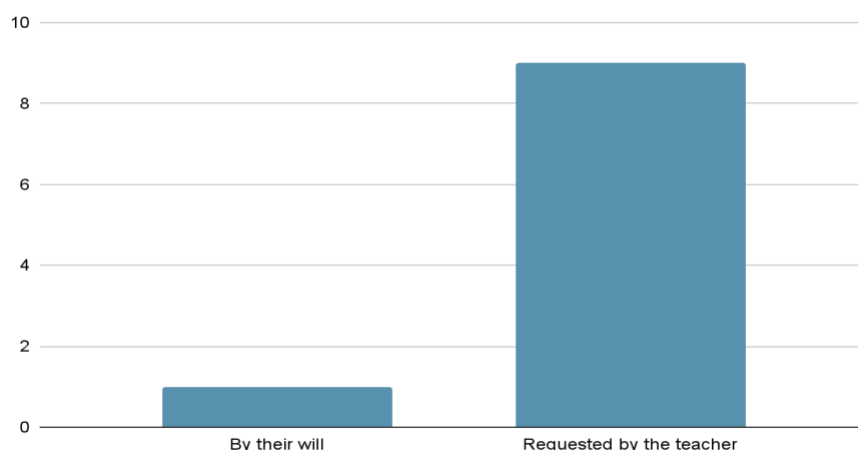
The Role of Language Instructors in Learners' Language Use

We could analyze the importance of the instructor's role in students' motivation and purpose for using the target language in off-task interactions. The teacher's attitude towards using only English influences students to only speak English during transactional interactions with her. Moreover, students just use English when talking to the teacher directly or when she is around. In Figure 1, there is a representation of the interview to 10 students in which they

share the circumstances in which they use the target language in off-task interactions in the classroom.

Figure 1

Circumstances when Learners Use the Target Language in Off-task interactions



Note. The information in Figure 1 was extracted from student interviews.

With the data collected in this section, we could reflect on how the initiative and personal reasons of students play an important role in the frequency in which they use the target language. The importance of teacher motivation and awareness was also analyzed. In this specific population, an external push towards their learning use needs to happen for students to use their target language more. When considering the problems with decision making and maturity that teenagers have regarding language learning, it is necessary in most of the cases that language instructors generate enough motivation in students for them to use the target language in situations that are outside class tasks. Babkie (2006, as cited in Jaffal, 2019) claimed that teachers constitute an important part in the off-task behavior, for their inability to pay attention can be directed by the difficulty of understanding the information presented. He mentioned that, as students with less participation in the class are prone to be involved in off-task activities, once they become off-task participants, the process to retrieve onboard tasks becomes difficult (p. 705); otherwise, students will decide on using their native language and not risking falling into shaming situations when being in opportunities to use either language as a consequence of teenagers' immature personality.

Students' Inner Interest for English Language Development

Even though most students are not using output skills during off-task interactions, they are aware of the importance of the target language for their future professional lives. In this sense, the different answers of students portrayed the importance that they give to the target language when they are not making regular use of it during their English classes or communicative opportunities with classmates. One student mentioned the importance of

English as a worldwide used language for communication between two different languages spoken, while another student mentioned how not knowing a second language could limit a person's opportunities. During the research, we could also find how teachers play an important role in the interest and motivation boost of students towards the target language use.

In short, the inner motivation of students plays an important role in target language use of students' off-task interactions as these interactions are not regulated by the teachers, and therefore, students are free to use whichever language they prefer to use for communication. Jia (2013) stated how the fundamental base between learners-learner interaction is the degree of socialization between either side, which in the same way regulates the level of interaction. Also, the analysis of this interaction shows how the level of communication desired takes students to use more variety of language elements, which is not common in teacher-student communication (p. 209). In the same way, an important aspect to analyze with their inner interest for using the language can be aligned with the awareness of the importance that these off-task interactions represent in the development of their target language to prepare them for future opportunities of language use.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this section, we present the conclusions and recommendations that originated from the analyzing and discussion of the findings of the research process of the specific phenomena under study. These conclusions and recommendations are specially directed to teachers, students, and future readers of this research article. It was concluded that students have a latent social stigma around the use of the target language. This happens because students place a significant amount of importance on the perception that the people around them might have. Because of the persistent relation between English and the academic or working environment, students tend to link the English language to these aspects in their life and do not see the language as a means of communication for their daily routine and activities. For this reason, speaking in the target language is not widespread within teenagers and its use is limited to academic tasks, which derives into a lack of English communication practice. This conclusion also implies a negative attitude from the students towards learning the target language because there is no motivation for them to use the language. This leads students to a persistent avoidance of the target language use even during on-task activities. Also, it is important for teachers to be aware of the stigma among the use of the target language, which is suppressing students' use of the target language in the classroom due to feeling judged and under social scrutiny.

The second conclusion is that students' lack of vocabulary for real interactions limits them to use the target language in off-task interactions. Even though the MEP's curriculum focuses on providing students with different topics and scenarios in which they can use the target language, students tend to forget vocabulary and phrases learned in previous lessons as they barely find instances to use that vocabulary. Some phrases like the ones they constantly use when recurring to basic needs like going to the bathroom or answering a call are the general ones that they tend to remember as a matter of everyday use. The lack of essential vocabulary for communication is an important roadblock that prevents students from using

the target language in off-task and even in-task communication. Because of the lack of vocabulary, students prefer to use their native language and not even try to encode the same message with different words in the target language. In this sense, topics and vocabulary that students resorted to in their daily interactions should be given more importance than medical or technological ones, thus increasing learners' willingness to put into practice the vocabulary learned and ensure long term learning.

The third conclusion is how teachers' influence on students' motivation and interest for the language is a key factor when dealing with teen learners and the lack of maturity they have. As previously analyzed, the avoidance of using the target language within the student population is constantly present during off-task spaces. In most of the cases, even if the use of the language was required, students showed a very low willingness to use the target language, for they did not find any importance in using it, but when we mention some examples of the importance of second language learning, they agreed on them. This implies that a positive willingness for participation is shown when motivation for the use of the language is promoted in the classroom. To know that students tend to give more importance to their native language than the target in English classes is important because the negative behavior students have towards the use of the target language is also due to the lack of motivation to use the target language.

After having presented the conclusions, a series of recommendations will be given to deal with or aviate the problems found. The first recommendation is for teachers. There is a certain negative view upon using the English language in high schoolers' social environments. For this reason, teachers must work to implement different tasks, approaches, and activities to help students in the process of changing their mindset towards the use of the English language. Teachers should consider the creation of classroom activities and tasks that boost students' willingness to learn and acquire the language. Also, they should consider the creation of spaces in which students can use the target language freely while doing or playing something that they like. This will help students feel more comfortable and realize that English can help them in many social aspects such as communication, art appreciation, innovation, production, besides others and not only in academic or occupational environments.

We recommend that teachers focus on providing students with classroom vocabulary to help them make use of that vocabulary in their daily interactions in the classroom. This can also be reinforced by reviewing and practicing classroom vocabulary. Despite teachers addressing the lack of willingness to participate, students' limited use of the target language is sometimes due to the few knowledge previously acquired. We also recommend that teachers often take time in their class to motivate students in the use of the target language in every instance possible through the implementation of reflective activities that awaken students' interest to use the target language. Motivating students only once in a long period of time is not enough to keep them motivated, for they tend to forget or lose awareness of the importance it has. During a workshop or talk about this issue, they tend to be more conscious about the problem addressed to them.

For future studies, we recommend analyzing different situations in which off-task interactions can occur and consider different participants for the study. For example, analyzing how a group with bilingual students influences off-task interactions or how groups of learners from different ages make off-task interaction in the target language is more prone to occur. For highschoolers, maturity and motivation in old learners may be a big factor in language use motivation. For this study, a main limitation was to find a group with a general good level of English for the study. We conducted the observation with 11th grade students in a class of literature, and despite being observed, students seemed to behave naturally. There is still concern that students could have had a different behavior in terms of using the language when being in a conversational subject and a different teacher whom they may be fonder of instead. In this regard, a suggestion for future studies is to conduct the study with a group that has a good level of English and enough communicational opportunities for the use of the target language. While conducting the interview with students, we also had problems with students understanding the questions asked or finding the correct answer to some questions. In this sense, we also recommend simplifying the questions addressed to students in case of using the interview instruments, so that students can be familiar with the questions and the context in which the answer should be given.

Finally, we can see how the information collected, analyzed, and then concluded could help to answer the central question of this research project, which was why off-task class interaction is relevant in the development of language aural-oral skills for language learning. In this sense, in the off task-interaction spaces, students were provided with situations to practice the target language through the implementation of aural-oral skills in conversation; on the contrary, they relied on their native language for communication. Despite students mostly taking advantage to improve listening skills in interactions with teachers, a focus on both listening and speaking could be given while interacting with each other in off-task interactions. As a result of some students' lack of implementation of aural-skills in off-task interactions, students' development of the target was slightly affected. Nevertheless, in other students that mentioned implementing the target language in spontaneous interactions in the classroom, a development of the language was reflected through the improvement of listening and speaking of recurrent vocabulary.

As part of this research project, we included an action plan to deal with lack of off-task interaction in the target language in the classroom. This action plan is a workshop of a lesson directed to students in order to boost motivation and interest for the use of the target language in spontaneous communications with equals. The workshop is to be given by the teacher and helps as an initiative to implement motivational activities for language learning during time. For the workshop, which would last approximately 60 minutes, the presenter should include an introduction activity, a main/group activity, and a closing activity. The main objective of the workshop would be to motivate students to use the target language in every linguistic space possible.

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In-class Participation of Tenth Graders in English Classes in a Public High School in Pérez Zeledón

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Abstract

In-class participation is a key factor for English language student's learning progress. Students' participation is indispensable in learning since it may reflect their interest and engagement. In this case study, researchers observed and analyzed how in-class participation takes place in a tenth-grade English class at a public high school in Pérez Zeledón. The study included students from 15 to 17 years old and their teacher. The results revealed that active and passive in-class participation allowed students to produce output and collect input that are essential in the learning process. The implementation of challenging student-centered and teacher-centered activities contributed to enhancing participation. A positive environment and the teacher's attitude enhanced the teaching and learning process. This case study offers pedagogical implications regarding the activities implemented in the English classroom and the opportunities given to the students to use the language.

Keywords: Active participation, passive participation, public high school, EFL, student engagement

Introduction

In-class participation is essential in an English language classroom since it helps to confirm students' learning process. In-class participation has gained importance because teaching now follows the student-centered approach where participation is key in the process of learning (Arman, 2018, p.65). To understand how participation takes place in the English language classroom, it is important to know some key definitions. In-class participation consists of students having an active role in the activities during the lesson, and it can be achieved depending on students' behaviors. Girardelli and Patel (2016) defined in-class

participation as the actions students take in the classroom, including “asking questions or clarifications, engaging in group work, presenting opinions in class, and volunteering to participate in class activities” (p. 32). English language teachers might develop different activities to promote participation and engagement in class. Engagement, in this sense, consists of being involved during class by participating and completing the tasks (Anyichie et al., 2023; Hornby, 2015). Students who participate and are highly engaged in the class might remember more content information. Consequently, students' language learning process may be improved when they participate.

Students' participation is indispensable in learning since it may reflect their interest and engagement. It is crucial that teachers encourage students to get involved in class dynamics to enhance participation. Classroom participation helps high school learners to develop language competence to achieve the goals according to the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) English curriculum. An engaged student is able to ask questions, formulate arguments, share opinions, reject ideas, among others. Participation is a process in which not only students but also teachers should be involved. A skilled and innovative teacher generates the desire and concern to learn and be active in students. The level of participation in students is reflected in the activities that a teacher uses. O'Connor (2013) suggested that English language teachers should implement techniques that involve all students and not only the ones that always participate (p. 340). In this way, teachers make sure that all students are learning.

The purpose of this case study is to investigate how in-class participation takes place with tenth graders' English lessons in a public high school in Pérez Zeledón. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to know how participation occurs, how it was promoted, and which activities teachers can implement in the class. During the development of the teaching practicum, preservice teachers observed that students were unwilling to participate regardless of the type of activities implemented. Thus, the previous aspect caught the researcher's attention to deeply investigate it.

The significance of this case study is to provide teachers with an overview of how in-class participation took place in the English classroom in a public high school in Pérez Zeledón. This case study sheds light on the importance of students' participation to ensure successful learning. The findings may benefit educators in their professional field. Analyzing the real situation happening in the classroom may allow teachers to understand what brings students to engage or not in in-classroom participation. Participation is chosen as the object of study since it might reflect the students' engagement and interest when learning the English language. Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions: How does in-class participation take place in the English classroom of a public high school in Pérez Zeledón? What types of in-class participation occur in an English public high school classroom in Pérez Zeledón? How is in-class participation enhanced in an English classroom at a public high school in Pérez Zeledón?

Literature Review

The Importance of In-Class Participation for Language Learning

Input and output are key elements to achieve participation in the classroom and favor learning. Kersten and Rohde (2013) stated that there are three elements that are critical for learning a language which are input, interaction, and output (p. 110). There are different ways in which learners can be exposed to input through visual and aural stimuli such as pictures, real objects, audios, videos, and others. It is relevant to provide a perceptual learning environment with much linguistic input (Kersten & Rohde, 2013, p.113). It is indispensable for learners to see and listen to a variety of sources and for the teacher to use language constantly. When students obtain comprehensible input, they will receive enough information in the target language to eventually be able to produce output. Interaction and participation play an important role to produce efficient output. Thus, language educators may implement interactive activities such as role-plays, group discussions, debates, games, and others. By implementing these activities, students might recognize their weaknesses and strengths and, while producing output, teachers may be able to identify if learners achieved the outcomes expected by the curriculum. At last, students need to be exposed to input and to experience the English language through interaction and participation to produce output. It is through output that the teacher can determine the types of in-class participation that can be implemented in the classroom.

It is through in-class participation that students' active or passive role is evident. Participating during class helps students to put into practice the knowledge that they have acquired during their classes. It is a way in which students measure what they learn and improve their abilities to formulate ideas and express themselves. Active participation is defined as the act of being involved in the development of the class, participating in discussions, and giving opinions regarding the topic. Being active requires individual involvement that generates retention and concentration abilities essential for students to have high performance in class (Funmilayo & Adedayo, 2019, pp.1-2). When students are active participants, the development of the class becomes dynamic and enjoyable. It generates a positive environment where students may feel comfortable to express ideas. Passive, on the other hand, describes silent behaviors. It is also known as marginal. Lara (2018) defined marginal participation as the act in which students are more listeners than speakers. Learners just listen and take notes (p. 74). It refers to students who are sitting at the desk, completing assignments, and answering questions when it is required. Those students are recipients that internalize information (Funmilayo & Adedayo, 2019, p. 2). In this type of participation, students are learning even though they are not the center of the class. This type of lack of participation can make the educational process less enriching. Lastly, participation in the class is crucial since it allows students to acquire high language proficiency. To achieve that, students must be motivated and engaged; they should lower the affective filter to foster language learning.

Ways to Enhance In-Class Participation

Learners play an active role in the learning process; however, teachers need to be intentional when promoting their participation. Motivation is key to enhancing students'

active in-class participation. Motivation is understood as a complex concept that involves individuals' inner power to achieve goals or rewards, to complete tasks, or even to avoid punishment (Guvenc, 2015, p. 648). In a language-learning setting, motivation may empower students to participate by completing all the tasks and activities proposed for the lesson. To ensure motivation, teachers can help by supporting activities that engage students. To accomplish this, identifying and addressing different types of motivation is key. On this account, autonomous motivation refers to an internal drive that enables students to complete the activities for their own benefit. Elements like effort, persistence, interest and enjoyment are key for autonomous motivation. Controlled motivation, in contrast, pressures students to complete the tasks to avoid negative emotions including anxiety, underachievement, or failure (Guvenc, 2015, p. 649). Promoting autonomous motivation in the classroom is essential to foster learning since a motivated student may see in-class assignments as a personal goal contributing to their understanding of the target language. Motivation may provide students with autonomy and competence to actively participate in class activities.

In-class participation reflects on students' engagement in the learning process. It is a product of motivation that determines the intensity and quality of participation in learning activities (Guvenc, 2015, p. 648). Engaged students are usually willing to actively participate in the classroom activities. This may include behavioral or emotional dimensions. A behavioral dimension involves effort, concentration, and class participation. Moreover, emotional dimensions reflect on positive emotions including enthusiasm and enjoyment during the learning process (Guvenc, 2015, p. 648). A combination of both dimensions is essential to ensure students' engagement in the classroom activities. Students' success and behaviors are highly related to engagement since engaged students have more probabilities of gaining more linguistic proficiency.

Motivational support directly affects students' class participation and their emotional engagement. Support and belonging provide students with a feeling of security to meet their physiological needs, which turns into positive effects on the students' motivation, engagement, and active class participation (Guvenc, 2015, p. 654). Motivational support may contribute to lowering the students' affective filter since it may relate to a feeling of disaffection, negatively influencing their learning process. Lowering students' affective filter contributes to make them feel comfortable, valuable, and engaged in the class activities.

In-class Activities that Enhance Participation

English language teachers might use different activities to enhance class participation because students might be more willing to participate if the class dynamics are engaging. Through time, teachers have adapted conventional activities and implemented alternative ones to promote participation. Traditional activities are known as teacher-centered, and alternative activities are student-centered; both kinds of activities can help teachers to achieve their goal. For example, O'Connor (2013) listed a set of traditional activities that are present in a classroom, such as initiate-respond-evaluate (I-R-E), cold calling, and group discussion. I-R-E is an activity in which teachers rule the class, ask students to participate (voluntarily or involuntarily), and students receive feedback. It promotes student participation, but only for those students that the teacher chooses. Also, cold calling is a successful activity since

students wait for their turn to be called on randomly. Teachers can control students' participation in this activity if they are in charge of students' roles, but some students might feel uncomfortable due to this activity because they do not know who the teacher will call. Another activity is group discussion in which teachers set roles and ask students for a purposeful discussion. Student participation is mandatory because each student has a role that must be developed in the activity. Moreover, role-plays can be implemented to boost participation of all students and make decisions as a group (Lara & Díaz, 2019, p. 78). All the previous traditional activities can be applied in the classroom to improve participation since each activity offers different ways to be engaged in the class.

Alternative activities, on the other hand, involve most students in the class, and they are student-centered activities. Some alternative activities are graffiti walls, inside-outside circles, and think-pair-shares (O' Connor, 2013, p. 342). In graffiti walls, students are asked to participate by writing on the board. In this activity, the whole class might be included to ensure all students participate. Also, inside-outside circles is a way in which students move and share knowledge by creating two circles of students (inner and outer). After a certain time, students from the outer circle move one step and start talking with a new classmate. This activity might engage students since it is interactive. The last activity, think-pair-shares, consists of proposing a question or statement for students to think about it and then share with classmates. As it is an activity in pairs, participation is mandatory, so students are accountable for their contribution during the class (O'Connor, 2013, p. 342). Alternative activities engage students to class more than traditional ones because they demand an active role from students.

Research Methodology

This study followed a qualitative approach which allows an exploration of a phenomenon considering the participant's perspective and drawing on a wide spectrum of instruments to collect data. The study aimed to analyze how in-class participation takes place in an English classroom in a public high school, what the activities are used, and how the language is enhanced. The data collection in this study took place in the classroom where students participated. Creswell (2014) stated that a natural setting is the field in which the data is collected (p. 185), and the place where the participants experience the issue that is investigated. In the EFL classroom, the observations allowed researchers to analyze the participation of students and the role of the teacher. Also, during the interviews, the participants talked about what happened in the class and how English classes were normally taught.

This research followed a case study design in which a phenomenon was investigated. Baxter (2008) stated that the focus of a specific unit of analysis depends on the audience, the study and the type of data researchers want to obtain (p. 448). The data in this case study was collected in three different ways to have various sources and perspectives to later generate the analyzes of the information and answer the research questions. The unit of analysis of this case study is in-class participation of tenth grade students in a public high school in Pérez Zeledón.

Context and Participants

The context of this case study was a public academic high school in Pérez Zeledón. This study focused on an intensive 5-year English program offered by the Minister of Public Education in some selected high schools. It is an optional program, but if students want to enroll in it, they should take an admission exam in seventh grade. In this program, students receive ten lessons per week of 40 minutes each. Once students finish the program, they are expected to reach B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The participants of this case study were tenth grade students from a public high school and their teacher. Their ages ranged from 15 to 17 years old. The group was composed of 16 students. Their linguistic level ranges from A2 to B2 according to the MEP English syllabus. On the other hand, the teacher that was interviewed holds a master's degree and has seven years of teaching experience. He has worked for private high schools and for private higher education institutions. This teacher has experience teaching academic and conversational English.

The sampling strategy chosen to select participants for this study was criterion sampling (Bloomberg, 2016). To follow this strategy, the participants met three specific criteria. First, all the students enrolled in the same public institution. Second, all students had been admitted into the intensive English program offered at their school. Third, the teacher was chosen because he was the one teaching the intensive English program. These participants provided the information needed to answer the research questions. To ensure confidentiality, all participants are referred to by pseudonyms in the research report.

