

Challenges in Teaching and Planning in Costa Rican Public Primary Schools: The Reality of the Action-Oriented Approach

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.Abstract

This essay examines the challenges faced by Costa Rican public primary school teachers in implementing the Action-Oriented Approach (AOA) within the English language curriculum. Planning is a fundamental and demanding aspect of teaching that requires considering multiple factors such as syllabus demands, diverse student needs, and limited resources. Through interviews with ten English teachers from the Guanacaste region, this paper explores their understanding of the AOA, their planning experiences, and the practical barriers they face, including overcrowded classrooms, lack of training, inadequate materials, and rigid curricular structures. Combining insights from research and the author's teaching experience, this paper intends to argue in favor of changes to strengthen English instruction in public education in Costa Rica for urgent reforms to improve language learning, including better teacher training, increased access to resources, and more flexible syllabi. The goal is to raise awareness and support for educators striving to deliver meaningful English instruction in challenging public-school environments.

Keywords: Action-Oriented Approach (AOA), English language teaching, Costa Rican public primary schools, lesson planning, teacher challenges.

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Introduction

Planning is an everyday demanding teaching task that allows educators to organize lesson goals, instructional strategies and approaches to follow, assessment methodologies, and the resources needed in order to achieve the expected outcomes. The effectiveness of this assignment depends on successful learning experiences with the students, which enable teachers to overcome potential challenges and take the necessary actions to ensure learning. However, although we, as teachers, know the importance of planning to organize our teaching and ensure meaningful learning, it is becoming increasingly complicated for us. To plan effectively, teachers that work for the Ministry Education of Costa Rica must follow the current lesson plan framework, guidelines to the appropriate pedagogical mediation, which ultimately involves a heavy burden to bear for teachers that try to manage the syllabus demands, approach, universal design for learning strategies for the variety of learners in our classroom, the resources available, the environment, time, among others.

Likewise, teaching in Costa Rican public primary schools faces multiple challenges for teachers, including overcrowded classrooms, limited access to resources, and rigid curricular structures. The lack of motivation to learn and absenteeism are everyday issues teachers have to deal with. According to Tetteh (2018), students who attend regularly benefit from structured learning environments and improve language learning in contrast to those who miss classes frequently. Also, according to Chaves et al. (2021), public school teachers often manage large class sizes, which demand personalized instruction and classroom management. Additionally, it is popularly known that rural schools lack access to modern technology, making it difficult to integrate innovative teaching methods (Rojas-Alfaro & Montenegro Sánchez, 2024). I think this strict national curriculum limits teachers' flexibility in adapting lessons to students' diverse learning needs, impacting engagement and effectiveness. This syllabus requires the use of the Action-Oriented Approach (AOA) in the pedagogical mediation process, which makes the teaching and planning job exhausting and hard to do in public primary school scenarios. This essay explores the difficulties that Costa Rican teachers face in implementing the AOA, including a lack of resources, inadequate training, traditional practices, and structural barriers. It stands up for necessary reforms to enhance English language education.

This paper aims to share teachers' opinions of the AOA related to the knowledge and experience they have in planning, the challenges they face in their practice, as well as the success or failure of the application of the methodology with their students. In order to gather teachers' opinions, ten teachers from ten different schools in the Guanacaste Region answered a questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to know first, if the teachers fully

understand the Action Oriented Approach, second, if they know how to plan, and finally, to explore some of their teaching practices regarding planning. In some of the teachers' answers, it has been noted that implementing AOA in Costa Rican public primary schools is challenging due to traditional practices, a lack of teacher training, and insufficient resources. As an English teacher for about 19 years in the Ministry of Education of Costa Rica and as a professor of the Teaching courses in Primary Education in English at the University of Costa Rica in Guanacaste, I must say that to fully integrate the AOA in the classroom, teachers have to work very hard on the preparation of resources, printed and digital materials, technological tools, better infrastructure of classrooms and syllabus flexibility is needed.

Secondly, this essay aims to raise a voice for the Costa Rican teachers who face diverse and complicated challenges with no clear leadership from the Ministry of Education of Costa Rica. In the same way, one of the challenges of English as a foreign language is the limited classroom language opportunity for the learners to practice the language (Vargas et al., 2023). Also, Chaves (2022) highlighted in his survey that teachers spend plenty of hours planning, which many educators consider a consuming duty without economic benefits. Besides these facts, I often listen to teachers complaining about the syllabus and the little time they have for teaching, the lack of understanding of the AOA planning, the difficulties they as teachers have to finish a complete AOA sequence of tasks in a week, or the interruption of classes because of extracurricular activities.

