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EDUCATION

LA ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS Y LA EDUCACIÓN  
MULTILINGÜE



FACULTAD DE EDUCACIÓN

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# **MONOGRÁFICO 1**

## **LANGUAGE TEACHING AND MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION LA ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS Y LA EDUCACIÓN MULTILINGÜE**

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**Kate Elizabeth Heath**

**Miriam García Rodríguez**

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## **Methodological approaches in the didactic second language context**

### **Enfoques metodológicos en el marco de la enseñanza de segundas lenguas**

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#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The unprecedented spread of English worldwide and its status as the language of international communication (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2003; Mauranen & Ranta, 2009), also referred to as “the world language” by Seidlhofer (2004: 209), have promoted the implementation of different national and international policies in order to improve L2 students’ proficiency in English. In Europe, the demands brought about by the Bologna Process and the consolidation of the European Space of Higher Education (ESHE) have also emphasized the importance of fostering foreign language learning. This has been especially connected to a growing use of English in tertiary education in order to promote students’ mobility and employability since, as previously stated, English has certainly become the *de facto* international language of trade, economy, tourism, science, technology, research and popular media, among others (Crystal, 2003; Joseba, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Thus, different language policies all across Europe have been adopted to encourage the learning of English at different stages of the education system, which has led to the elaboration of new language syllabuses and to redesign of curricula with a view to improving linguistic educational outcomes. Moreover, following the recommendations of The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; Learning, teaching,

assessment (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001), which advocates for the implementation of an “action-oriented approach” based on the development of communicative language competences, different teaching approaches have been developed. Indeed, one of the main goals of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001:1) is to provide a comprehensive description of “what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively”. From this perspective, learners should be able to demonstrate their ability to communicate in the L2 as well as to show a good command of their basic language skills (i.e. reading, listening, writing and speaking). Various methodological approaches have been proposed to achieve these aims, highlighting the importance of promoting positive affective factors (i.e. motivation, attitudes, beliefs and emotions) that are likely to facilitate second language learning (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001; Bernaus et al., 2004; Garrett, 2010; Amengual & Prieto, 2015; Lasagabaster, 2015). This has resulted in the creation of ‘learning situations’ (Sakai and Kikuchi, 2009; Huang, 2011) as well as ‘Optimal Learning Environments’ (Shernoff, 2013), which include, among others, strategies and methods to deal with diversity in mainstream classrooms (‘inclusive education’).

From a communicative perspective, the integration of technological innovation in educational settings has also been gaining global attention. In fact, Chapelle & Douglas (2006:108) point out that: “communicative language ability needs to be conceived in view of the joint role that language and technology play in the process of communication”. Research also suggest that the use of technology in the L2 classroom may enhance the motivation and involvement of already ‘digital natives’ students (Amengual & García-Laborda, 2016; Prensky, 2010; Calle-Martínez et al., 2016; Litzler & García-Laborda, 2016), and can be explored to promote interactiveness and oral communication skills among students from different educational institutions in today’s multilingual and multicultural context (Piker & Rex, 2008; Prensky, 2010; Masiero, 2014).

It goes without saying that, among the wide range of methodological approaches proposed, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been particularly influential over the last decades and, in fact, its adoption has been widely recommended throughout the European Union. CLIL approaches try to integrate foreign language and content-based instruction in a more naturalistic and meaningful communicative environment (Marsh, 2002; Dalton Puffer, 2007; Pérez-Vidal, 2009; Coyle, 2007; Coyle et al., 2010; Ioannou, 2012) and their implementation have proved to be successful across a wide range of instructional settings and educational levels from primary to higher education (Grenfell, 2002; Muñoz, 2007; Coyle et al., 2010; Lasagabaster & Ruiz de Zarobe,

2010; Lyster and Ballinger, 2011; Pérez Cañado, 2012; Ruíz de Zarobe, 2015). In Europe, the application of CLIL programmes has also been connected to the promotion of multilingualism (Lasagabaster, 2015; Pérez Vidal, 2015). According to Lim and Low (2009), in an ever-growing globalized context of increasing interdependence and interconnectivity new priority has been given to the need to communicate and be competent in various languages so as to be able to embrace diversity in multicultural and multilingual contexts. Indeed, there has been an increasing need to promote multilingualism across European countries due to the great variety of coexisting languages in the continent. As Lasagabaster (2015: 19) puts it: “there is a widespread belief that Europe’s future must be multilingual”. Interestingly, the spread of English in Europe has also been linked to the promotion of societal bilingualism and multilingualism, in communities which area already bilingual (Hoffmann, 2000; De Angelis & Selinker, 2001; Jessner, 2006; Cenoz, 2009; Cenoz, 2013). The emergence of these new social environments has posed new challenges for researchers and educators interested in the complex process of multilingual acquisition or the acquisition of additional languages (Third Language Acquisition, TLA) (see Cenoz, 2003; 2013; De Bot & Jaensch, 2015). This current second language scenario is forcing us to redefine existing theoretical models as well as to adopt new methodological approaches (Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain, 2014) so as to be able to better respond to the needs of multilingual environments in the ‘borderlessness of today’s world’ (Lim Low, 2009: 2).

## **2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME**

This special issue belongs to a flourishing area of second language research, the field focusing on methodological approaches and the application of new technologies in English as a Second Language. As its title suggests, it examines this booming field by offering new practices and is aimed at both teachers and researchers in this area. Hence, the objective of this monograph is to gather a compilation of works that collect practices and results from different points of view on the methodologies applied in the second language teaching context.

The issue encompasses 8 articles. The first one, from Giménez-Gómez, explores several methods to maintain a beneficial learning atmosphere through the creation of a classroom community. After analyzing relevant literature on the concepts of classroom community and cooperative learning, the author proposes a series of activities and lesson plans which aim at helping teachers and students create a classroom culture and consequently improve student performance. Giménez-Gómez sustains that to help students get involved



in their own learning process by means of a classroom community is through gamification (i.e., combining learning with games). In her study, the author presents the results obtained from the analysis of a questionnaire addressed to students to find out if they felt that their involvement in their own learning process had been enhanced thanks to the classroom dynamics. The analysis revealed that most students were satisfied with the new classroom dynamics and the introduction of cooperative work.

Then, Puigserver starts the second article by doing a review of the numerous research studies concerning the field of inclusion and dyslexia research to create a general view of the concept of Special Educational Needs and disabilities in order to offer an analysis of the difficulties faced by dyslexic students when learning a second language, to help secondary school teachers with guidelines when dealing with dyslexic students in their classrooms. The author delves into features of the so-called “inclusive education” and explores different strategies and methods that are applied to deal with diversity in mainstream classrooms focusing with special interest on the specific difficulties dyslexic students face in foreign language learning.

The third article intends to raise teachers’ concern about the challenges students face when working on the listening skill as well as what educators can do to facilitate the teaching and learning process of this skill. In this sense, Roble sustains that there are at least three main reasons to understand listening as a challenging skill to teach: (1) the complexity of the skill, (2) teachers’ demanding role, and (3) students’ active role. Throughout the three sections of her article, the author explains what the listening process comprises and highlights the internal factors that learners use to deal with the task and succeed in it. In the second section of her article, Roble explores the actions taken by the teachers to help learners to overcome the difficulties the learners face and finally, the author gives guidelines on how learners should be encouraged to take an active role in their learning process and offers a wide range of activities to be put into practice in the pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening stages to that purpose.

The fourth article suggests linguistic intercultural exchange projects between high schools as a solution to three major problems of TEFL during secondary education: motivation, participation and negative emotions in the classroom. In this regard, Serra analyzes in her study these three aspects so as to find out how intercultural linguistic exchanges between educational institutions in the English classroom can help improve the students learning process. The author enhances the use of ICT in the English classrooms in these intercultural linguistic exchanges and highlights the importance of these types of

resources tools which are motivating for students and without which it would not be possible to carry out such projects.

In line with this, Montaner supports in his article the growing use of ICT in the foreign language classroom given the various possibilities which ICT provide in education. In this sense, Montaner conducts a study on 23 students of a Public Professional Training Center in the province of Valencia. An in-depth analysis of two surveys was carried out to verify if written competence improves through the use of  *Blogging*  as a teaching tool. The analysis revealed that although there is no way to confirm this aim, there has been a significant improvement regarding the reading comprehension competence in technical English, as well as in the acquisition of technical vocabulary in English.

The study of Heath provides some details about the results obtained from a research conducted on four Chinese students aged from five to thirteen years old to study the effect of providing interactional feedback through the use of Total Physical Response gestures to scaffold learner's spoken responses in an online classroom. In a preliminary research the author observed that many of the learners had difficulties in the areas of pronunciation, syntax and lexis. Thus, Total Physical Response gestures were incorporated into the classes as to make the lessons more interactive. The aim of the study was twofold: to verify whether scaffolding enhances students' oral communication skills and to ensure if TPR could be used to scaffold learning and increase student autonomy in problem areas. The results of this study show that TPR scaffolding measures can be applied in order to improve autonomy, oral communication skills and classroom interaction.

The next work focuses on the areas of Content-and-Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Project-Based Learning (PBL) as the two main alternative models for teaching in a bilingual environment within Secondary Education. After a thorough review of the literature on the subject, García-Rodríguez presents what she has identified as the  *Reverse Cycle model* , which aims at the creation of final-units projects inside English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction that are both content and language driven. The author highlights the versatility of the model and sustains that it can be easily introduced in our educational institutions.

The closing paper, by Ortega-Durán, provides an overview of research on multilingual acquisition, focusing on some psycholinguistic factors, and describes the unique features of multilingual learners as compared to monolingual or bilingual learners. The author highlights the importance of multilingualism in the educational system as the interaction among different languages is becoming more and more important all around the world. She also sustains that the increasing contact between different languages in a globalized

world motivates a shift of paradigms that have risen in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and that could be included in the teaching of foreign languages with the aim to help learners in their learning process.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

English has become the first Lingua Franca in the world despite its limited number of native speakers worldwide. European universities have also done a considerable effort in promoting the number of graduate and undergraduate degrees totally taught in English to encourage the number of international students. Likewise, educational systems worldwide are making sound efforts to increase compulsory bilingual programs. For instance, Madrid (Spain) has about 64% of its primary and about 15% of its secondary schools following bilingual curricula. From a linguistic perspective, this leads to the change of scope and teaching paradigms in core education by providing both a more communicative approach (in regular English language classes) and an academic use of content subjects taught in English.

Having this in mind, this volume intends to address a number of articles which place the emphasis in this new interest for the language and ways of teaching. In this sense, it includes unusual aspects of socio-cultural language learning such as the role of communities of learners, teaching foreign languages to Students with Special Needs, the role of listening (an aspect that is probably the weakest in many countries like Spain), the need to emphasize cross and intercultural communication in and out the classroom – especially through ICT, new approaches to traditional methods such as the Total Physical Response or Project Based Learning, and, finally, the importance of multilingual issues in the educational system. Overall, it makes an excellent collection of very relevant and updated matters that challenge the school system in many countries. All in all, the reader will find not only new information but also topics which undoubtedly will bring food for thought. In that sense, this monographic volume will certainly be of relevance for both teachers in training and especially for active practitioners alike.

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# **Classroom community and its benefits: working towards the optimization of student learning processes**

## **La comunidad de aula y sus beneficios: trabajando para la optimización del proceso de aprendizaje del alumnado**

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### **Abstract**

Student performance is often affected by a number of factors such as engagement and classroom atmosphere. In order to optimise student learning processes, a teacher might need to consider all the variables which determine the performance of a specific group of students according to their context. This means taking into account not only their level and previous knowledge, but also their specific needs and emotions. For this purpose, it is essential to create an atmosphere of work based on trust; a safe environment in which students share a common purpose and feel comfortable and confident enough to develop their full potential. In other words, building what could be called an optimal “classroom community”. In the present research, several methods to maintain a favourable learning atmosphere through the creation of a classroom community will be explored, resulting in an educational proposal in which students’ performance can be optimised while also trying to procure their wellbeing.

**Key words:** classroom community, cooperative learning, English as a Foreign Language.

### **Resumen**

El rendimiento de los alumnos suele verse afectado por un número de factores tales como el nivel de implicación y la atmósfera de aula. Con el propósito de optimizar el proceso de aprendizaje del alumnado, deberían considerarse todas las variables que determinan el

rendimiento de un grupo específico de alumnos en función de su contexto. Esto implica tomar en cuenta no sólo su nivel de conocimientos previos, sino también sus emociones y necesidades específicas. Con tal fin, es esencial crear una atmósfera de trabajo y confianza en la cual los aprendientes compartan un propósito común y se sientan lo suficientemente cómodos como para desarrollar su potencial, algo denominado “comunidad de aula”. En el presente artículo, se explorarán varios métodos para mantener una atmósfera de aprendizaje favorable a través de la creación de una comunidad de aula, intentando proponer una forma de optimizar el rendimiento del alumnado, así como su bienestar.

**Palabras clave:** comunidad de aula, aprendizaje cooperativo, Inglés como Lengua Extranjera.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For many years, researchers and educators have been concerned with the optimisation of the learning process, trying to identify the different factors which help students develop their skills and abilities, and finding new methods to adapt to student needs. The motivation behind such research might be due to the responsibility teachers feel to take care of the aspects which they can control inside the classroom. This, in turn, results in their intent to do everything they can to make sure all students have the same learning opportunities, enabling them to develop their full potential even if that does not mean achieving a perfect score.

For this reason, the first aim of this paper is to analyse the concepts of classroom community and cooperative learning, examining their possible benefits by exploring what other authors have concluded in previous works. Thus, different aspects will be exposed, including the relevance of emotions in second language learning, the conditions which promote student engagement, the benefits of cooperative work and of creating a sense of community in the classroom, and ways of implementing said practices in the English classroom.

The close revision of relevant literature will then lead to the proposal of a series of activities and lesson plans, which are intended to help both teachers and students build a classroom culture and therefore boost student performance. Moreover, this paper also features a case study which serves as a simple example of how some of the proposed methods and ideas can be applied in real life. The circumstances and observations of said case study will appear together with the results obtained from an anonymous questionnaire presented to students, so that the results include not only assessment

results and the teacher's perspective, but also the students' opinion on the change in classroom dynamics and atmosphere.

The relevance of this topic lies in its possible benefits, since ideally students will be provided with tools to acquire and use knowledge (both academically and in real life), which will increase their motivation, optimise their learning process, ensure an adequate development, and improve the classroom atmosphere.

## **2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

### **2.1. Looking for a way to enhance learning: the relevance of emotions**

Many variables affect the teaching and learning of a second or foreign language, including the students' attitudes and beliefs, the anxiety they might feel while learning and using the language, and their degree of motivation (Arnold, 2010). However, and most importantly, the student's personal circumstances and background will also affect their performance in a significant manner.

For example, those students with serious personal concerns might see their education as worthless and useless in real life, since they perceive the future as a menace for which they are not offered an explanation (Cardús, 2005: 344). Moreover, certain aspects of a student's lack of motivation and engagement, such as the boredom that many secondary school students feel during most of their academic life, seem to be partly caused by a biological factor, since the teenage brain tends to feel interested only in those tasks which feature a strong emotional impact (Loste, 2011). Therefore, it seems clear that the students' personal background plays an important role in their learning process.

However, there are other factors to take into account, such as the one mentioned by Shernoff in his work *Optimal Learning Environments to Promote Student Engagement* (2013), where it is noted that "features of the immediate learning environment, especially if conceived as a nexus of historical, cultural, social, and more proximal influences, may be an even greater factor in the propensity to engage in learning than characteristics of the individual." (Shernoff, 2013: 128). For all these reasons, the objective of many educators should be to look for alternative ways to overcome some of the aforementioned circumstances, and although previous research focuses mainly on other fields (e.g. students of ICT, primary education, or higher education), most studies examine exactly the same factors and propose similar solutions across areas.

For instance, some scholars think that it is relevant to find out what the good qualities of a teacher are, while others believe that, rather than looking up to the perfect role model, one should examine oneself and strive for perpetual improvement (Williams et al., 1999: 56-

57). Alternatively, some authors describe a number of methodologies and approaches which can be used to teach a second or foreign language (Brown 2001; Johnson 2001). Nevertheless, while some people commonly believe that it is up to the lecturer to choose a certain classroom methodology according to his or her own teaching style, in order to promote effective and significant learning, it will be the students who will indirectly choose the necessary methodology according to their own learning needs and personal background (Viveros Guzmán, 2016).

For instance, Viveros Guzmán points out that students from certain parts of the world prefer a traditional grammar approach, even if the teacher attempts to use the communicative approach (2016). This idea reinforces the importance of perceiving pupils as individuals, a belief endorsed by Gómez Candiani, who defends that teaching also involves listening to students and paying close attention to their needs, opinions and experiences, providing an environment of trust and respect, and being able to listen “not only with our ears but also with our eyes and heart” (2010).

In relation to this point, the work “Emotion circuits in the brain” (2000) by Ledoux explains the effect of emotions on the creation of memories, with the author stating that emotions are more powerful than reason. Thus, success does not depend on methods alone, but on whatever happens inside the classroom and between people, revolving around the experiences which occur there (Foncubierta Muriel, 2016). What is more, Shernoff (2013) notes that students feel “positively” engaged in classroom activities when the teacher supports them “emotionally [and] interpersonally” (130), and when they feel the lecturer “care[s] and provide[s] active learning opportunities for them as individuals” (133).

Hence, emotions seem to play an important part in the ESL classroom, and teachers who wish to make the contents of their lessons memorable do well to consider designing lesson plans which feature activities with an emotional impact or relevance in students’ lives. For this reason, the notion of classroom community becomes particularly relevant while trying to enhance student performance, since as Shernoff points out, there is impracticality in “daily preparation in comparison with how to set up a learning environment that has the best chance to meet the learning and developmental needs of all of their students” (2013: 129). In the next section, the concept of classroom community will be explored in an attempt to find a way of creating such learning environment.

## 2.2. Classroom community and its benefits

The term “community” has been defined as “the feeling that members belong to one another, matter to the group, and that the group will meet member needs” (McMillan and Chavis as paraphrased in Glantz, 2014: 56), with some authors adding that, in the case of classroom communities, “members’ educational needs will be met through their commitment to shared goals” and that “[t]he primary purpose is learning” (Rovai, 2001). Thus, the key factor of engaging students to be part of a classroom community is to create a series of “shared values, beliefs and attitudes about learning”, which constitute the classroom culture (Brown-Wessling, 2012).

In their work, *Classroom Management and Culture* (2011), the educational organisation Teach For America offers some advice on how to build and manage a classroom community, mentioning respect, tolerance, and engagement as key elements of the community (60, 67-68), and reminding teachers that “your own behavior should model appropriate speech and actions to your students” (60). Moreover, they emphasise the importance of interpersonal relationships (61, 63), prompting teachers “to learn about your students’ personal lives, interests, and goals, [since] seeking this information will show students that you value, respect, and care about them” (61). In particular, it is essential that teachers “establish positive channels”, particularly with students “who do not tend to receive any positivity from others, or who rub you the wrong way” (63). Gruwell (2007) also mentions some of these points, highlighting the importance of believing in students while also empowering them (5, 12).

Finally, some authors observe that working as part of a classroom community “offers a positive outcome if one accepts that ‘all of us’ are smarter than ‘any of us.’” (Glantz, 2014: 53), which helps build an atmosphere of cooperation. Hence, it becomes evident that a combination of elements and conditions is needed for the community to work effectively, the main focus being placed on cooperative learning. The following section will deal with the aforementioned concept and its impact on classroom community.

## 2.3. Cooperative learning and gamification

Cooperative learning has been implemented for many years in language classrooms, since it increases student engagement and motivation (Crandall, 1999: 234; Shernoff, 2013: 129), creates more opportunities for a student to participate in an environment with less stress and anxiety (Crandall, 1999: 233, 235; Brown, 2001: 178-179), and is believed to “improve the quality of the processes of learning and instruction” (Johnson et al., 2004: 5). For instance, Dörnyei and Malderez (1999) point out that a “cohesive group means established acceptive relationships between all members, which allows for

unselfconscious, tolerant and 'safe' L2 practice" (108), and that group work "acknowledges the resources each member brings" (109), which is a central idea in the concept of classroom community.

Furthermore, cooperative work also promotes the development of social skills and relationships (Crandall, 1999: 228; Dörnyei and Malderez, 1999: 167), which creates a chance for "learners to develop cross-cultural understanding, respect and friendships as well as positive social skills for respecting alternative opinions and achieving consensus" (Crandall, 1999: 237). For this reason, some authors even believe that conflicts should be welcomed "as a sign of group development" (Dörnyei and Malderez, 1999: 168).

However, there are certain requirements needed for cooperative learning to function properly. For instance, it is relevant to discuss norms and goals explicitly (Dörnyei and Malderez, 1999: 167), and to create tasks which are "genuinely interesting" and "meaningful" (Crandall, 1999: 243), which will also have a positive impact on classroom community.

Some authors have even pointed out the effectiveness of group work while developing certain reasoning skills, since "collaborative activities teach students how to make disciplinary arguments" (Bean, 2011: 183). Moreover, authors such as Shernoff (2013) and Summers and Svinicki (as paraphrased in Glantz, 2014) noted a "higher mastery of goals in collaborative learning environments, as opposed to traditional lectures". Therefore, due to the aforementioned benefits and impact on student engagement, cooperative work seems to be a key element in classroom community, and thus it should be considered as its main group dynamics whenever possible.

Another way to help students get involved in their own learning process by means of a classroom community is through gamification, a type of group work which "is used to create a classroom community wherein students are encouraged to contribute to, and benefit from, peer learning" (Glantz, 2014: 53). Hence, it is not surprising that some researchers believe that small-group games and competitions "promote group cohesiveness" (Dörnyei and Malderez, 1999: 167).

Taking these aspects into account, if we designed a competition in which all students participated in groups in order to achieve a common goal, all students would be able to enjoy being part of the competition independently of their final results and overall performance. As Shernoff (2013) explains, "[s]eeing others rewarded not for their success, but by their success, reinforces and intensifies the competitive chase for success as the primary goal on which one would spend his or her freedom. [...]. Now one may be satisfied only by higher and higher levels of success." (110). However, he also notes that "[a]n

emphasis on competition can also lead to a relative lack of connectedness” (Shernoff, 2013: 110), so competitions should be carefully designed and implemented when trying to build a sense of classroom community.

In the following section, a proposal featuring cooperative work and gamification will be presented with the objective of attempting to optimise student learning processes.

### 3. PROPOSAL

As mentioned above, classroom community, together with cooperative work, seems to have a positive impact on student learning processes. For this reason, and taking into account the information presented above, a total of three lesson plans have been designed with the objective of motivating and engaging students in their own learning process, as well as trying to establish a sense of classroom community. Each lesson plan adapts popular games or activities from previous authors and adds ideas for in-class implementation, as well as the main features of the lesson (e.g. context, aim, materials, group dynamics), which will be individually listed and described below.

#### 3.1. Sample lesson plan 1

Table 1. Sample lesson plan 1

<b>Context and target audience:</b> this activity could be used in any level once students already know each other quite well.				
<b>Objectives:</b> describing people’s appearance and personality; discussing issues of gender, background (race, nationality, culture) and stereotypes (physical and psychological).				
Activity	Time	Skill	Materials	Interaction (group dynamics) and development
The perfect human being	25 minutes	Writing, Speaking, Listening	Pen and paper	1-2-4 technique (individual work, pairwork, small group)
The peanut game (adapted from Gruwell 2007)	30 minutes	Writing, Speaking, Listening	Peanuts, pen and paper	Individual work and big group

In this sample lesson, each student would write some adjectives which describe the appearance and personality of how they think the perfect human being should be. Afterwards, students would work in pairs and discuss possible differences between their ideas, after which students would work in groups of four to reach agreement on the most

important qualities the perfect human should have. Finally, they would describe their vision of the perfect human being in a short paragraph.

Once all groups have written their description, they would share it with the rest of the class and discuss their differences. The teacher would then ask them to reflect on how different their ideal is from people they know in real life, including themselves.

Subsequently, each student would be given a peanut (or shown a picture of a peanut) and be asked to describe both the inside and the outside of a peanut in one short paragraph. The whole group would then discuss the differences they found between both descriptions and think about the meaning of the activity in connection with the issue of appearances and personality traits. The teacher would lead the discussion so that students are able to realise the importance of accepting differences, giving importance to one's inner qualities, and rejecting social expectations regarding beauty standards.

### 3.2. Sample lesson plan 2

Table 2. Sample lesson plan 2

<b>Context and target audience:</b> this activity could be used for any level once students already know each other quite well.				
<b>Objectives:</b> using modal verbs; building classroom community; developing writing skills.				
Activity	Time	Skill	Materials	Interaction (group dynamics) and development
Brainstorming: modal verbs review	10 minutes	Use of English, Listening, Speaking	Whiteboard or blackboard	Big group
The mailbox (adapted from ESL Kids 2016)	25 minutes	Writing and Speaking	Envelopes and pieces of paper	Individual work
I would like to receive a letter saying...	20 minutes	Speaking	None	Big group

This sample lesson would start with a brainstorming through which students would remember and review modal verbs and their use. After that, the teacher would explain that they will have to write a short letter to one of their classmates, which should start with the sentence "You may not know, but..." and feature some sentences enumerating things they admire from the other person (e.g. You're a great friend or You're the best student in this classroom).

The teacher would then hand out one envelope to each of the students, which would contain the name of the person to whom they have to write the letter. While the teacher



monitorises the students, they would write the letters individually (it is important that they do not write their name so that the letter is anonymous).

Subsequently, students would hand their letter to the teacher, after which they would sit in a circle. The teacher would then give each envelope to its recipient, and once they have all received their letter, they would read it out loud to the rest of the group.

Finally, each of them would be asked to imagine they were able to receive a letter saying anything they wanted to read, and they would have to explain what they would like that letter to say using the expression I would like to receive a letter saying... (e.g. I would like to receive a letter saying I have won the lottery, I would like to receive a letter saying I am immortal).

### 3.3. Sample lesson plan 3

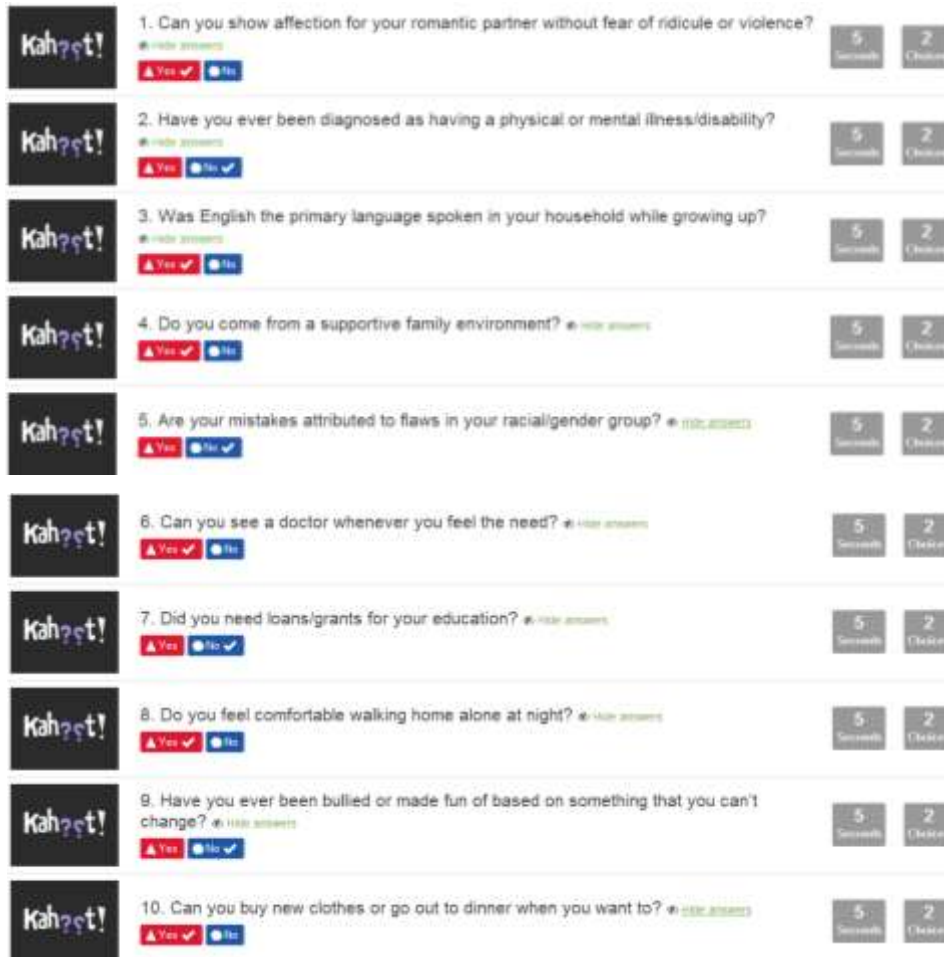
Table 3. Sample lesson plan 3

<b>Context and target audience:</b> this activity could be used for intermediate and advanced levels once students already know each other.				
<b>Objectives:</b> introducing new vocabulary; developing the students' ability to reason and to express opinions, agreement and disagreement.				
Activity	Timing	Skill	Materials	Interaction (group dynamics) and development
The privilege test (Adapted from BuzzFeedYellow 2015)	10 minutes	Reading	<i>Kahoot!</i> Test (see figure 1)	Individual work
Discussion of basic terms	10 minutes	Vocabulary, Speaking	Blackboard or whiteboard	1-2-4 technique (individual work, pairwork, small group), whole group
Hangman	15 minutes	Use of English	Whiteboard or blackboard	Group work, big group
Debate	20 minutes	Listening, Speaking	None	Big group

In this lesson, students would first interact with ICT materials by completing a test on the online platform Kahoot! (Brand et al., 2016) with a series of yes/no questions. In the absence of ICT materials, desks could be moved to the side of the room and students could form a line; then, they would take one step forward for 'yes' and one step back for 'no' (BuzzFeedYellow, 2015). The purpose of the test is to find out which students (if any)

benefit from the social concept of privilege, which is to be explored and discussed later in the lesson.

Figure 1. Kahoot! quiz (Brand et al., 2016) to test privilege (adapted from BuzzFeedYellow, 2015)



Afterwards, the class would be divided into five groups, and the five most privileged students (the ones with the highest scores) would be the captains (alternatively, students can work individually). The whole class would then discuss basic terms related to social equality, such as “privilege” and “equity”. Afterwards, they would play a short game such as Hangman to review key vocabulary items, with each group winning one point for each right answer.

After a group has been proclaimed winner, the teacher would unexpectedly add the points from the *Kahoot!* test to the group scores, even if that implies that students who did worse in the game will now be the new winners.

The teacher would then explain that, since some of them were more privileged than others from the very beginning, not all of them had equal chances of success, so some of them

would have to work much harder than those born in more favourable environments. Subsequently, the lesson would conclude with students discussing how they felt and what they think about the concept of privilege (e.g. *Do you think it really exists? If it exists, does it promote fair situations?*). Hopefully, students would realise the importance of equity and of taking care of all members of the community, both inside and outside the classroom.

#### 4. CASE STUDY

As a way of providing real-life examples for the proposal presented above, two textbook units were adapted and taught in two different groups of the secondary school IES Arxiduc Lluís Salvador in Palma (Balearic Islands): first year of *ESO B* (students were aged 12 or over) and second year of *Bachillerato A* (students were 17 years old or over).

The objective of this action was to test the extent to which student engagement and performance are actually improved by means of cooperative learning and the creation of a classroom community, even with only a few subtle adjustments and modifications in activities and classroom dynamics. Moreover, at the end of both units, an anonymous questionnaire was handed out to students to find out if they felt that their involvement in their own learning process had been enhanced thanks to the aforementioned classroom dynamics.

In the following sections, the approach followed in each of the groups will be described, after which the questionnaire results will be commented on and compared. Subsequently, a series of improvements will be suggested based on knowledge acquired in the experience.

##### 4.1. First year of ESO B

The first adapted textbook unit was “Appearances” (Pelteret, 2014), taught in first year of *ESO B*, a European Sections<sup>1</sup> group with twenty-eight students. In the first session, students completed certain activities of group cohesion (e.g. introducing a classmate), and with the help of the group’s tutor and permanent English teacher, pupils were divided into heterogeneous groups of four, who were then able to choose a name for themselves. It should be noted that one of the students was originally part of a low-performance group and that the permanent English teacher had prepared special materials for her, but she joined one of the groups and completed the same activities as her classmates during the length of this unit (with slight modifications in certain activities).