Data Collection Instruments

To conduct this case study the data collection instruments used were class observations, an interview for the teacher, and a focus group with seven students. The instruments were administered during the English lessons for approximately a month. These methods were suitable for the research purpose because they allowed the researcher to observe real life situations and to get first-hand information by obtaining students' and teachers' opinions and concerns about in-class participation.

Classroom observation instrument.

The aim of this instrument was to observe how in-class participation took place in the English classroom of a public high school in Pérez Zeledón. The method was directed to collect data from both students and the English teacher. For this case study, the researchers carried out five observations of 80 minutes each. The instrument is a structured observation divided into three parts. Part 1 is about the in-class participation that took place during the class. The researcher observed aspects like input, students and teacher's interaction, the use of the target language, and the types of participation that occur in the class. Part 2 aims to observe students' motivation and engagement by considering aspects such as students' questions, attitudes, expressions, interactions and participation. Finally, Part 3 is about the types of in-class activities including traditional, alternative, pair, and group activities.

Interview for the teacher instrument.

The objective of the interview was to understand the teacher's perspectives about his students' in-class participation. The method was an online interview due to the accessibility of the teacher, confidentiality, and data management convenience. The interview is composed of eleven questions; all of them are open-ended. The questions are addressed to the teacher's perspectives about the role of participation in the class, the input learners receive, the output they produce, the types of participation that occur during the lesson, the influence of engagement and motivation, the kind of activities that engage students to participate, and the strategies used during the class.

Focus group instrument.

The aim of this focus group was to gather information from seven tenth graders about their in-class participation in their English classes. The focus group questions consisted of eight questions related to how participation takes place in the classroom, what factors influence students' participation, and what activities are implemented to enhance participation. Most questions were open-ended, so students allowed researchers to rectify some unclear answers. Also, this instrument was administered in Spanish since it is students' native language, and students would express themselves more freely. Finally, it has an observation section for additional information to write different aspects observed during the focus group session.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, different actions have been considered to make the study credible, dependable, and transferable. To address credibility, the researchers collected data from multiple sources such as observation guides, an interview for the teacher, and a focus group for students. This allowed researchers to get different perspectives from participants to get a deeper understanding of the topic. Also, peer-debriefing was used to ensure accuracy in the findings. Researchers read all the data collected from each instrument and analyzed the findings together. Then, to achieve dependability, three different data gathering methods were used to collect vast information. In addition, inter-rater reliability was ensured when coding researchers got together to interpret and analyze results. The two professors collaborated as briefers leading the process also assessed this process. Finally, to carry out transferability, the researchers provided a thick description of the phenomenon. Thus, how in-class participation takes place in the English classroom and how students respond to the teacher's input is explained in detail.

Data Analysis

To address the research questions that guide this case study, this section presents an analysis of the data obtained through the observations, interview and focus group session. The analysis was obtained through thematic analysis. The data were organized first into codes, then categories and finally themes. Excerpts from participants are used throughout the section to aid in describing the reality encountered. A total of nine themes are provided.

Active Participation to Enhance English Language in the Classroom

Both students and teachers agreed that active participation in the classroom helped students in the learning process. It was observed that when students participated orally in class, their performance contributed to the development of their language skills. In the interview, the teacher mentioned that “participation has a big role in my class; students are always part of it [by] giving their opinions [or] asking for clarification. They are happy and pleased in what they are doing. They can be very creative”. The teacher considered that students actively participated because they felt engaged in the classroom activities. Similarly, through the observations, it was noted that students participated voluntarily, asked the teacher for clarifications or instructions, took notes, shared opinions, made comments, created dialogues, and described pictures by themselves. It seems that participation is not a big problem in the class. The students enjoy being part of the development of the class.

Most of the time, students demonstrated an active role in the class when they participated, especially in groups. In this regard, the teacher stated the importance of active participation when he said that “students, [who] overcome their fear of speaking in front of others, are able to participate, practice more, and have the opportunity to correct themselves from possible slips while talking.” According to the teacher, students, who actively participated, are more likely to develop higher language proficiency. It occurred because learners were not afraid of participating and making mistakes. They had enough confidence to speak in groups where students helped each other and learned at the same time.

Passive Participation in the Language Learning

Passive participation demonstrated to be as important as active participation for students. Even though some students did not have an active role in class, they were also learning in a passive manner. It was observed that most of the time, they paid attention and completed tasks, but they did not share what they did. Thus, to find a solution, the teacher mentioned during the interview that “[I] try to bring some questions for them to answer like quick, and warm up activities basically for them to participate. I also use speaking activities that involve them working in groups, and they also produce a lot of writing during class”. The teacher proposed alternative activities to involve those students who usually did not like to participate or felt shy. It was observed that passive participation took place when the students were paying attention to the teacher, reading materials assigned, raffling the assignments to know who presented first, completing tasks individually, writing in silence, listening to conversations.

Passive participation occurred when students were working at their own pace when completing the assigned tasks. Some students were faster than others, but the tasks were completed. When checking, shy students participated orally when it was required. They completed all the tasks, but voluntary participation was not an option. When the teacher asked them to participate, they did it perfectly. It showed that not participating is not due to lack of knowledge, it was because they were shy or did not have the confidence to do so. Not only active but also passive participation helped students in the learning process. In both types of participation, students could learn either through voluntary participation or because the teacher asked them to do so.

Activities Preferred by Students

Student-centered activities were preferred by students in the English classroom. Although teacher-centered activities were present in the classroom, students mentioned that they preferred student-centered activities since they are more interactive and entertaining. During the focus group, students mentioned that the teacher brought activities that incorporate technology such as Kahoot and Quizzes; those platforms were used to review the classroom content. However, during the focus group and interview, students and the teacher indicated that these activities are not always present in the classroom because of external factors such as internet access. Despite that, students clarified that the teacher tried to implement other engaging and problem-solving activities that do not require technology, such as role-plays in which the teacher provided a situation, and students decided how to develop it.

During the focus groups, John, a student, expressed that he likes the Popcorn activity when they read a paragraph. During this activity, students were engaged in the class because they must pay attention to the reading in case they were called on by a classmate. In addition, students played Guess Who I Am. Andrew and Stefanny stated that for this game, a student would put on a headband with a picture on their head, and the rest of the group would have to describe the picture. The student who had the headband had to guess what it was. This student-centered activity persuaded the students to use the language. Although alternative activities were not always present in the English classroom, students still preferred student-centered activities in the classroom.

The Use of Teacher-centered Activities in Today's Classrooms

During the observations, teacher-centered activities were often developed. It was noticed that students had a worksheet to work on during the class. The material had students solve activities such as organizing images, ordering sentences, and filling the blanks. Then, the teacher called students by their names to check some of the exercises mentioned before. These traditional activities were present throughout the whole class, and the teacher called students that did not participate actively. It was a strategy to include all students in the class. Dictation, another teacher-centered activity, was usually implemented at the end of most classes. Even though students did not show enthusiasm about it, they completed it. Then, they exchanged dictations with a classmate to give peer-feedback. This activity provided students the opportunity to improve their listening and writing skills, and to raise awareness about mistakes.

During the interview, the teacher explained that the implementation of teacher-centered and student-centered activities depended on the classroom content. The teacher stated that the activities “cannot lead just one by itself. I mean, there are teachers that only make student-centered but no, it doesn’t work.” There should be a balance between both types of activities because they complement each other. Also, the teacher added that due to the number of lessons students received per week, which were ten, they cannot have only learner-centered activities; there should be both types of activities. Even though teacher-centered

activities are traditional, the teacher found a balance between traditional and alternative activities to promote students' in-class participation.

The Exposure Learners Have to the English Language in Use

Learners, in this case study, were exposed to continuous oral and written input throughout the lessons, for example, through greetings, explanations, instructions, exemplifications, vocabulary, idioms, and feedback. By doing this, students received a lot of input which eventually could be helpful for them to produce output and participate in the classroom. In the focus group, some students mentioned that some of the oral materials that the teacher commonly used to expose them to language were authentic audios, realia, videos, movies, and feedback. They also emphasized that among all the material that the teacher brought, they especially loved technological resources since it made the class more joyful and encouraged them to eventually participate. It was observed that learners were receiving oral input when listening to the teachers' instructions, explanations, and pronunciation of words. This variety of oral material during the class might boost the students' learning process of the language since it made the exposure to input interactive.

Some students reported that some of the written materials that the educator used were worksheets with vocabulary, flashcards, and readings. During the class, learners were using printed materials with grammar exercises, PowerPoint presentations, and scripts of plays. All these materials are critical for students to get familiar with written language and improve their written comprehension. The teacher remarked that the task's authenticity was important when he said, "I try to make it as more real as I can. Basically, because they feel more comfortable, and they can relate it easier." As reported, authenticity made it easier for learners to associate vocabulary with real life situations making eventual language production less challenging. The exposure learners had to the English language in use was critical to achieve participation in the classroom and favor learning.

Language Production in the English Classroom

During class time, students were provided with plenty of opportunities to produce oral and written output. It was noticed that students gave opinions, answered questions, asked for meaning, and argued to support their ideas in spoken and written form. This showed that they had many opportunities to produce oral and written language. Some activities students mentioned they did to practice oral production during classes were role-plays and spontaneous discussions. There was constant oral student-teacher and student-student interaction in the classroom. These interactions were possible due to a positive classroom environment, so oral output occurred spontaneously. It was perceived that the students and teacher were having friendly conversations by joking and gossiping. The teacher always promoted oral English production in the classroom even if learners were discussing matters not related to the class. Having a good relationship with the teacher and classmates was crucial to encourage language production and have voluntary participation in oral activities.

Some students said that dictation and writing journals were some of their favorite written production activities since they were engaging. The teacher mentioned that to practice

written production students created scripts for role plays and questions for quick answers in speaking activities. These activities help students to put into practice written output and boost writing skills. In fact, in the focus group, David said that he likes to write scripts, but he also likes to perform them because he can show what he has learned in the classroom. By doing this, learners are going to have the opportunity to produce not only written output when creating the dialogues but also oral when acting out the role plays. Students' in-class participation was influenced by a vast number of opportunities the teacher gave them to produce language during class time.

Classroom Environment Influence Students' Participation

A positive classroom environment influenced student's participation in class activities. Both students and the teacher mentioned in the interview and focus group that the classroom environment had a lot to do with in-class participation. One aspect that contributed to a positive classroom environment was the size of the group. The teacher commented that "the good part is that we have small groups, so that helps a lot with participation." He argued that when it comes to large groups, students do not participate as it happens with small groups. Making students feel comfortable enhanced their participation; to this regard the teacher said that "they come with really good ideas. They work really nice and do very nice things. They feel important and really value those opportunities." When students feel valued, they are more likely to actively participate in the classroom activities.

Other features of the classroom environment influenced students in-class participation. Students referred to the schedule and argued that the school day was very long, so in the last lessons they felt tired and unwilling to participate. All students agreed that the infrastructure of the institution influenced their motivation and therefore their participation. Students mentioned aspects like the internet connection, the classroom ventilation, the lack of furniture like desks and chairs, and the fact that they had to share the room with other groups. These classroom environment issues prevented students from totally engaging in the class development. As the student David mentioned, this situation lowers the students' morale. Sometimes they had to go around classrooms looking for furniture; they could not develop an activity and participate because they did not want to interrupt the other students in the room, and there were some nice activities that they could not undertake because of the connectivity issues. Students' in-class participation was negatively influenced by these classroom environment issues.

Challenges Engaging Students

Challenging activities engaged students and caused them to participate in the class development. The data collected from the teacher's interview and the student's focus group showed that students were engaged in participating in challenging activities. As the teacher mentioned, "they like to feel challenged by a game or activity; they love the sense of competing with each other." However, it was not only about competing with each other but also to prove their own potential. "Sometimes you give them some things they have to develop, create by themselves and if they like the activity, they would do it and go beyond." This statement from the teacher was evidence that when students feel challenged, they do more than expected. He also pointed out the importance of motivating students through the

implementation of challenging activities when he said: “If they do not feel motivated, challenged, I mean they get bored, sleepy.” In this case, challenges were considered a way to keep students engaged in the class development. Students agreed in the sense that they were engaged by challenging activities. They mentioned that this kind of activity in an English lesson helped them to lose fear of speaking in a foreign language and making mistakes. Steven, for instance, maintained that it is not the same to memorize a list of vocabulary than applying it into an activity that challenges them to really learn it and put it into practice. Knowing the meaning of a word does not imply knowing how or when to use it, so students really valued the activities that challenged them to improve their language knowledge. All students agreed that they participated more in challenging activities. This type of activities required a higher linguistic level. Challenges encouraged students to participate and engaged them in the class development.

Teachers’ Positive Attitudes Effects on Students’ Participation

Teacher's attitudes demonstrated to directly affect students’ in-class participation. Evidence gathered from the teacher’s interview and the students’ focus group established a relationship between the teacher’s attitudes and students’ in-class participation. The teacher stated that “attitude is very important. I try to be speaking and asking questions. I always try to find ways to involve students in participation by splitting them into groups or exposing them in a context where they need to be active.” The teacher seemed to have a clear idea of how his attitudes and way of teaching influenced students’ desire to participate. He also mentioned the fact that he tried to be dynamic and very active because if he talked slowly and quietly students might fall asleep. This demonstrated that the teacher’s active classroom management could influence students' participation positively. This claim was also supported by students, who mentioned that teachers have a lot to do with their participation in class activities because it is not the same to arrive in the morning and see a teacher with a bad attitude, then arriving and seeing a positive teacher. Moreover, they argued that when teachers look like they are enjoying their role, they feel motivated to participate in the class. Steven commented that a teacher who does things because he has to is not the same as a teacher who clearly made an effort to make the class interactive. It was evident that students perceive teacher’s attitudes even in the activities they prepare, if they planned something to be really engaging or just presented any activity to cover the lesson. Student’s in-class participation was influenced by the teacher’s attitudes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has found that active and passive participation are essential in the learning process. Both types of participation contribute to the improvement of students’ linguistic abilities. One of the most significant conclusions is that students who passively participated during the lesson were just as successful as active students when called on. Passive students do not participate voluntarily, they do it when the teacher asks them to do so. This situation limits oral practice opportunities. Students who actively participated in the class overcame their fears, developed confidence, and improved linguistic skills. Taken together, these results suggest encouraging quiet students to actively participate orally in the development of the class. The teacher can plan interactive activities where the students can work in small groups,

so those students who are usually quiet can participate more. It may help passive learners to develop abilities, overcome limitations, and fears.

Both types of activities, teacher-centered and student-centered, were present in the English classroom; however, students liked the latter better because they gave them the chance to use the language more. In addition, students are engaged in high level language activities that challenge their production skills. The study demonstrated that students who feel challenged were more engaged in the class activities. Therefore, they tend to go beyond what the teacher expects from them. As a result, a recommendation is the implementation of student-centered activities that challenge students' abilities to engage them in the class development. On the other hand, the results of this study indicate that even though teacher-centered activities are conventional, they still foster students' participation. In this case, it is suggested to create a balance between traditional and alternative activities in the classroom.

This study has shown that both oral and written input were key elements to promote participation in the classroom. Therefore, it is recommended to continually expose students to oral and written input to facilitate the acquisition of language and enhance participation. The findings of this case study suggest that both dynamic activities and the number of opportunities that students had to produce language were critical to boost students' voluntary participation. In this case study, it is recommended to provide students with many opportunities to produce output by implementing interactive activities that promote participation.

One conclusion in this case study is that the environment is a relevant aspect that can influence students' motivation. A teacher's positive attitude moves students to actively participate in the class activities; however, negative attitudes decrease students' willingness to participate. The evidence suggested that other classroom aspects such as the lack of enough furniture, the bad conditions of the building, and the lack of connectivity affected students' motivation to engage. A recommendation is to provide students with a comfortable environment that promotes positive social interactions, and with the necessary tools to assure a pleasant learning setting for students.

Action Plan

To promote in-class participation in similar contexts as the one in this case study, researchers suggest a workshop about the implementation of student-centered activities. The target audience is high school teachers of public institutions. This workshop could be organized in four virtual sessions of one-hour and thirty minutes each. Online workshops allow teachers to participate from any location which offers the opportunities for more attendees to connect. At the end of this workshop, the teacher is expected to have a wide variety of alternative activities to develop in the English classes. The topics to develop in the workshop are the importance of implementing student-centered activities in the English classroom, types of student-centered activities that can be implemented in the classroom, exploration of language challenging language activities and implementation of how to implement student-centered activities into the English classroom to promote students' participation.

In this first session, the moderator explains the importance of student-centered activities to enhance in-class participation. The facilitator emphasizes the benefits that students might have when they are exposed to those activities. A list of possible activities is described and analyzed. After that, in small groups, the participants choose an activity and present its characteristics and benefits for the learning process. The workshop ends with a wrap up activity. During the second session, the moderator explains some types of student-centered activities that the teacher can implement during the English lesson. After the exposition of the activities, the teacher can create a student-centered activity according to an objective suggested by the MEP's curriculum. In the third session, challenging activities are the focus. The moderator explains the need to implement student-centered activities that challenge learners' linguistic level. After a brief description of how to identify these activities in the English classrooms, participants may develop their own student-centered challenging activity. In the final session, the presenter shows some techniques to implement student-centered activities in the classroom. After that, the presenter asks teachers to get in groups and design a student-centered activity that promotes participation by choosing a level and one theme from the MEP's curriculum.

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The Role of CALL in EFL Seventh Grade Learners: A Case Study

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Abstract

Computers are used for different purposes in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. In fact, knowing how to mediate the teaching of the four skills through a computer may have benefits on students' language learning process. This qualitative case study was aimed at understanding the role of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as a resource of didactic mediation in the EFL classroom. More specifically, the objective of this case study was to understand how CALL aids learners' performance in their output tasks, what effects CALL has on the EFL students, how these effects impact EFL students in their output skills and what the students' perceptions about CALL are. This research included the analysis of a group of seventh graders at a public high school in Coto Brus. Researchers administered a semi-structured interview to four people and used three observation checklists. The study revealed that CALL has advantages and disadvantages on the learners' performance.

Keywords: CALL, output tasks, interaction, comfort, influence

Introduction

Computer assisted teaching methods have become useful for English teaching. Not only teachers but also learners have been exposed to the use of technology during the mediation of classroom activities. According to Yang (2010), a few years ago computers were not relevant in teaching a language; nevertheless, because of the emergence of technology, teachers and students should deal with the computer-assisted language learning (CALL) era. Even though the term CALL involves the use of computers for language teaching and learning beyond the classroom space, for the sake of this research, CALL will only be the word used to refer to the use of computers in the pedagogic mediation of the linguistic skills in the EFL classroom.

Technology came to make people's lives easier, yet the use of CALL had a negative connotation on interaction, participation, and learner's motivation (Nim & Son, 2009). For instance, because learners used to be in front of their technological devices, they may not interact with each other, which is the reason why there is a concern in the field of TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). Tafazoli and Golshan (2014) mentioned that the

integration of technology in the English language syllabus is relevant to take into account the students' reality in the target language, but educators should be informed about the difficulties that they might face. As an example, sometimes teachers are not able to develop all the language skills as requested in the syllabus as they should because they pay more attention to input skills (reading and listening) rather than output skills (writing and speaking).

The aforementioned problem was observed during the teaching practicum when we noticed that the collaborative teachers avoided the implementation of output tasks. It is important to deal with this issue due to the limited language proficiency shown by students when speaking and writing. Without production, students are not corrected if they have pronunciation, fluency, or intonation mistakes. In the case of writing, they are not learning about the use of grammar and punctuation because their computers automatically correct them without any explanation. Lai and Kritsonis (2006) claimed that computer technology will not replace teachers because it is not able to give students immediate feedback as human beings do; however, this statement is debatable nowadays. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the role of CALL in EFL learners in a group of seventh grade students at a public high school in Coto Brus.

The importance of this research is to discover the role of computer assistance on the EFL learners and the way it affects their output skill development. The use of technologies might be a useful pedagogical tool, but it could have a dark side if it is used inappropriately by teachers and students (Office of Technical Assessment, 1995, as cited in Lee, 2000). Based on this, the expected research findings will benefit educators and learners because the results could provide the advantages and disadvantages of CALL on the learning and teaching process. Once the research questions are answered, teachers can understand how students reacted to CALL to improve their methodology to help the students produce output activities. The following are the research questions that this qualitative research answers:

Central question

- What is the role of CALL for EFL learning in a group of seventh grade students at a public high school in Coto Brus?

Associated sub-questions

1. What role does CALL have on the EFL students?
2. How does this role mediate in EFL students' output skills development?
3. What are the participants' opinions about CALL in the English classroom?

Literature Review

In this section, journal articles are used to provide consistent information from diverse sources. The sources of this research were collected from Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Cambridge Core, and ERIC. The collected information was analyzed and evaluated in order to understand and show what has been investigated about the role of CALL. The developed topics are useful for future teaching researchers because they can find different perspectives about the topic and, at the same time, students create their conclusions.