Despite these challenges, Costa Rican educators continue demonstrating resilience and dedication to their students. However, to fully implement the AOA and improve English language teaching, urgent reforms are needed. These include better training opportunities, increased classroom resources, better syllabus flexibility, and stronger institutional support. Without these changes, the effectiveness of English language teaching in public primary schools will continue to be limited, and both teachers and students will struggle to teach and learn English in the public educational system. Raising awareness of these issues is crucial for advocating change, hoping that Costa Rican teachers receive the support and recognition they deserve in their efforts to enhance English language education.

Therefore, this essay not only seeks to explain and show the reality of the planning and teaching challenges faced by English teachers in Costa Rica's public primary schools but also intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of what is required to successfully implement the Action-Oriented Approach. By examining teachers' voices, experiences, and concerns, this paper aims to reflect and promote evidence-based changes in educational policy and practice.

Ultimately, the goal is to advocate for a more supportive, flexible, and resourceful system that empowers teachers to provide quality English instruction and ensures equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Teachers' Perspectives on the AOA

Since 2017, with the implementation of the new English curriculum for primary and secondary education in Costa Rica, most teachers have been trying to familiarize themselves and adapt their teaching to the new, demanding approach. The Ministry of Education of Costa Rica (MEP) has promoted a shift in language teaching through the adoption of the AOA. This new approach was created by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to emphasize real-life communication through well-designed tasks to enhance learning and learners' autonomy. However, despite its many benefits, I have heard numerous teachers in MEP's workshops express the difficulties they face in planning and understanding the practical application of the approach, the learning sequence, and the multitude of factors they must consider to teach effectively across diverse contexts and address varied learning needs.

According to two teachers who answered the questionnaire to collect data, question twelve related to the challenges they face when planning and teaching with the AOA. Five of them said they have been trained in the pedagogical use of the approach, but they argued that the theory is extensive, requires a lot of time to implement, and that they do not quite understand the purpose of some tasks. Also, question nine of the teachers' questionnaire refers to the elements of the AOA they regularly integrate into their lesson plans. Two of the teachers answered how important it is for teachers to try to follow the scope and sequence provided by ¹caja de herramientas, make some little changes of resources and decide to teach the content in the ways they have always based their teaching in but honestly do not follow the didactic sequence understanding what to plan and what to do in every moment.

Some other five teachers, mentioned that although they understand some parts of the teaching sequences, they think it is very long and that the class time is very short, followed by the fact they cannot finish a complete teaching sequence, so what they do is teach contents following some other methodologies and in the worst cases improvising strategies without any theoretical foundation related to a language principle of methodology. They argued that to be

¹Caja de herramientas is a web resource from the Ministry of Education of Costa Rica where teachers download the scope and sequence and free resources for teachers

prepared to teach a lesson using the proposed approach, they would not have any social life because the demands of a single lesson plan take time, resources, and preparation.

Also, three teachers who are new to teaching in public education wrote that they do not have a clear idea that what they are doing is an Action Oriented Approach. They have not had any formal training by MEP authorities regarding planning and teaching with the AOA, and besides, they have received some guidance from teachers with experience and research on the web to learn more about the approach, but not a modeling version to watch to be able to understand the approach. It is well known that the information about this new approach is limited, and the CEFR has not provided a comprehensive pedagogical guide. However, it does outline the foundation of the Action-Oriented approach by emphasizing that language learners are “social agents” who develop communicative competence through real-life tasks.

By focusing on the previous comments of ten teachers who participated in the survey about teaching perspectives of the AOA, some teachers mentioned that they always use strategies from the AOA, and few of them associate what they do with effective results. Some positive comments from one teacher were motivation when using the AOA strategies to teach vocabulary, and from another teacher, listening strategies were carefully designed for his students. Two of them refer to more challenges and effective aspects such as: little time to teach with AOA, difficulties in having students interested in the tasks and designing exercises, collaborative tasks, limited time and resources, lack of materials, and facing day-to-day class situations, and getting students to participate.