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<sup>1</sup> “European Sections” is the name given to an initiative implemented in some Spanish schools with the objective of improving student proficiency in foreign languages. For this purpose, content subjects such as Music or Physical Education are taught in English or French, depending on the school and level (Cid Manzano, 2004: 9).

The students were told that the completion of several tasks throughout the unit would enable them to win points (e.g. doing homework, working cooperatively and finishing an activity before other groups), while certain behaviour would subtract points (e.g. talking while other students are participating, drawing on desks). As a way of rewarding their performance, at the end of the unit the group with the highest number of points would be able to choose a film to watch and discuss in class out of a list provided by the teacher, and each week the group with the highest number of points would be announced. The idea was welcomed by all students, and although some pupils tended to work on their own and had to make an effort to work with their group, most students were happy to work together and they often prompted other members to behave properly and complete the activities so that they could win more points.

Regarding the development of the lessons, certain activities were specifically designed so as to involve students in their own learning process; for instance, since in the unit students learned how to describe appearances, some activities included the description of a classmate as well as of some of their favourite singers or actors (e.g. Michael Jackson, Keira Knightley, Justin Bieber, Nicky Jam, Shannon Williams). Moreover, a visit to the museum Fundación Joan March was designed so that students would be able to choose a work and write a description of the person or people in it, thus applying their knowledge in a real-life situation. The worksheet designed for the museum visit also included questions about their feelings and impressions, which enabled them to discuss how differently they perceived and interpreted certain abstract works (see figure 2 below).

Figure 2. Worksheet designed for the museum visit

There is a hidden man...  
There are people...  
The film is amazing...  
He has long short brown black blond hair  
The colours are dark bright

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**MUSEUM VISIT: FUNDACIÓ JOAN MARCH**

1. Choose ONE of the following works and describe them. Use the vocabulary you learned to write 7 sentences in e.g. present tense. Include, tell, look long, hair, short, brown, blonde, blue, etc. Use, call, I and the expressions below to help you.

a. La familia Saperstein

b. Compositor, Salvador Dalí

c. The crowd, Antoni Gaudí

d. The artist, Antoni Gaudí

e. The artist, Antoni Gaudí

f. The artist, Antoni Gaudí

g. The artist, Antoni Gaudí

h. The artist, Antoni Gaudí

2. Find the paintings below and answer the questions with a word or short phrase.

a. Calligraphic drawing, José Manuel Broto

i. How does the painting make you feel?

b. The Artist, Antoni Gaudí

j. What does the painting look like to you?

k. How does it make you feel?

l. How do you think the artist felt while painting it?

c. Abstract piece, Antoni Gaudí

m. Does it look like a person?

n. Why do you think the artist made it like that?

d. Landscape impression, Carles Serra

o. Look at the paintings and name the animals.



Another example of a way in which certain activities were adapted to students was a lesson where students had to complete some reading comprehension and vocabulary exercises about the Solar System (Pelteret, 2014: 129). Since the text for the reading exercise included a description of stars, the exercises were introduced with a clip from the film *The Lion King* (Allers and Minkoff, 1994), which most students recognised and remembered as their favourite childhood film. In the scene shown to students, three main characters hypothesise about what stars are and how they work. After watching the clip, students were asked to summarise or paraphrase what each of the characters had said and to vote for what they thought was the right answer.

Furthermore, a varied set of activities was used for particular purposes in certain lessons. For instance, in order to review vocabulary items, students were given the chance to review key terms with popular games such as Hangman or The Longest Word. Moreover, the aforementioned activity The Mailbox (adapted from ESL Kids 2016) was also introduced with the intention of strengthening bonds between students and to lessen the effects of competitiveness.

Following the indications provided by the permanent English teacher of the group, students were assessed following very traditional methods (i.e. written exam, short oral exam with questions), and the general performance was very satisfactory, with only two students failing. One of those pupils was the student who had recently been moved to the group, who had covered the same contents as the rest of students during the unit and had had an assessment slightly adapted to her level. Although she did not pass the exam, her results and degree of engagement improved considerably in comparison to previous units.

#### **4.2. Second year of Bachillerato A**

The second teaching unit was taught in second year of bachillerato A (scientific itinerary), with twenty-one students. The unit was part of the textbook Trends 2 (Baines and Rodwell, 2014), entitled “Animalia”.

Despite featuring some complementary activities and alternative assessment methods, these lessons followed a more traditional approach, since group work was often implemented but there was no monthly competition. However, some of the activities carried out did feature a certain degree of competitiveness, such as the two Kahoot! quizzes completed to review grammar and vocabulary items (see figures 3 and 4 below), which were highly appreciated by pupils.

Figure 3. Kahoot! Test (Brand et al., 2016) with vocabulary items

1. A scorpion \_\_\_\_\_ Hide answers  
 bites  stings  scratches

2. The chameleon is a master of \_\_\_\_\_ Hide answers  
 digging  escaping  swimming

3. Animals have offspring with their \_\_\_\_\_ Hide answers  
 mother  brothers  sons

4. Unless we make a global effort, the lynx will soon \_\_\_\_\_ Hide answers  
 die out  tag  march

5. Unfortunately, it's unlikely that cockroaches will ever be \_\_\_\_\_ Hide answers  
 wiped out  widely accepted  treated well

6. Some animals are \_\_\_\_\_ because they have lost their habitat Hide answers  
 threaten  endangered  die hard

7. I think people who hunt animals for fun have some kind of mental \_\_\_\_\_ Hide answers  
 disease  behavior  illness

8. You are responsible \_\_\_\_\_ this situation! Hide answers  
 for  of  about

9. I'm not going to hate you just because you're different \_\_\_\_\_ me Hide answers  
 from  of  at

10. The man was declared guilty \_\_\_\_\_ Hide answers  
 of all crimes  as he is  for all crimes

11. I'm really \_\_\_\_\_ to my mum Hide answers  
 concerned  grateful  surprised

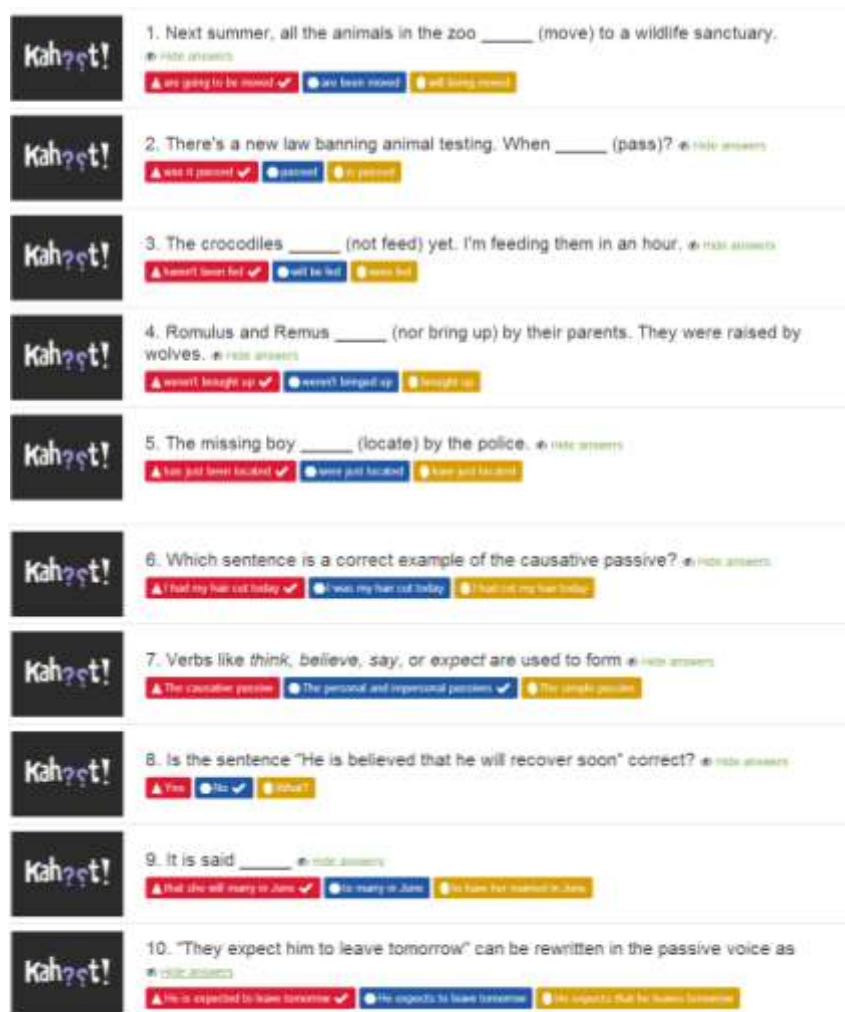
12. He's not the sharpest tool in the box, but we're \_\_\_\_\_ him Hide answers  
 pleased with  pleased for  loved him

13. I'm very \_\_\_\_\_ sports! Hide answers  
 good at  good for  good about

14. The act of copying nature to create human designs is known as Hide answers  
 biomimicry  mimics  mimic

15. Sadly I can't own a pet permanently, but I'm a \_\_\_\_\_ parent Hide answers  
 foster  can  have

Figure 4. Kahoot! test (Brand et al., 2016) used to review grammar points



With the objective of using meaningful materials in order to increase student engagement, certain tasks, such as a sample reading exercise and the final exam, were designed following the exam model used in the university entrance exams of the University of the Balearic Islands. This allowed students to work with the knowledge they had acquired throughout the unit, as well as to have real practice for the university entrance examinations (see figure 5 below).

Figure 5. Reading exercise designed to resemble official university entrance exams

**READING COMPREHENSION EXERCISE**

Read the passage carefully and answer the questions in English. USE YOUR OWN WORDS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE.

**Wild lynx plan 'threaten sheep farmers'**

Plans to reintroduce wild lynx to parts of Southwestern and Central Spain would mean "completely unjustifiable" losses for sheep farmers, a report claims.

The Lynx UK Trust wants to place up to six lynx per site as part of efforts to regenerate the species, which has been extinct in Britain for 1,300 years. But the National Sheep Association (NSA) fears the move could damage the livelihoods of sheep farmers.

The trust says that if successful the trial will boost regional economies. The trust is looking to lodge a formal application with Natural England to go ahead with the trial later this year. Its chief scientific specialist Dr Paul O'Donoghue, said: "The UK can support a population of up to 400 lynx, that is based on habitat suitability studies. We think conservatively that the reintroduction of lynx would be worth £80m to £70m a year to the UK economy. They will play a vital role in both promoting rural regeneration and forest regeneration. The experience in other parts of Europe where lynx have been reintroduced is that it results in a massive boost for the environment as well as to the economy."

But the NSA report calls for more research before the trial is approved. It says: "The impacts that lynx would have on sheep are completely unjustifiable when farmers already work tirelessly for the welfare and performance of their livestock, and also to maintain their own livelihood. Sheep play an important part of maintaining the biodiversity of the current, perfectly functioning ecosystem, which would be disrupted by the introduction of an unnecessary predator." The association's chief executive Paul Booker added: "We think the UK is too small an island and too heavily populated for this and the way the countryside is managed at the moment is already good for tourism. Also, these animals are going to be nocturnal and extremely shy and it is going to be very unlikely that anyone ever actually gets to see one."

Adapted from BBC News, 04 April 2010

**Vocabulary:**  
 - Livelihood (N): occupation or employment.  
 - Lodge (V): To place.

**1. Say whether the following statements are TRUE or FALSE. Explain WHY using your own words (10 finding evidence in the text. 50 marks are given for only TRUE or FALSE. (1 point)**

a) The reintroduction of the lynx in Great Britain is a threat to the environment. (0.5)

b) The Lynx UK trust believes nobody will ever see a lynx because they are shy. (0.5)

**2. In your own words, and based on the ideas from the text, answer the following question. 50 marks are given for responses copied directly from the text. (1 point)**

Why are some people against the reintroduction of lynx in Britain?

**3. Find in the text words or phrases which mean the same as the ones below. In the case of verbs, ONLY infinitive forms will be accepted (1 point)**

1) To indicate interest, harm, danger, or pain. (0.25)  
 2) Having no living representation; having died out. (0.25)  
 3) To improve, help, or increase. (0.25)  
 4) Finally, happiness, prosperity. (0.25)

Regarding the oral production skill, instead of carrying out interviews to assess Speaking, students were encouraged to investigate and present a particular topic. With the objective of stimulating them to develop their research skills and autonomy, each student chose an animal out of a list provided by the teacher. The list, which attempted to include animals which do not typically appear in secondary school textbooks, featured the sugar glider, the katydid, the platypus, and the pygmy marmoset, among others. Moreover, in order to help students organise and prepare their presentations, a whole lesson was devoted to explaining how to plan and structure an oral presentation. In said lesson, pupils were shown two sample oral presentations (a "good" and a "bad" oral presentation) and were encouraged to point out the strengths and weakness in order to detect issues to be avoided, as well as desirable features (see figure 6 below).

Figure 6. Slide from the "bad" oral presentation

**The Angler Fish**

- Classification (type of animal): fish
- Physical appearance: ugly
- Environment: water
- Diet: carnivores
- Reproduction and offspring: sexual parasitism, eggs
- Life span and threats: they are eaten in some parts of the world
- Behaviour: lethargic (ambush predator)
- What can we learn from it? They use bacteria as light
- Video: [True Facts About the Angler Fish](#)



Concerning final results, only three students failed the oral presentation (sometimes due to lack of rehearsal, but mostly due to poor use of English), and only one student failed the final exam.

### 4.3. Questionnaire and results

At the end of each unit, students from both groups were handed out a questionnaire which they would answer and submit anonymously, in order to find out their opinion on the methods used during the unit. With the objective of achieving reliable results, the questionnaire was conducted in Spanish, and it included multiple-choice questions to find out student perception about working in groups, the lecturer and her teaching, the classroom atmosphere, the complementary activities, and the assessment methods, while also giving them the chance to assess their own degree of involvement and engagement.

Although the versions of the questionnaire featured slight variations (e.g. the one for Bachillerato did not include questions about a competition), the options for all questions and measurable aspects present in both surveys remained the same. Therefore, although the questions were arranged so that there would be a thematic link between them, the results of questions answered only by one group will be commented on separately, which will imply the question number might not follow a strict numerical order.

Table 7. Results of the questionnaire (questions answered by both groups: 49 students)

	Option A	Option B	Option C	N/A
<b>Question 1</b>	87.75%	8.16%	4.08%	0%
<b>Question 3</b>	59.18%	38.77%	2.04%	0%
<b>Question 6</b>	89.79%	10.20%	0%	0%
<b>Question 7</b>	24.48%	75.51%	0%	0%
<b>Question 9</b>	77.55%	22.44%	0%	0%
<b>Question 10</b>	46.93%	44.89%	2.04%	6.12%
<b>Question 11</b>	85.71%	12.24%	0%	2.04%
<b>Question 12</b>	42.85%	40.81%	16.32%	0%
<b>Question 13</b>	73.46%	26.53%	0%	0%
<b>Question 14</b>	57.14%	42.85%	0%	0%

As mentioned above, the first aspect measured was the extent to which students believed working in groups was preferable or beneficial (questions 1 and 3), which showed that most students preferred working in groups (about an 87.75%) and thought of it as a more effective learning method (a 59.18% highlighted cooperation whilst a 38.77% believed it heightened memorisation).

Concerning their perception about the teacher (questions 6, 7 and 14), most of them thought she was helpful and tried to make sure that all students understood the contents (89.79%), that she spoke English frequently but not to the point where information was

lost (75.51%), and that they had been generally happy with the lessons (a 42.85% said they were “happy”, whilst the remaining 57.14% said they were “very happy”).

Regarding classroom atmosphere (question 13) an 85.71% thought that it had promoted learning, with 77.55% of students appreciating the inclusion of alternative activities and the remaining 22.44% pupils wishing there had been more adapted activities (question 9). Furthermore, in relation to the assessments methods (question 11), most students believed that there had been a correlation between the contents covered in class and the exercises which appeared in the final exams (85.71%). Overall, students felt that their involvement in the lessons had been moderate (40.81%) or high (42.85%), with only a 16.32% of students feeling their level of engagement had been low (question 12).

Hence, as it can be observed, most students were happy with the new classroom dynamics and the introduction of cooperative work, as well as the teacher’s work and performance during the lessons, even if some of them did not feel a significant increase in overall engagement and degree of implication.

Moreover, first year of *ESO* students also answered questions in relation to the competition, gamification, and activities such as the museum visit as ways of optimising their learning process.

Table 8. Results of the questionnaire (questions answered by first year of *ESO*: 28 students)

	<b>Option A</b>	<b>Option B</b>	<b>Option C</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Question 2</b>	14.28%	32.14%	53.57%	0%
<b>Question 4</b>	82.14%	10.71%	7.14%	0%
<b>Question 5</b>	89.28%	0%	10.71%	0%
<b>Question 8</b>	67.85%	32.14%	0%	0%
<b>Question 15</b>	89.28%	7.14%	0%	3.57%

Concerning the creation of a permanent group to work with throughout the unit (question 2), some students felt happy with their assigned partners, but most students would have preferred to work with different people each day (53.57%). Students also thought that having the common goal of watching a film and talking about it together (question 4) had increased their motivation (82.14%), and that the disciplinary methods used in the preceding competition (e.g. subtracting points for uncooperative behaviour) were effective as they promoted that all members worked to maintain the well-being of the group (67.85%); however, a 32.13% did not feel that the results had been that positive, but maintained that the mechanism was good enough since they thought some students would display disruptive behaviour regardless of the type of punishment. Finally, an

89.28% of the pupils thought that the museum visit as a learning tool to practise descriptions was an original and effective activity, which enhanced learning.

Moreover, in relation to the separate results for both groups, it should be noted that first year of *ESO* students, who participated in the competition, seemed to feel an overall degree of engagement higher than that of second year of *Bachillerato* students, who also appreciated teamwork and complementary activities but did not feel that their personal degree of engagement had been remarkably high. Hence, first-year students were generally much more involved in the completion of activities and perceived a better classroom atmosphere, while also appreciating the token economy used throughout the unit.

Table 9. Results first year of *ESO* (28 students)

	Option A	Option B	Option C	N/A
Question 1	89.28%	7.14%	3.57%	0%
Question 3	53.57%	46.42%	0%	0%
Question 6	89.28%	10.71%	0%	0%
Question 7	28.57%	71.42%	0%	0%
Question 9	64.28%	35.71%	0%	0%
Question 10	64.28%	28.57%	3.57%	3.57%
Question 11	89.28%	7.14%	0%	3.57%
Question 12	53.57%	35.71%	10.71%	0%
Question 13	57.14%	42.85%	0%	0%
Question 14	60.71%	39.28%	0%	0%

Table 10. Results second year of *Bachillerato* (21 students)

	Option A	Option B	Option C	N/A
Question 1	85.71%	9.52%	4.76%	0%
Question 3	66.66%	28.57%	4.76%	0%
Question 6	90.47%	9.52%	0%	0%
Question 7	8.16%	80.95%	0%	0%
Question 9	95.23%	4.76%	0%	0%
Question 10	23.80%	66.66%	0%	9.52%
Question 11	80.95%	19.04%	0%	0%
Question 12	28.57%	47.61%	23.80%	0%
Question 13	95.23%	4.76%	0%	0%
Question 14	52.38%	47.61%	0%	0%

## 5. FUTURE RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENTS

Based on the proposal and the case study described above, there are some aspects which could be improved in the event of attempting to create a classroom community and use cooperative work for a whole academic year. For instance, regarding the questionnaire presented in the previous section, the percentages seen above have been obtained by means of a rule of three, so it would be appropriate to make the research more

scientifically accurate by including features such as the standard deviation in the final statistics.

Moreover, in relation to the lesson plans proposed above, it should be noted that, although they do attempt to develop all four main skills (Writing, Reading, Speaking, Listening), activities depart from the traditional approach when it comes to practising said skills, since the main objective of the lessons is to develop a sense of community. For this reason, these lesson plans should be complemented with further plans which include different types of exercises (e.g. tasks designed to enhance listening comprehension). Furthermore, it is relevant to highlight that there is no universal system and that, while a certain activity or methodology might work well with a particular group, it might not work with a different one, so the use of diverse methodologies and strategies (which adapt to students' learning needs and particular classroom atmospheres) becomes essential.

Finally, concerning the competition carried out with first-year students, after some lessons it became apparent that their sense of competitiveness had an impact on the sense of community, which was not the main objective of the activities. For this reason, it would be interesting to measure the performance, engagement and satisfaction of students working in a similar competition but who work in a different group each lesson or every few lessons (as mentioned above, this idea was also suggested by some students in the questionnaire). Moreover, in order to further engage students during the lessons, classroom activities should feature real-life materials or examples, giving students the chance to relate to the information presented in class in order to transform their time in the classroom into a learning experience which offers the potential of applying that knowledge beyond the school walls.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This paper has examined some of the main variables which affect student performance and engagement in second or foreign language learning, and it has attempted to establish the importance of the classroom as a micro community with its own culture, which conceives students and teachers as members who work together for a shared goal: the development of student potential and abilities.

As stated in section 2.1, factors such as engagement and personal background play an important role in the learner's degree of implication, which is why lecturers should try to adapt the contents of their subjects to students, so that their lessons have an emotional impact and relevance in real life. Moreover, by means of techniques such as gamification and cooperative work, together with the use of different tools, group dynamics and the

development of different activities, it will be possible to optimise the classroom atmosphere and learning process, which will promote students' progress and development.

The case study and questionnaire results presented above are a simple example of how appreciative pupils are whenever teachers try to improve and transform their lessons, no matter how small the change, how sizeable the group, or how repetitive the content is. The key to success in innovation is perpetual improvement; there is no universal formula, but the knowledge that comes from the experience of trial and error.

Thus, educators need to make sure students feel comfortable enough to involve themselves in the learning process, especially if they are not in the classroom by choice; they should feel positive that the hours they spend there are worth it, which naturally implies emotional involvement on the teacher's part. Hence, teachers can only make students believe in themselves by believing in them first.

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**Special Educational Needs in the Mainstream Classroom. A didactic proposal for teaching English as a Foreign Language to dyslexic students**

**Atención a la diversidad en el aula. Una propuesta didáctica para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera a estudiantes con dislexia**

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**Abstract**

Diversity is a natural characteristic of any ecosystem. Yet throughout Human History we have tried to look for unity, for ways of connecting and understanding. The aim of this article is to engage the idea of unity through the educational sphere with a particular focus on the concept of 'inclusive schools'. Such schools aim to provide every student with equal opportunities under the realms of equity. Even though teachers have the support of institutions, they need to know deeply the type of difficulties pupils may present and use the required tools to overcome them. Dyslexia is a specific difficulty linked to language and information processing, sequencing and memory. This paper will explore the specific educational support needs which should be addressed by inclusive teaching practices, involving differentiation and adaptations to help students achieve their potential.

**Key words:** differentiation, dyslexia, inclusion, learning difficulties.

**Resumen**

La diversidad es una característica natural de todo ecosistema. En la historia de la humanidad se ha buscado la unidad, maneras de conectar y entender. La idea de unidad se materializa en los sistemas educativos a través del concepto de "escuela inclusiva", que intenta proporcionar iguales oportunidades a todo el alumnado de forma equitativa. Aunque los educadores cuentan con el apoyo de las instituciones educativas, es necesario



que éstos conozcan las dificultades del alumnado en profundidad y utilicen las herramientas adecuadas para superarlas. La dislexia es una dificultad específica de aprendizaje relacionada con el procesamiento del lenguaje y de la información, así como con la memoria y la secuenciación. Estas dificultades requieren una serie de necesidades educativas especiales, que el profesorado tendrá que atender a través del conocimiento de los mismos y una serie de estrategias que darán forma a su estilo de enseñanza y metodología.

**Palabras clave:** diferenciación, dificultades de aprendizaje, dislexia, inclusión.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and onwards, national and international governmental institutions have been working on the acknowledged right of Education for all, stated in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). UNESCO's different documents serve as an influence for different legislations, such as the various Spanish Acts that constitute the Spanish Educational Systems and Balearic Islands curriculum, both of which promoted an inclusive educational model.

A great deal of literature in the field of inclusion and dyslexia research is supported by the different institutions, such as the British Dyslexia Association (hence forth BDA); the International Dyslexia Association (hence forth IDA); the Balearic association of Dyslexia and Family (hence forth DISFAM). These associations are known across the board and offer information about the Specific Learning Difficulty (hence forth SpLD) as well as guidance, resources and counselling. Names such as Reid and Peer are worth highlighting due to their several publications and research in this field.

For instance, Reid's *Dyslexia*, first published in 2005 is an informative and comprehensive guide for practitioners. Reid and Peer's co-edition *Multilingualism, Literacy and Dyslexia* (2000) and *Dyslexia – Successful Inclusion in the Secondary School* serve to reveal a number of articles regarding the management of inclusion, and more precisely dyslexia, for secondary education teaching and second language acquisition. The former addresses the challenges faced by dyslexic students in the learning of a foreign language and offers innovative methodological strategies; while the latter tackles the challenges of the treatment of special educational needs and dyslexia in Secondary Education.

Such publications, alongside Crombie and Elke Schneider, offer a number of strategies which can be applied to the foreign language learning and, while drawing on their work, I will offer my own methodology and teaching practices usable in inclusive learning.

## 2. AIMS

The overall purpose of this paper is to create a general picture of the concept of Special Educational Needs (hence forth SEN) and disabilities; to offer an analysis of the difficulties faced by dyslexic students when learning a second language; and to create guidelines for coping with dyslexic students in a foreign language lesson. The project is aimed at secondary school teachers whose subject specialism is English as a Foreign Language and who practice in mainstream secondary education centres.

Through an analysis of qualitative data, the study will focus on features of so-called “inclusive education”. This study will also review the procedures followed by educational institutions through the analysis of different legal documents, policies and codes of practice regarding inclusion and attention to diversity.

A study of different strategies and methods that are applied to deal with diversity in mainstream classrooms will be made, with special attention given to the particular challenges dyslexic students face in foreign language learning.

Finally, different learning activities and methodologies will be designed for fourth-year students of secondary school and adapted to students with varying abilities, including a dyslexic pupil. Such an approach is taken to promote inclusion in the classroom and will show how different teaching methods can help to make information both accessible and understood.

Our didactic proposal will serve as a model for English as a Foreign Language teachers to include those students with different capacities in a mainstream class.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### a. Inclusive education

Most European countries agree that every individual must receive an education, regardless of their academic ability (UNESCO: 2015). Attention to diversity focuses on the inclusion of students with special educational needs in the mainstream and it should be understood as a holistic approach, which involves an organisational scheme with fair and equal opportunities in the classroom. Good practice in the name of inclusion, however, can be challenging since the demands upon resources, training and restructure are increased.

#### i. *Inclusion and attention to diversity*

Professor Ashman (2009) in his book, *Education for Inclusion and Diversity* points out that the terms “inclusion” and “diversity” represent two concepts which are in tension with each other. While the former means integrity and is related to having equal rights within a group, the latter refers to variety, difference and heterogeneity. In fact, looking for

common ground among a variety of students can sometimes be tricky: how can we expect the same achievements from the sportiest student and an overweight student of the same class in an intense cardio sports session?

It would be unrealistic to ignore diversity in the educational background by enforcing generalised learning targets and assessing students only with uniform, fixed criteria. Educational practices need to help all students achieve their potential. As Ashman (*idem*) points out, education systems often aim to seek equality by appreciating difference and variety as a positive attribute.

Therefore, in order to cope with diversity, educational institutions have developed different policies to make those sometimes neglected individuals feel included in the mainstream hegemony.

## *ii. Organisational aspects*

Moving focus towards the legislative framework governing and guiding the Spanish education system, the current Organic Acts on Education (*Ley Orgánica 2/2006* and *8/2013*) gives attention to diversity and equity as fundamental principles in the educational system, and are targeted to provide every student with an education adapted to their characteristics and needs.

As the teaching proposal of the present paper is potentially applicable in such context, focus will be given to the Balearic Decree (*Decret 39/2011*) related to Attention to Diversity, which recognises diversity as an inherent quality of human groups and hence as a social and educational reality.

Schools are in charge of applying and selecting appropriate measures for supporting diversity. Those measures will be for instance, in relation to specific educational needs, grouping students under heterogeneity criteria and applying specifically adapted materials and assessment (*Decret 39/2011*). One measure that responds to individual educational needs is differentiation. Other measures include the organisation of flexible groups in specific subjects and extra support in classrooms, such as language assistants or educational technician assistants in certain centres.

Despite the legislation that models a system on inclusion, teachers still face the challenge of dealing with diversity. Therefore, inclusive classrooms will depend very much on teachers' daily practices, accessible resources and their knowledge of their students.

### **b. The inclusive school**

The *Salamanca Statement* (1994: 11-12) defines inclusive schools as those that 'respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning'. In accordance to the fact that learning difficulties 'tend to be resistant to

conventional teaching methods' (BDA, n.d.) different inclusive approaches help mitigate the effects of learning difficulties in the classroom.

*i. Inclusive educational methods*

A study carried out in various countries by the European Agency for Special Needs Education (2003) shows some approaches that contribute to effective inclusive practices. Experience acknowledges that students from inclusive environments perform better than students from segregated ones. SEN-friendly settings should include the following: cooperative teaching (also termed team teaching or co-teaching); cooperative learning (also called peer tutoring), which combines quite well with project-based learning; and heterogeneous grouping or differentiated instruction.

Apart from these, one of the most named approaches to tackle difficulties in the dyslexia research literature is the so-called multisensory approach (Reid, 2007; Schneider and Crombie, 2003). The stimulation of all senses is claimed to be effective for both processing and retaining information, as opposed to the use of sight and hearing in traditional teaching. Baines (2008) conveys that learning in a multisensory way involves engaging the lesson through hands-on, visual, auditory, olfactory stimuli.

Another method that considers inclusion is the multiple intelligence approach. Puchta and Rinvolucrí (2005) distinguish seven different intelligences, which include intrapersonal, interpersonal, logical, linguistic, musical, spatial and kinaesthetic intelligences. As the authors rightly assert, "students' motivation depends on how addressed they feel in class" (idem: 16). This is the reason why only focusing on the linguistic domain in the FL subject might cause frustration.

When teachers use various ways of presenting content, students are offered an opportunity to use their learning style. For the importance of learning styles, Jameson (2000) remarks on assessment over testing, since continuous assessment allows the student use their own style to demonstrate their knowledge.

The importance of ICT in schools has been widely spoken about in literature and some remark on the suitability of computers, recorders, and other electronic devices to support students with dyslexia (Baines, 2005; Dimitriadi, 2000; Scully 2001). For example, Dimitriadi (2000) shows that various media, such as videos and images helps to access the curriculum and unlock the more difficulty aspects of language learning in a fun and engaging way.

Agreeing with Mackay (2001), a dyslexia-friendly classroom should be a supportive environment, where making errors is free from judgement or punishments, different intelligences are valued; where learning targets are achievable, the purpose and structure

of the lesson is clear beforehand; and where access to the content is possible due to the multiplicity of channels it is transmitted on.

*ii. Differentiation*

There are a number of strategies that teachers can use in order to make the teaching accessible to the whole class, including those students with different types of difficulties. In this section, strategies addressed to SEN - and especially dyslexic - students will be offered.

As Schneider and Crombie (2003) state, accommodations in the Foreign Language classroom are a 'set of enabling arrangements which are put in place to ensure that the dyslexic person can demonstrate strengths and abilities, and show attainment' (pages x-xi).

The IDA (2002) offers a set of accommodations that can be applied by teachers in mainstream lessons and classifies them according to accommodations involving materials, interactive instruction and student performance. It is widely discussed that most of the accommodations are always beneficial for the whole group and not only for SEN students (Schneider and Crombie, 2003). Another differentiation strategy could involve curricular adaptations.

In the following section, focus will be given to the different types of special educational needs presented by students and, more specifically to which difficulties are experienced in students with dyslexia and how they can be identified.

**c. The student with special educational needs**

Having defined concepts of inclusion and diversity in relation to abilities and the needs of individuals, different learning difficulties and the needs they require will now be discussed. How these difficulties manifest themselves in dyslexic students and how they affect foreign language learning is the focus of the following section.

*i. Learning difficulties and disabilities: Special educational needs*

Both current Spanish Acts on Education (*LOE* and *LOMCE*) include under the umbrella term 'Specific Educational Support Needs' (NEAE after Spanish *necesidades educativas de apoyo educativo*) to refer to those students who need different educational attention to the ordinary ones because of their special educational needs (SEN in English, NEE after Spanish, *necesidades educativas especiales*), specific learning difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (hence forth, ADHD), high intellectual capacity and late entry to the education system or personal condition. Although SEN in English should correspond to Spanish NEE with Spanish NEAE; the acronym SEN will be used in this project to refer to NEAE.

