

Lenguas **en** contexto



Lenguas contexto

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índice

2 Editorial
Daniel Rodríguez Vergara

**12 Raising Oral Participation through Talking Journals
and Presentations**
Anabel Sol Rodríguez y Enrique Vez López

**22 Six students' bilingual literacy processes in the transition
between kindergarten and primary school in Mexico**
Lizbeth Eloina Díaz Palacios y María Teresa Fátima Encinas Prudencio

**38 Cyberbullying: Una exploración descriptiva en
estudiantes universitarios**
Elvis Ismael Puc Cárdenas y Addy Rodríguez Betanzos

**47 What do CELE BUAP English exams assess in terms of
reading comprehension abilities?**
Rosalba Leticia Olguín Díaz y Michael Thomas Witten

**64 Creencias Epistemológicas y Prácticas de Enseñanza de
Profesores de Inglés de Nivel Bachillerato**
Brenda Lucía Yeladaqui Ramírez y María del Rosario Reyes Cruz

**75 A Survey of Learning Strategies at the Facultad de Lenguas
of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla**
Yonatan Puón Castro y Teresa Aurora Castineira Benítez

**91 Writing intervention from a psychological perspective:
Graduate Writing Seminar**
Sara Merino Munive y Nancy Susan Keranen

EDITORIAL

Estimados(as) lectores(as):

La Facultad de Lenguas tiene el honor de presentarles este ejemplar de *Lenguas en Contexto*. Se trata de un número especial en el que alumnos de diferentes maestrías de tres universidades de la república (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Universidad de Quintana Roo y Universidad Veracruzana) presentan sus hallazgos de investigación en co-autoría con sus tutores.

En primer lugar, Jaqueline Galicia y Roberto Criollo nos presentan un análisis de artículos de investigación médica desde la perspectiva del género discursivo. Su análisis lo presentan en dos etapas; en un primer momento describen la estructura general de los artículos en términos de movimientos discursivos, mientras que en segundo lugar, identifican patrones léxico-gramaticales de recursos descritos por la lingüística sistémico-funcional, a decir, tipos de procesos, modalidad, modulación y polaridad. Sus resultados sugieren que existen regularidades tanto discursivas como gramaticales que pueden ser tomadas en cuenta en la elaboración de materiales didácticos dirigidos a estudiantes de inglés del área médica. Por su parte, Anabel Sol y Enrique Vez llevaron a cabo una investigación-acción en la que implementaron el uso de diarios y presentaciones orales para promover las habilidades de producción oral de alumnos principiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, llegando a la conclusión de que dichos métodos fueron efectivos en el sentido de que los estudiantes superaron sus problemas de ansiedad al sentirse en un ambiente más relajado y contando con la posibilidad de practicar su inglés a través de la grabación de sus diarios y la preparación de sus presentaciones.

En el tercer artículo, Lizbeth Díaz y Fátima Encinas presentan un estudio del desarrollo de la alfabetización en niños bilingües. A través de un método riguroso de recolección y comparación de datos, las autoras notaron que en la transición entre educación preescolar y primaria los niños logran alcanzar una etapa silábica o alfabética en ambas lenguas a diferentes ritmos y utilizando diferentes herramientas y apoyo. Al parecer, las diferencias que mostraron se deben al contexto familiar, el cual afecta su desarrollo lingüístico de manera considerable. Por otro lado, Elvis Puc y Addy Rodríguez exploraron el tema del acoso escolar a través de las tecnologías de la información y el conocimiento. Los autores encuestaron a 136 estudiantes universitarios que cursaban el idioma inglés a través de un cuestionario basado en la escala de Likert y cuyas respuestas fueron procesadas a través del paquete estadístico SPSS. Los resultados apuntan hacia una baja frecuencia de acoso en los universitarios encuestados, aunque éstos consideran que la tecnología facilita la agresión, las bromas y la humillación.

El siguiente artículo es el de Rosalba Olguín y Michael Witten, quienes se encargaron de realizar un estudio comparativo de las habilidades de lectura evaluadas en la prueba TOEFL y en exámenes departamentales de inglés del CELE-BUAP. Después de una inspección exhaustiva de 6 pruebas de comprensión escrita de exámenes del CELE y la correspondiente al TOEFL, los autores llegaron a la conclusión de que hay variaciones significativas que no permiten que los estudiantes del CELE se preparen de manera adecuada para presentar el TOEFL, el cual es la prueba de certificación más usada en este contexto. Como se sugiere, los datos resultantes de este estudio podrían utilizarse para diseñar pruebas que faciliten a los estudiantes la adquisición de las habilidades de lectura necesarias para desempeñarse de manera exitosa en pruebas de certificación. En un tenor distinto, Brenda Yeladaqui y Rosario Reyes presentan un trabajo en el que buscaron identificar las creencias epistemológicas de profesores de inglés de nivel bachillerato y determinar si existía una correlación con sus prácticas de enseñanza. A través de entrevistas a cinco profesores de diversos planteles, se detectó que en algunos casos existen incongruencias entre creencias y prácticas, lo cual podría deberse a factores situacionales tales como las reglas de cada escuela y el número de estudiantes por grupo.

El séptimo artículo es el de Yonatan Puón y Teresa Castineira. Ellos nos presentan una encuesta sobre las preferencias de estilos de aprendizaje de alumnos de nivel licenciatura y su relación con sus niveles de dominio del inglés. El artículo presenta una cuenta sistemática de los principales estilos de aprendizaje, y, después de presentar los datos y su interpretación, se llega a la conclusión de que, aunque no existe una correlación significativa entre estilos de aprendizaje y niveles de dominio, los resultados tienen implicaciones importantes en el diseño curricular, en la enseñanza, y en la adquisición de lenguas extranjeras. El último artículo, de Sara Merino y Nancy Keranen, documenta los cambios de hábitos y aptitudes de un grupo de profesionales en el proceso de incorporar la redacción a su trabajo académico. Los participantes formaron parte de un curso de redacción de tres meses que se enfocó en la superación de los problemas que impiden el desempeño en la producción escrita. A lo largo del curso, lograron mejorar sus prácticas de escritura al modificar factores psicológicos relacionados con sus hábitos y percepciones.

Como se puede apreciar, los artículos de este número son diversos en temáticas y metodologías. Agradecemos a todos los alumnos y alumnas de maestría que participaron en la elaboración de este número, y a sus tutores(as), quienes los han guiado tanto en el proceso de investigación como en el de difusión de hallazgos. Esperamos que éste represente el inicio de una larga carrera de éxito para los nuevos investigadores.

Daniel Rodríguez Vergara

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A Genre Analysis to the Structure of Journal Medical Articles

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Abstract

This study is based on genre analysis with the purpose to analyze six research articles of medicine from journals in the field of medicine. This analysis aims to characterize the textual organization of medical texts. The analysis was performed on two levels. The first level of analysis was to identify the schematic structures or moves and their constituent elements. The second analysis was to identify the lexico-grammatical patterns of the medical texts. The analysis was based on Nwogu's (1991) study for moves and submoves; and Halliday and Hasan (1989), the systemic functional linguistics approach for lexico-grammatical patterns. The purpose of the analysis of medical articles has a pedagogical perspective; it is in order to design authentic reading comprehension materials for doctors whose need is to develop the reading comprehension skills in the English language. The results obtained indicated that scientific medical articles are very structured and predictable.

Key words: genre, genre analysis, modality, process, systemic functional, transitivity system

Resumen

Este trabajo se basa en el análisis de género, con el propósito de analizar 6 artículos de investigación de revistas científicas en el campo de la medicina. El objetivo es caracterizar la organización textual de los textos médicos. El análisis se realizó en dos niveles. En el primer análisis se identificó las estructuras esquemáticas y sus elementos constituyentes y en el segundo análisis se identificaron los patrones léxicos gramaticales que caracterizan los textos médicos. El análisis se basó en el estudio de Nwogu (1991) para identificar los movimientos y submovimientos y el segundo análisis se basó en el método sistémico funcional de Halliday and Hasan (1989) para el análisis léxico gramatical. El objetivo de este análisis de artículos médicos tiene un propósito pedagógico; que es el diseño de material auténtico de comprensión de textos para médicos que tienen la necesidad de desarrollar la habilidad de comprensión de textos en el idioma inglés. Los resultados obtenidos mostraron que los artículos científicos médicos son muy estructurados y predecibles.

Palabras clave: género, análisis de género, modalidad, proceso, gramática sistémico funcional

Introduction

This paper aims to carry out a genre analysis of 6 research journal medical texts which have been selected at random from the medical journals that students and doctors use to read in English. The analysis was done on two levels of analysis of journal medical texts. The first analysis is to characterize the patterns of discourse organization of medical articles. And the second level is the analysis of the function of lexico-grammatical patterns of texts in the field of medicine. The genre analysis of journal medical texts has a pedagogical perspective; it is in order to design authentic reading comprehension materials for doctors whose immediate need is reading comprehension

in English. Therefore, one of the approaches that seem appropriate for analyzing the medical texts is Nwogu's (1991) study to identify "core characteristics" of texts and Halliday and Hasan (1989) the systemic functional linguistics approach for lexico-grammatical items identification.

Literature Review

Theory of Genre Analysis

During the last 30 years there have been approaches to the analysis of genres that have to do with the analysis of written and spoken texts, such as research articles, theses, dissertations, textbooks, new reports, editorials, and business

letters. Hasan and Esmat (2004) state that the analysis of these texts has served as a model to be used as a pedagogical tool to help non-native speakers of English understand how to participate in the scientific communities which they are entering. Hyland (as cited in Hasan and Esmat 2004 p. 2) based genre analysis on two assumptions. First “the features of a similar group of text depend on the social context of their creation and use” second “those features can be described in a way that relates a text to other text like it”. In genre analysis, Swales’ (1981) move model proposes a definition of genre that focuses on the communicative purpose of discourse: In addition, in each of the studies, Swales’ model has been modified and expanded regarding their purpose. For example, Nwogu,(1991) based on Swales’ work proposed his own model to analyze not only one segment of the text but the whole text. On the other hand, Vazquez y del Árbol used Paltridge’s model which is also based on Swales’ analyzed biomedical texts by using keys both in English and Spanish. Also in William study, Swales’ model is used for move identification; Duddley-Evans’ model is also based on Swales (1994) for evaluating the discussion section objectively; and Thomas and Ye’s research (1991) inspired by Swales’ work, for reporting verbs in citations.

Swales’ Genre Model

Swales (1981) investigates 45 research articles introductions and reports that the majority of them follow a 4-move rhetorical pattern: (1) establishing the field, (2) summarizing previous research, (3) preparing for present research, and (4) introducing present research. However, Swales (1990) revises his 4 move model and proposes a more elaborated approach what he calls a 3 move “Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model: (1) establishing the territory, (2) locating a research niche (3) occupying the niche. Paltridge (1997) states that the studies that have followed Swales’ genre analysis model have been carried out in the area of English in academic and professional settings. Some studies that have been analyzed on academic genres are the results sections of research articles (Mckinlay 1984, Peng 1987, Hopkins and Dudley-Evans 1988, Brett 1994), the introduction and discussion sections of dissertations (Dudley-Evans 1986, 1989), popularized medical texts (Nwogu 1991), job application and sales promotion letters (Bha-

tia 1993), legislative documents (Bhatia 1993), abstracts (Hyland, 2003, 2000) school textbooks (Egg et al., 1993; Love, 1993; Coffin, 1997; Veel, 1998, Ansary and Babaii, 2000). The analysis of texts has demonstrated typicality in the organization of rhetorical patterns and specific language features.

Nwogu’s Study

The first study by Nwogu (1991) attempts to characterize the patterns of discourse organization of one science popularization -Journalistic Reported Version (JRV) of research articles in science magazines and newspapers in the field of medicine using Swales’(1981) model genre analysis limited to 4 move article introductions. However, this study is an attempt to expand on what Swales has done by extending the theory of moves to the whole text. Swales’ study is not just an attempt to chunk texts into identifiable knowledge structures; it is also concerned with characterizing the linguistic features of each “move” and the means by which information in the moves is signaled.

A move is defined by Nwogu as a text segment made up of a bundle of linguistic features: lexical meanings, prepositional meanings and illocutionary forces which give an orientation and signal the content of discourse in it. Each “move” is taken to embody a number of “constituent elements” or “submoves” which combine to constitute information in the move. Nwogu points out that “moves and their constituent elements are determined partly by inferencing from contexts, but mostly by reference to linguistic clues in the discourse” (1991 p. 114).

The Systemic Functional Approach

The systemic Functional (SF) approach explores how people use the language and how language is itself structured (Eggins 1994). Malinoswki (1946) found the importance of understanding the culture of any language: “the study of any language, spoken by a people who live under conditions different from our own and possess a different culture must be carried out in conjunction with the study of their culture and their environment” (cited in Eggins 1994 p. 50). In translations, Malinowski observed that the linguistic events were only interpretable when contextual information and both the culture and situation were taken into account. Language only makes sense when it is interpreted within its context (Eggins1994). Ma-

linowski (1946) made significant contributions in identifying both functional role of language: why people use the language and the semantic role: how language means. However, the linguist Firth (1935, 1950, 1951), influenced by Malinowski, extended the notion of context of situation to the issue of linguistic predictability. Firth claimed the importance of context to make predictions about the use of language.

For this reason, some variables are considered in the context of situation. Halliday (1978, 1985) asked which aspects of context make a difference to how people use the language. He found out that in any situation there are three aspects that have linguistic consequences. They are called register variables: *field*: what language is being used to talk about or write about. *Tenor*: the role of relationships between the interactants, that is, the relationship between the speaker and hearer or writer and reader. *Mode*: the role language is playing in the interaction, in other words, the type of text that is being made. Halliday (1978, 1985) points out that “the three variables are significant because they are the three meanings language is structured to make and each situational variable has a predictable and systemic relationship with lexico-grammatical patterns (Halliday 1985 cited in Eggins 1994 p. 76). After analyzing some texts, Halliday (1985 cited in Eggins 1994) suggests that the variable of field is realized in some parts of grammatical system: they are the patterns of process (verbs), participants (nouns), and circumstances (propositional phrases of time, manner, place, etc).

The Grammar of Experiential Meaning: Transitivity

To describe the experiential function of language, it is first necessary to look at the grammar of the clause as representation. In the clause, a system of grammatical choice is found. This is the system of *transitivity* or process type. Thus, it is necessary to consider the three functional constituents in which the clause is divided: *participant*, *process* and *circumstances*. In analyzing the transitivity structure in a clause, it is has to do with the selection of the process type realized in the verb or verbal group. They are classified as doing processes, projecting process and being process. The selection of the participants (realized in the nominal group) and the selection of the circumstances (expressed through the adverbial groups or prepo-

sitional phrases). Therefore, each process type is associated with functional participant roles, and a process type can also have circumstantial elements in it.

The Meaning of Transitivity

Transitivity analysis describes the functional grammatical structures of English clauses. Clauses can be identified by a process type: material, mental, behavioral, verbal and existential. The process type establishes the relationship between the participants involved, nominal groups. The processes can be expressed through circumstantial constituents: time, location, manner, etc. Carrying out a transitivity analysis involves determining the process types, participants and circumstance realized in any clause. “The transitivity patterns represent the encoding of experiential meanings: meanings about the world, about experience, and about how we perceive and experience what is going on” (Eggins 1994. p. 266).

Modality

As pointed out above, whenever people exchange information the clause takes the form of a proposition. A proposition is something that can be argued, but argued in a particular way. When people exchange information, they are arguing about whether something is or is not. Information is something that can be affirmed or denied (Eggins. 1994, p. 178). However, the two poles (yes/no) are not the only possibilities; in between these two poles are a number of alternatives of degree of certainty of usuality: e.g. “something is perhaps”, “something is not sure”, “something is sometimes” or “something is always”. These intermediate positions are what it is referred to as modalization.

Modalization

When modality is used to argue about the probability or frequency of propositions, it is referred as modalization. Halliday (1985) identifies in modalization two types of meanings: probability and usuality. When modality is used to argue about the obligation or inclination of proposals, it is referred as modulation. The meanings of modalization occur in the Finite of modal operators, and in the mood adjuncts (certainty, probability) or in both a modal finite and a mood adjunct. Both modal operator and mood adjuncts can be classified with respect to the degree of certainty or usuality they

express: high (must, certainly, always), median (may, probably, usually) or low (might, possibly, sometimes). Also, when the expression of modalization is negated three degrees are identified: high (certainly did not, could not, possibly, never), median (probably did not, did not usually), low (possibly might not, did not always).

Modulation

Modulation is the second dimension of modality. It is a way speakers express their judgments or attitudes about actions and events. Sometimes speakers look for a position between something happens or does not happen. The scale in between is of obligation and inclination, and there are also degrees of modulation: high (must, required to), median (should, supposed to) and low (may, allowed to). Thus, meanings of obligation can be expressed in the Finite as modulated verbal operator, e.g. *You must take the copy of The Bostonians*. Also, meanings of obligation and necessity can also be expressed objectively, through a passive expansion of the predicator, e.g. *You are required to read Henry James*. And the meanings of inclination may be expressed subjectively, through an adjectival element, which is followed by an infinitive, e.g. *I'm willing to make the coffee*.

Eggs (1994) points out that the analysis of the structure of the clause permits to make the kinds of meanings essential for interaction to take place. Thus, giving and demanding information involves both the choice of clause Mood (interrogative, declarative, exclamative), and the choice to express or not express modalization. The modalization is expressed through the choice of finite modal, mood adjuncts, or grammatical metaphors. Through the two grammatical subsystems of modalization and modulation, it is pointed out that exchange of information, demanding giving information can be expressed by degrees of either possibility/usuality, or obligation/inclination. With the analysis of the functional grammatical elements of mood, it is recognized how language is structured to enable to make meanings for interaction to take place (Eggs1994).

Methodology **Participants**

In the first part, a questionnaire to collect the data was administered to 25 doctors who were doing the internship at the Hospital Universitario. Their

ages range from 21 to 36 years old. All of them have taken 4 general English courses at least at the university. In the second part, the same questionnaire was applied to a group of 15 doctors, with ages ranging from 23 to 35 years old. They are doing the residency in different specializations, for instance: surgery, pediatrics, cardiology, gynecology and internal medicine at the Hospital General in Tlaxcala. Both groups have had the need to do readings in English related with the area of specialization in medicine.

Instruments

A questionnaire to elicit the main text types of interest to be analyzed was designed for data collecting. In order to design this instrument an interview was carried out with two students of medicine and two doctors. The questions for these interviews were taken from the needs analysis instrument designed by Criollo (2006). After analyzing the interview, a questionnaire was designed by the people involved in this project.

The questionnaire consists of four sections: personal information, multiple choice, scale and open questions. In the first section, the three first questions refer to age, sex and academic grade. The second section contains five multiple choice items. Question one is about the previous English courses that participants had taken. Question two is about the level of English they thought they had. Question three is intended to obtain information about the importance of English language in their field. Question number four is about the type of English used in the area of medicine and the last question was about the place of preference for taking English classes. The third section contains three scale items analyzing the importance of the four English skills in medicine, the frequency of activities they perform and the frequency of materials they use in their field. And the last section consisted of 5 open questions intended to obtain information about subjects of doctors' interests, magazines and books in medicine; the type of activities they would like to do in an English course and people they usually communicate with in the English language.

Selection of the Corpus

To select the articles to be analyzed, first all of, the results of the needs analysis applied to doctors in both parts mentioned above were taken into ac-

count. This instrument contains a section of open questions and it was considered question 8 and 11. In question 8 doctors are asked to write three names of journals they usually consult to read articles related to their area of interest; and in question 11 they are asked to mention some topics or areas related to their specialization. Based on the results of the journals and topics or areas of interests with respect to the internship and residency that doctors are doing; the selection of the texts taken from the medical journals was carried out.

Selection of the Medical Texts

The texts chosen for the analysis was carried out in two stages. First, the results of the needs analysis questionnaire applied for doctors in the internship and the residency were taken into account. The results obtained were similar. Doctors read the same medical journals, for instance: Pediatrics, New England, American, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Trauma, Cardiology and JAMA. Second, the different topics or areas of interest related to their specialization were considered. They mentioned gynecology, pediatrics, internal medicine, surgery, traumatology, and neurology. Taking into account these two aspects, the articles were selected at random from the journals mentioned above.

Procedures

The analysis of the medical research articles was carried out on two analysis levels. The first one was macro level which is the analysis of hierarchical schematic structures or moves, and the second was micro level which is the lexico-grammatical analysis.

The Identification of Schematic Units

The texts in the corpus were analyzed into hierarchical schematic structures or moves and their constituent elements. By the term move is meant a texts segment that signal the content of the discourse on it. And each move embodies a number of constituent elements or submoves which combine to constitute information in the move. Each text was analyzed in order to identify the moves and their submoves. The moves and the constituent elements were determined by inferencing from context, but mostly by reference to linguistic clues in the discourse. Once the texts were analyzed, the information were entered in excel to compare the schematic patterns that constitute each medical research articles.

The Identification of Lexico-Grammatical Patterns

As a first step, the six research medical texts were scanned in order to be analyzed. Second, the lexico-grammatical analysis was applied to identify the patterns that constitute the medical texts. Then, each one of the texts was analyzed to identify the different types of grammatical tenses that dominated in each schematic structure. Each text was classified into clauses to identify the tenses of each verb or group of verbs. The information was presented in tables to indicate verbal tenses and the number of occurrence of the tenses that appeared in the texts.

Identification of Types of Process

After classifying the verbal tenses in each one of the texts, a second analysis was carried out. It was applied the systemic functional approach to analyze the type of verbs or group of verbs that were found in these texts. From the functional perspective, the verbs were classified by difference in transitivity. The transitivity of a clause is its process type. It was found the different types of process that dominated more by number of occurrence that appeared in each text.

Identification of Modality, Modulation and Polarity

In addition, modality, modulation and polarity were analyzed. The clauses were examined to identify the modality which is expressed in the modulated verbal operator and indicated the number of choices of degree of certainty or of usuality. Also the number of occurrence of modulation which is the degree of obligation and inclination expressed in the modulated verbal operator as well. With respect to negative polarity that was expressed also in the process type or modulated verbal operator, it was identified the number of occurrence of negative polarity as well as positive polarity.

Results

The Ordering of Moves and their Constituent Elements

The first step in the analysis of medical texts focused on the ordering of rhetorical moves and the elements within. This is important because it shows a rough structure of the text under study and how it is organized in terms of communicative intentions. For this purpose, the texts were analyzed in order to find the common patterns that

characterize the typicality of such texts. The evidence found in the research medical articles texts analyzed shows that most of them normally embody the following types of information:

1. An indication of some background information to the problem
2. An indication of the new research
3. A description of the methods applied used in the collection of data
4. Description of the research outcomes
5. Discussions and explanations of specific research outcomes
6. A statement of the main conclusions of the research

Following the information mentioned above, it was observed that in a typical medical research article text is organized according to the following “moves” and “constituent elements”

MOVE I: Presenting Background Information

- S1. Reference to established knowledge in the field
- S2. Reference to related studies
- S3. Explaining related studies
- S4. Reference to the main research problem

MOVE II: Presenting New Research

- S1. Reference to research purpose

MOVE III: Research Methods

- S1. Description of the subjects
- S2. Description of the methods applied
- S3. Description of statistical analysis

MOVE IV: Explaining Research Outcomes

- S1. Stating the important results
- S2. Contrasting results
- S3. Reference to study limitation

MOVE V: Discussions

- S1. Stating a specific outcome
- S2. Explaining principles and outcomes
- S3. Indicating comment and views
- S4. Contrasting present and previous outcomes

MOVE VI: Conclusion

- S1. Indicating the significant of the results
- S2. Promoting further research

Description of the Moves

Move I is most often, an initiation move in most medical research articles texts. Its major function is to provide information which serves as background explanation to the topic of discourse in the text. This information is realized by the use of the present simple tense. Move I also functions to highlight the main research problem. Another distinctive feature of Move I is its tendency to incorporate information of the discourse with similar problems in other medical researchers conducted before. This move also attempts to explain principles and concepts in the medical research. To this end, the move I is characterized by the use of material processes, propositional phrases, adverbial elements as clause elements.

Move II in medical text announces the new research. The dominant information in Move II is in reference to research purpose. This is achieved by present simple tense and past simple tenses.

Move III concerns with the description of the aspects of the process of data identification, selection and statistical measures, as well as the procedures for experimentation. This move is characterized by passive constructions and past tense forms.

Move IV generally appears in those texts which report the analysis and description of already generated data. The move is characterized by reference to statistical figures and measurements. It is characterized by the use of past simple tense.

Move V in the medical articles usually presents information which restates most of the main observations made in the study, indicates their significance, interprets and contrasts them with similar observations made in related studies. In addition, the medical research article writer presents the reader with the comments and views of the researchers on the results obtained in the study. The move is characterized by the following linguistic features: the use of present tense forms to explain principles and concepts, the use of reporting verbs to indicate comments and views and the use of exemplification and explicit lexical clues to contrast present and previous research.

Move VI is usually the last move of the research article. It is presented the report of the possible contribution which the study has made to the field. This move also contains information of the implications of the study as well as the need for further studies.

The results obtained in this study indicate that there are six possible moves which may be realized in a typical medical research article text. This is not to suggest that every medical research article was found to typify the same possible constituent elements in the medical texts. According to the analysis, two of the texts in the study were found to have two constituent elements in the last move. The number of constituent elements in each move is optional; however the other four texts were found only one constituent element in the same last move. In the six articles, the same hierarchical order for the organization of moves and constituent elements in the texts were found (Table 1 below). The research medical articles indicate the same total uniformity in the way moves are ordered in all the texts examined.

Transitivity of Medical Research Articles

In the analysis of the research medical articles texts, it was found that the material processes are dominant in all texts. This indicates that all the texts are centrally concerned with actions and events, and the participants who carry them out. Thus the proportion of material processes to other process types is highest in all texts. Whereas the proportion of the following processes is low. The relational attributive process indicates that the texts are descriptive. It is concerned with defining as describing participants. And the relational identifying processes relate a participant to its identity, role or meaning. Relational possessive indicates meanings of ownership and possession. Verbal processes are processes of action. It indicates quoting or direct speech. Mental process encodes meanings of thinking. It probes mental reaction.

The presence of relational existential suggests that these actions are sometimes framed as simply stated to exist. The circumstantial relational process indicates meanings about the circumstantial dimensions. The low use of causative processes was only in 3 texts. This process provides evidence of the purpose of the texts. These texts construct a field to do with reasons and explanations.

Table 1. The Second Lexico-Grammatical Analysis

Types of Process	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5	Text 6
Material	54	96	167	126	110	95
Relational Attributive	17	18	37	24	22	10
Relational Identity	24	35	16	34	19	10
Relational Possessive	11	19	16	12	23	13
Verbal	0	15	4	7	13	12
Mental	6	10	2	2	1	27
Existential	0	0	12	0	6	7
Circumstantial	0	0	3	3	3	13
Causative	0	0	0	1	0	1

The second step performed in the analysis of the medical research articles is the lexico-grammatical with the purpose to identify common types of processes realized in the verbal group and also it indicates the frequent grammar tenses that characterize these types of texts. As mentioned before, the systemic functional system was applied for the analysis of the transitivity system or process type. Thus it is necessary to consider the three functional constituents in which the clause is divided: participant, process and circumstances. The analysis of the transitivity structure of a clause has to do with the selection of the process types realized in the verbal group. In addition, another aspect to be analyzed is modality in which three categories were identified such as probability, usuality and obligation.

The Third Analysis: Modalization, Modulation and Polarity

The frequency of modalization, modulation and polarity are expressed through verbal constituents of the clause. The results show that the medical texts have a low level use of modality, modulation and polarity. Modalization has to do with the different degrees of probability and usuality that are expressed by finite modal operators in the verbal group. Modalization indicates the writer's messages expressing his judgments as to the probability or to the frequency of something happening or being the proportion of modalization does not appeared so frequent in most of the texts. However, the use of probability and usuality was more frequent in text 4.

As with modulation, it was also recognized the degrees of modulation that has to do with the judgments and attitudes of the writer towards actions and events. With modulation it is expressed the degrees of inclination and obligation and necessity.

Polarity is the choice between positive and negative statements. The negative polarity is expressed in the structure of the verbal group of a statement. The frequency of negative polarity in medical articles is not so frequent. The dominance of full declaratives in all the texts indicates that the texts are focused on giving information.

Discussion

The results of the three levels of analysis of the six research medical articles demonstrate the structure of hierarchical patterns of the 6 medical texts. To start with, the first analysis was to identify the ordering of the moves and their constituent elements of the medical texts which indicate six rough moves in most of the texts. There is a pattern of sequence of moves and their constituent elements. However, it does not imply that all the texts contain the same moves as well the same number of constituents. There is a variation among them. The second analysis was the lexico-grammatical identification of the frequent types of processes and the most tenses used. It was found out that the most common type of process was the material that confirms that these scientific medical texts have to do more with the description of actions and events that are based on facts. In addition other processes such as: descriptions, possessions, existence were identified at a lower rate. Also, the common grammar tenses identified in the moves were present simple, past simple, both active and passive voice. These tenses were dominant in the six medical texts. The last analysis was the identification of the probability and usuality. It was found out that the proportion of such modalization was low. Very few examples were found. In other words, it means that the writer's message is mainly based on actions and events obtained from the results instead of the writer's beliefs. The second analysis is modulation that indicates a low frequent use of writer's judgment regarding necessity and inclination. Finally the last analysis was to identify the proportion of

negative or affirmative statements. The dominant polarity is the positive in the six texts. This indicates that the texts are informative. The negative polarity was also found but there were very low. To conclude, the analysis carried out with the six medical texts demonstrates a pattern in the sequence of the moves and their sub-moves as well as the lexico-grammatical patterns identified which indicates the dominance of types of probability and usuality was more frequent in text 4.