Understanding the Action-Oriented Approach in the MEP Syllabus

The term *Action-Oriented Approach* describes the CEFR's strategy for enhancing clarity and consistency in the complex areas of language use and teaching. It offers a strong framework that connects individuals to their social environments and emphasizes real-life scenarios along with their consequences and outcomes. Therefore, reproducing real-life situations and assigning tasks, while taking into account different resources and capabilities for the learners to be able to develop their abilities, is the major goal (Piccardo & North, 2019). They are advocating language learning through practical use and encouraging students to apply their language skills in a meaningful context by focusing on communicative competence and fostering linguistic and cognitive development (Council of Europe, 2001).

When it comes to lesson planning with the AOA, teachers need to promote an environment related to the scenario in which students in most school scenarios will be

immersed for a minimum of six weeks, which is the duration of a unit from the syllabus to be followed by the MEP teachers in Primary and Secondary Education (not all MEP scenarios are the same; some exceptions are the specialty programs in secondary). To do so, teachers must provide students with sufficient opportunities to visualize and imagine the scenario, vocabulary, goals, and expected outcomes to achieve. Without this initial step, it becomes very difficult for students to develop the strategies and tasks necessary to engage meaningfully in class. This is because they will not be connected to the situations the teacher is creating for them to perform the different tasks. By engaging in these tasks, students build both broad and focused communication skills, shifting from simply studying the language to using it in real, dynamic, and genuine interactions (MEP, 2016).

According to the Council of Europe (2001), tasks are defined as:

...any purposeful action considered by an individual as necessary to achieve a given result in the context of a problem to be solved, an obligation to fulfill, or an objective to be achieved. This definition would cover a wide range of actions such as moving a wardrobe, writing a book, obtaining certain conditions in the negotiation of a contract, playing a game of cards, ordering a meal in a restaurant, translating a foreign language text, or preparing a class newspaper through group work. (p. 10)

In light of this, in an AOA-based class, teachers need to consider the purpose or goal of every well-designed task. Moreover, these tasks need to be challenging yet achievable for students. In addition, the use of appropriate and engaging resources is essential to draw students' attention and support their learning process. For example, some tasks may require the use of information gaps or guiding questions that help students perform activities through a scaffolding process.

Tasks are set in contexts that learners might face in everyday life situations or scenarios. As a result, tasks in this approach often involve "the creation of a product as part of the performance" (MEP, 2016; p.26). This product may be an oral presentation about a favorite meal, a recipe for a traditional healthy dish, or an environmental project, in which it is not only the result that matters, but also the process, since it helps build every small part that leads to the final goal. Thus, the scaffolded process of activities, from the simplest to the most complex, is taken into account. Although this learning process is typically carried out over just four sessions, a final product is expected from students, which reinforces the importance of tasks in the learning process within the AOA.

In this view of learning, students are regarded as active participants who take responsibility for their own learning progress, recognizing communication as a social act aimed at achieving particular goals. Importantly, the responsibility of assigning students this active role lies with the teacher, who must design the scenario and involve students in it. This approach views users and learners of a language primarily as 'social agents', i.e., members of the society who have tasks to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment, and within a particular field of action" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9). Additionally, "The learner/social agent is not an empty vessel but a whole person with values, beliefs, an identity, and a language. Furthermore, they possess knowledge and experience that can be used to face the challenge of learning a language" (MEP, 2016, p. 29). Consequently, this previous knowledge and experience help learners make sense of new information by giving them something to relate it to. This holistic perspective, therefore, highlights the importance of personal experience in language acquisition and aligns with the national curriculum's communicative and humanistic vision.

The teacher's role, therefore, is to be a facilitator and help the learner become autonomous. In this process, "the teacher may take different roles such as coach, resource person, advisor, organizer, and facilitator for the learner's successful completion of the tasks" (MEP, 2016, p. 27). Correspondingly, regarding the use of technology, the teacher's role is to implement diverse and relevant methodologies and ICT tools to empower learning and action research. In doing so, they can design effective, communicative tasks and contexts that help develop the learners' knowledge, skills, and attitudes for communication in English (MEP, 2016).

MEP's syllabus considers technology an essential part of a globalized world, one where young learners are naturally immersed. As such, its implementation in English classes is no longer optional but necessary. This, in turn, demands that teachers be prepared to adapt to the context and needs of today's students. In support of this, the internet is considered a "fundamental tool for providing students with real input for listening and reading tasks, such as podcasts, radio broadcasts, online television, movies, and songs. Additionally, mobile phones can be integrated to create real exchanges for listening and speaking activities" (MEP, 2016, p. 27).