When referring to SEN, people might think of students with a specific learning difficulty or disability, however, any type of learning difficulty may demand a type of special educational need. The *Code of Practice for SEN* of the UK defines learning difficulty as having greater difficulties for learning than the majority of students of the same age.

Although the educational needs of children and young people are not always easy to categorise, they can be grouped according to the difficulties resulting from a particular disorder. *The SEN Handbook* (Spooner, 2006) classifies difficulties as: communication difficulties; behavioural, emotional and social difficulties; specific learning difficulties, like dyslexia; general or global learning difficulties; sensory impairment; physical difficulties, and medical conditions.

## ii. *Dyslexia*

Different authors and institutions have given various definitions for dyslexia. Reid (2007) also conveys that there are many potential overlaps with other types of learning difficulties. Before offering an accurate definition, Reid emphasises the idea of difference over deficit; that is to say, dyslexic people process information differently to the majority of other people.

In terms of meaning, the Greek root of the word gives us basic hints as *dys* stands for “difficulty with” and *lexicos* or *lexic* stands for “words”. However, it is not specific enough and it is only used to refer to written language (Schneider and Crombie, 2003: ix).

The IDA (2016) defines dyslexia as “*a specific learning disability or difficulty that is neurobiological in origin*”. It is characterized by difficulties with:

- *accurate and/or fluent word recognition/reading*
- *poor spelling and decoding abilities*
- *phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed*

To these difficulties, the British Dyslexia Association (BDA, n.d.) adds:

- phonological processing
- rapid naming
- working memory

Others define dyslexia as “*a combination of abilities and difficulties which affect the learning process in one or more of reading, spelling, writing and sometimes numeracy*” (Peer, 2001: 2).

Research (BDA, n.d.; Reid, 2007) agrees that dyslexia is individual and should be understood as a continuum. This is the reason why supporting different students with dyslexia may require learning plans and adapting the lessons, materials and interaction.

The overlap of different difficulties will depend on the student's individuality and will affect their learning differently.

Every definition of dyslexia applies best to different contexts and Schneider and Crombie's definition meets the purposes of this paper as it refers 'to those who have a difficulty with literacy which results in them requiring a set of accommodations to be made to enable them to demonstrate their abilities' (Schneider and Crombie, 2003: x). This definition shows that dyslexia should not be understood as lack of abilities, but as a different way of learning. Enabling the students to use their capacities will depend on the identification of the learning difficulties in time, through accurate assessment.

As part of the definition, dyslexic students are said to learn differently. In Reid (2007), difference is referred to the way information is processed, the style and speed of processing and the strategies needed to learn effectively. However, other authors including Miller and Bussman Gillis (2000: 218) discuss dyslexia as a "deficiency in language processing".

Generally speaking, there are two tendencies in dyslexic learners. Peer (2001) distinguishes between those who have visual and creative ability, but with oral difficulties; and those who are orally proficient but have certain difficulties in visual, spatial and hand skills. He adds that although some learners share both, all of them have competency in some of the areas and they all have difficulties in processing language.

### *iii. Foreign language learning with dyslexia*

English as a foreign language is a compulsory subject in the Spanish national curriculum (LOMCE 8/2013). Even though students have no choice whether they study a foreign language or not, it should not be thought of as detrimental to the academic success of the student. Learning a FL is not impossible for dyslexic people, but the teaching method will determine the process and outcomes of the learner.

#### *1. Foreign language learning*

It is widely assumed that bilingualism (or multilingualism) is an additional factor to the multilingual individual's learning and actually beneficial for the speaker. Difficulties and abilities in the first language (hence forth L1) are often transferred to the second language (hence forth L2) or foreign language (hence forth FL), which does not mean that the dyslexic trends worsen. However, it should be assumed, Turner (2000) admits, that if bilingual people have a double load when managing languages, dyslexic people will have a triple load due to their difficulties with language.

Different researchers agree that FL learning may prove difficult for dyslexic people (Robertson, 2000; Miller and Bussman Gillis, 2000) and that Modern Foreign Languages

might not be the favourite subject of students with dyslexia (Schneider and Crombie, 2003). However, it is not an impossible task if both student and FL educator are aware of the dyslexia student's difficulties and are able to find appropriate solutions to FL learning problems. In addition, Jameson (2000: 229) remarks that dyslexic children pick up the new language when they move abroad. Therefore, social interaction, relaxed environments and no academic pressure serve as positive environmental factors in this regard.

Apart from the benefits of being able to communicate in English in contemporary society, there is a personal component that motivates or discourages a person to learn English. Shneider and Crombie (2003) agree that personal motivations, interests and purposes for the learning of the foreign language will trigger a positive or negative attitude towards it. Unfortunately, English language is said to be a non-transparent language, which makes it an even more difficult process due to its inconsistency in spelling. Unlike Spanish, Catalan or Italian, which are transparent languages, English language spelling does not always coincide with its pronunciation. It is therefore, extremely difficult to guess its spelling and phonetics. Indeed, one of the most common difficulties for dyslexic children is spelling; and English has 26 letters, 44 different sounds and 176 ways of spelling them (Dyslexics.org.uk).

## *2. Weaknesses and strengths*

It is believed that difficulties in L1 affect L2 and linguistic capacities in the first language serve as a basis for the acquisition of the second or foreign language (Crombie and McColl, 2001). Difficulties dyslexic students encounter when learning a FL are due to their weaknesses in sequencing, and in short- and long- memory as well as working memory and phonological skills.

Sequencing refers to the ordering of sounds to form words, and words to make sentences. Crombie and McColl (2001) argue that phonological processing involves being able to discriminate certain sounds and translate them into written symbols, as well as sounding verbally letters and words into sounds, which is decoding and encoding oral and written language. Difficulties in short- and long-term memory involve remembering which sounds stand for which written symbols and vice versa; and consequently, pronouncing them and/or spelling them accurately. Working memory helps to work out the sounds certain letters or clusters would correspond to, and how sounds should be discriminated. Therefore, they claim that speaking, listening, writing and reading should be taught and/or learned in interaction to prevent failure.



It is also said that dyslexic students are normally right-brained (Reid, 2007). The right hemisphere (in right-handed people) is used for visual-spatial processing (important for spatial information), the analysis of perceptual aspects of letters/words; and works with novel information. The left hemisphere is normally used to process language and therefore important for accurate reading skills, phonological skills (decoding sounds) and also processing familiar information. Robertson (2000) recognises the importance of dual hemisphere involvement in reading. This is the reason why activation of the left hemisphere, where language acquisition takes place first, should be reinforced by transferring the information from the right hemisphere.

Regarding language processing, therefore, dyslexic learners can find certain difficulties in reading or writing activities. As listed in Nijakowska et al. (2011), difficulties encountered in writing and reading a second language will be: limited vocabulary in FL; problems reading 'visually challenging' materials; insufficient knowledge of syntax and/or morphology; difficulties in ordering ideas; slower speed; lack of meta-cognitive strategies; difficulties establishing letter sound correspondences.

However, learning a foreign language needs to be seen as a motivating experience. As Schneider and Crombie (2003) state, a large barrier to success in FL learning is the students' negative attitudes towards the target language; therefore, the strengths of students with dyslexia have to be reinforced in the MFL classroom to increase student's confidence, participation and engagement in lessons. Ultimately, working on linguistic aspects while focusing on motivational activities will depend on the teaching approach and the school ethos.

#### **4. TEACHING PROPOSAL: SUGGESTIONS FOR DIFFERENTIATION IN THE CLASSROOM OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE REGARDING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

##### **a. Introduction and contextualisation**

Our teaching proposal is based on the adaptation of different tasks for a dyslexic student and would take place in an average English Language lesson in a Spanish secondary school. The proposal, which is an individual curricular adaptation, would ideally be applied in a setting with the following characteristics. The set of activities suggested below would be carried out in classroom of the 4<sup>th</sup> year of a mainstream secondary school (*4<sup>o</sup> de E.S.O.* after Spanish nomenclature) in a Majorcan locality. The class group would be of 27 students and the general level of English shifts in between an A2 and a B1, according to the

Common Reference Framework of Languages descriptors. The majority of students of this classroom can (Cambridge University Press, 2013:5).

Apart from setting an SEN-friendly environment by applying different strategies, the adaptation would have been arranged in collaboration among the four language teachers – a Catalanian, Spanish and two English teachers; their learning mentor, a psychopedagogue from the Counselling Department, in agreement with the student and their family. Hence, the adaptation of different tasks for the dyslexic student will be the object of our didactic proposal.

### **b. Solutions to dyslexia in FL learning**

Robertson (2000) is one of the authors to claim that weaknesses of dyslexic students should be overcome by modifying the FL teaching approach. In fact, pitfalls in different areas, which are necessary for the acquisition of languages, will make the learning challenging.

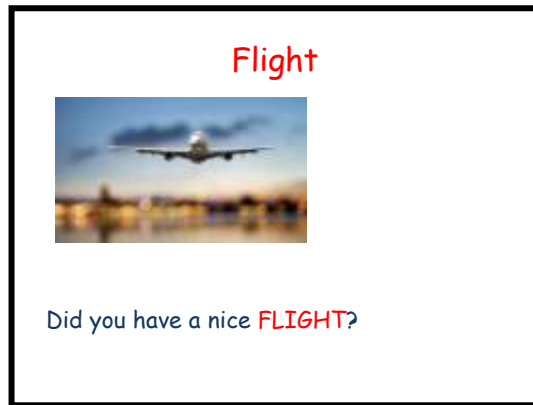
As dyslexia creates problems for language processing, some authors, like Miller and Bussman Gills (2000) say that knowledge of language structure is key to remediation. In order to acquire a new language successfully, the dyslexic student needs to learn basic structures of both languages, L1 and FL. In addition, languages need to be taught in a multisensory way.

Miller and Bussman Gills (2000) divide the learning of languages into four different levels. Among others, they suggest teaching FL focusing in those interdependent levels. As it is well known, the simplest unit of sound is a phoneme, which has different written symbols and combinations, then morphemes, which have a grammatical and semantic charge and help position words on the sentences, and finally, semantics that is the understanding of sequences of those words and sentences.

Therefore, students need to be able to correlate those sounds with written symbols and then they need to be able to combine them into meaningful units. As morphemes give us clues to meanings and help to qualify words, so they are markers that help where to put them into sentences. Difficulties with segmentation of words, which affect decoding and encoding, can be overcome by explicit learning of phonemes and morphemes, put in context. Subsequently the learning of syntax and semantics, regarding sentence structure and meaning respectively, is essential to acquire communication skills.

Schneider and Crombie (2003) prove that explicit teaching is highly useful for dyslexic students due to their difficulties in recognising language patterns and memory. Hence, the development of meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic skills is necessary in the FL lesson. In addition, the modern languages teacher needs to discuss strengths and weaknesses with

the student. This implies self-awareness on behalf of the students, not only of their abilities and difficulties, but also of the learning style and strategies that work best for them.



*i. Task 1: Starters. Phonological level*

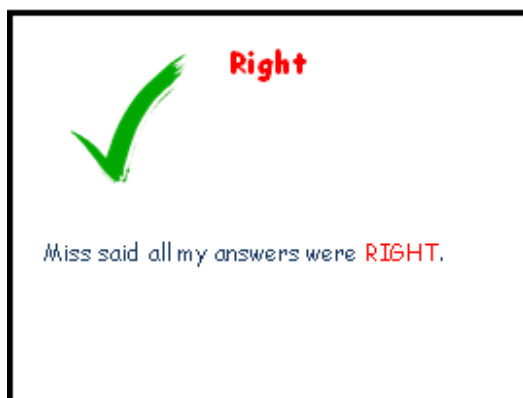
This activity should not last more than 10 minutes. The teacher would pronounce some words that have a specific sound and spelling in common. Students would write those words on a small white board and

show them to the teacher independently.

This type of activity can be done recurrently in the English classroom and its procedure would be always similar. First of all, the students would see the word on the board and listen to it at the same time; secondly, the students would repeat it aloud in unison; then the word would be covered and they would write it down. The words should be written individually on the board and not pronounced in isolation, but appear in a sentence or attached to an image displayed by the projector.

This starter activity focuses on the pronunciation and spelling for specific clusters, *-ight* in this case. The introduction of vocabulary is not restricted to new words; on the contrary students may have already acquired most of them. In addition, this activity will pave the way for the assimilation of some irregular past-tense verbs that should be practiced afterwards.

Figure 1. Power Point screenshots.



The *-ight* words suggested in this activity are: right, light, moonlight, tight, flight, sight, lightning, lighthouse, night, fight, might.

The purpose of this playful activity is to gain familiarity with the relationship between a specific sound and its corresponding codification. And the targets are to consolidate the spelling and pronunciation of *-ight* as well as the meaning of the words mentioned.

The dyslexic student could have the word list beforehand, so that they can be supported if in doubt. In addition, phonological awareness and spelling strategies are reinforced, so information can be transferred to other areas, such as reading and memory. The use of visual aids to reinforce phonological awareness and spellings helps students overcome their difficulties in language processing. By means of using visual stimuli and engaging them to work in a playful way, they participate like the rest of students. This activity involves individual effort but also interaction within the group. Seeing it, hearing it, saying it, covering it, writing it, and checking it involves different sensory channels and learning styles as well.

*ii. Task 2: meta-cognition. Morphological level*

Learning the list of irregular past tense verbs has to be specifically difficult to some students. However, this is a must in the secondary education curriculum. Instead of learning the list by heart, which is not at all helpful for dyslexic students, who have got memory and decoding difficulties, it can be introduced by learning a song.

Figure 2. Screenshot of the video Fluency MC (Nov.1<sup>st</sup> 2010)



Figure 2 shows the video shot in which the song is played interruptedly, so that the students can actively participate and fill in the silences. As can be seen, the three verb forms are tricoloured. Listening and watching to the rap song by Fluency MC (2015), while tapping with a pencil on the desk, a couple of times in different lessons can aid the learning. Students should be provided with the transcript.

The aim is to be able to fully understand the use of the irregular past forms of verbs as well as pronounce and spell them and to learn the song. By listening to the rap song,

students get used to the sound of the past-tense verbs. Phonological awareness is developed and pronunciation and fluency abilities are enhanced.

This is a dyslexia-friendly task since it follows multi-sensory principles and every step focuses on different senses in relation to language; students are able to see it, listen to it, say it, write it and repeat it. Tapping with a pencil on the table allows students to learn in a kinaesthetic way. In addition, every verb form is colour coded on the video and grouped in categories, according to patterns, so the student can colour and organise each group of irregular forms.

The activity is based on the multi-sensory approach and uses different channels such as kinaesthetic, by tapping a pencil on the desk; visual, by colours, video and sheets; and auditory by listening to the song. Musical intelligence is essential in this activity which can be motivating for those who have musical abilities.

*iii. Task 3: Reading comprehension. Syntactic and semantic level*

This activity is based on the reading of a piece of the first chapter of Elizabeth Laird's *The Fastest Boy in the World*. The opening of the story gives the reader a picture of the life of an eleven-year old Ethiopian boy, who describes a bit of his life. In addition, reading a story set in Africa allows different subjects to work in a cross-curricular manner and offers an opportunity to work in cooperation within different departments, such as Geography or languages.

Pre-reading activities are firstly suggested, such as creating a spider diagram in small groups describing the cover of the book and making predictions. They could answer questions to describe what they see on the cover, from 'what colours are there?' or 'what is the boy doing?' to 'where is the story set?' Another activity before reading is to look for 4 different facts about Ethiopia and its young people.

After sharing outcomes together as a whole class, students would be put into mixed ability pairs. Student A and student B would read the corresponding extract (A or B) and do the "while-reading" activities independently. Then they would explain what their extract is about to their partner (preferably in the target language). To answer the "after-reading" questions, students will work cooperatively and tell the answers to each other.

The learning aim is to understand a text and be able to extract grammatical aspects and meaning. The text contains mainly past tense verbs. What is more, students practice descriptions, sequencing of events and opening of stories.

This activity is mostly implicitly differentiated, since it can be applied to both students with and without learning difficulties. As the text might be tiring and long for the dyslexic student, it can be printed in a coloured paper (cream, yellow or pale blue) and should

always be printed in non-bright paper (International Dyslexia Association, 2002) and the text can be read to him after attempting. This is an example of cooperative teaching and cooperative learning. Pair work and group work involve interaction among the students.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Diversity existing in society is reflected in education and the way to include difference is through the establishment of equity as a principle. In fact, equity, quality and equality are actual principles of different educational systems, such as the Spanish one. These principles are achieved through good practice for inclusive education, where difference is considered as a positive attribute.

Therefore, inclusive education involves flexible educational practices emphasising the integration of all students, including those with specific educational support needs. Thus, organisation of schools will be determined by different measures, such as the arrangement of heterogeneous groups; specific adapted material; accommodations in class, learning plans and teaching methods; which are also observed in the Balearic Islands Decree which regulates the curriculum.

Despite the wide range of needs, being caused by different difficulties in one or various areas, dyslexia is considered a specific learning difficulty in relation to language processing and has an impact on the way information is processed, sequencing and memory. Therefore, students being diagnosed as having dyslexia will possibly find foreign language learning specifically challenging. Even so, learning a foreign language is not an impossible task and the way it is taught will definitely make all the difference.

Inclusive methodologies, such as cooperative teaching and learning, multi-sensory approach, multiple intelligences approach, and differentiation in the mainstream Foreign Language classroom need to be applied if teachers want to include students with learning difficulties. Therefore, a primary step is knowing the student's weaknesses and strengths so that strategies can be put into place.

Due to the lack of phonological awareness, dyslexics find it hard to distinguish sounds, to decode and encode information from written/oral text. Difficulties in syntactic processing skills are also common in dyslexia, and consequently semantic processing skills can be affected too. Hence, a possible solution in foreign language teaching is structuring the language in different levels: from the single unit of sound to the text. Correspondingly, the steps to understand language would be:

- Focusing on phonemes at the first level, then making words from sounds. This is reflected in the starter tasks of our proposal, where focus to specific words with a common spelling *-ight* is given.
- Being aware of morphological information of words afterwards, as portrayed in the second task, where the irregular past tense is explained.
- Ordering words to make meaning as we have put forward in the reading comprehension task.

Coping with diversity is a teaching requirement, but differentiation will be also determined by the organisational aspects of the context in which it takes place. This is the reason why, apart from the above mentioned, individual curricular adaptations and continuous assessment can be the solution to overcome learning difficulties. The curricular adaptation proposed in this project should be a product of teachers' abilities and provisions to serve the totality of their students. As seen in our proposal only by knowing the students' strengths and difficulties in detail, we can start to adapt our teaching methods.

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### ❖ Didactic resources

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## Listening: a challenging skill to teach

### La destreza oral: un reto para la enseñanza

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#### Abstract

This scientific paper presents a revision of some articles and studies related to the teaching and learning of the listening skill in a foreign language (Gakonga, 2015; Goh, 1999; Richards, 2008; Sternberg, Sternberg, & Mio, 2012; Ur, 1996). Throughout the sections, the author aims to support the idea that although this skill is challenging for both teachers and students, it is possible to plan, monitor, and evaluate its development provided that three aspects are taken into account: the complexity of the skill, teachers' demanding role, and students' active role. The first section describes what it is involved in the listening process. The section mainly addresses students' internal factors that learners use to deal with the task and succeed in it. The second section is a revision of what teachers can do to improve their teaching. This section gives ideas to help learners overcome the difficulties mentioned in the previous section. Finally, the third section illustrates what activities teachers could prepare for the pre, while and post listening stages to encourage students to take an active role in their own learning process. All in all, this paper intends to raise teachers' concern about the challenges students face when working on the listening skill as well as what educators can do to facilitate the teaching and learning process of this skill.

**Key words:** listening skill, Anderson model, working memory, cognitive and metacognitive tasks.

#### Resumen

El presente artículo científico presenta una revisión de algunos artículos y estudios relacionados con la enseñanza y aprendizaje de la habilidad de escucha de un idioma extranjero (Gakonga, 2015; Goh, 1999; Richards, 2008; Sternberg, Sternberg, & Mio, 2012;

Ur, 1996). A través de las distintas secciones, se espera justificar la idea de que, aunque esta habilidad representa un reto tanto para profesores como para estudiantes, es posible planificar, monitorear y evaluar su desarrollo si se consideran tres aspectos: la complejidad propia de la habilidad de escucha, el rol esencial del docente y el rol activo del estudiante. La primera sección describe el proceso de escucha. Esta sección se enfoca principalmente en los factores internos que los estudiantes usan para realizar las tareas de escucha con éxito. La segunda sección da sugerencias sobre lo que los profesores pueden hacer para mejorar sus estrategias de enseñanza. La sección incluye ideas para superar las dificultades mencionadas en la sección anterior. Finalmente, la tercera sección ilustra las actividades que los docentes pueden preparar antes, durante y después de las tareas de escucha para que los estudiantes tomen un rol activo en el proceso. Este artículo intenta concientizar a los profesores acerca de los desafíos a los que los estudiantes se enfrentan, así como lo que ellos pueden hacer como educadores para facilitar el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje de la habilidad de escucha en una lengua extranjera.

**Palabras clave:** habilidad de escucha, Modelo Anderson, memoria de trabajo, tareas cognitivas y tareas metacognitivas.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Some EFL learners have experienced that the listening skill have been the least practiced skill in their classrooms and that understanding spoken speech in real life interactions is quite hard. These students might devote their time on practising grammar and reading, learning vocabulary, doing writing and speaking activities, and listening to teachers' instructions and explanations sometimes in English, other times in their L1. However, this approach does not benefit students when they have to deal with an evaluation or interact in an English conversation since they have to be ready for the listening section in the former and for understanding and reacting to the message in the later. This learning scenario does not follow the prevailing trends in listening instruction.

Fortunately, there exist many EFL teachers that provide students with a more meaningful learning experience because they have realized what is required to teach this skill. From my point of view, understanding what we are to teach is the first step to leave behind misconceptions and improve our teaching practice. Therefore, this scientific essay aims to describe why I believe there are at least three main reasons to understand listening as a challenging skill to teach.

## 2. THE COMPLEXITY OF THE LISTENING SKILL

First of all, it is essential to recognize the complexity of the listening skill since teaching it is not that simple as playing the recorded texts and then asking students to pay attention to master the skill. On the contrary, there are relevant theories about how EFL learners perceive and understand acoustic input and how they develop their listening abilities. Thus, teachers are meant to know the listening process before preparing the lessons because listening involves a complex cognitive process inside our brains and memory systems.

When we listen to spoken messages our memory is actually encoding the input to make coherent mental representations by connecting with our previous knowledge and the new input. The perception, parsing and utilisation processing of information that keeps coming is called the listening comprehension process or Anderson's model. Native speakers automatize these phases, but when students learn a foreign language, they need to become skilful in the process since if one stage fails, the understanding of the whole message is compromised. As a result, in order to assist learners, teachers should know not only what students' brains are supposed to be doing, but also what difficulties they might be facing in each phase.

Goh's study (1999) of 40 undergraduate students' listening diaries provides insights on the ten most common listening comprehension challenges learners struggle with in each of the three phases of Anderson's model. In the perceptual phase, students struggle to recognize words and sounds in connected speech, and they work hard to keep focused on the spoken text by managing internal and external distractions. Then, in the parsing stage, their working memory try to make sense of what was and what is being heard to establish connections between the new information and the previous knowledge. In other words, their working memory control the flow of input that goes to and comes from the long-term memory. Finally, when the message is stored in the long-term memory, our students' brain has completed the utilisation phase.

As it has been described, the listening skill is not a passive skill, but a very complex one. Unfortunately, as Goh points out teachers cannot observe these internal processes that take place inside our students' brains in order to help them overcome any problem. Nevertheless, I am inclined to believe we can do something better than just telling them to "pay more attention and keep on listening".

### 3. TEACHING THE LISTENING SKILL: A DEMANDING TASK

Another reason to consider listening as a challenging skill to teach is that it is not only a complex process by itself and for students, but it is also a demanding activity for teachers. English teachers must do a lot more than only playing the recording and asking questions about a conversation. They have to take some actions to maximize students' opportunities to develop their listening skills. Even though the measures might be overwhelming, they are actually necessary for the efficiency of our teaching practice. Those actions can be summarized in two words: planning and assessing.

Considering the listening problems students reported in Goh's study (1999), it seems that the three main problems students face when listening to recordings are recalling the input they have just heard, recognising the words from that input, and understanding the message. In other words, our students usually need support in all the levels of the listening comprehension model. Hence, it is our challenge to do something to guide them to deal with these issues. I have identified three points that, to my mind, we can be constantly planning and assessing.

Firstly, we should do something regarding learners' tendency to quickly forget the new input they hear. Goh thinks this might happen because the short-term memory is overloaded for either too demanding or too unfamiliar input. Therefore, we can devote time assessing the suitability of the listening material, both written and spoken text, according to our students' needs and interests. The main goal of this point is to determine if the texts are appropriate for our learners' level because this fact would influence their cognitive process while listening. Krashen's concept of comprehensible input ( $i + 1$ ) rule is very useful because it suggests working with materials that are neither too easy nor too difficult, but challenging. Furthermore, we can aid the working memory processes by activating students' prior knowledge with meaningful pre-listening tasks that ensures the elicitation of language, vocabulary, and factual knowledge, which are stored in the long-term memory.

Secondly, helping our students manage the amount of information they hear from the recorded texts does not solve their second main problem of not being able to recognize words and sounds. There might be some reasons to this problem, for example students did not learn the correct pronunciation, or they were not aware of connected speech rules, or they were not involved in relevant tasks when acquiring the new lexis (Goh, 1999; Sternberg, Sternberg & Mio, 2012; Gakonga, 2015). All in all, this difficulty should encourage teachers to evaluate how effectively we are introducing and reviewing vocabulary because there is a relationship between how we learn new words and our

ability to recognize them in connected speech. That is why, I think bottom-up processes can assist students in overcoming this problem as it allows them to work on the identification of key words and prosodic features like stress and intonation (Richards, 2008). However, we should not underestimate top-down processes since they ease the understanding of the recording by associating the spoken text to the prior knowledge that this process suggests eliciting in the pre-listening stage.

Thirdly, our students can argue that practising how to identify words in connected speech and how to retain them in their memory would not solve their difficulty of understanding the intended message. This comment urges us to explain to them two important facts. On the one hand, developing the listening skill does require time and practice, so they should keep their motivation alive, and we should sustain it too. On the other hand, listeners are not supposed to understand every single word of the spoken speech, but the words that convey the meaning of the utterance. One more time, teachers are challenged to plan relevant activities that provide them with a listening purpose and the social context of the conversation they will be hearing. I agree with the idea of giving students a purpose to listen to the recording as well as some cues that they would have in real life conversations and that are not part of the listening task itself (2004). This information is included in the pre-listening stage. Besides, if these factors are related to our students' needs and interests, they might find a connection with the recorded text, so they could also easily associate it to the purpose they have just assimilated (Sternberg, Sternberg & Mio, 2012). It is important to keep in mind that all these actions would work provided that we encourage our students to take agency of their learning process. There is no point in doing all the job if learners do not become competent listeners in the second/foreign language. Hence, the last reason to claim listening is a challenging skill to teach is that it requires teachers to raise students' awareness of their role in the listening process.

#### **4. STUDENTS' ROLE IN THE LISTENING PROCESS**

Teachers are called for planning tasks to promote strategies that enable learners to skilfully approach listening activities. Students can apply several mental activities (cognitive) and management tasks (metacognitive) to perform better in each of the listening stages (Richards, 2008) if we provide them with practice. As a result, I have grouped the strategies according to the phase in which they will be more necessary. In this last section I describe some strategies that, from my point of view, could be practiced in the classroom, so that learners can deal with the four main listening comprehension problems discovered in Goh's study.



Regarding the pre-listening stage, we should give students opportunities to consciously plan or predict what they will be listening to. The activities in this stage should develop the understanding about the situation, social context, key vocabulary and its pronunciation, and the appropriate strategies that would help the working memory to process the information in the utilisation stage. One might claim that some students will not follow our guidance in this matter, however, in my teaching experience, I have realized students work better if they know what they are expected to do, and even better when they see the benefits of an activity that is appealing to their needs and interests.

In the while-listening stage, students should be trained to overcome problems at the perceptual and parsing level to not neglect the rest of the message and ensure its understanding (Goh, 1999). The activities should prepare students to monitor their performance and even to apply problem-solving strategies every time they are allowed to listen to the recording. For instance, when they are monitoring their listening, they need to learn about compensatory strategies such as inference, contextualization and prediction in case they get lost or confused during the tasks. They can also apply the direct attention and listen selectively metacognitive strategies as well as note-taking because all of them facilitates the identification of key words, discourse markers, and aid the brain to keep focused. Besides, learning these strategies teach learners how to manage “stressful situations”, to use the knowledge that was elicited in the pre-listening phase, and to try to make sense of what they hear.

In the post-listening stage, it is recommendable to engage students in self-assessment activities. They have to learn to reflect on their learning process to determine whether they applied effective strategies or not. Furthermore, students can discuss in pairs or groups what they should do to improve their bottom-up (perception) and top-down (understanding) processes. There must be a room to study and share this assessment after the listening tasks and tests, and students should be encouraged to give and receive peer and group feedback. This strategy will strengthen students’ proficiency as competent and autonomous listeners.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

By and large, this essay has attempted to analyse the reasons why it is possible to say it is challenging to teach the listening skill. The rationale of this essay aims to support the idea that listening is not a passive skill that requires students to pay “attention”, but that it is a compromise for teachers, and that we should devote some time to plan the activities that will actually benefit our students during this complex process. This skill demands us to be

constantly assessing the effectiveness of our approach, the appropriateness of the activities, and the development of our students' listening skill and metacognitive awareness. I believe that being aware of what we are supposed to know and do to teach this skill, somehow, eases the challenging task of guiding our students to become competent listeners.

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# **Los intercambios lingüísticos en el aula de inglés a través de las TIC para la mejora de la motivación, la participación y las emociones negativas de los alumnos de secundaria**

## **Intercultural exchange projects through ICT between high schools to improve motivation, participation and negative emotions in the EFL classroom**

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### **Resumen**

El presente artículo propone los proyectos de intercambio lingüístico interculturales e intercentros como solución a tres de los grandes problemas del aprendizaje del inglés durante la ESO: la motivación, la participación y las emociones negativas en el aula. Para tal propósito, se realiza un análisis teórico de los tres aspectos previamente mencionados, desde la perspectiva de cómo los intercambios lingüísticos interculturales entre centros para el estudio del inglés, realizados a través de las TIC, pueden significar una mejora de éstos y un progreso en el aprendizaje. Además, se ofrecen propuestas didácticas para proyectos de intercambio lingüístico entre centros de países diferentes de habla no inglesa. A través de este estudio, se concluye que el contacto intercultural entre adolescentes en el aula de inglés a través de la TIC, mejora su motivación e implicación en el proceso de aprendizaje, y palia los sentimientos negativos que surgen durante el estudio del inglés.

**Palabras clave:** intercambios lingüísticos, motivación, participación, TIC.

### **Abstract**

This article proposes linguistic intercultural exchange projects between high schools as a solution to three of the major problems of TEFL during secondary education: motivation, participation and negative emotions in the classroom. For this purpose, the three aspects

previously mentioned are analyzed from a theoretical point of view in order to discover how intercultural linguistic exchanges between educational institutions in the English classroom, realized through the ICT, can improve our students' learning process. In addition, the article discusses didactic proposals for language exchange projects between educational institutions of different non-English speaking countries. From this study, it is concluded that the intercultural contact between adolescents in the English classroom through ICT improves their motivation and involvement in the learning process and alleviates the negative feelings that arise during the study of this language.