The Role of CALL in EFL Learners

CALL is a method used to teach using computers. Hananiah et al. (2022) explained that this method is used as a didactic resource in which educators and students can reinforce, present, and assess materials in the class, and use different elements to interact. Nevertheless, Nim and Son (2009) claimed that computers and technology are not the key for better learning because it depends on educators' mediation rather than on how a computer can work. In this sense, teachers are not easy to replace. Although technology is relevant, teachers are the ones that make the class. Moreover, input activities are managed by CALL. Chapelle (2009) stated that grammar, lexicon, and pragmatics help the teacher in input tasks. However, many of the studies do not focus on output tasks, such as writing and speaking.

When using CALL, learners are most of the time working individually, and this is a barrier of communication between the teachers and the students. There is no dialogue between the students and their facilitator; therefore, their learning process is developed in isolation (Dina & Cironei, 2013, as cited in Tafazoli & Golshan 2014, p. 35). Furthermore, Yunus et al. (2016) discussed the use of CALL as an instrument for vocabulary acquisition. In their study, they found that learners' vocabulary and their reading ability significantly increased once the students' teacher implemented the use of the computer. On the other hand, Meihami and Esfandiari (2021) affirmed that CALL has an impact on how educators develop their professional identity and how learners become autonomous.

CALL Impact on Output Tasks

Technology has positive sides if teachers know how to implement it. In this view, CALL can help in the teaching of the four language skills. Imran et al. (2022) argued that the four skills are essential to communicate daily with other people. In addition, CALL can be used to achieve different objectives, such as practicing and learning to speak, especially for non-native speakers of the target language. In addition, Nim and Son (2009) also supported the idea that for a student to be a good speaker, they must be exposed to educational programs that include videos, movies, and social media, which will introduce them to the language in real life context. Likewise, the same authors claimed that some teachers mentioned that there are many reliable resources and programs which are interesting and catch the students' attention in the classroom because of their visual element.

Alotabi and Alzu'bi (2022) admitted that by using CALL through a software program for writing, learners could enhance their writing skills because this tool facilitates the students' writing stages. Otherwise, Ben-Itzhak (2021) claimed that when technology is correctly integrated into a classroom, learning is effective, whether it is a video, a podcast, a web page, or a program. Teachers must know when it is good to implement the use of technology or not. Yi and Cha (2016) pointed out that, after testing some students in using CALL in English speaking, they realized that the participants learned fast in the first weeks, and their knowledge in that skill continued increasing. On the other hand, students also critiqued negative aspects. Lowen et al. (2019) reported that interaction was a problem

because some students mentioned that they do not feel the interaction with anyone. Students also mentioned that they do not produce as they would like.

Although there is existent research on the use of CALL in EFL learning, such as improvement in listening, reading, grammar, and vocabulary; however, there is a gap on how CALL affects learners' output tasks. For instance, Chapelle (2009) examined the use of CALL focusing on input for students' interaction rather than output. Consequently, previous studies about the use of CALL do not mention specifically which programs and didactic resources are useful for output tasks.

Research Methodology

This section describes: the research approach, the participants and context, and the data collection. The research approach explains the type of research and the design of the study. In the same manner, the description of the population is presented in terms of age, linguistic level, gender, number of the students in the group, pedagogical approach, and curriculum, in this case the MEP syllabus. In addition, the high school environment, educational setting, and location are described. Finally, the methodology explains the data collection process used by explaining the purpose of the instrument and its appropriateness.

Research Approach

The focus of this case study was qualitative. To understand the concept better, Jackson et al. (2007) noted that "qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding human beings' experiences in a humanistic, interpretive approach" (p. 21). It means that qualitative research is focused on specific people's behaviors to analyze and understand them. Therefore, this research is qualitative because it emphasizes information gathered from secondary sources, observations, interviews, and experiences. Furthermore, this investigation adheres to a case study design. According to Heale and Twycross (2017), "a case study has also been described as an intensive, systematic investigation of a single individual, group, community or some other unit in which the researcher examines in-depth data relating to several variables" (p. 7). This case study seeks to analyze the role of CALL in the output activities in the English classroom.

Participants and Context

The high school chosen for this study was a day high school located in Coto Brus. This is a small high school located in a rural area, and it has a small population of 207 students. The students who attend this public institution come from different small towns around the area. The participants involved in this study are learners between thirteen and fourteen years old. They were seventh graders with a basic linguistic level. To carry out the observation and the interview, a group of four people, two males and two females, was chosen. Moreover, the collaborative teacher had been teaching for seventeen years, and she followed the MEP syllabus to implement her English classes. On the other hand, this high school has two laboratories for the English department; therefore, the collaborative teacher used technology in her English lessons, and the learners worked on different tasks on their computers.

Data Collection Procedures

The sampling method used to select the specific population for this qualitative research was criterion sampling. According to Sandelowski (2000), "Criterion sampling is a kind of purposeful sampling of cases on preconceived criteria, such as scores on an instrument" (p. 248). Therefore, we as researchers decided to use this type of sampling based on what we perceived during the teaching practicum to find answers to the questions about the phenomenon under study. Lastly, to start the recruitment process, we asked the principal for permission to attend the high school. Then, we talked to the collaborative teacher to ask for permission to carry out the observations and the interviews to one of her groups. For the data collection, two methods were used, a semi-structured interview and an observation checklist to compile the required information. Those gathering methods were selected because they were useful instruments for this case study. By applying these methods, reliable information was obtained.

Semi-structured interview.

The purpose of this research instrument was to obtain responses from the students' perceptions of the role of CALL in their English class. To collect the information, the researchers created a nine-question interview. Before starting the interview, the researchers followed a set of instructions to build a comfortable and confident environment. Then, a protocol was read for each interviewee to explain the objective of the interview and the instructions to follow. For example, the participants were told they would be recorded for academic purposes and that the expected time was about ten minutes. The interview was applied face-to-face to a group of seventh graders. The participants were five male students, and two female students because it was a small group of learners. The researchers divided the participants into two groups, and each of them assessed the interview.

Observation checklist.

To understand the role of CALL, the researchers attended the high school three times. The observation was carried out on three occasions during three lessons of forty minutes each. The observation guide consisted of a checklist composed of five statements which were answered through adverbs of frequency (always, usually, sometimes, rarely, never). The checklist analyzed the engagement, interaction, output task development, and feedback received based on the influence of CALL. Afterwards, the researchers took notes when they noticed limitations, advantages, and students' perceptions to complement the gathered information to answer the research questions. Those observations were conducted in the English laboratory when the collaborative teacher taught the class.

Findings and Discussions

To accomplish this qualitative study, some data analysis procedures were administered. First, the results were divided into themes. According to Kigger and Varpio (2020), "thematic analysis is an appropriate method of analysis for seeking to understand experiences, thoughts, or behaviors across a data set" (p. 1). After analyzing the data gathering, three themes related to the associated research questions were explained. To

discover the main themes, a codification process was done. According to Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), deductive coding is about “theoretical concepts or themes drawn from the existing literature. In a deductive coding approach, the number of codes will typically be relatively limited, with maybe just five to ten codes derived from the theoretical framework” (p. 14). To provide reliability, the coding procedure was divided into categories, such as initial codes and focused codes. In this section, the information analyzed is divided into three main topics. The first topic is the use of technology for learning. The second topic is student interaction (teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, and computer-student interaction) and the third topic is students’ comfort in the use of CALL.

The Role of CALL in Learning

Participants in the study revealed that they learned the target language using the computer in the English classroom. Some of them argued that using the computer was a good idea because it helped to practice the language in context with authentic materials, such as listening to audios and videos of native speakers. Students also claimed that they felt engaged on the topics while using the computer because they used various materials. They also said that classes were less boring because pencils and notebooks were not used all the time. Two of the students explained that they understood easily and quickly when they used the computer to practice the target language. Students said that they used tools such as Word, PowerPoint, and YouTube and still find the classes interesting even though those tools are of common use.

It is important to understand that students seemed motivated when they received classes with a computer. As disputed previously by Hananiah et al. (2022), this method is used as a didactic resource in which educators and students can reinforce, present, assess materials in the class and use different elements to interact. Likewise, Nim and Son (2009) also supported the idea that for a student to be a good speaker, they must be exposed to educational programs but also to videos, movies, social media, which introduces them to the language in real life context. These statements are aligned with the answers gathered in the interviews when some students remarked that they preferred the use of the computer for learning due to the use of different technological tools. Classes with technology were considered less monotonous because different materials were used. It was determined that students like variability in classes. The results of the use of technology were positive; however, one of the students mentioned that he liked to receive both traditional and technological classes.

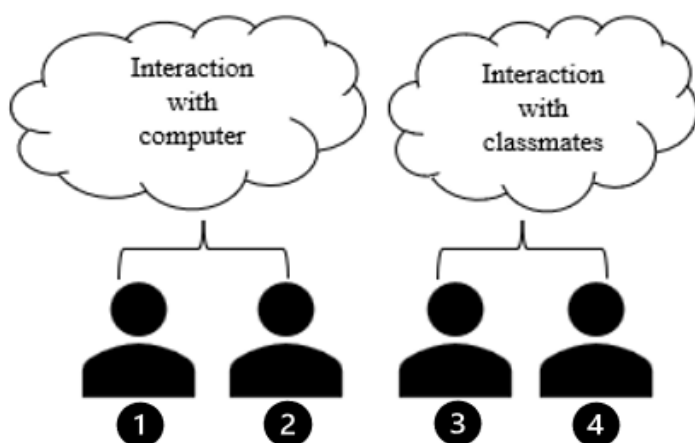
Learners’ Interaction

Throughout the observation process and the information gathered from the interviews, it was found that learners do not interact with each other in the target language while they are using the computers. A lack of pronunciation practice, as well as writing and speaking activities were identified as some of the effects on the EFL students’ output skills. Instead of having speaking tasks, they spent their time doing some listening activities or practicing grammar. Therefore, learners did not interact with the person next to them, which was a problem for developing their language skills. Two participants mentioned that they preferred to interact with their classmates rather than the computer because they could have fun and

learn at the same time. Oppose to that, two other participants expressed that they preferred computer interaction (See Figure 1). We interviewed four participants, as it is presented in Figure 1, two of the participants mentioned that they preferred the interaction with the computer; however, we noticed during the observations that they said it because they did not get along with their classmates, so for those learners it was more interesting to spend time working on the computer.

Figure 1.

Type of Interaction Preferred by Learners



Note. This figure reflects the learners' perspectives about the interaction between their classmates and the computer.

Through the three observations carried out, we found that learners did not have any speaking task. The participants used the computer to practice grammar and vocabulary, but not for practicing pronunciation or any interaction with their classmates. Lowen et al. (2019) reported that interaction with the computer was a problem because some students explained that they do not feel the interaction with anyone. As a support to that statement, half of the interviewees said that they prefer the interaction with their classmates. Moreover, Chapelle (2009) examined the use of CALL focusing on input for students' interaction rather than output. In our case, we observed that output tasks were never included, such as speaking or writing. Finally, learners usually used the translator for listening to the words, but they did not work on how to pronounce words, not even the vocabulary. Additionally, the learners did not practice how to write a sentence or a paragraph; instead, they used the translator all the time.

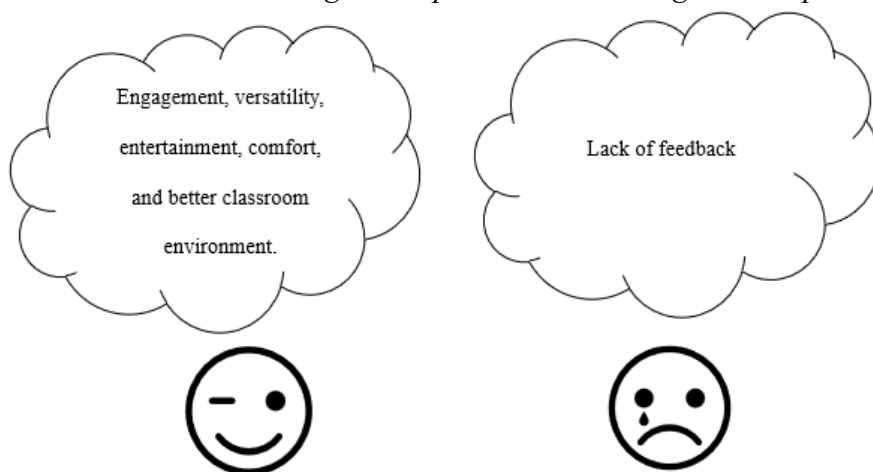
Student's Comfort

Students revealed that it is easier for them to use a computer than to write in a notebook to avoid the use of the traditional blackboard. Most of the students stated that they felt good when they only used the computer and technological resources during class (see Figure 3). In addition to the fact that they like it and find it entertaining, another student

confirmed that she feels more comfortable using the computer because she does not get along with her classmates. Another student admitted that using the computer to learn English is a smart idea because students could feel more comfortable using tools that were familiar to them. It was found that some learners like to take classes in the computer laboratory just because of the class environment. There was access to air conditioning and a quiet environment. An important aspect to comment on is that all students said they did not receive immediate feedback. The feedback received was only through Google Translate, or if they asked questions to the teacher directly.

Figure 3

Student's Positive and Negative Opinions when Using the Computers in the Classroom.



Note. The words shown in the clouds are the learner's opinions about how they felt when they were working on the computers. Negative factors are represented with a sad face, while positive opinions with a happy face.

Here it is noted how the students' needs are important for the development of the class. If students feel calm in the class environment, they can complete assignments efficiently. In this sense, Yi and Cha (2016) pointed out that, after testing some students in using CALL in English speaking, they realized that the participants learned fast in the first weeks and their knowledge in that skill continued increasing while using the computer to learn. Nevertheless, when the students did not have any speaking activity, as perceived in the observations, it seemed uncomfortable to keep silent during the whole class. Otherwise, not receiving immediate feedback was a problem for the student's learning.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following section provides the conclusions and recommendations after analyzing the data. Regarding the issue stated in the central question, we concluded that thanks to the use of CALL, learners have diverse material to work on different tasks and skills at their disposal. Students have different resources to practice the English language, such as YouTube, Oxford Dictionary, social media, and websites to practice grammar, vocabulary, phonology, speaking, writing, and listening. Throughout the use of these resources, teachers

can take advantage of their students' potential due to the fact that they have different learning styles and intelligences. According to the participants' opinions, we also realized that working with their computers provided learners with a comfortable environment to work on different tasks. This implies that the students' choices could be considered for their own learning well-being. Thanks to the comfort provided by CALL, students were on-task during the class.

The use of CALL has some benefits but also disadvantages for the EFL students. For instance, the lack of output tasks and feedback are reasons why teachers should implement different activities to include output tasks and assess feedback to the students' necessities. This is important to highlight because, by applying output tasks and giving feedback, learners can acquire the necessary skills to learn the English language. On the other hand, we concluded that students were engaged when using the computer. So, it is suggested that teachers take learners to the English laboratory to motivate them to learn. Moreover, the use of CALL allows diverse material for EFL students to learn English in context of the target language and, according to their perceptions, they learn faster and more easily. Therefore, teachers should implement the use of the computer in classes to help students learn the language in context with other English speakers. The use of computers has many reliable resources and materials to learn.

We offer some recommendations for teachers and future researchers. First, teachers should apply the use of the computer to motivate their students to learn due to the variety of materials to work on the classroom activities. In addition, teachers ought to implement the use of computers in the English class to provide students with authentic material to learn. It is recommended that teachers implement a comfortable environment when using computers for students to feel comfortable and engaged. Moreover, educators should incorporate output tasks when they are working with learners in the English lab for them to improve their oral and written communication in the target language. One piece of advice is to provide learners with feedback, even though they are using the computer; it is always necessary to walk around the classroom to clarify doubts and correct learners' mistakes. Furthermore, lack of interaction was found while learners were using the computer; therefore, another piece of advice is to implement group work and speaking activities for learners to increase their communication skills in the English language. Finally, it is advisable that future researchers use more than two instruments to collect the data to obtain more information about the research problem because sometimes students provide limited answers, and it is difficult to codify the information.

Action Plan

After analyzing the findings, we decided to suggest a workshop to promote speaking and writing tasks when using the computers. At the beginning of the workshop, there is an ice breaker. Then, a brief introduction about the importance of having output tasks in the English class is given. After this, the workshop is focused on the implementation of speaking and writing tasks to promote speaking and writing activities. During the research, it was noticed that the EFL students from seventh grade do not produce output tasks as they should when they were receiving classes in the English lab. With the ideas shared in the workshop, teachers can vary the activities used in class when they are in the English lab. These activities

promote learner engagement as they foster writing or speaking activities. In the end, the teachers will notice what aspects to improve in their methodology and how to help their students to produce in the speaking and writing tasks.

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The Use of ELT Textbooks in a Pre-University High School in the Southern Region of Costa Rica

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Abstract

English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks are one of the most popular teaching methods for language instruction. In fact, textbooks work as the main source of language input and practice students receive in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. They are usually selected for specific levels with the goal of fostering students' language skills using a particular syllabus and serve as a guide for teachers. This qualitative case study investigated the use of ELT textbooks for both receptive and productive skills and the teacher's and students' perceptions of their use in a pre-university high school in the southern region of Costa Rica. To gather data for the development of this investigation, researchers used classroom observations, interviews with students, and an interview with the teacher. Participants included tenth and eleventh graders and their EFL teacher. Findings revealed that textbooks provided teachers with a clear structure to follow while teaching a class, which also helped students study for course evaluations in an organized way to gradually improve not only their receptive but also productive skills. However, findings also showed that even though textbooks were helpful didactic tools for EFL teachers and students, there is a frequent and unquestionable need for adaptation and improvement of the textbooks' contents since one of the main weaknesses that researchers found is that they often lack speaking tasks that encourage students to participate orally. These findings have implications for the development and improvement of learners' productive skills, especially their speaking skills.

Keywords: ELT textbooks, EFL, high school, receptive skills, productive skills

Introduction

As the need of learning English in Costa Rica increases, teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been influenced by methodologies and strategies to achieve the necessary linguistic competence to communicate effectively. One of the most popular teaching resources is the use of textbooks. Most of the time, textbooks work as the main

source of language input and practice that students receive in the EFL classroom. Textbooks are usually selected for specific levels with the goal of fostering students' language skills using a particular syllabus and serve as a guide for teachers, indicating what to do and what sequence to follow. With the use of textbooks, teachers can organize and conduct their classes as this educational tool guides lesson development (Rathert & Cabaroglu, 2022). Even though recent studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of using textbooks in English teaching (Brown & Lee, 2015; Burns, 2012; Crawford, 2002), it is imperative to do further research about how textbooks are used for receptive and productive skills. In an EFL context, receptive skills can be defined as the ability to listen and comprehend, whereas productive skills are known as the ability to speak and write (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018). This area requires further research because of the significant role that these skills play in the learning process. It is vital to learn how to use, adopt, and adapt textbooks to enhance receptive and productive skills to ensure successful language learning.

This case study analyzes the perceptions of an EFL teacher and tenth and eleventh grade students from a pre-university high school about the use of textbooks in the classroom for receptive and productive skills in the southern region of Costa Rica. The use of textbooks in EFL teaching is a common practice. This material is used by teachers and students for several purposes like reading, listening, writing, and speaking activities as well as the systematic teaching process of grammatical topics of the language. This research project strives for observing, collecting, analyzing, and presenting results on the teacher's and students' perceptions of textbook-based instruction, which in turn implies features such as reasons to use textbooks in the EFL classrooms, benefits and drawbacks, and didactic methods to use this tool for receptive and productive skills.

The problem that this study aims to address is that EFL teaching in pre-university high schools in the Southern region of Costa Rica promotes the use of textbooks as the main source for delivering English language instruction. In a formal education context, using textbooks could be considered as a traditional and repetitive method due to its reliance on displaying boring visuals, reading texts, and teaching activities (Kodriyah et al., 2018). Hence, it is essential to prioritize the students' needs and deeply explore how the use of textbooks impacts the receptive and productive skills of the EFL learners since, as suggested by Rathert and Cabaroglu (2022), there is limited literature and research conducted in this area. The need to do research on this topic comes from the teaching practicum experience in which we observed the continuous use of textbooks. The purpose of this case study is to investigate the use, effectiveness, and challenges concerning the use of textbooks so that decisions about classroom practice can be made.

The significance of this study lies in providing a deep understanding of the way English Language Textbooks (ELT) are used to foster both receptive and productive skills. By deeply analyzing the exercises and activities in the book as well as the perceptions on the use of these educational tools, this study holds the potential of providing both EFL teachers and policymakers with insights on possible decisions to improve the use of textbooks to foster learners' receptive and productive English skills. Therefore, educators would be able to easily meet their students' specific changing needs by providing them with improved language

learning experiences. Lastly, taking into account the teacher's and students' perspectives, the findings of this study may contribute to a change in decision making about the role that textbooks play in the classroom to guide students towards a successful achievement of their English language learning goals.