Some strategies used by the AOA involve students carrying out projects or mini-projects as a means of producing the four language skills. While completing these tasks, "learners may seek

and manage information through digital technologies, collaborate on shared documents online, make classroom presentations, and publish their work on the internet, both inside and outside the classroom” (Ipek & Acar, 2023, p. 2). These projects, therefore, play a key role in allowing both teachers and students to put into practice the language skills learned throughout the unit. In many cases, technology is highly regarded as a valuable and engaging resource by both parties.

Challenges in Implementing the AOA

As mentioned before, one of the challenges teachers face when implementing the AOA is time constraints. Teachers struggle to complete the full AOA sequence. First, many situations interrupt the class time, such as extracurricular activities, such as art festivals, sports championships, and science fairs. Second, school assemblies about holidays and important celebrations in the country, as well as congresses and meetings held by teachers’ labor unions, such as the SEC (Sindicato de Educadores Costarricenses), ANDE (Asociación Nacional de Educadores), and APSE (Asociación de Profesores de Segunda Enseñanza), which often require teacher participation and can contribute to interruptions in the academic calendar. Finally, the time to complete a sequence. It is fundamental to describe what a complete sequence of the AOA in MEP’s planning means. It includes the following stages: Pre-Teaching, Pre-Task, Task Rehearsal, Task Completion, and Task Assessment. Every stage is going to be described next to take into consideration how the development of the sequence affects teachers' time to finish the process.

1. The Pre-Teaching Stage: During this time, teachers do a warm-up activity, then share the goal of the day, and develop a task to activate the students’ prior knowledge. For example, the teacher may ask students questions about some pictures related to a specific topic or scenario, brainstorm ideas, or review sentence structures, among others. In this stage, the teacher must stimulate students’ knowledge; they must be creative and motivating, and if they do, results can be better in the later stages. Next, modeling, in this task, the teacher should model to students the structures and contents to be taught during the class is more like presenting on a little stage the topic, and finally, clarifying, which means using some assessment strategies to make sure students comprehend what was modeled or presented before (MEP,2016). Those might be questions about what was presented to see if students could replay or comprehend.

2. Pre-Task: During this stage, the teacher prepares students with some basis to be able to develop the rest of the tasks. Here, the teacher reintroduces the objective and expected result of the task, helping students tap into their prior knowledge to complete it again. Key language and sentence structures are revisited and presented as phonological components. Whenever possible, students are encouraged to engage in practical, hands-on activities or combine this phase with interactive videos of engaging games related to the topic, once again emphasizing the key vocabulary. Also, as communicative competence needs to be developed, listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills are selected by the teacher to plan tasks according to the goal and the skill or skills to be performed. Here, the Pre-Task activities vary according to the skills (MEP, 2016). Most of the time, this is done in a different class than the Pre-Teaching stage because of time, so it is like a repetition of the Pre-Teaching, but in a shorter way, preparing students for the next task.

3. Task-Rehearsal: As the name implies, in this task, the major goal is to rehearse the part of the language that needs to be learnt by the students. So, the activities or strategies developed to practice the language are arranged for students to practice speaking, listening, reading, or writing. In this stage, students need to have all the vocabulary and structures necessary to solve the task using all the resources they have. For example, students may rehearse a presentation or revise a written report, interview their classmates, etc (MEP, 2016).

4. Task Completion: In this task, the main goal is for students to complete a strategy already designed by teachers. At this point in the class, students are expected to be familiar with the vocabulary, language structures, or different parts of speech, for example, to fill in the blanks when listening to an audio, a podcast, a song, etc. At this stage, it is important to support, monitor, and encourage the students while solving a task, keeping in mind that they do a part of the task by themselves, following the provided clues (MEP, 2016).

5. Task Assessment: This task is for teachers to determine if students reach the expected goal or determine in what stage of learning they are. Teachers should carefully design the task assessment, taking into account the previous scaffolded process. Some ideas involve strategies where a product might be seen in any of the skills. It is also an opportunity for teachers to provide rubrics for assessing students' task performance and move progressively to self-assessment and peer assessment. A post-stage of task assessment is the post-task, where additional practice and feedback are provided in areas requiring improvement, such as listening,

writing, speaking, reading, vocabulary development, and awareness of phonemic patterns. (MEP, 2016).