Conclusion

The purpose to carry out both genre analysis and lexico-grammatical analysis to the medical research articles was with the aim to identify the frequency and hierarchical order of patterns that characterize these texts and lexico-grammatical items that are dominant in such texts. With the identification of patterns and lexical items of medical texts, it is possible to design reading comprehension materials for a reading comprehension course for doctors who are asked to demonstrate their reading abilities in an exam in order to do a residency program. The results of the moves and the constituent elements and the hierarchical order of these elements in the medical texts provides enough information to develop reading materials that doctors will read in order to develop reading comprehension skills and language skills. Also the reading comprehension material will be based on the results of lexico-grammar components found in the medical texts.

For example, in the genre analysis of the articles it was found out a pattern of six rhetorical structures that characterizes the medical articles. In the lexico-grammatical analysis, on the other hand, it was found that the dominant process is material, which emphasizes that the scientific medical texts are based mainly on facts obtained from the results of analysis carried on. Also the dominant grammar tenses are present simple and past simple. The last analysis, it was found very few examples of usuality, inclination and necessity. With the result of polarity analysis, it shows that the text is declarative consequently, the research medical texts are classified as giving information instead of expressing the writer's opinions or demands. ■

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Raising Oral Participation through Talking Journals and Presentations

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Abstract

Communication is vital when learning a language. Therefore, oral participation plays a significant role in learning a language. Consequently, if students are not willing to utter a single word, it may be detrimental to their learning. This action research (AR) reports the implementation and findings of the use of talking journals and presentations to promote oral participation. Eleven students kept a talking journal, and gave presentations during a seven-week period in an attempt to foster oral participation and build self-confidence. Data were collected through observation, questionnaires and interviews. Findings show an increase in students' oral participation; however, it seems that students' self-confidence did not increase.

Key words: Oral participation, self-confidence, talking journals, presentations

Resumen

La comunicación es vital en el aprendizaje de una lengua. Por lo tanto, la participación oral juega un papel significativo en el estudio de un idioma. En consecuencia, si nuestros estudiantes no están dispuestos a expresar una sola palabra en la lengua meta, esto podría ir en detrimento de su aprendizaje. La presente investigación-acción (IA) reporta la implementación y los hallazgos del uso de diarios orales y presentaciones para fomentar la participación oral. Durante un periodo de siete semanas, once estudiantes llevaron un diario oral e hicieron presentaciones en un intento de incrementar la participación oral y aumentar la confianza en sí mismos. Los datos fueron recogidos mediante la observación, cuestionarios y entrevistas. Los hallazgos muestran un incremento en la participación oral de los estudiantes; sin embargo, la confianza de los estudiantes en sí mismos no parece haber mejorado.

Palabras clave: Participación oral, seguridad en uno mismo, diarios orales

Introduction

According to Louma (2004:ix) “being able to speak in the target language is surely the goal of many learners”. Moreover, as Edge (1993) claims, communication is the goal of language teaching and part of the learning process. However, speaking a language is not easy. Even when students are motivated and eager to learn, we should not neglect the fact that as Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert, (1999, in Tsiplakides, 2009) claim, speaking is an aspect that produces much anxiety in second language learning circumstances. This may be caused by some aspects such as fear of making mistakes, not feeling competent, low self-esteem, and/or shyness.

It is common to find beginner students who do not feel ready to start using the language.

As Macintyre (2007) states, beginners think that once they have learnt enough grammar, they will be able to speak. They may achieve a degree of proficiency in subsequent stages by practicing the language, provided that they have a sound knowledge of grammar, and vocabulary, among other cognitive elements necessary to develop their speaking skill. Nevertheless, teachers should not ignore the importance of confidence, because it is an essential element if students are to find the courage to speak despite making mistakes. In addition, if they do not take risks, they are not likely to improve their language ability (Macintyre, 2007). That is why teachers should encourage students to practice the target language and tackle inhibitions and anxiety caused by lack of confidence. In an at-

tempt to achieve this, the main focus in this paper consists in implementing a plan based on talking journals and presentations so as to promote beginner students' oral participation, which may be raised by building students' confidence.

The motivation to carry out this project emerged from the participants themselves, who asked for help in order to tackle their inhibitions to speak in the target language. Inhibition combined with other elements such as low self-esteem, can raise the students' affective filter and create a mental block which hinders using comprehensible input for learning (Clement, Dórnyci, & Noels, 1994).

Macintyre (2007) claims that the decision to speak or not, has an impact on the person's success at language learning. This situation may lead learners to not develop the language. That is a reason why teachers should foster learners' confidence so as to increase their willingness to communicate. Moreover, learning may be "effective" if teachers manage to mitigate anxiety caused by lack of self-confidence, inhibition and limitations originated by the obstacles emerging from the sense of risk.

Objectives and research question

The main objective of this research was to reflect upon and search for ways to design and implement an intervention plan in order to address students' lack of oral participation. An initial concern was to observe and detect students' attitudes that may inhibit their willingness to speak. Lack of confidence was identified. The next step was to look for ways to promote students' oral participation in class. To this end, an action plan was designed and implemented based on the use of talking journals in order to discover whether they would promote students' oral participation and increase self-confidence when speaking English. In brief, the goal was to evaluate the impact of talking journals and presentations in promoting students' oral participation.

Literature review

Several researchers have looked into learners' oral participation; each has approached oral participation in a different way. Meihua (2007) reported that the students participating in his study men-

tioned that in order to decrease their anxiety when speaking, their confidence should be built. In the same study, learners state that preparation is a determining aspect to build confidence and consequently enhance their oral performance. Likewise, Lemos (2012) claimed that students stated feeling more confident to speak in the target language when they prepared their speech. As such, we may assert that preparation is a positive factor to promote oral participation.

Tsiplakides (2009) suggested that a way to decrease students' nervousness is to ask them to participate in speaking assignments. Therefore, students may be able to tackle their inhibitions and be familiar with speaking by practicing on a regular basis. Furthermore, Burns and Sinfield (2004) argued that students should practice continuously in order to eliminate that threatening feeling caused by the fear of making mistakes. Once students realize that making mistakes is part of the process of learning, they are more likely to take risks and learn.

Lemos (2012) found that most of the students did not like to participate in oral interaction because they did not feel confident. However, as a result of implementing a Radio show, students felt more confident, especially when they worked with their classmates. In addition, students became aware of the relevance of pronunciation and practice to feel confident when speaking in English. Similarly, Collins and Hunt (2011), after a three-year study, claim that students need opportunities to speak in the target language. They reported that in a year, talking journals, among other activities they implemented, improved students' confidence in speaking inside and outside of the classroom.

Lemos (2012) points out that "the students' confidence increased since their attitudes were modified towards motivation for performing better" (p. 103). Hence, we may assert that three elements have an effect on students' willingness to speak in the target language: motivation, ability, and confidence. Wu, Yen, and Marek (2011) concluded that motivation is an implicit factor that impacted the ability and confidence of the students participating in their research. If students are motivated, they practice, and practice may enhance their ability. As a result, their confidence increases.

Tepfenhart (2011) asserts that “in order to encourage all students to participate orally in foreign language class, teachers need to create a safe and fun environment” (p. 20). Moreover, in Meihua’s (2007) study, students suggested that English teachers should try to create a friendly, supportive and non-threatening environment so as to make them feel free to speak the target language in class. Likewise, Hughes (2002 in Lemos, 2012) highlighted “the importance of the environment for acquiring confidence in speaking” (p. 93).

All things considered, in order to understand the nature of students’ unwillingness to speak in the target language, it is necessary to take into account affective factors such as self-confidence and classroom atmosphere. In all the studies reviewed, a correlation between self-confidence and oral participation was mentioned. Consequently, it may be safely stated that an action plan to promote students’ oral participation, should take into account confidence building. According to the previously mentioned research, this can be achieved through preparation, constant practice, motivation and creating a good atmosphere.

Methodology

This study was carried out by means of an Action Research (AR). According to Burns (2010) “AR involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring your own teaching contexts” (p. 2). In order to carry out this research project, some phases needed to be followed. Burns (2010) highlights four main stages in AR: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The first phase of the present study involved identifying a problem and designing a plan to bring about improvement in a determined area. At a second stage (the action part of the research), the intervention plan was implemented; this was done with a specific time framework. After that, the effects of the implementation were assessed and documented. Finally, the present report was written down

Context and participants

This research was carried out in a public language school run by the local university. This institution aims to disseminate and update knowledge of languages. The language courses (English, French, Italian, German, Portuguese, Chinese, and Japa-

nese etc.) are aimed at the university community, private enterprises and general public. The participants were eleven beginner students enrolled in the first English course available at the school. The school population is heterogeneous; there are people of different ages (sixteen year old students and older can take the courses), interests, social status, idiosyncrasy and academic training. The students’ background is diverse. Students have a fifty-minute class every day. This particular expressed their concern about their lack of participation and their desire to tackle the problem and learn English. Some of them had taken English courses before at school.

Data collection tools

In order to identify the problem for this action research project, and understand its nature, two data collection techniques were used in the initial research stage: observations, questionnaires and interviews. The objective of the observations was to focus on specific information while observing the class (Burns, 2010). In order not to risk gathering information that was too general, a checklist was employed, which contained the names of the participants. This list allowed me to quantify the number of voluntary and mandatory oral participation events in class, as well as measure students talking time. An observation sheet was also used in order to help the observer focus on specific participation patterns.

I applied a questionnaire to collect baseline data when I carried out the initial research. The goal was to find out whether or not their unwillingness to communicate was really due to lack of self-confidence or another reason. The questionnaire used in this research was designed following these is based on a questionnaire designed by Lemos (2012), who conducted research on promoting self-confidence. However, it was adapted to make it more suitable for this study. A second questionnaire was applied at the end of the implementation stage and contained questions related to the usefulness, or not, of talking journals and presentations.

After applying the questionnaire, I interviewed five students chosen at random to obtain their perceptions concerning the action plan. In this way, data gathered from the questionnaires

were supported and enriched by information from the interviews. Responses from interviews gave me a better understanding of the observations made during classes.

The interviews carried out were individual and unstructured. I chose this kind of interview so as not to allow my own perspective to interfere during the talk. In addition, I wanted to provide the participants with a relaxed atmosphere, as in a conversation, to “help respondents to open up and express themselves in their own terms and at their own speed” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 173).

The interviews were carried out in Spanish. Thus, the extracts chosen from the interviews were transcribed into this paper in the original language. In-text translation to English was avoided. The objective was to really give a voice to the participants and let their own words express what they said in the interviews.

Outcome of Initial Research

The data collected through the observation hinted at lack of confidence on the part of the students during class, especially during oral activities, which translated into low oral participation of students, regardless of the topic or activity. Only three students participated voluntarily and when asked to do so. The rest of students were reluctant to participate even if I asked them to. In total, students talked for about fifteen minutes or less within a fifty-minute class. In their answers to the questionnaire, the participants expressed their desire to participate ore, but they said they were afraid and ashamed of not being understood. They also said they did not feel competent enough to do so, and felt they could not keep up with their more participative classmates.

The intervention plan

We designed an action plan in an attempt to increase their oral participation during class. This intervention plan consisted in implementing talking journals and presentations as a means to build up students’ confidence when speaking in English. Implementing talking journals may not be an easy task. Some students may not be willing to do these activities. However, “any type of positive communicative experience in the target language will strengthen the confidence of students”

(Wu, Yen, & Marek, 201, p. 127). Therefore, talking journals give students the opportunity to rehearse speaking at their own pace, and practice as many times as they want until they feel confident to record themselves, which may give them a feeling of achievement.

Different strategies can be used to work with talking journals; students can work alone, in pairs or in groups. Also, the kind of tasks may vary according to the objectives of each talking journal. In order to create a talking journal, first, the teacher has to assign students a topic or they decide what topic to develop. Once they have decided the topic, students write a draft of what they want to say about that topic. After that, they choose some keywords from their draft and write them down on cards. Then, they are asked to record themselves by using the key words they have previously chosen as prompts. Another way to do it is not to develop a draft, but to write key words only and improvise. However, for the purpose of this study, students were asked to write a draft before recording themselves. It has been pointed out that by practicing; students’ anxiety levels decrease as learners get familiar with their schemes (Lemos, 2012).

For the purpose of this research, a topic was assigned for the students’ talking journal. Students were asked to keep a talking journal in which they would write entries three times a week during seven weeks. The contents of the talking journals were based on the topics they were learning in their books at that time. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, a topic was assigned to the students and they were asked to write about it for homework. The participants were asked to develop the topic in no less than five sentences. Then, they chose keywords from their writing, wrote those keywords on cards, and finally, recorded themselves talking about the topic. The recordings were submitted to the teacher either on a flash drive or via internet. When recording themselves, the students were not allowed to read their text, but they could rely on the keywords they had chosen previously.

Additionally, students were to give some presentations about the topics they were asked to develop in their talking journals. This was carried out on a daily basis. Every day, five students

were chosen to present a topic from their talking journals. This was done in order to make sure that students would practice speaking without reading. Shuqin (2004) points out that by doing presentations on a regular basis, students start speaking instead of reading or memorizing. That is the reason I considered presentations as a suitable option, despite the fact that, at the beginning, students might memorize their speech. Sometimes students were asked to work in pairs. They had to write conversations and the recording had to be performed in pairs so as to recreate the conversation. The main focus of this kind of activity was to motivate students to interact with their classmates in order to help each other.

Students were allowed to use posters, objects, pictures or other objects which might help them during their presentation. At the end of each presentation, the presenter(s) could ask their classmates questions. The students' presentations and the recordings from the talking journals provided some of the data used to evaluate the intervention plan.

Findings

The information obtained from the three methods described above was useful to evaluate the action plan. After categorizing and analyzing the data obtained. The information retrieved was classified into two sections; Students' talking journals and Students' presentations.

Students' talking journals

Some changes related to oral participation at the end of the implementation stage were observed. When analyzing the data, other unexpected benefits were noticed. In general, participants reported that the talking journals were helpful for their learning process, writing, and pronunciation.

[Los talking journals] fueron muy buenos ya que se resolvían dudas y además aprendíamos a realizar textos y expresarnos ([The talking journals] were very good because they helped us to clear questions. Besides, we learnt how to write texts and express ourselves)

Only two claimed that they obtained very few learning benefits from the talking journals.

Todavía creo que me hace falta más práctica antes de empezar a hablar en inglés, no me siento segura aún.

(I still think I need more practice before I start to speak English, I don't feel self-confident yet)

The observations brought about a change in oral participation. Before the implementation of talking journals, students were reluctant to repeat even a word in English. After the implementation, most students easily repeated what they were asked to, and some of them would even try to communicate in English, without having to be asked to do so. Many students, who used to remain silent, started participating voluntarily in the classroom and the students talking time increased. However, most students did not seem to have noticed this change, and they reported other benefits from the talking journals such as reinforcing what they had learnt in class and learning the pronunciation of words, among others discussed below.

There were some positive outcomes from the implementation of talking journals that are not directly related to oral participation or to self-confidence. Participants expressed that talking journals had several advantages and that their learning processes were enhanced. Most of the students claimed that talking journals helped them to reinforce the topics taught in class. For instance, one of the students, SAMO asserted that their talking journals had a positive impact on her learning because they helped her review what she had done in class. SAMO claims that she:

Reforzaba lo aprendido en clase ya que tenía que checar mis apuntes para realizarlos.

(I reinforced what I had learnt in class as I had to check my notes to do them)

It may be safely claimed that talking journals supported what had been previously learnt in class. They served as a review for students and helped them to understand the topics because if they had not understood the topic they were not able to develop their writing for their journal. Hence, they were studying, but they did not consider it as such and they were more involved in their learning.

Some students could notice an improvement in writing. For instance, according to MAGO's responses, the talking journal helped her to structure sentences in English because the teacher corrected the homework. She said that talking journals:

Me ayudaron a estructurar mejor enunciados en inglés gracias a las correcciones que hacía la maestra en cada tarea.

(They helped me to form sentences in English better thanks to all the corrections that the teacher made in every assignment)

For PRIMO, talking journals were useful because he could clarify doubts and learn to write and express himself. Talking journals not only encouraged students to speak, but also helped them to learn and practice how to structure their writings. This means that they also reinforced the writing skill in terms of using correct punctuation and developing coherent ideas. In addition, students became aware of the importance of well-constructed sentences and they wanted to be corrected.

Another advantage was that, as the students knew that their recordings would be listened to, they became more interested in pronunciation. Most of them started asking the teacher about the pronunciation of the words they included in their writings. A few students, for example JULRO, claimed that by working with talking journals, they could improve their pronunciation as they checked how the words were pronounced before recording themselves. He highlights that talking journals:

Me ayudo a familiarizarme con las palabras y saber la pronunciación de cada una porque las buscaba antes de grabar.

(They helped me to become familiar with the words and to learn the pronunciation of every one of them because I looked them up before recording)

When it comes to pronunciation, there was a change in students' attitudes. Before the talking journals, they felt anxious about mispronouncing, but they did not take action to change their situation. Once they started recording themselves, they

became more curious about pronunciation and started asking how to pronounce certain words. Some students took advantage of their recordings to practice their pronunciation and use them as a resource to feel less inhibited. Therefore, pronunciation was not considered to be a problem with no solution. However the data do not suggest a conclusive result as some students, SAMO for example, did not perceive any gains in their pronunciation:

Ayudaban a reforzar el tema pero una de mis dificultades es la pronunciación así que en ese aspecto no me apoyaba.

(They helped me to reinforce the class topic, but one of my problems is pronunciation. They were not very useful in that respect)

Despite my efforts to show her that she could check the pronunciation before recording herself, she did not change her attitude towards pronunciation. This might indicate that some people could have felt overwhelmed rather than encouraged to improve when recording talking journals.

Another issue that emerged from the analysis of data was that even though several students acknowledged their increase in oral participation, a few claimed that they still did not feel confident when speaking English, for example, ULSUS, stated that:

Tener conocimientos del tema me anima a participar pero sigo sintiendo nervios cuando tengo que hablar.

(Knowing something about the topic encouraged me to participate but I still feel nervous when I have to talk)

These comments may suggest that their self-confidence did not increase with the use of talking journals.

In sum, the use of talking journals resulted in benefits for students' learning such as reinforcing the topics learnt in class, practicing the writing skill, being aware of pronunciation and starting to speak in the target language. However, it seems that their self-confidence was not raised through the use of talking journals.

Students' Presentations

One of the main goals of including presentations in the implementation was to ensure that students would not read their writing when recording themselves. The objective was to give students a space to practice their oral skill in front of other people. Nevertheless, after having analyzed the data collected, it was clear that the outcomes of the presentations were positive for students, not only regarding cognitive aspects, but also affective ones. Data suggests that presentations resulted in the students' being more willing to speak in English.

Among other responses, students stated that the presentations helped them to participate. All their classmates had to present their topic. This way, during the second week of implementation, they could get some ideas on how to do their own presentations. A student, DIEOS, found a way to take advantage, not only of his own presentations, but also those of his classmates as they helped correct his own work:

Al ver las participaciones de mis compañeros corregía detalles en mi exposición.
(My classmates' presentations helped me to correct some details in my own presentation)

This is an example of how students started taking advantage of presentations. Indirectly, they may have developed a sense of self-criticism that helped them to correct their own mistakes.

In addition, they were not afraid of participating because all of their classmates would do it, and they were empathetic with each other. They were all in the same situation, and they could notice that all of them felt nervous when they had to speak in English. JULRO shared some benefits that he could get from his experience with presentations:

Se pierde el miedo a presentarse delante de los compañeros y es como un tipo taller donde todos participamos y nos ayudamos
(You get rid of the fear to do presentations in front of your classmates. It is kind of a workshop where everyone participates and helps one another)

He stated that the fear of presenting in front of classmates is lost and it is like a workshop in

which all students participate and help each other. In contrast to a class in which students compete to get good grades, this idea of a workshop may have helped to create an environment which was conducive to learning. As they had to speak in front of their classmates on a regular basis, they lost the fear of talking in front of people and making mistakes. They still felt a little bit anxious about speaking in front of their classmates, but now they were willing to do so. A student, ITGU, reported:

Exponer me ayudó a tener confianza porque hablaba en público y repasaba lo que iba a decir
(Presenting helped me to gain self-confidence because [before] I spoke in public, I went over the things I was going to say)

It may be stated that presentations had a positive influence in her learning process because giving presentations gave her confidence as she started talking in public. She also mentions that she gained confidence because she had studied what she was going to say.

Some students mentioned they had learnt from their mistakes and did not feel threatened when presenting anymore. For example, IRMAR, had to face her fear of speaking in front of her classmates and eventually, she overcame that feeling of inhibition as well as her fear of making mistakes. She highlights:

Al exponer, perdía poco a poco el miedo a hablar frente a todos y el miedo a errar.
(When I presented, I gradually got rid of the fear to speak in front of others and make mistakes)

The participants also mentioned also that if anybody made a mistake, it was fine because, all of them would learn from it. PRIMO mentions:

Me di cuenta que todos nos equivocamos y que si me equivoco no importa porque igual que yo aprendo de mis compañeros, ellos aprenden de mí.
(I realized we all make mistakes and if I make one, it does not matter because I learn from my classmates anyway, and they learn from me)

PRIMO was not the only one who adopted this positive attitude, and this created good rapport and an environment of respect, too. All of them realized that everybody makes mistakes and it is normal. In a long term, this attitude encouraged some students to take risks and start participating despite their limitations.

Most of the students claimed that they felt less inhibited when they had to speak in English by preparing the topic they were going to talk about as well as the keyword cards and other support materials. MAGO, for instance, claims:

El uso de las tarjetas me daba una idea del tema que tenía que hablar en cada clase lo cual representaba una gran ventaja a empezar de cero.

(The use of key-word cards gave me an idea of the topic I had to talk about in class, which was much better than starting from scratch)

She asserts that the use of key-word cards was a great tool because they gave her an idea about the topic she was going to talk about. Similarly, GIOV points out the significance of extra material when presenting, as well as the reciprocal environment:

Mi confianza aumentó porque varias veces participaba, podía llevar material extra y había participación grupal.

(My self-confidence improved because I participated several times, I could bring additional materials and there was also group participation)

She remarks that her confidence increased for three reasons; she participated several times, she could bring extra material to support her presentation and the whole class participated in the presentations. The underlying aspects of preparing a presentation, such as getting informed, preparing materials and making extra materials helped the participants feel more confident about their work.

As pointed out above, although students' oral participation increased, they claimed that they still felt nervous when they had to speak in English. For instance, JULRO expressed that:

No creo que mi confianza haya aumentado porque todavía me da pánico escénico exponer.

(I don't think my self-confidence improved because I still feel stage fear when I have to do a presentation)

This situation may be related to the students' individual characteristics and personality as some participants may feel nervous when presenting any topic, either in English or Spanish.

It may be claimed that the presentations were useful for the students. After the presentations, a positive change in students' attitudes towards oral participation was noticed as oral participation by the most inhibited students increased. During the first two weeks, most students participated because they had to. When the implementation period was in the final stage, some students would participate voluntarily. Students prepared their presentations and knew what to say and how to express themselves, which may have been a factor that affected students' willingness to speak positively.

All things considered, the use of talking journals together with the presentations was successful to the extent that students' oral participation in class increased. It was a significant increase in the sense that students, who did not speak prior to the innovation, started producing during class. Although some of the participants reported that their self-confidence did not seem to increase and that they still lacked self-confidence when they had to participate orally in class, there were other perceived benefits that the action plan produced; the students reinforced their knowledge of the language, learnt how to structure sentences better, lost their fear of making mistakes, learnt from their classmates, started collaborating with each other and got used to talking in front of other people. In the following sections there is a more in depth reflection regarding the findings.

Conclusions

The presentations seemed to have made students aware of their capabilities. Speaking in front of their classmates made them realize that they were able to give presentations, and that helped them lower their affective filter. Hence, teachers should take into consideration both, cognitive and affec-

tive factors as important variables for language learning outcomes.

For students, developing speaking skills may signify overcoming strong feelings of anxiety generated by the fear of making mistakes, not being able to communicate, or even making a fool of themselves. That is why a relaxed atmosphere is important to foster students' oral participation (Lemos, 2012). As it was showed in the findings, students started feeling less threatened when they had to speak in English. The data suggest that this was a result of a positive environment and the new conditions created by the intervention.

Teachers may improve their practice by providing activities that may boost students' self-confidence, and that may encourage students to lose their inhibition and take the risk to participate and make mistakes. Promoting a relaxed atmosphere may also contribute to students' willingness to participate. These outcomes confirm what other studies (Collins & Hunt, 2011; Lemos, 2012; Tsiplakides, 2009) have found about the contributions of a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.

The data also suggests a positive change in my students' performance in class. Their learning processes were facilitated in the sense that most of them claimed to have taken advantage of the action plan. As the action plan was not restrictive, they could adapt the talking journals and presentations to their needs. Moreover, they could prepare their presentation in order to make them

more appealing. Writing a draft of what they wanted to say and giving their presentation, may have contributed to the students' learning processes as they reinforced their knowledge of the language. In other words, they appear to have needed to go through a process before presenting the final work in order to engage in learning more effectively.

It is possible to encourage students to participate by actually asking them to carry out a task. That is to say, students can perform well as long as teachers know how to give them appropriate support and guidance. It is also relevant to know how much you can demand from your students. However, motivation is a determining factor of students' eagerness to carry out a task. Therefore, teachers should provide adequate, challenging and motivating activities so as to enhance students' performance. Talking journals and presentations also helped the participants to organize their ideas and to prepare before they presented a topic.

Finally, by incorporating talking journals and presentations, students practiced their oral skills, which is sometimes difficult to achieve as it is not always possible for all the students to speak during the class. However, perhaps one of the most important benefits of the intervention was that the participants developed empathy and created a non-threatening environment conducive to students bonding with each other, so they felt welcome in the class and did not feel threatened when they had to participate. ■

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Six students' bilingual literacy processes in the transition between kindergarten and primary school in Mexico

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Abstract

This study explored 6 students' literacy development processes in a private bilingual school in Mexico. Based on Ferreiro's and Teberosky's (1979) stages of writing development in Spanish and Rubin's and Galvan's (2005) stages in bilingual Spanish-English speakers; this study analyzes students' transition between kindergarten and primary school. The findings indicate that most of these children reached: 1) either a syllabic or alphabetical stage in both languages at different rhythms and paces using different tools and support, 2) these stages without affecting either acquisition process significantly and finally, these children's family context affected their linguistic development considerably. This study's main pedagogical implication is that there is a need to raise English teachers' understanding about the importance of this transition especially in bilingual contexts as well as to raise their awareness about the differences in rhythm and pace of each child's bilingual literacy processes.

Key Concepts: Literacy, bilingual, transition, phonological and phonemic awareness.

Resumen

Este estudio exploró los procesos de desarrollo de la alfabetización en español e inglés de 6 alumnos en un colegio bilingüe privado en México. Basado en las etapas de desarrollo de la escritura en español de Ferreiro y Teberosky (1979) y las etapas de los hablantes bilingüe de español e inglés de Rubin y Galvan (2005), este estudio investiga la transición de estos niños entre jardín de niños y escuela primaria. Los resultados indican que la mayoría de estos niños logran: 1) una etapa silábica o alfabética en ambos idiomas a diferentes ritmos y utilizando diferentes herramientas y apoyo, 2) estas etapas sin afectar a cualquiera de los procesos de adquisición de manera significativa y finalmente, finalmente el contexto familiar de estos niños afectan su desarrollo lingüístico considerablemente. La principal implicación pedagógica de este estudio es que existe una necesidad de promover la comprensión de los profesores de inglés respecto a la importancia de esta transición, especialmente en contextos bilingües, así como para aumentar su concienciación acerca de las diferencias en el ritmo de los procesos de alfabetización bilingües de cada niño.

Conceptos: Literacidad, bilingüe, transición, enfoque fonético y fonológico.

Introduction

Research on the development of young children's bilingual literacy competences in an EFL context has been limited in Mexico. Nonetheless, there are studies in other countries (Brisk, 2011; Sparrow, et al. 2014 among others) which compare children's literacy strategies in ESL contexts in both languages and conclude that they are similar. Fitzgerald (2006) summarized, "the existing research on L2 writing and concluded that the evidence indicates that the development of writing in young L2 writers does not differ much from writing development of native speakers of English".

There is, however, an ongoing debate on the best age to start the foreign language learning literacy process. For some researchers, the best age to start learning a second language reading and writing skills is as children. Lightbown and Spada (2005) state that studies have demonstrated the lack of evidence that learning two languages slows down children's linguistic, cognitive or academic development. However, some studies in South America state that the learning of a foreign language in this case English has affected the students' Spanish literacy development. Ordoñez (2004, p. 450) argues

that “students in a bilingual artificial context do not develop neither same language skills in Spanish nor English as monolingual students do in their first language”. This Colombian researcher claims monolingual students in fact are more proficient. “Students in a bilingual immersion program did not speak English easily, naturally or willingly. They often showed actual resistance to using it, and instead of English they used something like Spanish with English words” (Ordoñez, 2011, p. 149).

Other first language literacy researchers focus on the transition from preschool to primary in children’s development (Solovieva & Quintanar 2008). Cognitively, children’s brains undergo important morphologic and functional changes. Socially, they are exposed to significant changes such as: new children, schedules, and school activities.

However, there seem to be a lack of studies at least in our context on this transition in bilingual schools. This transition is a crucial stage in these

schools because it is then that young children start their second language learning along with their first language learning. These schools base their work on the belief that children can develop their literacy processes in both languages during this stage. Children in these bilingual schools start their Spanish literacy process in the first grade of kindergarten and then gradually at the middle of third grade start their English literacy process.

This study took place in a bilingual school which follows the High Scope curriculum in which children develop literacy skills by engaging in meaningful reading and writing and focus on phonemic awareness activities (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002). Mainly because recent longitudinal studies of reading acquisition have demonstrated that the acquisition of phonemic awareness is highly predictive of success in learning to read— in particular in predicting success in learning to decode.

