Didactic strategies used in a classroom to improve a foreign target language acquisition in University students

Estrategias didácticas usadas en clase para mejorar la adquisición de una lengua extranjera objetivo en estudiantes universitarios

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ABSTRACT

Didactic strategies used in a classroom to improve a foreign target language acquisition in university students was a qualitative research study, based on our thesis project, called "The impact of implementing the Common European Framework English standards to a group of elementary school teachers at Francisco Antonio Ulloa school" handle to the University of Cauca in 2015, that uses strategies such as focus groups. This study involved students from some universities in the Cauca region, Colombia; some dynamic teaching methodologies and strategies were applied to them aimed at the acquisition of the English language on the basis of our own teaching experiences. Its main objective is to summarize teaching strategies to make them known to new or novice teachers and teachers who must teach the language without background knowledge, for example in elementary schools, where teachers from other areas must teach it. In doing so, students are expected to have a better attitude towards the learning of this language. The methodology was designed to make teaching more meaningful, resulting in a list of activities presented here.

RESUMEN

Didactic strategies used in a classroom to improve a foreign target language acquisition in University students fue un trabajo cualitativo investigativo, basado en nuestro trabajo de grado "The impact of implementing the Common European framework English standards to a group of elementary school teachers at Francisco Antonio Ulloa school" entregado a la Universidad del Cauca en el año 2015, que usa estrategias como grupos focales. Este estudio involucró estudiantes de algunas universidades de la región del Cauca, Colombia, en quienes se aplicó algunas metodologías y estrategias de enseñanza dinámicas orientadas a la adquisición del idioma inglés con base en experiencias propias de enseñanza. Su objetivo principal es resumir estrategias de enseñanza para darlas a conocer a docentes nuevos o inexpertos y a profesores que deben enseñar el idioma sin tener conocimiento previo, por ejemplo, en primaria, donde docentes de otras áreas deben hacerlo. A hacer esto, se espera que los estudiantes con una mejor actitud ante el aprendizaje de este idioma. La metodología fue diseñada para hacer una enseñanza más significativa, que dan como resultado una lista de actividades presentadas en este artículo.

INTRODUCTION

This research was developed with university students in Popayan, Cauca. It is based on significant approaches that were analyzed during learning and teaching processes, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Other approaches such as Content-Based Instruction Approach (CBI) were also considered because classes were learner-centered, in which students were allowed to interact freely and be involved in an environment where they were required to use the language in real interaction.

As justification, this research was supported in teaching actions, helping to promote the professional development of university professors and high school teachers, which involved the implementation of a course based on methodology. Contributions to students' learning are also expected through the implementation of this methodological component in teachers' classrooms.

In addition, this research was conducted based on our personal experiences, when we started to practice as teachers, without clear and concise information that could help us to be good teachers. We also realized that this problem still exists with new teachers being afraid of what might occur in their classes. This is the reason why we, as teachers, decided to list and implement methodologies for new people in this field to improve teaching, without causing problems in the future.

Based on this paper, teachers are expected to benefit from previous knowledge, giving a specific list of activities to be developed in classes. When considering actual competence, the most important goal for ESL students is the ability to verbally communicate or have a conversation with other English-speaking people. Communicative competence is defined by several authors,

but this concept was considered by two authors that influenced this research: Hymes (1971) and Chomsky (1965).

Chomsky (1965) highlights an ideal speaker-listener of the language in a homogeneous speech community. In order for an ESL student to develop communicative competence, there must be a mutually reinforcing relationship between language knowledge and language use (Ellis, 1996). The relationship between these two elements is extremely important. To achieve actual linguistic competence, they must operate simultaneously because language knowledge is virtually useless if language use is not actively practiced.

This concept is a term coined by Hymes (1966) in reaction to Noam Chomsky's notion of "linguistic competence" introduced in 1965. Communicative competence is the intuitive functional knowledge and control of the principles of language use. As Hymes (1972) noted:

"a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only grammatical, but also appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others" (p. 277).