Another challenge is the workload; in a previous study about the challenge of teaching English in the post-era of language teaching methodologies by Chaves (2022), he pointed out that one of the heaviest challenges for teachers is the amount of work they have on their plates, referring to the responsibilities teachers have on their hands such as planning, and I could add some others such as creating materials, finishing reports, designing materials, rubrics, tests, specialized material for taking into consideration universal designs of learning for some students with specific learning needs, etc. All of those are already overwhelming, charging teachers with pressure and stress and, much more importantly, limiting their spare free time and their families. Workload affects teachers emotionally and mentally, often leading to stress and burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). This continuous overload not only impacts their performance in the classroom but also takes a serious toll on their overall well-being and work-life balance.

Student engagement is one of the most pressing issues teachers face today, especially in public education. In a saturated era of digital content and constant need to be connected, students are often exposed to plenty of distractions that make it difficult for them to concentrate, follow learning goals, and have and maintain study habits. Most of them, since they were born, were exposed to technological devices such as smartphones, tablets, and other screen devices, which have influenced their attention span and cognitive development. Studies have shown that constant digital stimulation can negatively impact the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for executive functions such as focus, planning, and impulse control (Frontiers in Cognition, 2023). Moreover, research suggests that excessive screen time may reduce sustained attention and make it more difficult for students to engage deeply in learning tasks (Radesky et al., 2020). As a result, teachers face difficulties in motivating students and designing attractive materials and activities that can fulfill students' expectations, especially when students' goals are far removed from learning what is proposed in the syllabus or the target language.

It is a fact that not all students have the facility of learning a second language. According to the multiple intelligences theory, individuals with strong linguistic intelligence are typically more capable of acquiring and using language effectively, which can facilitate second language learning. However, those with lower linguistic intelligence might require different instructional strategies, such as visual or kinesthetic support, to enhance their learning (Gardner, 2011).

Demanding teachers use more techniques to make English as a second language attractive and motivating for those types of students.

Structural and Systematic Challenges in Costa Rican Public Schools

Costa Rica's public education system faces several structural and systematic challenges. CEPAL-UNESCO (2020) supported in its study that the digital divide among countries is the lack of government investment and the social inequities that have been dragging on for years. In Costa Rica, this is a reality because although Costa Rica has committed to allocating 8% of its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) to education; however, according to Programa Estado de la Nación (2023), the allocation has been below almost half of the target in recent years. Also, according to Programa Estado de la Nación (2023), after the COVID-19 pandemic, students presented a huge gap in learning in comparison to previous years in different areas of learning. One of the biggest problems during the pandemic was the lack of technology for most students around the country. The technological devices available were very few to provide students with the necessary equipment to have a competent education during the pandemic.

Technological limitations have persisted even five years after the pandemic. The education budget has continued to decrease, and government investment is still poor to the population's demands. Some of the technological limitations presented today at the Ministry of Education schools are the lack of access to technological devices, such as Plasma TVs, video beams, sound equipment, and a fast and reliable Internet service, as well as some other modern teaching tools. In the implementation of the AOA, the use of technology is fundamental for its everyday use. Language learning in this approach relies on the use of technology to fully involve students in real-life scenarios. Technology, according to the MEP syllabus, acts as a crucial tool to facilitate communication, accessing information, and creating authentic learning experiences within the AOA framework (MEP, 2016). In contrast to the expected teachers deal with the limitations stated before to provide students with authentic scenarios provided in videos and other technological resources that MEP's planning templates suggest. Most of the time, teachers use their own personal resources to provide students with authentic scenarios because MEP does not equip teachers with the necessary tools, and they need to be able to do their job effectively.

Regarding other types of resources as printed and digital materials to support AOA-based instruction, the limitations are even wider because a teacher should select from whatever book or internet website resource to provide input and printed material to students to rehearse, complete, read, and watch, because teachers do not have books, not booklets or printed materials for their students. Schools allocate from the budget some resources for teachers, such as white sheets, markers, etc, which depend on each learning community, budget, and principal, but the reality is that they are always few. The Constitution of Costa Rica (Asamblea Legislativa de la República de Costa Rica, 1949) stated that preschool and basic education are free and compulsory. Besides, this provision ensures that all citizens have access to a basic level of education without financial barriers. There still exist several barriers, which at the end are in charge of the teachers' personal budget due to the lack of resources, which is unfair and very demanding for teachers to do their job.