**Keywords:** linguistic intercultural exchange, motivation, participation, ICT.

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

La importancia del dominio del inglés en la actualidad viene reforzada por los cambios globales que está experimentando la sociedad, con el avance de las nuevas tecnologías de la información y comunicación que han transformado nuestro entorno y la forma de relacionarnos con él. Los últimos resultados publicados por el CIS (2014) sobre las competencias en lengua inglesa en nuestro país, señalan que tan solo el 53% de los ciudadanos de entre 18 y 24 años consideran que tienen un dominio que les permite hablar y escribir en lengua inglesa. Comparando estos datos respecto a nuestros vecinos europeos de acuerdo con los datos facilitados por Education First (2015), España se sitúa en el puesto número 19 de 27 países europeos. Estos resultados evidencian la baja efectividad de la enseñanza de esta lengua en nuestro actual sistema educativo. Tal como señalan Rubio y Martínez (2008) al acabar los estudios de ESO, los alumnos habrán recibido un total de hasta 800 horas de clase de inglés. Considerando estos datos, resulta paradójico que un alumno no tenga un dominio comunicativo real al finalizar sus estudios. A la vista de estas cifras, debemos reflexionar sobre qué factores son necesarios mejorar para la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés. Diversos autores (Blázquez, 2010; Inglés et al. 2010; Rubio y Martínez, 2008; Romero, 2007; Rubio y Schwarzer, 2009) señalan como principal causa, entre otras, un estilo de enseñanza todavía demasiado supeditado a contenidos teóricos y viejas metodologías que conducen a una baja motivación, participación y seguridad del alumnado frente al aprendizaje, además de la ausencia de situaciones comunicativas reales y a un uso deficiente de los recursos disponibles, principalmente las TIC. Afortunadamente, los intercambios escolares brindan un respiro en el ambiente del aula cargado de desmotivación, poca implicación y desvinculación con la realidad (Mallol y Alsina, 2014; Ordorica, 2010). Los alumnos participantes en programas de intercambio han manifestado una actitud más abierta y participativa hacia

el aprendizaje del inglés (Mallol y Alsina, 2014), además de suponer una comunicación real e inmediata. Aun así, estas experiencias no sólo no llegan a la totalidad del alumnado, sino que suponen sólo una solución puntual a problemas permanentes del aula. Siendo conscientes de los beneficios de los intercambios, consideramos que sería favorable la implementación de un sistema de enseñanza que aporte las mismas ganancias de estos a la totalidad de un grupo, independientemente de su nivel socio-económico. Por tanto, el presente artículo propone paliar los problemas de motivación, participación y actitud en el aula de inglés a través los intercambios lingüísticos interculturales entre estudiantes de países diferentes con ayuda de las TIC, de manera continuada en el tiempo y a través de la colaboración internacional intercentros; es decir, el trabajo cooperativo entre dos centros de diferentes países para el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje. Esto está dirigido a incrementar la competencia comunicativa de nuestros alumnos, convirtiéndolos en los principales actores de su propio proceso de aprendizaje y creando situaciones comunicativas reales donde no sólo mejoren su inglés, sino donde además obtengan una respuesta directa a sus esfuerzos.

### **1.1. Objetivos y metodología**

Este artículo ofrece en primer lugar un marco teórico sobre tres de los aspectos que más afectan negativamente al aprendizaje del inglés, como son la falta de motivación, participación y las actitudes negativas en el aula. En segundo lugar, presenta el intercambio lingüístico intercultural como posible solución, a través del uso de las TIC y analizando proyectos de intercambio lingüístico en el aula de lenguas extranjeras. Por último, y a lo largo del artículo, este trabajo proporciona pautas para la implementación de proyectos de hermanamiento lingüístico intercultural en el aula de inglés para facilitar la realización e introducción de experiencias de este tipo en el aula. A continuación, se presentan los objetivos generales del trabajo:

- 4 Analizar la motivación, la participación y las emociones negativas en el aprendizaje del inglés.
- 5 Presentar los proyectos de colaboración lingüística entre centros como solución a estos tres problemas.
- 6 Motivar a crear experiencias de aprendizaje real, significativa y continuada en el tiempo, donde se priorice la necesidad de exposición natural a la lengua objeto de aprendizaje y en la cual el alumno sea el principal actor.
- 7 Impulsar la sistematización y cotidianidad en el uso de las TIC en el aprendizaje del inglés, para permitir al alumno disfrutar del aprendizaje a través de la socialización y la autonomía.

Fomentar la participación en proyectos de colaboración intercentros para el aprendizaje del inglés por su carácter educativo a nivel curricular y social.

## **2. LA MOTIVACIÓN, LA PARTICIPACIÓN Y LAS EMOCIONES NEGATIVAS EN EL AULA DE INGLÉS**

### **2.1. La motivación**

Uno de los aspectos que más preocupa en referente al aprendizaje es la motivación, o más bien, la falta de ésta en los alumnos de secundaria. Este hecho es consecuencia directa de una serie de factores que afectan a nuestro sistema educativo, como son la diversidad de las aulas o el uso de la disciplinaria y teoría frente a la interdisciplinaria y la actitud activa del educando (Huegun y Aramendi, 2011). Si bien es cierto que los docentes no son responsables de muchos de estos factores, sigue siendo esencial que estos entiendan el peso de la motivación en el aula y cómo conseguirla. Ramajo (2008) señala la importancia de esta en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera asegurando que facilita su adquisición. Bonetto y Calderón (2014) citan a Pintrich y Schunk (2006) para confirmar que los alumnos motivados presentan un mayor grado de implicación en el proceso de aprendizaje, así como seguridad en el aula, mientras que la desmotivación conduce a una falta de atención y diligencia en el estudio. Por tanto, entendemos que la motivación en el aula proporciona impulsos positivos y direccionamiento hacia la mejora. En esta línea resulta interesante destacar los datos de las investigaciones de Mallol y Alsina (2014) y Ordorica (2010), cuyos resultados muestran que, a la hora de aprender inglés, la motivación extrínseca es mayor que la intrínseca. Comprobamos además que los educandos no consideran el estudio de la lengua extranjera como un mecanismo integrador o cultural, sino como una posibilidad de mejorar su futuro laboral o formativo. De acuerdo con las tasas de abandono escolar del 24,9% (MECD, 2013), este tipo de motivación resulta no ser suficiente para el alumnado adolescente. Por tanto, existe una necesidad real de motivar a los alumnos a partir de sus propios intereses y necesidades. En ese aspecto, es necesario entender la mente del adolescente para poder ofrecer un aprendizaje más atractivo y adaptado. Uno de los aspectos más atrayentes para el adolescente es la necesidad de socialización, según afirman Inglés et al. (2011:453) en sus estudios sobre los hallazgos de Wentzel y Asher (1995) y Gilman y Anderman (2006) en los que señalan que “las relaciones con los iguales parecen tener un papel significativo, cuando se pretende comprender la motivación entre estudiantes de Educación Secundaria”. Además, añaden que los estudiantes con metas sociales y académicas presentan un mayor éxito académico. Por consiguiente, entendemos que si se proporciona

al alumnado unas metas de aprendizaje que impliquen la socialización, mejorará su motivación y predisposición para el aprendizaje. Aun así, debemos tener en cuenta que, si las metas que se proponen no se sustentan en una realidad y comprensión alcanzables por el sujeto, resultando o muy fáciles o muy complicadas o impuestas y obligadas, el proceso de motivación se reducirá al mínimo (Rodríguez y Huertas, 2000). Por tanto, determinamos que cuando el individuo se propone o elige unas metas acordes con sus posibilidades y comprensión, éste puede adecuar el grado de dificultad de la misma a sus habilidades o potencialidades. Concluimos este apartado entendiendo que la motivación juega un papel vital en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera como es el inglés. Esta motivación ha estado predeterminada por factores extrínsecos que poco influyen a los jóvenes adolescentes. Por ello hemos de conocer a nuestro alumnado para saber qué tipo de motivaciones intrínsecas e intereses tienen e incluirlas a nuestras cátedras. En esta línea, la fijación de metas alcanzables bajo un grado realista de responsabilidad y esfuerzo supone una motivación para el alumnado; si además añadimos el factor de la socialización e interacción entre iguales, el resultado ha de ser todavía más óptimo. Incluyendo estas afirmaciones al tema que nos atañe, los intercambios lingüísticos intercentros en el aula de inglés, sabemos que para que estos motiven al estudiante han de elaborarse a partir de sus intereses, implicando la comunicación y marcando objetivos realizables.

## **2.2. La participación**

Dentro de la educación y en el contexto del aula, la participación se define como “la intervención de los alumnos en la toma de decisiones en clase, en sustancial relación con lo que se dialoga, se decide y se hace en el aula” (Román, 1996). Es decir, participar es la implicación consciente del estudiante en el quehacer diario del aula. La participación en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje es un elemento fundamental, ya que facilita la evolución para que ésta sea eficaz (Fernández, 2010). A través de la participación se dan oportunidades para el error, se resuelven dudas, se aportan ideas, se argumenta y discute; además, conlleva el uso de las habilidades comunicativas orales. De todas las destrezas necesarias para el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera, tal vez sea la expresión oral la que supone una mayor dificultad, ya que según Rubio y Martínez (2008:56) esta es “la más difícil de desarrollar por el complejo procesamiento cognitivo que entraña y por estar ligada al contexto social e interpersonal”. Continúa diciendo que el Marco Europeo Común de Referencia para las lenguas (Consejo de Europa, 2002) explicita la gran dificultad de la destreza oral dada la concentración y esfuerzo que exigen los procesos cognitivos, lo que puede influir negativamente al alumno. Por tanto, creemos que para que un estudiante se

expresarse correctamente en una lengua extranjera, necesita un previo estado de planificación y organización en donde interviene el proceso cognitivo, condicionantes necesarios para poder formular el elemento lingüístico de manera significativa, ya que de no ser así el alumno se desarrollaría de una manera muy poco positiva en la producción oral. Con la finalidad de favorecer la participación del alumnado, necesitamos modificar el enfoque metodológico en el aula de inglés, potenciando la interacción y la socialización de manera que se consiga un progreso efectivo en el dominio de la expresión oral. Alcón (1992) declara que es fundamental conseguir un clima positivo en el aula, que mejore la predisposición de los alumnos a participar a partir de sus propios intereses, y donde el profesor pase a tener un papel secundario, aliviando la presión sobre el estudiante que se convierte en agente activo en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje.

Sobre este tema, cabe destacar el estudio de Fernández (2010), en el cual especifica las razones principales de la falta de participación de los alumnos en el aprendizaje. En su investigación, analizó la visión de 83 profesores de centros tanto públicos, como privados y concertados sobre el problema de la participación en las aulas. Entre los factores que afectan negativamente destacamos los siguientes junto con los porcentajes de respuesta:

1. La organización rígida del aula (92,3%).
2. La falta de motivación del profesor (84,6%).
3. No partir de los intereses de los alumnos (69,2%).
4. No presentar al alumno la tarea de forma clara y atractiva (46,1%).
5. Actividades poco motivadoras, discriminación entre iguales (38,4%).
6. El papel pasivo del alumno como consecuencia de la falta de libertad para participar (38,4%).
7. No aprovechar los recursos del entorno (38,4%).

Estas cuestiones podrían ser solucionadas en el aula de inglés a través de la colaboración intercentros en intercambios lingüísticos. Por una parte, ésta supondría eliminar la monotonía de las clases que desmotivan tanto al estudiante como al profesor. Jacob (2013) realizó un proyecto de intercambio lingüístico transcultural en el cual aseguró mediante una entrevista en mayo de 2016 (Jacob, 2016) que uno de los factores que más gustaron a los profesores implicados fue salir de la pesadez de la rutina; por consiguiente, vemos este tipo de proyectos son beneficiosos también para el docente. Además, implicaría a la totalidad del alumnado sin discriminación y supondría su participación como completamente necesaria para llevar a cabo actividades, las cuales serían diseñadas acorde a sus intereses. También supone facilitar a nuestros estudiantes la oportunidad de contar con situaciones comunicativas reales y prolongadas en el tiempo, no como un



elemento puntual y esporádico dirigido a alumnos con nivel más avanzado o mayores oportunidades económicas. Para tal propósito, creemos necesaria la introducción efectiva de las TIC como herramienta facilitadora de este proceso, ya que son capaces de transportarnos en el espacio para conseguir un intercambio lingüístico real que favorezca la participación entre iguales. Esta propuesta puede suplir la escasa cantidad de intercambios que realizan nuestros estudiantes ya que, según el Informe de la Comisión Europea de Educación (2012), las oportunidades de intercambios son relativamente bajas en el contexto europeo. Por tanto, exponer a los alumnos a situaciones comunicativas reales con otros estudiantes extranjeros, también estudiantes de inglés, que comparten inquietudes y expectativas propias de la adolescencia y el aprendizaje puede favorecer la motivación y en consecuencia la participación e implicación en el aprendizaje.

### **2.3. Las emociones negativas en el aula de inglés**

Tal como declaraba la psicóloga Pepa Horno en su conferencia Educación y Emociones en la Universidad de las Islas Baleares (Mayo 2016), las emociones forman la base de todo desarrollo de las capacidades humanas. En la enseñanza, obviar los sentimientos de los alumnos en el aula es un error fatal, puesto que estos nos señalan cómo nuestros estudiantes están viviendo el aprendizaje. Durante la adolescencia, el desarrollo emocional se magnifica y se entremezcla con el desarrollo social, creando una fusión de experiencias dentro de la mente del adolescente que pueden llegar a entorpecer su aprendizaje (Álvarez, 2010). Si bien la motivación y la participación tienen un papel importante en el aprendizaje del inglés en alumnos de secundaria, igual de significativa es la autopercepción de estos en relación a sus habilidades. Hay que ir con cuidado con poner en riesgo la imagen o estima del alumno, puesto que si dañamos su propia percepción estaremos dañando sus posibilidades de tener un aprendizaje exitoso. La autopercepción del propio estudiante juega un papel vital a la hora de explotar sus capacidades. Esta afirmación se corrobora en el estudio de Mallol y Alsina (2014) sobre la valoración de los estudiantes en lo concerniente a los beneficios de los intercambios lingüísticos, donde comprobamos que efectivamente hay una tendencia por parte de los alumnos de instituto a infravalorar sus capacidades y habilidades comunicativas en el aula de inglés. De la información recogida en sus tests, vemos que los alumnos se creían incapaces de llevar a cabo un intercambio lingüístico, expresando su sorpresa al poner a prueba sus capacidades comunicativas obteniendo buenos resultados. Martínez (2013:23) expande el tema citando a Dörnyei (2008) quien explica cómo Richard Clement introdujo el concepto de confianza lingüística en el modelo de motivación de Gardner. Martínez explica que, en líneas generales, la confianza en uno mismo se refiere a la seguridad que tiene un

individuo en sus propias posibilidades, pero Clement da un nuevo sentido a este concepto, haciendo referencia a la ansiedad que se produce al usar un idioma del cual no se es hablante nativo. Además de la importancia de la autopercepción y la confianza lingüística, Romero (2011:6) señala que “España es uno de los pocos países del mundo en donde existe una especie de “complejo generalizado” a la hora de pronunciar bien un vocablo en inglés”. En efecto, es una práctica muy común a nivel social castellanizar palabras inglesas, por lo que es más aceptado pronunciar de manera incorrecta. Con estas afirmaciones concluimos que el alumno se enfrenta a una situación dicotómica: por una parte, su condición de adolescente sitúa en un lugar elevado la percepción de su imagen por parte de sus iguales; por otra, el deseo de participar y mejorar puede verse disminuido por el miedo al fracaso o por la percepción de su habilidad. Por esta razón, durante las actividades se debe priorizar el refuerzo positivo frente al negativo, y limitar la participación del profesor introduciendo la colaboración entre iguales y la autocorrección. Refuerza nuestra idea la aportación de Delicado (2011:31), quien considera que “no se puede pasar por alto que la ansiedad y el miedo que se origina ante el aprendizaje de lenguas es un factor emocional capaz de vaticinar el resultado positivo o negativo durante el proceso de adquisición de una lengua extranjera.” Concluimos a través de estas declaraciones que para el óptimo desarrollo de las capacidades comunicativas y de aprendizaje del adolescente, debemos ofrecer un ambiente donde su autopercepción y autoestima no se pongan en juego, sus habilidades no sean cuestionadas y sus aportaciones se perciban como útiles. Mediante un intercambio lingüístico con alumnos que al igual que ellos, estén aprendiendo inglés, con los errores y carencias comunicativas que eso implica, el alumno es capaz de comprometerse en el aprendizaje sin miedo a que quede expuesta la insuficiencia de sus capacidades comunicativas.

### **3. LOS INTERCAMBIOS LINGÜÍSTICOS INTERNACIONALES EN EL AULA DE INGLÉS COMO SOLUCIÓN**

Este trabajo se centra en la motivación, participación y emociones negativas, y es en esta línea que proponemos como solución el hermanamiento internacional entre centros para la enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés. Siguiendo la definición de Gairín (1998:6) “la colaboración es entendida en este planteamiento como un medio para superar una realidad supuestamente mejorable”. Para Gairín, la colaboración puede satisfacer las necesidades actuales derivadas de los rápidos cambios sociales y culturales, percibiendo la colaboración como un elemento innovador. El hermanamiento supone trabajar aspectos que son causa clara y directa de nuestro fracaso lingüístico ya estudiados, como son la

falta de situaciones comunicativas reales, el complejo de pronunciación, el escaso fomento de las destrezas orales, la falta de motivación e implicación de los alumnos, así como desuso de las herramientas disponibles a través de las TIC. Giné et al. (2013:109) afirman que el aprendizaje cooperativo nos lleva a “aprender a gestionar las interacciones entre los alumnos para que se den oportunidades de aprendizaje”. Continúa diciendo que “[e]llo significa movilizar la capacidad mediadora que tienen los alumnos: la capacidad de ofrecerse ayudas para aprender y de aprender enseñándose”. En definitiva, se trata de compartir la capacidad de enseñar y aprender, de forma que los alumnos sean conscientes y partícipes en el procedimiento de enseñanza-aprendizaje. Para llevar a cabo un verdadero aprendizaje cooperativo, Giné et al. (2013:106) mencionan a Johnson, Johnson y Holubec (1999), quienes indican como necesarias dos condiciones, a nuestro parecer imprescindibles, que son la interdependencia positiva y la responsabilidad. La interdependencia positiva nos garantiza el trabajo y el éxito de todo el grupo; mientras que la responsabilidad individual asegura la participación de todos a partir de las diferentes aportaciones. Por lo tanto, entendemos que el trabajo del profesorado en el aprendizaje cooperativo consistirá en encontrar la forma de integrar estas dos condiciones, estableciendo objetivos de equipo y una planificación y distribución de tareas.

La ilusión y empatía que supone relacionarse con alumnos de otros países y culturas genera una necesidad de mejorar en el aprendizaje para poder comunicarse y compartir experiencias, intereses y expectativas, ello conduce necesariamente al incremento del interés en el aprendizaje, tal como demuestran las encuestas realizada por Masiero (2014) a un grupo de estudiantes participantes en un intercambio eTwinning, donde el 100% de los alumnos participantes contestaron afirmativamente a la pregunta: 'Después de esta experiencia, ¿te gustaría profundizar tu conocimiento del inglés?' para poder comunicarse mejor con los adolescentes conocidos en el intercambio. Por consiguiente, creemos que un aprendizaje basado en la interacción social en un contexto multilingüe y multicultural, fomenta la implicación del alumnado de una manera efectiva. Asimismo, tal y como como señalan diversos autores (Martínez, 2013; Delicado, 2011; Montes de Oca, 2005), la interacción en el aula de inglés puede generar ansiedad, pero esta puede disminuir al cambiar la interacción profesor-alumno a alumno-alumno, ya que se establece una relación entre iguales en un mismo contexto de aprendizaje, donde las ayudas mutuas pueden paliar las emociones negativas. Además, señala la importancia del trabajo entre iguales para crear un clima favorable en el aula a través de actividades que impliquen la cooperación y el aprendizaje mutuo, decreciendo la competitividad y la ansiedad.

### 3.2. El uso de las TIC en los proyectos de intercambio lingüístico

Los avances tecnológicos de las últimas décadas han desembocado en una nueva concepción del alumnado, donde los sistemas tradicionales han quedado obsoletos (Aliaga y Bartolomé, 2005). Esta nueva generación, bautizada como nativos digitales por Prensky en su libro *Teaching Digital Natives* (2010), está inmersa en una multidisciplinariedad de información. Sobre este tema Venzal (2012:4) comenta que “[l]a educación no se puede mostrar impasible ante este nuevo cambio que se da en la sociedad del conocimiento en base a la nueva tecnología”. Esta incorporación de las TIC también ha revolucionado el mundo de la comunicación y las relaciones, eliminando las barreras espacio-temporales. El sistema educativo no debe quedar excluido de estos avances ya que nuestros alumnos han crecido y se han desarrollado al unísono de estos cambios; excluir las TIC de la educación significa obviar las capacidades multidisciplinares que estas proporcionan a los estudiantes. Al tratarse de la enseñanza de un idioma, coincidimos con Barrera (2009:3) cuando afirma que el profesor de inglés debe ser consciente de la importancia de la comunicación en el proceso de aprendizaje, por lo que es imprescindible proporcionar al alumnado el mayor número posible de interacciones reales que permitan al estudiante conocer el valor de lo aprendido. Internet y las TIC proporcionan la posibilidad de ofrecer al alumnado herramientas que pueden involucrarse en dichas situaciones de comunicación con estudiantes de otros países. A este beneficio hemos de sumarle los que enumeran Lorenzo y Vidal (1992), quienes aseguran que el uso de esta tecnología favorece el trabajo en equipo y el desarrollo en la búsqueda de información, además de estimular el desarrollo integral de la persona al ponerla en contacto con alumnos de diferentes países. Por tanto, debemos impulsar el uso de las TIC en el aula, traspasando su ámbito físico para acceder al mundo del exterior.

El estudio de Venzal (2012) señala que las TIC, al desarrollar una enseñanza autónoma y fomentar el valor afectivo y humano en el aula, ayudan a recrear espacios y hábitos de la lengua inglesa y muestran la necesidad de utilizar el inglés tanto como medio autónomo de toma de decisiones, como de comunicación mundial. Luego relacionamos de manera directa el uso de la tecnología con una mayor motivación por parte del alumnado, ya que es una herramienta que les proporciona actividad, autonomía, relaciones humanas y situaciones reales de comunicación.

En cuanto a participación, las TIC fomentan la iniciativa, la cooperación y la interactividad, a la vez que ofrece un mayor espacio a la creatividad y a la autonomía incrementando la participación de todo el alumnado (Fernández, 2010). Teniendo en cuenta toda esta información, es de esperar que las emociones negativas en el aula de inglés se palíen en

presencia de las TIC, puesto que estas sirven para recrear espacios donde los alumnos trabajan la cooperación humana, la participación y la independencia.

Consiguientemente, vemos que combinar las tecnologías y las redes para facilitar el contacto entre estudiantes de idiomas, ofrece una comunicación real e inmediata, mejora la motivación y participación de los alumnos y aporta autenticidad y la oportunidad de trabajar por proyectos y en equipo, con capacidad para crear una comunidad de aprendizaje que rompa las barreras físicas del aula.

### **3.3. Experiencias de intercambio en el aula**

En Europa y también España, han surgido en los últimos años diferentes programas y plataformas que facilitan el contacto entre centros y profesores y que pueden facilitar el realizar proyectos de intercambio dentro del aula. Desde el Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, encontramos programas educativos gestionados por la Comisión Europea, ofreciendo diferentes posibilidades como son las Asociaciones Escolares Comenius y los Hermanamientos Escolares Europeos a través del eTwinning. Otras plataformas para encontrar compañeros de profesión dispuestos a establecer contacto para proyectos intercentros son <http://education.skype.com> y <http://www.language-exchanges.org>.

Han sido numerosos los proyectos llevados a cabo dentro de las aulas, que son necesarios estudiar para entender la puesta en marcha de estas experiencias y sus metodologías, así como posibles inconvenientes que hayan surgido y que se deben tener en cuenta a la hora de elaborar un proyecto de hermanamiento lingüístico entre centros educativos de distintos países. En esta línea, Jacob (2013) llevó a cabo un proyecto de intercambio entre estudiantes de inglés de dos centros de educación secundaria, uno de España (Calviá, Mallorca) y otro de Polonia (Opole). Dicha propuesta contó con 3 unidades didácticas con un enfocamiento cultural, las cuales eran llevadas a cabo por los alumnos de los diferentes centros de secundaria y compartidas a través de un blog. Este proyecto tuvo resultados muy positivos en referente a motivación y participación. En cuanto a contratiempos se refiere, Jacob menciona la importancia de estudiar los diferentes horarios de los centros además de los calendarios de vacaciones y festivos. Esto nos permite tener la oportunidad de realizar tareas de manera simultánea dentro del aula, de otra manera los alumnos deberían hacer las tareas a destiempo. Lorenzo y Vidal (1992) llevaron a cabo el proyecto Campus2000/XTEC, una experiencia telemática en el aula de inglés basada en la interdisciplinariedad a través de correos electrónicos y teledebates entre alumnos de España (Cataluña) y Reino Unido. En este caso, los autores del proyecto también señalan que hubo una mayor implicación en el aprendizaje, así como mejores resultados y más participación, motivación y predisposición a la comunicación por parte de los alumnos

implicados. Aunque este intercambio se llevó a cabo con nativos del idioma, es importante destacar la metodología seguida del proyecto, en la cual se elaboraron grupos pilotos destinados a detectar posibles problemas puntuales. Como dato interesante, Lorenzo y Vidal apuntan que el trabajo conjunto dio lugar a ayudas y correcciones colectivas, las cuales evitaban las interferencias del profesor, aumentando la motivación y espontaneidad del alumnado. Jacob igualmente afirmó que los alumnos tendían a la autocorrección y la ayuda entre ellos, lo cual se relajaba el ambiente del aula.

Mallol y Alsina (2014), al igual que Lorenzo y Vidal, escogieron un número limitado de alumnos dentro de cada aula por sus calificaciones, debido a las limitaciones del número de alumnado propuesto por el otro centro participante, cuestión que deberíamos tener en cuenta a la hora de elegir el centro o preparar las actividades. Los alumnos que participaron en el proyecto valoraron positivamente el haber trabajado en el aula de inglés con las TIC, reconociendo que su uso había mejorado su nivel de inglés, favoreciendo la comunicación a través de medios audiovisuales. Becerra, Colli y Crosby (2010) describen su experiencia de intercambio lingüístico a través de Skype asegurando que “al estar inmersos en situaciones reales del idioma tenemos la oportunidad de aprender frases coloquiales, cultura y sobre todo desarrollar las habilidades del idioma con un enfoque actual”.

En cuestiones de TIC y red, hemos de ser conscientes que pueden surgir innumerables inconvenientes, desde problemas con la red hasta el mal funcionamiento de la tecnología, todas estas problemáticas deben tenerse en consideración cuando se preparan actividades. Hemos de ser conscientes de las dificultades que entrañan trabajar conjuntamente con otros centros, entre las cuales destacamos el tiempo para la coordinación de horarios, la falta de formación de los implicados y la falta de recursos o recursos inadecuados. Estos obstáculos pueden ser superados con una buena organización y flexibilidad, aun así, solucionar el problema de los recursos inadecuados no están a manos de los profesores, quienes en muchas ocasiones deberán ingeniárselas para poder llevar a cabo las actividades de manera satisfactoria. A pesar de los inconvenientes, y en vista del éxito de estos proyectos, estamos convencidos que los intercambios interculturales lingüísticos dentro del aula fomentan una actitud hacia el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje más activa y motivadora, además de inclusiva y participativa, adaptando las herramientas en línea disponibles en nuestras cátedras.

#### **4. LOS INTERCAMBIOS EN EL AULA: HERRAMIENTAS, INCONVENIENTES Y SOLUCIONES**

Para realizar con éxito este tipo de proyectos, es necesario que el docente aprenda a utilizar diversos recursos TIC. Entre ellos destacamos como los más útiles Skype y Whatsapp para realizar video-llamadas y conferencias. Para compartir material y los resultados de las actividades, es recomendable crear un blog mediante las plataformas Wordpress o Blogspot. El uso de redes sociales como Instagram o Snapchat también facilitan la interacción entre alumnos y pueden ser utilizadas para mostrar el día a día en clase, compartir dudas o enseñar avances. Para compartir vídeos utilizamos Youtube, el editor de vídeo Windows Movie Maker y el editor de audio Audacity; además de herramientas como Screencast-O-matic, la cual permite grabar la pantalla del ordenador mientras graba la voz. Será necesario también el uso de ordenadores de mesa o portátiles facilitados por el centro, así como cámaras o un móvil para grabar vídeos y mensajes de voz.

En cuanto a problemas que puedan surgir durante la preparación y realización de proyectos, y teniendo en cuenta los proyectos analizados para este artículo, vemos que uno de los más comunes es que el número total del alumnado en cada grupo no coincide. Para solventarlos, podemos agrupar a los alumnos de la clase más numerosa en grupos heterogéneos acorde a su nivel, creando grupos más numerosos donde hay alumnos con un nivel más bajo. Aconsejamos también disponer siempre el mismo lugar o mesas de trabajo a cada grupo para facilitar y agilizar las actividades. En cuanto a la diferencia de horarios, se deben organizar y establecer horarios de trabajo antes de la puesta en marcha del proyecto; aprovechando los tiempos de recreo o descanso para la realización de actividades. Es importante no ser ambicioso y centrarse en la correcta realización de unas pocas actividades; hacer muchos ejercicios de intercambio en poco tiempo evitará que los alumnos disfruten tranquilamente, y podría crecer la inseguridad y desmotivación al no tener el tiempo suficiente de preparar las actividades.

Para evitar problemas de conexión a Internet, es imprescindible asegurarse del correcto funcionamiento de la Red antes de comenzar las actividades y, en caso necesario, obtener un módem USB. Si los docentes implicados en el proyecto tuvieran una deficiente formación en cuanto a las TIC, se deben organizar sesiones iniciales formativas entre los docentes implicados para ayudarse mutuamente y resolver dudas. Asimismo, estos pueden solicitar al CEP un curso de formación al profesorado en el propio centro.

Finalmente, para evitar problemas de comportamiento con los alumnos, es esencial establecer un sistema claro reglas y consecuencias al principio del proyecto sobre las

normas de conducta y utilización del material. Si los docentes lo ven necesario, pueden preparar un contrato de buenas prácticas en el que los alumnos se comprometen a comportarse de manera respetuosa en la red durante el proyecto, de esta manera estaría además tratando un tema transversal como son el valor del respeto de creencias y privacidad hacia los demás en internet. Igualmente, es recomendable realizar un seguimiento y ofrecer apoyo constante durante la realización del proyecto. En clase debemos utilizar el refuerzo positivo y transformar los errores en momentos para el aprendizaje; además de alabar el buen trabajo de los alumnos. No debemos olvidarnos de pedir la opinión personal de los alumnos a través de un cuestionario anónimo para asegurarnos de que sus respuestas sean sinceras.

Para evitar el desinterés o problemas con el otro centro, se pueden hacer reuniones vía Skype o llamadas de Whatsapp de manera bisemanal o trisemanal para resolver dudas, ofrecer y recibir ayuda, y motivarse entre docentes.

Concluimos recordando que los errores no deben desanimarnos, si no alentarnos a progresar y tomarlos en cuenta para mejorar futuros proyectos.

## **5. CONCLUSIONES**

Al principio de este artículo exponíamos la problemática actual en la enseñanza del inglés centrándonos en tres de los principales factores que afectan negativamente el proceso de aprendizaje en alumnos de educación secundaria obligatoria: la falta de motivación y participación y las emociones negativas en el aula de inglés. Como solución a tales inconvenientes hemos propuesto los intercambios lingüísticos interculturales entre estudiantes de inglés de diferentes centros de secundaria. A través del estudio bibliográfico descubrimos que efectivamente los intercambios lingüísticos dentro del aula suponen una solución a los problemas anteriormente mencionados, puesto que aportan situaciones comunicativas reales, metas y objetivos alcanzables y resultados inmediatos, elementos vitales en el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua. Además, fomentan la implicación y el desarrollo de las habilidades sociales, tan importantes en la etapa de la adolescencia. Finalmente, permiten que los sentimientos de ansiedad y vergüenza, comunes entre aprendices de un idioma extranjero, se vean paliados por la cooperación, la mejora y el desarrollo del grupo de estudiantes como un conjunto. Todo esto viene reforzado por el uso de las TIC y la red, herramientas sin las cuales sería imposible llevar a cabo proyectos de este tipo y que suponen una motivación añadida para los alumnos. Analizando proyectos de intercambio en el aula llevados a cabo por diferentes investigadores, vemos como estos afirman sus beneficios en cuanto a motivación,



implicación y emociones se refiere, además de motivar la tarea docente por su carácter innovador y colaborativo. Aun así, y siendo conscientes de las dificultades que entrañan proyectos de tal envergadura, hemos ofrecido además unas pautas a seguir frente a posibles inconvenientes que pudieran surgir durante la implementación de las actividades. Por todo lo expuesto, defendemos que los intercambios lingüísticos en el aula para el aprendizaje del inglés no pueden sino significar beneficios no sólo para el alumnado sino también para el profesorado. Es menester que se apliquen junto con otras metodologías para ofrecer un proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje completo, que abarque a la totalidad del alumnado y permita que estos trabajen acordes con sus capacidades. Sin embargo también somos conscientes que este tipo de metodologías, las cuales implican el contacto entre estudiantes de inglés dos países diferentes a través de las TIC, no son generalmente incluidas en los centros de educación secundaria, por lo que proponemos estudiar los efectos que éstas tienen a largo plazo, ambicionando que estos proyectos se vean no sólo como actividades puntuales o de un año escolar, sino como una metodología que acompañe al alumnado a lo largo de su proceso de aprendizaje en la secundaria. Animamos a los centros a ofrecer los proyectos de intercambio lingüístico dentro del aula como parte de su oferta educativa.