To carry out this case study, the following general research question was posted: How are textbooks used in a pre-university high school in the southern region of Costa Rica? This question aims at exploring the different ways of implementing textbooks to develop an English class. Additionally, the general research question is subdivided into the following specific research questions: how are textbooks used for receptive and productive skills? and what are the students' and teacher's perceptions about the use of textbooks in the classroom? These questions aim at describing the different ways of implementing textbooks to develop different skills in an English class and perspectives towards the use of these didactic tools.

Literature Review

The Use of Textbooks in the EFL Classroom

Textbook-based instruction is part of the multiple educational methods for language teaching and learning. This instructional tool is meant to be used by both the students and the teachers as a guide to plan and administer language lessons. Usually, textbooks are utilized to provide organized content for the development of students' skills and subskills and contribute to the assessment of learning. According to Mithans and Ivanuš (2020), textbooks are used to offer a variety of well-structured and systematic activities that gradually develop from the most basic to the most complex with the aim of enhancing learners' mental, critical, creative, receptive, and productive skills. This didactic tool is also used to furnish learners with an understanding of how language functions in context. As noted by Burns and Richards (2021), textbook-based instruction usually focuses on authentic discourse such as exchanging greetings, listening to news, participating in a business meeting, writing a course assignment, or simply engaging in social chit-chat. The use of textbooks in the classroom has a relevant role in education; thus, it is crucial to hold clear awareness of the characteristics of good quality EFL textbooks.

The impact of using textbooks in EFL classrooms is conditioned by the quality of the different components that constitute them. Good quality EFL textbooks possess a series of features such as the three main types of language practices. According to Gómez-Rodríguez (2010), there are three categories of language practices, which effectively define the activities included in textbooks. The first type is mechanical practice which refers to the learning process of grammatical items with repetition and substitution drills. The second type is meaningful practice. It focuses on activities in which students make meaningful choices when completing exercises. The last type is communicative practice. At this stage, textbooks offer activities that facilitate language production more spontaneously and authentically as learners negotiate and exchange real-life information. Moreover, another element that a quality textbook possesses is that it should present its content clearly and concisely, making it attractive in terms of the information, the illustrations, images, and graphics it conveys (Mithans & Ivanuš, 2020). All in all, these are just some of the components that characterize high-quality textbooks, contributing to a valuable and meaningful teaching and learning

process. Their implementation in EFL classes benefits educators and students alike, as they offer numerous reasons for their use. In EFL instruction, textbooks fulfill a role that comes with both advantages and disadvantages.

Benefits and Drawbacks of the Use of Textbooks in the EFL High School Classroom

Textbooks might play an essential role by promoting critical skills, adapting to diverse needs, and fostering independent learning. This didactic resource promotes a quality teaching process, facilitating the achievement of various curricular objectives (Mithans & Ivanuš, 2020; Kodriyah et al., 2018). Mithans and Ivanuš (2020) have pointed out three advantages associated with the use of textbooks in EFL educational settings. First, students learn not only academic subjects through textbooks but also employ 21st-century skills such as critical, creative, and dialectical thinking, as well as other cognitive abilities that prepare the learners at an academic and personal level. Another reason to use this instructional tool is its flexibility to fit the language learning needs since textbooks are available in both print and digital versions. Also, textbooks present contents in a structured way helping teachers understand and follow the curriculum they are assigned to teach according to their structure and considering the type of topics in compliance with the students' language level. Third, the structure and contents of the textbooks are designed to encourage teachers and learners to become more independent during the teaching process. All in all, textbooks might be used in EFL classrooms as effective pedagogical tools.

In some classrooms, EFL teachers use textbooks as the main didactic guiding tool for their classes. Textbooks provide a sense of confidence for students by serving as a guide for the course (Kodriyah et al., 2018). This helps students to know what will happen and what they should do (Kodriyah et al., 2018). Second, textbooks allow teachers modifications in their content. Teachers can adapt textbooks to fulfill the learners' needs and learning styles (Mithans & Ivanuš, 2020; Rathert & Cabaroglu, 2022). According to Rathert and Cabaroglu (2022), teachers can make effective adaptations by using techniques such as omission, addition, substitution, and modification, which might lead to efficient teaching materials. Adapting a textbook enables teachers to remediate the textbook's limitations (Kodriyah et al., 2018). Subsequently, textbooks guide teachers who are less experienced and still build their confidence (Crawford, 2002; Kodriyah et al., 2018). Textbooks help novice and less experienced teachers beginning their educational journey since they support them with the development or adjustment of teaching materials (Kodriyah et al., 2018). In summary, textbooks serve as a guide for instruction, offer the possibility to be adapted, and enhance teachers' confidence.

Despite these advantages, using textbooks may potentially present adverse effects such as the focus on grammar-oriented activities, the lack of authentic language and material, and the use of biased ideas. First, most textbooks rely more on grammar-oriented activities leaving aside the other language skills. Gomez-Rodríguez (2010) concluded that textbooks place greater emphasis on studying and practicing grammar compared to focusing on the development of the four communication skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Then, another drawback is the lack of authentic language and material that students are exposed to. In terms of authenticity, the way textbooks present the target language is

excessively forced and artificial (Kodriyah et al., 2018). Finally, textbooks tend to be biased on the author's environment and the various global factors that cannot be considered (Rathert & Cabaroglu, 2022). Textbooks might show lack of flexibility and tend to reflect pedagogical, physiological, and linguistic inclinations and biases of their authors (Kodriyah et al., 2018). Besides these drawbacks, when chosen wisely, textbooks can foster the development of receptive and productive skills.

Developing Receptive and Productive Skills Through Textbooks

The development of both receptive and productive skills is essential for students to communicate successfully in the target language (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018). Receptive skills are those that allow students to get input from their surroundings (listening and reading), and productive skills enable learners to use the target language to communicate and produce output (writing and speaking) (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018). Textbooks play a vital role in the enhancement of receptive and productive skills since they are usually meticulously created for teachers to guide students from the practice of receptive skills to exercises in which students make use of their productive skills (Gómez-Rodríguez, 2010). On one hand, to improve learners' receptive skills, textbooks often include tasks in which students are exposed to input which is analyzed to generate ideas. For example, textbooks often include listening activities in which students listen to a track to repeat the words they heard, choose the correct answer, or match pictures to what they just listen to. Moreover, reading skills can usually be fostered through textbooks by having students read a specific passage and answer or discuss questions about the information in the text (Gómez-Rodríguez, 2010).

To develop learners' productive skills, ELT textbooks frequently include different sequences of activities and prompts that encourage students to explore the target language and produce output to express their ideas. For instance, to foster reading skills, ELT textbooks often display prompts to encourage students to use their creativity and come up with their own short paragraphs or pieces of writing on diverse topics and using different formats (Gómez-Rodríguez, 2010). Additionally, using textbooks, students often practice their speaking skills through various activities such as role-plays, peer discussions, and question-answering tasks. These activities allow learners to produce oral output for different situations and contexts (Acar, 2019; Burns, 2012; Gómez-Rodríguez, 2010). All in all, ELT textbooks usually provide a variety of activities and exercises to foster both receptive and productive skills to promote the achievement of the students' language learning goals and ensure the improvement of their overall language proficiency.

Research Methodology

The present study followed a qualitative nature which aimed to collect, analyze, and present information on how EFL textbooks are used in a pre-university high school in the southern region of Costa Rica for the improvement of receptive and productive skills. The data of this research were obtained through three instruments: classroom observations, and two interviews for both the teacher and the students. A qualitative approach was the most suitable method for this study as it helped researchers to have an in-depth comprehension of a specific issue by examining and describing the reality encountered by the participants in this classroom. According to Creswell (2015), qualitative research explores a problem with the

purpose of providing a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon which is the purpose of this case study.

This research followed a case study design as it provides researchers with tools for studying complicated events in the natural environment of specific individuals. As stated by Baxter and Jack (2008), “qualitative case studies offer researchers opportunities to explore or describe a phenomenon in context using a variety of data sources” (p. 544); in the particular case of this study, the phenomenon was analyzed in the actual classrooms by collecting data from three different data gathering methods. Case studies are used to portray a complete description and knowledge of the subject being researched. For instance, the primary goal of this study was to comprehend the teacher’s and students’ perceptions towards the use of EFL textbooks in the classroom for the enhancement of receptive and productive skills. Thus, a detailed description from the qualitative instruments of this research would be implemented to gather the targeted data from the participants of the study. The unit of analysis of this case study is the use of textbooks in a pre-university high school in the southern region of Costa Rica.

Participants

The setting of this study was a pre-university high school in the southern region in Costa Rica. In this context, this pre-university high school seeks to provide integrated education to its students by considering the core values of Costa Rica within the framework of an educational process that highlights the significance of building meaningful knowledge. Due to the nature and the specific characteristics of this pre-university high school, students must go through an admission process to enroll starting in their tenth grade. As a result, the ages of the learners ranged between 16 and 17 years old. This pre-university high school follows an academic modality that provides learners with academic and intensive English classes. Eight weekly lessons of 45 minutes each cover the curriculum.

The research participants were full-time high school students and their English teacher. Students came from different high schools in the southern region of Costa Rica. They joined the two-year program in tenth grade and were expected to graduate in eleventh grade. One of the main requirements to attend this high school is to have grades higher than 85 in all subjects in the three prior high school years. This high school is hosted in a public university. For this reason, high school students share classrooms and other services with other university students like the campus’ cafeteria, science laboratories, and photocopy place.

The teacher holds a master’s degree in Applied Linguistics in English as a Foreign Language. He had 20 years of experience in the English education field, teaching in high school and university levels. Additionally, he has eight years of expertise in pre-university high schools. The sampling technique to select participants for this case study was criterion sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016) because the participants aligned with the requirements of the researchers conducting the study. The first requirement was to carry out the study with students enrolled in a pre-university high school. Also, the use of a textbook for language instruction was essential to gather the data required by the researchers. Finally, participants’ availability was vital to apply all the data collection instruments designed for the case study. To report the findings, pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality.

Data Collection Procedures

To gather pertinent data for the development of this investigation, a total of three instruments were used: classroom observations, interview for the teacher and student interviews. The observation aimed at identifying how textbooks are used in the classroom to teach receptive and productive skills. In addition, the interviews focused on collecting information based on students' and teacher's perspectives about the use of ELT textbooks. The collected information may contribute to a deep understanding of the topic from different sources.

Class observations.

This instrument aimed at helping researchers identify how textbooks are used in the classroom to foster both receptive and productive skills and describe which activities or materials are used for the same purpose throughout the lessons. The instrument consists of five open-ended questions for each one of the four language skills and subskills in study and two charts for material description. Observations were conducted over a two-week period in every English class that students took. Each class lasted approximately 90 minutes. This instrument was pertinent for the research since it provided researchers with information to describe specific helpful events that took place in the classroom, holding the potential of gathering vital insights for the development of the investigation.

Interview with the EFL teacher.

This instrument played a crucial role in this case study because it enabled the researchers to collect data from the teacher's perspective. This instrument consists of nine open questions related to the use of textbooks to teach receptive and productive skills. In addition, the instructor gave his opinion on the main advantages and disadvantages of using textbooks as well as the circumstances in which he prefers to use or not to use textbooks and teach with alternative didactic tools. Moreover, the teacher shared how well the textbook aligns with the curriculum and learning objectives for his course. Finally, the researchers asked the teacher for the most and least successful exercises in textbooks to teach receptive and productive skills. The information gathered by means of this instrument was essential for the investigation.

Interview with the EFL students.

The objective of this instrument was to collect students' perspective of using textbooks to obtain context related to the topic under study. This interview consists of nine open-ended questions that aim to explore different perspectives related to students' productive and receptive skills, as well as the way in which this shapes their learning process. This interview was conducted during English classes to five preselected learners. The teacher in charge of the group was asked for assistance in selecting these students and addressing the entire process of reaching out to them and scheduling the interviews. Additionally, the interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed in Spanish in preparation for its analysis stages. Spanish was used because students could express themselves better in this language. This instrument was suitable for the research purpose as it offered the opportunity to gain a

deeper understanding of how students, who are central to this case study, perceived the use of textbooks during their English lessons.

Trustworthiness

This study ensures trustworthiness by the standards of credibility, dependability, and transferability. First, researchers expressed participants' perceptions on the use of textbooks in an organized form to obtain a clear view to avoid previous biases that may interfere with the results gathered. All the information was collected through interviews, and classroom observations, which helped to acquire a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. Second, dependability was shown by a detailed description of the instruments and how these were used to collect the data. Finally, this research also ensures transferability as it provides an in-depth description of the processes that occurred in the setting studied. Therefore, this research might contribute as a guide for similar future studies.

Data Analysis

This section provides an analysis of the results of the data gathered from the interview to the teacher and students, and the class observations. Eight subheadings address the issue proposed in the research questions providing a thorough discussion.

Textbook-based Activities for Receptive Language Skills

Throughout the data gathered it was shown that textbooks used in class included several activities for the development of students' receptive skills. Receptive skills are those that expose students to input to complete specific tasks that are based on the students' understanding of that information; they are reading and listening. In fact, all students who were interviewed agreed that textbooks are helpful tools for enhancing their reading skills. Josue confirmed it by saying that textbooks are useful for reading because there is a lot of reading comprehension. With textbooks, learners were able to work on their reading comprehension skills by reading and analyzing multiple texts on different social topics while solving exercises such as multiple-choice questions, true and false, and open-ended questions based on passages. In fact, as evidenced during class observations, to complete these activities, the students made constant use of reading techniques including skimming and scanning. In addition, the development of listening activities was also present. For instance, the teacher played audios or recorded conversations about specific topics, and then Ls answered open-ended questions, completed true or false exercises, and concluded fill-in-the-blanks exercises based on what they understood.

During the interview, the teacher did not list specific exercises for the enhancement of receptive skills. Indeed, the teacher highlighted that a great lesson that he learned from one of his favorite professors was "to never get married to any activity, exercise, or methodology." However, the teacher admitted that greater improvement in the students' receptive skills can be noticed through the implementation of exercises like extensive reading and extensive listening. The teacher also mentioned that sometimes the listening tracks and reading texts from the textbooks that they used are not complex enough for some of the students since their English level can vary in the same group. When this happens, the teacher often complemented the contents of the textbook with the use of authentic material. Some of the material that he

reported using were magazines, extracts from different books, or songs with the purpose of challenging those learners who had a higher language proficiency.

Textbook-based Activities for Productive Language Skills

Textbook activities for the enhancement of productive skills were often structured so that students could produce output to communicate orally. For instance, from the information gathered through the observation and interviews, the use of various activities for students to communicate their ideas critically and orally became evident; some examples of these activities were open-ended questions and role-plays. Even though there were no specific speaking activities in the textbook, the teacher used the topic in the textbook to create his own speaking exercises. Most of the speaking exercises were provided by the teacher. This finding was reinforced when Josue stated that those were activities assigned by the teacher, referring to some questions discussed in class. Then in the first-class observation, there were no speaking activities recorded; nevertheless, for the before and while reading tasks, the teacher asked students to work in pairs to discuss a series of questions related to the topic, which was culture. For these two tasks, learners always used English to communicate their ideas. These two sections were checked orally as a group. This practice became evident when Ana commented that the textbook mainly proposes discussions of questions in pairs.

When analyzing the textbook, it was evident that the writing exercises included were limited to highlighting and defining words. Even though there was not a specific writing activity, learners used their computers to type the definitions of words for the before listening tasks. Writing skills were not evaluated summatively since all answers were checked orally, so explicit writing tasks were not developed during the observations. This is supported by what Pablo pointed out that in the case of writing, textbooks hardly include activities to foster that skill. Productive skills were registered in the creation of written sentences where the students and the teacher ensured the development of the written production. These tasks were carried out while developing the reading and grammar chapters. For instance, María stated that whenever a new topic was introduced in the textbook, they were asked to make sentences or questions based on an image or any other source or input. The textbook lacked sufficient opportunities for written practice and when it did include them, they consisted of very basic and short exercises. Productive skills were approached with diverse activities that in most cases were not based on the textbook. Instead, productive skills were developed through the activities that the teacher created. All in all, the textbook provided the teacher with opportunities to enhance writing skills, even though these were not explicitly stated in the textbook.

Usefulness of Textbooks in the EFL classroom

Textbooks are tools of great help to enhance students' understanding throughout their English lessons and outside the classroom for independent study. During the interviews, all students expressed that they liked and enjoyed using textbooks in their English classes since they thought it was helpful for them to have a guide as they develop their language skills. In addition, they mentioned that for their speaking skills, the activities from the textbooks were not helpful since they felt that the exercises did not allow them to communicate ideas orally. However, students manifested their preference towards the use of textbooks as the main

source of input during EFL lessons to practice other language skills, such as reading and listening. Another aspect that students highlighted throughout the interviews was that the explanations and tasks from the textbook were usually very easy to understand and that the exercises from the textbooks were enough for them to learn about a new topic.

In regard to independent study, most students stated that the fact that the textbooks were digital, and the teacher sent each chapter separately helped them study for quizzes and other evaluations. Moreover, Josue highlighted that it was easy to study the book chapters that the teacher sent due to the fact that he divided the chapters according to the topic and skills studied. These strategies had proven to be vital for the enhancement of material organization not only for the educator's teaching purposes in the classroom but also for the students to study at home. In addition to the textbook chapters, the teacher shared links and extra activities for practice, and during the interviews, almost all of the learners stressed the usefulness of both tools to boost their language learning and performance in both class time and evaluations.

Textbook Adaptation for EFL Instruction

The teacher agreed with the students' opinions concerning the usefulness of textbooks since he referred to them as didactic and teaching-oriented tools of which teachers can take advantage. Nevertheless, the teacher also emphasized that, since textbooks are "material that somebody else already prepared," using these tools could become difficult for two different reasons. The first one is that sometimes the topics were not related to what Costa Rican teachers must cover in their classes, causing their "planning skills come into play." The second difficulty that arose was that using all the exercises in the textbook became challenging because not all of them are suitable for the students in that specific high school and their language level. To overcome these obstacles, the teacher often adapted the textbook contents to his students' specific learning needs by complimenting them with extra material and technological tools; nonetheless, the teacher mentioned that even though textbooks work for him and his students, "sometimes the teacher is not responsible for everything" and "99.99% [of the success of class material] depends on the students." For this reason, teachers should always keep in mind ways to adapt pre-existing didactic material to the demands of their students.

Moreover, during class observations, it was evident that textbooks sometimes lacked warm-up activities and tasks that promoted students' oral interventions throughout the class. For instance, in the last two classes that were observed, the teacher brought self-made or other extra materials to get students ready to start the class or have them participate halfway through it. In one of the classes, the teacher sent an image that he created with different discussion questions on cultural misunderstandings, and then students got into groups of three to go over the questions. Later, right after an extensive reading activity, the teacher projected a PowerPoint presentation for students to discuss different cultural rules orally. All in all, extra material or resources were always necessary at some point in the class to adapt the textbook tasks by solving its deficiencies in specific skills and adapting the content to the students' learning needs.

Structured Learning as an Advantage of ELT Textbook Use

The use of ELT textbooks benefited students by providing them with a structured learning environment, which is especially beneficial in classrooms with students of varying English proficiency levels. Based on the insights gathered from the interviews, it was evident that the way the teacher used the textbook complemented the learning format effectively, which resulted in a significant advantage for the learning process. All students expressed that the structure of the textbooks was beneficial as it provided specific contextualized practices based on the linguistic area under study. For instance, in one interview, María stated that she believed textbooks helped in the application of existing knowledge and in ensuring the clarification of specific questions. This advantage was reinforced during the observations, as it was evident how the teacher carefully selected classwork exercises. Once this happened, the students solved them without any problems, confirming that the combination of the teacher's careful selection of parts of the textbook and the structured content nature that characterizes this tool facilitated students' comprehension of the lesson. This process was achieved by providing a clear and organized path to follow through clear explanations, practices, and objectives throughout their educational journey.

Based on the classroom observations, the usefulness of structured learning through the textbook was evident. The structural pattern in each of the linguistic tasks, especially listening and reading, was an asset. For instance, the moment learners completed the exercises, a familiarization of the students with the types of activities and their organization was noted. Even though the teacher explained each of the exercises, students seemed not to need a lot of instruction as they knew what to do. In fact, the questions that arose in practice came from lack of language knowledge and understanding of written and oral vocabulary and not due to a misunderstanding of the exercise as such. That is, the students knew that they were completing a true or false exercise or a fill-in-the-blank exercise since they had solved similar exercises before. Most of the activities, regardless of the linguistic skill, were the same; they were simply contextualized to the topic under study. This is why students felt comfortable using the textbook since they were already familiar with its structure.

Enhancement of Academic Performance through the Use of ELT Textbook

Textbooks provided essential support as an autonomous learning tool which could potentially contribute to their academic performance. Derived from the information obtained during the interviews, most students agreed that textbooks work as a valuable study resource. Through their use, students could easily access numerous class materials covered during their lessons. This advantage was evident when Sofia expressed that she found textbooks highly useful as it closely resembled some exam exercises; this type of resource prepared them to know what the teacher would ask, and even helped them recall the information they were studying during the lesson. Her comment illustrated how textbooks foster independent learning since students significantly trust in this tool for studying before tests. Furthermore, learners acknowledged that an important characteristic of the textbook is that information is easy to find. Overall, the use of textbooks facilitated access to content which contributed to students' independent learning.