Specifically, according to ten of the teachers interviewed, seven of them expressed that the syllabus limited their flexibility because it was very extensive, and they did not have enough time to cover all the content, especially considering the specific challenges they face in the classroom, such as large class groups, learning difficulties, and time constraints. These factors made it difficult to implement personalized instruction, meaningful activation of prior knowledge, and proper scaffolded pedagogical instruction. Furthermore, a 2023 study about the teachers' perception of the English curriculum change in Costa Rica revealed that participants perceived the materials provided by the AOA were not adapted to the time for instruction they had, for example they said that AOA plan suggested a video that lasted fifteen minutes, but that particular teacher had just three lessons per week and that specific teacher did not have internet access at their school. Moreover, some teachers commented on minimal support and unclear leadership from educational authorities that denied help, resources when needed (Vargas Solís et al., 2023). Notably, even after nine years of having a new syllabus and pedagogical approach, teachers still do not have access to official textbooks or instructional references, nor the appropriate support and leadership from their authorities. There are very few training workshops; five teachers in the questionnaire answered that they did not receive any training workshop (Appendix 1) and that the workshops they received were more about oral information given, based on theory and an end-to-do list for teachers, than modeling and giving strategies to make improvements to develop their teaching practice with the AOA.

The Need for Educational Reform

Teacher training and professional development play a crucial role when implementing a new curriculum or educational reform. I was part of the first training for teachers on the English Syllabus for primary education, organized by MEP. I remember receiving a couple of training sessions to understand the syllabus and following its theoretical foundation, based on the AOA, but it took me two to three years to become familiar with the pedagogical teaching sequence. Even though I had some guidance at that time, many teachers have reported no preparation and a lack of clear guidance for its practical application. This gap in training shows the urgent need for more effective and practical professional development that goes beyond theoretical understanding to include hands-on strategies, classroom modeling, and contextual adaptation.

Furthermore, there is a need for teaching opportunities to continue learning, reflection, and peer collaboration. There are few spaces for the teacher to reflect on their teaching practices, and teachers should have paid lessons to plan and organize their lessons. Having time to reflect on their practices, either positive or negative experiences, allows teachers to understand the purpose of their calling, the guiding principles under their teaching experiences, and helps teachers overcome the challenges they face, preventing burnout and traditional teaching methods (Machost & Stains, 2023). Teachers need opportunities for reflection to continue learning and have methodological support. Generations are changing, students are coming with sensory overload, which makes it harder for teachers to capture their interest in learning, and MEP is not providing the methodological support to prepare them for the actual challenges.

For these reasons, there is a need for policy change and institutional support at the Ministry of Education of Costa Rica to fully direct the Costa Rican population to the bilingual path they are dreaming of (Vargas et al., 2023). To do so, it is fundamental to consider a more flexible curriculum to allow adaptation to students' needs or update the one that is currently being used. Also, investing in classroom resources and technological tools, and providing MEP with stronger leadership nationally and locally to approach the entire primary and secondary education around the country.

But what does it mean to have a more flexible curriculum that allows for the educational needs? Students may not have the expected level of English if they do not have the quantity and quality of input required. According to Gass et al. (2020), both the quantity and quality of language input are crucial for successful second language acquisition. They argue that learners benefit most from exposure to rich, meaningful input that is frequent and contextually embedded, as it promotes deeper processing and long-term retention. This aligns with the principles of the AOA, which emphasizes learning through real-life communication. As Little et al. (2017) stated, the AOA fosters autonomy, collaboration, and authentic language use by encouraging learners to participate actively in goal-oriented tasks. However, in the classrooms, related to quantity and the authentic use of the language, the expected goals do not correspond to the time dedicated to teaching, for example, the quantity of lessons dedicated to English as a subject in most educational centers.

Regarding quality, there is a double discourse between the aspirations of the curriculum and the actual government investment in bilingual education, and education in general, because the resources provided are insufficient. Teachers often rely on their materials and face increasing workloads, while simultaneously managing the complex social, economic, cognitive, and learning needs of their students. This disconnection between policy and practice has led to frustration and burnout among educators, as well as concerns about the effectiveness of bilingual implementation (Vargas et al., 2023). Due to those facts, there is a need for stronger leadership from the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of education in the National System, making political changes and providing institutional support.