Monolingual English speakers' stages of writing development (Gentry, 1982, 2000)	Monolingual Spanish speakers' stages of writing development (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1979/1982)	Bilingual Spanish-English speakers' stages of writing development
Precommunicative stage Know the difference between writing and drawing. Write with scribbles, mock letters, and real letters unconnected to sounds.	Levels 1 & 2 Know the difference between writing and drawing. Write with scribbles, mock letters, and real letters unconnected to sounds.	Generally the same as monolingual English and Spanish, except some children will write the same letters and symbols in both languages but read them differently in English and in Spanish.
Semiphonetic stage Letters are written to represent some of the sounds in words.	Level 3 Each syllable in a word is usually represented by a vowel.	Generally similar to monolingual English, except some children will write the same words in both languages but read them differently in English and Spanish.
Phonetic stage Letters are written to represent most sounds in words.	Level 4 Letters are written to represent most sounds in words.	Generally similar to monolingual English and Spanish. Some errors are made because of different letter-sound relationships in the two languages.
Transitional stage Letters are written according to common spelling patterns and include silent letters.	No corresponding level.	Similar to English monolingual stage with some errors caused by different letter-sound relationships in the two languages. Vocabulary and sentence structure become more complex.
Conventional stage Writing is generally correct.	Level 5 Writing is generally correct.	Writing is generally correct Vocabulary and sentence structure become more complex.

Figure 1: *Writing development stages in English speaking, Spanish speaking and bilingual children.*

Researchers have identified five stages in the English phonemic awareness process. Beers as cited in Griffith and Beach (2008) state the five stages are pre phonetic, early phonetic, phonetic, structural and meaning. Whereas, in Spanish, writing acquisition researchers have identified four levels of writing concepts, pre -syllabic, syllabic, syllabic alphabetic, and alphabetic.

Although bilingual learners becoming literate must learn how to use literacy in different contexts and for different purposes, they have to learn how to encode and decode in both languages first. According to Brisk and Harrington (2007), students developing literacy in two languages can learn the psycholinguistic process through one language but must learn the spe-

cific symbol systems of both languages. To be able to read or write students must learn and develop automaticity in such skills as letter and word recognition, encoding, and decoding. Bilinguals learn such skills in both languages. Although they may be able to apply the process and strategies learned in one language to their new language, they still need to learn specific characteristics in each language.

Methodology

This study used ethnographic data collection strategies to explore six 5-6 year old children's literacy transition processes from kindergarten to primary school in a private bilingual institution in Central Mexico. As mentioned before, this institution follows a construc-

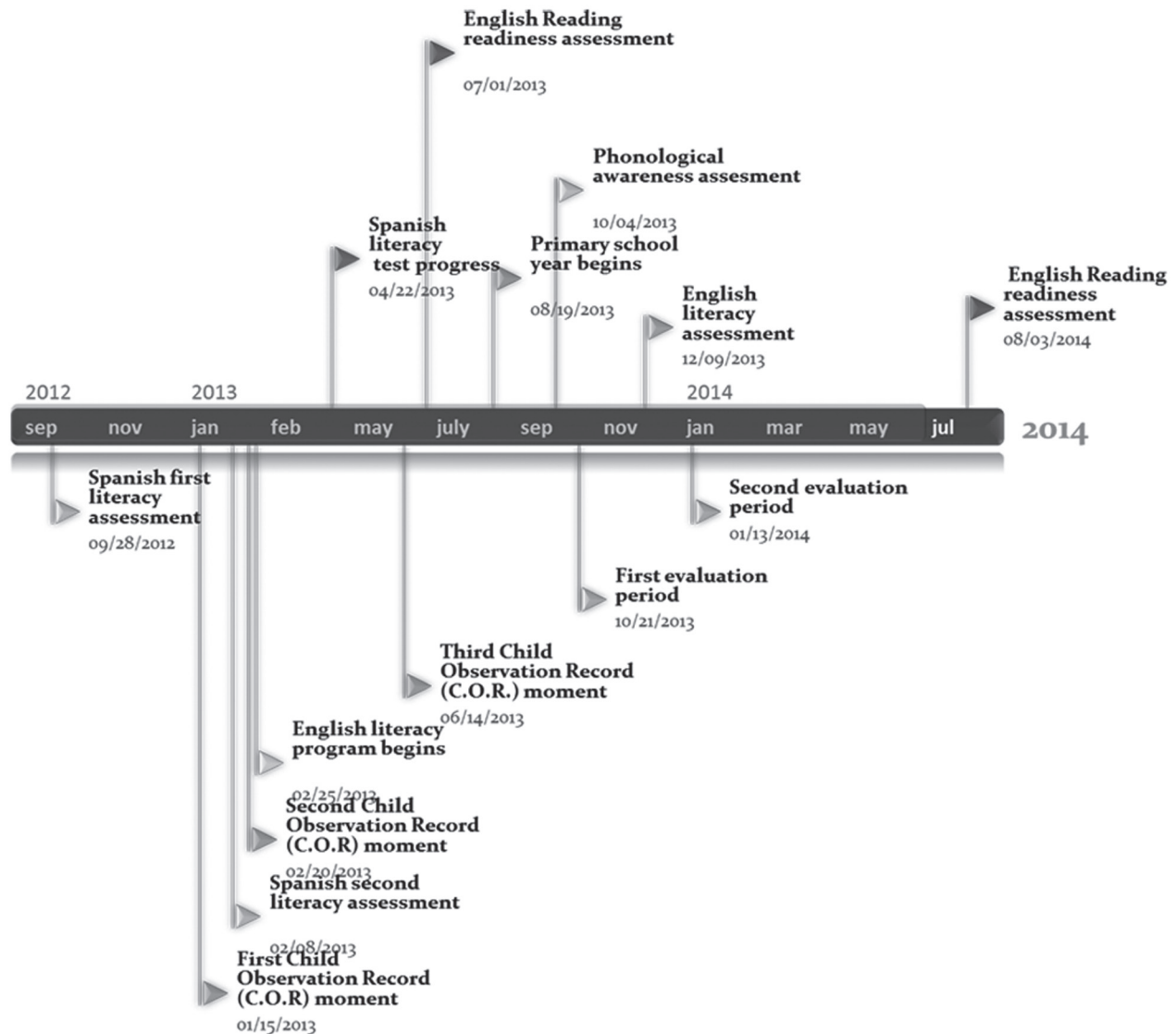


Figure 2. Data collection timeline

tivist model “High Scope” based on students’ interests and active learning from kindergarten to High School.

The study started in February 2013 and finished in January 2014. Although the study lasted for a year and used ethnographic data collection strategies, as mentioned above, it was a case study because of my participation as part of the institution’s staff and as the researcher in the study.

This study focused on the transition process from kindergarten to primary school because children, teachers and parents tended to report that this transition process was difficult for children. The children start their Spanish literacy process formally in the second grade of kindergarten. So after a year and a half working with Spanish, they start their English “Literacy program” in last semester of kindergarten. Then after finishing kindergarten they start their transition to primary school in August. Therefore, this study was carried out from February 2013 to January 2014.

Different case study data collection strategies were used to collect data in this research: teachers’ interviews, report cards, Phonological Awareness checklist (See appendix A), children observation, and literacy assessments in Spanish and English. Fig. 2 shows the data collection timeline.

The six children who participated in this study were five to six years old at the beginning of the study, four boys and two girls. They belonged to a social middle class and most of their parents spoke English. Two showed some evidence of having problems in their first language literacy acquisition, two were considered average and the other two were considered “good” students by both their Spanish and English teachers.

Findings: The 6 Participants Introducing Ivanna

Ivanna was seven years old, she was currently finishing first grade. She was the youngest in her family and had a brother who was ten. Ivanna came to the preschool at the age of three and started her Spanish learning literacy process at the age of five. Once she started working in reading and writing activities, teachers noticed she had difficulties in her learning process and had some Spanish language pronunciation problems. She switched /d/ instead of / r /. In her writing acquisition she

switched the directions of certain letters and imitated writing without any meaning when the other children wrote words. At the beginning of third grade kindergarten, she had her first writing assessment and was classified in the “pre- syllabic” stage with some laterality or lateral dominance problems. “Lateral dominance means establishing either right – or left handedness as the child grows. The left side of the brain controls the right hand activities, just as the right side of the brain controls the left – hand, and this crossover takes time to become effective. This dominance affects the child’s ability to recognize and write letters correctly.” (Boegehold, 1984 p.87). Teachers related this problem to a brain immaturity. However, she continued working with her literacy skills; she learned to copy rapidly and this was interpreted as improvement. However, at the end of kindergarten, she still was at the same stage.

Simultaneously, her phonemic awareness was tested, and she showed very little understanding about English writing language patterns, but recognized vocabulary picture words. Ivanna could also produce certain words in English. Nevertheless, when she was asked to write them down, she often wrote letters which did not necessarily match the word. Griffith et al. (2008) define invented spelling as “a child’s attempt to write a word when the spelling of the word is not already known” (p. 84).

When she started elementary school, she took a standardized English test to identify her literacy progress. She was able now to identify vocabulary words writing them in the correct place. She could also read some words, but not a complete sentence. The following example shows one of the sentences in the test, the words underlined in red are the ones Ivanna could read properly.

The dog wants to eat his food now.



As the academic contents got more complex, she seemed to have an important scholastic backwardness in reading and writing acquisition and math. Her school report card showed low grades. This led her parents and the principal to talk often about her situation. Teachers observed a lack of attention and excessive anxiety. Par-

ents were asked to take their daughter to a psycho – pedagogical intervention. Cucuruz (2013 p. 6) states that “attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder being usually diagnosed when going to school, that is after the age of seven, precisely because of the accentuation of symptoms as a consequence of the increase in requirements concerning attention, school work organization and other responsibilities”. Ivanna was diagnosed with a deficit attention and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and some brain maturation problems. However, the study evidenced Ivanna had an higher intelligence coefficient than the average student. Therapist suggested working with her to help her improve her literacy processes and attention levels.

Introducing David

David was six years old and was the youngest of two brothers. He lives with both parents who work for different car companies, so, his grandparents took care of them after school. His grandmother usually helped him with his homework in Spanish and David said that his older brother helped him with the English homework. David was a tall boy that looked older than the rest in the class. He was a nice and talkative guy with a loud voice, so, his language pronunciation problems were evident every time he talked. He could not pronounce the /r/ sound properly, and he hardly pronounced the consonant blends.

He started kindergarten when he was three years old and started his Spanish literacy process when he was four. When he started third grade kindergarten, he had his first Spanish literacy assessment, and according to his writing he was classified in the pre- syllabic stage. However, he was able to write his name correctly. “Letter knowledge frequently begins with a child’s awareness of his or her own first name in print, and for many children, their name is the first stable written form that has meaning” (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982 as cited in Griffith et al., 2008 p. 74). In the first Spanish assessment, he wrote the words with some vowels and circles. During word dictation activities, he intended to represent them mainly using vowels, but without any sense. “Pre alphabetic spellers tend to use letters that are common in the writing system to which they have been exposed, tend to use two-letter sequences that are common

in the writing system to which they have been exposed” (ibid, p.86).

When he started his English literacy process, there was little evidence of development in his Spanish process. In the English classes, he used Spanish vocabulary words to complete vocabulary activities. He did not try to use any English words. When the teacher showed flash cards to ask for certain vocabulary, he tended to create a word similar to Spanish and wrote it. He was able to follow some of the instructions, and if he did not understand them, he imitated his classmates. He showed a good learning attitude, but he had many difficulties. When preschool ended, his Spanish literacy skills were tested again. Even though he showed a little improvement, he was still considered in the pre syllabic stage. In primary school, he had a bad time during the first months because of his literacy skills. As months passed, he understood writing patterns, and he began his process slowly and improved his Spanish literacy skills.

Similarly, in the second English assessment, he was able to recognize the most common vocabulary words such as numbers, some animals, and verbs. He was asked to read, and if he knew the word, he was able to read it properly but with a Spanish pronunciation. He recognized the vowels sounds properly, and he identified those sounds in a word. When he was asked to segment letters to make words and then build a sentence, he could do it with few of them. However, he understood the instruction, and recognized the most common words from the sentence. Figure 1 shows the way he segmented words.

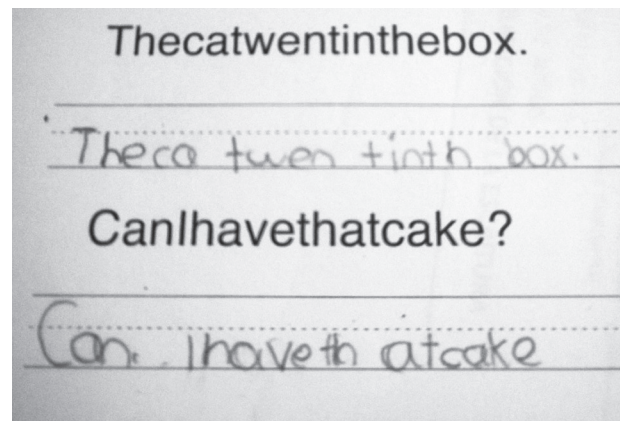


Figure 3. Word segmentation activity

Then, as he learned more English patterns, he translated the words he did not recognize into Spanish. According to the Media Biliteracy model the multiple and complex interrelationships between bilingualism and literacy and the importance of the contexts, media, and content in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in or around writing' (Hornberger, 1990, p. 213). Therefore, David built his second language through Spanish word translation. After the first grade, his speaking and writing skills developed significantly and so did his reading. "In reading and writing acquisition stable learning facilitate a better reading; this allows intellectual work to reach an effective level (Solovevia & Quintanar, 2008 p. 27)

Introducing Luis

Luis was also six years old and was the youngest of three. His brother and sister studied at the same elementary school. His father worked as an accountant in a car company. His mother had a part time job as an accountant and participated actively in the school's activities. Luis started kindergarten when he was two years old and his Spanish literacy process when he was four. His mother helped him to learn rapidly and he had private tutoring to improve his reading. However, in his first Spanish literacy assessment he was classified in the syllabic stage. In his writing, he tended to omit a letter in words, so that he lost the meaning of the word. As time passed, he improved his literacy skills, his second literacy assessment was more organized and he almost reached the alphabetic writing stage. However, when writing sentences he got lost, he did not

mark any word segmentation and he omitted some vowels when writing a sentence. The following images show Luis progress in his Spanish literacy process.

As he started his English literacy process, he had some vocabulary problems. When his teacher showed him cards to write words, he did not write. He said he did not know the word in English. When he wrote words they tended to have some spelling mistakes, he wrote words as he heard them. He omitted some consonants. However, when he was asked to draw the words he read, he showed understanding and drew something associated to the given words. When asked to read, he tried to read as if the text were in Spanish. After preschool, he improved his Spanish literacy skills. His writing structure was more organized

in both areas Spanish and English. He was able to carry out words segmentation activities correctly in Spanish, however in English he still had some difficulties.

He improved his writing in English but still had some spelling mistakes. He could write sentences with a given structure. For example, *It is a car*. Even though, this kind of structure is considered as inauthentic writing. "Children are exposed to authentic and inauthentic reading and writing activities, writing patterns and change some vocabulary words, is inauthentic because the action becomes mechanic" (Wells, 2008, p. 17).

Once he started primary school, he did well. He did not show any problem with the content subjects and his literacy process. He was recommended to work harder in reading compre-

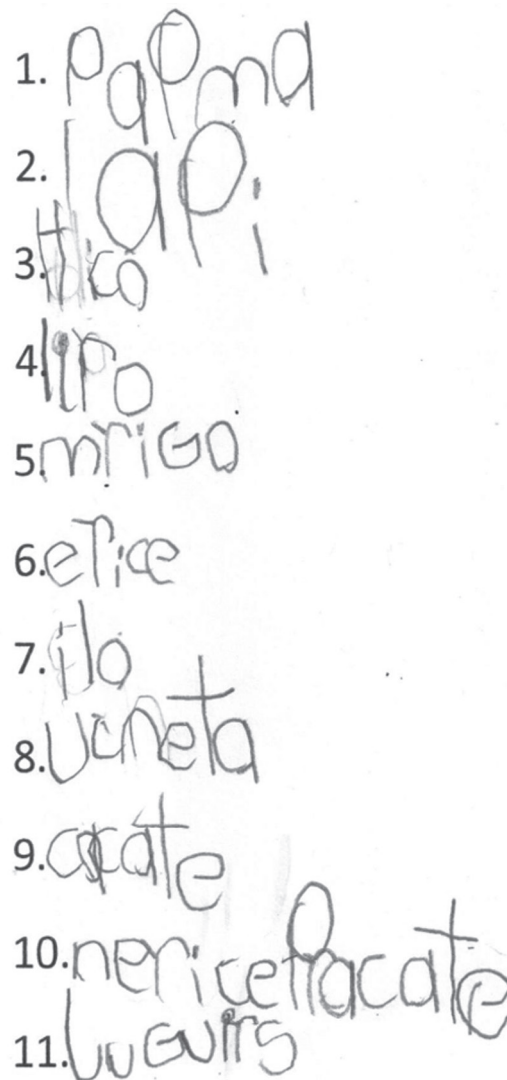


Figure 4. Luis' progress in Spanish literacy assessments

hension activities to understand academic contents. “Books and academic language is the more formal language found in texts and school settings. This language is decontextualized from actions that a child is involved in, as the language is being used.” (Griffith et al., 2008, p. 121). As a result, he was able to transfer his own literacy skills in Spanish to English, and he could improve in both languages.

Introducing Raquel

Raquel was six years old and the youngest of two children. She lives with her parents, and her mom tried to speak in English sometimes. She started preschool when she was two years old. In kindergarten Raquel was disciplined, she started her Spanish literacy process slowly but appropriately. When she began third grade she was considered syllabic in her Spanish writing assessment. She had lateral dominance problems in which she switched the direction of consonants such as /s/ p /d/. At that moment, she was able to write two and three syllable words. She was not able to use consonant blends such as /tr/. She identified the sounds of most of the letters. In word dictation she wrote a list of words, but when she heard a sentence, she wrote it as a long word. She was not able to segment of a sentence into words. When she started her English literacy process, they teacher reported she knew certain vocabulary and used it in class. The first English reading assessment evidenced that she identified some vocabulary words and associated them with pictures and wrote the words as she pronounced them. In the dictation activities there was evidence that if words had a similar pronunciation to Spanish, she wrote them correctly, if not she wrote them as she heard them. The following box shows her spelling of certain words.

Table 1. Raquel’s writing errors

English word	Raquel spelling
Cat	Cat
Pet	Pet
Milk	Milc
House	Gaus
Alligator	Aligeitor
Tree	Tri

As time passed, she learnt English words patterns through daily modeling writing activities. “Modeling writing becomes a tool to improve writing. So that, writing experiences are among the best ways for children to see the process of mapping spoken language onto writing language” (Griffith et al., 2008 p. 79). At the same time, she improved her Spanish literacy process; she achieved the “alphabetic” stage in writing. When she finished kindergarten, she was able to read words in English properly. She also identified words and wrote them in a sentence getting the meaning by context, and associating words with a picture. There was evidence of progress, but her lateral dominance problem was there, she still changed some letter direction such as /d/ or /p/. As she started primary school, she got better in her literacy processes in both languages, Spanish and English. In the English standardized test she was able to read sentences. She was able to segment words to make a sentence. Raquel’s pronunciation improved, and so did her reading in English. At the end of first grade, she recognized she liked learning English because she was learning another language.

Introducing Santiago

Santiago was an only child. He was seven years, a year older than the rest. His mother was a higher education professor and his father was an engineer in an important car company. He started kindergarten when he was 3 years old. He was a good student who usually followed instructions, and carried out all the activities in class. When he began third grade kindergarten, he showed an important improvement in his Spanish literacy process. In his first assessment he was able to write properly. He was placed in the alphabetic stage. He was able to write one, two and three syllable words, but he made writing mistakes with consonant blends such gr /cr/ fr /. When writing sentences, he tended to write them as long words. There was no evidence of word segmentation in his sentences. As the school year went by, he showed progress in his Spanish literacy process, and he corrected some consonant blend mistakes. When, he started his English literacy process, he was able to recognize and write common vocabulary words in English. He wrote the words as he heard them.

He was able to read the given words, comprehend and represent them in drawings. “Comprehending is building a mental model of what the print says and matching it to what the reader already knows to construct a meaning that makes sense” (Griffith et al., 2008 p. 116). He was a fluent reader, and he showed understanding in reading. At the end of preschool, he seemed to have completed his Spanish literacy process but still made some spelling mistakes. In his English process, he improved his spelling, we was able to write phrases and short sentences. He could read longer and complex words.

As he started elementary school, Santiago got used to the primary school routine and the academic contents easily. At the end of first grade, he got an academic acknowledgement for his outstanding grades in first grade.

Introducing Juan Carlos

Juan Carlos was six years old and the oldest of two boys. He was good in mathematics and took extra classes after school. His father was a higher education professor and his mother was a business woman. He started preschool when he was 3 years old. Teachers reported him as a good student. He showed his literacy skills when he was in 2nd grade preschool and was the best of the class. His mother encouraged and pushed him to improve his literacy skills. Therefore, when he started 3rd preschool, in the first test, he was able to write one, two and three syllable words. He could also use double consonant blends. He had some spelling mistakes, but once his teacher gave him feedback, he corrected them and worked with the task again. He was also a good reader, his reading was paused, but he could comprehend what the text was about. His Spanish literacy process was a much more advanced than the rest of the class.

When he started his English literacy process, his work was neater than the other students, but he tended to make the same writing mistakes. When the teacher showed him cards to identify and write the

word in English, he wrote it correctly when the sound was similar to Spanish such as cat and pet. However, when writing longer words, he wrote them as he heard them making spelling mistakes. He was able to identify words and draw meanings.

As Juan Carlos started elementary school, he starting having some trouble in getting used to the primary school routine and the academic contents. In his first primary school content assessment, he had a hard time. The evaluation process blocked him, and he did not show a significant progress. The transition to primary school was a complex process even though he was considered a good student. As time passed he got used to primary school, and at the end of first grade, he got an academic acknowledgement for his outstanding grades in first grade. “The continuity of the process, education and learning which will probably have not only direct negative impact upon behavior and school performance during the early school years, but it will also have a short-term negative impact upon the formation of the person’s traits” (Kienig, 2002 cited in Vrinioti, Einarsdottir & Broström 2006, p. 3).

After observing each child’s progress in their Spanish and English literacy processes in kindergarten and at the beginning of elementary school, we will compare the participants’ processes using two different tools: assessments and report cards.

Comparing the Participants Spanish literacy assessment

Three Spanish assessment tests were applied at different moments during third grade preschool to observe the children’s progress in their Spanish literacy acquisition. As explained before, Spanish literacy process is categorized in four stages: pre –syllabic, syllabic, syllabic alphabetic and alphabetic (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1979 cited in Rubin and Galvan p. 736). The results of the exams showed most of the students advanced in their writing. The following table indicates students’ level in each assessment.

Table 2: Spanish Literacy assessment stages

Student name	First Spanish literacy assessment	Second Spanish literacy assessment	Third Spanish literacy assessment
Ivanna	Pre –syllabic	X	Pre –syllabic
David	Pre –syllabic	Pre –syllabic	Syllabic
Luis	Syllabic	Syllabic	Alphabetic
Raquel	Syllabic	Syllabic	Alphabetic
Santiago	Alphabetic	Alphabetic	Alphabetic
Juan Carlos	Alphabetic	Alphabetic	Alphabetic

When Ivanna and David started third grade, they were placed in a pre-syllabic stage; they were not able to write a word. Ivanna tried to write some letters, but she wrote just vowels that were sometimes related to each word. David had the same problem. He wrote symbols simulating letters. Both children did not recognize any meaning. The second assessment did not indicate improvement in their processes. Ivanna's maturity problem increased, she got more confused in both literacy processes. David reported the same problems he had before due to his immaturity and language problem, however, he was able to identify some vowels sounds and write them representing the word. At the end of the course Ivanna had not improved. Both were asked to have a pedagogic intervention to help them. Ivanna parents' refused because thought her daughter was not taught properly while David's parents accepted the intervention and he reached a syllabic stage.

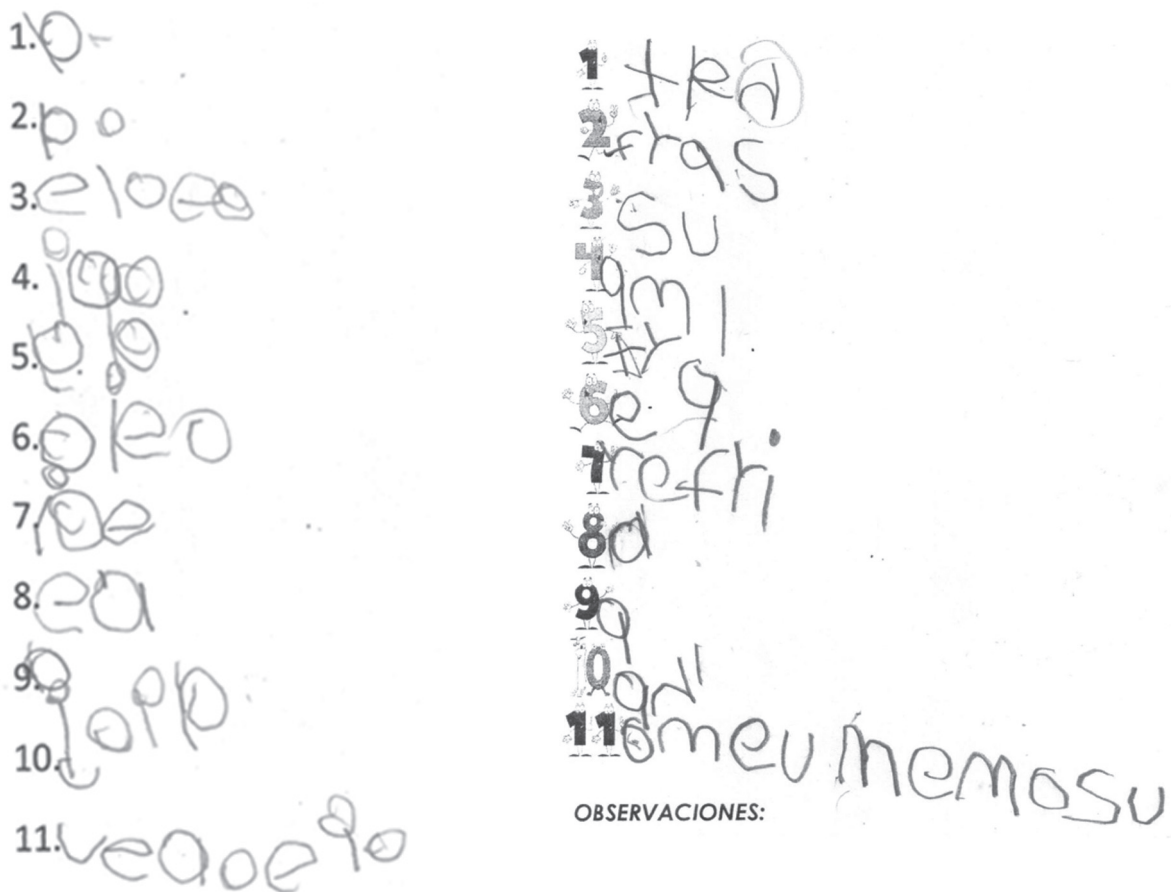


Figure 5 and 6: Ivanna's and David's first Spanish literacy assessment: Pre-syllabic writing

Raquel and Luis were in the syllabic stage in the two previous Spanish assessments, but both of them had different problems to work with. Since the first assessment, Raquel showed some problems with her lateral dominance; however she was considered in the syllabic stage. She had some spelling mistakes, and tended to change the direction of some letters. At that moment, Luis showed progress in his literacy skills, his writing was better than Raquel's. As time passed, his literacy process development slowed down while Raquel's literacy development improved significantly. The second assessment indicated Raquel development was evident even though she continued having lateral dominance problems. Her writing progress was more evident than Luis'. He still read slowly and omitted some letters while Raquel's reading was more fluent.

1. pah
2. apis
3. isicio
4. lboro
5. oimariho
6. erice
7. ilo
8. cuenta
9. cacaguate
10. ericecmapracaguate
11. guamosche isicio

1. papama
2. apis
3. isicio
4. lboro
5. mriego
6. erice
7. ilo
8. uneta
9. acate
10. nericecaccate
11. bueurs

Figure 7 and 8: Luis' and Raquel's first Spanish literacy assessment: Syllabic writing

Santiago and Juan Carlos were at the same stage in the three tests. Each one showed a considerable improvement in their writing. In the first test they were able to write the words they heard, and omitted letters with the phonemes qu/ cl. Santiago's writing looked more organized and neat. He used capitals and lower case consonants.

Juan Carlos writing still had some consonant inversions. He made more spelling mistakes than Santiago. However, both children wrote the sentence they heard omitting spaces between words. They wrote like a long word. Both of them needed to work on writing direction and organization. Figure 5.5 and 5.6 compare these two children's writing in the first assessment. Both children were able to write most of the words, but they seemed to have more problems with double consonant blends.