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**La competencia en producción escrita del inglés técnico mediante  
el *Blogging***

**Competence in written production of technical English through  
*Blogging***

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**Resumen**

En la actualidad, el uso de las TIC en el aula de idiomas y, particularmente, en la enseñanza del inglés ha incrementado significativamente dada las diversas posibilidades que las TIC aportan en la educación, con el objetivo de motivar al alumnado durante todo el proceso de aprendizaje. El objetivo de este artículo es analizar las posibilidades didácticas del *Blogging* en la enseñanza del inglés. Para tal fin, se ha llevado a cabo un experimento en el aula, con alumnos de Formación Profesional. En esta comunicación se pretende confirmar que, a partir de los resultados obtenidos según los métodos cualitativos, la competencia en producción escrita mejora en el aprendizaje del inglés técnico mediante el *Blogging*. También se pretende comprobar que se ha producido un aprendizaje positivo con respecto a la adquisición de vocabulario técnico en el contexto educativo de la Formación Profesional.

**Palabras clave:** Web 2.0, *Blogging*, Competencia en Producción Escrita, Inglés para Fines Específicos, Inglés Técnico.

**Abstract**

Nowadays, the use of the ICT in the foreign language classroom and, particularly, in teaching English as a Foreign Language has increased significantly because of the various applications which the ICT offers in Education, always with the aim of motivating the learners during the whole learning process. This paper aims at analyzing the didactic possibilities of *Blogging* in teaching English as a Foreign Language. For that, an experiment

has been taken place with learners from Vocational Training. The main aim of this article is to prove that written competence in English improves, considering the obtained results according to the qualitative methods, when learning technical English through Blogging. A secondary aim is to check that learning technical vocabulary in English can be positive within the educational context of Vocational Training.

**Key words:** Web 2.0, Blogging, Written competence, English for Specific Purposes, Technical English.

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Esta investigación está determinada por la necesidad de mejorar la calidad de la competencia de la producción escrita en inglés, de un grupo de 23 alumnos de Formación Profesional que, durante el curso 2013-14, estudiaron la Familia Profesional “Diseño y Amueblamiento”, 1º curso de Grado Superior. De ahí que este artículo estará enmarcado dentro de la aplicación de las TIC como herramientas de aprendizaje del inglés en el ámbito de las lenguas específicas y, por tanto, dentro del área conocida como inglés para fines específicos. Además, esta investigación surge dada las pocas publicaciones con respecto al uso del *Blogging* en la enseñanza del inglés tanto en la enseñanza secundaria obligatoria como en la enseñanza postobligatoria y, en particular, en la formación profesional reglada.

## 2. OBJETIVOS

Nuestro objetivo principal es comprobar si la competencia en expresión escrita mejora mediante el *Blogging* y, concretamente, con el uso de la plataforma *Blogger* (<https://www.blogger.com>) como herramienta educativa. Los alumnos participantes en el experimento son estudiantes de Formación Profesional. Ellos trabajaron tareas relacionadas con el aprendizaje del inglés relacionado con la Familia Profesional “Diseño y Amueblamiento”.

Se pretende además conseguir dos objetivos secundarios. Por una parte, se persigue comprobar que los alumnos han mejorado con respecto a la competencia en comprensión lectora, implicando con ello un tercer objetivo: verificar que los alumnos pueden aprender vocabulario técnico relacionado con su ámbito, siendo preciso así evaluar su capacidad de comprensión lectora.

Se espera pues que los alumnos hayan mejorado, acabando el experimento, su capacidad de desarrollar la producción escrita, así como la competencia lectora mediante el *Blogging* (Fellner, T., y Apple, M., 2006; Murray, L., y Hourigan, T., 2008); pudiendo, por tanto,

corroborar la hipótesis de partida establecida en este trabajo, a partir de un debate, respondiendo a las preguntas de investigación iniciales.

### 3. MARCO TEÓRICO

#### a. Enfoques metodológicos

A continuación, se explicará de forma concisa los tres enfoques metodológicos en los que se fundamenta la Web 2.0 en el ámbito de la enseñanza de idiomas. En primer lugar, con respecto al Constructivismo, la Web 2.0 aporta diversas herramientas claramente con un componente social, facilitando el trabajo colaborativo, mayor interacción en el proceso de aprendizaje y el aprendizaje en grupo (Vázquez y Sevillano, 2011), también la creación conjunta y compartida de conocimiento, permitiendo a los alumnos relacionar lo aprendido con un contexto específico. El constructivismo defiende así la relevancia de los componentes sociales como parte del aprendizaje y, por ello, se consideran las teorías constructivistas de gran importancia para analizar el aprendizaje de idiomas a través de la Web 2.0 (Carrilla, M.C., 2012).

En segundo lugar, se contempla el Enfoque Comunicativo como base metodológica para la Web 2.0. La Web 2.0 ofrece mayor interacción en el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras por parte del alumnado, asumiendo éste el protagonismo en el proceso de su aprendizaje, “aprender a aprender”<sup>1</sup>; al tiempo que se producen diferentes interacciones, siempre en un contexto real. Estas interacciones son: 1. Alumnos-alumnos y 2. Alumnos-profesor, convirtiéndose todos ellos en usuarios dentro del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje. El docente debe hacer un uso adecuado de la web 2.0 considerando que el objetivo principal es que los alumnos consigan una competencia comunicativa real en la lengua extranjera.

El tercer enfoque metodológico es el Aprendizaje por Tareas. La Web 2.0 proporciona una serie de herramientas mediante las que los alumnos pueden realizar tres tipos de actividades (Pérez Torres y Pérez Gutiérrez, 2005). Estas actividades son: 1. Cazas del Tesoro 2. *WebQuests* y 3. *WebTasks*. Una “caza del tesoro” es una página web con una serie de preguntas y una lista de páginas web en las que los alumnos buscan las respuestas. El término *webquest* fue definido por Bernie Dodge (1995) como “una actividad orientada a la investigación donde toda o casi toda la información que se utiliza procede de recursos de la web”, con carácter interdisciplinar (Pérez Torres, 2010: 58). La esencia de la *webtask* es la realización de una tarea como producto final de la actividad, siendo sus principales características la sencillez y la flexibilidad de estructura y contenido.

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<sup>1</sup> Una de las ocho competencias obligatorias establecidas por la LOE para los alumnos de secundaria en el Real Decreto 1631/2006.

## **b. Enseñanza de Lenguas para Fines Específicos**

Este término supone el enfoque de la enseñanza de lenguas que persigue satisfacer las necesidades comunicativas de un grupo concreto de alumnos (Hutchinson y Waters, 1987). Con respecto a la enseñanza del inglés para fines específicos, Hutchinson y Waters (1987: 16) distinguen cuatro categorías: ESP (*English for Specific Purposes*), EAP (*English for Academic Purposes*), EST (*English for Science & Technology*) y EOP (*English for Occupational Purposes*). Robinson (1991) ha incluido inglés para fines académicos y el inglés para fines ocupacionales mientras Kennedy y Bolitho (1985) han añadido el inglés para la ciencia y la tecnología.

Dado que el tema central de este artículo consiste en el aprendizaje del inglés técnico en la Formación Profesional, es conveniente explicar brevemente la situación del inglés dentro de la formación profesional reglada. La formación profesional pretende preparar a los alumnos para la actividad en un campo profesional y facilitar la inserción del alumno en el mercado laboral. Los alumnos pueden realizar prácticas no remuneradas en países de la Unión Europea, cuando están finalizando estudios. Por esta razón, el aprendizaje del inglés adquiere cierta relevancia en los centros públicos de formación profesional. El aprendizaje del inglés ha sido introducido en todos los ciclos formativos con la Ley Orgánica de Educación (2006).

El aprendizaje permanente es un factor clave, considerando las diferentes relaciones económicas y financieras entre España y el resto de países de la Unión Europea así como con otros países, donde el inglés es la lengua vehicular. Para fomentar el aprendizaje permanente, se ha creado los centros integrados de formación profesional. Estos centros persiguen completar la formación profesional existente y aumentar la calidad del sistema en su conjunto. La nueva red de centros integrados está en permanente contacto con la realidad del mercado laboral de su ámbito tanto con empresas nacionales como con empresas extranjeras. De ahí la importancia que adquiere el aprendizaje del inglés.

En un curso de inglés para fines específicos, adquiere relevancia el concepto “análisis de necesidades” (Munby, 1978). El análisis de necesidades se concibe como “the corner stone of ESP and leads to a very focused course” (Dudley-Evans y St. John, 1998: 122), es decir, se trata de un concepto clave que implica un curso muy especializado. Los autores se refieren, en particular, al concepto “necesidades del alumno” como elemento clave en la enseñanza de lenguas para fines específicos. La enseñanza del inglés para fines específicos está basada en el enfoque centrado en el alumno (Hutchinson y Waters, 1987; Dudley-



Evans y St. John, 1998), dado que el alumno es el protagonista en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje, siendo los contenidos del curso adaptados a sus necesidades comunicativas. Con respecto a las TIC aplicadas en la enseñanza del inglés para fines específicos, se han publicado numerosas investigaciones, entre las cuales destacan Lázaro, Pena y Vitalaru (2009) y Martín Monje (2010). Lázaro, Pena y Vitalaru (2009) realizan un estudio cualitativo centrado en la enseñanza del inglés aplicada al derecho. Martín Monje (2010) se centra en la enseñanza del inglés para fines específicos en un contexto docente universitario a distancia, tratándose de un experimento realizado dentro del programa de formación permanente “English for specific purposes”.

### **c. Los blogs**

A continuación, se comentará brevemente el estado de la cuestión en torno a los Blogs en la enseñanza de lenguas para fines específicos. Apenas hay estudios académicos especializados relacionados con el empleo de los blogs en la enseñanza de Inglés Técnico dentro de la Formación Profesional Reglada. Por ello, se ha considerado conveniente investigar la aplicación de los blogs en la enseñanza del inglés para fines específicos y, en concreto, el inglés especializado en el sector del Diseño y el Amueblamiento en el marco de la formación profesional reglada dentro del sistema educativo español.

Los autores más representativos son Arani (2005), Martín-Monje (2010) y Murray y Hourigan (2008). Arani (2005) desarrolló su experimento en el ámbito de la medicina. Martín-Monje (2010) analiza las posibilidades didácticas del blog como herramienta de aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa para fines específicos a través del curso online “*Scientific and technical English*”. Murray y Hourigan (2008) experimentan con alumnos de un curso de Lenguas y Tecnología con el fin de introducirles en el uso de las TIC durante el proceso de aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras.

## **4. METODOLOGÍA**

### **4.1. Identificación de un problema y contexto**

El problema de esta investigación sucede en el contexto de un centro integrado público de formación profesional, donde se encontró una carencia en competencia de la producción escrita mediante la observación y el análisis permanente de la realidad educativa de la asignatura de lengua inglesa de una clase de inglés en el primer curso de Grado Superior de la Familia Profesional de Diseño y Amueblamiento, tratándose pues de una clase de inglés para fines específicos y, en concreto, de inglés técnico.

En la enseñanza pública no universitaria, se ha observado claramente un bajo nivel educativo con respecto al inglés como lengua oficial del currículum (LOE, Real Decreto

1631/2006, E.S.O.). Hay una gran diversidad de niveles dentro de un mismo grupo de alumnos, en la Enseñanza Secundaria Obligatoria, y en la Enseñanza Postobligatoria no universitaria. Esto se ha podido observar en el Centro Integrado Público de Formación Profesional "Catarroja", Valencia, donde el autor de este trabajo impartió clases de inglés durante el curso académico 2013-2014, cuando se desarrolló el experimento de la presente investigación.

El bajo nivel educativo del inglés en la Formación Profesional se debe a que los alumnos no ven una aplicación práctica del idioma a corto plazo. Se puede distinguir claramente tres grupos de alumnos: 1. alumnos jóvenes con estudios universitarios y con algún conocimiento del inglés, 2. alumnos procedentes de Bachillerato con conocimientos muy básicos, y 3. un tercer grupo de alumnos cuya edad oscila entre 40 y 50 años. Estos alumnos parten de cero con el inglés. Esta es la realidad educativa en la Formación Profesional dada la precariedad laboral. Se hace pues necesaria esta investigación con el fin de ayudar a los alumnos a mejorar la calidad de la competencia en producción escrita en inglés en el marco del aprendizaje del inglés para fines específicos.

#### **4.2. Pregunta de investigación**

El ámbito científico de este trabajo es, por un lado, la corrección de los niveles de producción escrita del alumnado en la formación profesional reglada y, por otro, la corroboración o refutación de que la utilización de los blogs beneficiaría el desarrollo de la competencia en producción escrita, realizando diferentes tareas que se les asignaron a los alumnos a lo largo de todo el curso académico. Se establecen pues las siguientes preguntas de investigación:

1. ¿Puede influir el empleo de los blogs en la mejora de la competencia en producción escrita en lengua inglesa? 2. ¿Puede influir la utilización de los blogs en la mejora de la comprensión lectora en inglés? 3. En relación a la adquisición de vocabulario técnico en inglés, ¿cómo puede el uso de los blogs ayudar al alumnado a mejorar este aspecto? 4. ¿Puede el uso de los blogs aumentar la motivación del alumnado hacia el aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa?

#### **4.3. Hipótesis de partida**

La "hipótesis de trabajo" se establece como base de una investigación que puede confirmar o negar la validez de ésta. Con respecto al estudio del caso, las hipótesis se establecen mediante la observación y la recolección de datos, proporcionando así un ejemplo tomado de la vida real a partir de un contexto educativo concreto.

Las hipótesis de partida de esta investigación son: 1. La utilización del blog en la clase de lengua inglesa aumenta la motivación del alumnado, y tiene una influencia positiva en la

mejora de la competencia escrita, tanto en comprensión como en producción. 2. El empleo del blog en la clase de inglés para fines específicos ayuda a mejorar sustancialmente tanto en la comprensión lectora de textos en inglés técnico, así como en la adquisición de vocabulario técnico, adaptándose bien a las necesidades formativas bien a las necesidades laborales del alumnado.

#### **4.4. Estudio del Caso: características**

Robert E. Stake (2006, 1995, 1979) es pionero en la aplicación del estudio del caso en la evaluación educativa. Sus obras desarrollan la metodología del estudio de caso en la investigación cualitativa. Su libro *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995) es una referencia en los estudios de doctorado y postgrado a nivel internacional. Los principios teóricos de la investigación cualitativa del estudio de casos constituyen un conjunto de métodos de investigación de carácter naturalista, holístico, fenomenológico y etnográfico.

Merrian (1988) define el estudio de caso como particularista, descriptivo, heurístico e inductivo. Este método de investigación resulta útil para analizar problemas prácticos o situaciones determinadas, encontrando al final del estudio de caso el registro del caso, donde se expone de forma descriptiva, con cuadros, imágenes, recursos narrativos, etc. Existen diversas categorías del estudio del caso (Stake, 1994; Yin, 1993). Stake distingue tres tipos de estudios de caso: intrínsecos, instrumentales y colectivos, mientras Yin, por su parte, clasifica el estudio del caso en dos categorías que corresponden al estudio de caso único y al estudio de caso múltiple.

En cuanto a la enseñanza de idiomas, Labrador (1996: 531) define el estudio del caso como “Un conjunto de descripciones de una situación de la vida real que puede incluir datos cuantitativos, cuadros, gráficas, mapas, organigramas, soporte informático..., que plantea un problema y necesita una toma de decisión”. Por esta razón, el propósito del estudio del caso va dirigido a mejorar la realidad educativa mediante ejemplos que se producen en la vida real a partir de un contexto educativo concreto, respondiendo a preguntas tales “cómo” y “por qué” (Yin, 2004), permitiendo estos interrogantes concretar el problema inicial de una investigación de estudio de caso donde será necesario identificar un sistema integrado que constituirá el fenómeno objeto de estudio.

En relación a la enseñanza del inglés para fines específicos, Basturkmen (2010) y Long (2005) investigan experimentos, en los que han utilizado el estudio del caso como modelo de investigación. Basturkmen (2010) describe dos experimentos correspondientes a un curso de inglés para policías y un curso de inglés en el ámbito de la medicina. Long (2005) investiga en torno al aprendizaje del inglés en el ámbito de la hostelería (2005: 127-158) y la enseñanza del inglés para periodistas (2005: 182-199). En la presente investigación, se

ha elegido el estudio del caso porque en el experimento educativo se encuentra un ejemplo real y auténtico considerando la carencia en la competencia en producción escrita el elemento clave.

La investigación cualitativa se realiza mediante la realización de cuestionarios, la observación directa y entrevistas personales por parte del docente-investigador a los alumnos, por lo que, a continuación, se describirán los métodos cualitativos utilizados para el experimento educativo del presente trabajo.

#### **4.5. Métodos cualitativos**

Los datos cualitativos se obtienen a partir de tanto la realización de los cuestionarios como de la observación directa en el aula. Con respecto a los cuestionarios, se realizaron dos cuestionarios: uno al comienzo del curso escolar y el segundo al final del curso. El objetivo del primer cuestionario es recoger información del alumnado con respecto a su experiencia en el proceso de aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa, su familiaridad con las TIC, a nivel general, y con respecto al aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera. En cuanto al cuestionario final del curso, su objetivo será medir la actitud del alumno hacia el empleo de *Blogger* en lo que refiere a la consideración de la escritura como proceso. La principal finalidad de ambos cuestionarios será medir la motivación general del alumno hacia el inglés con el objetivo de comprobar si la motivación por el idioma se correlaciona con el uso del *Bloggig*. 23 alumnos, cuyas producciones escritas en *Blogger* han sido valoradas, conforman la muestra.

Ambos cuestionarios estarán accesibles en línea<sup>2</sup> a través de *Google Docs*, permitiendo así el cálculo automático de los resultados del cuestionario gracias a la hoja de cálculo generada en *Excel*. Se utilizará esta herramienta colaborativa online considerando dos motivos: En primer lugar, es recomendable considerar el ahorro de tiempo que implica en relación a la cuantificación y codificación de los datos. En segundo lugar, la realización en línea del cuestionario resulta más atractivo para los alumnos, viéndose pues incrementada su predisposición para colaborar y no teniendo que imprimir el cuestionario en formato papel.

La observación directa es una herramienta relevante en el ámbito de la educación dado que se trata de una forma de acercarse a la realidad educativa del alumnado y, por tanto, permite un análisis más exhaustivo del escenario de los alumnos. El investigador se beneficia de esta técnica en relación a la posibilidad de recoger información al mismo

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<sup>2</sup> Véase en:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1kWMEZgBodPqbut0hOd8Auh0PRgxEIjD4Fh3EnqKvg/edit> y  
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1SqPftTfjTtl12wJKiDnhA8yB-cWILqcZ9FD0m8OXIWc/edit#>

tiempo que se produce el proceso de aprendizaje por parte de los alumnos mientras éstos siguen las metodologías que se están investigando.

En la presente investigación, el registro de datos recogidos se encuentra disponible en las diferentes producciones escritas así como en las actividades de adquisición de vocabulario técnico visibles en la plataforma *Blogger*, donde se encuentran las interacciones escritas de los alumnos. Los datos de relevancia en el aula tradicional son guardados diariamente en “El cuaderno del profesor” en formato tradicional y en la programación de aula del curso. La plataforma *Blogger* desempeña el papel de instrumento mediador entre alumnos y profesor. El docente puede constatar todas las acciones realizadas por parte del alumnado en *Blogger*, en especial, el número de *posts* que los alumnos publican y el número de interacciones que se realizan en la plataforma. Toda esta información será de utilidad para realizar la triangulación de datos, sirviéndose también del cuestionario final. La observación directa será relevante durante todo el proceso del presente experimento puesto que esta técnica permite la alteración de diferentes aspectos según las necesidades de cada momento. Algunos ejemplos pueden ser la distribución de los alumnos en grupos así como la asignación de fechas límite para la realización y posterior publicación en *Blogger* de diversas actividades. El objetivo de la observación directa es identificar los posibles problemas con los que se puedan encontrar los alumnos con la utilización de *Blogger* en el aula. También se trata de poder conocer cómo los alumnos perciben el aprendizaje mediante el *Blogger*, aun considerando que, a principios del curso académico 2013-2014, se dedicaron dos sesiones al uso de esta herramienta para que los alumnos se familiarizaran con esta herramienta.

#### **4.6. Contexto y muestra**

El centro es un centro integrado público de formación profesional situado en un pueblo de la provincia de Valencia. En cuanto a la industria, destaca de manera relevante el sector del mueble. De ahí que una de las especialidades formativas que se imparten en el centro sea la familia profesional de madera, mueble y corcho; dividiéndose en dos titulaciones diferentes: el Ciclo de Grado Medio en Carpintería y Mueble y el Ciclo de Grado Superior en Diseño y Amueblamiento.

Con respecto a la recogida de datos y el análisis de estos, se recurre a la triangulación de datos (Pérez Serrano, 2006) con el fin de aumentar la propia validez de los resultados y conclusiones obtenidas, considerando datos cualitativos y datos cuantitativos. En este ensayo la triangulación se llevará a cabo mediante los datos cualitativos, que se recogen tanto a partir de los cuestionarios como de la observación directa, considerando el modelo del Estudio del Caso.

## 5. ANÁLISIS DE RESULTADOS

### 5.1. Datos cualitativos

- Cuestionario Inicial

Para la realización de ambos cuestionarios, se ha utilizado “Formulario” de *Google Drive*. Dado que no se disponía de información relacionada con las necesidades de aprendizaje del alumnado, los alumnos realizaron un cuestionario inicial de curso con el fin de proporcionar información interesante para la presente investigación. Este cuestionario inicial fue aplicado sobre 23 alumnos que formaban el grupo de alumnos participantes en el experimento. Sólo 19 alumnos participaron en el cuestionario. De este modo, se les animaría a los alumnos a tener motivación con respecto al aprendizaje del inglés mediante el *Blogging* como herramienta para fomentar la competencia en producción escrita, así como conseguir mejorar la comprensión lectora y el conocimiento de cierto vocabulario técnico en lengua inglesa dentro del sector en el que estos alumnos se estuvieron especializando durante sus estudios de formación profesional.

El cuestionario inicial consta de cinco bloques. Estos cinco bloques se denominan así: I. About you, II. About your habits related to learning English, III. About your habits related to the ICTs, IV. What you expect from the course y V. Other comments. A continuación, se realizará un análisis de los ítems más relevantes para la presente investigación.

El primer ítem a destacar corresponde al tercer ítem del bloque II, “*I would like to learn English because...*”. Nuestra intención es saber las razones por las cuales los alumnos quieren aprender inglés como lengua extranjera. Este ítem consta de 5 subítems:

1. I am thinking of moving abroad and working in the UK
2. I want to do FCT abroad and I also have to prepare official exams (EOI, Cambridge, etc.)
3. I would like to be able to listen to music and understand spoken English
4. I would like to be able to communicate orally and, in a written way, with people.
5. I would like to be able to read any kind of text.

Los resultados indican que el subítem 4 es el más destacado, obteniendo un porcentaje de 84.2% del alumnado. Este dato es bastante relevante puesto que demuestra el bajo nivel que existe con respecto al uso del inglés en situaciones comunicativas y auténticas. Un porcentaje de 31.6% estaría interesado en realizar prácticas no remuneradas en el extranjero (subítem 2), por lo que les interesaría superar exámenes oficiales de prestigio.

El subitem 1 es el de menor porcentaje (15.8%) de alumnos que se plantean aprender inglés con el fin de desplazarse al extranjero y trabajar en países de habla inglesa. De estos datos, se infiere que a los alumnos les preocupa más aprender inglés con respecto a las destrezas lingüísticas que aprender la lengua con el fin de ejercer su profesión en el extranjero.

El siguiente ítem es el cuarto del Bloque II, *"How long have you been studying English?"*. Se les pregunta a los alumnos sobre su previa experiencia con respecto al aprendizaje del inglés. Un 36.8% del alumnado ha estudiado inglés en un tiempo inferior a dos años. Un porcentaje de 31.6% ha aprendido inglés durante más de 5 años. Un 26.3% ha estudiado inglés entre un periodo de 2 y 3 años y, por último, un porcentaje muy reducido de 5.3% del grupo ha aprendido inglés entre 3 y 4 años, concluyendo pues que 12 alumnos, de un grupo de 19, tienen muy poca experiencia con respecto al aprendizaje del inglés mientras que, por otra parte, 6 alumnos afirman tener más de 5 años de experiencia aprendiendo inglés, confirmándose el bajo nivel educativo con respecto al inglés a principios del curso 2013-2014.

Con respecto al segundo bloque del cuestionario inicial, *"About your habits related to learning English"*, son de especial relevancia los ítems 3 y 4. El objetivo principal de este bloque es conocer los diferentes hábitos que los alumnos tienen en el momento de aprender inglés. Con respecto al ítem 3, *"I practice my English, writing and speaking"*, un 57.9% afirma no haber practicado nunca la producción escrita y la producción oral, mientras un 5.3% afirma practicar frecuentemente estas destrezas.

En cuanto al ítem 4, los resultados reflejan que un porcentaje aproximado de 57.9% nunca ha practicado las destrezas en comprensión lectora y en comprensión auditiva, mientras un 5.3% afirma haber practicado frecuentemente estas destrezas, obteniendo pues resultados similares al ítem 3. Se puede pues confirmar que un porcentaje alto de alumnos no disponen de un hábito consolidado en el aprendizaje del inglés, siendo necesario ejecutar medidas educativas para fomentar el aprendizaje del inglés como una actividad cotidiana de nuestros alumnos dentro del sistema educativo español.

En el tercer bloque, *"About your habits related to the ICTs"*, se pueden encontrar 4 ítems, de los cuales son de especial mención, en esta investigación, el ítem 1, *"1- I use ICT for work purposes"* y el ítem 4, *"I use Blogs, Wikis, Websites, Podcasts and any other ICT tools"*. La finalidad de este bloque es conocer los hábitos del alumnado con respecto al uso de las TIC en su vida cotidiana. En el ítem 1, los datos reflejan que un porcentaje de 42.1% afirma que no utiliza o no ha empleado nunca las TIC en el ámbito laboral. Un porcentaje de 36.8% afirma utilizar ocasionalmente las TIC. Un 21.1% utiliza las TIC frecuentemente

en el trabajo, siendo este porcentaje el menor. Estos datos son relevantes puesto que indican el grado de familiaridad por parte de los alumnos con respecto al uso de las TIC en el ámbito laboral. Se puede atisbar pues el hábito poco consolidado por parte de los participantes con respecto al empleo de las TIC en el trabajo.

El cuarto ítem persigue conocer qué tipo de herramientas utilizan los alumnos para así averiguar con qué herramientas tecnológicas los alumnos están más familiarizados. De nuevo, se puede observar claramente como el porcentaje de alumnos que nunca han utilizado estas plataformas online, salvo las redes sociales, asciende a un 42.1% en comparación a aquellos alumnos que han utilizado algunas de estas plataformas online frecuentemente, representando un 26,3%, lo cual resulta significativo.

En el cuarto bloque, *“What you expect from the course”*, se requiere de los alumnos que nos hagan saber cuáles son sus expectativas de aprendizaje con respecto al curso de inglés durante el curso académico 2013-14. Para tal fin, los alumnos tuvieron que seleccionar un mínimo de 3 opciones, de las 6 que se plantean en el siguiente gráfico.

Figura 1. Ítem 13 del Cuestionario Inicial



Cabe destacar, por su vinculación con las preguntas de investigación establecidas en esta investigación, que un porcentaje de 63.2% afirma que espera aprender vocabulario técnico en inglés relacionado con el sector de la madera y el mueble, dado que el objetivo de las diferentes producciones escritas será adaptar el proceso de aprendizaje a las necesidades de aprendizaje de los alumnos para poder utilizar correctamente vocabulario técnico en su apropiado contexto. Se puede observar que los alumnos desean aprender estructuras gramaticales propias del lenguaje técnico, así como esperan ser capaces de leer manuales técnicos en inglés relacionados con el ámbito del diseño y el amueblamiento. Ambas opciones representan el porcentaje de 52.6% del alumnado. Sin embargo, un 31.6% parecen mostrarse escépticos con respecto al uso de las TIC como herramientas de aprendizaje del inglés.



El quinto bloque, "Other comments", tiene por objetivo que los alumnos puedan expresarse libremente y puedan así aportar sugerencias que consideren relevantes con respecto al curso de inglés. Algunas de estas observaciones son:

1. Dame tiempo para familiarizarme con el idioma
2. Espero que las clases sean prácticas y amenas
3. Nunca he estudiado inglés, mi nivel es 0, empiezo desde 0.
4. He estudiado inglés hasta el nivel de secundaria

- Cuestionario Final de curso

El objetivo del cuestionario final era obtener información sobre el progreso del alumno, durante todo el curso académico, con respecto al aprendizaje del inglés mediante el *Bloggng*. Así, se podrá saber si los alumnos han podido adquirir nuevos hábitos con relación al aprendizaje del inglés y también en el empleo de blogs y *Google Docs* para mejorar su nivel de inglés. Teóricamente el cuestionario final debía ser aplicado sobre los 23 alumnos participantes en el experimento pero, en esta ocasión, sólo 17 alumnos<sup>3</sup> participaron en la realización del cuestionario final.

El cuestionario final de curso constaba de tres partes y de 8 ítems diferentes, de los cuales 4 ítems corresponden a la Parte I; 2 ítems están ligados con la Parte II y los últimos 2 ítems están dentro de la Parte III. Los 4 primeros ítems son preguntas cerradas, permitiendo únicamente a los alumnos elegir una sola opción mientras que los dos últimos ítems son preguntas abiertas, facilitando así a los alumnos que puedan aportar libremente sus aportaciones.

A continuación, se realizará un análisis, en términos generales, a partir de los datos obtenidos en los diferentes ítems que conforman el cuestionario final de curso. Con respecto a la Parte I, los ítems son: 1. ¿He mejorado mis hábitos de estudio con respecto al inglés?, 2. En caso afirmativo, ¿en qué aspectos?, 3. ¿He mejorado mis hábitos con respecto al uso de Nuevas Tecnologías? (Blogs, *Google Docs*, etc) y 4. En caso afirmativo, ¿en qué aspectos?

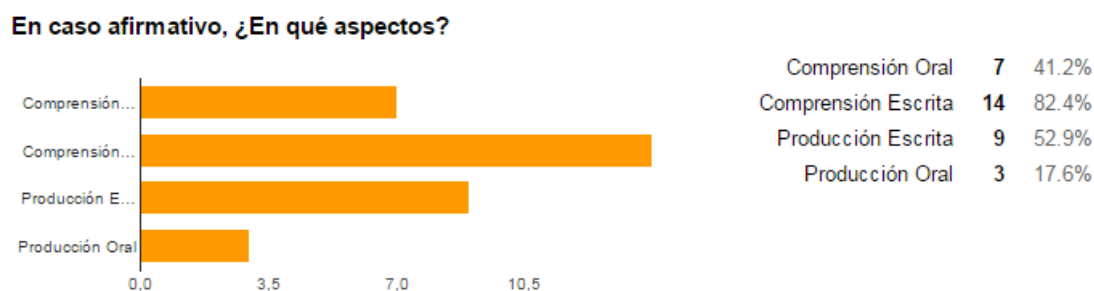
En el ítem 1, los alumnos únicamente tenían que responder de forma afirmativa o negativa. Según los datos mostrados, el 100% del alumnado afirma haber mejorado sus hábitos de estudio con respecto al inglés. Sin embargo, un 5.9% respondió que no ha mejorado sus hábitos de estudio, produciéndose así una confusión en los resultados. Esto

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<sup>3</sup><https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1SqPftTfjTtl12wJKiDnhA8yB-cWILqcZ9FD0m8OXIWc/viewanalytics>

se debe a que el estudiante 10<sup>4</sup> respondió afirmativa y negativamente a la pregunta. En el ítem 2, los alumnos debían responder únicamente si han respondido afirmativamente al primer ítem. En este ítem, los alumnos deben concretar en qué aspectos consideran haber mejorado con respecto al aprendizaje del inglés. En esta gráfica se pueden atisbar los resultados.