In this study, there was no specific measurement of students' academic performance concerning the use of ELT textbooks. However, the idea expressed by students in the interviews about how the implementation of this didactic tool enhanced their academic performance was evident throughout the observations. It was noted, especially during practice sessions, that students consistently relied on the textbook to seek clarification or additional information on the topic under study, which boosted their performance in class. This was mostly reflected in the correct responses provided by the students when the teacher reviewed reading exercises. Across each observation, it was witnessed how the textbook facilitated English interaction among learners during each lesson by engaging in group discussions of textbook content; not only that, but it also encouraged students to develop a deep understanding of the topics and develop critical thinking skills. This was noticeable since the first observation when, at the beginning of the class, the students had little to say about the topic of study which was culture. Nevertheless, that changed when, through group work, they discussed a series of questions from the textbook. The success of this interaction became evident in the main discussion with the teacher when students actively participated and provided enriching comments about the subject.

Lack of Speaking Activities in Textbooks

By solely relying on ELT textbooks, students might have experienced lack of exposure to speaking activities, which did not help to foster oral production skills. In the interviews, a few students mentioned the lack of speaking activities as a disadvantage found in textbooks. They pointed out that reading and listening were the most developed skills when using the textbook; however, there was less support and limited focus on speaking exercises since the tasks related to speaking were mainly about answering basic questions or, in other cases, the teacher wrote the speaking exercises on the board. For example, in his interview, Pablo shared that in textbooks, the questions provided were also basic when it suggested talking to another classmate. In addition, in the interview, Josue commented that sometimes the teacher provided extra speaking exercises since the textbook did not include them.

A lack of speaking activities in the textbook was noticed during the class observations. Throughout the observation period, the teacher emphasized listening and reading activities, explicitly incorporating speaking practice at certain stages. This situation was more evident during the second and third observations. The teacher used the questions from the reading and listening stages as questions for oral discussion and asked the students to work in pairs. Then, during the third observation, due to the lack of speaking tasks in the textbook, the teacher provided students with some questions to discuss in groups. Students could then express themselves orally since the teacher gave them extra activities to get them to discuss their points of view on the topic. As a result, this practice confirmed what the students had claimed in their interviews; the textbook did not include sufficient speaking tasks. Textbooks that do not focus on speaking activities might limit EFL students' overall learning process.

Task Repetition in Textbooks

Textbooks can lead to repetitive and methodical classroom activities, which may result in a less effective learning environment. Some students agreed that the textbook activities may seem repetitive and methodical, so classes tended to be similar every week. This repetitive pattern can make the lesson boring and less engaging for students. Even though some students referred to structured learning as an advantage of using textbooks, the interviews showed that textbooks may lead to repetitive activities, which can become monotonous for students. For instance, Josue shared that what he believed is that the excessive use of textbooks in the class makes it very methodical. It makes the class less interactive and more boring. This concern was not noticed during the class observations; however, the researchers noted that most of the class activities were related to reading and listening skills, which can be considered as the repetitive pattern that the textbook follows. This monotonous and methodical way of practicing through textbooks was predicted as a disadvantage for EFL students.

The perception that textbooks can be monotonous and therefore boring not only comes from the students but also from the teacher. Based on the interview conducted with the teacher, he expressed that some of the activities are tedious, and one of the issues that practically all textbooks have is that each chapter follows the same repetitive format. The teacher remarked that, after chapter 3, students already know what they will do. This reduces uncertainty, preventing students from leaving their comfort zones, which in turn helps them in the development of their critical thinking skills as they adapt to new academic situations. On the other hand, during class observations there were no signs of these statements since most students completed the activities without showing physical or verbal signs of boredom.

Conclusions and Recommendations

According to the data in this case study, two significant conclusions regarding the benefits of implementing ELT textbooks in a pre-university high school were drawn. Based on the responses provided, it was evident that this didactic tool plays a crucial role in establishing a structured learning environment for students, which is especially beneficial for enhancing their classroom performance in a diverse English proficiency level context. Furthermore, all the students expressed a shared belief that textbooks serve to improve their overall learning. They emphasized that textbooks facilitate independent study and provide easy-to-understand support for their academic journey; thus, they felt that it enhances their academic performance. Considering these insights, the researchers suggest the institution develop a workshop aimed at encouraging EFL teachers to incorporate textbooks as valuable resources for supporting students' academic performance. The objective of conducting a workshop is to provide teachers with skills to design well-organized lessons and offer contextualized practices through the effective integration and use of textbooks. By embracing this recommendation, high schools can ensure the optimal use of ELT textbooks to create a diverse learning environment that benefits all students' academic performance.

This case study showed that textbooks offer a considerable number of activities that enhance students' receptive skills. Most exercises from the textbook focused on reading and listening comprehension. For instance, by reading and analyzing several texts on various

social themes included in textbooks, students were able to work on their reading comprehension skills. These exercises included multiple-choice, true-false, and open-ended questions. Additionally, during the lessons, it was observed that listening skills were developed by means of the material proposed in the textbook. For example, the teacher would play audios about particular subjects, and the students would respond to open-ended questions, complete activities with true and false statements, and fill in the gaps using their understanding of the ideas presented in the audio. Considering this, a possible recommendation is the implementation of a webinar that focuses on providing teachers with relevant information about the different forms of using textbooks for the enhancement of receptive skills. Through a webinar, professionals in the field of English teaching can participate with the aim of sharing personal experiences and recommendations on the use of textbooks to help students improve their reading and listening skills. This can help novice teachers have a more clear and broad understanding of the use of textbooks in the classroom.

The findings also pointed out that textbooks are helpful tools since they offer an established structure to teach. Furthermore, textbooks provide students with the guidelines they need to understand textbook tasks for in-class activities as well as for out of class preparation for evaluations. During the class, students followed a sequence of activities that allowed them to gradually put their language skills into practice. Most of the interviewed students expressed that textbooks are in fact useful for them to get prepared for evaluations and get satisfying results since they display clear instructions and explanations. Despite textbooks' success for classroom use and students' independent study, it is advisable that teachers promote the exposure of students to material that is authentic not only during class but also for the students' autonomous language learning process.

The results of this study indicated that even though textbooks are helpful for both teachers and students, some of the tasks may not be suitable for all students in a group, or students that belong to a specific academic context with different proficiency levels. In this case, the need for textbook adaptation becomes unquestionable. A recommendation for teachers that face this challenge in their classrooms would be to identify their students' language learning needs with the objective of getting the most out of these tools in the classroom. Once the needs have been identified, teachers can act and implement different strategies to modify the textbook for their groups; for instance, certain tasks can be omitted and replaced by resources that the teacher creates according to their students' linguistic necessities only.

In this case study, the student-researchers noticed that textbooks presented monotonous and methodical activities that may lead to lack of engagement and reduce meaningful learning. By analyzing the data gathered, it was evident that the activities in textbooks may be repetitive and methodical. This led the researchers to conclude that overreliance on textbooks can lead to less interactive and engaging lessons, which may hinder the overall success of the English learning process. A recommendation was to change or modify repetitive and methodic activities that students consider boring or not engaging. Teachers can consider students' perceptions through a survey in which they point out activities that help them to improve their English skills and the ones they consider are

repetitive. Then, based on the results from the survey, teachers may modify or change the exercises if they consider it pertinent. Some ways to modify the exercises could be through the incorporation of teachers may incorporate technology in the classroom, such as language learning applications, interactive websites, and digital resources. By doing so, teachers can provide a more interactive and dynamic learning experience.

The results of this research support the idea that there are discrepancies regarding the activities included in the textbook used in this language program. The fact that most of the activities were for receptive skills hindered the development of productive ones. From the data gathered and analyzed, this study has found that, by using ELT textbooks, students are not exposed to many speaking and writing activities, which does not help to foster these abilities. The interviews and observations revealed information about the types of activities in the textbook and the way that they were developed during the lessons. The writing and speaking tasks from the textbook tended to be part of reading or listening stages so, when necessary, the teacher provided extra activities to fill this gap. Students, and even the teacher, have pointed out that the textbook was likely to focus more on reading and listening skills, with limited support for productive skills. This suggests that the use of ELT textbooks in the classroom may be a challenge for students when developing productive skills since textbooks present a limited focus on writing and speaking tasks.

Action Plan

To address the deficiency in oral production development in this high school, the researchers suggest designing and implementing a digital booklet which includes free material and resources. The main objective of this booklet is to provide a series of speaking practices that align with the textbook topics. Additionally, the booklet is expected to be used throughout the whole academic year as it includes the textbook's contents. This booklet includes topic-related role-plays, conversation questions, and discussions that create a more balanced learning process and promote students' productive abilities, which is essential for EFL learners. In fact, by implementing additional speaking activities students might improve their productive skills.

This booklet should be composed of four different sections that include themes from tenth grade, which are health, technology, social relationships, and college life. Each section of the booklet should follow the same structure with two different role-play prompts, two sets of conversation questions for students to discuss in smaller groups (of two or three students maximum), and one group discussion to be carried out in the form of a debate in which all students of the group participate. These activities should be carefully chosen and designed according to the textbook deficiencies that were observed by the researchers and the students' preferences.

The teacher would share the booklet with students digitally and will assign specific tasks for them to speak at some point of the class according to the topic developed. Students can download their booklets on their computers or cell phones. The teacher decides when in class, students would work with the booklet. Since each activity includes a specific set of instructions, the teacher would read them with students first. Then, students could take time to

interact and speak while working on the activity assigned. Finally, students participate in a group discussion in which they listen to their classmates' ideas.

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THEME 3

Beyond the
English
Language
Classroom



Beyond the English Language Classroom

EFL students' success in their learning does not solely depend on the dynamics inside the classroom space. In this sense, the social phenomena that revolve around students' lives could potentially shape their learning process. Being Costa Rica's Brunca Region in a socially disadvantaged context (INEC, 2020), bridging the gaps in the literature regarding students' language learning experiences beyond the classroom allows stakeholders to better respond to their particular needs in the curriculum. As a matter of fact, researchers have reportedly analyzed situations related to students' high-school-to-higher-education transition (Morrison & Pérez, 2016; Kao et al., 2024) and drop-out phenomenon (Lee & Burkam, 2000; Herrera, 2012; Evans & Tragant, 2020), yet attempts to address these research problems with EFL learners in the peripheries are still scarce. Under these circumstances, the research conducted by undergraduate students about these specific topics can become a valuable resource to know the reality of English language teaching and learning in the region.

This section explores two case studies based on Brunca Region students' language learning experience beyond the classroom at a public university in the region. The first study analyzes EFL students' transition from public secondary school to public higher education, while the second research article unravels the causes of student dropout in the English Teaching Major. With the findings suggested in these case studies, curriculum stakeholders are expected to make better informed decisions by being more socially aware of the needs to be raised in the EFL field to critically transform students' learning experience both inside and outside the classroom.

EFL Student Transition from Public Secondary School to Public Higher Education

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Abstract

Student transition from secondary school to higher education can be a difficult step for learners because of the many changes encountered. This case study focused on EFL students' transition process from public secondary school to a public university in the Brunca Region in Costa Rica. The phenomenon observed was the challenges and changes first year students faced during their transition. The participants were all students from a public university in Pérez Zeledón, specifically students who were taking the Integrated Skills 1 course for the second time at the time of the study. The students' age range went from 18 to 40. The data were gathered through 7 interviews with students and professors and 7 class observations. The main results revealed that students faced greater difficulty due to their lack of prior knowledge about the target language. Also, the students reported that they reached out-of-class help in order to improve their linguistic skills and grades. Another important result was that professors encouraged students to be more active and have more agency in their learning process. The main conclusion is that the two biggest challenges students faced when entering the English program were the low proficiency level that they acquired in secondary school and the realization that they had to take a more active role in their learning process. A final conclusion is that professors in the program should be mindful of the challenges behind the transition process of first-year students encountered.

Keywords: First-year university students, English as a foreign language student, transition process, higher education, language proficiency

Introduction

According to records provided by the register office of a higher education institution in the southern region of Costa Rica in (2023), 127 students entered one of the two the English programs offered on campus in 2023, but 15% of them dropped out of the major during the first semester. Only around 88% of the initial population remained in the

institution for the second semester. Students' transitioning experience from high school to university faces a series of challenges related to emotional academic, social, and academic emotional adaptation. According to Ricks and Warren (2021), students can experience feelings like fear, loneliness, and anxiety when being in a new environment and when trying to adapt themselves to college life. Some students experience difficulties in adapting to the university's advanced English level compared to the one in high schools causing obstacles in their learning process leading to learning limitations (Al-Mahrooqi, et al, 2015; Roessing & Douglas, 2011). Difficulties in adjusting to this new lifestyle, college life, and new demands in classes, and college life may result in academic failure, stress, and interpersonal obstacles.

The gap between the Costa Rican public secondary English curriculum and the public university English language programs is causing many students to fail in the first-year courses. According to Programa Estado de la Nación (2018), even though the public education system has implemented English in the curriculum for many years, students have not been able to develop the expected proficiency level in the target language. The majority of learners feel overwhelmed due to the abrupt change they experience as higher education students. This situation causes adaptation issues in the university environment (Eryilmaz, et al, 2023; Roessing & Douglas, 2011). This case study seeks to portray the challenges that students face in this transition process to higher education, to identify the scenarios freshman students in a public university in Costa Rica may face, and to analyze the different ways to succeed in this process of transitioning.

First-year university students face several changes that can result in stress and distress not only because of the academic challenges but also because of the emotional challenges faced, for instance feeling lonely and nostalgic when moving away from their hometown. According to Wyatt (2017), the fact that these students must create a new social circle for studying and socializing not only for scholastic purposes but also for social purposes can be seen as a challenge that most people overlook. An additional responsibility first year university students encounter is that they must keep up with academic demands of each course (p. 179). The educational part of this transition process is complicated due to the many changes: new evaluation system, the methodology used, the classroom environment, and the new vocabulary they must manage.

The research question that drives this case study to understand and examine the students' point of view is: How do first-year students face their transition from public secondary education to a public university in the southern region of Costa Rica? This contributes to the analysis of the reality that first-year students experience when they initiate during their initial stage in the English program in the public university. To answer this general question, there are two sub questions: what are the challenges the students experienced during their transition stage? and, what changes did English students make in their study habits? Some of the problems may be the result of the differences between both educational systems, for this reason, these questions are key to comprehending the adaptation that learners go through to succeed in the English language program at a university level.

This case study identifies the step backs encountered by first year students to help potential newcomer students be aware of some of the possible challenges that appear when

transitioning from public secondary school to higher education in the Costa Rican context. By understanding the problem, learners may find ways to prepare themselves for experiencing situations that are like the ones identified in this study. It can also help teachers working with first year students to anticipate and create strategies that may be essential to mitigate the transition process experienced by students that is causing high dropout rates. Raising awareness of this issue may lead to the changes in students' habits to reduce the gap between high school and college English assignments. The transition process can be very difficult for learners, but it also means a challenge for college professors who, in some cases, find the academic performance of first-year students worrisome. Understanding the phenomenon could help professors and university authorities create remedial strategies to help students feel less overwhelmed by the differences that exist between the two environments.

Literature Review

High School English Curriculum vs Higher Education English Language Curriculum

High school English curriculum and higher education English language curriculum have both similarities and differences. One of the similarities is the use of the Common European Framework guideline as a reference to the level that students are expected to reach at the end of a course in the case of public higher education, or at the end of each school year in the case of public secondary school. An eleventh grader in high school is expected to reach B1 based on the Common European Framework, according to Costa Rica's public education system (Ministerio de Educación Pública, 2016). A further similarity is the requirement of approving a previous class to continue to the next one; for instance, an English student had to approve with a minimum score in Integrated Skills 1 to enroll in Integrated Skills 2. The same case is applied to a high schooler seventh grader who has to pass all of the subjects to sign in to eighth grade.

Both curricula have also several characteristics that set a barrier between them. In the case of secondary school, the topics covered and listed in the English syllabus are themes based on personal information, daily routines, natural wonders, family, traditions, free time activities, holidays, exercises, and home (Ministerio de Educación Pública, 2016). All these topics are related to the lifestyle a teenager has since most of them live with their relatives, so most of their activities are household-related or hobbies. Meanwhile, in higher education, the topics studied in class are related to young adulthood and university social life because this is the new lifestyle for higher education students. Additionally, students must devote time to independent study hours which play a key role in their success. Students are expected to be more autonomous as language learners. This requisite is not so mandatory in secondary school.

The way language learners are taught and assessed also changes drastically. In higher education, students have to fulfill a set of out-of-class study hours to achieve course objectives. In these hours, students must review the four language skills on their own: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Initial courses also include an important component of grammar in their curricula. These language skills, and the subskill, are then evaluated individually, which is a different test that focuses specifically on a skill or subskill. Meanwhile, in the high school curriculum, skills are integrated. For instance, in the second

year of the English Teaching Major (ETM), students have a set of courses, and each one is centered mainly on only one language skill, like an oral expression course that emphasizes speaking. On the other hand, in public secondary schools, they have a subject that focuses on all English skills, such as academic English. According to Ministerio de Educación Pública (2016), “writing is closely connected to reading”. Consequently, when writing, secondary school students are guided to pay attention to the pre-writing stage. In this pre-writing stage, they read and understand texts to activate prior knowledge or to have guidance once they begin to write. All the skills end up being connected in the same class.

Challenges Encountered by First-year Students in Higher Education

The transition process from the environment students is accustomed to in high school and the one in college may be difficult for some learners who do not feel prepared, especially when there are emotional and academic challenges involved. According to Rodríguez et al. (2017), first-year students suffer from shock in the first lessons when moving from secondary to university classes. While transitioning, students are leaving their teenage phase and initiating adulthood, which may produce emotional and academic repercussions. For Liu and Zhang (2023), adaptation can cause some emotional and educational challenges. Stress and anxiety are common feelings among first-year students due not only to the instructional demands but also to the process of leaving their families and becoming autonomous (Al-Mahroqi et al., 2015, Eryilmaz et al., 2023). These feelings may be difficult to deal with during their first year of university.

One more aspect to consider about this transition is the emphasis given to the overall curricula. According to Rodríguez et al., (2017), higher education classes usually focus on the content of the syllabus while high school syllabi are more centered on lesson planning. One mistake students may commit is that they enter the first year of college thinking that the deadlines for the evaluations are as flexible as they were at the secondary level, but this is not the case. Following Rodríguez et al (2017), college faculty need to go through deadline policies in the first classes to help students understand those are not optional. Some students might feel overwhelmed by the differences encountered between high school to higher education.

Changes in the Study Habits of First-Year Students

First-year university students face an abrupt change in their learning and study habits that implies a more independent learning style, the development of self-regulated learning, and better time management. Public high school graduates who enroll in a higher education program usually come from a teacher-centered system (Liu & Zhang, 2023). This system has an impact on the student’s learning style; it creates dependency on the teacher instead of developing their capacity to acquire knowledge independently. Therefore, learners tend to rely only on the knowledge that the teacher decides to provide in the classroom, limiting their independent study hours to the week of examinations. The repercussions of this learning style affect their future university life when they find themselves in a student-centered classroom where the program requires them to actively participate (Liu & Zhang, 2023). Considering this, one of the main challenges that first-year students face is the change in their self-study

habits and their struggles to get used to a new way of learning that requires more independent time and research.

Liu and Zhang (2023) affirmed that, when students transition from high school to university, they need to develop self-regulated learning (SRL) to identify the best way to acquire the knowledge that the program requires, manage their time properly to avoid bad habits such as procrastination, and work on their emotional status to keep their motivation during the process. However, high school learners get detailed guidance from their teachers to the point where it is almost impossible to foster the SRL mode of study, resulting in a negative impact such as the difficulty in independently achieving SRL when they start higher education (Liu & Zhang, 2023). In this aspect, the way students organize their time is key to academic success. According to Liu and Zhang (2023), students' lack of time due to the heavy workloads is a significant step back when completing tasks that require self-regulation, making it difficult for learners to develop certain skills that are necessary to succeed academically.

Research Methodology

The current research is qualitative since it sought to address the research problem by collecting information from participants. According to Creswell (2015), qualitative research is followed when exploring unknown variables is needed. There might be a need for more information in the literature, and the researchers can learn more by exploring the data collected. A qualitative approach is considered in this study because it sought to understand the challenges that MEP high school graduates face when they enroll in the ETM in a public higher education institution as well as the study habits that learners use to adapt to the changes that it entails. There is little information about the process of transitioning from secondary education to university in the Costa Rican context. The use of the qualitative approach allowed researchers to analyze the participants' points of view from their personal experiences, opening spaces for a better understanding of the research problem.