Conclusion

The implementation of the AOA in Costa Rica's public education system continues to present significant challenges for teachers. They face a complex landscape when implementing the AOA in public primary schools. The structure of the AOA sequence, although pedagogically rich, is often difficult to complete due to time constraints caused by frequent interruptions to class time and an already demanding schedule. Each stage of the AOA, Pre-Teaching, Pre-Task, Task Rehearsal, Task Completion, and Task Assessment, requires thoughtful preparation and execution, yet teachers are also burdened with excessive workloads that include planning, materials creation, administrative tasks, and adapting lessons to meet diverse student needs. Moreover, teachers must manage the growing student disengagement and disinterest in a

digitally overstimulated world, while also addressing the challenges of learners with varying cognitive and linguistic capacities.

Consequently, these realities demand more than isolated efforts by teachers; they require systemic change. Increased investment in teacher training, technological resources, and curriculum support is essential. Educational authorities must recognize teachers not just as implementers of policy but as key actors in educational reform. Supporting and empowering them is not only fair, it is fundamental to the success of bilingual education and the full realization of the AOA in Costa Rica's public schools. If teachers are treated professionally, with increasing support, training, and resources toward education, better instructional results are going to be achieved.

This essay intends to argue in favor of changes to strengthen English instruction in the Costa Rican Educational System. Due to the current condition of public education and the many challenges it faces, there are more private institutions, and there is a growing preference for more families to consider private education as an option. But still, families are free to choose, and private institutions provide better curriculum opportunities to learn. The reality is that the majority of students in Costa Rica cannot afford private education and still deserve a qualified bilingual education. This may provide learners with the skills they need to survive and be productive in this world. Which is what MEP originally dreamed and stated, "the national vision for the teaching of English is to empower Costa Rican citizens to become bilingual through the development of communicative competence" (MEP, 2016, p. 9). To turn that vision into a reality, the government must strengthen public education by investing in equitable reforms, resources, and support systems that ensure no student is left behind.

Ultimately, achieving the dream of a bilingual Costa Rica through public education requires more than curriculum innovation—it demands commitment, equity, and sustained support. The AOA offers a solid pedagogical framework, but without addressing the systemic barriers teachers face daily, its potential is useless. Ensuring that all students, besides of socioeconomic background, receive a high-quality English education is not only a matter of justice but a national cause. It is time for policymakers, educational leaders, and communities to prioritize public education, value the work of teachers, and invest in the conditions necessary for real change. Until then, Costa Rica can truly fulfill its vision of empowering its citizens through bilingualism and open doors to a more inclusive, competitive, and connected future.

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Appendix 1

Action-Oriented Approach Questionnaire

Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica

Maestría en Educación con Énfasis en el Aprendizaje del Inglés

Final Project Questionnaire

Instrument for Data Gathering

Teacher's Name: _____ Date: _____

Objective: The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather teachers' perspectives on the Action-Oriented Approach, their knowledge, and the possible challenges they face in their teaching experience.

Instructions:

Please read each question carefully and answer it fully and honestly.

Section 1: General Information

1. What is your teaching experience?

- 0–2 years
- 3–5 years
- 6–10 years
- More than 10 years

2. What level(s) do you teach? *(Select all that apply.)*

- Primary (Grades 1–6)
- Secondary (Grades 7–12)
- Higher Education
- Adult Learners

3. How long have you been teaching in primary school at MEP?

- less than five years
 - between five and ten years
 - more than ten years
-

Section 2: Knowledge of the Action-Oriented Approach (AOA)

5. How familiar are you with the Action-Oriented Approach (AOA)?

- Not familiar at all
- Slightly familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Very familiar
- Expert level

6. Where did you first learn about the AOA? *(Select all that apply.)*

- University coursework
- Professional development training

- Colleagues or mentors
- Online resources (webinars, articles, etc.)
- Other (please specify) _____
- None

7. Have you received formal training about the Action-Oriented Approach?

- Yes, through the MEP workshop or official courses
 - Yes, but informal and very little information
 - No, I haven't
-

Section 3: Application of the Action-Oriented Approach

8. To what extent do you incorporate AOA principles in your lesson planning?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

9. Which elements of the AOA are the most difficult for you? (Select all that apply.)

- Designing real-life tasks
 - Aligning tasks with CEFR levels
 - Managing time within lessons
 - Assessing learner performance
 - Lack of resources for examples
 - Students' lack of engagement
-

Section 4: Challenges and Support

11. **What are the biggest challenges you face when implementing the AOA in your classroom?** *(Open-ended response)*
12. **In your opinion, what kind of support would help you better apply the AOA?** *(Open-ended response)*
13. **Please, share any successful experience you have had using the AOA?** *(Open-ended response)*