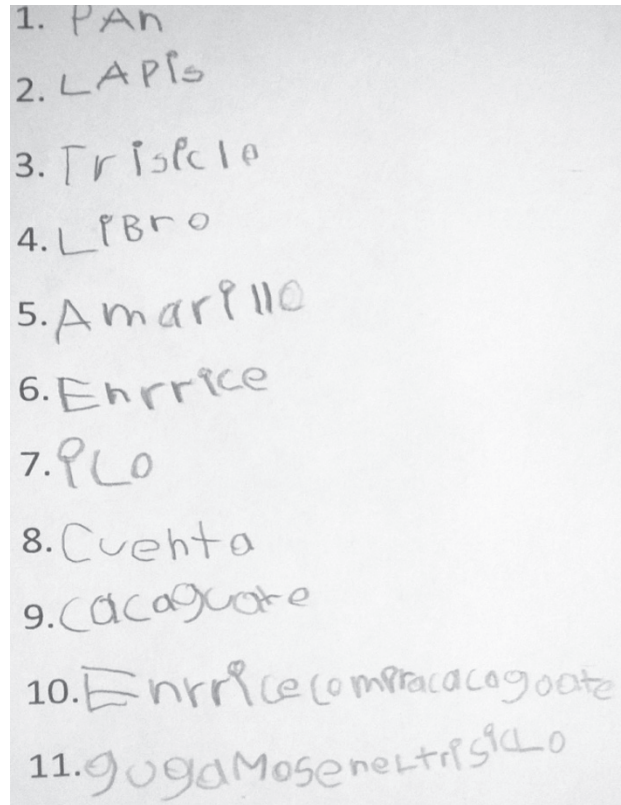
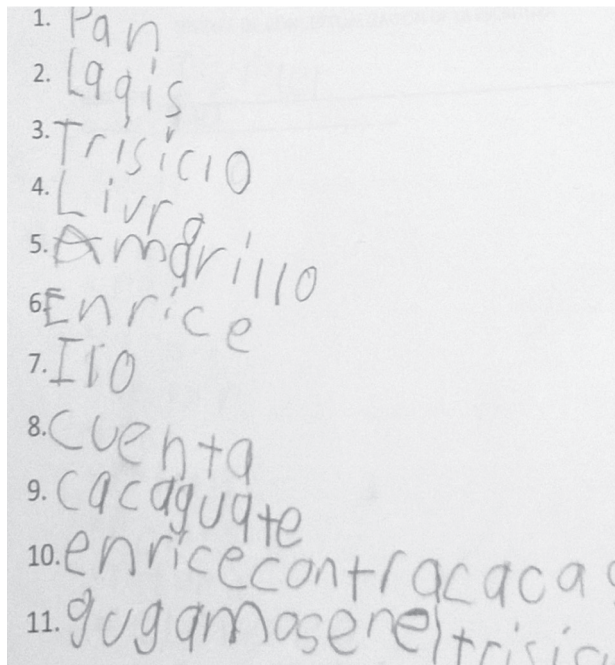


Figure 9 and 10: Juan Carlos' and Santiago's first Spanish literacy assessment: Alphabetic writing

In the second Spanish literacy assessment Santiago and Juan Carlos continued their literacy progress and improved their writing and spelling organization. Juan Carlos still had some problems in word segmentation in sentences, and Santiago at that moment was able to write them correctly. When reading in Spanish, they were able to read a text in a slowly and understood most of it. The last Spanish assessment in preschool showed that Santiago and Juan Carlos were considered full alphabetic. They were able to express their ideas in their writing and were also able to build short sentences properly. Both children needed to work on reading fluency, and both had to pay attention to their inversion mistakes. According to Rosa, Ferrazoli and Marilia (2013, p. 869) “It is common for preschool-aged children, when beginning to copy letters shapes, inverting or mirroring them. They become an orthographic error to work on them”.

English literacy assessment

“High Scope research in language and literacy has shown there are four important aspects for literacy development, those aspects are the comprehen-

sion, phonological awareness, alphabet decoding and written patterns” (Epstein, Lawrence & DeBruin, 2006, p. 1). So, phonological awareness activities and tests were applied in order to observe children’s English literacy progress.

The first English assessment was carried out in preschool. It was a vocabulary word dictation, in which in general the six children wrote the words they heard, and a list of three common vocabulary words to read and draw them. In the dictation the six children tended to write words as they heard them, or wrote them as if they were in Spanish. They were able to recognize the difference between writing in Spanish or English. According to Rubin and Galvan (2005 p.732), “children at the age of six can make difference between letter structures in two languages”. The second part of the assessment consisted on reading three common words and then drawing them to check if they could recognize each word.

The chart below shows children results in the first part of the assessment. It is important to mention that at the time this English assessment was applied, the six children had not concluded their Spanish literacy process.

Word	Ivanna	David	Luis	Raquel	Santiago	Juan Carlos
Cat	<u>cat</u>	<u>cat</u>	<u>cat</u>	<u>cat</u>	<u>cat</u>	<u>cat</u>
Pet	<u>pet</u>	<u>pet</u>	<u>pet</u>	<u>pet</u>	<u>pet</u>	<u>pet</u>
Milk	<u>milk</u>	<u>milk</u>	<u>Milk</u>	<u>Milk</u>	<u>milk</u>	<u>milk</u>
House	<u>house</u>	<u>house</u>	<u>house</u>	<u>house</u>	<u>house</u>	<u>house</u>
Alligator	<u>alligator</u>	<u>alligator</u>	<u>alligator</u>	<u>alligator</u>	<u>alligator</u>	<u>alligator</u>

Table 3: First English literacy assessment chart.

So, as mentioned above, Ivanna had some difficulties in her Spanish literacy process, and in English she hardly wrote a word. She was able to write a word like in Spanish /cat/ but the other words were hard to understand. In the second part of the test, she was not able to read an English word. “Children whose language problems persist past age five may be at risk of developing awareness deficiency” (Catts cited in Griffith et al., 2008 p. 48).

David had some difficulties in writing when he took this English assessment. He identified more words, but misspelled them. In the second part of the test, he read and drew the three given words. He showed an understanding of each word.

Luis in his first English assessment showed he could write the dictated words. He had spelling problems in long words; he wrote one syllable words correctly. He was confused with the use of the /k/ sound and he used the /c/ sound instead. When reading, he could identify the words and illustrate them properly. Raquel did more or less the same mistakes as Luis in spelling and she could also read and illustrate words properly. She read in English slowly and identified some vocabulary words and pronounced them correctly.

Even though Santiago and Juan Carlos had an advanced level in their Spanish literacy skills, they made the same English spelling mistakes as Raquel and Luis. They had problems with the /k/ sound and they tended to write as they heard the words. Santiago became a fluent English reader, and Juan Carlos had some problems in uncommon word pronunciation.

The second English assessment was carried out at the end of preschool. Most of the students improved both literacy skills. The test consisted on a list of word dictation, and the ability to write a sentence with a given structure. In general, children were able to write more complex spelled words, and followed the pattern to construct a sentence using some pictures. In the reading section, they had to read a story about animals.

At this point, Ivanna was still considered at the pre-communicative stage. She was able to recognize some letters and wrote them, but could not write complete words. She could copy the pattern to build a sentence, but she was not able to do it by herself. Children at this stage “know the difference between writing and drawing, write with scribbles, mock letters, and real letters unconnected to sounds” (Rubin & Galván, 2005 p. 736).

David and Luis wrote some words, as they heard them and therefore, often misspelled them. However they wrote the ones which were familiar to them correctly. They had problems in spelling double vowels sounds. They were able to build sentences through images. When they did not know a word in English, they invented a new English word similar to a Spanish word or to something that made sense to them. For example, David did not know how to say cat in English, so he wrote /miao/ in Spanish. When they read, they had some pronunciation mistakes but they were able to read numbers and some animal names.

In the second assessment Raquel, Santiago and Juan Carlos kept in the phonetic stage. Their

writing was neater than the others, and they wrote most of the words correctly. They had problems spelling words with double vowel sounds such as: tiher, techer, or ticher. They spelled the word girl as ger, or gril. According to Rubin and Galván (2005, p. 736) in bilingual literacy context, some errors are made because of different letter-sound relationships in the two languages.

The third English assessment was carried out after children started primary school. So, they already were conscious about the two different literacy processes. According to Solovevia and Quintanar (2008, p. 17) “in the transition to primary school, children become conscious about the language structure, and children achieve brain maturity”. A sample of a “Reading I Core Common Standard test” was applied to measure children English language acquisition process. The test evaluated phonemic awareness, words segmentation and children reading readiness. The purpose of the exam was to identify children literacy stage, and the possible problems they had at that moment.

When Ivanna took the test, she had been facing different problems in her two literacy processes, and now in the content classes. In the standardized test she was able to identify the sounds of the words, she recognized vocabulary by identify the meaning of them through images. However, she had some difficulties in identifying words in a sentence and had problems with word segmentation. In the English reading assessment, she just read the words she recognized.

David found some difficulties in his English literacy process. In the test, he showed a better understanding of English instructions. In the phonemic

awareness part, he could identify the word sounds and could match the word to the image. He was able to read the sentences. He had some difficulties in pronunciation, but showed an understanding of the context. He had some difficulties in word segmentation, and he could segment only the words he recognized, and one syllable words.

Luis performance in the standardized test showed he was able to identify words, and match them according to the sound. He also was able to read sentences but had some problems in word pronunciation. He could segment words in parts of the sentences. He segmented the vocabulary words he knew previously. In the reading readiness part, he could read sentences properly and complete them with the correct sentence.

Raquel, Santiago and Juan Carlos kept the same English proficiency level after the standardized test. Their development along this process was evident. Raquel recognized sounds from the phonemic awareness activity properly. She became a fluent reader with a few pronunciation problems that she improved after feedback. The word segmentation activity demonstrated she understood patterns, and identified the words in the sentence. Whereas, Santiago still presented some problems in word segmentation.

After observing all the English assessments and the Standardized test children were categorized according to their writing bilingual skills. The following chart explains children progress in their English literacy process. As mentioned before, Rubin and Galván (2005) classified bilingual children literacy stages in the following: pre -communicative, semi phonetic, phonetic, transitional and conventional stage.

Table 4: Children’s English literacy progress chart

Student name	First English literacy assessment	Second English literacy assessment	Third English literacy assessment
Ivanna	Pre - communicative stage	Pre - communicative stage	Semi phonetic stage
David	Pre - communicative stage	Semi phonetic stage	Phonetic stage
Luis	Semi phonetic stage	Semi phonetic stage	Phonetic stage
Raquel	Phonetic stage	Phonetic stage	Transitional stage
Santiago	Phonetic stage	Phonetic stage	Transitional stage
Juan Carlos	Phonetic stage	Phonetic stage	Transitional stage

Children’s backgrounds, home support and their literacy development processes

Reading, writing and talking are part of everyday activities. Children are exposed to different literacy experiences at school and home. At school, the teacher guides them to fulfill daily literacy activities. At home, parents’ support plays an important role in children’s development. This study observed parents’ backgrounds, the influence in their children processes and their own beliefs of how they support their children in their biliteracy acquisition processes. Griffith et al. (2008 pp. 173) defines parents involvement as “parents role conception which describes what parents thought they were supposed to do, and perceived efficacy describes how effective parents believe they can support their child’s learning”. During this study, parents were observed about their own conception of how to support their children. They generally helped as they were taught. “parents construct their beliefs through the past and present experiences. Thus, beliefs about parents’ involvement are shaped by, and represent, the values, of family members and friends” (ibid, p. 172).

Table 5 shows the six children’s parents background s and their education background in order to understand their influence in their children biliteracy processes. This information was provided by parents through different informal conversations.

Table 5: Parents backgrounds

Participant name	Mother’s background	Father’s background
Ivanna	BA – basic English level Stay at home mother	BA – High school engineering. Basic English level
David	BA Stay at home mother	BA level Publicity company
Luis	BA Accountant insurance company	BA Accountant in a car factory
Raquel	BA – studied English at different languages school s Own business	BA Professional chef
Santiago	Masters– she teaches in a university. Proficient English level UPAM (Universidad Tecnológica de Amozoc) engineering area	Masters Engineering Car company: Federal Mogul
Juan Carlos	Masters Math teacher SEP	Masters Office SEP

In this study parents’ education background had a positive effect on children success in their biliteracy processes. Children, whose parents had a professional background, were more successful in their understanding of their children’s biliteracy processes. Parents’ participation in their children’s literacy development played an important role. During the study they were asked about the way they support their children. “All children are likely to become more successful readers and writers when teachers have a strong family involvement component in their literacy program” (Mandel & Tracey, 2007, pp. 66 – 67).

Findings and significance

There is very little research on children literacy process in EFL bilingual English Spanish contexts and the analysis of children’s transition process from preschool to elementary school in Mexico which were the main

objectives of this study. The findings of the study allowed observing and understanding more about these children's biliteracy development processes. Each child's process depended mainly of each child and the learning environment provided mainly by the parents' support and school involvement. In this case preschool learning played an important role in these children's biliteracy learning. Preschool gave children the opportunity to acquire both literacy processes at the same time. "Children who have high – quality preschool experiences with an emphasis on language and literacy are more likely to acquire strong language and literacy skills that translate into achievement in the early grades and throughout their schooling" (Mandel & Tracey, 2007 p. 63 – 64).

Most these children were able to reach either a syllabic or alphabetical stage in both languages using different rhythms, paces and using different tools and support without affecting either acquisition process significantly. Escamilla (as cited in Rubín and Galvan 2005 p. 732) stated "in young children learning two-languages frequently use both of their languages to communicate ideas and to demonstrate what they know. There is no evidence that the use of two-languages causes children to become confused" (p. 123).

This study also identified the influence of the children phonological awareness processes and their literacy development in both language. Children's work and phonological awareness activities helped them to understand reading and writing patterns in English, and facilitated their reading and writing processes in Spanish. "Immersing these children in reading and writing activities that support mainstream children's development of phonological awareness benefit children performance in the school environments" (Griffit et al., 2008 pp. 63 – 64).

The findings of this study can contribute to our understanding of children's biliteracy acquisition processes in the transition between kindergarten and primary school in a bilingual school (Vrinitioni, Einarsdottir & Broström, 2006).

One of the main pedagogical implications of this study is that there is a need to raise English teachers understanding about the significance of the transition between kindergarten and primary school specially in bilingual contexts as well as to raise their awareness about the differences in rhythm and pace of each child's bilingual literacy processes. ■

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Cyberbullying: Una exploración descriptiva en estudiantes universitarios

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Resumen

En este artículo se presentan los escasos estudios realizados sobre el tema del acoso escolar a través de las tecnologías de la información y el conocimiento (TIC's) Éstas, así como resultados del estudio exploratorio sobre el cyberbullying con la participación de ciento treinta y seis estudiantes universitarios que cursan el idioma inglés, a quienes se les encuestó para conocer aspectos del cyberbullying. Los resultados indican que el cyberbullying si bien se presenta con baja frecuencia en los universitarios encuestados; los hallazgos demuestran que ambos sexos están involucrados en el fenómeno de alguna u otra forma. En este artículo se presentan las opiniones de los propios universitarios acerca del cyberbullying puesto que éstos afirman que los valores universales son básicos para las relaciones sociales sanas, consideran que la tecnología facilita la agresión por medio del cyberbullying, y por último, algunos perciben al cyberbullying como una broma, o bien no saben sobre este fenómeno.

Palabras Clave: Cyberbullying, Alumnos, Víctimas, Agresores, Celular, Facebook.

Abstract

In this article the few studies are discussed that have been carried out in the area called cyberbullying. Also, an exploratory study is detailed about cyberbullying. The research was done with one hundred and thirty-six students of English. They were given a questionnaire that elicited the necessary information to describe cyberbullying among the sample group. According to the results, cyberbullying was found in low frequency. The results showed that both women and men participated in the phenomenon in some way. Furthermore, the opinions of the students about the topic are discussed, since some of them consider that universal values are the base for healthy relationships. Other students reported that technology facilitates aggression in cyberbullying, while other undergraduate students saw cyberbullying as a kind of joke. Finally, some of them indicated not to know about this type of violence.

Key Words: Cyberbullying, Students, Victims, Aggressors, Witness, Mobile Phones, Facebook.

Introducción

En este artículo si bien se habla de violencia es, en particular la violencia que se expresa en los espacios educativos; más específico aún en las redes sociales donde se emplea algún tipo de tecnología; por lo que emplearemos más el término anglosajón de bullying y cyberbullying. Como se sabe, algunos organismos promueven la investigación de la violencia (OMS, 2002) y la búsqueda de una educación para la paz (OREALC/UNESCO, 2008). No obstante, al menos en México, los estudios acerca de la violencia llamada cyberbullying son muy escasos. A partir de ello, se consi-

deró pertinente identificar y describir la violencia cibernética entre los estudiantes universitarios.

Con la intención de definir qué entendemos por cyberbullying hay que mencionar que, estudios realizados por García, *et al.* (2010); Buelga, Cava, y Musitu (2010) y, Álvarez, *et al.* (2011) acerca de la violencia entre las personas, indican que ésta adquiere una nueva forma ante el uso de la tecnología de la información (TIC); sus investigaciones demuestran que las TIC son utilizadas comúnmente para propagar la violencia entre iguales y esta nueva expresión de intimidación cibernética es

conocida como ciberbullying. Ortega, Calmaestra y Mora (2008) observaron que el Internet, como el celular son los medios más utilizados para cometerlo.

En México, una revisión a ochenta investigaciones científicas; a través de bases de datos realizada por médicos de la Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas (UAT), encontró que un cuarenta por ciento de los educandos encuestados en los trabajos tuvo contacto con el ciberbullying (García, Joffre, Martínez y Llanes, 2011). Los investigadores reportan que una de cada cuatro personas se vio involucrada en dicha violencia. Asimismo en Nuevo León, López (2009) concluye que el ciberbullying es una realidad e indica que dos de cada diez alumnos de preparatoria participó como agresor de sus compañeros. Por consiguiente, se realizó un estudio por encuesta cuantitativo de tipo exploratorio descriptivo en estudiantes universitarios que cursan diversos niveles del idioma inglés y a continuación se presentan los resultados obtenidos en la investigación.

La UNESCO promueve la búsqueda de una educación para la paz y la prevención de la intimidación (OREALC/UNESCO, 2008). Por ende, investigar sobre el ciberbullying en la Universidad de Quintana Roo (UQRoo) contribuirá en prevenir este fenómeno en el contexto universitario. En México los únicos estudios relacionados con el ciberbullying, encontrados hasta el momento, son los de López (2009), García, Joffre, Martínez y Llanes, (2011), Muñoz (2012, Cit. en Ortega y González, S/.F.), Valdés, Carlos, Tanori y Wendlandt (2014) y Velázquez, (S.F.).

A pesar de que es muy incipiente su estudio y muchas sus expresiones, es notable, en Quintana Roo no haberse encontrado estudios similares a los ya descritos. Por tanto, se consideró pertinente realizar una investigación acerca del tema dada su relevancia e interés educativo tanto para estudios sobre violencia y acoso escolar, como para estudios de paz y convivencia escolar, los dos paradigmas con los que se estudia este fenómeno educativo.

Revisión de la literatura

Se observó que las investigaciones sobre ciberbullying se enfocan en adolescentes de secun-

daria o bachillerato, como son los estudios de López (2009); Buelga, Cava y Musitu, (2010); García, *et al.* (2010 y 2011); Álvarez, *et al.*, (2011) y Gutshall (2012). Se identificó también que, en varias investigaciones empíricas realizadas en distintos países, los sujetos de investigación eran jóvenes menores de diecisiete años de edad, con excepción de algunas, como la investigación con universitarios realizada por Walker, Rajan y Koehn (2011).

En el contexto mexicano, el único trabajo realizado con universitarios es el de Muñoz (2012). Es interesante mencionar, de acuerdo con Zaitegi (2010) que, el problema de la violencia en la variable conocida como ciberbullying, pone de manifiesto que algunos alumnos del sexo masculino tienen dificultades para ser sociables, para comportarse y relacionarse con sus semejantes.

Después de revisar los trabajos descritos, se identificó que el tema del ciberbullying es una constante a nivel mundial. Asimismo, se observó que la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS, 2002) indica que existe una necesidad de recolectar y analizar datos sobre la violencia y la información es importante a todos los niveles, pero es a nivel local donde se determinarán su calidad y su grado de complejidad.

El estudio empírico

La pregunta principal de investigación que guió esta investigación fue, por un lado si los estudiantes universitarios que cursaban distintos niveles del idioma inglés en el Centro de Idiomas habían sido víctimas o agresores de ciberbullying. Por otro lado, interesaba conocer si es el Facebook o el celular los medios recurrentes en los cuales se manifiesta este acoso; con qué frecuencia se presentaba este tipo de violencia entre los universitarios; qué género estaba más involucrado ya fuese como víctima, testigo de víctima, agresor o testigo de agresor en el ciberbullying. Por último, resultaba interesante conocer sus opiniones personales acerca del tema.

El presente trabajo al ser exploratorio-descriptivo se encuadró dentro de una perspectiva cuantitativa. Según Hernández (2010) el método por encuesta es el más recomendado al llevar a cabo investigaciones descriptivas puesto

que este método se caracteriza por la aplicación de cuestionarios con el fin de reunir datos. Para lograr mayor precisión en el momento de realizar el análisis cuantitativo, el cuestionario utilizado se basó en la escala de Lickert con el objetivo de formar categorías con las respuestas y el procesamiento de los datos para la obtención de los resultados fue a través del programa SPSS.

Las variables que se consideraron en esta investigación fue principalmente, la frecuencia del ciberbullying, y de manera dependiente, las variables sociodemográficas, el género y el medio de actuación. Para determinar la selección de los sujetos universitarios, se revisaron los registros de inscripción de mil ciento cuarenta y dos estudiantes pertenecientes a diversos programas de licenciatura que cursaban el idioma inglés en el Programa Universitario de Idiomas durante el ciclo primavera 2013. Se pretendió encuestar al mayor número de alumnos posibles, lográndose una muestra de ciento treinta y seis universitarios para realizar esta investigación. El análisis de los datos indicó que del total de la muestra, sesenta y siete eran mujeres y cincuenta y tres eran hombres; el resto no contestó el ítem correspondiente a sexo. A pesar de lo descrito, las proporciones señaladas contribuyeron para identificar qué género estaba más involucrado en el ciberbullying como víctima, testigo de víctima, agresor, o testigo de agresor. Aún

más, en el análisis de los datos con SPSS se logró identificar claramente las proporciones de hombres y mujeres que contestaron participar en el ciberbullying y con esas cantidades se definió quién estaba más involucrado en el fenómeno.

El cuestionario utilizó como base el cuestionario DAPHNE, el cual fue diseñado Calmaestra (2011) para tres universidades europeas con el objetivo de medir el nivel de incidencia en el ciberbullying tanto en España, Reino Unido, Italia como Finlandia. Asimismo, se tomó como referente una tabla de resultados con ítems, proporcionada en el estudio de Lawrence, Lam y Li (2012). De estas dos referencias, se tomaron los ítems más apropiados para la construcción del cuestionario y se adaptaron a los propósitos de la investigación. La validación del contenido del cuestionario se realizó por medio de una prueba piloto con cincuenta y seis estudiantes universitarios, a través del pilotaje correspondiente se identificó la confiabilidad y validez del instrumento; a través del Alfa de Cronbach de .952.

Los resultados del estudio sobre el ciberbullying entre estudiantes universitarios

En la tabla 1 se resumen los hallazgos del estudio empírico. Se identifica que el Facebook es el medio más utilizado para victimizar en el ciberbullying. También, se resalta la testificación de víctimas por ambos géneros y ambos medios.

Tabla 1. Cuadro comparativo sobre víctimas en celular y Facebook (Fuente: elaboración propia)

Tipo	Frecuencia negativa Facebook	Frecuencia positiva Facebook	Frecuencia negativa Celular	Frecuencia positiva celular	Medio más usado	Género victimizado por mayoría en los 2 medios
Insultos	60.9 %	28.6 % una o dos veces Hombres el 18.8 % del total	70%	22.2% una o dos veces Hombres el 22.2 % del total	En Facebook se victimizó en mayor medida.	Hombres
Intimidación	76.6%	18.9 % una o dos veces Mujeres el 13 % del total de porcentajes	76.3 %	14.8 % una o dos veces Hombres el 12.6 % del total de porcentajes	Facebook	Mujeres en Facebook Hombres en celular

Acoso sexual	74.2%	15.9 % una o dos veces Mujeres con 13.6 % del total de porcentajes	80%	11.1 una o dos veces Mujeres el 11.1 % del total de porcentajes	Facebook es por donde se produjo más acoso sexual.	Mujeres en ambos medios
Denigración mensajes y posts	84.2%	12 % una o dos veces Hombres el 9.1% del total de porcentajes	83.7%	14.1 una o dos veces Mujeres el 9.6% del total de porcentajes	El celular	Mujeres por celular y hombres por Facebook
Rumores	75.8 %	18.9 % una o dos veces Hombres 13.6 % del total de porcentajes	77%	17% una o dos veces Hombres 11.1 % y Mujeres 11.1 % del total de porcentajes	Facebook	Hombres fueron mayoría en Facebook Mujeres y hombres en celular en porcentajes iguales
Envío de fotos y videos	88.5%	6.9 % una o dos veces Hombres el 6.8% del total de los porcentajes	90%	5.9% una o dos veces Hombres el 5.9% del total de los porcentajes	Facebook fue el lugar donde se sufrió más esta forma de cyberbullying.	Hombres en ambos medios
Bromas pesadas		No se incluyó ítem	60%	28.9% una o dos veces 8.1 más de tres veces Mujeres el 20% y los hombres el 17.8 % del total de porcentajes	Solo celular	Hombres por un poco proporción
Testigo víctima	41 %	32.6% una o dos veces 15.6 % muchas veces Hombres el 25.1% Mujeres el 27.4 % del porcentaje total	50 %	28.4 % una o dos veces 11.9% más de tres veces Hombres 24.6% Mujeres el 19.4% del porcentaje total	Facebook fue donde más se testificó	Mujeres en Facebook y hombres por celular
Víctima	70.9%	18.7 % una o dos veces Mujeres el 14.2% del porcentaje total	80%	14.9% una o dos veces Hombres el 10.4% del porcentaje total	Facebook como el lugar donde se fue más victimizado	Hombres sobresalieron en celular y las mujeres resaltaron en Facebook

El único ítem donde más se victimizó por ciberbullying vía celular fue en denigración. Facebook se utilizó en un doce por ciento mientras que el celular se utilizó en un catorce por ciento. Resalta que el género masculino figuró como víctima en celular y Facebook, y que las mujeres sobresalieron como víctimas en Facebook. Asimismo, se destaca que las mujeres, aunque no dominaron como víctimas de manera general, prevalecieron en sufrimiento de acoso sexual vía celular y Facebook, así también como víctimas en denigración por celular, intimidación en Facebook y de bromas pesadas por celular.

Aunque Facebook resultó el medio de testificación más frecuente; es importante no dejar de lado los porcentajes de testificación que se observó por el celular. Se puede notar que tanto en Facebook como celular, prevaleció constantemente la categoría de victimización *una o dos veces*, más que las otras frecuencias como *más de tres veces* y *muchas veces*.

Tabla 2. Cuadro comparativo de agresores en celular y Facebook (Fuente: elaboración propia)

Tipo	Frecuencia negativa Facebook	Frecuencia positiva Facebook	Frecuencia negativa celular	Frecuencia positiva celular	Medio más utilizado	Género agresor por mayoría en los 2 medios
Insultos	67.7%	26.3 una o dos veces. Los hombres el 18.8 % del porcentaje global	67.9%	23% una o dos veces. Los hombres el 17.9% del porcentaje global	Facebook	Hombres
Intimidación	88.6%	9.8 una o dos veces. Los hombres el 9.2% del porcentaje global	90%	6.7 % una o dos veces. Los hombres el 6.7% del porcentaje global	Facebook	Hombres
Acoso sexual	95.5%	3.0% una o dos veces. Los hombres el 2.3% del porcentaje global	97.8%	1.5 % muchas veces. Hombres y mujeres el .7% del porcentaje global	Facebook	Hombres en Facebook y celular. Las mujeres sólo por celular
Denigración mensajes y posts	88.6%	6.8 % una o dos veces Los hombres el 8.4 % del porcentaje global	95.6%	2.9 % una o dos veces Los hombres el 3.6% del porcentaje global	Marcada diferencia en Facebook.	Hombres
Rumores	88.6%	8.3 una o dos veces Los hombres el 7.7 % del porcentaje global	88.7%	7.5% una o dos veces Los hombres el 6.8% del porcentaje global	Facebook	Hombres en ambos medios

Envío de fotos y videos	No se consideró ítem		84.6%	9.6% una o dos veces. Los hombres el 8% del porcentaje global	Celular	Hombres
Bromas pesadas	No se consideró ítem		64.7%	26.3% una o dos veces Los hombres el 19.5% del porcentaje global	Celular	Hombres
Testigo de agresor	63.7%	20% una o dos veces. 9.6 muchas veces Los hombres el 20.7% del porcentaje total	63%	20.7 %una o dos veces 8.1% más de tres veces Las mujeres el 17.1% del porcentaje total	Facebook	Hombres por Facebook Mujeres por celular
Agresor	74.1%	18.5 una o dos veces Los hombres el 17.8% del porcentaje global	78%	13.3% una o dos veces Los hombres el 14% del porcentaje total	Facebook	Hombres en los dos medios

En esta segunda tabla se observa que no existió ciberbullying en mayor frecuencia más que una o dos veces en el grupo muestra de inglés, esto en cuanto a agresión. También se establece que se marcó una diferencia relevante en cuanto a medio de actuación, Facebook fue usado en un cincuenta y cuatro por ciento para cometer algún tipo de ciberbullying mientras que el celular fue usado casi un cuarenta y dos por ciento para cometer los mismos tipos de ciberbullying en Facebook. No obstante, es importante señalar que, en tales porcentajes no se consideraron las proporciones de bromas pesadas, el envío de fotos y videos por celular ya que en Facebook no se consideraron esos ítems, de haberse incluido tales proporciones; el celular resultaría como el medio mayor usado con más de un setenta y siete por ciento.