Figura 2. Ítem 2 del Cuestionario Final



Un porcentaje de 82.4% afirma haber mejorado sustancialmente con respecto a la comprensión escrita, surgiendo una significativa diferencia con respecto al porcentaje de alumnos que afirman haber mejorado su producción escrita (52.9%). Se deduce pues que un número considerable de alumnos ha adquirido una base consolidada de vocabulario técnico del idioma inglés dentro del ámbito del diseño y el amueblamiento. Se puede inferir que el uso del *Blogging* no ha sido satisfactorio para los alumnos en lo concerniente a la competencia en producción escrita.

El objetivo del tercer ítem consiste en la toma de conciencia con respecto al uso de herramientas TIC por parte del alumnado con respecto al aprendizaje del inglés. Los alumnos únicamente tenían que responder de forma afirmativa o negativa. Un 70.6% afirma haber progresado satisfactoriamente con respecto al uso de las TIC en el aprendizaje del inglés mientras un 29.4 % no les ha reportado beneficios el uso de las TIC, pudiendo ser, por tanto, un dato relevante para esta investigación.

El cuarto ítem sólo será respondido por los alumnos que hayan contestado afirmativamente al tercer ítem. Se exponen aquí algunos comentarios de los alumnos:

1. El caso de los Blogs nunca los había utilizado y en el aspecto de *Google Drive* me ha sorprendido la capacidad de poder almacenar datos en una nube. Ciertamente gracias al profesor he podido mejorar y conocer estas nuevas tecnologías (...) con práctica y esfuerzo se consiguen.

<sup>4</sup> <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1mSZbR-DO6eQ3vxFUclTxx35fRRvV2ZmZ9eteVyth90w/edit#gid=0>

2. He aprendido a utilizar el blog.
3. He mejorado mi vocabulario técnico.
4. He aprendido a utilizar *Google Docs* para trabajar en grupo con mis colegas. Me parece una herramienta con mucha potencialidad (...) El blog también me ha parecido una idea muy interesante, (...) quizás el año que viene le podremos dar una vuelta de tuerca más.

Con respecto a la Parte II, "Autoevaluación y Coevaluación", el objetivo es ayudar a los alumnos a que tomen conciencia respecto de si sus expectativas planteadas al principio del curso han sido cumplidas o no. En el primer ítem, "¿he cumplido con mis expectativas?", los alumnos únicamente tenían que responder afirmativa o negativamente. Un porcentaje de 88.2% afirma que sus expectativas se han cumplido mientras un porcentaje de 11.8% declara no verse satisfechos, siendo pues superior el número de alumnos que están satisfechos con su propio aprendizaje.

En el segundo ítem, los alumnos determinarán qué contenidos han aprendido, a lo largo del curso académico 2013-14, durante la realización del experimento. Los datos reflejan que un porcentaje de 94.1% considera haber consolidado bien la gramática integrada con el vocabulario técnico en inglés. Un 88.2% afirma haber aprendido bastante bien vocabulario técnico relacionado con su especialidad. Esto se debe a la elaboración del diccionario online como primera producción escrita. Un 70.6% ha consolidado su nivel de inglés mediante el *Blogging*. Se puede establecer pues que el uso del *Blogging* efectivamente ha ayudado a mejorar su nivel de inglés.

La parte III, "Feedback. Evaluación al curso y al blog", consta de dos ítems que son dos preguntas abiertas, por lo que los alumnos podrán expresar sus opiniones con respecto al curso de inglés y con relación al blog. En el primer ítem, los alumnos expondrán su opinión con respecto al enfoque del curso de inglés. Se exponen aquí algunos comentarios:

1. En general el curso de inglés me ha gustado bastante, (...), pero luego con el blog y demás actividades, (...), se han hecho más amenas y divertidas las clases.
2. El estudio de vocabulario técnico me ha parecido una muy buena idea (...) El blog ha venido muy bien para fijar unos conceptos básicos, y para combinar el lenguaje gráfico con las palabras. (...) asociar una palabra con una imagen ayuda mucho el aprendizaje (...).
3. He mejorado mi vocabulario técnico, no tenía ninguna base de este vocabulario.

4. El uso del blog ha sido una herramienta nueva que te permite relacionarte con los otros alumnos en línea y aprender a hacer trabajos en la nube. En el segundo ítem, los alumnos debían exponer su opinión con respecto al blog. También se les invita a escribir propuestas de mejora para seguir desarrollando esta iniciativa. Algunas propuestas son:

1. Fomentar más si cabe este tipo de enseñanzas
2. Sería bueno tener un ejemplo de lo que sería un blog terminado para poder consultarlo y saber qué hay que poner en cada apartado, ...
3. Participar individualmente para poder extender el trabajo, al hacerlo en grupos nos ha venido bien para aprender de una forma amena
4. Más ejercicios para practicar la gramática, el vocabulario técnico y lo uniría con el blog porque los alumnos practican inglés y aprenden a utilizar el blog
5. Creo que hay buenas bases y la propuesta es interesante. Introduciría videos realizados por los alumnos como forma de integrarlos de manera más personal.

- Observación Directa

En esta investigación, cabe destacar que no hubo interacciones significativas en los blogs grupales de los alumnos. Los alumnos simplemente realizaron las actividades propuestas como tarea para practicar la competencia en producción escrita, publicando sus trabajos en sus blogs de grupos, no habiendo, por tanto, lugar a interacciones que fueran significativas, a pesar de los varios intentos realizados por parte del investigador. Una razón pudo ser la falta de tiempo por parte del alumnado, optando por hacer las tareas en los ordenadores disponibles en el aula de inglés, dado que los alumnos no mostraron disponibilidad para trabajar en casa desde sus ordenadores personales.

Mediante la entrevista directa con los alumnos, se pudo obtener las siguientes consideraciones: 1- Impaciencia por parte del profesor dada la original reticencia por parte del alumnado para realizar las producciones escritas en sus ordenadores personales, 2- Poca motivación por parte de un porcentaje alto de alumnos al principio del experimento, puesto que no parecían verle una aplicabilidad práctica a corto plazo con respecto al aprendizaje del inglés. Para solventar el primer punto, el investigador realizó vía online un curso titulado "Crea tu blog de Aula"<sup>5</sup> con el fin de ayudar al alumnado a

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<sup>5</sup> <http://selectic.es/servicios/sector-educacion/cursos-educacion/curso-crea-tu-blog-de-aula>

realizar sus propios blogs grupales. En cuanto a la segunda consideración, era comprensible que los alumnos se mostraran reticentes al principio, siendo ésta su primera experiencia.

Se ha intentado, de forma resumida, analizar los datos cualitativos a partir de los cuestionarios y la observación directa. Realizando los alumnos un cuestionario inicial de curso y uno final, se pretendía comprobar si el modelo del estudio de caso aportaría un beneficio positivo con respecto a la competencia en producción escrita en lengua inglesa y, particularmente, en el inglés técnico. En cuanto a los cuestionarios, el primero nos aportaría información en torno a las necesidades formativas con respecto al aprendizaje del inglés por parte de los alumnos y el segundo viene a indicar retroalimentación con respecto al curso de inglés y, en particular, sobre la integración de las TIC en el aula de inglés mediante el *Blogging*. La observación directa viene a complementar toda esta información cualitativa.

## **6. DISCUSIÓN Y CONCLUSIONES**

Se ha intentado dar respuesta a las preguntas de investigación formuladas en este trabajo. A partir de los datos obtenidos en el análisis de los resultados según los métodos cualitativos, no se puede corroborar que la competencia en producción escrita mediante el *Blogging* en el aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa para fines específicos y, en particular, en la enseñanza del inglés técnico en la formación profesional haya mejorado. Sin embargo, sí se puede confirmar que ha habido una mejora significativa en lo que respecta a la competencia en comprensión lectora en inglés técnico, así como en la adquisición de vocabulario técnico en inglés, respondiendo pues afirmativamente a la segunda y tercera pregunta de investigación.

Para concluir, considerando que la bibliografía con respecto a la aplicación del *Blogging* en la enseñanza del inglés para fines específicos y, en particular, la enseñanza del inglés técnico en la formación profesional reglada del sistema educativo español es muy poca, resulta interesante comentar que este artículo podría servir como punto de partida para una futura investigación en forma de tesis de doctorado con respecto a la aplicación del *Blogging* en la enseñanza del inglés tanto en la enseñanza secundaria obligatoria como en la enseñanza postobligatoria no universitaria.

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# Using Total Physical Response Scaffolding to Improve Oral Communication Skills in Online Contexts

## El Uso del Andamiaje Instruccional con la Respuesta Física Total (RTP) para Mejorar las Habilidades de la Comunicación Oral en Contextos Virtuales

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### **Abstract**

This action research project studied the effect of providing interactional feedback through the use of Total Physical Response (TPR) gestures to scaffold learner's spoken responses in an online classroom. It was meant to answer two questions: Does TPR scaffolding enhance students' oral communication skills? Could TPR be used to scaffold learning and increase student autonomy in problem areas? This research began after noting that many of the students would simply repeat after the instructor when making mistakes without improving their pronunciation or applying the appropriate syntax or lexis when speaking. In order to provide feedback and elicit self-corrections amongst the students, gestures were incorporated as a means of scaffolding their answers. After recording five, 25-minute classes conducted with four students and transcribing these lessons, it was concluded that TPR scaffolding helped to elicit corrections, improve oral communication skills, and increase learner autonomy.

**Key words:** Interactional feedback, Total Physical Response (TPR), Scaffolding.

### **Resumen**

Este proyecto de investigación-acción estudió el efecto de proveer comentario interaccional por el uso de gestos basados en la teoría de la Respuesta Física Total (RTP) para apoyar las respuestas habladas de los estudiantes en un aula virtual. Fue creado para responder a dos preguntas: ¿cómo mejora el andamiaje instruccional con la RTP las



habilidades de la comunicación de los estudiantes? ¿Se puede usar la RTP para apoyar el aprendizaje y aumentar la autonomía estudiantil donde confrontan dificultades? Esta investigación empezó después de notar que muchas de los estudiantes simplemente repetían al profesor cuando se equivocaban sin mejorar su pronunciación o aplicar la sintaxis o el lexis apropiado cuando respondían. Para proveer comentario y solicitar unas auto-correcciones de los estudiantes, los gestos fueron incorporados como una manera de apoyar sus respuestas. Después de recordar cinco clases de 25 minutos con cuatro estudiantes y transcribirlas, fue concluido que el andamiaje instruccional con la RTP solicitó correcciones, mejoró las habilidades de la comunicación oral, y aumentó la autonomía de los estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** el andamiaje instruccional, la Respuesta Física Total (RTP), la comunicación oral

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This research studies the effect of the interactional feedback via TPR gesturing on students' oral communication skills. This topic was chosen because the students were having trouble incorporating the appropriate pronunciation, syntax, and lexis in their classroom speaking tasks. Since the teaching is one-on-one, the students did not have the opportunity to practice with their peers. Thus, they often repeated information, feedback, and corrections provided from the teacher. In response, Total Physical Response gestures were incorporated into the classes as to make the lessons more interactive and to elicit more accurate and genuine responses for the students. This interactional feedback encouraged the students to participate more and produce language independently rather than reflecting methods of rote repetition.

These classes take place via an online platform. The student can see the instructor, and the teacher can see the teacher via webcam. The students can also see a PowerPoint with text and images. They can interact with the PowerPoint by writing on it in order to complete certain activities. The role of the instructor is to teach 25-minute classes that focus on reading, writing, listening, speaking, social science, and math skills. The teacher guides the students throughout the sessions, and the main goal of each lesson is for the students to produce specific vocabulary words and key sentences autonomously.

The pupils are Chinese students aged from five to thirteen years old. These classes are private lessons taken outside of their schools. The pupils chosen to focus on specifically are as follows: Tom (age eleven), Maggie (age ten), Beckham (age seven), and Apple (age nine). These four students were selected because they represented common speech-

problems in the online classroom as related to pronunciation, syntax, and lexis in oral communication. Regarding pronunciation errors, Tom struggled to pronounce and read multi-syllabic words correctly, while Maggie also had difficulties in producing accurate speech when blending vowel sounds. When considering syntax, Beckham needed prompting to form grammatically-correct, full sentences. With respect to lexical issues, Apple lacked confidence in responding to questions independently by applying the correct vocabulary terms to her speech. Many of these issues stemmed from the fact that these students only had the opportunity to learn from the teacher via repetition.

In order to encourage the students to interact more in the classroom and produce key sentences and vocabulary words autonomously, gestures were used to scaffold their learning. Although Chinese students are more accustomed to learning via repetition and direct correction sequences, interactional feedback and scaffolding measures allowed the students to produce more genuine speech while simultaneously improving their pronunciation, syntax, and vocabulary-related oral communication skills. Furthermore, students should be encouraged to autonomously produce language and correct themselves when necessary by means of greater interaction, such as prompting. In turn, Total Physical Response scaffolding was applied in order to elicit correct answers without the need for constant repetition and in order to motivate these students to interact and produce more genuine responses in this online context.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to better understand how to use the Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology to scaffold students' learning in an online atmosphere, one must take the following aspects into account: the online classroom in comparison to the Chinese education system, the importance of interactional feedback, TPR teaching methods, and applying scaffolding measures to encourage more genuine responses.

### **a. The online classroom**

The students take lessons through a Chinese company specializing in online English lessons for young learners. The teachers are native speakers who practice English language skills with Chinese children aged from about four to thirteen years old. The material represents a hybrid when considering Chinese and American education practices. The teachers are largely North American and use student-centered learning practices. Thus, the lessons largely focus on student output and production of key vocabulary words and target sentences.

These classrooms are designed for Chinese students who attend daily classes in various parts of China. They join these online classrooms with preconceived notions of how teaching and learning should take place. Due to the influence of Confucianism, students have a great deal of respect for their teachers, who lead the class in a slightly authoritarian manner (Hawkins and Stites, 1991: 44). Hawkins and Stites note how teachers often direct virtually all conduct in the class, and given this context, there is not enough room for creativity and the development of critical thinking skills (1991: 51). Students typically repeat after the teacher and only produce language when explicitly told to do so (Hawkins and Stites, 1991: 51).

### **b. Interactional feedback**

In contrast to traditional Chinese teaching methodologies, students should be encouraged to produce language more autonomously through increased classroom interaction. In these one-on-one lessons, positive student-teacher communication is essential in student development. Piker and Rex found that this interaction is essential as student progress in their second languages; English language learners should learn, play, and spend time with English speakers to benefit from these vital exchanges (2008: 188, 192).

Part of student-teacher interaction includes the instructor providing feedback. Teachers should allow time for students to independently respond, as Tobin explains that there is a direct correlation between a longer average wait time (of three seconds or more) to higher cognitive levels of success (1987: 69). After waiting for an appropriate response, teachers may model or provide feedback to help the student. Gurzynski-Weiss and Révész note how feedback can be given more naturally during teacher-student interaction in real classroom contexts (2012: 875). This type of natural feedback can be provided explicitly or implicitly. Nassaji and Fotos explain how the use of implicit, interactional feedback can facilitate second language learning through exposure to grammatical forms (130: 2004). These measures allow students to better understand the material while drawing the learners' attention implicitly to grammatical forms or problem areas.

Seeing as it is a necessary part of the teaching and learning process, providing feedback while optimizing interaction is ideal in the online classroom. Thus, implicit, interactional feedback via gestures was applied to lessons in order to enhance the students' oral communication skills as relate to accuracy especially.

### **c. Gesture-based scaffolding**

In order to provide feedback for students while maximizing communication, teachers can employ gestures based on the theoretical practice of TPR.

Davidheiser explains how TPR is a popular type of teaching method which synchronizes learning vocabulary and language structures with body movement (2002: 26). The Total Physical Response method of teaching had been largely used to teach commands, vocabulary, and motivational activities in the classroom (Asher, 1969: 3-17).

Gestures could also be employed to scaffold learning and student responses. Walqui outlines the major types of scaffolding measures teachers use to aid students in their comprehension and production of a foreign language: Modeling, bridging, contextualizing, schema building, representing text, developing metacognition (2006: 170-177). Gesturing can be used to model correct responses and contextualize the appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures applicable to the responses.

Park et al. found that the use of gestures was valuable because it prompted word retrieval amongst learners (2006: 20). O'Neill & Miller's study concluded that gesturing can also scaffold children's understanding of linguistic rules through an additional reinforcement of meaning (2013: 1525). Thus, gestures become applicable in reinforcing lexis and syntax.

Students can respond to this feedback in a plethora of ways. Lyster and Ranta explain the possible responses with the concept of uptake: "A student's utterance that immediately follows the teachers' feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student's initial utterance" (1997: 49). The authors discuss how learners can acknowledge the feedback, repeat their original mistake, repair the error, or partially repair it (Lyster and Ranta, 1997: 49-51). TPR scaffolding would prompt student uptake in eliciting and/or providing a repair for their errors.

Scaffolding can be provided to aid students to become autonomous learners. George shows how teachers scaffolded their students' oral communication skills by providing communication patterns to follow (11: 2011). Later, these patterns should be removed when students internalized the grammatical rules and produced the language independently (George, 13-14: 2011). Initially, the students will notice the gestures; over time, they should apply such gestures to speech in order to correct their mistake without relying on the TPR scaffolding.

#### **d. A new method: TPR scaffolding**

When considering the students' educational background, theories of interactional feedback, the TPR method, and scaffolding, it was concluded that unobtrusive gesturing would benefit the students in their English language learning experience. Thus, the students were provided with interactional feedback through TPR gestures as to scaffold

their oral communication skills related to pronunciation, syntax, and lexis. The goals of this intervention were to improve oral communication skills and encourage these young learners to produce more genuine language independently. The main research questions were the following: Does TPR scaffolding enhance students' oral communication skills? Could TPR be used to scaffold learning and increase student autonomy in problem areas?

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

Before starting this research, a research journal was regularly updated to evaluate how TPR was being used in the lessons and the how the students were responding to these gestures. Based on the students' language behavior that was noted starting in October, the students needed more interaction and scaffolding in their lessons to improve their speaking skills (H, 1-28: 2016). Thus, an observation log of the classes was also regularly updated. Later, this same structure was applied to note the students' language behavior in response to the TPR scaffolding intervention.

Based on these observations, it was concluded that many of the learners had difficulties in the areas of pronunciation, syntax, and lexis (H, 1-28: 2016). Thus, four students were chosen to study more closely, and notes on TRP scaffolding usage were kept. These notes served to evaluate the students' learning in certain problem areas in order to improve their oral communication skills.

During the months of November and December of 2016, a log of the students' language behavior and their reactions to the TPR gestures was regularly updated. After reviewing these logs, salient parts of the lessons were transcribed in order to better understand the students' responses to the gestures and to see if TPR enhanced their oral communication skills online classroom. The findings and discussion include various "episodes" from the lessons that have been organized into patterns for each of the four students.

Previous teachers' comments about their lessons with the selected students were also included in order to show that the observances about the students' difficulties were not biased. Other teachers shared the same ideas regarding these specific students' difficulties in learning English.

### **4. RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1. Pronunciation**

##### *4.1.1. Tom: pronouncing multi-syllabic words*

TPR scaffolding was incorporated into classes with Tom (eleven years old) in order to correct his pronunciation of difficult vocabulary words. Tom's lessons included higher-

level materials that were not as compatible with TPR practices (H 2016: 12), but gestures were implemented to help Tom slow down when reading and pronounce words correctly. At first, Tom had difficulty pronouncing multi-syllabic words. He struggled with reading, but gestures helped him to sound out words like “vegetables” by clapping when saying the various syllables (H 15: 2016). Other teachers noticed this issue with Tom as well. Another teacher commented the following: “Tom knows his English but makes a lot of pronunciation errors. Make sure he is on the right path to making responsible decisions about pronunciation” (Comment MC-L3-U9-LC2-10 2016).

TPR scaffolding helped Tom become more confident in his pronunciation skills. At first, Tom would simply repeat after the teacher when encountering multi-syllabic words as seen with the word “skyscraper” in Transcript 1.1. TPR scaffolding aided Tom in learning how to break up the sounds of multi-syllabic words by himself. Gestures were used to break down difficult words into parts/syllables so that Tom could both see and hear the difference when pronouncing the word.

This method encouraged Tom to use these harder words in sentences. In the following lesson, Tom had not gained the confidence to challenge himself to use multi-syllabic words like “skyscraper” in full sentences or appropriate responses yet (see Transcript 1.2). With the use of TPR scaffolding, Tom also began to answer questions autonomously with responses that contained multi-syllabic words. Transcript 1.3 shows how he independently used words like “skyscraper” with more confidence and fluency. During his unit assessment, he read the word “skyscraper” perfectly, and he produced the word on his own in order to respond to the question, “What are the places to go in the city?” (see Transcript 1.4).

After the intervention of TPR scaffolding, Tom produced multi-syllabic words like “skyscraper” by himself when reading passages and responding to the questions. The use of TPR scaffolding with Tom reflects improved pronunciation and more independent, meaningful production in oral communication skills.

#### *4.1.2. Maggie: reinforcing vowel sounds in word blending*

Maggie (nine years old) had trouble distinguishing between different vowel sounds and blending them herself. This issue was first observed when she attempted to blend -im and -am words (like “rim” and “ram”), which sounded almost identical (H, 19: 2016). Other teachers noticed her struggle as well: “Maggie does a great job with Nouns, Verbs, and animals, but she has a hard time with pronunciation.” (SJC 2016). These sounds were modeled for Maggie to repeat, but the production of the vowel sounds in these minimal pairs was not reinforcing this auditory difference. Seeing as Maggie was more of a

kinesthetic learner and loved to both see gestures and use them herself (H, 3: 2016), TPR scaffolding was the perfect intervention for her.

As seen in Transcript 2.1, Maggie had difficulty saying words with -ab and -ad sounds. Simply repeating the correct pronunciation of such blends after the instructor was not working effectively. Oral gestures were used with different words to exaggerate the way in which native speakers hold their mouths when pronouncing the word; in turn, Maggie copied these gestures and accurately pronounced the key vowel sounds (see Transcript 2.1).

By having the instructor point to her teeth and lips when pronouncing these different vowel blends, Maggie could both see and hear the difference. She began to mimic these gestures and pronunciation in order to produce the correct vowel sounds regularly in her lessons. As shown in Transcript 2.2, Maggie did not need the instructor to repeat or model the vowel blends first. With TPR scaffolding, gestures were only applied to remind Maggie how to hold her mouth when producing the minimal pairs. Transcript 2.3 shows how Maggie produced “-ad” word blends without the need for modeling or repetition.

During her unit assessment (Transcript 2.4), gestures were not necessary to remind Maggie how to pronounce “-ad” and “-ab” words correctly. She learned how to blend these vowel sounds autonomously. Thus, the use of TPR scaffolding helped Maggie to improve her oral communication skills by pronouncing vowel blends more autonomously. These scaffolding to self-correct her pronunciation rather than repeating after the teacher.

## **4.2. Syntax**

### *4.2.1. Beckham: eliciting correct sentence structures*

Beckham (seven years old) had difficulty applying his knowledge of syntax (combining nouns, verbs, adjectives, and articles) in order to create sentences (H 28: 2016). Beckham learned vocabulary words such as “happy,” “sad,” and “mad” quickly (H 28: 2016), but he had some difficulty creating sentences with these adjectives. Rather than simply providing the sentences for Beckham to repeat and memorize, TPR scaffolding provided increased interaction, improved oral communication skills, and more independent production within the lesson.

TPR gestures were employed in order to elicit feedback for Beckham so that he could produce a full sentence such as “I am Happy” or “This is a computer.” As seen in Transcript 3.1 the gesturing of the emotion “mad” helped Beckham to create a sentence on his own. During the next lesson (Transcript 3.2), Beckham also had a moment when he struggled to produce a target sentence including a pronoun and an emotion. By using TPR scaffolding,

Beckham produced a full sentence without the need for a direct verbal correction and repetition sequence.

TPR scaffolding was also used to reinforce the use of articles (See Transcript 3.3). Beckham understood he needed to insert the article “a” when he was shown one finger from the instructor; he consequently corrected his response without the need for a verbal correction from the instructor. Later, Beckham understood the need to use articles when responding to questions. (see Transcript 3.4). After continuing to use TPR scaffolding, Beckham produced a sentence with the correct article and noun (see Transcript 3.5). Language modeling was no longer necessary; after seeing gestures, and Beckham responded with the correct sentence structure.

Beckham autonomously produced two sentence structures with the help of TPR scaffolding. Over the course of five lessons, his lessons included greater student-teacher collaboration outside of repetition-based learning and reflected improved oral communication skills. In turn, TPR scaffolding allowed Beckham to apply his knowledge of syntax to improve his oral communication skills as he successfully produced full sentences more independently.

### **4.3. Lexis**

#### *4.3.1. Apple: applying vocabulary to responses*

Apple (nine years old) was student with great reading skills. She largely understood meaning through written examples, but Apple had difficulties answering questions on her own (H 18: 2016). Other teachers saw this issue with Apple: “Apple is a good student. She reads well. Encourage her to speak more and answer questions” (CNH 2016). Another teacher noted, “Apple gets distracted easily and I can’t find too much to hold her attention. I’m trying to make it a fun class! I tried to have some extra conversation but she ignores what she doesn’t know” (Comment MC-L2-U6-LC1-5 2016). Most of the time, Apple would read the answer written on the PowerPoint, but she would be unable to produce a thoughtful answer independently. Thus, TPR scaffolding was used to reinforce the meaning of responses and words and to model responses.

As shown in Transcript 4.1, Apple had difficulty responding to more personal questions such as “What are your favorite toys?” By providing an example response reinforced with a gesture, Apple understood how to reply appropriately. Consequently, Apple began to answer questions using such gestures rather than relying on the text and pre-written responses. Transcript 4.2 also shows how Apple would attempt to answer questions with the wrong form. TPR scaffolding was applied to vocabulary terms to reinforce their meanings so that Apple could understand the question and produce an accurate response.



Apple began to produce responses more independently and thoughtfully. She applied verbs to full sentence responses rather than misunderstanding the questions and attempting to answer with a simple “yes” or “no” (see Transcript 4.3). After, Apple independently applied the vocabulary terms, like the verb “swing,” to other responses. Transcript 4.4 shows how Apple’s oral communications skills had improved to the point where she responded to a new question based on her previous understanding of the verb “swing.”

In conclusion, the TPR scaffolding helped Apple to learn how to apply her knowledge of lexis when responding to questions. She interacted more in class because she had to pay attention to the gestures rather than just reading the pre-written responses on the PowerPoint slides to gain meaning. TPR gestures enhanced her oral communication skills since she did not need to repeat after the instructor when making mistakes, learned how to self-correct, and produced key language (vocabulary terms) autonomously.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

After compiling the data on the four students, it was observed that all of these students showed enhanced oral communication skills and more independent production with TPR scaffolding. All students went through the same basic steps: At first, they repeated information and noticed these gestures. Then, they learned how to respond and apply the pronunciation, syntax, or vocabulary-related feedback to their spoken responses. Finally, they became independent in their learning and no longer relied on gestures to produce accurate speech. Altogether, TPR scaffolding helped each student improve their oral communication skills in various problem areas—pronunciation, syntax, or lexis—while every student produced such language more autonomously.

Given these results, TPR scaffolding measures can be applied in order to improve oral communication skills, classroom interaction, student talk time, and the autonomous production of meaningful language. TPR will continue to be used to aid the four students who were observed, and TPR scaffolding will be extended to enhance the communication skills of more students in the program. This research shows how this method reinforces vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical concepts and also keeps students motivated throughout the lessons. TPR scaffolding could especially help kinesthetic learners and students who have difficulties interacting or staying focused.

This research has brought attention to Chinese learners’ difficulties in the online classroom and issues related to interaction in a one-on-one atmosphere. With this method, the students have the opportunity to thoughtfully produce rather than simply repeat the

appropriate language. Thus, TPR scaffolding provides a solution in which gestures can model and elicit correct responses implicitly while enhancing oral communication and independent speaking skills.

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## APPENDIXES

### Transcripts: Tom

#### *Transcript 1.1*

##### **Student Tom**

*November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 2:00 pm*

*Life in the City: Lesson 9*

Teacher: Tom, What is this? (circles picture of the skyscraper; mouths skyscraper while clapping three times)

Student Tom: it is uhhhhh.....

.....

(Teacher shows the text: "It is a skyscraper." Tom tries to read)

Student Tom: (teacher claps three times) sky sruh uhhhhh...sky scruh aper.

Teacher: Good. Sky-scrape-er (claps three times).

Student Tom: Skyscraper.

Teacher: What do people do in the skyscraper?

Student: People work in the sky...scarper.

#### *Transcript 1.2*

##### **Student Tom**

*November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 1:00 pm*

*Life in the City: Lesson 10*

Teacher: Tom, what is this place?

Student Tom: It is a sky uh scrap uh er

Teacher: Sky-scrape-er (gestures different level of building for each syllable).

Student Tom: Skyscraper

Teacher: What do people do in the skyscraper?

Student Tom: People work there.

*Transcript 1.3***Student Tom***November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 1:00 pm**Lesson 11: My Life in the City*

Teacher: Tom, what is this place?

Student Tom: It is a skyscraper.

Teacher: Good—skyscraper (teacher gestures three syllables and floors for “skyscraper”).

Student Tom: Skyscraper.

Teacher: Beautiful.

*Transcript 1.4***Student Tom***November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 1:30 pm**Unit Assessment Lesson 12*

Teacher: Life in the City. A city...

Student Tom: (*reading*) A city is a big place. Wa-one can see tall skyscrapers and wide roads.

Teacher: Uh huh.

Student Tom: (*reading*) There are many place to go in the city like the parks, stores, the stadium, and the zoo.

Teacher: Beautiful.

.....

Teacher: What are the places to go in the city?

Student Tom: Uh, skyscrapers, parking garage...

**Transcripts: Maggie***Transcript 2.1***Student Maggie***November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016; 1:00 pm**What is in My Neighborhood?: Lesson 3*

Teacher: Let's practice these words (circles word blend “mab”).

Student Maggie: Mab.

Teacher: Mab and...

Student Maggie: Mayd.

Teacher: Mad.

Student Maggie: Mad, mad.

Teacher: Very good. MaB (points to lips).

Student Maggie: Mab.

Teacher: MaD (points to teeth).  
 Student Maggie: Mad (Maggie smiles wide and shows teacher her teeth).  
 Teacher: Very good good. Let's practice these two...suh...ab...  
 Student Maggie: Sab.  
 Teacher: Sab and (gestures crying when writing sad).  
 Student Maggie: Sayd.  
 Teacher: Good. SaD (points to teeth).  
 Student Maggie: Sad  
 Teacher: Good. SaB (points to lips)  
 Student Maggie: Sab.  
 Teacher: SaD (points to teeth).  
 Student Maggie: Sad.  
 Teacher: Good. Let' do one more...(writes "Rab")  
 Student Maggie: Ruh, ab, rab.  
 Teacher: Rab. Very good. Let's try, ruh-aD (points to teeth).  
 Student Maggie: Rad.  
 Teacher: Very good job Maggie! That was beautiful!

### *Transcript 2.2*

#### **Student Maggie**

*November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016; 1:00 pm*

*What is in my neighborhood?: Lesson 4*

Teacher: How about this word (writes "tab" and points to lips)?  
 Student Maggie: Tab.  
 Teacher: Uh huh. Tab. How about this word? (writes "tad" and points to teeth).  
 Student Maggie: Tad.  
 Teacher: Tad. Good job!

*Transcript 2.3***Student Maggie***November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 1:00 pm**What is in My Neighborhood?: Lesson 5*

Teacher: Can you say this word? (circles "mad," opens sound wide and points to teeth)

Student Maggie: Mad, mad.

Teacher: Uh huh. And this word? (circles "lad" and mouths the word, pointing to her teeth)

Student Maggie: Lad. Lad.

Teacher: Beautiful. This word? (circles "yad" and mouths the word, pointing to her teeth)

Student Maggie: Yad. yad

Teacher: Great job Maggie. Very nice work.

*Transcript 2.4***Student Maggie***November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 1:00 pm**Unit Assessment Lesson 6*

Teacher: Alright Maggie. Let's start with -ab. Can you read this word?