The research followed a case study design directly related to understanding the phenomenon of transition from public secondary study to higher public education. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a case study is an analysis of a real-life event, such as a program, and the way that it affects the participants involved (p. 447). The main objective of this case study is to show the issues students face during the transition process from a secondary to a university institution. The main participants are first-year students from a public university. The purpose of this case study was to give a detailed description of the event and the contextual factors that influenced the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008), as is the case of this study. This case gives a detailed description of how students cope with the transition from high school to university providing an in-depth analysis and giving a thick description of the problem. This is a characteristic of this case study. The unit of analysis of this case study is the transition students face from a public secondary school to a public higher education institution.

Participants

The setting of this case study was a public university in Pérez Zeledón. The university offers an ETM and an English Associate's Program. English classes at the public university consist of a four-hour lesson three days per week. Students who attended these programs mostly come from surrounding communities and the southern part of Costa Rica. The research participants were students who are taking the course Integrated Skills 1 for the second time, their two instructors, and the coordinator of the major. Students belong to different social classes, and most of them receive a scholarship that can be affected if they fail courses. In the participant's group, there were students from the ETM and the English Associates Program whose ages ranged from 18 to 40. The group's instructors have a master's degree in Applied Linguistics, and the coordinator has a master's degree in Education Administration. The sampling technique in this case study was criterion sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016) since the participants fit the qualities the researchers looked for the students enrolled in a specific public university; they must have been in one of the English programs offered in the institution and have graduated from a public high school. Additionally, they must have been taking the English course for the second time. Pseudonyms are used through the study to ensure confidentiality to all participants.

Data Collection Instruments

To gather the information required to answer the research questions, four data collection instruments were used including interviews and observations. These instruments are addressed to different participants.

Classroom observation instrument.

This instrument was a structured observation guide that gathered information about students' behavior in English classes as part of the transition process from public secondary schools to public higher education. It was composed of two parts; the first part consisted of five questions about the challenges observed during in-class activities, and the second one had six questions about the behavior students showed in class. The observation was designed in English due to the observers' English level, and it was administered five times. The observations were performed by different members of the research team with the purpose of having a variety of perceptions. The instruments do not include the students' and professors' names or any other information that could reveal their identities.

Student interview guide.

This instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview guide that collected information about the student's experiences during their transition from secondary to higher education. It was composed of twelve questions that gathered data about their adaptation process, the changes that they went through, and the main challenges faced at the university. The interview was designed in Spanish because the participants are beginner English learners, and their linguistic level is not enough to answer questions of this complexity. The interview was recorded by using video and audio to avoid missing information in the transcription process. In this case, students who agreed to participate signed a consent agreement that allowed the interviewer to save and use the recordings.

Instructor's interview guide.

This interview used a semi structured interview guide. It collects information about the instructors' perspectives on being a teacher of first-year students experiencing the transition process from public higher education. The main purpose was to know the instructors' opinions about their experiences as professors of first-year students in English higher education programs. It has three parts; each part has from two to five questions. The interview was in English due to the instructors' high English level. Before conducting the interview, the instructor signed the consent form that allowed the interviewer to save the recording only for research purposes.

Coordinator interview guide.

This instrument was addressed to the coordination department of the majors studied. The interview guide is composed of nine questions that gather information about the first-year students' experience and their challenges in the university. The purpose of the instruments was to obtain data from a reliable academic source to provide information that could not be obtained otherwise. This set of questions covers topics such as the main challenges that students face during their transition, the English level required in their previous institutions, and the way the university supports students to achieve academic success. A consent form was signed by the informant to allow the researchers to record the meeting and use the information for academic purposes.

Trustworthiness

The data analysis process ensures trustworthiness. The researchers expressed the participants' perceptions in a clear and organized manner avoiding the influence of previous biases that can prevent the alteration of original ideas that the participants showed. The information contained in the present research was compiled from different resources and the answers given by the participants were compared and analyzed to shed light on credibility. The instruments administered were explained in detail as well as the procedures followed to analyze the data collected; this gives dependability to the study. This study can serve as a guide for similar future research. To ensure transferability, the evidence collected entails in-depth information about the points of view obtained from participants who graduated from public secondary education and enrolled in public higher education at a rural university in a rural region of the country.

Data Analysis

To provide answers to the research questions, this section aims to provide an overview of the data analysis from the information obtained through classroom observations and interviews to different participants involved in the issue under study. The information was arranged and presented using thematic analysis. The following explains the four primary findings.

The Urge for Student Agency and Academic Responsibility

The professors reported that students seemed to lack agency and academic responsibility during classes. Throughout the two interviews conducted with the two professors, they mentioned that students should be more responsible in their language learning process since they were the ones who opted for an ETM and the reason for this would normally be that they would like to become English teachers, so they should be more enthusiastic in their learning. As Professor Anna mentioned, “They have to fall in love with the language.” Instead, professors reported that students expected to pass the courses effortlessly just like they used to do in high school. Some common behaviors that revealed a lack of commitment and were present in most of the students during the five observations revealed constant use of the phone in class with non-academic purposes, the use of the mother tongue with their classmates, and sometimes even when speaking to the instructors, the lack of note-taking, and the Spanish when they asked questions because they consider they do not understand if the instructions are in English.

Another behavior observed that showed a lack of commitment was that a great number of students refused to voluntarily participate in class activities mainly if the task was to train their oral proficiency. Instead of participating, they just watched the professor solve the exercises or gave it a try but in Spanish or in a combination of both languages. Teachers considered that students are not giving their studies the importance it deserves. Instructors emphasized that they know the difficulty learners are going through, but that they should not forget they are full-time students seeking to become qualified professionals for their future work. All these behaviors, together with the difficulty involved in studying a major at a public university, are factors that seemed to worry professors, and they believed that students should worry even more. Not changing the study habits students used to have at the secondary level can be detrimental in the transition process from high school to higher education.

First-year Students Seeking for Out-of-class Help

First-year students reported that they constantly sought out-of-class help resources. Students reported that they were aware of their need for improving their English level which requires support from several out-of-class resources. This led them to search for paid tutors who could offer more personalized and clearer explanations of certain topics. In one of the interviews, Pamela mentioned that she attended paid tutoring classes from a pre-service teacher to improve her understanding of the topics seen in class. Students like Pamela showed satisfaction about attending paid tutoring classes and expressed positive results with the strategy.

As a way to provide students with a chance to succeed academically, the university offers a series of strategies. One of them is English courses offered before the start of the first semester of the school year. These courses cover subjects such as mathematics, science, engineering, and languages, the latter being the one that students from these majors can take advantage of. However, many first-year students did not attend these courses offered by the university. The English department coordinator mentioned that these types of courses are optional. As a consequence, not all students enroll even though they might actually need it. Another strategy developed by the university was a tutoring program. In fact, there were some

advanced students who imparted free tutoring classes offered by the university. Students could enroll in a tutoring session that was specific to the course that they were taking as part of their major. These tutoring sessions are offered only in those courses where student repetition is high. In these free tutoring classes, students normally attend two hours weekly to reinforce class topics. Sadly, as Professor Yoel mentioned, not all students take advantage of this service offered by the university.

First-year students also tend to seek out-of-class help by using online resources that do not imply an expense. Pamela mentioned that she took advantage of her free time by studying with the help of online resources, such as YouTube and TikTok videos, which contributed to her development of language skills. This type of resource can provide students with short explanations covered from a different perspective that may be easier to understand or work as a reinforcement to class explanations. Sometimes students do not have enough time and money to attend private tutoring sessions, or the tutoring courses organized by the university. Students reported that the tutoring service offered by the university was not compatible with their class schedule, so they asked relatives or friends who understood the topics they did not for help. As Karolina mentioned in her interview, she had looked for help to understand topics seen in class from relatives who have English teaching experience. This out-of-class help resource did not require any cost compared to paid tutoring sessions.

Personal Challenges Faced by Students in the English Language Programs

Students faced personal challenges during the transition process. In most cases, the first-year students enrolled in English programs had little or no prior knowledge of the target language. As Veronica mentioned, her classes in public secondary school consisted only of the teacher giving the students a short text for a reading task, then they could answer some short questions about it. In simple words, not all the language skills were addressed. Also, during Pamela's interview, she remarked that first-year students lack the prior knowledge needed to understand professors in class, who only spoke in the target language in class. The lack of basic knowledge about the language can be an obstacle to succeed in a class that requires a much higher language proficiency level than they had. A consequence of this reality is failing the first tests and assessments in the integrated skills course. As a chain reaction, this also caused emotional burdens on some students. In some cases, failure can cause demotivation and stress. As claimed in the professors' interview, students tended to feel stressed and only a small percentage of them would take a further step to improve their grades. In most cases, these personal challenges caused a negative outcome in the student's transition process.

Other than the academic challenges, university students also had to deal with emotional issues. Students who lived far away from campus needed to move out of their homes to attend the university; for some of them, it was their first time living by themselves, so they needed to start worrying about new responsibilities that may take time away from their studies. Additionally, the fact that they were living away from their loved ones had a strong influence on their emotional state which could also be reflected in their academic results. All the interviewed students agreed that the university was much more challenging than higher secondary education to the point where they needed to make significant changes

in their daily habits to maintain a high academic performance. This part of the transitioning stage is challenging for most students since they need to make many changes in a short period, and this could negatively impact several of them negatively.

Participant Perception Regarding the Difficulty Level Encountered in English Classes

There was a discrepancy between students' and professors' perceptions regarding the challenges encountered in higher education. During the interviews conducted with the two professors, they mentioned that the skills they considered easier for students were listening and speaking. They even emphasized that students were accustomed to listening to music in English and are familiar with some words in the target language. On the other hand, students' answers in the five interviews showed that grammar, listening, and speaking were some of the most difficult for them in classes. According to one of the professors, she tried to teach grammar classes in different ways for students to understand the topics. According to one student, in high school, he never covered grammar topics such as prepositions or time clauses in high school. Learners also agreed in saying that the university had a better evaluation system compared to high schools and that teachers helped students in classes when they had doubts.

Both students and teachers agreed that reading is the skill that is the easiest for them at a higher education level while lack of vocabulary affects all other skills. An instructor mentioned that this happens because students were accustomed to reading since high school, as this is the skill that is most emphasized in public secondary schools. According to this professor, reading skills are the easiest for students because the curriculum in high schools is made for them to reach a basic level in this skill, yet it leaves behind the remaining skills. For this reason, he tried to push students to reach the necessary level in the other skills. Difficulty with a subskill like vocabulary is also a challenge that students face. Some students highlighted that all English skills go hand in hand and are similar in difficulty, but they believed that lack of vocabulary was an element that caused their proficiency in all areas of English to be affected. For one student, to reach the required level in all language skills that they found difficult, they must practice writing and speaking.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The evidence from this study suggests that professors should give advice to students regarding academic responsibility. There is a concern among professors about students' behavior in in-class and out-of-class activities because students do not show interest when completing tasks, and this leads them not to achieving the necessary linguistic level required to pass the courses. Students should take more responsibility for completing out-of-class assignments. A possibility to draw students' attention to these out-of-class assignments could be providing more weight in the grade to these tasks. The purpose is to motivate students to complete them and to devote more time and effort to their learning process and consequently get better academic results. By doing this, students may improve their proficiency. Also, students should be aware that language learning is their responsibility, and they should actively participate in this learning process in order to improve.

This case study also found that, generally, first-year students need more support from other than what they have in the classroom. The university already identified these needs and offered office hours and a tutoring program for those who need it. Nevertheless, several students are unable to attend these sessions because the schedules proposed do not suit their needs. To help this population, professors could provide students with a list of online resources for extra practice. Ideally, these resources should be connected to the specific course contents. YouTube channels, content creators, or any other online resource that contributes to their learning based on the skills and topics that each professor covers based on the course. With these resources, students can have a guide to know where to find useful resources that help them to develop their language skills outside of class time.

The evidence of this research suggests that most of the students participating in this study struggled with personal and academic challenges linked to changes in academic demands at the university level compared to the ones encountered in high school and changes in their lifestyle. Since some students leave their homes and move out, they might be forced to be more independent and responsible for their academic responsibilities but also their personal duties. Both demand a lot of time and effort from the students. In most cases, learners may be overwhelmed by the implications of being a university student. To help learners successfully adapt to the changes, it is advisable that they receive instruction about the challenges implied in the transition process they are about to face. It is also necessary to ensure that students know about the free psychology services the university offers. Students can reach out to these services by sending an email or approaching the institution's service department.

One of the most significant conclusions in this case study is the fact that professors had different perceptions of the personal challenges students face. Several students had a special situation in their life which compromised their academic performance. This causes students to feel that they lack time to study every day or to complete assignments. This situation brought forth academic challenges. Another important finding was the perception professors and students had regarding academic demands. As reported by students, several language skills such as listening were challenging for them. On the other hand, professors had a different perception regarding this skill. As a recommendation, professors should apply a diagnosis at the beginning of the course to measure the students' linguistic level. The results of this test might help to map out the learners' proficiency level and detect students who might have more difficulty adapting to university life.

Plan of Action: Digital Listening and Speaking Booklet

To offer students a wide variety of online resources to facilitate self-regulated learning, researchers suggest creating and using a digital booklet. The idea with this booklet is to give students autonomy and accountability by using Zimmerman's (2002) self-regulated learning cyclical process. By following the cycle, students follow three steps: they plan for a task, they monitor their performance, and, finally, reflect on the outcome. The booklet includes helpful tools and websites about basic grammar and vocabulary topics covered in first-year English courses. The target population is first-year university students from the course Integrated Skills 1 in the English Teaching Major and the Associate's Program. This

booklet would provide a list of websites in which students can find vocabulary lists, pronunciation tools, trustworthy dictionaries, YouTube channels, and online practice exercises that align with the course's topic list. The topics to be covered in this booklet should be vocabulary about personal information, routines, home life, food and holidays and grammar structures like there is/there are, count and noncount nouns, and parts of speech. Some of the sources are: <https://agendaweb.org>, <https://soundgrammar.com> and <https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog>.

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Causes of Student Dropout in the English Teaching Major in a Public University in the Brunca Region

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Abstract

Student dropout is a big concern in public higher education as it does not exclude any major or program. The causes behind drop out can vary depending on the students' personal situations, but there are common reasons that might influence students' decisions. This article reports a qualitative case study aimed at investigating the main causes of student dropout in the English Teaching Major at a public university in the Brunca Region. For this study, seven interviews were conducted with different participants including students who dropped out, professors teaching in the program, and the coordinator of the tutoring department which allowed different points of view to be analyzed to answer the research questions. These interviews collected data about the students' reasons for dropout, the teachers' perspectives about dropout, and the measures to implement. The results of the study indicated that some of the main causes for students dropping out are mainly characterized by mental health challenges, university life issues, financial problems, and lack of vocational guidance. By identifying the main reasons behind students' drop out, this study provides significant insights about the phenomenon. The findings have implications for future English teaching students, English teaching current students in risk of dropout out, English instructors, and the administration.

Keywords: Dropout, English language learning, causes of dropout, dropout rates, scholarships, tutoring sessions

Introduction

The high dropout rates in the English Teaching Major (ETM) in a public university in the Brunca Region have become a big concern. This problem became evident when at the end of our first year in the program, it was possible to notice how the number of students was significantly reduced. Dropouts become more common every day, and large groups are

usually reduced. This was evident in the information provided by the Register office of the institution where every year more than 20 students drop out. According to Evans and Tragant (2020), since this problem became a constant, teachers have been trying to analyze the main reasons why students drop out. This socio-educational problem was the main motivation behind this study as it aimed at identifying some of the aspects that have an impact on student dropout. The causes can vary depending on the students' personal situations, but there are some specific aspects that might influence the decision of students to drop out from a specific major in a university. As Stracke et al. (2023) mentioned, there are internal factors that have to do with emotions that drive students not to complete their programs or courses, such as demotivation. On the other side, external factors that might influence these decisions are the teacher, methodology, and evaluation strategies.

To better understand the causes of these circumstances, the following research question was posted: Why do students drop out of the ETM classes in a public university in Pérez Zeledón? The previous question was divided into the sub questions: What are the reasons why students from a public university in Pérez Zeledón drop out of the ETM? What are the teachers' perceptions about the causes of students' dropout? and What are some measures implemented in the institution to prevent dropout? By answering these questions, teachers, students and the administration will have a better understanding of the reasons that cause students to drop out to take well-informed actions to address this problem.

Costa Rica has five public universities, fifty-three private ones and six international ones (Blanco & Sauma, 2020). All public higher education institutions in Costa Rica experienced significant-desertion issues (Pascua-Cantanero, 2016, p.2). The same author explained how different Costa Rican institutions as Fondo de Financiamiento de Educación Superior (FEES), Comisión Nacional de Rectores (CONARE), and Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior (SINAES) have worked on action plans to maintain students inside the classrooms (as cited in Programa Estado de la Nación, 2013). This issue has become noticeable throughout the country and motivated this research which sought to provide insights about the high dropping out rates within the English Teaching Major (ETM) in a public university to understand some of the causes that lead to this phenomenon. This study tried to understand the multiple justifications why English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students decide to drop out of their language program, specifically. After understanding the students' reasons to quit, some suggestions are given to help future students. According to Behr et al. (2020), dropping out is a hard process for students. Learners have several challenges that cause them to leave the courses without achieving their goals (p.325). Making this social problem visible may contribute to keeping students from dropping out.

Drop out in Public Higher Education

The term drop out does not have one specific definition itself as it has different foci. For some researchers, drop out mainly refers to the personal factors of individual students (Lee & Burka, 2000, p. 2). Students who drop out of the educational system usually do not enroll in any other formal institution or course during the school year. Another important point to mention is that there are two types of dropouts. The first type has an academic focus. In this type of dropout, students decide not to continue with their learning process because

they consider it too complicated for them. The second type is the demotivational one which occurs when students do not have any role model within their environment or someone who serves as motivation to continue with the educational process. Due to this previous situation, family, economic, and environmental factors can interfere and affect students' emotions so that they do not want to continue with their studies anymore (Herrera, 2012, p14).

Dropout in higher education has its own background. According to Lee and Burkam (2000), the transition from high school to university is difficult for students since it represents a new experience and requires growth from them. This transition affects students in areas such as adapting to a new system and finding new learning opportunities. For Lee and Burkam (2000), the urban areas represent the highest percentage of dropouts. By having more opportunities to get a job and work, many students decide to drop out. Family dynamics can also influence students' life choices as they take care giver roles. Sometimes family dynamics, the environment around the students, and how they feel personally and emotionally about studying push learners to situations where they cannot complete the school year. Consequently, drop out becomes a big concern for educational institutions.

Students' decisions for dropping out denote consequences not only for students' lives but also for their institutions' academic records. The consequences that this situation presents for students are divided into two different types. According to Lee and Burkam (2000), the two different types are social and academic (p.14). As social consequences we can highlight the families' feelings of disappointment, the personal goals that cannot be reached, and the disengaging process that students show with the learning process and the people that they meet at the university. Some academic consequences are the loss of academic performance that can affect students if they wish to return after a long period. Also, students cannot achieve their educational goals and obtain a degree that can help bring about better job opportunities. When researched by institutions, the consequences of high dropout rates are several. When students drop out, groups are reduced. This situation can cause institutions to face structural problems and as result the groups and the courses offered are affected by less attendance. Another consequence is that the institution loses enrollment rates. As highlighted before, the high dropout rates might generate several consequences for both students and institutions.

Common Dropout Causes

In a foreign language learning environment, self-confidence plays a vital role since it boosts the development of different in-class tasks and overall participation and engagement. Self-confidence may be affected by demotivation, which might lead students to make the decision of dropping out. Dornyei (1998) stated that lack of self-confidence is one of the most common factors that make students feel demotivated and anxious about failure and prevents them from succeeding (as cited in Evans & Tragant, 2020, p.3). Sometimes learners are afraid of making mistakes during the English classes, and it can cause a negative attitude towards the language. Feelings of anxiety and nervousness are present in EFL classrooms due to the exposure to a new language. For this reason, it is fundamental for learners to establish relationships with their classmates and professors to gain confidence while communicating so they feel encouraged and motivated (Stracke et al., 2023, p.188). Establishing strong

relationships with professors and classmates motivates students to trust in their abilities since professors encourage students to try their best and never give up. Once students are motivated, the idea of dropping out would not be an option. As stated by Ramírez and Hidalgo (2018), interpersonal relationships are valuable sources of motivation that can be considered a preventive tool to avoid dropouts (p.11). Strong learner relationships provide them with the possibility to support each other to foster their self-confidence.

Teaching methods are a variety of tools that professors apply in their classes to catch students' attention and motivate them. These strategies might vary from one professor to another depending on the teachers' preferences and philosophy. Although professors are not responsible for the high dropout rates, they have a fundamental role in education since the support and the methods that they apply into classrooms can be a tool that motivates students to continue with their learning process despite the difficulties (Stracke et al., 2023, p.186). Since some professors might tend to ignore students' challenges, they do not implement methods to fulfill their necessities. This situation can disappoint students and make them feel demotivated and unwilling to accomplish a specific goal such as finishing completing a program. Evans and Tragant (2020) conducted a study on which the results show that some of the main reasons for dropping out are the teaching strategies applied in the English classes and the teachers' attitudes (p. 9). Not incorporating interactive activities that foster students' motivation to learn a second language can cause lack of engagement among students. As stated by Herrera (2012), some pedagogical aspects that might lead to dropout are related to unclear teaching methods and poor curriculum (p.17). Learning a second language is a complex process that requires teaching methods to be tailored to students' needs to improve their skills instead of being the cause of giving up on education.