In other words, a language user must use the language not only correctly (based on linguistic competence), but also appropriately

(based on communicative competence). However, this approach does not detract from the importance of learning the grammatical rules of a language. In fact, it is one of the four components of communicative competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence.

- Linguistic competence: it can be described as the knowledge of the language code, its grammar and vocabulary, as well as the conventions of its written representation (writing and spelling).

The grammatical component includes four aspects: the knowledge of sounds and their pronunciation (phonetics), the rules that govern sound interactions and patterns (phonology), the formation of words through, for example, inflection and derivation (morphology), the rules that govern the combination of words and phrases to structure sentences (syntax), and the way meaning is conveyed through language (semantics).

- Sociolinguistic competence: it can be described as knowledge of sociocultural rules of use, i.e. knowing how to use and respond to language appropriately.

Appropriateness depends on the communication environment, the topic, and the relationships between the people communicating. Moreover, being appropriate depends on knowing what the taboos of the other culture are, what politeness indices are used in each case, what would be the politically correct term for something, and how a specific attitude is expressed (authority, friendliness, courtesy, irony, and others), etcetera.

There are two more aspects to consider in this approach: discourse competence and strategic competence. The first is described as the knowledge of how to produce and understand oral or written texts in the modalities of speaking or writing and listening or reading, respectively. The second is described as the ability to recognize and repair communication failures before, during, or after they occur. In other words, strategic competence can be taken as sociolinguistic competence in Chomsky's theory.

These four components of communicative competence should be respected in the teaching of a foreign language, and they are usually considered by modern teaching methods employed in second language teaching.

However, grammar was used in some lessons, together with didactic strategies that will be explained below. We used the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method for the planning of our classes, based on the book "Principles of Language in Learning and Teaching" by Brown (2000); this aimed to help students with different ways to learn the target language.

Learner-centered teaching empowers learners to make certain decisions because this sense of effort determines a concept of ownership and increases motivation. **Cooperative learning** involves some characteristics of learner-centered techniques, but in this case, learners work in pairs or groups, while sharing information and increasing teamwork to achieve goals. This makes it possible to break boundaries of cultural variety, personality, or learning styles. Cooperative learning can be synonymous with collaborative learning, which is more structured to engage learners to develop and promote skills in language use.

Interactive learning promotes the interactive nature of communication and focuses on the real purpose of language, creating genuine opportunities to involve learners in real situations of language interchange and leading

to the development of oral, written, and communicative abilities in an atmosphere of interaction. These ideas were also supported by the following guidelines adopted by the Ministry of Education of the United Kingdom (1999) to create a better structure concerning the development of our study:

- To know and understand the national curriculum in your chosen subject(s) and/or age group.
- To be able to plan and prepare for lessons and set pupils' learning objectives.
- To have strong classroom management skills, such as knowing how to promote good behavior and minimize disruption by pupils.
- To know how to teach pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.
- To be able to assess pupils effectively.

According to Shemshadsara (2012), by making them to get to "linguistic behaviors that are characteristics in a given situation and function-determined conventions related to sociolinguistic formulae or conventional utterances that are used to perform tasks in context", they learn not just lexicon given in a classroom, but different words needed in real life and context . Since a teacher-centered class does not contribute to the students' learning process, learner-centeredness should be promoted, which will allow students to take control of situations, work in groups by encouraging various oral tasks, and develop different language skills. Teachers can also improve on their own because they analyze topics and strategies for teaching English by encouraging problem solving as well as their critical thinking, as stated by Lakovos (2011).

Another important theoretical support has to do with games. Some psychologists such as Moor (1981) stated that children feel more motivated when techniques such as games, images, and new material are used in class instead of the traditional material such as books and exercises, because the new ones contribute to concentration. Andrew Wright (1979) said that games allow participants to gain confidence in themselves and in their capacities.

In addition, music is one of the most admired activities in the world that plays an important role in most learners' lives. Therefore, every teacher should often implement the use of songs as part of their teaching methodology. Songs contain original language, are easy to understand, provide comprehensible vocabulary, and can be used daily. Rhyming games and some cultural aspects are highly appreciated by learners. Music also helps students in matters of speech issues, and listening to music in another language ensures greater fluency and more appreciation for written language.