Aunque se observa que el índice de agresión fue bajo, se destaca que el género masculino es el más involucrado como agresor en los dos medios. En los tipos de ciberbullying las mujeres solo aparecieron como agresoras en acoso sexual por celular. En la parte de testigos por estos me-

dios, los hombres sobresalieron en Facebook y las mujeres en celular. También, es significativa la semejanza de los porcentajes en agresión; a través de insultos en ambos medios, y la similitud en los índices de testificación de agresores una o dos veces tanto en Facebook como celular.

Ahora bien, el cuestionario incluyó una sección donde los alumnos pudieron expresar sus comentarios e historias acerca del ciberbullying, y es interesante analizar lo que estos estudiantes universitarios de ambos sexos compartieron.

[Un estudiante menciona que] “durante el primer semestre tuve un problema con una compañera y esta hizo que toda el aula me hiciera bullying tanto en el aula como el Facebook” [Otro estudiante señaló] “En una ocasión publiqué una imagen que para muchos fue ofensiva y me agredieron mediante comentario” [Otro dijo que si bien] “No soy víctima del ciberbullying, pero en alguna ocasión sí, solamente por el Facebook, llega a ser peligroso el hecho de tener agregadas per-

sonas que no conoces por lo que decidí no aceptar a nadie desconocido y a veces si los ubico, pero no tengo relación alguna, ni palabras hacia aquel (a), simplemente para mi tranquilidad no acepto a cualquiera. [Un estudiante más se mostró complacido con la encuesta que estaba respondiendo y dijo] “Me gustó la encuesta ya que es algo muy usual en estos tiempos conozco la historia de un compañero de mi salón que por ser muy alto le pusieron Petter la anguila. Creo que está muy mal por parte del grupo ya que sea como sea somos humanos y merecemos respeto”. [Otro manifestó preocupación al indicar que] “En Facebook una persona jackeo mi cuenta y publicó fotos y mensajes con el fin de crear mal aspecto a mi persona sugiero alguna ley que castigue esto” [Por último, dos estudiantes más dijeron] “En lo que cabe en mi estancia en esta institución no he sufrido o sido testigo de algún caso de ciberbullying. Sin embargo, en el pasado si he sufrido ciberbullying por Metroflog. Opino que hay que tener cuidado en lo que se expone en estos medios, porque la memoria online es muy larga y se queda plasmada” y, “En las bancas de la universidad he visto que se jueguen bromas pesadas”. (Estudiantes encuestados, 2013).

Estos universitarios decidieron contar de manera escrita sus experiencias con el ciberbullying y bullying. Se identifica que en el ciberbullying, las redes sociales como Facebook y Metroflog, así como la aplicación whatsapp, fueron los medios más utilizados para llevar a cabo la agresión. Otros universitarios incluso pueden definirlo muy bien, al proponer algunas alternativas y mostrar preocupación.

El ciberbullying y el bullying es un conjunto de acciones inapropiadas hacia las personas, a veces bromeo a compañeros sólo por jugar pero creo que a veces he podido ridiculizar a alguien. Me arrepiento posteriormente pero luego vuelvo a bromear. Mis bromas deberían ser a niveles más bajos.

El ciberbullying muchas veces empieza como una broma entre amigos que alcanza otros niveles y que muchas veces se

vuelve costumbre ridiculizar a otras personas. Es importante identificar estos actos y si se puede apoyar a esas personas que son víctimas.

Pienso que la raíz de esto es la devaluación de los valores, pues el principal de estos es el respeto a las personas. Sería interesante trabajar en algún método para inculcar de nuevo los valores y recalcar que nunca pasará de moda la tolerancia y el respeto.

Pienso que es importante detectar a las personas que sufren de este tipo de acoso para poder ayudarlos. Además de que con el constante avance de las tecnologías seguirán aumentando estos casos y surgirán otras formas de ciberbullying, por lo tanto se debe orientar a las personas sobre el uso correcto de las nuevas tecnologías.

Nunca he sufrido de este problema o tenido que tratar directamente con alguien que haya sufrido esto, pero considero que este comportamiento de daño a los demás es de una persona con muchas inseguridades que a través de esto llama la atención. Considero que las redes sociales y los medios de tecnología pueden funcionar como un arma de doble filo, así que tomen las precauciones debidas. Y hay que tener presente que esa persona tiene más problemas que nosotros.

De hecho el ciberbullying, es una de las causas de la desintegración familiar, porque a veces mediante bromas con los primos llega a un cierto tope en donde se pelean, esto suele suceder mucho en el Facebook.

Algunos alumnos manifestaron que los valores son necesarios para las buenas relaciones sociales. Otros indicaron que la tecnología facilita la agresión por medio del ciberbullying. También, algunos alumnos observan a éste como una broma, y varios universitarios no sabían que el fenómeno está ocurriendo. En la investigación se halló que el Facebook fue el medio donde más se sufrió y cometió ciberbullying, cabe mencionar que el celular también tomó un rol importante en cuanto a bromas pesadas, puesto que de los alumnos encuestados el veintinueve por ciento fueron víctimas una o dos veces, y los que se de-

clararon agresores alcanzaron un veintiséis por ciento en la misma frecuencia. En este trabajo se registró que más del treinta y dos por ciento de la muestra atestiguó haber sido víctimas una o dos veces, y dieciséis por ciento muchas por Facebook y el veintiocho por ciento también testificó haberse sentido victimizado por celular una o dos veces y el doce por ciento vio sufrir a la víctima más de tres veces.

Conclusiones

De acuerdo con los resultados descritos, se establece que, el ciberbullying existió en baja frecuencia en los escolares encuestados, aunque esto no precisamente sugiere que el fenómeno no se deba atender. Los resultados de este estudio sobre ciberbullying en estudiantes de inglés muestran que tanto hombres como mujeres están involucrados en el fenómeno de alguna u otra forma. También se identificó que los hombres fueron quienes estuvieron más involucrados en el ciberbullying como agresores por Facebook y celular y como víctimas por celular.

Asimismo, al parecer, en algunas de las perspectivas de los universitarios no se observa el ciberbullying como un tema alarmante y que éste se deja al criterio de la persona, otros entienden

que empieza como una broma que pasa a la costumbre, si es así, entonces podría afirmarse que algunos alumnos identifican el fenómeno como algo normal. Sin embargo, es notable que a pesar que toman el ciberbullying como broma, algunos escolares entienden que puede ser perjudicial.

También se encontró que el ciberbullying se genera comúnmente a través de la red social Facebook, en otras páginas web o por celular, pero no se encontró si también en la red social Twitter se propaga este tipo de violencia por lo que éste puede ser una línea de investigación a futuro para este tipo de estudios sobre la violencia que ocurre en Internet.

Se resalta de las opiniones que, algunos de los universitarios tienen en cuenta las desventajas de la tecnología y el rol que juegan los valores para una sana convivencia entre iguales. De igual modo, se consideran vitales y notables las opiniones expresadas por los alumnos para la ejecución de estudios en el universo cualitativo. En este tenor, el alto porcentaje de testigos de ciberbullying vía Facebook y celular propician la inquietud de continuar con el análisis del fenómeno en los estudiantes universitarios. Incluso estudiar el mismo fenómeno con otras redes sociales como Twitter o Instagram. ■

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What do CELE BUAP English exams assess in terms of reading comprehension abilities?

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Abstract

At the Language Center (CELE) of Puebla State University (BUAP) English as a foreign Language (EFL) students need to meet certain language requirements to graduate. They commonly fail, however, to reach a satisfactory TOEFL score. Factors such as the timing, the duration or the format of the test can be blamed. Nonetheless, this failure is often characterized by students' lack of the pertinent reading abilities that in turn can be indicative of academic underachievement and non-strategic methods of reading instruction. They lack the appropriate reading skills and abilities to become efficient readers. The present study investigates the reading abilities being assessed in both CELE departmental English and TOEFL exams and uses the results to determine which skills need to be added to the CELE examinations in regards to the reading section. Findings revealed differences in the reading abilities assessed in terms of items, exercises, occurrence rates and format. These variations help to explain why students are struggling to reach a specific TOEFL score to graduate. The study concludes with some recommendations to facilitate CELE students in acquiring the necessary reading abilities to achieve success in future examinations.

Keywords: TOEFL, Reading, Reading Assessment, Reading Abilities, Evaluation.

Resumen

En el Centro de Lenguas (CELE) de la Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP) los estudiantes universitarios deben realizar la certificación de un idioma (inglés) para titularse. Sin embargo, la mayoría no logra alcanzar el puntaje de TOEFL requerido para dicho efecto. Factores como el tiempo, la extensión o el formato del examen son vistos como el origen de tal resultado; no obstante, un análisis más detallado por área deja ver otras causas. En el apartado de lectura específicamente, se observa la carencia de habilidades de lectura pertinentes que los alumnos necesitan para responder la prueba con eficiencia. Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio comparativo entre las habilidades de lectura evaluadas en la prueba TOEFL y las de los exámenes departamentales de inglés de CELE, con el objetivo de determinar qué cambios se deberían implementar en estos últimos para semejar la prueba TOEFL, es decir, para medir las mismas habilidades que ésta y en el mismo modo. Los resultados revelaron diferencias con respecto al tipo de reactivo y al porcentaje de ejercicios de las diferentes habilidades de lectura. Estas variaciones ayudan a explicar por qué los estudiantes no están alcanzando los puntajes requeridos para aprobar la prueba TOEFL que necesitan para titularse. El estudio concluye con algunas recomendaciones para facilitar a los estudiantes de CELE la adquisición de las habilidades de lectura necesarias para lograr el éxito en exámenes futuras.

Palabras clave: TOEFL, Lectura, Evaluación de Lectura, Habilidades Lectoras, Evaluación.

Introduction

Today's individuals are aware of their global environment and perceive the need to be prepared for the future, including potential contacts with other languages and cultures, either in their private life, school or job. This has logically

triggered the interest of governments and, then, schools to lay down standards to demonstrate foreign language proficiency. The notion of language standardization has permeated worldwide and promulgated language tests to certify the

mastery of a language. No single test can reflect accurately everything a student knows or is able to do in a given language, yet these certification exams are well-respected and widely seen as a fair and authentic measure of foreign language ability. The Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP), like the majority of educational institutions, requires students to certify a command of any foreign language in order to graduate and obtain their diploma. Most of BUAP students opt to get their certification in English and the BUAP approves international tests such as those issued by Trinity College London, Cambridge Exams, International English Language Testing System (IELTS); English Language Assessment System for Hispanics (ELASH) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Nevertheless, a great deal of students chooses to take either ELASH or TOEFL tests because of their low fees and accessibility, but the TOEFL is the most commonly used and perhaps the best known in terms of its format, cost and length. The Centro de Lenguas (CELE) offers language courses, English being the most popular, designed to prepare students to meet the appropriate requirements stated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages to be certified at an A2 proficiency level. After each level (nine in total) students are required to present a departmental exam in order to pass to the next course. These departmental exams, regardless of the language they assess, have the purpose of evaluating a set of abilities determined by each level as a means to measure students' language progress. CELE courses are meant to prepare students to pass any examination outlined in the CEFR, but a large majority of students fail to achieve the required TOEFL score, principally in the area of reading. The discussion above leads us to two important conclusions. First, CELE students' low TOEFL scores delay (and sometimes prevent) students' exit from their university program. Second, their poor TOEFL performance affects the institution's quality standards in terms of overall rates of graduate students per year or cohort.

Background

The reading ability according to Solé (2000) is the cognitive process through which an individual interacts with a given text in order to fulfill the ob-

jectives that this individual has regarding that text. In order to carry out a reading comprehension activity, it is imperative to always have an objective in mind. As such, the reading process takes place when the reader constructs meaning in relation to a text. Alderson (2000) concurs by stating that reading is, in essence, a purposeful activity. Reading success is measured in terms of how a reader uses the new knowledge to construct new meaning for future problem solving situations (Alderson, 2000; Grabe, 1991; Solé, 2000; Stanovich, 1980).

Reading consists of lower and higher level processes (Alderson, 1990; Grabe, 1991; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Stanovich, 1980), such as decoding, reasoning, inferences, and even predictions. Carrell (1984) and Anderson and Pearson (1984) believe that a text guides the reader as to how one retrieves previous knowledge to construct meaning; this is called background knowledge or schemata. Schemata theory presumes that reading takes place between a reader and a text where prior knowledge and language knowledge interact with the text to contribute to comprehension. According to Smith's perspective (2004), reading comprehension is the way we relate the old with the new, how we make sense of the new information and how we accommodate newly acquired knowledge with our previous knowledge. Such prior knowledge helps us select among various possible interpretations of a text, so predictions before and while reading a text are not careless but rather made in relation to previous knowledge.

Rupp, Ferne, and Choi (2006) agree that any successful reading takes on the fluid, accurate and efficient application of bottom-up processes (p. 444). This view is supported by Carver's Rauding theory (1977) where any 'typical' reading (p. 13) performed independently from academic pursuits is stable in comprehension, and the occurring language is understood as it is presented without difficulty. The Matthew Effect or "rich-get-richer" effect (p. 381) is Stanovich's conception (1986) to describe that those who normally read a lot and will keep on doing so will, therefore, eventually develop bulky vocabulary and broader knowledge.

Perfetti's 'verbal efficiency theory' (1985) purports that reading is not the mere mechanics of decoding words but an understanding of a text

and its future coherent construction: the reader comprehends rather than just recognizing words. A proficient reader can, then, carry out three key processes or levels for a successful reading task: lexical access that encloses the identification of words to their phonological representation; propositional encoding that involves the recognition of words and their meanings within a context; and finally, text modeling which incorporates the propositions (meanings) into a coherent and logical mental illustration of the text. Perfetti (2010) proposes, twenty-five years later, the *Golden Triangle of Reading Skill*, where he argues that the triangle or 'Decoding, Vocabulary and Comprehension' theory (DVC) includes the *verbal efficiency theory* notions plus a new element, knowledge. The DVC triangle illustrates the interdependence of knowledge, meanings and comprehension.

The above notions have commonalities, as they are all scaffold: decoding, meaning and then comprehension. Moreover, Luke (1992), citing his previous work in Freebody and Luke (1990); enriches this reading model by categorizing an efficient reader into four roles: code-breaker, text-participant, text-user and text-analyst. Both authors argue that effective readers break a code and pay attention to letter-sound correspondences, complete words, sentences, paragraphs, semantic information, punctuation and word meaning. A text-participant reader is involved in the context of the text's topic. A text-user grasps and uses the text to achieve a particular social purpose. The text-analyst critiques and analyzes the primary and underlying assumptions or beliefs in a text; to read between the lines. Freebody and Luke (1990) empower the reader as the conductor of this interaction along the whole process of reading.

Pressley (1998) agrees and suggests that efficient readers become competent when they learn: word identification strategies and comprehension strategies. These strategies are interdependent, with comprehension linked to the identification of words in a text which, in turn, will definitely facilitate and sustain understanding that leads to fast and fluent text processing. The bottom line is that to the majority of researchers the heart of reading is meaning; since meaning is what we search for as we read, and it is also part of what we use to reach that specific purpose.

In making meaning from a text, readers combine their knowledge of the world, the topic of the text and their knowledge of the language (Solé, 2000). Pressley (1998) emphasizes that higher-order processes are essential for achieving this purpose or objective; for example, comprehension or making inferences. These higher-order processes help develop the ideas in the text through the channel of lower order processes, such as decoding, in the same text. Retrieving meaning from a text depends on highly efficient lower order processing to what Pressley (1998) adds: "good readers are interpretive, evaluative and reactive to the text" (p. 62).

Models of Reading Comprehension

Different concepts about reading have been discussed along with the previously outlined array of micro processes within the macro and complex process of reading. Following the above ideas, it is also important to discuss the different notions that attempt to explain how reading comprehension happens. How exactly does the brain process a text or how does a reader approach a text in order to make meaning? Researchers agree that reading is all about constructing meaning, but the question that arises from this principle is how exactly this construction of meaning happens. Some scholars have attempted to explain how comprehension takes place by creating models of understanding (Alderson, 2000; Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Gabe & Stoller, 2002; Goodman, 1967; Pressley, 1998; Solé, 2000). This opens the discussion about processes and mechanisms to understand a text, specifically three major frameworks or models: the Bottom-up, the Top-down and the interactive model in order to explain how reading comprehension is realized.

Bottom- Up Model

This model is hierarchically ascending and claims that reading comprehension is reached by following the basic and logical sequence in any text. First the words, then the sentences, and later the paragraphs as a means to guide the individual to comprehend the text; therefore it relies strongly on the decoding of the language. For the bottom-up approach, the individual understands a text only if the decoding skills are well honed. It is text centered but it fails to explain how typos can be skipped and yet understanding is unaltered or how

it is not necessary to decode accurately every word and still make sense of what is being read. Also, it cannot explain how inferences are made along the text before moving on to the next word or phrase (Solé, 2000). It is highly mechanical in its nature and works under a mental translation in a one piece at a time mode (Gabe & Stoller, 2002). This idea of reading is very simplistic (Pressley, 1998) by just reducing it to text decoding as a way to retrieve meaning. The Bottom-up model depends upon decoding skills – the corner stone to comprehension- to achieve meaning but it reduces the process to a pure translation of the ‘code’. Finally, this model makes reading comprehension seem petty and undermines the complexities that it entails.

Top- Down Model

This approach is hierarchically descending and highlights, according to Solé (2000), the importance of previous knowledge and high cognitive levels to anticipate the text content beforehand. Solé (2000) also adds that it is based on mechanisms to construct hypotheses and anticipatory stances whose veracity is later tested in a text. Grabe and Stoller (2002) explain this model as the one based on the reader’s expectations and goals, widely supported by inferences and background knowledge. There is evidence that the same text will be interpreted differently among readers because of their prior knowledge, but in the end, both will grasp the essence of the same text (Anderson & Pearson, 1984).

Goodman (1967) underlines reading, according to this model, as a ‘guessing game’ where the reader guesses or predicts meaning solely based on minimal textual information by activating existing knowledge. In regard to knowledge, Smith (2004) adds that this *prior* knowledge plus “non visual information” (p. 13) are mental resources that facilitate visual information (printed text) to be interpreted. The reader, in Pressley’s words (1998), does not allow prior knowledge processing to get out of hand which means that the reader controls and gauges the reading process. The Top-down view stresses the potential exploitation and interaction of both higher and lower order processes, but as its counterpart, it inclines towards a rather general recognition of words to favor comprehension, disregarding the acute decoding skills that are essential for more efficient and accurate reading comprehension.

Both views strive to demonstrate how meaning is constructed through a text, but because of their contradictions; they both fail to explain certain features that the other model supports. These gaps in theory make it complicated to fully accept one or the other. They both outline valuable data but leave out salient features of the reading process to defend a particular aspect. The bottom-up model places the reader as a passive decoder while the top-down view considers the reader as an active encoder (Alderson, 2000). Finally, after reviewing both models, the most sensible course of action may be to find an intermediate perspective since neither one of them offers an adequate characterization of the reading process (Alderson, 2000).

Interactive Model

The debate over which model satisfies reading comprehension, at best, has led to a simple yet obvious idea: to combine the best of both worlds in favor of a more complete and fulfilling perspective regarding comprehension. Alderson (2000) describes an interactive model as one where the different reading components interact regardless of their nature either ‘higher order’ or ‘lower order’ (p. 18) and Grabe (1991) deepens the notion of a parallel process rather than a serial one, where parallelism harmonizes with the transversal nature of reading. Both, Grabe and Stoller (2002) and Solé (2000) discuss an interactive model as the combination of the bottom-up and the top-down approaches, but not a hybrid (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). In this model the reader carries out the bottom-up features such as decoding but at the same time top-down aspects like predictions and expectations. There is a simultaneous interaction (Solé, 2000) between the two models where the reader uses background knowledge to activate interpretation and construct new meanings from the text. The reader is an active agent, constantly producing and probing hypotheses in an effort to construct comprehension from the text. Urquhart (1987) suggests text interpretation flexibility because this depends on the reader and the purpose as there are many goals and interpretations from the same text. Iser (1980) asserts that readers are the focal point because their prior knowledge works together with the text. In sum, the interactive model refers to the dynamic relationship between bottom-up and top-down, between decoding and interpretation, and

between text and reader; a balance that Alderson (2000) adds may vary with the text, purpose and reader. The reader is therefore assigned a proactive leading role.

Reading: single indivisible process or multi-componential process

Along the three processing models mentioned above, there has long been considerable disagreement about whether reading comprehension is a single process or a multi component process with separate elements. For example, Rost (1993 in Carver, 1992 and in Weir & Porter, 1994) states that reading comprehension is a unitary process because the subskills are closely fused so that it becomes virtually impossible to distinguish among subskills and measure them separately. Although the nature of reading comprehension remains divisive, many researchers support the idea of reading comprehension in terms of separate components or as multi-divisible. These researchers claim that such factors influence readers' ability to successfully read and comprehend a text, such as vocabulary (Carver, 1992; Urquhart & Weir, 1998) and inferences (Enright, Grabe, Koda, Mosenthal, Mulcahy-Ernt & Schedl, 2000).

Weir and Porter (1994) argue different skill components in reading just as the convention of having skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. A number of researchers (Alderson, 1990; Grabe, 1991; Koda, 2005; Weir, Hughes & Porter, 1990) agree that reading is composed of multi-componential skills but differ on the number and scope. Grabe (1991, 2009) and Grabe and Stoller (2002) comment on automaticity in identifying words along with syntactic knowledge, content and background knowledge as well as skimming, and scanning. Moreover, Alderson (2000) considers that a unitary approach in testing reading comprehension may not fully characterize it, and it could fall short in appropriately assessing all the related reading skills. Likewise, Koda (2005) points out that in the process of reading, every single operation depends on a broad selection of competencies by also adding that reading is of a multifaceted nature, a complex mental process that cannot be observed directly. Grabe and Stoller (2002) characterize these models of reading comprehension as attempts to create a common understanding about how reading comprehension takes

place whether in an ascending or descending path or in a perfect amalgamation of the first two.

Lower and Higher Level Processes in Reading

Smith (2004) defines comprehension as internal cognitive structure of knowledge organized inside our brain that permits a model of the world, a personal theory of our understanding of that world. This suggests a system of categories such as the gear foundation of survival and of learning to sort and process experiences according to differences or similarities (p.16). Perfetti's (2010) triangle or Decoding, Vocabulary and Comprehension (DVC); reinforces the idea of structure and categorization and the interdependence of knowledge about words and comprehension. Thus, cognitive processes require categorization of knowledge to succeed in learning or disregarding any experience. These cognitive reading processes are known by general convention as Lower and Higher order processes. Grabe and Stoller (2002) clarify that this distinction has nothing to do with the idea of easy or difficult or that one is better than the other. To this regard, Pressley (1998) states that skilled reading is the result of the coordination of both processes.

Lower- level Processes

Grabe and Stoller (2002) and Grabe (2009) explain the reading process as the coordination of multiple levels of sub-component processes. Lower-level processes are predominantly linguistic such as recognition of words and retrieval of meanings (i.e. lexical access), syntactic structure of the sentences (i.e. syntactic parsing), and elementary meaning units (i.e. semantic proposition encoding). Lexical access is the immediate recognition of words. Reading is 'a word by word affair' (Pressley, 1998, p.44) whenever the reader attempts to learn what is in the text. Perfetti (2007) sustains that reading comprehension depends on efficient word reading and efficient decoding of words and meanings which grow in relation to literacy and language experience. These words are recorded and stored in our long-term memory to emerge when needed (Kintsch, 1988; Kintsch & Mangalath, 2010). Westwood (2001) suggests a systematic word-recognition instruction to promote reading skills in poor readers. Lexical access is automatic once the reader accesses the

meaning, but to be proficient requires extensive practice. Syntactic parsing is the ability to recognize words in context so the reader can maneuver multiple meanings and determine their position in the text. Urquhart and Weir (1998) defend parsing as crucial to build up meaning by means of the regulations in the ordering of English. And an extensive vocabulary is a fundamental component of automaticity in reading (Westwood, 2001). A third basic process is the semantic proposition that is the act of combining words and meanings into basic clauses and sentences to make sense of the text. Semantics and syntax knowledge help readers make educated guesses about the unknown words (Smith, 2004; Stanovich, 1980). Developing automaticity of lower level processes will allow an adequate higher level text-processing (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Without these so-called lower-level reading skills, the higher cognitive skills cannot function (Carrell, 1984).

High-level Processes

Higher-level processes go beyond the literal; they extend to interpretation, analysis, and synthesis of information. They are of a comprehension building nature as well as of a strategic processing character. They tend to be controlled processes opposite to lower-level which become automatic as a requirement for fluent reading (Alderson, 2000; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Grabe, 2009). This means that readers adjust their reading practice to the type of text so they can paraphrase precisely. They also relate the new ideas to their background knowledge and offer conclusions drawn upon the text. There is also the ability to consider the author's purpose or intentions to judge the text (Solé, 2000). Readers become self-conscious of their reading process and adjust their reading strategies either to verify or repair accordingly (Perfetti, Landi & Oakhill, 2005). Skilled readers are active (Pressley, 1998) and base this efficiency in their prediction ability as they read (Smith, 2004).

Perfetti (1985) suggests that both high or low-ability readers are capable of deciphering words within a context much faster than when in isolation. Although low ability readers rely more on the context to grasp the meaning than high-ability readers, both high and low proficiency readers detect visual prompts the same. However, the difference is that high proficiency readers have better and more efficient word recognition processes to revise con-

text faster and do their sampling more quickly than lower proficiency readers. Both Perfetti (1985) and Stanovich (1986) argue that because good readers are more proficient at word recognition skills, they rely less on the context, which works in the opposite direction with less proficient readers who rely more on contextual cues.

Kletzien (1991, p. 82) mentions that 'comprehenders' use a variety of word recognition strategies such as phonics, sight words, contextual clues and structural analysis. However, this effort takes its toll on cognitive capacity, so partial comprehension on the part of the author is sacrificed. Stanovich (1982) examined a series of studies where the results showed that a deficient decoding ability was not only exhibited in poor reading skills but also in listening comprehension. Therefore, low proficiency readers are correspondingly low proficiency listeners. Readers with a deficit in reading comprehension struggle with the extra demanding processes that are required to analyze more complex texts. Pressley (1998) states that students can read for the gist of the text and can carry on with the task without an entire recognition of words; except when they get totally lost, but inefficient word recognition takes place at the expense of appropriate meaning analysis of the author's intentions.

In summary, the success of reading comprehension depends on issues such as the information in the text, the reader's background knowledge and the reader's lower and higher level reading abilities (Alderson, 2000; Pressley, 1998; Solé, 2000; Stanovich, 1980; Villaume & Brabham, 2002). Reading comprises a spectrum of micro tasks or processes that lead to comprehension as the final product. These micro processes as such can take place, cognitively speaking, either from bottom to top or from top to bottom. These two views can blend in a more interactive mode where micro and macro processes happen simultaneously and boundaries are thought flexible but still in harmony. Reading comprehension is successful, efficient and skilled when the reader grasps meaning and can move on to the next phase with an interpretation on his own.

Skills and Strategies

Reading comprehension skills and strategies are important since, from an educational and administrative perspective, reading skills are evaluated

according to the product and the strategies are the decisions employed to arrive to that final product. Researchers like Alderson (2000) state that there is not a distinguishable clear line to define skills, abilities or strategies. A broad distinction is made where skills are the techniques required to process a text while strategies are the decisions as to how to process that text. As for, Grabe and Stoller (2002) skills are the linguistic processing abilities, acquired gradually until they work automatically. They are the final learning outcome in goal oriented tasks while strategies are considered a set of abilities that are consciously controlled by the reader. Anderson (2000), like Grabe and Stoller (2002), clarify that these distinctions do not have a clear cut boundary due to the cognitive nature of reading. It is pertinent to clarify that even if the concepts of *skill* and *strategy* overlap according to some researchers, in reality they are significantly different. *Skills* are processing techniques acquired unconsciously through practice until they become automatic, and *strategies* are the moves selected intentionally to accomplish a goal or objective during reading (Paris, Wasik & Turner, 1991). Strategies can grow with time to become automatic and in turn become a skill. The difference is simple: when the procedure is evoked, it is a strategy, and when it is applied automatically, it is a skill (Alexander & Jetton, 2000).

Skills, just as strategies, are tested to offer a more tangible vision of reading comprehension ability. The results of a reading comprehension test differ in function from the reader's comprehension skills and strategies (Kletzien, 1991). Normally, the results are estimated in terms of the efficiency of these skills such as word recognition (decoding), vocabulary (syntax and parsing), poor phonic and phonological knowledge, contextual clues; the management

of reading roles such as code-breaker, text-participant, text-user and text-analyst along with higher level skills in reading comprehension that include interpretation, analysis and synthesis of information (Freebody & Luke, 1990; Grabe, 1991; Stanovich, 1982; Weir & Khalifa, 2008). A central aim of education is to provide students with the pertinent reading skills to perform essential processes whenever necessary, either to undergo an institutional examination, or to assist readers when reading for other purposes not associated with school like contexts. And this, as Snow (2002) discusses, brings into question government policies and programs regarding education, reading and literacy whose foundations are rarely based on local and empirical information which may result in inappropriate evaluation.

Method

Data collection

The data consisted of seven reading sections (six CELE exams and one TOEFL test) questions included. Six CELE departmental English tests -level four- from two academic years, 2012 and 2013 (spring, summer and fall). The second exam was TOEFL™ whose sample reading tests were taken from a commercially distributed preparation book (Mahnke & Duffy, 1996). CELE's level four was selected because it is the middle point in the language learning process, and it worked as a gauge to measure students' progress thus far. Level five had previously undergone piloting to change textbooks, exams and programs; therefore it was not considered for these ongoing changes. The CELE exams sampled for this study had already undergone piloting, revision and application to students by the institution; therefore, the material was free for release. Table 1 shows an overview of the samples considered.