Another common cause of students' dropout is the lack of good infrastructure and financial support. The infrastructure design of a classroom takes an important role when students are learning. Ramírez-Díaz and Hidalgo-Solano (2018) shared that every institution needs specific infrastructure for specific purposes, just like houses, which change depending on the weather, place, or culture (as cited in Gellnier, 1967, p. 95). The environment of a classroom should be appropriate so that students feel comfortable and safe while learning. It is important to think about the culture and background of the students when modifying a classroom. Creating a classroom with a welcoming atmosphere fosters the sense of belonging to the institution, where students can feel they matter and have a voice. On the other hand, financial factors may also affect the general overview of the institution. Money always takes a part in the learning process. Public universities offer different programs and financial support for learners at social risk. Most public universities, if not all, offer multiple kinds of scholarships. Even though this support has existed for years, dropout rates are still high. Students may face various internal and external challenges that cause them to drop out. Each case is unique, but there may be common relevant factors that influence their decision, even if the institution offers a strong support system for students.

Measures to Fight Dropout

Learners can take advantage of many non-academic activities that their campus offers to help them with their internal development to improve their skills, to release stress, and to

reinforce their mental health. These aspects are relevant because higher education students are exposed to different obstacles that affect their academic performance. Most of these students are adults who work and who are responsible for other members of their families. Students may face these responsibilities out of their school schedule as obstacles that may affect their learning process. These learners may not have healthy sleep habits, ideal mealtimes, or enough time for independent study due to a lack of time organization because of the several tasks that they must fulfill during the day. Taking advantage of the activities proposed by the different departments of the campus, such as tutoring sessions, therapy sessions, recreational activities, and dance and music clubs might help students feel motivated to continue studying to achieve their learning goals and consequently, lower dropout rates.

Having a classroom with a positive atmosphere, which includes appropriate equipment and strong relationships, could also help avoid students' desertion. According to Behr et al. (2020), one of the reasons why students decide to drop out is the lack of proper materials in the classrooms (p.327). There are different institutions that have poor study conditions with lack of materials, damaged classrooms, and lack of technological resources. Having a positive learning environment where students feel comfortable and welcome impacts learning positively. The class environment is also affected by the teacher-student relationship. Stracke et al. (2023) added that teachers need to be careful because sometimes they focus on completing as many tasks as possible, instead of giving feedback. A class with a positive atmosphere is where all the participants involved feel heard and supported. Individualized prevention programmes can be implemented to create an inclusive class (Behr et al., 2020, p.327). The most important aspect is that students feel that they matter inside the class, and that teachers can be facilitators of knowledge. A student-centered classroom can be effective to create a good class environment. If students feel the confidence to talk and express their ideas with their teachers and classmates, that will create a positive atmosphere.

Another measure to fight desertion is family involvement. Even though most university students are over 18 years old, they need support from their families to continue with their studies. No matter their age, students always need to feel accompanied by the people around them. Herrera (2012) explained that the process of education is continuous, and it is influenced by the institution, community, and family (p.6). Having a good or bad relationship with their family influences the students' performance in school. The same study by Herrera (2012) showed that one of the main reasons why students dropout is the lack of support from their parents (p. 12). These family issues can be also affected by financial distress. Most of the time, students feel the obligation of helping their families financially. The help students try to provide can make them feel overwhelmed because they have many responsibilities with their parents and relatives. This is why family relationships have a defining role here. Changing these difficulties is almost impossible, but well-informed universities and motivating professors can help tackle them a little. They can create spaces to listen to students' problems and challenges where the most important part is showing the students that they are not alone.

Research Methodology

Throughout this investigation, the researchers implemented a qualitative research approach. Cresswell (2014) pointed out that the qualitative approach highlights the purpose of the researcher when gathering the information by using several data gathering sources, analyzing the results of the investigation through different steps of analysis, and by collecting data from the natural context to get an in-depth understanding of the topic (p. 183). In this study, the researchers designed three different types of instruments to collect detailed data to support the importance of analyzing the dropping out phenomenon in the ETM in a public university.

This investigation followed a case study design. In this type of research, it is crucial to gather information from people who have experienced the phenomenon. According to Baxter (2008), case study research is described as deep research of the characteristics of problems in real environments by including crucial elements such as the perspectives and views of the participants related to the situation (p. 447). This case study gathered important details that are crucial for the analysis of dropout. Different details about the experiences, reasons and perspectives of the students that had dropped out of the major could be collected. The researchers, in addition, were interested in the teachers' points of view about the topic and why they think this happens. The unit of analysis of this case study is students' drop out in the ETM in a public university in the Brunca Region.

Participants and Context

This research took place in a public university whose campus offers different majors including the ETM. This four-year program includes general courses in Spanish during the first year, and pedagogical courses during the whole program, which are in English from the second year on. The program also helps students to develop their English level from the first year by providing grammar, pronunciation, writing, reading, and oral expression courses. During the first year, all skills are taught together, but in the second year they are divided into stand-alone courses. The program also includes literature courses in the third and fourth year. By the end of the study plan, students are expected to reach a B2 level according to the Common European Framework of References for Languages and have the basic requirements for language teaching. Even though this major has shaped many professionals for years, there are people who have decided not to finish the program.

The participants of the study were students who have dropped out, instructors from the major, and one coordinator. The students who participated were adults whose age ranges 22 to 33 years old. Two of them are male and three are female. All of them dropped out from the ETM at different moments from 2019 to 2022. Two instructors were also part of the study; both are females with more than ten years of teaching experience in the institution. One of these instructors has vast experience teaching the Integrated Skills courses, which are taught during the first year. The other instructor has experienced teaching-pedagogical courses. The last participant is the Tutoring Program coordinator of the campus. She has seven years of experience working in the institution. She is familiar with the resources that the university offers to students. The contribution of the coordinator is also relevant because she is a witness of the number of students who dropout and the reasons they give. Using pseudonyms in this

study helped disguise information that might directly or indirectly lead to the identification of the participants.

The sampling technique used to select participants in this study to select participants was criterion sampling. According to Volpe (2016), criterion sampling is one purposeful sampling strategy in which all participants must adapt to the predetermined aim of the study. The criteria that all participants fulfill were that they have been or are currently part of the ETM and they are aware of dropout in the program.

Data Collection Instruments

To conduct this qualitative study, three instruments were administered to collect information about the phenomenon of drop out. The first interview was administered to students who had dropped out and the second interview was administered to instructors of the campus who have experienced drop out in their courses. Finally, a third interview was conducted to the coordinator of the Tutoring Program. All the instruments designed were interviews, but each of them has a different focus point and target. The first interview was designed for the students that dropped out of the major with the purpose of gathering the reasons why these students dropped out and what they experienced when it happened. The second instrument was created for two experienced teachers that work at the institution with the purpose of gathering different perspectives of the phenomenon. The third instrument was targeted to an administrative assistant that oversees a program that helps students with their academic performance. This last instrument has the purpose of collecting information about the different support strategies that this public university offers.

Instrument 1: Interview with Students

This instrument aimed to collect information about the main reasons behind student drop out directly from students. The interview was administered and recorded through a videoconferencing platform. The interview has three sections. The first part includes four questions about experience succeeding the drop out decision. The second part also has four questions to collect data about the possible reasons that lead students to drop out. In the last section, three questions collected data about students' suggestions to avoid drop out. As a closing step, a specific question was included so that students could add any other detail they consider necessary about the topic shared.

Instrument 2: Instructors' Interview

This instrument aimed to gather information from the instructors teaching in the ETM. The purpose of this interview was to understand their perspectives about the reasons why students decided to drop out from the program and institution. The instrument has three different sections. The first part provides a general understanding of drop out in the institution and consists of three open questions. The second part has two questions about the causes of their drop out in the English program. Finally, the last part gathers information about measures to fight desertion through two questions. This instrument was conducted and recorded through a videoconferencing platform.

Instrument 3: Interview with the Coordinator of the Tutoring Program

This instrument aimed to collect information from the coordinator of a tutoring program offered to students. The objective of this interview was to identify the implemented measures by the institution to avoid drop out. The instrument has three different sections. The first part is about understanding drop out in public higher education and it has three different questions. The second part explores the common causes of drop out and consists of two questions. The last part of the interview aims to gather information about the measures currently taken to fight drop out in the campus, and it has two questions. This instrument was administered face to face. The informant provided suitable information because of the years of experience in the institution.

Trustworthiness

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), trustworthiness, as part of qualitative case studies, validates the information they provide and makes it valid and relevant. To guarantee trustworthiness of this case study, three different interviews were applied to three different types of participants. The information provided by the participants' interview was analyzed without excluding or manipulating any aspect. As Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) proposed, to ensure trustworthiness there are three main aspects that should be included which are credibility, dependability, and transferability. This case study shows credibility since throughout the process there is self-reflection on all the information that results from notetaking and interviewing the participants. Notes about the progress and results were continually taken which help layout bias. Even though there was a significant amount of information that was obtained through multiple sources of data, no data were excluded in the analysis. Dependability was also important in this case study. There was a whole process to collect and interpret data collected by applying the three different interviews. The information was analyzed by different researchers so that the information was consistent, and there was no bias. Detailed accounts made it possible for others to deeply understand the issue. Regarding transferability, it allowed the reader transferability of the lessons learned to other settings since the amount of detailed information regarding the background offered a shared and relatable experience for other researchers.

Data Analysis

This section attempts to give a deep description of the data analysis process. Thematic analysis was used to organize and convey the data in a total of nine themes. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of informants and ensure confidentiality.

Mental Health and University Life

Students' mental health and university life were considered key factors that influenced the decision to drop out of the ETM. Although the research questions of this case study did not emphasize mental health and the difficulties that students could face during their university life, the interviews showed that these were some of the main reasons for dropping out. Some of the students who dropped out of the program mentioned that stress, frustration, and depression were some of the emotional issues they experienced that caused a sense of failure. For example, in one of the interviews, Luis shared he experienced stage fright when

presenting in front of the class or difficulties understanding content when studying for the pedagogical courses. He also mentioned that if he had not had serious stress problems, he might have lasted longer in the major. This issue was also supported by Kendall when he acknowledged that, emotionally, it was quite heavy not feeling capable of doing many tasks because he started to doubt himself. This phenomenon led students to experience guilt when feeling incapable of accomplishing a life goal such as finishing their chosen major.

Some instructors also mentioned that students' mental health and lack of emotional intelligence could have played a significant role in their decisions to drop out. When analyzing instructors' answers, some of them mentioned that some students lack emotional intelligence which affects how they react to different situations or problems during university life. For example, instructor Xinia expressed that the root of this problem was how students manage their emotions and the challenges they face when starting their university life. Instructor Sara shared that when students enter the university, they think a low English level would be enough, but once they realize the linguistic demands of the major, they feel frustrated and decide to drop out. This problem happens due to the lack of emotional intelligence. Graciela also expressed that students often experience feelings of worry and frustration when the chosen major does not align with their expectations. These feelings guide students to make the decision to drop out. Interestingly, some students and instructors' perceptions were similar when referring to mental health as one of the main causes of students' drop out.

Personal Reasons behind Dropout

Students reported to have faced various personal reasons that lead to dropout. The interviews conducted with students who already dropped out reported different personal reasons that motivated their decision. On this note, Luis and Kendall did not mention a specific cause for their dropout and reported that they made the decision because of some personal reasons. Learners may experience many types of struggles while studying, and each case is unique. In the case of Ana, she shared that one personal reason why she dropped out was because she has always wanted to study medicine, which means that she knew since the beginning of the major that she was going to drop out at some point. Ana also mentioned that the year she spent on campus studying English teaching helped her to complete Humanities courses, which are a requirement for any public university in Costa Rica. Luis also shared that he wanted to study a different major and that he was never sure about studying English teaching. Actually, he stressed that he never felt comfortable in the program. Most students shared varied personal experiences that influenced their decision to drop out.

Some instructors also agreed that students face personal problems that affect their lives that resulted in their drop out. These problems seem to relate to information instructor Xinia shared in her interview. She mentioned that dropout happens mostly during the first year. Even though each student has their own reasons for dropping out, there might be a tendency for this to happen in the first year as they have not made a firm decision of which program to complete. Instructor Sara support Xinia's idea when she shared that in the first semester, some students realize how hard English could be and decided to drop out. Other personal problems reported were sensitive factors, difficulties when studying, and wanting to

pursue another major. Added to these problems, Kendall mentioned that one of the reasons that influenced his decision to drop out of the ETM was the emotional and physical difficulties caused by the pandemic.

Financial Problems Preventing the Completion of the Major

Financial problems were one of the principal reasons that determined participants' decision to drop out from higher education. Students reported that one of the financial reasons for dropping out was the lack of a scholarship when they started the major. Also, some of these students had issues when renewing the scholarship papers every year. This was the case of Rachel, who shared that since she could not bring the papers on time, she could not renew her scholarship. These problems together with some other economic expenses led these students to drop out of the ETM. In fact, even though many students have this benefit from the university, most of the time the amount of money they get is not enough to afford all the required expenses and take a full-time student role. Students reported that they have to commute from their homes to the institution; they have to pay for lunch; they have to buy copies and other different materials. Students also must pay for internet service on their phones to work on the out-of-class activities, and sometimes they even help with some household expenses. Students who obtain a scholarship, including English Teaching students, cannot have a job while studying as the school load is demanding.

For some of these learners, the scholarship that they get from the university is not enough to cover their expenses. Unfortunately, some students experienced serious home financial problems that directly interfered with their decision to complete the program. For students, the scholarship they get not only helped them go through student life but also helped them solve some of their personal challenges such as childcare and food. Kendall mentioned that the financial situation he had at home was complicated, and his family could not support him to pay university responsibilities which made it impossible for him to handle it on his own. In fact, he was even expected to help his family with household expenses. This problem is not limited to the amount of money received, but students with a scholarship must get good grades or approve at least 80% of the annual course credits to maintain the benefit, if not, they can lose their scholarship. Kendall's testimony illustrates this situation; he pointed out that he failed Integrated Skills 2 which affected him since he lost the scholarship. He also expressed that his family was facing a difficult financial problem, and his parents could not afford the expenses of being a full-time student. He found a job so that he could keep studying, but later, due to the tight university schedules, it became almost impossible for him to continue working and studying at the same time. For these learners, the scholarship was not enough, and it is almost impossible to keep a part-time job

A Tendency to Ignore Student Dropouts

Findings in this case study revealed that instructors tend to ignore students' dropouts. During an interview with instructor Xinia, she explained that she is aware of how some students do not feel confident and need support from teachers, but there are not many actions taken. Giving academic support and guidance is a fundamental part of teaching. This instructor also said that dropout should be in everybody's interest, including professors, because dropout affects everybody. Students, professors, and the institutions live the

consequences of dropout. Both instructors, Xinia and Sara, said that finding a solution for dropout is urgent. In another interview, instructor Sara expressed that there are instructors who are very committed to their jobs. These instructors ask students how they feel and what they want for the future. Creating a safe environment for students to share how they feel is a vital part of the teaching process. Some students like Luis and Kendall shared that they told their teachers their decision of dropping out. They said that their teachers talked to them and gave some pieces of advice. Thus, even though there are teachers who do not care about students' dropout, there are others who do care about their feelings and thoughts.

The lack of interest from some instructors towards dropout may be related to lack of communication with students. Ana shared that, when she made the decision of dropping out, she never told any instructor about that situation. She also said that she wondered what the instructors could have told her about her decision; they could have given her advice. Sometimes, instructors cannot intervene with dropout decisions because they are not informed. Also, lack of communication between instructors and students may influence dropout. Related to this issue, Graciela shared that, from her point of view as a professional, it is important to strengthen the teaching profile based on the characteristics of the population of the campus. In the case of English Teaching, following Graciela's advice, the instructors can go beyond and research new methodologies to diagnose students' backgrounds because the population of this year is different from the one three years ago. According to Gabriela, the students have different necessities now, so it is necessary to work on rapport and communication. Lack of communication between instructors and students and the need to update the way of teaching are part of the tendency to ignore dropouts in English Teaching.

Lack of Vocational Guidance when Choosing a Major

There is not much vocational guidance on students' decisions when choosing an English language major so this can lead to drop out. When students started their admission process in April, they had the responsibility of deciding on a major to study, although they may not have received vocational preparation to make an informed decision. During the interview, the instructors and the coordinator of the tutoring program agreed that first-year students do not receive sufficient vocational assistance to guide them when choosing a career that fits their skills. This weakness might lead students to choose a major they do not feel passionate about. For example, instructor Xinia mentioned that universities should offer guidance or preparation to high schoolers to provide them with vast detailed information about the linguistic demands of English language programs. Most students were not informed about their requirements. These findings were supported by instructor Sara, who said that she considered that not knowing what to expect in the university can be a reason for student drop out. Not receiving vocational preparation may result in students choosing a major that does not fit their linguistic skills causing them to eventually drop out.

The absence of vocational guidance can affect students' academic performance and trigger the decision to drop out. For example, Luis' testimony exemplifies this issue since he mentioned that, when he made the decision to study English teaching, he did not think that the major was going to be difficult, but it was. He shared that he constantly faced stage fright. This was one of the main causes behind this student decision to drop out. Instructor Graciela

also shared that drop out is a multilayered phenomenon mainly marked by the lack of choice and preparation about vocational guidance. Vocational guidance provides students with options and future job opportunities.

Universities and High Schools Joining Forces

Universities and high schools should join forces and work together to diminish the negative effects transitioning from high school to university could have. During the interviews, instructor Xinia pointed out that “there are challenges [the students] face as they enter university life and all the challenges of every single course, the workload of the course, difficulty in adjusting to the university system which is very different from the high school system. They are not guided”. This perspective reflects a gap in information between high schools and university life entails and what the ETM is about. Instructor Xinia also mentioned that “students need to know from the very beginning, if the ETM would be an option for them in all senses”. When entering the program, students do not know what they are going to study, and they may feel lost in the process. These situations cause students to not feel capable of coping with the demands the ETM has and decide to drop out. For this reason, high schools should guide students in their search for universities and majors for them to enroll with a clear idea of their requirements and expectations.

Even though entering university means a great achievement in students’ lives, the change in assessment methods, tight schedules, and new classmates causes fears that often influence drop out. Professor Sara commented that students are not prepared to have evaluations two or three weeks after entering university. It is a phase of life that moves very quickly and not everyone can handle it. She also agreed with this idea when she mentioned “In three weeks they have a speaking quiz, or they have a presentation, and they are not ready”. Class periods at the university are shorter and the amount of information that students must handle, and master is much greater than the one in high school. Because of this gap between high schools and universities, students seem not to be prepared to comply with higher education demands.

Tutoring Sessions for Specific Courses

Students from this public university have access to tutoring sessions for specific courses that have been identified to be the most difficult because repetition is very common in the program. The coordinator of the tutoring program mentioned that the institution has programs such as tutoring sessions, academic workshops, metacognitive workshops, motivational talks, and soft skills talks to help students adjust to their university life. She also explained that these tutoring sessions are given by students at advanced levels who can support and understand the students who are just entering. The fact that the tutoring sessions are given by students at advanced levels of the same major is beneficial since they all can relate with the same experiences about the difficulties that students face when entering the program and learning English. This situation can be a motivation for beginners since, in the future, they may be the ones in charge of these tutoring sessions.

Unfortunately, even though the institution offers this type of support to students, they often do not take advantage of it or do not know about this benefit. Kendall mentioned that he

knew about the tutoring sessions when he was a student, but he considered that they were more focused on improving academic performance than on preventing dropout. The institution offers these tutoring sessions so that those who are having problems with specific subjects can find academic support which might translate into high academic performance that prevents dropouts.

The Need for Emotional Guidance

Students in the English Teaching program have access to different programs that teach, guide, and help them throughout their academic life. Students in higher education may face emotional, financial, and academic challenges throughout their major. These situations make learners seek guidance to help them control their reaction to obstacles as they try to adjust to university life. This university has a psychologist that is dedicated to help students and give them guidance. In the interview administered to instructor Xinia, she mentioned that public universities should have more psychologists on each campus and, also, more workshops that focus on student mental health and their abilities to overcome difficult obstacles with resilience. She highlighted the importance of these activities as a type of support for students and as a measure that the institution can implement to reduce the dropout rates in the ETM.

The campus, moreover, offers other strategies for students to face non-academic barriers. There is one that helps student-parents with financial support for childcare. Rachell, one of the students interviewed, shared that one of the reasons why she decided to drop out of the major was because she did not have any money to pay for a babysitter. Probably, this student did not know about childcare support available on campus. Another department on campus follows up on the academic performance of students. The university tries to give good-quality facilities to students in many ways. Some students may feel stressed even though they know the resources the campus offers. Even though some of these cases go beyond the control of the campus, it is urgent that universities try to reinforce their information strategies and do everything in their power for students to feel supported by the university.