Krashen (1982), who worked with music, discovered that students can acquire accidentally vocabulary and expressions when students work in this musical context because that's how students can be familiarized and attracted to idioms more easily, learning them in the exact context in which they are used in real life; this also happened with the vocabulary. For this reason, music can show students what is the more exactly use of certain words and idioms and proper situational use.

This idea is supported by the research of some linguists who discovered that music is the source of colloquial English (the one spoken on the street) and out-of-school English, something that should always occur because if out-of-school English is separated from school English, the target language could possibly become tedious and only used in specific places. Gatbonton et al

(1988) discovered that music can be used to speak fluently, helping the automation of ideas, as the repetitive nature of the music makes our brain record very long sentences and reproduce them at a substantial recite speed when assisting with the spoken part of the language.

METHODOLOGY

For this project, we used a qualitative approach and the Action Research method, because we consider we were immersed in the development of this research, not only with one person, but also with the whole heterogeneous group, since we needed to put into practice what we expected to show with research theories, trying to determine which strategies we could work with and which we had to avoid. That is why we based our proposal on the steps proposed by Herr & Anderson (2005).

DIDACTIC CATEGORIES

This research lists six aspects that teachers can use in class:

New technologies:

The Internet has created so many new ways to communicate that, given the purpose of communication, it can be used in language acquisition; some ideas are presented below to help new teachers in their future classes:

One tool that was considered very important was online video games, because they allow real communication with people from other countries using different languages and following a specific goal such as winning a game. This research found it to be the most important, as it allowed students to have a fluent communication in the target language.

Another specific tool that teachers can use is social networks. Since they may be dangerous, it is important to have clear objectives, because students can learn common mistakes people make, an example in Spanish in the use of "haiga" instead of haya, or their and they're; Nevertheless, they now become part of real life, that is why: "Teacher education programs should create room for innovation and flexibility in their curriculum by refocusing instruction on tools that are well known" (Hasko & Colomer, 2011). Teachers should encourage students to chat in the target language and to look for new information from other countries (for example, in Pinterest). In those places, they can use, not only scholarly lexicon but real language, helping them to find another kind of information or to chat with people who live and think of a different culture and knowledge.

Social networks are not enough. Teachers have to know what they are going to do there: "Of course, the innovative nature and ubiquity of social networking sites do not automatically guarantee their pedagogical worth and may not emerge as optimal tools for delivery of discipline-specific instruction in all academic fields" (Hasko & Colomer, 2011). As mentioned above, social networks could be dangerous if teachers have no clear pedagogy.

In this case, we prefer apps created specifically for chatting in different languages that are better than Facebook or Instagram, because they include language courses and they also validate that speakers of different languages, motivated by their desire to learn more about new languages and cultures, can serve as sources of mutual development and support for each other (Hasko & Colomer, 2011). Making new friends from another culture could be a good goal for new students.

Another way to teach could be with e-learning platforms, which is a better way to learn for people who cannot attend schools or universities personally. These kinds of platforms have some advantages, such as providing education to people who live far from universities, fun education, etc. However, they cannot support our study itself; it needs a didactic method and "Model used, the teacher's experience in this model, the type of education, distance or in personal, the area of knowledge, and teaching strategies used" (Fernandez, 2009, p. 22).

MULTICULTURALISM AS A TOOL FOR TEACHING EXPRESSIONS IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE

This strategy provides a specific lexicon to students who participate in it, because students can learn by heart some expressions or slang used in "real life" out of the classrooms through the use of cultural aspects. The easiest way to work this strategy is through films (step by step), short videos, and especially narrations about teacher's own trips abroad, with pictures or videos. In doing so, students will approach cultural aspects as well as cultural words and expressions.

Finally, some review of history could help students identify some expressions or words, for example, words such as *gringo*, referring possibly to the U.S. army or a Greek reference, and the word *barbaric*, referring to foreign people, but now to someone rude.