Table 1. Summary of the Data collected to analyze Reading Abilities

	CELE	CELE	CELE	CELE	CELE	CELE	TOELF
	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Standard
	2012	2012	2012	2013	2013	2013	PBT
Items per section	10	10	10	10	5	10	50
Number of passages	2	1	1	2	1	2	5

Instrument

The instrument used was Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) which allowed an accurate identification and insertion of the significant and predominant categories of those abilities present in both exams (CELE and TOEFL) as a means to yield commonalities or divergent features. The instrument took the shape of a table with a detailed description of the different abilities enunciated in the first two levels of Bloom's taxonomy: Knowledge and Comprehension. The third level –Application– was not considered because it involves the ability to apply solutions to problems; neither CELE nor TOEFL assess this ability. Bloom's taxonomy (1956) provides a wide spectrum of abilities and specifics to indicate general skills in reading comprehension. Moreover, it encapsulates the most significant behaviors considered within an educational environment. Its primary goal is to help teachers construct and design curricula, specify objectives and prepare evaluation devices accordingly.

Procedure of coding and analysis

During this stage, the task involved the analysis of each reading section according to the indicators described in the instrument to concentrate the different abilities of the reading sections under analysis. This meant to consider the sections and items in all the exams to get an overall view of their format, number of items and types of exercises, including the percentage they accounted for. The next step was to determine the ability being tested in each item within each reading sample. Each exam was described in detail in terms of the format, the number of passages and items, the types of exercises and the abilities assessed. Afterwards, each table was transferred into condensed tables for better visualization with a detailed display of the abilities, items and percentages. Each section was designed to provide a descriptive guide to identify the level and the ability for each of the exams items.

The procedure consisted of reading every item (question or statement) in each reading passage to then analyze them in terms of the abilities that they were assessing. These abilities were identified and tallied in the appropriate level and category. This procedure was done for all the exams yielding a total of seven tables, one per

exam analyzed. A total of fourteen reading passages were examined where one hundred and five items were read, analyzed, categorized and tallied for further management in the comparison process. After compiling the information from both types of exams, it was also necessary to process the qualitative data results (abilities) in percentages (numbers) as a way to show the occurrences of the ability per category and level per selection. The following section describes the results of this analysis for the purpose of this study.

Results

TOEFL: Reading Abilities

The TOEFL reading section consisted of fifty items distributed in five passages. Each passage is followed by either nine, ten, eleven or twelve questions depending on the length of the passage. The passage length ranges from 300 to 600 words. The reason for long texts lies in the fact that these attempt to reflect the academic experiences that students deal with and to facilitate their reading comprehension (Cohen & Upton, 2006).

Enright et al. (2000) consider that the manipulation of the text length, type and task allows for a reliable, efficient and fair evaluation of an individual's academic reading ability since the above conditions mirror similar academic conditions at college where students encounter comparable formal reading settings. The five passages were analyzed in terms of the items (questions) to obtain a list of the abilities that they were assessing and then have a general scope of what was assessed. The following is a detailed outline of these abilities.

It can be observed that the TOEFL reading sections encompass the first two levels of Bloom's taxonomy (1956) as previously described. Regarding Knowledge, 22 items retrieved information related to vocabulary, terminology and facts. Regarding Comprehension, 28 items drew on connotative language to be translated into denotative terms: vocabulary in context, summaries and inferences. From a quantitative perspective, the TOEFL reading section assesses 56% of comprehension and 44% of knowledge, which shows a major interest in the area of inferences and vocabulary in context as well as facts and terminology. For a better illustration of the items and abilities see Table 2 below.

Table 2. Reading abilities and their representation in percentages

	Ability	Number of items that assess this ability	Percentage of the recurrence of the ability in TOEFL	Percentage of the recurrence of the ability per LEVEL
Level 1 Knowledge	Ability to distinguish referents for words from others.	2	4%	10%
	Knowledge and mastery of vocabulary and terms of fine arts, science, accounting, geometry and quantitative thinking.	4	8%	18%
	Recognition and Recall of facts about cultures, biology chemistry, and physics processes, society, health, natural resources, nutrition.	16	32%	72%
Level 2 Comprehension	-Ability to translate non-literal statements (metaphor, symbolism, irony, exaggeration) to ordinary English.	3	6%	11%
	-Ability to comprehend the significance of words in their context.	14	28%	50%
	-Ability to grasp the thought of a work as a whole at any level of generality.	5	10%	18%
	-Ability to deal with conclusions in terms of inferences.	6	12%	21%

CELE: Reading Abilities

The reading sections in these six exams consist of a total of fifty five items distributed in nine reading passages. Each passage is followed by either five or ten questions depending on the number of passages in each exam’s reading section. The nine passages were analyzed in terms of the items (questions) to obtain a list of the abilities to provide a general scope of what was being assessed. The following is a detailed outline of these abilities.

The visible feature that emerges from the reading of the items and the categorization phase was the different formats of CELE reading sections, which present an irregular array of items per section, type of exercises and number of passages per exam. This layout differs from exam to exam and so do the abilities being assessed (see Table 3).

Table 3. Different CELE exam layouts vs TOEFL

Type of Exam	Total Items in reading section	No. Total passages	No. Passages Per exercise	Type of exercise	No. items per type of exercise	Percentage of the exercise
CELE Spring 2012	10	2	1	Multiple choice	5	50%
			1	Matching	5	50%
CELE Summer 2012	10	1	1	Multiple choice	10	100%
CELE Fall 2012	10	1	1	Multiple choice	10	100%
CELE Spring 2013	10	2	1	Matching	5	50%
			1	True or false	5	50%
CELE Summer 2013	5	1	1	Multiple choice	5	100%
			1	Multiple choice	3	30%
			1	Open questions	2	20%
CELE Fall 2013	10	2	1	Matching	3	30%
			1	True or false	2	20%
TOEFL Standard PBT	50	5	5	Multiple choice	50	100%

It can be observed that the number of items in the reading section is often ten except for the summer 2013 with only five. The number of passages also differs since in some exams (spring 2012, 2013 and fall 2013) there are two passages while in others only one (summer 2012, 2013 and fall 2012). As for the types of exercises, various exercises range from multiple-choice to open questions. Some passages are tested via two different types of exercises, as shown in the spring 2012, 2013 and fall 2013, while other exams are exclusively in a multiple choice format, like in summer and fall 2012 and summer 2013. Multiple-choice is the most common type of exercise (despite format variations); its inclusion is evident in all of the CELE exams.

The above table suggests that in contrast to the TOEFL, the layout of CELE exams' reading sections is not standardized in terms of what types of exercises should be included since they appear to be miscellaneous regarding number of passages, exercises and items. This assortment of items provides test users with an ample collection of options in the visual aspect because it appears to be dynamic in contrast to the exclusive use of the multiple choice mode in TOEFL. As diverse as this format may look, it is pertinent

to mention the apparent absence of standardization because while one exam requires only five items to test reading, others need ten. Similarly, there are instances of complete reading sections containing only one passage while others contain two. If the purpose is to offer various and varied types of exercises to test reading, it is recommended to outline specifications in terms of which types can be included and the possible combinations, but also a fixed number of overall items as well as passages. Therefore even if the format seems to be cluttered, it would fall into a regulated layout, obeying one of the many possible combinations but always respecting aspects such as the number of passages and items.

It is also advisable to regulate the number of abilities assessed through different types of exercises, which gets to the core of this study. Table 4 illustrates the emerging categories and abilities found on each exam according to the year and period of test application. The table displays the salient abilities tested in terms of their occurrence and percentage in each reading section. They are later compared to those in TOEFL in order to draw the appropriate conclusions and answer the questions underpinning this study.

Table 4. Resulting abilities in CELE exams

Emerging Ability		Spring 2012	Summer 2012	Fall 2012	Spring 2013	Summer 2013	Fall 2013
Abilities and Percentages							
1	Ability to distinguish referents for words from others.						10%
2	Knowledge and mastery of vocabulary and terms of fine arts, science, accounting, geometry and quantitative thinking.						10%
3	Recognition and Recall of facts about cultures, biology chemistry, and physics processes, society, health, natural resources, nutrition.		10%	20%	50%	100%	20%
4	-Abstract into concrete or less abstract. "in your own words"	40%	10%				
5	-Ability to translate non-literal statements (metaphor, symbolism, irony, exaggeration) to ordinary English.		10%				10%
6	-Ability to comprehend the significance of words in their context.		10%	20%			10%
7	-Ability to grasp the thought of a work as a whole at any level of generality.	10%	20%	40%			
8	-Ability to comprehend and interpret with depth and clarity.		20%				
9	-Ability to deal with conclusions in terms of inferences.		10%	10%			
10	-Ability to draw and state conclusions.		10%	10%			
11	-Interpolate where there are gaps in data.	50%			50%		30%

CELE and TOEFL: Comparison of Reading Abilities

After the analysis of both types of exams separately, the last step was to compare them to see both similarities and differences. The first aspect was to consider which abilities occur in both exams and their rate of occurrence. Table 5 shows the final abilities assessed in both exams.

Table 5. Resulting abilities in TOEFL and CELE exams

Table 5. Resulting abilities in TOEFL and CELE exams

TOEFL	CELE
Ability to distinguish referents for words from others.	Ability to distinguish referents for words from others.
Knowledge and mastery of vocabulary and terms of fine arts, science, accounting, geometry and quantitative thinking.	Knowledge and mastery of vocabulary and terms of fine arts, science, accounting, geometry and quantitative thinking.
Recognition and Recall of facts about cultures, biology chemistry, and physics processes, society, health, natural resources, nutrition.	Recognition and Recall of facts about cultures, biology chemistry, and physics processes, society, health, natural resources, nutrition.

-Ability to translate non-literal statements (metaphor, symbolism, irony, exaggeration) to ordinary English.

-Ability to comprehend the significance of words in their context.

-Ability to grasp the thought of a work as a whole at any level of generality.

-Ability to deal with conclusions in terms of inferences.

-Abstract into concrete or less abstract. "in your own words"

-Ability to translate non-literal statements (metaphor, symbolism, irony, exaggeration) to ordinary English.

-Ability to comprehend the significance of words in their context.

-Ability to grasp the thought of a work as a whole at any level of generality.

-Ability to comprehend and interpret with depth and clarity.

-Ability to deal with conclusions in terms of inferences.

-Ability to draw and state conclusions.

-Interpolate where there are gaps in data.

Similarities

A salient feature is that both exams apparently assess the same abilities despite the extra four abilities present in the CELE exams. The realm of abilities CELE measures is the same in regard to that of TOEFL which is a very important aspect because this means CELE exams consider the same abilities as TOEFL, but the extent to how much and often these abilities are measured is of major importance for this study, and are detailed further below. As for the format, although CELE uses various types of items, which expand upon a full multiple choice mode, there is a great incidence of multiple choice use in all CELE exams.

Differences

From a numerical perspective, the abilities assessed in TOEFL are only seven while CELE assesses eleven. Drawing on both exams assessing the same abilities, it is very important to see in more detail this apparent correspondence. As shown in table 6, the occurrences of the abilities differ in percentages; therefore the number of incidences diverges in terms of how appropriately they are assessed and qualified. For instance, the ability with the highest percentage in TOEFL was related to recognition and recalling facts with 32% while CELE assesses the same ability at different percentages, which range from 10% to 100%. This means that some CELE exams may assess only this ability while others assess it at a low rate. Moreover, the ability regarding vocabulary in context is assessed in TOEFL with 28%, but in CELE it ranges

from 10% to 20% (present in only half of the exams analyzed), placing it way below the required level by TOEFL.

Abilities such as detecting referents or vocabulary in general are considered in TOEFL at 4% and 8% respectively while just one CELE exam, from the six examined; considered these both at 10% each. TOEFL assesses the ability to translate connotative language to denotative at 6% while the ability to make inferences is at 12%. In CELE exams these two abilities are measured with at 10% each, which is not far off the requirements of TOEFL, but they are taken into consideration in just two exams. The last ability that matched in both exams was related to producing a general idea or a summary about the topic, which TOEFL assesses at 10%, but CELE assesses from 10% to 40% (present in just half of the cases once again).

Furthermore, it is significant to mention in this regard that CELE exams assess other abilities not considered by TOEFL such as the interpolation ability which displays a high rate at 30% to 50%, the ability to draw conclusions (10%), paraphrasing (10% - 40%) and the ability to comprehend and interpret (20%). These rates suggest that certain abilities are prioritized over others without an apparent framework since they also fluctuate in their occurrence and assessment. This suggests considerable attention is given to certain abilities while undermining those relevant in TOEFL.

Table 6. Resulting abilities in TOEFL and CELE exams

TOEFL	PBT	Spring 2012	Summer 2012	Fall 2012	Spring 2013	Summer 2013	Fall 2013	CELE
Ability to distinguish referents for words from others.	4%						10%	Ability to distinguish referents for words from others.
Knowledge and mastery of vocabulary and terms of fine arts, science, accounting, geometry and quantitative thinking.	8%						10%	Knowledge and mastery of vocabulary and terms of fine arts, science, accounting, geometry and quantitative thinking.
Recognition and Recall of facts about cultures, biology chemistry, and physics processes, society, health, natural resources, nutrition.	32%		10%	20%	50%	100%	20%	Recognition and Recall of facts about cultures, biology chemistry, and physics processes, society, health, natural resources, nutrition.
XXXXXXXXXX		40%	10%					-Abstract into concrete or less abstract. "in your own words"
Ability to translate non-literal statements (metaphor, symbolism, irony, exaggeration) to ordinary English.	6%		10%				10%	-Ability to translate non-literal statements (metaphor, symbolism, irony, exaggeration) to ordinary English.
Ability to comprehend the significance of words in their context.	28%		10%	20%			10%	-Ability to comprehend the significance of words in their context.
Ability to grasp the thought of a work as a whole at any level of generality.	10%	10%	20%	40%				-Ability to grasp the thought of a work as a whole at any level of generality.
XXXXXXXXXX			20%					-Ability to comprehend and interpret with depth and clarity.
Ability to deal with conclusions in terms of inferences.	12%		10%	10%				-Ability to deal with conclusions in terms of inferences.
XXXXXXXXXX			10%	10%				-Ability to draw and state conclusions.
XXXXXXXXXX		50%			50%		30%	-Interpolate where there are gaps in data.

Conclusion

The analysis sheds light on the fact that the CELE English exams' format does not comply with TOEFL; If this format is to become systematic, it should comprise a regulated framework where many possible combinations can take place, yet always considering aspects such as a strict number of overall items, the number of passages; and the types of reading abilities being assessed. Additionally, if there are to be various and diverse types of items, adequate specifications in reference to their combinations should be included.

Also, CELE exams swing in extremes as some abilities are totally neglected while others are over prioritized. The aspect of abilities as well as format are of key importance since they would have to correspond to TOEFL in occurrence and percentages in order to adequately prepare stu-

dents for the TOEFL. The previous analysis shows that the abilities CELE considers for assessment correspond greatly to those of TOEFL, but they are assessed neither in percentage - same rates per ability- nor in occurrences or in the format of the exams. The abilities are present in all CELE exams undeniably, but they are randomly and dispersedly tested. This means that some CELE exams fluctuate from measuring a handful of the abilities to exclusively testing one but not the entire set of salient abilities all at once (as it is established in TOEFL). CELE exams are unsuccessful in measuring the same reading comprehension abilities as TOEFL, and this is translated in salient abilities not being assessed accordingly or appropriately. These findings provide a partial explanation of CELE English students failure at TOEFL examinations. ■

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APPENDIX A
LEVEL 1
KNOWLEDGE

LEVEL	CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	
1.0 Knowledge	1.1 Knowledge of Specifics	1.11 Knowledge of terminology <u>Essential terms. Literal.</u>	
		Define terms by attributes, properties or relations.	
		Ability to distinguish referents for words from others.	
		Familiarity with large number of words and meanings.	
		Knowledge and mastery of vocabulary and terms of fine arts, science, accounting, geometry and quantitative thinking.	
		1.12 Knowledge of Specific Facts <u>Precise and Specific info, data, facts, words.</u>	
		Recognition and Recall of facts about cultures, biology chemistry, and physics processes, society, health, natural resources, nutrition.	
		Acquaintance with significant names, places, events, authors, particular periods and events in the news.	
		1.2 Knowledge of Ways and Means of dealing with Specifics	1.21 Knowledge of Conventions <u>To treat or to present ideas or phenomena in a field.</u>
			Familiarity with forms and conventions (verse, plays, scientific papers, maps, charts)
	Correct forms of speech and writing. Acceptable forms of language. Correct pronunciation, punctuation.		
	1.22 Knowledge of the Trends and Sequences <u>Processes, directions, movements with respect of time.</u>		
	Understand continuity, trends, effects, developments (health, culture, evolution of man, history events, economics, politics, environment, administration, government)		
	Know forces, past and present, and their world interdependence.		
	1.23 Knowledge of Classifications and Categories <u>Classes, sets, divisions, and arrangements.</u>		
	Recognize a given area according to the problems or materials.		
	Familiar with various types of literatures.		
	1.24 Knowledge of Criteria <u>Criteria to test or judge facts, principles, opinions or conduct.</u>		
	Familiarity and knowledge about criteria to judge a type of work and the purpose to read it.		
	Criteria used to judge recreational activities, social sciences, a source of information, a work of art, nutrition, and economy incomes.		
	1.25 Knowledge on Methodology <u>Methods of inquiry. Techniques. Procedures.</u>		
	To know methods to attack and evaluate problems (health, social sciences)		
	To know techniques and methods to answer questions about the world (sciences)		
	1.3 Knowledge of the Universals and abstractions in the Field		1.31 Knowledge of Principles and Generalizations <u>Particular abstractions which summarize the principle or generalization.</u>
			Recall and understand generalizations and principles of biological phenomena, cultures, chemistry, civilizations, economy, learning, evolution, history.
		Develop knowledge and understanding of principles, functions, and elements.	
		1.32 Knowledge of Theories and Structures <u>Clear and systematic interrelated principles and generalizations of a complex phenomenon that form a theory or structure</u>	
Recall and recognition of major theories about cultures, philosophic bases, chemical principles, evolution, congress structure, and government.			

APPENDIX B
LEVEL 2
COMPREHENSION

LEVEL	CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY
<p>2.0 Comprehension</p> <p>Objectives, behaviors, or responses which represent an understanding of the literal message. Extensions beyond communication itself.</p>	<p>2.1 Translation</p> <p>Transform an abstract idea into everyday terms to facilitate thinking.</p>	<p>Translation from one level of abstraction to another</p> <p>Ability to translate:</p>
		-Abstract into concrete or less abstract. "in your own words"
		-Lengthy communication into briefer or less abstract terms.
		-An abstraction by giving an illustration or sample.
		<p>Translation from symbolic form to another form or vice versa</p>
		-Ability to translate relationships expressed in symbolic form to verbal form and vice versa.
		-Ability to prepare graphics of data into visuals.
		<p>Translation from one verbal form to another</p>
		-Ability to translate non-literal statements (metaphor, symbolism, irony, exaggeration) to ordinary English.
		-Ability to comprehend the significance of words in their context.
	-Ability to translate (with or without a dictionary) foreign language prose or poetry into good English.	
	<p>2.2 Interpretation</p> <p>Recognize essentials and differentiate irrelevant aspects.</p> <p>Analysis.</p> <p>Beyond mere repetition and rephrasing.</p>	<p>Interpretation</p>
		-Ability to grasp the thought of a work as a whole at any level of generality.
		-Ability to comprehend and interpret with depth and clarity.
		-Ability to distinguish warranted, unwarranted or contradicted conclusions.
	<p>2.3 Extrapolation</p> <p>Determine the relations between a sample and a universe and vice versa.</p> <p>Extend the trend beyond the given data.</p> <p>Make inferences of probability.</p>	<p>Extrapolation</p>
		-Ability to deal with conclusions in terms of inferences.
		-Ability to draw and state conclusions.
		-Predict trends
		-Interpolate where there are gaps in data.
-Ability to estimate or predict consequences.		
-Ability to sensitize to render predictions when inaccurate.		
-Ability to distinguish consequences with a high degree of probability.		
-Ability to differentiate value judgments from predictions of consequences.		

Creencias Epistemológicas y Prácticas de Enseñanza de Profesores de Inglés de Nivel Bachillerato

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Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación cualitativa con diseño fenomenológico cuyo objetivo fue identificar las creencias epistemológicas de profesores de inglés de nivel bachillerato y determinar la relación con sus prácticas de enseñanza. Se realizaron entrevistas a cinco profesores de diversos planteles. El análisis se efectuó siguiendo el método propuesto por Moustakas (1994). Los resultados indicaron que existen profesores cuyas creencias son adecuadas para la enseñanza del idioma y coherentes con sus prácticas. Sin embargo, también se detectaron incongruencias entre las creencias y las prácticas de algunos profesores. Esta incongruencia parece estar influida por factores relacionados con el profesor y con otros de tipo contextual.

Palabras clave: profesores, inglés, bachillerato, creencias epistemológicas, prácticas de enseñanza.

Abstract

This article presents the results of a phenomenological qualitative research whose objective was to identify the epistemological beliefs of English language teachers working in high school and to determine the relation with their teaching practices. Five teachers from different schools were interviewed. The analysis was carried out based on Moustakas method (1994). The results indicated that there are teachers whose epistemological beliefs are appropriate for language teaching and coherent with their practices. However, there were inconsistencies between the beliefs and the practices of some others. This situation seems to be due to factors related to the teacher and the context.

Key words: teachers, high school, English, epistemological beliefs, teaching practices.

Introducción

En los últimos años se ha registrado un renovado interés en el estudio de las creencias epistemológicas (CE) en el ámbito internacional. Las investigaciones han encontrado que las creencias determinan las actitudes y opiniones de los profesores (Marín, 2005) y predicen las prácticas de enseñanza (Jones & Carter, 2007; Tsai, 2006). No obstante, en el área de enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras sólo se encontró un trabajo (Mori, 1997) sobre las CE de estudiantes que aprenden japonés. El interés más acentuado de los investigadores ha residido en estudiar las creencias sobre el aprendizaje de una lengua (generalmente el inglés) por parte de estudiantes y profesores.

En el contexto nacional ocurre el mismo fenómeno, hay evidencia de una considerable preocupación por las creencias acerca del aprendizaje y enseñanza de lenguas (Reyes, 2013). No obstante, hasta donde sabemos, sólo dos trabajos investigan las CE (Reyes, 2010; Reyes & Murrieta, 2011); aunque igualmente relacionadas con los estudiantes. Analizar las creencias epistemológicas de los profesores resulta importante dado que las acciones que éstos realizan en el salón de clases pueden afectar las creencias y acciones de los estudiantes (Tsai, 2006), los resultados obtenidos (Hofer & Pintrich, 2002), la argumentación y la habilidad para solucionar problemas (Feucht & Bendixen, 2010).

En el caso particular de la enseñanza del inglés en México, ésta siempre se ha percibido como de baja calidad debido, entre otros aspectos, a los escasos espacios de reflexión para los profesores sobre su enseñanza (Roux & Mendoza, 2014). Este fenómeno parece especialmente acentuado en la educación básica y media (Basurto, 2010). Analizar las creencias epistemológicas de los profesores puede arrojar datos que constituyan la base para el desarrollo de acciones que promuevan la reflexión y evolución de las propias creencias. Lo anterior abonaría a una docencia de mejor calidad y podría impactar positivamente el aprendizaje del inglés. En esa línea de pensamiento, esta investigación tuvo como objetivo identificar las creencias epistemológicas de los profesores de inglés del sistema de bachillerato público del estado de Quintana Roo y determinar la relación con sus prácticas de enseñanza (PE).

Revisión de la literatura

“Las creencias epistemológicas son conjuntos de creencias sobre qué es el conocimiento y cómo se aprende” (Jones & Carter, 2007, p.1077). Las epistemologías personales de los profesores emergen desde experiencias de aprendizaje tanto formales como informales y sirven como ejemplos mentales para construir y evaluar su propia práctica de enseñanza. Las CE también han sido llamadas teorías epistemológicas, maneras de conocer, cognición epistémica o epistemología personal (Hofer, 2004). Sin embargo, todos estos términos se refieren al mismo fenómeno: la naturaleza del conocimiento y del aprendizaje.

El trabajo de Perry (1970) dio origen al estudio de las creencias epistemológicas. Perry propuso un modelo unidimensional según el cual los estudiantes ingresan a la universidad creyendo que el conocimiento es simple. En el transcurso de los estudios universitarios, las creencias evolucionan linealmente y el conocimiento es concebido como complejo, tentativo y adquirido mediante la evidencia empírica y la razón. Años después, Schommer (1994) propuso un modelo multidimensional con las siguientes cinco categorías.

a) Estructura del conocimiento, se le concibe como aislado o como un conjunto de hechos interrelacionados.

b) Certeza del conocimiento, puede ser absoluto o tentativo.

c) Fuente del conocimiento; puede ser dado por la autoridad o derivado de la lógica y el razonamiento.

d) Rapidez de la adquisición; el aprendizaje es rápido o se trata de un proceso gradual.

f) Control de la adquisición; la habilidad de aprender se concibe como adquirida o como innata.

Schommer también considera que las creencias epistemológicas se encuentran influenciadas por factores como la cultura, la educación y por variables de tipo familiar. Los resultados de su trabajo sugieren que las CE tienen implicaciones en cómo los estudiantes visualizan el aprendizaje y cómo lidian con el conocimiento. Una de las razones por las que la investigación sobre creencias epistemológicas se ha incrementado es por el uso de modelos de aprendizaje constructivistas. En general, este modelo enfatiza la creación de ambientes activos y críticos de aprendizaje que permitan el descubrimiento y el trabajo colaborativo.

Aunque los estudiantes son los sujetos de la mayoría de las investigaciones sobre CE, también existe un número considerable de estudios sobre docentes de diversas disciplinas (Bernardo, 2008; García & Sebastián, 2011; Roth & Weinstock, 2011). Según Pajares (1992), los profesores construyen sus creencias cuando son estudiantes y más tarde, ya como profesores, convierten estas creencias en acciones. Es decir, estas creencias se llevan al salón de clases, por ende, los profesores ejercen gran influencia en la formación de las CE de sus estudiantes.

Los estudios sobre las creencias epistemológicas han obtenido resultados diversos. King, Lavesque, Weckerly y Blythe, (2000) encontraron que el entrenamiento para formar creencias sofisticadas en los profesores es efectivo sólo en el corto plazo; no obstante, Brownlee (2001) demostró más tarde que se pueden lograr cambios más duraderos si se pide a los profesores reflexionar sobre lo que creen y lo que hacen. Goosen (2000) halló que los profesores consideran que algunos conocimientos son ciertos y otros cambian; en contraparte, Oguz (2008) y Wadsworth (2007) encontraron que los profesores creen en una verdad simple e inmuta-

ble. Sin embargo, estos autores; en consonancia con Chai, Khine y Teo (2006) descubrieron que los profesores consideran que el aprendizaje depende del esfuerzo y de la habilidad.

El término prácticas de enseñanza se refiere a las acciones pedagógicas relacionadas con el currículo que los profesores instrumentan en sus clases para lograr el aprendizaje en sus alumnos. La mayoría de los investigadores han encontrado que existe una relación directa entre el tipo de creencias epistemológicas de los profesores y sus PE (Beswick, 2005; Jones & Carter, 2007; Tsai, 2006). Así, los profesores que manifiestan creencias epistemológicas sofisticadas, tienden a concebir la enseñanza desde una perspectiva constructivista (Hashweh, 1985). En sentido inverso, quienes sostienen creencias ingenuas, conciben la enseñanza como transmisión de conocimientos (Benson, 1989; Chan, 2003; Gallagher, 1991). No obstante, Goelz (2004) halló inconsistencias entre las CE y las PE. Kang y Wallace (2004) consideran que la relación entre creencias epistemológicas y las prácticas de enseñanza es compleja y que ésta se encuentra mediada por otros factores como las metas instruccionales, los alumnos y el contexto de enseñanza.

En México existen pocos trabajos sobre las creencias epistemológicas accesibles en línea. Hasta donde investigamos, ninguno de ellos pertenece al ámbito de las lenguas extranjeras. Padilla y Garritz (2014) investigaron las CE en el ámbito universitario y encontraron que éstas tienen un impacto en las prácticas de enseñanza. Gómez y Silas (2012) analizaron las CE de estudiantes y profesores de secundaria. Los resultados mostraron que tanto alumnos como profesores albergan CE ingenuas que contribuyen poco a un aprendizaje efectivo. Como hemos revisado, las creencias epistemológicas influyen de manera importante en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje. No obstante, hay una gran escasez de investigaciones en México y en el área de lenguas extranjeras en particular. Este trabajo pretende contribuir a llenar ese vacío.

Método

El diseño utilizado en esta investigación fue fenomenológico. La fenomenología es la ciencia de describir lo que uno percibe, siente y conoce en la experiencia y conciencia inmediata (Moustakas,

1994). Husserl (en Moustakas 1994) establece que el objetivo primero de la fenomenología es comprender las relaciones concretas y significativas implícitas en la descripción original de la experiencia en el contexto de una situación particular.

Desde una perspectiva fenomenológica, para construir conocimiento es importante que el investigador elimine suposiciones, se encuentre dispuesto a encontrar información nueva y cuide siempre no incluir sus propias creencias u opiniones acerca del fenómeno estudiado. Husserl (en Moustakas 1994) llama al proceso anterior “epoché”. De acuerdo con Moustakas (1994), los fenómenos son la base de la ciencia humana y por ende de todo conocimiento. Esto significa que la única manera de crear conocimiento es comprendiendo un fenómeno en la forma como lo experimenta un individuo. Cualquier situación u objeto puede constituir un fenómeno siempre y cuando seamos conscientes del mismo.