Student Maggie: (*reading*) Ab. Fab.

Teacher: Uh huh. Fab.

Student Maggie: (*reading*) Fab, tab, mab.

Teacher: Uh huh.

Student Maggie: (*reading*) Cab, vab.

Teacher: Uh huh.

Student Maggie: (*reading*) Rab, bab, dab.

Teacher: Beautiful.

Student Maggie: (*reading the word lab*) Aab.

Teacher: /L/ (makes fingers into L shape).

Student Maggie: Lab.

Teacher: Lab. Uh huh. And...

Student Maggie: (*reading*) Yab.

Teacher: Great job Maggie. Let's try ad.

Student Maggie: Ad.

Teacher: Can you read this word?

Student Maggie: (*reading*) Fad, tad.

Teacher: Uh huh.

Student Maggie (*reading*) Mad, cad, vad,

Teacher Uh huh.

Student Maggie: (*reading*) Rad, bad, sad, l..lllad (teacher makes the letter L with fingers; Maggie gestures the same).

Teacher: Lad.

Student Maggie: (*reading*) Yad

Teacher: And yad. Very good job Maggie! That was perfect! Nice work!

## **Transcripts: Beckham**

### *Transcript 3.1*

#### **Student Beckham**

*November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 1:30 pm*

*All About Me: Lesson 11*

Teacher: How are you? (shows pictures of emotions and circles mad)

Student Beckham: I'm...

Teacher: (gestures a mad face) I am mad.

Student Beckham: I am mad.

Teacher: Good. So, Beckham, how are you?

Student Beckham: I'm mad.

Teacher: Very good. I am mad. Beckham, are you happy? (gestures with a smile)

Student Beckham: Yes, I am happy.

Teacher: Good! Yes, I am. (gestures three thumbs up while saying the sentence)

Student Beckham: Yes, I am.

Teacher: Good. Beckham, are you happy? (Gestures three thumbs up)

Student Beckham: Yes, I am.

Teacher: Beautiful. Great job, Beckham!

*Transcript 3.2***Student Beckham**

*November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 2:00 pm*

*Unit Cycle Assessment Lesson 12*

*Some pictures of emotions are on the screen (mad and sad)*

Teacher: Beckham, what is this? (makes angry face with crossed arms)

Student Beckham: Mad.

Teacher: Yes. Good. Let's say, "I...(points to self and makes an angry face).

Student Beckham: I am mad.

Teacher: Good. I am mad. What is this? (gestures happy by smiling)

Student Beckham: I am happy.

Teacher: Very good! What is this? (gestures sad by pretending to cry)

Student Beckham: I am sad.

Teacher: Beautiful. Great job Beckham!

*Transcript 3.3***Student Beckham**

*November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016; 2:00 pm*

*My Classroom: Lesson 1*

Teacher: Screen.

Student Beckham: Screen.

Teacher: What is this?

Student Beckham: This is screen.

Teacher: This is A (holds up one finger) screen.

Student Beckham: This is a screen.

Teacher: Very good job. And Beckham, what is this? (shows image of a monkey).

Student Beckham: This is monkey.

Teacher: This is...(shows 1 finger)

Student Beckham: This is a monkey.

Teacher: Good job Beckham!



*Transcript 3.4***Student Beckham***November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 2:00 pm**My Classroom: Lesson 3*

Teacher: Good. What is this? (holds up 1 finger and acts out mouse scrolling; circles image of a computer mouse on the slide)

Student Beckham: This...is...a...

Teacher: Mouse.

Student Beckham: Mouse.

Teacher: Good. What is this? (circles the image of the computer)

Student Beckham: This is a.....

Teacher: (holds up 1 finger and gestures a computer screen) Com..

Student Beckham: Computer.

Teacher: Good. This is a computer.

*Transcript 3.5***Student Beckham***November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 2:00 pm**My Classroom: Lesson 5*

Teacher: What is this? (mouths answer, holds up 1 finger, gestures computer screen)

Beckham: This is a computer.

Teacher: Good job. Beckham, what is this? (holds up 1 finger, gestures mouse)

Beckham: This is a mouse.

Teacher: Perfect!

**Transcripts: Apple***Transcript 4.1***Student Apple***November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 12:30 pm**My Toys: Lesson 7*

Teacher: Apple, what are your (points to student) favorite (hugs oneself) toys (acts out playing with toys)?

....(no response from the student).....

Teacher: (gestures my favorite toys again). My favorite toys are....

(teacher gestures with shoulders shrugged to show a question sequence and shows her ear to student)

...(no response from the student)....

Teacher: (gestures holding a baby doll). My doll.

Student Apple: Doll.

Teacher: Good. My doll. (gestures doll; shows ear to student to encourage her to speak more)

Student Apple: My favorite toys are doll...

Teacher: My doll AND my... (gestures building with blocks)

Student Apple: My my blocks.

#### *Transcript 4.2*

##### **Student Apple**

*November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 12:30 pm*

*My Toys: Lesson 8*

Teacher: Can you say "swing"? (circles picture and gestures swinging)

Student Apple: Swing.

Teacher: I swing (shows ear to prompt response).

Student Apple: (reading) I swing on the swing.

Teacher: I swing on the swing. Great. Apple, do you swing (gestures swinging) on the swing?  
(mouths answer: Yes (thumbs up), I (points to self) swing (gestures swinging) on the swing)

Student Apple: Yes, I have.

Teacher: Good. Yes, I swing. (gestures swinging)

Student Apple: Yes, I swing.

Teacher: Very good.

#### *Transcript 4.3*

##### **Student Apple**

*November 14<sup>th</sup> 2016; 12:30 pm*

*My Toys: Lesson 9*

Teacher: Alright, Apple. Let's say, "I swing." (gestures swinging)

Student Apple: I swing on the swing.

Teacher: Good, I swing on the swing (gesturing).

Student Apple: I swing on the swing

Teacher: Apple, what do you do on the swing? (points to self, gestures swinging)

Student Apple: I swing on the swing.

*Transcript 4.4*

**Student Apple**  
*November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016; 12:00 pm*  
*My Toy: Lesson 11*  
Teacher: Very good. Apple, what do you do on the playground? (gestures swing)  
Student Apple: I play...I swing on the swing (text not available).  
Teacher: Beautiful. I swing on the swing.

**Teacher Comments**

Comment MC-L3-U9-LC2-10. December 2016:



Comment MC-L2-U10-LC1-4. December 2016:



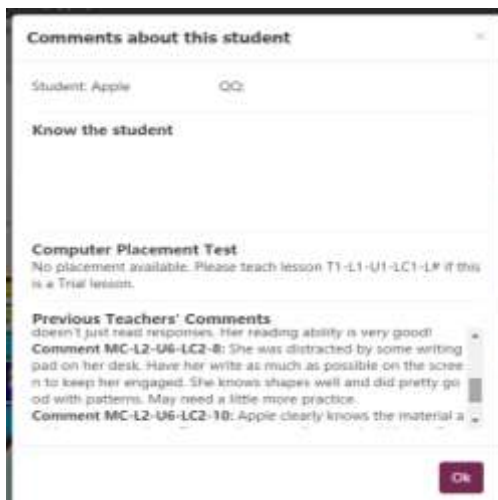
Comment MC-L2-U6-LC1-4. November 2016 and Comment MC-L2-U6-LC1-3. November 2016:



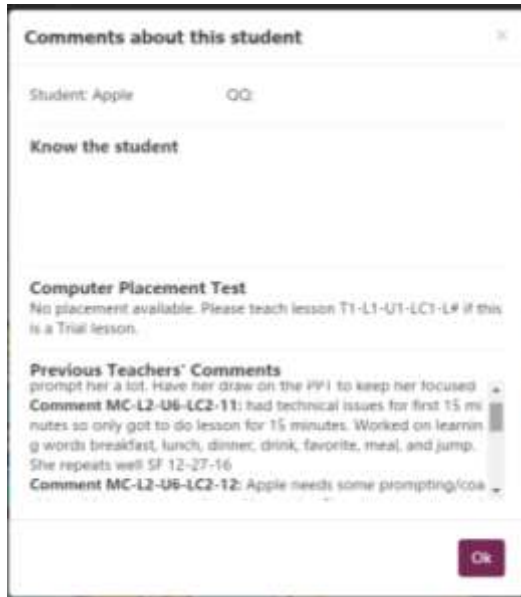
Comment MC-L2-U6-LC1-1. November 2016:



Comment MC-L2-U6-LC1-8. December 2016:



Comment MC-L2-U6-LC2-11. December 2016:



Comment MC-L2-U6-LC1-5. December 2016:



## Is Soft-CLIL the solution to Spaniards' low level in English? A suggested planning model

## ¿Es la introducción de AICLE moderado la solución para el bajo nivel de inglés de los españoles? Sugerencia de modelo de planificación

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### Abstract

The consolidation of English as the *lingua franca* of today's society has meant that its learning is no longer a choice, but a requirement due to the importance it now reflects in our educational system and the subsequent growth of different teaching approaches.

Among the wide variety of methodologies, in the last few years, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been positioned as one of the most important teaching approaches. However, the lack of cohesion among the authors about its teaching practices and the application of the model, as well as the training CLIL requires in mastering both content and language, have made their introduction in our educational system difficult. For these reasons, a good alternative to solve this problem is the combination of the so-called "soft-CLIL" and Project-Based learning (PBL).

As a result, it is the aim of this article to suggest a model that combines both of these learning approaches in the Majorcan setting where, although CLIL is quite extended, PBL is almost nonexistent at a secondary-school level.

**Key words:** soft-CLIL, task-based learning (TBL), project-based learning (PBL), Majorca, EFL.

### Resumen

La consolidación del inglés como *lingua franca* en nuestra sociedad actual ha dado lugar a

que su aprendizaje ya no sea una elección si no un requisito en nuestro sistema educativo dando lugar a un fuerte crecimiento de diferentes métodos de enseñanza.

En los últimos años, el Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras (AICLE) se han posicionado como uno de los métodos de enseñanza más importantes. Aun así, la poca cohesión entre los autores sobre sus prácticas y la aplicación del modelo, además de la necesidad de formación en lenguaje y contenido por parte del profesor, ha hecho que su aplicación en nuestro sistema educativo sea complicada. Por estas razones, una buena alternativa para solventar este problema, es la combinación del llamado “soft-CLIL” y la enseñanza por proyectos.

Por consiguiente, es la intención de este artículo sugerir un modelo de planificación de unidades didácticas que combine estos dos métodos de enseñanza en Mallorca, donde aunque AICLE está bastante extendido, la enseñanza por proyectos a nivel de secundaria es prácticamente nula.

**Palabras clave:** soft-CLIL, aprendizaje por tareas, aprendizaje por proyectos, Mallorca.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND JUSTIFICATION

Globalization’s impact has spread across our society so deeply as to even change the conception of what should be included in our educational system and how it should be taught. Consequently, once the status of English changed internationally, the methodologies applied to its learning had also to evolve.

A more communicative approach is currently preferred since it “[provides] context for authentic, meaningful communication as well as [...] opportunities for learners to gain exposure to more foreign language (FL) input and become engaged in more active learning” (Ioannou, 2012: 495). One of these methodologies is the currently popular CLIL in which, contrary to typical English as a foreign language instruction (EFL), students not only drill on language structures for possible usage outside the classroom, but language is contextualized by the subject content and is needed to follow the session and to do the tasks. Students are not only shown the use of the target language in a clear context, but required to use it in order to fulfill the task. Therefore, it becomes a necessity to learn it and enhances the student’s motivation, contributing to a more meaningful instruction. (Ioannou, 2012: 496)

In our context, Majorca, students are exposed to English around three or four hours a week, depending on the educational level they are at, a time span which is not sufficient for a language to be mastered. Therefore, CLIL poses an effective alternative for meaningful acquisition since it provides more vigorous exposure to the language and more

opportunities to use it in a rich and effective manner (Borrull et al., 2008: 108). Although there have been attempts by the Balearic Islands' educational administration to include programs using CLIL, the following challenges have made its establishment in our educational system difficult.

To begin with, several authors agree with the difficulty of achieving a rigorous balance between content and language since both skills should be targeted equally (Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Coyle, 2008; Mehisto, 2008). This problem leads into the second one, the lack of formal instruction given to CLIL teachers, which is not offered on a regular basis (Šulistová, 2013: 50). Nowadays, the only requirement for CLIL teachers, according to Decreto 98/2009 (*Boletín Oficial de las Islas Baleares*, BOIB 2009), is to have a B2 English level (according to CEFR). Due to this lack of specific training, most of the time, content teachers need to rely on an EFL teacher to support the language instruction. Moreover, another problem arises as a consequence of the lack of cohesion among authors concerning its pedagogy, approach and theory considering that "there are no fixed models which pre-determine how CLIL will develop", making its application in the educational centres difficult since there is not a clear model to be followed (Coyle, 2012: 245).

What is more, the Project-Based method is non-existent in secondary education at the foreign language level, although its use is clearly encouraged in the Balearic Islands curriculum. This approach, however, seems to go perfectly hand in hand with CLIL since all the content and language learnt can be used to create a final project that combines their whole knowledge, giving the students a clear stated purpose for learning the language and a context in which to see how it applies in a real situation. Taking stock of this vacuum in our educational context, and of the non-existent fixed CLIL model, it is my aim to combine both the Project-Based approach and the CLIL continuum in EFL class instruction in order to boost the students' motivation and to create a naturalistic environment for the acquisition of language in which the teacher can easily integrate the mixed-ability of the classroom. For this purpose, I will focus on the first column within the CLIL continuum from the chart provided by Dale and Tanner (2012).



Figure 1: CLIL ad CBI compared (from Dale& Tanner, 2012: 4)

	← CBLT	CLIL		→
				More content: <b>Immersion</b>
<b>Who teaches?</b>	language teachers	CLIL language teachers (in language lessons)	CLIL subject teachers (in subject lessons)	Immersion subject teachers
<b>What kind of language work do they do?</b>	work on language through content	work on general language while supporting subject-related topics and language related to them in their language lessons	work on the language as it comes up in the subject teaching	little or no attention to language per se as teaching is done in another language
<b>What is the aim?</b>	to teach language	to teach language	to teach content and some language	to teach content
<b>What do they teach?</b>	non-curricular subject matter (extra topics) in another language	the language curriculum as well as the language of the subject to support subject teachers	subject matter and subject language	subject matter

Taking this chart as the CLIL continuum, we find what is known as “soft-CLIL” (Harmer, 2002; Bentley, 2010; Dale & Tanner, 2012). This CLIL variant refers to taking “topics from the curriculum as part of a language course” (Bentley, 2010: 6). This means that CLIL is, therefore, language-led and not content-led, reducing the latter to a mere content topic used to teach a specific target language. In this case, CLIL has mainly linguistic objectives rather than content ones. Hence, this CLIL variant can be fully adapted to EFL class instruction taking the best of both sides, and thus being a more realistic implementation for our educational system since it will take place in the already established EFL classes and will “challenge the student’s cognitive maturity and engage their critical thinking.” (Mas, 2015: 24)

## 2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROPOSAL

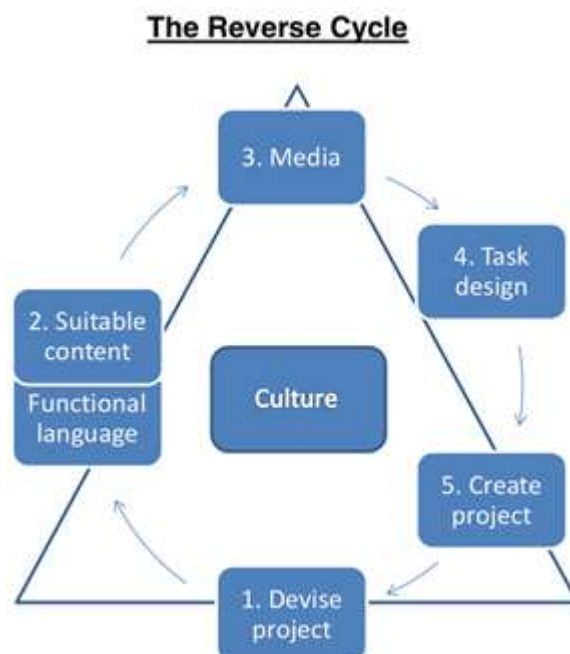
### a. Suggested lesson-planning model: The Reverse Cycle

It is my aim then to suggest a didactic unit-planning model or tool, based on projects, with the intention of introducing content in the classroom which culminates in a skills’ integrating project. Therefore, an adaptation and implementation of the challenges posed by CLIL will be attempted together with the use of the Project-Based method. For this purpose, after analysing five different existing CLIL planning models (Willis, 1996; Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010; Meyer, 2010; Dale, Van der Es & Tanner, 2010 and Mas, 2015), I came to what I have labeled as the Reverse Cycle model, which aims at the creation of final-unit projects inside EFL instruction that are both content and language driven. In order to understand it better, first a brief explanation on how it was devised will be discussed, and then a real example of the designed and implemented model unit in a secondary state school in the Majorcan setting will be presented. The topic that will illustrate how the model I propose works concerns the combination of a study of the

Victorian times (content) and the past simple tense (language), which culminates in the creation of a video magazine that reflects a Victorian high street, the characteristics of its workers and some interactions of the shopkeepers of the period.

As we can see in the diagram, this model is centered around devising a project, an end-product that the students will have to create as the result of the knowledge acquired from the unit.

Figure 2: Miriam Garcia's model proposal



Consequently, the starting point for planning the unit is for the teacher to decide the project that (s)he wants the students to achieve at its end. This first step is the most important one, since the rest of the lesson planning will be based on the necessities that our students will need to fulfill the devised project. Therefore, it “serves to organize and drive [the class] activities; [which] will culminate in a final product” (Blumenfeld et al., 1991 in Helle et al., 2006: 288). There are several reasons why the choice of a project as the starting point has been included.

First, projects, as well as CLIL, provide contextualization for the learner, and hence, it provides a more valuable and stimulating learning context (Helle et al., 2006: 293). Students are learning for a clear aim; they need all the knowledge presented to create a final product that is going to be useful for their future life since they “partake in authentic tasks for authentic purposes”, which enhances the students’ cognitive processes and their interests (Stoller, 2006: 24). Moreover, by creating the project “students gain deeper

understanding of a topic” (Beckett, 2006: 58) and they are using the input provided in a clear and tangible context that could be later recalled if they find themselves in a similar situation (Dale et al., 2010: 209).

Furthermore, projects have been argued to prompt the students’ motivation and, therefore, their engagement in the learning process (Stoller, 2006; Dale et al., 2010), and thus provides the perfect opportunity “for ESL teacher[s] to teach the English language, school and social cultures, curriculum content, and various skills” at the same time (Beckett, 2006: 58). The latter is especially relevant for the purpose of this article since, as will be seen later, all skills are given the same amount of importance by “nurturing the naturalistic acquisition through meaningful use” that this approach fosters and thus being closer to the acquisition of their L1 language (Moore & Francisco, 2015: 336).

Once the project is devised, the selection of suitable content and functional language that suits our needs is chosen, as suggested by Mas (2015). In this case, the choice of content is of crucial importance since, as this scholar claims, the theme will provide the context in which the students will build upon the functional language (Mas, 2015: 25). It is important here to remark that when we refer to the functional language, we refer not only to grammar structures, but also to the textual typology that is going to be worked on, the lexis used or the functional language related to the topic provided, for instance, fixed expressions such as “Can I help you?” when going shopping. The model proposed is aimed at our educational system. Therefore, these two aspects, the content and the grammatical structures selected, should be included within the educational curriculum of our region and not chosen randomly by the teacher without any criteria.

Whereas content provides the context, language is also an essential part of the lesson, and it should also be in line with the requirements of the project that we are aiming at. Contrary to CLIL, in this model, content is not given more importance than language, and although when planning the unit, they are at the same level, in practical terms, as this unit is intended for a “soft-CLIL” situation, when applied in the EFL class, content will be seen more superficially than language.

Once the topic and language needed for the project have been selected, the third step is the choice of media. Just as inferred by Meyer (2010), the third step is to compile potentially useful multi-modal input that suits the needs of our project, and that can be adjusted to the level and requirements of our students. This media should be as varied and as real as possible in order to accommodate the different learning styles and multiple intelligences of our students. Consequently, the whole diversity of the class is being included in the lesson without making any distinction between the students.

As Meyer (2010: 24) puts it, “the nature of the selected input, [written, visual, audiovisual, auditory, etc.], [...] determines the skills that need to be practiced with the students so they can successfully cope with that input [and adapt it to the final project requirements]”. Therefore, all the media selected will be then distributed evenly within the task design, and classified in different skill sequences that will contribute to create the students’ output for the final project. First, the receptive skills are introduced (reading and listening) and finally, the productive ones (writing and speaking). The receptive skills are introduced first to activate the “different kinds of knowledge, experiences and language that [the students] already possess and use these to build on [...] [and] help learners to learn both the language and the content more effectively” (Dale, 2010: 27), since the productive ones need to be more scaffolded and worked on. In each of these sequences, the content and language needed for the final project is introduced through input, practiced through tasks, and finally brought into the end-product. By doing this, the project is being broken into simple steps to make it easier for students to analyze, understand and acquire both the information and the target language. Therefore, the project can be considered as what Nunan (2004) calls a “maxi-task” where sequenced and integrated tasks are used to later create the final project, similar to the task-based approach.

The design of the tasks is one of the key steps for the model to succeed, since they all have to be carefully planned having the demands of the project in mind so as to be cohesive and coherent with the output that will be later demanded from the students. The tasks that the students are doing are used as a kind of drilling for students to internalize all the new knowledge they are exposed to and to later create their own. The “project [...] is student-centered and driven by the need to create an end-product. However, it is the route to achieving this end-product that makes [the] project work so worthwhile” (Fried-Booth, 2002: 6). Consequently, the task step should be very carefully outlined since it has to be completely defined by the project’s requirements. In a nutshell, the tasks are adapted to the material that we have first gathered in the media step, and not the other way round since the input we provide to our students is the key to success and is what is going to be used to build up the end-product.

Finally, once the four different skills have been practiced and the knowledge needed to complete the project has been appropriated by the students, it is time for them to create the project. The role of the teacher is as a guide that helps the students understand and internalize the knowledge, helping them and redirecting the lesson when necessary to make sure that they are on the right track and do not lack any angle for the fully

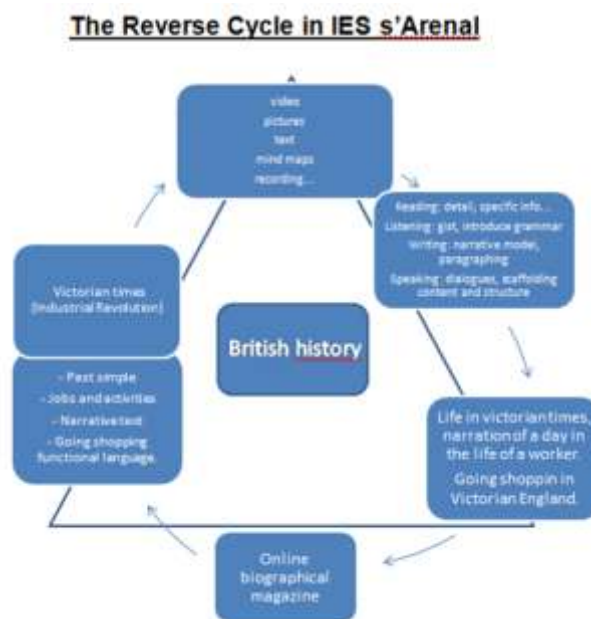
comprehension. Finally, once the project has been created, the students will be asked to give feedback on their opinion about creating a project. The feedback provided by students will serve as new intake to devise another project, which makes the model cyclical; with the new intake, a new project will be devised and the planning model will go around again and continue indefinitely. Moreover, similar to the cyclical process proposed by Dale et al. (2010), the activities are designed to meet the final project that will determine the language and content outcome to be assessed.

The final piece to give shape to the model is the triangle that encloses the cycle, which recalls one of the building blocks from Coyle et al.'s 4C's Framework (2010), culture. Culture is intrinsically attached to language, as previously stated, and students must have a connection with the heritage, traditions, values, and lifestyle of the foreign society they are studying. The EFL teacher is the one giving shape to their thought on the myriad of different territories belonging to English-speaking society, determining how they are going to perceive them. Culture not only shapes their perception of the English-speaking world, but also as suggested by Coyle et al., it helps students to understand the world globally and also to discover their own selves, helping them to position themselves against 'otherness' (2010: 55). Personally, I think that if you do not have some background knowledge of the peculiarities in which the language that you are learning is framed, it will never be fully acquired or understood.

#### **b. Teaching proposal, a classroom experience**

Once the model was conceived, it had to be put into practice to prove its efficacy. The centre, IES s'Arenal, is located in the South-East of the island, and it stands out for the high quantity of multicultural students in their classrooms due to immigration from mainland Spain, as well as other European and non-European countries.

Figure 3: Miriam Garcia’s model proposal in context



I got the opportunity to test my model in a first of ESO classroom (Educación Secundaria Obligatoria) thanks to the collaboration of my tutor in the school.

As soon as I knew the group, a half class following the law’s decision to split classes, I decided that the project they were going to create was a video magazine in which they could see their work, and which could also be included in the European Portfolio to which IES s’Arenal participates in. For this, the past simple was chosen as the functional language to be acquired, and the Victorian times was thought of as the perfect scenario for it to be contextualized. More specifically, the Industrial Revolution and the different jobs associated with the period, showing the learners the different lifestyle people had in the past. Taking everything into account, the final project proposed was to create a performance and organizational project through a journal/documentary magazine that reflected a Victorian street. Each student would be assigned a job from the time, with a traditional name and a profile associated with the job. Then, they would have to create a narration of how the life of that person and their daily life (routines, type of work, timetables or free time activities among others) was. To this short explanation, a video of the students interacting in the shops of the time would also be included. This way, learners would go through a real experience of how life in the past was.

Once the project was clearly devised, long and scrupulous research was done in order to find the materials needed to create the task that would result in, in this case, the Victorian magazine. A wide array of multi-modal materials was found that ranged from videos of the

time, to voice recordings with workers' testimonies, or text explaining the main facts of the period. Once the input was selected, and graded when necessary by the teacher, it was distributed between the four different skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking). Personally, I do not consider the use of English (grammar and vocabulary) as a skill that should be presented to the students straight away. On the contrary, it is to be prompted from the skills mentioned above. Apart from distributing the material within the different sequences, the tasks that the students were going to carry out had to be conscientiously designed considering what the students would need to create, (in this case, a narration of a day in the life of a Victorian worker), and to be able to express; a dialogue in a shop.

### c. The task creation step

Here you have a table summarizing the main tasks achieved in each skill and their function within the unit:

Table 1: Main tasks achieved in each skill and their function

Task	Skill	Student's task	Role Teacher
Introduce topic and vocabulary	Reading	Activate prior knowledge (content and topic)	Present input, prompt from SS, motivate and create curiosity
Introduce job description	Reading	Receive input and introduce writing model	Present/Guide writing model
Introduce past simple tense	Listening	Appropriate past tense	Introduce functional language
Introduce text typology (narration)	Writing	Analyze and internalize narrative model	Present writing model (scaffold) and guide
Going shopping interaction	Speaking	Acquire specific vocabulary and conceptions related to going shopping	Introduce speaking practice (scaffold) and guide

First, the reading sequence was used to **introduce the topic and the vocabulary of the unit**, serving as both useful input to put the students in context and to activate their previous knowledge. For this purpose, a video from the era was projected and skinny questions were prepared to prompt the students' previous knowledge. By doing this, they

were forced to spot the differences and to start creating some knowledge on the period and on the type of society they had. After creating curiosity in the students through the video, I used a concise PowerPoint presentation to explain to them the main facts of the period through pictures of, for instance, their clothes, the different jobs that people did or where they lived. To have a closer look at the era, the students did a short comprehension activity in which they had to read for gist and complete a spider diagram. A spider diagram was used since it has been argued to be “an excellent tool for creating an overview, and remembering” (Cooke, 2013).

Once the theme was clear and our lesson was contextualized, the different jobs of the era were introduced through a reading comprehension that would later serve as the content for scaffolding the writing practice since tasks have to be in cohesion with the final project. This way, we are overcoming problems that might occur in the future, as well as saving time not having to create new worksheets later.

In this second part of the reading comprehension, each learner was given a **job description**. These jobs included a factory worker, a chimney sweep and a mine worker, among others. Each student became an expert in a type of work, and then they had to ask the other students for the other worker’s information. Students not only had to overcome the communication gap to obtain the missing information, but they also become experts in a specific Victorian job. However, modern jobs were also introduced and studied in comparison to the ones people had in Victorian times to make them reflect upon the differences and follow the curriculum requirements.

Once the reading sequence served the purpose of introducing the topic and the vocabulary, the listening sequence began with the main purpose of **introducing the students to the past simple tense**. The recording was used to practice listening for gist, detail and specific information, from a more general understanding to a more specific one, at the same as the students were introduced to the destitution of Victorian children. As regards the specific information activity, the gaps selected were those whose missing word was specifically relevant for the learner to remember. Then, the transcript was used to introduce the grammatical content they were going to need in the project, the past simple tense. In it, students had to discern between the regular and irregular forms of verbs and to find the pattern that regular verbs used to form the past. To do this, they were provided with a list of verbs in the infinitive form that had to be found in past form in the transcript in order to find the correct answer. Therefore, they were active in their learning process. Subsequently, an irregular verb list was provided to them with a selection of those verbs that were required by the curriculum, and also those that they



were going to need for the project, as for example, *sweep*. Following this activity, some exercises to practice irregular verbs were provided combining both the content of the unit, the Victorian setting, and the functional language to be acquired, past simple.

As far as input skills are concerned, they served the purpose of activating the student's previous knowledge, setting the context for the content and introducing the grammatical structures and lexis required. Subsequently, the writing and speaking sequences were introduced to acquire output from the students and to provide them with a model to create the final end product. The writing sequence did not only introduce **the narrative typology**, but also sequence connectors classified in two groups, those that implement the reading sequence (*first, then, after that* and *finally*), and those referring to the content of the narration (*in the morning, in the afternoon* and *at night*). Secondly, it was important to show the students a narrative model that was not arbitrary for this specific type of narration they had to create, but that it could be used in the years to come with any other topic. Moreover, scaffolding in two levels was needed: in terms of content, which was directly linked to the information that they had gathered about the Victorian times during the previous sessions, and language scaffolding, linked to the functional language introduced in the unit.

The model for the structure, as said before, was the reading comprehension text from which students had to analyse the type of information included and the structure of the text. This activity was carried out in heterogeneous groups so learners could nurture one another and take advantage of the reading comprehension activity that had already defined some of the parts that were included in the narration. However, this exercise was not only for scaffolding the structure of a narration, but also the language used, since learners had to first put the verbs in the correct tense. It served to make sure they associated the period of time with the functional language used and that the past simple form was already acquired.

Finally, after some drilling on sequence words, the **main writing activity** was given out. For this activity, I created a blog (<http://thevictoriansblog.wordpress.com>) in which an entry that included information on five different types of jobs from Victorian times (a textile mill worker, a blacksmith, a chimney sweep, a maid and a trapper) was created and assigned to the students depending on their aptitudes. Each entry had multi-modal input for the students to analyze, evaluate and use to create their own narration on their worker. Hence, students were provided with some more content scaffolding, bearing in mind that this unit is aimed at a soft-CLIL situation, and therefore language is more important. Although plenty of scaffolding and input was provided to the students, given

the diversity of learners, further content scaffolding was provided for those that were in need. Although at first sight it seemed an easy task for them to do and was very carefully guided, it was hard for them to evaluate the information they had in the blog to create their own product.

Having corrected the compositions, a delayed-error correction exercise was used to make them aware of the typical mistakes they had made. The treatment of error was dealt through gamified exercises. This way, they do not see mistakes as something bad, but instead they take an active role in their learning. Once the students handed in the corrected compositions, the teacher had to record them reading their texts aloud to include them in the final project. For this purpose, the students worked on narrating events aloud. An adjective associated with their job was assigned to each student, and they had to read using that adjective while the rest of the class had to guess which one the student was acting out, forcing students to work on their intonation skills.