More Professional Help to Avoid Dropout

Some English language university students require more emotional support than others during their first year. Studying in a university and adapting to it is not easy, and receiving psychological help can support students during this process. Kendall mentioned that he was dissatisfied with the psychological help he received in the university when he was a student because he expected something different. He shared that the help he received did not make a difference in his life. Therefore, he wondered, if someday, the campus will upgrade that area to help the students who are still there. Another participant, instructor Xinia, suggested that one psychologist for one campus is not enough. One difficulty is that the psychologist has limited time and limited resources to work. If there is not enough time for all the students who require this attention, especially the ones at risk of dropout, not all of them will be heard and helped. Receiving proper psychological help from the university could potentially reduce dropout.

Social workers can also help students with social vulnerability by taking a counselor role. Instructor Xinia recommended that the students' thoughts and points of view should be listened to and catered by social workers as their profile includes helping students with special issues. Even though this campus does not have counselors, the social workers sometimes end up counseling students. Social workers normally support students who are in a vulnerable situation or if they have emotional problems that affect them academically. Also, students can be open with social workers if they have financial problems or any other social-risk situation. Kendall mentioned that it is relevant to consider students first as humans, not as numbers in a list, in a holistic way where their mind and soul matter.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The students in this case study were aware of the importance of mental health and the influence that the lack of it has on their decision of dropping out. This issue also caused concern among professors since they could perceive how the lack of emotional intelligence impacts students' decisions. These students struggled when adapting to an unknown academic system. Not knowing how to deal with this new experience emotionally could cause mental health issues. The students agreed on the fact that not feeling able to complete a specific task can be emotionally difficult. Also, the lack of wellness strategies and mental support affect students' academic performance. This led the researchers to conclude that mental health and university life challenges were some of the most compelling reasons behind students' decision to drop out.

A recommendation to this concern is to make sure that the university is aware of the impact that adjusting to an unfamiliar system has on students and the difficulties they face. In this sense, the institution can look for new wellness strategies that involve students' participation. Providing workshops that help students to learn more about the importance of emotional intelligence could potentially determine their decision to stay. The main objective of implementing new workshops can be to reduce students' stress and anxiety problems by distracting themselves while learning strategies to understand and control their feelings. Psychological support should also be available for students who really need it. Students who are part of the ETM should feel supported by the institution to work on their mental health issues and avoid dropout.

One important conclusion is that the teachers' attitudes toward students have an impact on their feelings and emotions. Most of the students who participated in this study mentioned that they did not have any communication with their professors before they made the decision to drop out. The researchers of this study found this problem significant since open communication between teachers and learners is important for students' sense of belonging. This finding also revealed the need to establish different strategies to solve drop out. One strategy is to open short periods of time in class time to suggest and provide their students with methods to improve the different English skills that are particularly difficult for students. Another recommendation for the institution to prevent dropouts in the major is to promote tutoring sessions not only on how to improve academic performance, but also on strategies to build confidence and wellness. Researchers consider that by implementing new

strategies to have better communication with students may positively contribute to the students' decisions of dropping out from the ETM.

One of the most significant conclusions is the direct impact of financial problems on students' drop out decision. Scholarships that the institutions offer to students are not enough to cover the majority of students' expenses, and the budget of these public universities is limited so not all the population can have access to this benefit. There is a tight connection between students' scholarships and linguistic skills that negatively influences drop out. Learning a second language is challenging and many students with a scholarship do not have the linguistic levels they are required to have to pass the courses. One of the requirements to keep this benefit is not to fail more than 20% of the courses; otherwise, their scholarships are reduced.

Students who do not have any scholarship have to work to afford their school expenses. Considering that being a full-time student in a public university in Costa Rica demands a lot of time, students make the decision to drop out because they cannot deal with their jobs and the school simultaneously. One recommendation this study suggests is that the institutions may offer workshops on how to manage time and how to save money. One recommendation for teachers is to take time to check on their students' progress to monitor how well they are doing on the specific courses. If the students are having a hard time, teachers can talk to them and give them advice on how to improve their skills. In this way, students can succeed, pass the courses, and maintain the benefit of the scholarships. Students should also take advantage of the tutoring sessions offered in these institutions to avoid their scholarship reduction.

The gap between transitioning from high school to university can affect students' academic performance. This situation revealed the need to create ways to introduce beginners to the higher education system to make this transition period smoother which in some way could avoid early dropout in the ETM. A recommendation is that the institution can contribute by analyzing, improving, and making future changes in the methodology that is applied when introducing beginners to higher education. A change in strategies when leveling students and the course activities as a long-term plan may be necessary to help students because courses sometimes require a high level of English that beginner students do not have. The results of this research come to the conclusion that higher education institutions need to make changes in the beginning courses to avoid early dropout of students.

A final conclusion is that there are many students with personal problems and with no vocational guidance, which leads to dropout. The findings showed that many students who enrolled the major did not want to study English teaching, and they wanted to pursue a different career in life. These preferences normally result in dropout. It could be noticed that students did not really know what the major is about, and they chose the ETM with no previous preparation or knowledge of the English language. One possible measure to ease this gap is to organize more informative workshops for prospective students, so that they know what requirements, content courses, methodology, and other key information. It is fundamental that future ETM students are well-informed about what they are going to study for the next four years.

Proposal for an Action Plan

An action plan was suggested to address one of the findings about the drop out phenomenon in the English Teaching Major in this case study. This plan addresses the finding that explains the lack of vocational guidance that students receive when choosing a major. For this reason, this proposal suggests adding a new tab or link on the official university website that provides vocational guidance to high schools. The objective of this website link is for high school students to know in depth what the major is about to make an informed decision. The target population are high school students. In this website, students, teachers, and parents can access information such as a curriculum overview, course details, English language practices, and metacognitive strategies.

The first part to be included in this website is a curriculum overview that provides general information about the major and the courses for each semester like the names of the courses. The second part shows the courses in more detail. In this section, students can explore the courses offered in each semester, and the specific details about what the course is going to be about and the corresponding content. The third part contains English practices where students can immerse themselves in the reality of the English Teaching Major through practices with items like those studied in Integrated 1 and 2. Grammar, listening, reading, writing and speaking practices will be available on the link. In this sense, students can practice and analyze the level required to enroll in the program. This section is important because the students in this major are expected to have a B1 English level, so these practices are specifically designed for this level. The fourth part includes metacognitive strategies. They are key factors to improve and develop English skills. The link offers a variety of metacognitive strategies for some English skills and subskills like vocabulary, grammar, listening, and others. The last part is a forum for questions where students can ask different questions about the major if needed.

This website link is meant to be created with the help of the English Teaching program coordinator because this person knows first-hand all the details about the program. The coordinator may ask for help from advanced students from the major, and even can ask for professors' material to create the website. The last section is a forum for students' questions, so the coordinator, advanced students, or any other qualified person will be answering the most relevant questions. The link of this website can be shared in the Open House offered by the university. It can also be available on the university's official website so that people can have access to it. Most of the parts on the website will be in Spanish so that people can understand the information better. The only part in English will be the practices. A demo was created to illustrate this proposal. This is the link to the website:

<https://sites.google.com/view/wwwvocationalguidance/p%C3%A1gina-principal>

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Concluding Chapter



Lessons Learned

This is the first compilation of students' research activities of this type on our campus. Although designed primarily for future students and teachers in the Seminar on Innovation, Field Research, and Educational Design course, this compilation is also a useful reference for those involved in English teacher education programs in higher education and EFL teaching and learning in general. Though slow, the field of EFL in Costa Rica has witnessed constant evolution and consequently demonstrated the need for intentional practice that guarantees the strengthening of linguistic competence. By sharing pre-service teachers' research process and findings, we hope that they contribute to the implementation of effective classroom practices and in the questioning of classroom and institutional decisions. For this final section, we invited students who participated in this compilation to reflect on their experiences, lessons learned and takeaways. To this end, their reflections were organized in two parts: *skills and knowledge development* and *takeaways for professional and personal development*. A final section includes two artistic expressions created by two of the students who shared their emotions representing what their research experience meant to them.

Skills, Knowledge Development

During their research process in the course, students reported they developed different skills and knowledge in terms of academic writing, research methodology, and transferable skills. Academic writing in this course included learning tasks that ensured presenting ideas, analyzing results and constructing effective arguments while using clear, unbiased, concise, consistent, and well-structured language. This was not an easy endeavour as students' writing skills were constantly revised and it was an exhausting process for both students and professors. Fortunately, students reported their awareness of their improvement. In this regard, one student reported that *"Writing skills were massively improved as the bulk of the work and quality control demanded more from me than any previous work."* Students had previously developed skills for academic writing in previous courses of the major. Nonetheless, in these courses, students often focused on the development of writing as a linguistic skill rather than an academic skill. Most students acknowledged that the instructors of the seminar course demanded the application of most of the contents and principles learned in the previous writing courses, and this shaped the way in which they wrote for their research report in a more academic and critical fashion.

Students also claimed that their knowledge of research methodology was boosted through learning tasks that guided them to design of instruments, data collection, and data analysis. One student, for example, affirmed that she noticed progress in her skills to observe, analyze, and codify information because of this research activity. Important research skills such as time and data organization were transferred along with knowledge about ethics. As a matter of fact, one student shared, *"I learned the importance of citing. Also, to value others works because an investigation takes too much time."* This ensures that these new professionals are aware of the structure and standards needed when doing research. Students seemed to have a solid foundation to conduct research as they recognized they now know how to organize their work and give proper credit to the different sources of knowledge. Due

to the qualitative approach followed, learning how to handle large amounts of data was also a skill they reported they have acquired.

Despite the benefits of learning research, students listed different challenges, most of them concerning group work dynamics, the nature of the research process, and the course characteristics. First, the rendered time management, personal commitment to the process, and teamwork were reported difficulties to overcome while working with their classmates. With respect to the research process itself, they faced difficulties in terms of information management and evaluation, constraints for data and source gathering, and the recruitment of participants. At last, they also consider that the course methodology generated difficulties due to the short time given to write the report and the restrictive policies implemented regarding no use of technological devices in class. This last challenge comes from professors' decision to do in-class writing for most first drafts where students were not allowed to use their computers. This decision was informed by the potential use of artificial intelligence when generating texts that risks the development of writing skills and academic integrity. It is important to note that when working on the second draft for each section, students used the technological tools that they considered necessary and followed ethical procedures outlined in class.

On a positive note, the research process has harvested memorable moments that these pre-service teachers will always cherish. Most memories come from students' involvement with the participants in the field work like the focus groups and interviews. Another memorable moment was their feelings of fulfillment after the final submission and presentation of their work. Finally, the bonds forged with their research partners represented an opportunity to develop teamwork skills and a deep interpersonal connection.

Takeaways for Professional and Personal Development

Students were directly asked about the lesson learned through the research process. To this end, they shared that it was fundamental for both their professional and personal life. More specifically, students acknowledged to have received professional benefits such as capacity to work in groups, the incorporation of research informed reflections to expand knowledge, more knowledge about challenges in the field, deeper understanding of scientific work and the use of a learner-centered approach when conducting research. One final academic reward is the opportunity to publish their research report in this book. At the personal level, students shared that they gained more confidence in themselves, autonomous learning skills, critical thinking and agency for continuous learning. A student went beyond these contributions and remarked: *"This research contributed to reaffirm my vocation as a teacher."* All in all, this statement reflects that pre-service teachers understand that research is part of their teaching practice and allows them to reflect on their feelings toward their future profession.

Next are a poem and drawing, both created by two students. They represent what the research experience meant to them. These written and visual representations include a personal interpretation of the artists.

Reading, citing, and evaluating
 Listening, thinking, and decoding
 Those words were a kind of brainstorming

Many unsolved problems were waiting outside
 At first, my mind was black and white
 There was not a perspective
 I did not feel like a detective

Then, time passed, and I was concerned
 The goal of education was not only to learn
 Research was more than necessary
 Even though it seemed to be scary

Frustration, procrastination, and lack of information
 The words people are assuming in every conversation
 However, there is a new world to explore
 And there is no reality to ignore

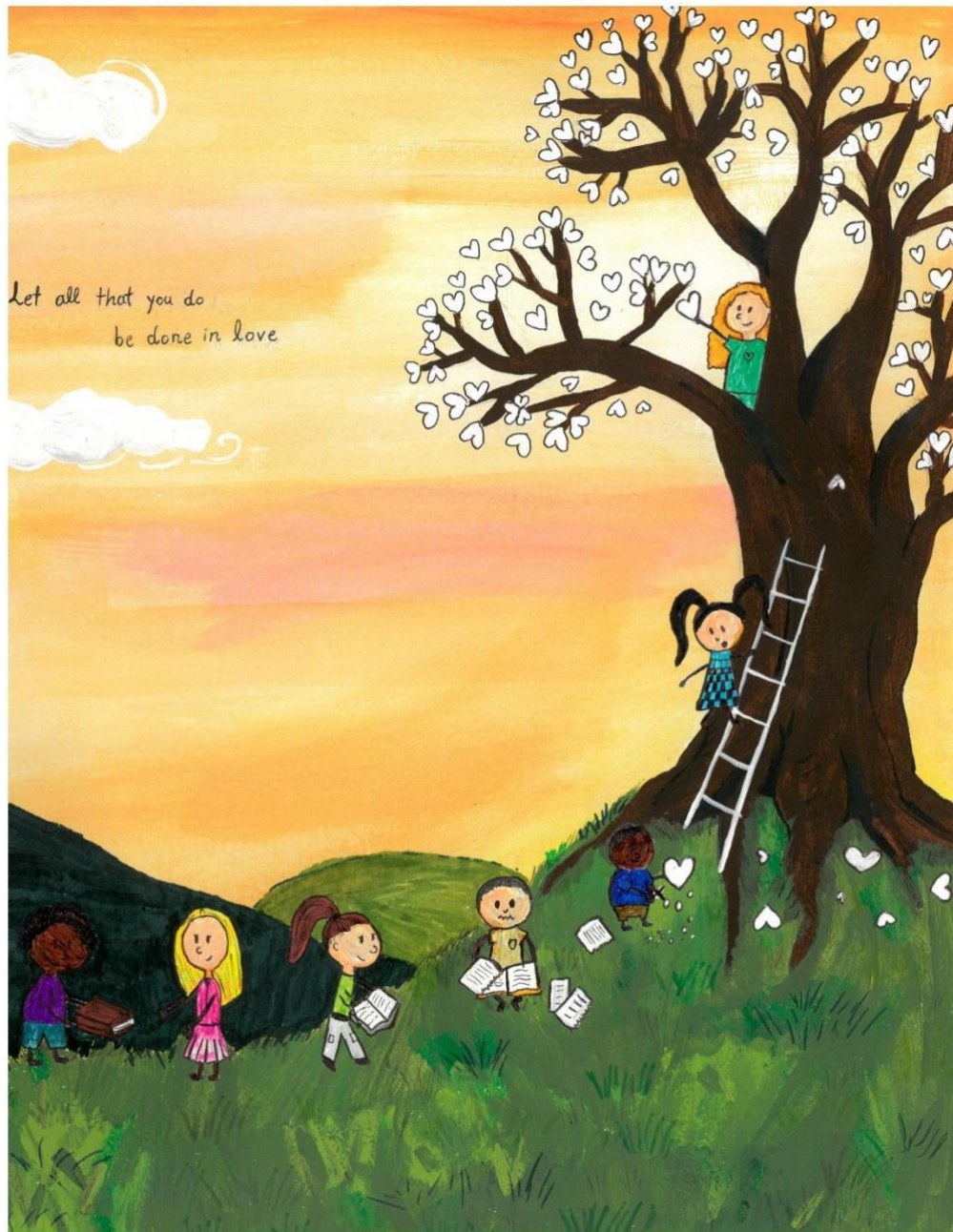
It might be a never-ending process
 But education is built on progress
 We need to fight with the lack of curiosity
 Imagine, what an atrocity!

Unfortunately, there is no willingness to explore
 Time is being ignored
 Thinking outside the box is required
 Because we need more teachers to admire
 And reading, citing, and evaluating
 It can also be fascinating.

Yendry R, 2024

Artist's interpretation.

Throughout this poem, I wanted to reflect on my process of doing research. First, I shared my perspective on the importance of reading and how it was connected to evaluating and citing resources; at least those were the ideas I had in mind. Then, I knew there were some unsolved problems waiting for an answer; however, I did not have any idea how to start, and I was even scared. Moreover, I wanted to express the frustration we used to feel when doing research, and most of the time that is because of the assumptions we used to hear. Every research project will be different; therefore, people will tell us about diverse experiences, and that does not mean that we are going to live the same. In the end, despite the obstacles, I wanted to pursue the value of doing research as an opportunity to grow because once we inspire other teachers to question themselves and look for answers, we are contributing to our new generations.



Magdalena, 2024

Artist's interpretation.

This illustration shows the teamwork that is needed to create a research study. The characters included are working together to complete their tree. The image of cutting paper, which comes from trees, to put them back on the tree may not make sense for some people. This image explains how when we started our research, we had to take information from books and journals. Then, we transformed this information as needed to incorporate it into our work which is represented by the tree. The quote at the top of the illustration is taken from the Bible, 1 Corinthians 16, 14. This is why the leaves of the tree are heart shaped. What the image expresses is the effort, the teamwork, the struggle, and the love that doing research takes.

As the pages of this book end, it is evident that the journey taken by these pre-service teachers has been of profound growth and realization. Through the lens of qualitative research, they have not only contributed to the expanding body of knowledge in language teaching and learning but have also set out on an academic and personal journey of growth. The content that each chapter reports highlights the value of research in our field and the importance of developing successful, learner-centered pedagogical strategies to improve English language learning in the Brunca Region. As these pre-service teachers handled the complexities of research methodologies, they refined their writing skills and gained essential abilities and insights that cannot be achieved without venturing into a language classroom and making sense of what happens within those four walls. In addition to expanding their knowledge about language teaching, these students also have learned about group work and ethical responsibilities toward all the people involved in research. The whole experience underscored the importance of empathy, integrity, and sensitivity in the search for knowledge.

As the professors that guided them through this academic quest, it is our deepest wish that the skills learned throughout the research process transcend the boundaries of academia and lead to their holistic growth as individuals and as future English language teachers. We aspire for them to use the lessons learned as a compass to success, fulfillment and contribution to the world around them. May their experience encourage upcoming generations of English teaching professionals to set out their own intellectual journey.

The Editors

Afterword

As an English Foreign Language (EFL) professor in public education in the Brunca Region deeply committed to student academic and personal growth, I find *English Teaching and Learning in Costa Rica's Brunca Region: A Collection of Case Studies by Undergraduate Students* essential to the academia. Not only does it enrich the educational literature but also empowers learners, improves their academic and professional skills, and contributes meaningfully to the field of English language teaching and learning, which should go beyond the simple transmission of knowledge and cater for individual development and social transformation. The book considers various fundamental elements since it focuses on a particular educational context with unique characteristics and challenges. Each chapter offers significant insights into pedagogical approaches aimed at fostering learning experiences: from the use of AI in writing courses, the role of multimedia as a didactic resource, and the enhancement of the writing skill to the transition from high school to the university, classroom mediation, and university dropout. They all consider the dynamic and ever-changing process of EFL teaching and learning in different contexts.

The book is noteworthy because of its wide range of contributions in terms of academic knowledge but mainly because of its contextual relevance and empowerment of undergraduate English student teachers. First, it addresses English language education within the Brunca Region of Costa Rica. This focus ensures that the knowledge generated through the investigations is directly applicable and beneficial to instructors and students in the region, which directly contributes to student engagement, improved instructional designs, and informed decision-making processes. Second, involving learners in the research process makes the results more meaningful since the student perspective offers insights from individuals who are actively engaged in the learning process. This student-centered approach provides innovative views that enrich educational practices to a great extent. Moreover, it allows students to enhance their critical thinking and communication skills, problem-solving abilities, academic growth, autonomy, agency, and, hence, personal development. This book makes a significant impact on both local education and broader academic contexts because it emphasizes regional educational challenges, provides practical insights from student researchers, and greatly contributes to educational research.

Throughout the pages of this book, one can perceive how enriching, transformative, and empowering the English language teaching and learning process is. It not only explores different scenarios in public education regarding teaching and learning, but it also inspires others to investigate and understand practices that provide a different panorama of what this process entails. This book is a reflection of transformative education because it helps learners find their voice and become academically, socially, culturally, and individually competent. One of the most important takeaways is the exploration of pertinent topics. This sparks the commitment to educational opportunity and serves as a door of inspiration, inviting all to embark on a journey of researching, learning, unlearning, adjusting, and sharing introspective analysis. Special thanks to the student researchers for giving us the opportunity to learn from their process and to all authors and editors of the book for believing that teamwork and purposeful teaching and learning can be achieved through commitment, passion, love, honesty, and dedication.

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