Cada individuo tiene una percepción del entorno y de las cosas que le rodean. No obstante, los fenómenos se experimentan de manera diferente por cada individuo (noema). De igual forma, esa experiencia puede representar algo distinto para cada persona (noesis). Por ello, en este trabajo se decidió utilizar la fenomenología, dado que las creencias epistemológicas son un fenómeno complejo y dinámico que se relaciona con la experiencia y contexto de cada individuo. Por ejemplo, un profesor puede concebir al libro como una fuente inequívoca de conocimiento (noema), mientras que otro puede verlo como un repositorio de conocimientos obsoletos. La explicación para estas creencias pudiera ser que en el primer caso al profesor se le enseñó por medio de libros durante su licenciatura (noesis). En el caso del segundo profesor, este estudió una maestría y ahí aprendió que el conocimiento más actualizado se encuentra en los artículos de investigación.

Contexto

La investigación se efectuó en 5 planteles de nivel bachillerato del estado de Quintana Roo. Los colegios de bachilleres imparten clases de inglés como lengua extranjera. Las clases se toman durante cuatro semestres en la mayoría de las especialidades. Únicamente la Especialidad en Turismo incluye en su plan de estudios seis semestres del

idioma. Durante los dos primeros, las clases tienen una duración de 4 horas a la semana; el resto de los semestres es de 3 horas. Según el marco normativo “el aprendizaje del idioma inglés debe desarrollarse en contexto y las actividades deben proveer oportunidades para que al desarrollar un tema central, se logren integrar las habilidades por medio de actividades reales” (Dirección General de Bachillerato, 2010, p. 3).

Participantes

Los participantes de este estudio fueron cinco profesores de inglés que imparten clase en distintos colegios de bachilleres de Quintana Roo. Todos fueron seleccionados mediante muestreo por criterio (Creswel, 2007). Los profesores debían contar con al menos dos años de experiencia enseñando en el nivel bachillerato y estar adscrito a un colegio diferente del resto de los participantes. A cada uno de ellos se les asignó un seudónimo para proteger su anonimato: Perseo (Colegio de Bachilleres plantel 2), Manuel (Colegio de Bachilleres plantel 1), Francisco (Colegio de Bachilleres plantel Zamora), Rachel (Colegio de Bachilleres plantel Carlos A. Madrazo) y Julián (Colegio de Bachilleres plantel Maya Balam). Todos los profesores estudiaron una licenciatura en la enseñanza del inglés. Sus edades fluctúan entre 25 y 30 años.

Procedimiento

Se explicó a los informantes en qué consistía esta investigación, se recabó su anuencia para utilizar los datos con fines científicos y se les aseguró el anonimato. Todos los participantes fueron entrevistados dos veces. Cada entrevista duró alrededor de dos horas y media. Las entrevistas se dividieron en dos temas principales: las creencias epistemológicas y las prácticas de enseñanza. Dada la naturaleza del diseño fenomenológico, se prestó particular atención a las experiencias de los participantes y se estuvo muy atento a todos aquellos temas que contribuyeran a explicar y contextualizar las CE y las PE de los participantes. Es de notar que varios de los profesores tuvieron dificultades para responder preguntas relacionadas con el conocimiento y sus manifestaciones, por lo que se recurrió a ejemplos y a la reformulación en repetidas ocasiones.

Análisis de los datos

Los datos se analizaron siguiendo los pasos que Moustakas (1994) recomienda para un estudio fenomenológico.

1. Se elaboró una descripción de la experiencia vivida por las investigadoras durante el proceso de recolección de datos (Epoché).
2. Se desarrolló una lista de afirmaciones significativas. Estas afirmaciones se categorizaron en temas.
3. Se describió de manera literal la experiencia de los entrevistados (descripción *textural*).
4. Se describió el contexto en el que las CE se han experimentado (descripción *estructural*).
5. Se contrastaron las descripciones *texturales* y *estructurales* para obtener la esencia de la experiencia (descripción *compuesta*). En esta parte se llegó a una interpretación de la forma en que los participantes han experimentado las creencias pedagógicas y sus prácticas de enseñanza.

Resultados

En primer lugar se presentan los resultados relacionados con las creencias epistemológicas de los participantes. Respecto de las características del conocimiento, Perseo mencionó que el conocimiento es variable, depende de puntos de vista y del contexto.

Todo es conocimiento. Muchos profesores por ejemplo creen, quizá yo estoy equivocado, pero muchos profesores consideran que saber es si yo sé como ellos saben. O sea, si yo veo las cosas como ellos las ven, entonces... sé. Pero, realmente quizá se les olvida que todos tienen una visión de las cosas. Por ejemplo, una misma manzana sobre una mesa significa muchas cosas para bastantes personas. Si tú le preguntas a una persona ¿Qué es eso? Cualquiera [te dirá] ok, eso es una manzana que está sobre una mesa. Pregúntale a un niño que tiene hambre; es un manjar. Si tú le preguntas a un pintor [te dirá] ¡ah mira! las sombras no están proyectadas, es una figura cuyas sombras son circunflejas. O sea todos tienen un conocimiento (Perseo).

Julián coincidió con Perseo pero además agregó el aspecto crítico y constructivo:

El conocimiento son hechos que uno aprende para que de ahí, con base en ese conocimiento, determines tu postura. Por ejemplo, ya aprendí esto de determinado autor pero yo no estoy de acuerdo ¿por qué? Porque dice esto y este otro autor dice otra cosa. O sí estoy de acuerdo con él por esto. Quiero decir que yo formo mi propio conocimiento a partir del original.

Rachel y Francisco mencionaron que el conocimiento es algo que se memoriza primero y luego se relaciona con actividades prácticas “el conocimiento es algo que primero necesito memorizarlo y ya luego, así como que con el tiempo, con la experiencia, así como que lo voy aplicando. O le voy entendiendo mejor o digiriendo” (Rachel). Manuel disintió, para él el conocimiento es “información que se comprende y se pone en tus propias palabras”.

Respecto de cuál es la fuente del conocimiento hubo dos tendencias. Rachel y Francisco mencionaron que el conocimiento proviene de los expertos: “Yo confío que son grandes, que son grandes las personas que hacen ese libro [el libro de texto de inglés]. Y nunca lo he cuestionado. Yo confío en ellos, no los cuestiono (Francisco)”. Perseo, Manuel y Julián dijeron que el conocimiento es relativo

Tú con tu experiencia, yo con mi experiencia; y nos damos cuenta de que la forma en que los autores tratan los temas no es la adecuada. No es que estén mal, sino que es inadecuada para el proceso enseñanza-aprendizaje de mis alumnos, para mí eso no sirve” (Julián).

Todos los participantes coincidieron en decir que la rapidez de la adquisición del conocimiento es variable y depende de varios factores, entre ellos el interés del estudiante “Si le interesa, en poco tiempo. Si no, ¡uh! Hay que batallarle” (Francisco); de la complejidad del tema y del papel del profesor:

Hay cosas que dependiendo de su grado de complejidad y de tu grado de análisis

mental puede ser tan algo fácil y rápido como sumamente difícil y también como te facilitan o complican las cosas... el profesor te presenta el tema de manera amigable, entendible y que te da curiosidad, te presenta materiales, donde buscar información, se revisan esos recursos en tiempo y forma y se hace ¿no? (Perseo).

En cuanto a cómo se evalúa el conocimiento, Rachel, Manuel y Perseo mencionaron que si los estudiantes usan lo que estudian entonces quiere decir que han aprehendido el conocimiento:

Yo siento que los estudiantes tienen el conocimiento cuando por sí solos ya están usando lo que se vio en clase o que vean que de verdad les sirve para alguna otra materia; o que, inconscientemente o conscientemente, lo hablen con sus compañeros [el idioma], o fuera de clase; así en un contexto más relajado. Que no tengan miedo así de usar el idioma (Rachel).

Julián, además de coincidir con Rachel y Perseo adicionó el contexto: “Cuando contextualizan [lo estudiantes], no se quedan con el texto sino que logran aterrizarlo a algo” (Julián). Adicionalmente, todos los participantes coincidieron en que hay aspectos que deben memorizarse para aprenderse: “también hay cosas que necesitan memorizarse, como los verbos irregulares” (Manuel).

Esta parte está desbalanceada. Se presentan más ejemplos que interpretación.

A continuación presentamos los resultados sobre la forma en que las creencias epistemológicas se relacionan con las prácticas de enseñanza utilizadas por los maestros. Francisco y Manuel dijeron basar su enseñanza principalmente en el libro.

El libro es una fuente importante además de guía, ¿no? Sabemos, que es lo que vamos a ver... emmm es importante puesto que los chicos eh, saben o se sienten... he notado que al llevar un libro como que sienten que van sobre algo, o van sus objetivos sobre algo que vale la pena (Manuel).

Aunque Manuel en cierto momentos también mencionó “creo que aprenden mejor cuando hay una variedad de actividades enfocadas a que ellos actúen, definitivamente es cuando he notado que más lo disfrutan, más participan”.

Rachel también mencionó constantemente la influencia de las autoridades en las actividades que realiza en su salón:

En la escuela me dicen que hay libertad de cátedra pero luego me decían que no “es que si metes juegos interrumpes a los de a lado y cosas así”. Entonces pues yo decía bueno pues entonces nada más un ejercicio escrito y con eso es suficiente. Pero no, ahora trato de buscarles variado, de otras materias, por ejemplo, de biología pero en inglés y cosas así ¿no? De literatura, ética o no sé, trato de hacer tanto juegos, canciones, o escritos o de práctica nada más. Trato de combinarlo para ya no hacerlo monótono y también identificar si los alumnos es algo que les agrada o no.

Perseo hizo patente un gran interés en que los estudiantes aprendan. Mencionó una serie de actividades variadas tendientes a fomentar todas las habilidades lingüísticas, el trabajo cooperativo y el interés en la clase.

Trabajo mucho con los *handouts*, las imágenes, diseñé los blogs completos. Trabajo con el Facebook, con los alumnos de quinto y sexto semestres que se la viven ahí, tienen un grupo que es el que se les da en Facebook para sólo sus materias y se trabaja. Trabajo con presentaciones de PowerPoint, con audio que yo bajo de internet, con videos que a veces yo hago (Perseo).

Julián, además de compartir la postura de Perseo agregó elementos como la creatividad, la argumentación y la interrelación de su clase con otras.

Me van a hacer [los estudiantes] una pintura con *CorelDRAW*® porque estaban aprendiendo a usarlo. Entonces hicimos un trabajo en conjunto el maestro de informática y yo para que entreguen un

solo trabajo... uno para primero, otro para tercero y otro para quinto semestre. Entonces, ellos tienen que hacer una pintura que se apegue a la corriente que eligieron y van a explicar por qué. Por ejemplo para eso del resumen y la corriente literaria van [los estudiantes] a utilizar *PageMaker*® para hacer un artículo de revista. Siempre trato de hacer actividades que impliquen que tengan que estudiar el texto, el contenido; pero que también les dé chance para que ellos se expresen, para que ellos digan: “yo estoy a favor o yo estoy en contra”. Trato de que cuestionen lo que dicen los autores

Francisco dijo basar la mayoría de su enseñanza en el libro, fotocopias y ejercicios gramaticales:

Tengo el *Grammarway* y tengo el... el... varios libros tengo. Y de ahí voy sacando cuáles voy a poner, cuáles pienso que van a ser más accesibles para ellos. “Eso péguenlo en su libretita, esa copia, para que les sirva en su examen”. Traen varias opciones. Hay ejercicios que traen varias, cuatro o tres opciones. O hay ejercicios que traen... a veces elijo los que tienen imágenes”.

Rachel también mencionó que los estados de ánimo influyen en la forma de dar su clase:

Bueno, es que depende [qué actividades hago en clase]. Depende de los alumnos y depende de mí a veces. Porque a veces llego así como que sin ganas, cansada a la escuela y digo, bueno, para ya para librármela pues les doy un ejercicio. Para que no me molesten [risas]. Pero cuando ya llego así con el ánimo elevado, ahora sí, con ganas de... alegre, ¿no? Ya empiezo con una dinámica, un juego, luego les pongo el ejercicio, les explico.

Discusión

No se encontró uniformidad respecto de las creencias epistemológicas en los profesores. En coincidencia con Oguz (2008) y Wadsworth (2007), tres profesores sostienen que el conocimiento es tentativo y que la fuente del conocimiento es la ra-

zón. En línea con los hallazgos de Gómez y Silas (2012), los dos docentes restantes definen el conocimiento como absoluto y piensan que el origen es la autoridad. En términos de Schommer (1994) diríamos que tres de los participantes albergan creencias sofisticadas mientras que dos de ellos sostienen creencias ingenuas.

Todos los participantes opinan que el conocimiento se adquiere de forma gradual y se logra con esfuerzo y dedicación. Chai, Khine y Teo (2006), Oguz (2008) y Schommer y Walker, (1997) encontraron el mismo tipo de creencias en sus respectivos estudios. Llama la atención la inconsistencia existente en dos profesores que opinan que el conocimiento es absoluto y viene de la autoridad pero a la vez consideran que éste es gradual. La inconsistencia reside en que la mayoría de la literatura sobre el tema ha encontrado que aquellos profesores que conciben el conocimiento como absoluto, también creen que éste se aprende rápidamente o no se aprende. Se carece de estudios que pudieran ayudarnos a explicar este hallazgo. No obstante, la experiencia anecdótica nos indica que, en términos generales, la enseñanza de lenguas se lleva a cabo haciendo énfasis en su carácter gradual y práctico. En contraparte, en muchos casos también se pone particular atención en la memorización y aplicación de reglas gramaticales. Es probable que los participantes hayan tenido este tipo de instrucción y que éstas experiencias se hayan trasladado a la docencia (Pajares, 1992).

Otro aspecto que los participantes mencionaron como determinante para la adquisición de conocimiento fue la existencia de un ambiente de aprendizaje agradable y cooperativo entre estudiantes y profesores. Hunter (2006) establece que efectivamente el conocimiento se construye mediante la experiencia auténtica y colaborativa de los involucrados en el proceso de aprendizaje. Descartes (en Moustakas, 1994) afirma que todos nos encontramos conectados de alguna manera con cada partícula del mundo que nos rodea. En ese tenor, cada experiencia vivida en la escuela puede ser determinante en la creación de conocimiento. El ambiente completo en el que uno se encuentra inmerso tiene relación o coopera con la creación de la realidad, lo que al mismo tiempo permite la construcción de epistemologías personales.

Respecto de cómo se evalúa el conocimiento, los resultados coinciden con los de Goosen (2000). Todos los participantes consideraron que la forma de saber si un estudiante ha aprehendido el conocimiento es si éste puede aplicarlo a contextos reales pero también si lo ha memorizado. Estas creencias parecerían una franca contradicción pues normalmente las creencias de tipo sofisticado indicarían que el conocimiento se aplica, se discute y contextualiza pero raramente se memoriza. Aquí parecen entrar en juego las características específicas de la disciplina. Efectivamente el aprendizaje de un idioma conlleva la puesta en práctica de lo aprendido; no obstante, la memorización de reglas gramaticales, expresiones fijas y formas irregulares también son necesarias para una comunicación efectiva. En este sentido puede decirse que las creencias de los profesores responden adecuadamente a la naturaleza de su trabajo.

Las dimensiones que conforman las creencias epistemológicas encontradas en esta investigación son parecidas a las propuestas por Schommer (1994). Los participantes se refirieron a cuatro de las cinco (Estructura del conocimiento, certeza del conocimiento, fuente del conocimiento, rapidez de la adquisición, control de la adquisición) postuladas por esta investigadora. Únicamente el factor “estructura del conocimiento” no se manifestó. Los profesores no mencionaron explícitamente si conciben el conocimiento como aislado o interrelacionado con otras áreas o disciplinas. Aunque si se analiza el discurso de los mismos, es posible percibir que aluden poco a otras disciplinas, salvo por un profesor que lo menciona al referirse a sus prácticas de enseñanza. Otra dimensión que los profesores mencionaron y que coincide con el énfasis que según Hofer (2004) deben tener las CE es la evaluación del conocimiento. Para esta investigadora, las creencias epistemológicas se centran en la forma en que las personas creen que ocurre el conocimiento, dónde reside, cómo se construye y cómo se evalúa.

Respecto de la relación entre las creencias epistemológicas y las prácticas de enseñanza, los resultados de estudios anteriores indican que las creencias de tipo sofisticado suelen dar como resultado prácticas constructivistas; mientras que las creencias de tipo ingenuo suelen alinearse con prácticas tradicionalistas (Gómez, 2003; Padilla

y Garritz, 2014). En concordancia con Hashweh (1985), en esta investigación se encontró que dos profesores con CE sofisticadas, dicen realizar prácticas de enseñanza de tipo constructivista. Uno de ellos no sólo fomenta la creatividad y el espíritu crítico, sino que además se coordina con sus colegas que imparten otras materias para evaluar a los alumnos conjuntamente. Esta práctica de evaluación de saberes integrados se considera como una de las expresiones más sofisticadas de la perspectiva constructivista (Bellocchio, 2010).

De igual forma, las creencias epistemológicas ingenuas coincidieron con prácticas de enseñanza tradicionalistas. Uno de los participantes fue el más coherente en este tipo de creencias y prácticas. Este profesor piensa que el conocimiento es cierto y dado por la autoridad; igualmente, basa su docencia en el libro y ejercicios gramaticales. En este caso, existe poco espacio para la interacción y para la atención de necesidades específicas de los estudiantes. Esta postura se considera como una clara expresión de la perspectiva tradicionalista (Marín, 2004). Chan (2003); Benson (1989) y Gallagher (1991) también hallaron el mismo patrón en sus respectivos estudios.

Adicionalmente, se encontraron inconsistencias entre las CE de dos profesores y sus prácticas de enseñanza. Este hallazgo es similar a los de Goelz (2004), Kang y Wallace (2004) y Pecharrroman y Pozo (2006). Una profesora dijo que sus PE eran variadas, mientras que otro profesor manifestó utilizar básicamente ejercicios gramaticales. Esta inconsistencia puede deberse a factores externos como las reglas de la escuela y el número de estudiantes por grupo. El contexto de enseñanza podría llevar al profesor a actuar en una manera diferente de la que piensa. En los colegios de bachilleres donde se realizó el estudio, el número de estudiantes por grupo es normalmente de 50. En estas condiciones, el control del grupo se hace más difícil al intentar realizar actividades centradas en el estudiante, además de que se requiere más tiempo de preparación, realización y evaluación de las mismas.

Una profesora manifestó dos aspectos importantes que median en la relación entre sus creencias y sus prácticas. La primera es la influencia de la cultura que parece prevalecer en su colegio. Todo hace pensar que una regla no escrita

es que los juegos son nocivos para la enseñanza en tanto provocan alteraciones al orden. Esta concepción es contradictoria con los lineamientos oficiales para la enseñanza del inglés (Dirección General de Bachillerato, 2010). Éstos establecen que se debe alentar el desarrollo integral de las habilidades lingüísticas y su uso en contexto. La segunda, se refiere a la forma en que el estado de ánimo de la profesora influye en las actividades que decide realizar. Investigaciones recientes (Jennings y Greenberg, 2009; Schutz y Zembylas, 2009) han encontrado que el humor y las emociones juegan un papel importante en el comportamiento de los profesores en clase.

Conclusiones

El objetivo de este estudio fue determinar cuáles son las creencias epistemológicas de cinco profesores de inglés de nivel bachillerato y su relación (o falta de ella) con sus prácticas de enseñanza. Se encontró que no existe una postura uniforme respecto de las CE, se hallaron profesores cuyas creencias son completamente ingenuas o completamente sofisticadas. De igual manera, hubo profesores que expresaron inconsistencias entre las propias dimensiones de las CE. En cuanto a las PE, se repitió la misma tendencia: algunas fueron completamente acordes con las creencias epistemológicas y otras mostraron inconsistencias en mayor o menor grado. Esta falta de coherencia parece tener explicaciones disciplinares, contextuales, personales y formativas.

Los resultados de este estudio muestran que existen creencias epistemológicas que pueden considerarse adecuadas para la enseñanza; sin embargo, también se hicieron patentes otras que no contribuyen a un buen aprendizaje del inglés. Preocupa el aparente escaso ejercicio de reflexión sobre el conocimiento y la enseñanza por parte de la mayoría de los profesores. Pareciera que el profesor de lenguas es alguien que únicamente se considera dispensador de conocimientos prácticos y acabados, desconectados de conocimientos más vastos. De igual forma, las concepciones de las autoridades locales sobre las actividades de enseñanza parecen restringir prácticas más dinámicas y contextualizadas que, por el contrario, se encuentran oficialmente promovidas en los documentos institucionales. Luego enton-

ces, sería positivo instrumentar acciones que tiendan, por una parte a un análisis institucional y por otra a la formación reflexiva de los profesores.

En términos de la investigación, ésta deja abiertas nuevas avenidas de indagación que podría aportar más elementos para una mejor comprensión de las creencias epistemológicas y su relación con las prácticas de enseñanza. Una de ellas sería realizar observaciones de clase que permitieran constatar si lo manifestado por los profesores es coherente con sus acciones en clases.

Investigar las concepciones de las autoridades y su consistencia con los lineamientos oficiales respecto de la enseñanza del inglés, también podría arrojar luz sobre la importancia de este idioma en la formación de los bachilleres y en consecuencia, las medidas que se toman o no para propiciar su aprendizaje. Lo anterior podría contribuir a mejorar la enseñanza del inglés y fomentar un interés genuino no sólo en que los estudiantes dominen el idioma, sino porque esta disciplina se considere tan compleja e importante como cualquier otra. ■

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A Survey of Learning Strategies at the Facultad de Lenguas of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla

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Abstract

This article reports on a mixed-methodological study concerning students' preferred learning strategies at three proficiency levels of a B.A. that belongs to a public university in central Mexico. Learning strategies "...are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). The study's primary aim was to analyze the preferred learning strategies among distinct EFL proficiency levels in order to explore how strategies evolve as students course the target language program. Research data were collected via survey applied to 87 students who belonged to the A2, B1 and B2 proficiency levels, and then, a focus group was conducted with eight students.

The research findings reveal that there was no consistent relation between preferred learning strategies and the three EFL proficiency levels. Furthermore, the research data also indicated that there seemed to be language learning strategies stability among the three proficiency levels. In overall conceptual terms, the study makes a contribution to the research context by providing a large-scale (within this context) and cross-sectional account of the preferred learning strategies of this B.A. program. The significance of this account could be explained in two main dimensions. First, the data can be used in processes of curriculum innovation and evaluation of this institution. Second, the data obtained has implications for classroom practices for the two significant groups in classroom cultures: raising i) teachers' and ii) learners' awareness about the importance that learning strategies play in the processes of language teaching and learning.

Key Words: Learning Strategies, Autonomous Learning, Method, Post Method

Resumen

El presente artículo reporta los resultados de un estudio de metodología mixta respecto a las preferencias de estilos de aprendizaje de alumnos de nivel licenciatura en una universidad del centro de México. Los estilos de aprendizaje "son acciones específicas que los alumnos llevan a cabo con el objetivo de hacer su aprendizaje más fácil, más rápido, más entretenido, más auto dirigido, más efectivo, y más transferible a nuevas situaciones" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). El propósito principal de esta investigación es analizar los estilos de aprendizaje preferidos por alumnos de distintos niveles de dominio de idioma inglés. Los datos fueron obtenidos a través de la aplicación de un cuestionario aplicado a 87 alumnos con niveles de dominio A2, B1 y B2. Asimismo, los datos adicionales fueron obtenidos a través de un grupo de enfoque en el que participaron 8 alumnos.

Los resultados de la investigación revelaron que no existe una relación directa entre las estrategias de aprendizaje y los tres niveles de dominio de idioma inglés. Además, los datos indican que las preferencias de estilos de aprendizaje aparentan ser estables en los tres niveles de dominio de inglés. En términos generales, la contribución de la investigación reside en que los resultados representan un diagnóstico a gran escala de las estrategias de aprendizaje de los alumnos. La relevancia de este estudio puede ser explicada en dos dimensiones. En primer lugar, los resultados pueden ser útiles para un proceso de evaluación e innovación curricular. Por otra parte, los resultados tienen implicaciones directas en las prácticas del salón de clase ya que tanto los docentes como los alumnos pueden concientizarse respecto a la importancia que las estrategias de aprendizaje tienen en el proceso aprendizaje-enseñanza de una segunda lengua.

Palabras Claves: Estrategias de Aprendizaje, Aprendizaje Autónomo, Método, Posmetodo

1. Introduction

The history of English language teaching methods has witnessed many theories and approaches that have influenced the nature of this process. For example, the arrays of methods that have left their mark on language teaching range from the Grammar Translation Method to the Communicative Approach (Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Although these methods have been helpful for all sorts of learners to become proficient in all or certain aspects of their proficiency, it is also true that they present theoretical and practical gaps. However, it has been widely recognized that the particular method is not the actual issue, for any given method holds positive and negative aspects. As Richards (cited in Prabhu, 1990, p. 165) has pointed out “The important issues are not which method to adopt but to how to develop procedures and instructional activities that will enable program objectives to be attained.”

While on the one hand, teachers are often admonished by administrations and curriculum designers for not adopting one method or another, they are also told that the method is not the central feature and that more attention should be paid to their instructional activities. As a result, dissatisfaction among professionals in the field of language teaching has been expressed. This feeling of disappointment has encouraged certain authors (viz. Prabhu, 1990; Holliday, 1994; Canagarajah, 2002; Kumaravadivelu, 2001) to propose an alternative to method. As Kumaravadivelu (2001, p. 537) has stated “As a consequence of repeatedly articulated dissatisfaction with the limitations of the concept of *method* and the transmission model of teacher education, the L2 profession is faced with an imperative need to construct a post-method pedagogy.”

In addition to proposing a three-fold conceptualization of a “post method” pedagogy in which the role of the teacher is reified from a mere adopter of methodologies and approaches to an active participant and constructor of his own pedagogy, Kumaravadivelu (2001, p. 545) acknowledged the importance of learner autonomy in three aspects: “academic autonomy,” “social autonomy” and “liberatory autonomy.” However desirable learner autonomy may be, it is not necessarily a distinctive characteristic of language learners; furthermore, the Mexican educational system, within which this study was undertaken,

has historically been subjugated by the old traditional methodology of knowledge transmission. For example, teachers have, for a long time, considered language teaching as a subject where translations and grammar are common practices in the language classroom.

As it is expressed in the *National Programme for Secondary Education* (2006, p. 7) “Attention shifted from structure and translation [English Language curriculum implemented in 1993] and began to concentrate more heavily on communication. However, a change at the conceptual level is not enough to have an impact on the classroom.” Therefore, many language learners are not used to being regarded and given an active and responsible role as participants of their learning process. It has not been until recent changes and innovations in national policies in education that attention to autonomous learning has been raised.

Mexican higher education is also following this trend. The *Minerva* project is an innovative curriculum reform project at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla that incorporates autonomous learning competence into its new principles. Although autonomous learning is a central competence stated in current innovative programs and projects in the Mexican educational system, it is not necessarily an inherent characteristic of Mexican students. As a result, one approach to understanding and promoting change in students is to take advantage of the existing tools for gathering information about learning strategies because “they have been found useful in making learners more active participants in their language learning while at the same time making teachers more sensitive to learner diversity and learning difficulties” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 10).

Purpose of the study and Research Questions

This study aims to contribute to the current language learning and teaching practices in the Language Faculty of a public university in central Mexico. The study is meant to provide an increased understanding of learner’s preferred learning strategies which may serve as a means to better guide the methodological decisions that teachers and administrators make within the various language proficiency levels. As explained above, the study was carried out through an investigation of learning strategies displayed by students within

this context. In light of the above, the study was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the most prevalent preferred learning strategy among students learning English as a foreign language?
2. What is the cline of prevalence of preferred learning strategies among these students?
3. Are students' preferred learning strategies (in) dependent of their EFL proficiency level (A2, B1 and B2)?
4. What are the implications to the answers of the above questions for teachers?
5. What are the implications to the answers of the above questions for policy makers?

2. Theoretical orientation

The early 90's was a decade in which contextual factors such as communication strategies, personality, students' cognitive processes and learning styles were considered essential in the TESOL field. This is a fact that is relevant to this study since the context where it took place has started a curriculum evaluation and restructuring process. Therefore, it is important to account for such factors as will be further discussed.

Although a good number of issues surrounding CLT have already been pointed out within the scholarly literature (i.e. negative results when applied with eastern-country learners and a large number of learners in a classroom), the discussion regarding an alternative solution has not seemed to arise in the TESOL circles of discussion. One of the earliest contributions to the issue of 'recipe methods' was the idea that "...contextual variability would not serve [only] as a means of avoiding methodological issues, but as a possible new approach to resolving them" (Prabhu, 1990 p. 163). Even though the previous assertion might seem like a rough attempt to address the dissatisfaction towards CLT, it did lay the foundations to what would later be defined as the Post-Method Era (Richards & Rodgers, 2001); Postmethod Pedagogy (Kumaravdivelu, 2001); and Post method Condition (Canagarajah, 2002).

The foundations laid by Prabhu were the starting points for a tendency which shifted the attention to contextual factors more than ever before; for instance, the concept of "appropriate methodology" (Holiday, 1994) was introduced in the field. According to Holiday (1994, p. 164) any appropriate methodology must be "culture-sensitive." As a re-

sult of the rising awareness in the 1990's about the importance of contextual factors as key elements to be included in any methodological consideration and planning, the central topic of the discussion was no longer what method or approach was considered "the best" but what variables the teacher should consider to teach an effective class. This issue has been addressed by Richards and Rodgers (2001) as noted:

As the teacher gains experience and knowledge, he or she will begin to develop an individual approach or personal method of teaching, one that draws on an established approach or method but that also uniquely reflects the teacher's individual beliefs, values, principles, and experiences. This may not lead to abandonment of the approach or method the teacher started out using but will lead to a modification of it as the teachers adds, modifies, and adjusts the approach or method to the realities of the classroom (p. 251).