The last part of the unit was the video of the **students' interaction in a going- shopping situation**. This output was simpler to illustrate, and the students did not take long to acquire the functional language associated with going shopping. In order to scaffold it, the students had activities that ranged from a very controlled to a freer practise. To help the students with the recording of the interaction, a role-play activity in class was used as a rehearsal. In this activity, the class was divided between shop keepers and buyers. Each shopkeeper had different items with a fixed price, and the buyer had a list of object (s)he wanted to buy. However, shopkeepers did not have all the items on the list, and the buyers had to find the one that the shop assistant did not have, providing a communication gap. This activity was similar to what they had to do when being filmed, giving the students some real and meaningful practice. For the recording, the students were characterized with costumes resembling their characters, and using the intonation assigned in the writing step. This created a scene closer to the Victorian reality.

With all the material gathered from the narrations and the interactions between the students, the final project was created, an online magazine on Victorian England presented in the form of a video. You can see the final product in the following link: [https://youtu.be/jrtMZcS\\_yys](https://youtu.be/jrtMZcS_yys).

#### **d. Taking diversity into account**

Nowadays, diversity is one of the main characteristics associated to any educational institution, and this class had a wide variety of students with different aptitudes, those with a curricular adaptation, early finishers and average-level ones. In order to accommodate the different types of learners, learning styles and aptitudes without leaving

anybody behind, the worksheets provided to the students had to be graded in terms of the cognitive level of the group to fulfill the tasks. Differentiated learning was then used to keep fast finishers engaged and give slow learners some extra time. For example, fast finishers were not given the verbs that they required to complete the sentences, and slow learners had simpler sentences to order, or the open questions were changed for multiple choice questions, simple gradations that can involve the student in the lesson, or lose him/her along the way.

Group work and cooperative learning were also fostered in the majority of the activities to favor the insertion of learners in the class. However, not only content was taken into account when dealing with the diversity of the class, but also the format of the worksheets that I provided to the students. For example, I used dyslexia-friendly fonts, for instance *Arial* or *Verdana*, I avoided underlining sentences which may cause chaos to the student and I also tried to include input through images in the worksheets to make them more visual (Farag and Harris, 2016).

#### **e. Problems carrying out the model**

When applying the model, some flaws arose. For instance, it was hard to find a suitable task for every skill, bearing in mind the purpose of the unit. For example, I could not find a listening comprehension that suited the project's needs, and consequently, a reading comprehension had to be used in the form of a recording. In connection with this, the creation of adequate tasks that suit the purpose of the final project is a time-consuming task in which a lot of hours have to be devoted looking for the media that suits our needs and to assure everything is correctly guided and clearly connected. Moreover, sometimes it is very hard to find material that is adapted for non-English students, and as a consequence, the teacher might spend a lot of time adapting, selecting and composing it to be incorporated in the tasks. For this reason, it is important to adapt the tasks to the material that we have and not the other way round, as has been previously stated.

Another problem that derived from applying the model is that most secondary schools do not contemplate projects in their assessment criteria. However, far from being a weakness for the model, it turned out to be a strength. Given that the project is underpinned by the four different skills, and not by content, the implementation of a soft-CLIL situation is easier in any educational institution which does not explicitly base their education on working by projects. Therefore, this type of model that promotes working by projects can be introduced in any context due to its adaptable nature.

When referring to more practical problems with activities planned, there were only two setbacks. First, the exercise from the writing practice in which they had to analyze the

information and create their own narration took longer than expected. However, in my view, this was due to the students' lack of training in these types of activities during their primary education, and sometimes even in secondary school where these types of activities are not practiced. These types of exercises are important for them because in the future they will be forced to do them in their academic and working life, and the sooner they know how to address them the better. And the other "problem" was with the voice recording for the online magazine. Speaking is a skill to which not enough time is devoted in our educational system and, therefore, most of the students do not feel comfortable speaking. Consequently, most of the recordings were very plain, and an exercise to prompt the students and demand them to make an effort to make them more joyful was requested, as explained above.

#### **f. Feedback provided by students**

One of the most important parts when carrying out this type of planning, and in order for the model to continue, is to request feedback from the students, to weigh if the project was successful in terms of knowledge acquisition, and also if they liked these types of classes. In this case, students agreed that what they had liked the most was doing a short play in class; they liked being dressed up and having to act out a role. They also liked having their voices recorded for a project, and when they saw the end-product, they were delighted with what they had achieved and with having done something so different in class. Moreover, they did not only like the different types of activities because were dynamic and entertaining, but also some students claimed that they found it interesting to study some history of Britain because as they declared, they only studied history from Spain, and it was fascinating to learn some culture and history of another country. Therefore, by having the students claim this, it can be argued that content was also an important part for the project to be fully successful.

However, there were also some negative comments. All of them agreed that they did not like to have so many photocopies because it was hard for them to study from them. This might be due to the fact that most of the teachers follow the book and do not implement it by providing further information and activities to the students. A solution to this problem might be to provide the students with all the photocopies of the unit at a time, simulating a book, instead of giving them a photocopy in each lesson. This way it might be easier for them. In addition, some of them found the level of the information provided complicated to understand in some occasions. It is true that it was hard to find, as explained above, adapted material, and it had to be leveled by the teacher. For this reason, the material might not be as adapted as needed to some of the students. To solve this problem, a

diagnostic test with the contents to be learnt in the unit should be done before starting the unit in order to adapt the materials more if possible to the needs of the students.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, although being a very time-consuming task for the EFL teacher, I think the time spent in preparing the material is worth it since the students have the opportunity to have a more meaningful learning experience that involves not only the four skills the language provides, but also to put the language in context, and work also with the culture surrounding the language. Furthermore, having the students carrying out a final project set in a real-life context that is not driven by the superficial topics usually found in English-as-a-foreign-language textbooks allows them to put together all their knowledge, which will be much more profitable for them in the future. Moreover, those students who had been diagnosed a curricular adaptation likewise favor from this methodology since they are part of the main teaching activity and do not feel left behind and are not given different activities from the other students as is usually the case. Therefore, it prompts their motivation favoring a full acquisition.

Furthermore, thanks to the versatility of the model proposed, it can be introduced in our educational institutions without having to change all the organization of the departments. What is more, since the model is framed in a soft-CLIL context, the EFL teacher does not need to seek for any further training or qualification, which is usually the case when trying to combine both content and language.

Of course, the model has some flaws, and further testing should be carried out to fully affirm its educational benefits. However, I think it is a good start to have this type of methodology implemented in our secondary schools and to start taking advantage of the benefits that working with projects provides to our learners, teachers; and ultimately to our educational context since projects can latter be shown to the whole educational community and thus used to give a message and to show what is being done in the schools and how the students are acquiring the knowledge. This way, the families could learn a bit more about what their children do at school and maybe, it would make the job of the teacher better viewed by society.

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## Is the acquisition of multiple languages a challenge?

### ¿Es la adquisición de múltiples lenguas un reto?

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#### Abstract

The interest in multilingualism and multilingual acquisition has rapidly increased in the last decades, which mirrors the reality worldwide. The present article provides an overview of research on multilingual acquisition, with a focus on psycholinguistic factors, and highlights the unique features of multilingual learners as compared to monolingual ones acquiring their first foreign language. The complex processes involved in multilingual acquisition, as well as different models that account for such complexity, are also described. The increasing contact between different languages in a globalized world motivates a shift of paradigms. Thus, it has become evident that language acquisition models need to explain the processes that inevitably take place due to the interactions among the languages that are part of the learners' linguistic repertoire. Such new paradigms that have emerged in SLA research could also be incorporated in the teaching of foreign languages, which could help learners in their learning process.

**Key words:** multicompetence, multilingual acquisition, multilingual lexicon, multilingualism.

#### Resumen

El interés por el multilingüismo y la adquisición multilingüe ha aumentado considerablemente en las últimas décadas, lo que refleja la realidad a nivel mundial. El presente artículo ofrece una visión general de la investigación sobre la adquisición multilingüe, con un enfoque en factores psicolingüísticos destacando las características únicas de los aprendices multilingües en comparación con los monolingües que adquieren su primera lengua extranjera. También se describen los complejos procesos involucrados en la adquisición multilingüe, así como los diferentes modelos que explican dicha



complejidad. El creciente contacto entre las diferentes lenguas en un mundo globalizado motiva un cambio de paradigma. De este modo, se ha puesto de manifiesto que los modelos de adquisición del lenguaje tienen que explicar los procesos que inevitablemente ocurren debido a las interacciones entre las lenguas que conforman el repertorio lingüístico de los aprendices. Estos nuevos paradigmas que han surgido en la investigación de segundas lenguas podrían también ser incorporados en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, lo que podría ayudar a los aprendices en su proceso de adquisición.

**Palabras clave:** multicompetencia, adquisición multilingüe, léxico multilingüe, multilingüismo.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of multilingual acquisition, defined as “the consecutive and simultaneous acquisition of three or more languages” (Cenoz, 2000: 39) and later by the same author as “the acquisition of languages other than the first or second” (Cenoz, 2005: 1) has attracted much interest in the area of language acquisition in the last two decades. This can be explained through a number of reasons, which are all related to the increased number of languages that people currently know. Nowadays, being monolingual is the exception and, what is more, having a good command of more than two languages is by no means an uncommon situation; it is indeed a frequent achievement to a great amount of people around the world (De Angelis, 2007). Therefore, as Hufeisen (2005) suggests, studies on language acquisition need to go beyond the acquisition of the first foreign language to mark the end of an era in which theoreticians have been working on models that only account for the acquisition of two languages, hardly reflecting the reality of language learners today.

As several research studies point out, this increase in the number of languages known by the same individual is the consequence of several facts. On the one hand, it might be due to the spread of English all around the world for international communication owing to the historical, political, economic and technological development that has been taking place in the last decades (e.g. Grosjean, 1992; Cook, 1995, Cenoz & Genesee, 1998; Jessner, 1999; Cenoz, 2005). On the other hand, it might also be due to the mobility of the world population and the recognition of the autochthonous minority languages in some European regions, such as Galicia, Frisia, the Basque Country, Brittany, Wales, Ireland or Catalonia, among others (Cenoz, 1997, 2005), which makes speakers increase their linguistic repertoires.

Views towards multilingualism and the relationship between the different languages that are part of the learners' repertoire have changed throughout the years. Research in the 1960s, following the Contrastive Analysis Framework, described the influence of previously acquired languages as interference or negative transfer<sup>1</sup>. Most scholars agreed on the fact that contact with more than one language could result in cognitive and linguistic problems. Other studies on multilingual acquisition, which started with Pearl and Lambert's (1962) study but which were not fully developed until the late 1990s, have acknowledged advantages of bilingual speakers over monolinguals when acquiring an additional language (see Cenoz, 2003). These advantages are mainly due to the learning strategies that bilinguals have, as well as to the skills they have developed to compensate for the lack of knowledge -e.g. language switches, foreignizings, literal translations, approximations, descriptions, word coinages (Poulisse, Bongaerts & Kellerman 1987)-, to their metalinguistic awareness, their communicative sensibility, and also to the fact that they have a wider linguistic repertoire that they can use as a basis when acquiring an additional language (Nayak, Hansen, Krueger & McLaughlin, 1990; Baker, 1996; Jessner, 1999, 2006, 2008; Hufesein, 2000; Herdina & Jessner, 2002; Cenoz, 2005).

The present paper, therefore, describes the unique features of multilingual learners as compared to monolingual or bilingual learners. It starts by discussing the complex processes that are involved in multilingual acquisition, followed by the account of several models that have tried to explain such complexity. The paper continues with a few words on the multilingual lexicon and the multilingual speech production process, so as to understand how the multilingual mind operates and how it might differ from a monolingual or bilingual mind. It will be finally argued that these ideas coming from multilingual acquisition research should be incorporated in educational practices.

## **2 THE COMPLEX FACTORS INVOLVED IN MULTILINGUAL ACQUISITION**

Multilingual acquisition<sup>2</sup> has often been considered as a variation of fields such as bilingualism and Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Nevertheless, nowadays, as discussed by several scholars such as De Angelis and Selinker (2001), Cenoz (2003, 2013), and De Angelis (2007), Third Language Acquisition (TLA) or the acquisition of additional languages has become a recognised field by itself. Additionally, as the field of multilingual acquisition is a much more recent field than SLA, there are still many issues in multilingual

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<sup>1</sup> See Celaya (1992) for an overview of the conceptualization of language transfer in the different periods.

<sup>2</sup> The terms 'multilingual acquisition', 'third language acquisition' and 'additional language acquisition' are used interchangeably with no difference in meaning.

contexts that need to be explored, due to the fact that the language acquisition process becomes more complex. The studies on multilingual acquisition have concluded that polyglots or multilingual learners are different from L2 learners and that, therefore, they should not be compared to them (see e.g. Cook, 2008); in short, “there is something special about having more than two languages” (De Bot & Jaensch, 2015: 130). In the same line, multilinguals should not be conceived as multiple monolinguals in one, so as not to consider multilingual speakers as incompetent speakers in each of their languages (Jessner, 2008b).

With the increase in the number of languages that multilingual acquisition presupposes, the complexity of language learning becomes more evident when compared to the acquisition of a second language. Although TLA shares some features with SLA, there are also some important differences between them. Multilingual acquisition is more complex and diverse than SLA. A great part of the complexity of multilingual acquisition relies on the different directional relations that can appear when the learner has knowledge of more than two languages. That is, L2 learners, as discussed in Cenoz, Hufeisen and Jessner (2001), have only two systems that can influence each other ( $L1 \leftrightarrow L2$ ), *substratum transfer* (Odlin, 1989) –i.e. transfer from L1 to L2- being the one that has been most widely investigated. In multilingual acquisition, other directional relations can take place –i.e. the L3 can influence and be influenced both by the L1 ( $L1 \leftrightarrow L3$ ) and the L2 ( $L2 \leftrightarrow L3$ ), giving rise to the phenomenon of Interlanguage Transfer (ILT) (De Angelis & Selinker, 2001). It is also worth mentioning that in TLA, apart from the one-to-one association typically found when the learner has knowledge of only two languages, a many-to-one association is possible –i.e. combined crosslinguistic influence (CLI) (De Angelis, 2007). It should be noticed, though, that identifying and separating these multiple sources of influence is methodologically challenging.

The study of CLI, thus, has been at the heart of multilingual studies, which have examined the interplay between all the languages that are part of the learner’s linguistic repertoire and analysed the different factors that condition the selection of the source of transfer (e.g. Williams & Hammarberg, 1998; De Angelis & Selinker, 2001; Ringbom, 2007; Bardel & Falk, 2007; Falk & Bardel, 2011; Rothman, 2010, 2011, 2015). In this way, the study of CLI in multilinguals, as discussed by de Angelis (2007), offers the possibility to re-examine the hypotheses that had been formulated for L1 influence in light of subsequent languages and, thus, confirm or refute them. The set of new studies on CLI in multilingual contexts allows the exploration of new dimensions and of new language directionalities that can only be explored when more than two languages are present in the mind of the learner.

This is so as “the impact of the [...] L1 in learning or using a [...] L2 is fundamentally (qualitatively) different from the impact of the L1 and L2 on learning an L3” (De Bot & Jaensch, 2015: 130).

### 3 CURRENT MODELS OF MULTILINGUAL ACQUISITION

Several models developed from a psycholinguistic perspective have been put forward to describe the varied and complex factors involved in the process of multilingual acquisition. The ones that seem to have had a huge impact in the field, as they efficiently identify different relevant issues in the language acquisition process, are the *Factor Model* (Hufeisen, 2005), the *Polyglot Speaking Model* (Williams & Hammarberg, 1997, 1998; Hammarberg, 2001), the *Dynamic Model of Multilingualism (DMM)* (Herdina & Jessner, 2000, 2002), and the *Multicompetence Framework* (Cook, 1991, 1992, 1997, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2008). These models tackle different aspects of multilingual acquisition and complement one another to describe the features and processes involved in multilingual acquisition.

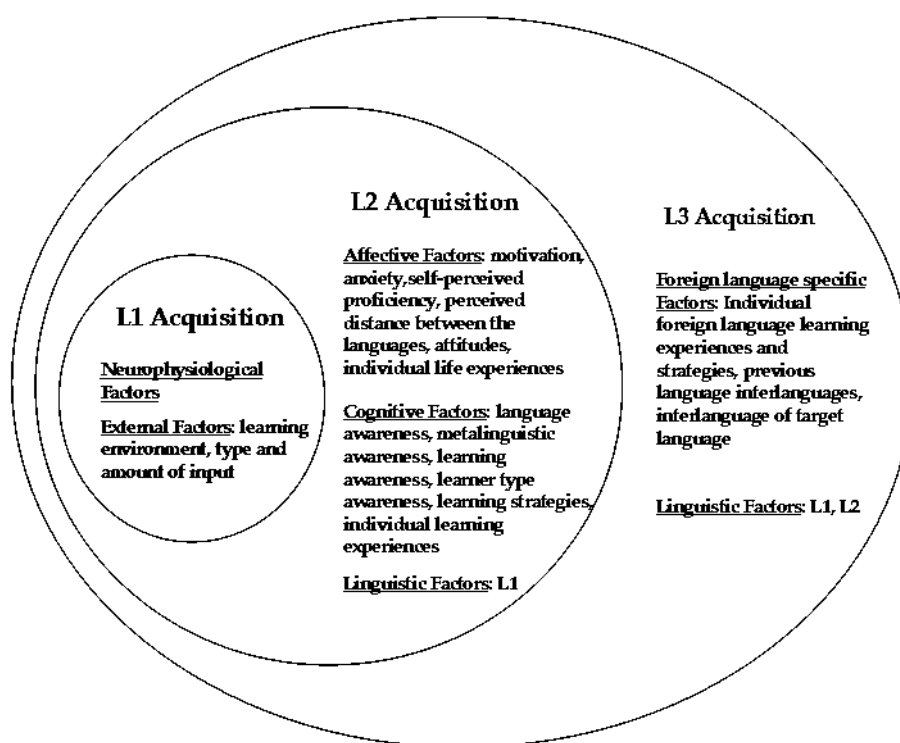
#### a. The factor model

In her *Factor Model*, Hufeisen (2005) attempts to identify the different factors that play an important role in the language acquisition process. She claims that there exist several factors that start influencing the language learning process as more languages are incorporated in the learners' linguistic repertoire, as can be seen in Figure 1 below. These factors explain why TLA cannot be subsumed under SLA.

While the factors that play a decisive role during the acquisition of the L1 are neurophysiologic factors and the input from the environment, in learning the first foreign language other elements come into play: affective factors -such as motivation, anxiety, self-perceived language proficiency, perceived distance between the languages, attitudes, and individual life experiences-, cognitive factors -such as language awareness, metalinguistic awareness and learning strategies-, as well as the influence from the L1. The addition of another foreign language causes further complexity, since other components become decisive influences in the process of language acquisition. These are individual learner factors, such as age, life experience and learning experiences, which might also play a role in the acquisition of the first foreign language; and other factors that start having an influence on the acquisition of the second foreign language, such as specific experiences in learning foreign languages, learning and communication strategies, as well as the influence that the knowledge of the previous acquired languages -i.e. the L1 and the first foreign language- can have on the acquisition of a new language.

The language acquisition process becomes more complex as more languages are incorporated in the linguistic repertoire, since more relations among the different languages are established and other factors come into play. One of the latter that adds to this complexity of multilingual acquisition is the linguistic factor –i.e. L1 and L2 CLI- which becomes the main and direct influence in TLA. Moreover, it is clear that both L1 and L2 acquisition are comprised within L3 acquisition, and, thus, can exert a great impact on the latter, which means that all previously learnt languages can affect the language currently being acquired. Additionally, while the L2 learner is a complete beginner in the process of acquiring the L2, the L3 learner has previous experience in acquiring an additional language; that is, the learner might have already acquired individual learning strategies, and might also have discovered his or her learner style.

Figure 1- Factor Model (adapted from Hufeisen, 2005: 38)



### b. The Polyglot Speaking Model

The *Polyglot Speaking Model* by Williams and Hammarberg (1997, 1998) and Hammarberg (2001) sets out to identify the specific functions that each language has in the multilingual learner's repertoire. By observing Sarah Williams' language learning process over approximately two years, the authors found out that the influence of some of the

languages she knew –i.e. Spanish, Italian and French- was minimal in her Swedish oral production-, but the influence of others –i.e. English and German- was considerable. Moreover, it was found that the type of influence exercised by English and German was different. Whereas L1 English was used for metalinguistic comments and was, thus, an external instrumental language, German worked as a source language (a default supplier language), that is, she resorted to German when she had not acquired a word in Swedish, and so she derived rules in Swedish from German ones. In addition, L1 English had a long-term influence on her L3 Swedish. The influence of L2 German, on the other hand, decreased as the learner obtained more proficiency in the L3. The L3 gradually took over of both instrumental and supplier functions.

This model is an excellent example of the importance of both CLI from the L1 and ILT and of the complex relations that are established in the learners' linguistic repertoire. However, it is also important to take into consideration that Williams and Hammarberg's (1997, 1998) and Hammarberg's (2001) studies and, thus, this model, are based on the analysis of the production of one single learner, also the co-author of the study and a linguist herself.

### **c. The Dynamic Model of Multilingualism**

The focus of the *DMM* by Herdina and Jessner (2000, 2002), which applies the *Dynamic Systems Theory* (DST)<sup>3</sup> to multilingual acquisition, is on general overall processes found in multilingual acquisition. This model presents multilingualism as a nonlinear and dynamic process of language development, in which the language systems that the speaker possesses influence those that are developing, as also emphasized by the models described above and in works by De Bot (2008, 2012), Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) and Verspoor, Lowie and de Bot (2012).

According to this model, all types of language acquisition are part of a holistic and autodynamic system. In other words, each language in the multilingual system constitutes a part of the complete system and is not equivalent to the language of the monolingual speaker –in line with Cook's *Multicompetence Framework* (see below). The authors of the model also emphasize the idea that each of the languages of a multilingual speaker is simultaneously influenced by a number of variables, each of which affects all the others, as

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<sup>3</sup> The DST, known in sciences such as neurology and psychology, is presented as an adequate methodological tool to investigate multilingualism by the DMM, and it can be regarded as the first step in the use of this method in research on multilingualism (see Herdina & Jessner, 2002 and Jessner, 2008 for an extensive review of the topic).

well as itself<sup>4</sup>. The totality of factors that affect any of the languages is what the authors refer to as *Crosslinguistic Interaction* (CLIN) (Herdina and Jessner, 2000, 2002; Jessner, 2003, 2008), which is a wider concept than CLI, as it encompasses all the known transfer phenomena as well as the cognitive effects of multilingual development.

The notion of *Multilingual Language Proficiency* is also of importance within the model, and it is in agreement with Cummins' (1991) *Interdependence Hypothesis* and his idea of the *Common Underlying Proficiency* that is developed by bilinguals through contact with the different languages. According to this model, all languages, apart from having surface features –i.e. automatized conversational features, such as pronunciation or fluency–, contain elements (i.e. skills and metalinguistic knowledge), involved in cognitively demanding tasks, which are common to all languages and that are transferable one to the other. Accordingly, any change produced in one of the languages will affect the other; that is, the learning of elements from a language affects the whole system. In the *DMM*, the multilingual language proficiency is also characterized by the interaction between the different language systems and the *Multilingualism Factor*, which is based on the changes in language awareness and the development of language strategies through increased exposure to language acquisition. Language awareness has been considered as a crucial factor that contributes to the effects that bilingualism can have on L3 acquisition.

The followers of this model also support the idea that the process of language acquisition is influenced by several internal as well as external factors. Herdina and Jessner (2000, 2002) further argue that the influence of the different factors can only be partially anticipated, as they differ among individuals and they interact with one another. This idea points to the complexity of the language acquisition process, which is affected by a high number of components. This is the reason why disentangling the net of factors and, thus, fully understanding language acquisition is a difficult task.

#### **d. The Multicompetence Framework**

An important landmark in the last years has been the acceptance of Cook's *Multicompetence Framework* (1991, 1992, 1997, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2008), which refers to “the knowledge of two languages in one mind” (Cook, 2008: 17). This framework asserts that those who have knowledge of more than one language have a state of mind different from two monolingual states, as they have a different vocabulary network that combines two or more languages. That is, the linguistic competence of multilinguals is characterised

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<sup>4</sup> See Jessner, Megens and Graus (2016) for a recent account of the complexity of multilingual acquisition and the varied factors that affect CLI.

by increased metalinguistic awareness, greater creativity and cognitive flexibility, and more diversified mental abilities (Cook, 2008).

Cook's *Multicompetence Framework*, which draws on Grosjean's (1985, 1989, 1992, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2004) view of bilingualism, goes against the fractional view of bilingualism that supported that individuals have separate competencies for their two languages and that these competencies are similar to those that monolinguals have; accordingly, bilinguals are seen as two monolinguals within the same person. Both Grosjean and Cook suggest that a bilingual is not the sum of two monolinguals, but a specific speaker with a unique and complete linguistic system. According to this view, and also in line with the *DMM*, the mind of a bilingual should be conceived as a whole whose competencies in the two languages are part of an intact system, that is, they are not separate entities. For this reason, the knowledge that a multilingual has of his L1 is different from the knowledge that a monolingual speaker has. This claim is supported, for instance, by Ewert's (2008) study, which looks for differences in L1 syntactic competence of Polish monolingual and Polish-French bilingual teenagers in a bilingual programme in Poland. Participants in the study had to rate 25 items that contained four versions of the same sentence from the most natural to the least natural-sounding one. The authors found out that bilinguals differed from their monolingual peers with regard to the frequency with which they chose the desired standard and the non-standard forms.

Cook has very pertinently argued that in SLA the language learner has been seen as a failure for not achieving the level of a native speaker; however, if the L2 learner's system is independent, it should not be measured against the native system (Cook, 1999). He insists on the fact that features of L2 learners –e.g. code-switching and lexical access errors– should not be considered as failures, but as evidence of the unique linguistic configuration of multilingual speakers. Multilinguals are not interested in mastering monolingual native-like norms, but they appropriate the language to suit their own interests. He claims that “ultimate attainment is a monolingual standard rather than an L2 standard” (Cook, 2002: 6). This common practice of assessing L2 performance or competence according to ideal monolingual norms is referred in the literature as the *monolingual bias* (Cook, 1997). It is for all these reasons that Cook prefers the term *L2 user* instead of *L2 learner* to counteract the implications that the term *L2 learner* has.

The *Multicompetence Framework* allows us to understand the reasons why multilinguals do not perform in the same way as monolingual speakers in all the languages they know (e.g. they usually code-switch), and, as Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008) point out, to theorise about the interaction of the different languages in the speaker's mind. As the mind of a



multilingual contains information from different languages, it is logical to assume that all this information might be integrated in the multilingual mind in some way or another and that influence from one language to another might occur.

#### **4. THE MULTILINGUAL LEXICON AND THE MULTILINGUAL SPEECH PRODUCTION PROCESS**

The mental lexicon is 'a memory system in which a vast number of words, accumulated in the course of time, has been stored' (Hulstijn, 2000: 210). While the first studies on the mental lexicon focused on the processing of the monolingual L1 lexicon, more recent studies have focused their attention on the bilingual and multilingual lexicon, since, as already pointed out, multilingualism is the norm worldwide in language learning. Therefore, studies on the mental lexicon need to account for phenomena such as code-switching, CLI, lexical errors and language loss (Ecke, 2001).

For some years, considerable research studies on the bilingual mental lexicon have been carried out in order to establish its organisation and development, as well as the relation that exists between the L1 and L2 lexicons, and the degree of separation and integration of the two systems. The connections that exist in the mental lexicon of bilinguals, as highlighted by Hufeisen (2005), become more complex for multilinguals, since two other criteria have been added: one or more languages and the degree of closeness that these new added languages has to the L1 and the other non-native languages. Furthermore, these new words can be associated with any of the languages in the learners' linguistic repertoire, or with all of them. Thus, what makes word production in multilinguals different is the configuration of their lexical networks, which is more complex as compared to that of monolinguals or bilinguals, as well as the number of possible sources and directions for transfer (Ecke, 2015).

Studies have fluctuated between those that state that the lexical knowledge from different languages is stored together, those which assert that it is kept separately, or those that posit that there is an overlap between the languages. Additionally, a question that has also been debated is to what extent the linguistic information is integrated. Hulstijn (2000) summarised the debate on similarities and differences between the L1 and L2 lexicons in four different hypotheses: 1) L1 and L2 words are stored together in a single store, 2) words are stored separately, 3) similar words, such as cognates, are stored in the same store whereas language-specific words are stored separately, and finally, 4) L1 and L2 words are stored in different subsets, which are stored in a common store.

Moreover, Pavičić (2008) has argued that the relationship between L1 and L2 words in the mental lexicon may vary from one speaker to the other, which means that each individual may use the organisational resources in the mental lexicon in a different way, depending on different factors, such as the way the word has been acquired, or the perception of similarity between the L1 and L2 words. Hufeisen (2005) claims that the learners' competence can also determine the access to a particular lexical item. That is, beginners will access new words in the L2 through the L1 and associate them to the same conceptual features. On the other hand, more advanced learners will connect new lexical entries more directly with the concept and less strongly with the L1 equivalent.

The first framework that accounted for the processes that occur in bilingual speakers is Green's (1986) model. It is proposed that the different languages in the bilingual mind can be activated to different levels. That is, they can be *selected* (language selected to be used), *active* (languages that can play some influence) or *dormant* (without any influence). This position is also taken by De Bot (1992), who applied Levelt's (1989) model of the monolingual speaker to the bilingual speaker, according to which the selected language is determined in the conceptualiser. However, due to a lack of knowledge in the selected language, another accessible language might be activated at the same time. Thus, the utterances are thought to be produced in parallel in all the steps of formulation; however, they might not be passed on to the articulator. In this way, the active language may interact with the selected language, leading to the appearance of language transfer.

Grosjean (1995, 1997, 2001) also referred to the level of activation as the *Language Mode Hypothesis*, according to which if a language is highly activated it can be more easily selected during production and, thus, be the source language in CLI. The speaker, thus, selects a language for communication (the *base language*), which is the most highly activated one as it governs language processing, and the other languages (the *guest languages*) remain less activated depending on their position on the *language mode continuum*, ranging from low activation to nearly total activation. This position might depend on several different factors, which include language proficiency, presence of monolinguals, degree of formality, and type of vocabulary needed, among others.

Dewaele (1998), for instance, makes reference to the level of activation to account for the origin of *lexical inventions* in French with traces of Dutch, French and English, and points out that the language with the highest level of activation is the one that provides the lexical information, and that learners do not have access to lemmas from languages that have a lower level of activation. A similar position is also taken by studies on word recognition (e.g. van Heuven, 2005), which are in favour of a bilingual model of word

recognition with an integrated lexicon, in which the two languages are never completely off-line, but always present some level of activation.

The models presented here have shown how the different languages in the learners' minds might be interrelated. Moreover, these models are useful in order to understand why and how the phenomenon of CLI occurs, and why some languages in the linguistic repertoire are preferred over others as the source language in transfer.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although multilingual acquisition is nothing new, it is nowadays becoming more widespread due to the introduction of foreign languages at an early age at school, as well as to the changing status of minority languages and the spread of English as a *lingua franca*. Therefore, scholars in the field of language acquisition have started to study the process of multilingual acquisition in the last decades. The studies have revealed that the process of acquiring an additional language becomes more complex as more languages are incorporated in the system, as more factors come into play and, thus, more relationships between the different languages are established. This has led scholars to assert that learners acquiring their first second language cannot be treated in the same way as those learning their second or subsequent additional languages. For multilinguals, their languages are always in contact; they influence and complement each other. Therefore, the idea that one language negatively interferes with another should be reconsidered.

It should also be noted that multilingualism should not be ignored in the educational system, as the interaction among different languages is becoming more and more important all around the world. The heterogeneity of the students has nowadays become a reality in the classroom, which is, with no doubt, a challenge for the teachers, who need to take into considerations the students' linguistic profiles to make them develop their linguistic skills. Multilingual education, therefore, presents more challenges than bilingual education owing to its complexity, which is related to the different forms of language teaching that might lead to multilingualism, as well as to different social environments, which might require different forms of multilingual education (Jessner, 2008b).

The prevailing ideas on multicompetence that have emerged from SLA research could be, thus, integrated into multilingual teaching. Traditionally, as pointed out by Jessner (2008b), language subjects are kept totally apart. As a consequence, teachers tend not to make use of the learners' knowledge of other languages in the classroom in order to avoid confusion. This idea from the 1960's is in complete opposition to the new findings in research. Therefore, following more recent ideas in language acquisition, a cross-language

approach in teaching, and a focus on similarities among the different languages that are part of the learners' repertoire could increase learners' linguistic awareness and, thus, help them in their language acquisition process.

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