Some cultural aspects that can be taught, for example, is African American vernacular English. Although it breaks some classical grammatical rules, students understand better why it happens, including the creation of new words such as *ain't, y'all, or gonna.*

ENGLISH THROUGH MASTERPIECES

The use of paintings could help students in oral aspects, because it allows them to make descriptions of images, talk about historical topics, give their opinions about the images, create critical thinking in a real context, and, finally, learn ESP (English for specific purpose) from art, cultures, and vocabulary about what the artist painted.

Teachers should select paintings that can be easily worked on in class and show them in front of the students by using the Socratic method: allow students to speak in the target language, addressing all aspects of the painting, such as colors, shapes, cultural aspects, and possible explanations of the author's ideas. Listening can also be improved while teachers explain the story, feelings, and ideas about the masterpiece.

READING THROUGH SONGS

Another aspect that worked in this research was music because it is an important aspect of life itself and it can be used as a tool for teaching. In this case, the focus should not only be on rhythm but also lyrics. Music was used as a reading strategy, in which students approach some genres they possibly like, enthusiastically learning songs in a different language and giving the possibility not only to analyze different contexts in other countries and realities but also promote critical thinking about ideas that cannot be analyzed in our country with different genres.

Teachers should select some songs with which they can work in class, taking into account specific lyrics aimed at a specific work. In this project, the songs that were selected were "Flight of Icarus" by Iron Maiden, "Holly Wars"

by Megadeth, "Poison" by Alice Cooper, and "Do the Evolution" by Pearl Jam, because they can be analyzed from literature, history, colonialism, among others.

ORAL DEVELOPMENT

To improve listening comprehension, some commands can be given to students that they feel they need to follow as if it were a game; some of them even help students with speaking. The list of strategies used is the following:

Dictogloss, the prohibition of using tag words in sentences, giving orders for yoga practice, words or feelings description (Students must describe how they feel at the very moment and talk about classmates as well), yes or no questions without answering yes or no, 7 pum, broken telephone, tic tac toe with numbers

Activities such as Dictogloss or giving orders for yoga practice helped students improve their listening comprehension. Activities such as the prohibition of using tag words in sentences and Words or feelings description improved speaking skill.

Yes or no questions without answering yes or no can help with both skills. Finally, the ones preferred by students were 7 pum, broken telephone, and tic tac toe with numbers; they practiced listening and speaking with them.

TRADITIONAL STRATEGIES

Finally, this section presents a list of specific strategies that can be used in class:

Guessing games (mime, word guessing, acting games, question games), hangman, hot potato, production of materials, Chinese whispers, role-playing, microteaching, grid filling, animal hopscotch, who stole my wallet, story making, writing words on the board alphabetically, among others.

CONCLUSION

After having worked on the application of these strategies for one month, we realized that in most cases students can improve the acquisition of English, but nowadays students prefer activities that involve technology. That is why this strategy was explained more in this research paper.

Teachers can mix all the strategies to see which works best in their own context and classes. However, it is recommended that all of them are used in all cases, because students may get bored with using one strategy or two only. Traditional strategies should be worked in classes without computers or gadgets, like in rural areas, but it is better to try to use them by adapting them to the context, or also be used as homework.

It is also important for students to differentiate between their mother tongue, second language, and foreign language because in our experience when students understand these concepts, they can have real goals and learn better a target language:

The mother tongue is the one obtained from paternal or family roots and is acquired unconsciously in childhood. The second language is the one that is acquired and spoken in the same country but outside the family nucleus. Finally, a foreign language is one that is learned in a country where that language is not used on a daily basis so it is the most difficult way to learn it, taking into account that it is not acquired, but learned. In this way, students are aware of the way they are learning and that helps.

Finally, teachers should take into account intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is what people produce in themselves, unlike extrinsic motivation, which is produced by their environment. If extrinsic motivation does not become intrinsic, both motivations will disappear. This is an important aspect when learning a language because if there is no different reason to learn a new language other than the requirement of a governmental entity, such as to learn and specific lexicon or to get to A2 in common European Framework (in a matter of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation), students will find it unnecessary and will not want to approach it, even if it is offered in every way and every class.

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