A more refined concept of a post-method era would then be proposed by Kumaravdivelu (2001) with his concept of "postmethod pedagogy." This concept is two-fold; on the one hand, it includes "... issues pertaining to classroom strategies, instructional materials, curricular objectives, and evaluation measures..." and; on the other hand, "...a wide range of historical, political, and sociocultural experiences that directly or indirectly influence L2 education" (ibid, p. 539).

In addition to proposing a conceptualization of a postmethod pedagogy, Kumaravdivelu (2001) identified three necessary parameters for such pedagogy to be efficient and effective: particularity, practicality, and possibility. Particularity is defined as that which is "...relevant (and) sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu." Particularity is then, conceptualized as the extent to which a post-method pedagogy regards the local and national sociocultural elements that impinge on the teaching and learning practices in the language classroom. Therefore, it becomes necessary to account for the particular learner's learning styles and strategies to promote sensitive teaching practices in any curricular innovation.

The Post Method learner

As part of conceptualizing the notion of post method pedagogy, it is also necessary to put in clear terms what the teachers' and students' roles in the teaching-learning process should be. According to Kumaravadivelu (2001) the role of the post method learner has to be autonomous, and this is only possible "... when learners are willing and able to take charge of their own learning" (p. 545). However, learners' autonomy is not an innate or intrinsic trait of all language learners; fortunately, there is a wealth of learning strategies (e.g., Oxford, 1990) and learning styles (e.g., Reid, 1995) inventories that have proven to be effective in raising learners' awareness about their own language learning process. It is then necessary to capitalize on such categorizations in order to optimize the learners' language learning process, and raise their awareness about the importance of developing autonomy.

As a result, an extensive literature that discusses the inclusion of learners' autonomy has extensively been written; for example, Kumaravadivelu (2001) has proposed three types of autonomy: Academic, Social and Liberatory autonomy. For the purposes of this study academic autonomy becomes relevant for it refers to the intrapersonal motivation to maximize the learning process which could be advantageous for learners by

1. identifying their learning strategies and styles by administering, or having administered, select portions of strategy inventories and styles surveys, and by writing their own language learning histories
2. stretching their strategies and styles by incorporating some of those employed by successful language learners
3. evaluating their ongoing learning outcomes by monitoring language learning progress through personal journal writings in addition to taking regular class tests and other standardized tests
4. reaching out for opportunities for additional language reception of production beyond what they get in the classroom, for example, through library sources and learning centers. (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 546)

The previous description on learners' academic autonomy become crucial for the current study since the concepts presented above

support the idea that conducting research on learning strategies and styles is necessary for any language school as a means to promote learners' autonomy.

Canagarajah (2002) has acknowledged the importance of learning strategies as the core of a more context-sensitive pedagogy when saying "Strategies are...different from methods in that they are not prescriptively/rigidly defined approaches that have to be used almost universally in any learning context" (p. 142). This approach constitutes a shift of thinking in that it accounts for a bottom up perspective to go about the teaching endeavor that every language teacher experiences when moving from classroom to classroom and then from students to students.

Conducting research to identify learners' preferred learning strategies is advantageous for two main reasons; on the one hand, students "... have to be made sensitive to the range of strategies available and the strategies that work for them," and, by doing so, teachers would also help students "...become aware of them [strategies] and manipulate them to their advantage holds great potential for developing a meta-pedagogical awareness" (Canagarajah, 2002 p. 143). In addition, the necessity to conduct classroom research as the basis of a postmethod pedagogy has been addressed by Canagarajah (2002, p. 149) as follows "Since teachers always have to learn the strategies students adopt and be sensitive to their linguistic and pedagogical consequences, they cannot be sound teachers without active classroom research." As a result, it is imperative to shift our attention to the learners' strategies which differ from context to context, from class to class, and from learner to learner. Learners and teachers' reflection upon the most suitable ways to approach language learning is not an end by itself; on the contrary, it is crucial that learners develop awareness about "Using...the strategies that are uncomfortable to them enables students to gain different skills/competencies in language" (Canagarajah, 2002 p. 146).

Learning Strategies

In the same way that the learning style construct has been constantly redefined over the years, learning strategies have also been described in various ways. The following is a brief description of the different definitions and categories proposed

for this construct. Such an account is relevant for this investigation since it forms the basis in which a significant part of this study will be dedicated to and it also intends to provide the reader with a detailed overview the learning strategies definitions and classification system.

Learning Strategies: A working definition

In the 1970's a fourteen-item list of "good" language learner traits was proposed by Rubin and Thompson (as cited in Brown, 2000) which led a group of Canadian professors to carry out a research project which was aimed at revealing the "good" language learning traits. Afterwards, O'Malley et al. (as cited in Brown, 2000) conducted one of the most inclusive English language learning strategies investigation in the United States.

As a result of the growing interest in this topic, a great number of definitions have been proposed. Weinstein and Mayer (as cited in Macaro, 2001, p. 17) stated that "Learning Strategies are the behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning that are intended to influence the learner's encoding." Although useful, the previous definition is somehow vague in the sense that it does not include the idea that "Learning Strategies are ...*deliberate* actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information." (Chamot as cited in Macaro, 2001, p. 17).

In an attempt to simplify this term Brown (2000, p. 113) states that "Strategies are specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information." Even though the previous definition emphasizes the idea that learning strategies involve a degree of conscious treatment of information to achieve a goal, it does not indicate that students, by using certain learning strategies, could make their learning processes less complicated than it already is. To this respect, Oxford (1990, p. 8) pointed out that "learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations."

In a further attempt to stress the importance of having a concept that comprises both the learners' active role in the process of learning a new language and their conscious engagement in it,

Macaro (2001, p. 20) argued, "we need to observe that the term 'language learning strategies' refers more specifically to the process of language learning whereas 'learner strategies' might be interpreted as techniques in the learning of any subject."

Learning Strategies classification

The following is a description of language learning strategies a classification proposed by Oxford (1990), which is "perhaps the most comprehensive classification of learning strategies to date" (Ellis, 1994 as cited in Griffiths p. 539, 2004). Oxford (1990) classified language learning strategies into two main groups: direct and indirect strategies which at the same time are subdivided into six subcategories such as memory, cognitive, and compensation; metacognitive, affective, and social. In addition, one of the instruments used for this study was adopted from (Oxford, 1990); therefore, a more detailed description of these categories and subcategories will be provided in the following subsections with the purpose of helping the reader become more knowledgeable about these subcategories.

Direct strategies

According to Oxford (1990) 'direct strategies' are linked to the proficiency. This strategy group is further divided into three areas: memory, cognitive and compensation. A common characteristic is that all of them involve a certain degree of "mental processing of the language" (ibid, p. 37). In the following subsections, these sub strategies will be described in detail.

Memory strategies

These types of strategies, also known as mnemonics, have been used since ancient times as a means to recall relevant information about the weather, farming, and other important information. Oxford (1990, p. 38) has subdivided memory strategies into four different subcategories: creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing well, and employing actions. It is thought that these strategies are very helpful to organize, associate, and review the input which students are provided with.

Cognitive Strategies

According to Oxford (1990, p. 43) cognitive strategies involve "...manipulation or transformation of

the proficiency by the learner.” These strategies have a variety of uses; for example, they are also sub-divided into four categories such as Practicing, Receiving and Sending Messages, Analyzing and Reasoning and Creating Structure for Input and Output. Although practicing, which involves repeating sounds and working with writing and using patterns, is the most important feature for this group, cognitive-oriented learners could also skim and scan a main idea, and transcribe the phonetic representation of words with similar spelling but with different sounds (i.e. through, though, tough).

Compensation Strategies

When students show a lack of grammar and vocabulary, it is very common that they employ a variety of strategies that helps them avoid communication breakdowns. According to Oxford (1990), there are two main groups of compensation strategies; for example, learners can “Guess Intelligently in Listening and Reading” and “Overcome Limitations in Speaking and Writing” (p.19). The former, “guessing intelligently,” can be subdivided into “using linguistic clues” and “using other clues.” The latter is subdivided into “switching to the mother tongue,” “getting help,” “using mime or gesture,” “avoiding communication partially or totally,” “selecting the topic,” “adjusting or approximating the message,” “coining words,” and “using a circumlocution or synonym.

Indirect strategies

Indirect strategies are “those which provide indirect support for language learning such as planning, co-operating and seeking opportunities” (Griffiths, 2004, p. 4). Moreover, Oxford (1990) subdivided indirect strategies into metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. In the following subsections, these sub-strategies will be described in detail.

Metacognitive strategies

In Oxford’s (2003) overview of learning strategies, metacognitive strategies are conceptualized to be “employed for managing the learning process overall.” (p. 12). For example, learners might find them useful to plan their own learning in an efficient way by “...planning of an L2 task, gathering and organizing material, arranging a study space and a schedule, monitoring mistakes...” among other ways to make their language learning pro-

cess easier (Oxford, p. 12). In addition, three subsets of metacognitive strategies can be identified: centering your learning, arranging and planning your learning and evaluating your learning.

Affective strategies

Affective strategies have to do with developing learner’s own awareness about “...identifying one’s mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, rewarding oneself for a good performance, and using deep breathing or positive self-talk...” as functional ways to enhance L2 learning. These strategies have been grouped into three sets: lowering your anxiety, encouraging yourself, and taking your emotional temperature. Evidence (Oxford, 1996; Oxford and Ehrman 1995) of the relation of this strategy and L2 proficiency has been gathered; although other studies (Mullins 1992) have not found consistent evidence for the previous claim. This could be related to the fact that learners, as they progress to more advanced levels, need less effective strategies.

Social strategies

According to Oxford (2003), social strategies are helpful for the learner to interact with others as a means to understand the proficiency and culture. Social strategies are then subdivided into three subsets: Asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others. For instance, learners display the use of this strategy when “... asking questions to get verification, asking for clarification of a confusing point, asking for help in doing a language task, talking with a native-speaking conversation partner, and exploring cultural and social norms” (Oxford, 2003, p. 14).

3. Methodology

The present study took place at a Faculty of Modern Languages, which is program that belongs to the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. This faculty offers graduate, undergraduate and an open B.A. program in ELT. It is important to mention that the focus of this project was on the undergraduate students.

A mixed-method research design was adopted for this study. Cresswell (2003) defines mixed methods as the employment of both “qualitative and quantitative research practices and data analysis” (p. 19). The main reason for adopting a mixed method research design was its complementary

nature. Whereas qualitative research “assumes a dynamic reality,” and quantitative research “assumes a stable reality” (Nunan, 1992 p. 4), a mixed method study “begins with a broad survey in order to generalize results to a population and then focuses, in a second phase, on detailed qualitative, open-ended interviews to collect detailed views from participants” (Cresswell, 2003 p. 21). Therefore, two instruments were sequentially applied. First, one learning strategies questionnaire, as primary sources of data, was applied to a large population (see section 3.1 below); then, a focus group, as a secondary source, was carried out as a means to corroborate and complement the data obtained from the questionnaires (see section 3.1 below).

The data obtained from the questionnaire was of a quantitative nature. This instrument drew numerical data about the research participants’ learning preferences on an ordinal scale, allowing research participants to order their preferred learning strategies from ‘most preferred’ to ‘least preferred’ by answering different series of questions about how they do and do not enjoy learning on a Likert scale. The results were then organized into frequency tallies. In order to use frequency tallies, it was necessary to ‘band’ the participants according to their language proficiency levels (i.e. basic, intermediate, and advanced). It was also necessary to ‘band’ the results of the learning strategy questionnaire into three general categories (i.e. high preference, medium preference and low preference). In other words, when calculating research participants’ preference scores, the actual numerical score is only used statistically to place each participant into the ‘high’, ‘medium’ or ‘low’ preference categories for each learning strategy. The total number of tallies for each learning strategy was then placed into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences analysis program (SPSS) according to the research participants’ proficiency level in order to discover if there is a systematic relationship between proficiency level and preferred learning styles and learning strategies.

In order to test this relationship, the data was put into the SPSS (a statistics program for behavioral and social sciences) and analyzed through cross tabulations and chi square techniques. In addition, a focus group interview (qualitative data) was recorded and transcribed and the most relevant sections were used in order to make the analysis of the quantitative data more meaningful (see Chapter 4).

3.1 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

Oxford’s (1990) *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL) (see Appendix B) was adopted (along with focus group interviews) for two main reasons. On the one hand, a survey is one of the best tools to obtain data from a large number of participants in a relative short period of time, and on the other hand, this instrument has been proven to be reliable in similar investigations since it “...has been translated into more than 20 languages and used in dozens of published studies around the world” (Oxford, 2003, p. 15). The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), version 5.1 (Oxford, 1990) is an 80-question, self-rating survey for ESL learners. The SILL determines the frequency of the strategy usage for L2 learning by learners’ self-rating (from 5 with “almost always” to 1 with “almost never”). The SILL is divided into six parts: part A covers memory strategies (questions 1-15); part B deals with cognitive strategies (questions 16- 40); part C addresses compensating strategies (questions 41-48); part D looks at metacognitive strategies (questions 49-64); part E is related to affective strategies (questions 65-71); and part F is intended to examine social strategies (questions 72-80).

One common method to obtain information regarding participants’ perceptions towards a given topics is focus groups. Silverman (2005, p. 378) defines focus groups as “Group discussions usually based upon stimuli (topics, visual aids) provided by the researcher.” The focus group discussion was prompted by a quotation that described the “perfect” language learner. Each learner was given five minutes to read it; then the researcher read it out loud and translated into Spanish. After that, the researcher elicited comments and managed the discussion, which was audio-recorded, in relation to the following topics: a) teaching activities and strategies, b) materials, c) classroom, d) group, pair and individual work, and e) previous language learning experience. As a natural practice in focus group interviews, the discussion moved into different directions and the role of the researcher was to elicit comments and redirect the discussion toward the previously stated topics. Nine learners from basic, intermediate and advanced proficiency levels participated in the discussion, and they all gave individual permission to use excerpts of that discussion in the present study.

4. Analysis and Interpretation

In this section, the results drawn from the data collected through the learning strategies survey described in the previous chapter will be presented. First, the research participants' preferred learning strategies are presented through descriptive statistics and graphics. Additionally, for each subsection, a detailed description and interpretation of the research participants' learning strategy preferences for each category of the questionnaires will be provided.

Learning Strategies Preferences

In this section, the students' preferred learning strategies will be presented. First, the preferred learning strategies of all participants are calculated through mean and standard deviation regardless of the participants' proficiency level. Then, each learning strategy preference is calculated through mean and standard deviation, while examining differences in learning strategy preferences according to participants' Proficiency level.

Learning strategy preference regardless of proficiency level.

Below in Figure 1, the results of preferred learning strategy of all participants regardless of Proficiency level are described and interpreted. As can be seen, figure 1 shows the total number of students that were included in this study (87) and their preferred learning strategies. The cline of distribution showed through the mean suggests that there is not a single prevalent learning strategy. On the contrary, it seems that learning strategy preference is rather equally distributed, with very little difference between the number of participants who prefer the "Organizing and evaluating your learning" strategy (mean = 2.41), which is the most preferred learning strategy represented among the participants, and the "Remembering more effectively" strategy which is the least preferred strategy among the students (mean = 1.92). In other words, there is only a difference of .49 between the highest and lowest mean in regards to learning strategy preference.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MEACOGNITIVE Organizing and evaluating your learning (Banded)	87	1	3	2.41	.620
COMPENSATION Compensating for missing knowledge (Banded)	87	1	3	2.38	.669
SOCIAL (Banded)	87	1	3	2.30	.701
AFFECTIVE Managing your emotions (Banded)	87	1	3	2.10	.716
COGNITIVE Using all your mental processes (Banded)	87	1	3	2.10	.591
MEMORY Remembering more effectively (Banded)	87	1	3	1.92	.554
Valid N (list wise)	87				

Figure 1. Preferred learning strategy regardless of proficiency level

Moreover, the standard deviations (above .5) that belong to each learning strategy suggest that the distribution of responses is again rather broad. This means that there was a wide range of responses (from very high to very low) among participants for each learning strategy on the questionnaire, which indicates a rather heterogeneous population of learners in regards to learner strategy preference. This is particularly evident for both the “social” strategy (.701) and the “affective” strategy (.716). These high standard deviations would indicate that most learners are probably on two opposite ends of the preference cline, meaning that they either very much “utilize” or very much “reject” the two previously mentioned strategies when working in the language class.

Learning strategy preference in relation to students’ Proficiency level.

In this section, the students’ preferred learning strategies in relation to the learners’ proficiency will be presented separately. All learning strategies will be presented through figures that represent the three preference scores (described in chapter three) in relation to the students’ proficiency level.

Memory strategy

Below in Figure 2 the results of the “memory” strategy of all participants in relation to the students’ Proficiency level are described and interpreted.

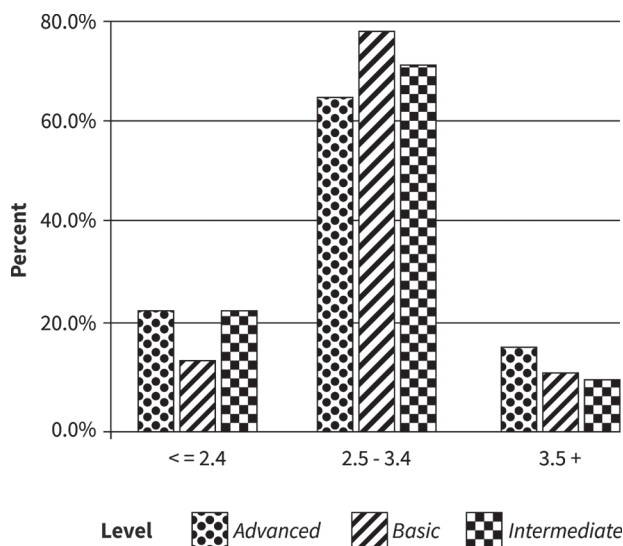


Figure 2. Remembering effectively

The results above show that the three proficiency levels principally marked a medium preference for this learning strategy; whereas the low and high score ranges show lower preferences among the three proficiency levels. Therefore, these results indicate that the students grouped in the three Proficiency levels apply this learning strategy not as the primary way of dealing with the new information but as an alternative strategy used to learn English. Hence, when looking at the three preference ranges (low, medium, and high) we can see that the “remembering more effectively” strategy preference is neither fully accepted nor fully rejected, which would confirm the results presented in section 2 in which this learning strategy was presented as the least preferred learning strategy regardless of Proficiency level. In addition, the Pearson Chi-Square significance ($p = 0.838$) confirms the results in section 2 showing that there is not systematic relation between Proficiency levels and the “remembering more effectively” strategy.

Cognitive strategy

Below in figure 3 the results of the “cognitive” learning strategy of all participants in relation to the learners’ language level are described and interpreted.

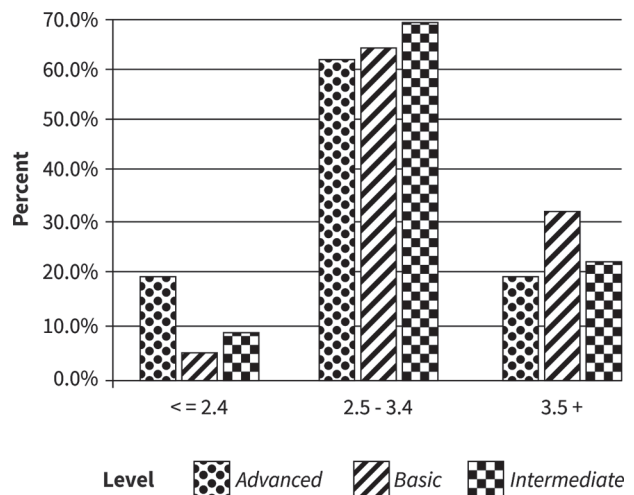


Figure 3. Using mental processes

As can be seen, the medium preference range groups the highest preference among the three proficiency levels. This would again confirm the results shown in figure 3 in which the “cogni-

tive” learning strategy is the second lowest strategy regardless of Proficiency level. Furthermore, it can be argued that this learning strategy is not prevalent in any of the three Proficiency levels since the Pearson Chi Square is $p=0.410$. Therefore, it seems that students tend to use this strategy as an alternative way of coping with new information in the process of learning English.

Compensation strategy

Below in figure 4 the results of the “compensation” strategy of all participants in relation to the learners’ Proficiency level are described and interpreted.

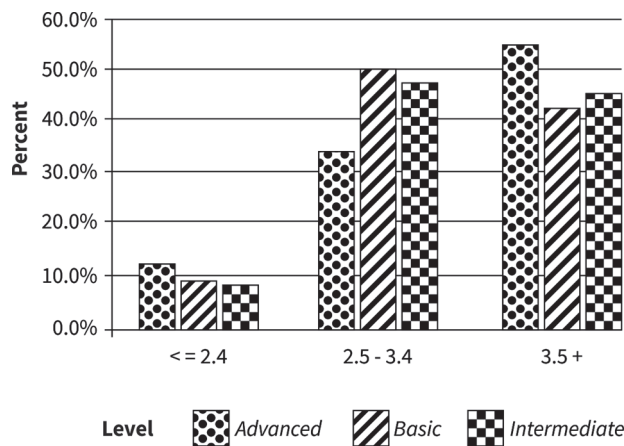


Figure 4. Compensating for missing knowledge

As can be seen, the three Proficiency levels are grouped into the medium and high range scores. This corroborates the results in figure 4 in which the “compensation” strategy is the second most preferred strategy regardless Proficiency level. This corroboration is further confirmed by the Pearson Chi-Square significance ($p=0.699$) indicating that there is not systematic relation between this learning strategy and Proficiency level. Although the advanced Proficiency level shows the highest level of preference towards this learning strategy, the intermediate and basic Proficiency levels also show a high tendency for this learning strategy. Therefore, it seems that this learning strategy should be paid attention to when planning language learning activities in the classroom.

A further comment obtained from a focus group interview seems to corroborate the tendency to use this strategy at advanced levels:

Learner: “...pues básicamente en un nivel más avanzado, lo único que hacemos es practicar todo lo que hemos aprendido durante los cursos...”

Although it seems evident that advanced Proficiency level learners are highly oriented to using a compensation learning strategy, the previous quote does not indicate that the basic and intermediate levels should be disregarded in relation to the inclusion of teaching activities that trigger the use of this strategy.

Metacognitive strategy

Below in figure 5 the results of the “metacognitive” learning strategy of all participants in relation to the learners’ language level are described and interpreted.

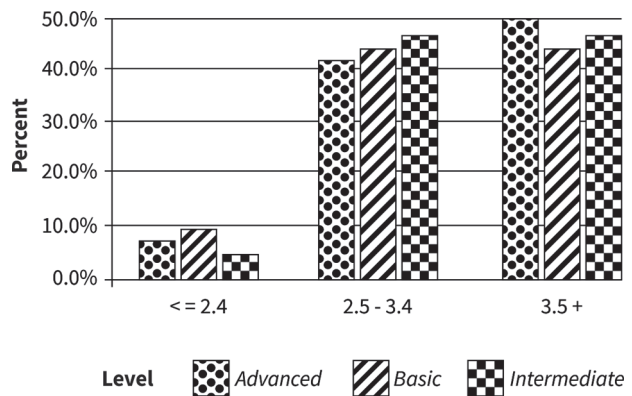


Figure 5. Organizing and evaluating learning

The results presented in figure 5 show a marked tendency among the three Proficiency levels towards the “Metacognitive” strategy. This confirms the results presented in figure 5 in which this learning strategy is the most preferred strategy regardless of Proficiency level. This is further corroborated by the Pearson Chi-Square significance of $p=0.971$, indicating that level does not systematically affect learners’ preference towards this strategy. As can be seen, the three proficiency levels are almost equally grouped into the medium and high range scores among the different proficiency levels of the learners. The possible implications that can be drawn from the previous results could call teachers’ and course developers’ (among other people involved in the teaching-learning process) attention to the fact that English lessons must

contain activities that trigger the use of this learning strategy in this context. The previous argument seems to be corroborated by the learner's comment obtained from a focus group interview:

Learner: "...entonces, estamos en un nivel básico y estamos aprendiendo eso, a veces hay métodos que nos ayudan a retener más la información o a tener conexiones o a hacer conexiones, por ejemplo, imágenes y la teoría, entonces, eso nos ayuda a hacer conexiones, para poder recordar así todo lo que nos está enseñando eso en un nivel básico.."

The quote previously presented displays a marked perception in relation to the use of teaching strategies that are highly oriented towards the application of metacognitive learning strategies at the basic level.

Affective strategy

Below in figure 6 the results of the "affective" learning strategy of all participants in relation to the learners' language level are described and interpreted.

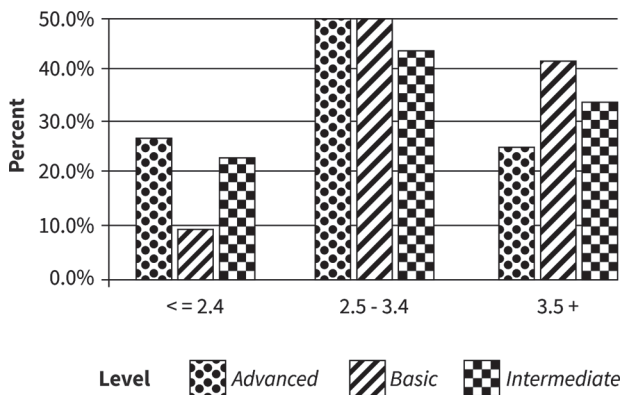


Figure 6. Managing emotions

As can be seen above, there is not a marked preference towards the "affective" learning strategy. In fact, the preference distribution among the low, medium and high range scores displays wide variation among each proficiency level. At first sight, the medium range score groups the highest percentages among the three levels which could create the wrong idea that this strategy is an alternative method for coping with new information. Nevertheless, upon closer examination of the low

and high proficiency levels, it cannot be claimed that this learning strategy is fully accepted or fully rejected. On the contrary, the standard deviation reported in figure 6 indicates that the distribution among the preference cline is rather broad, and the Pearson Chi square ($p= 0.447$) confirms that this standard deviation is accurate since this learning strategy is not dependant on of the students' Proficiency level.

In addition, the previous analysis seems as if learners' personality determines the use of the affective learning strategy which seems to be corroborated by the following excerpt:

Learner: "Bueno, yo soy Víctor de lengua meta VIII y yo opino que ok, como dice que los aprendices de una lengua que son exitosos sí opinan o sí se sienten seguros en un salón de clases. A parte no tienen miedo de equivocarse o parecer tontos al decir algo no porque ellos al sentirse seguros se sienten comprometidos con el aprendizaje ¿no?, entonces yo creo que es correcto lo que dice aquí acerca del successful language learners and the strong desire to communicate."

Teacher: "Gracias, ¿alguna otra conclusión?"

Learner: "Yesenia, lengua meta VII, desde mi punto de vista yo creo que bueno.. no estoy totalmente de acuerdo con esta opinión porque creo que hay en muchas ocasiones, los alumnos se sienten... sí les importa equivocarse, entonces a veces uno hace que no quieran volver a participar y aunque eso no signifique que... que el feedback."

Profesor: "la retroalimentación"

Yesenia: "Aja, la retroalimentación sea buena o mala, pero yo creo que a veces el hecho de que te equivoques y estás delante de los demás hace que no te sientas segura... seguro y no quieras volver a participar, entonces aparte de que es inseguridad en ti mismo también influye lo que está alrededor de ti."

The first aspect to be observed in the previous excerpt is that both language learners are in the advanced Proficiency levels; however, they

both display opposite opinions towards the “affective” factor in language learning. This could be the result of their previous language learning experiences. Therefore, it seems to be particularly relevant for this study because teachers need to be aware that they should keep an open mind in relation to the inclusion of strategies that allow learners to feel more confident at all Proficiency levels.

Social strategy

Below in figure 7 the results of the “social” learning strategy of all participants in relation to the students’ Proficiency level are described and interpreted.

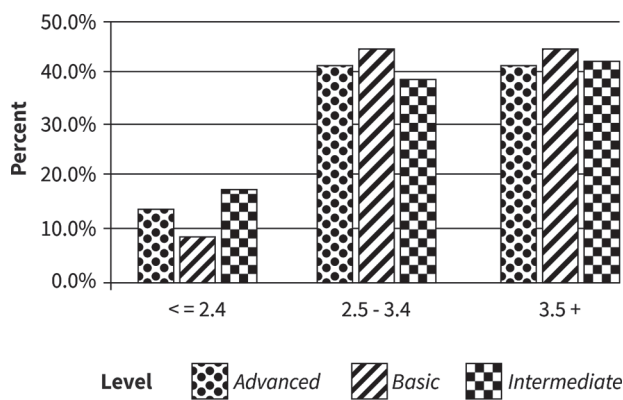


Figure 7. Learning with others

As can be seen, the three proficiency levels show a tendency towards the medium and high range scores. The three Proficiency levels show an even balance in regards to percentage in comparison to each other between the medium and high range scores. At first sight, a possible interpretation would be that the three Proficiency levels are oriented to using this strategy as a primary way of dealing with new information in the process of learning English. However, the results presented in figure 7 in regards to Standard Deviation indicate that the cline of distribution is rather broad; in addition to this, the Pearson Chi-Square significance $p=.951$ indicates that there is not a systematic relation between Proficiency level and this learning strategy. Thus, the results could indicate that learners from the three Proficiency levels use this strategy at any given stage of their learning process. Given this interpretation, teachers (and all the participants of the teaching-learning process) must keep the door open for the inclusion of activities that involve this learning strategy at all Proficiency levels, yet might take care to avoid the over-use of the strategy as well.

Conclusions and Implications

The analysis of the data revealed that there is not a prevalent learning style or learning strategy among any of the three language proficiency levels that the learners are divided into. Although it may seem odd to read at this point that the entire study did not draw conclusive results on the dominance of a learning strategy over a specific group of learners in relation to their language proficiency level, the conclusions and implications will provide the reader with a more in-depth explanation of the significance of this study in the research context.

Implications for curriculum developers

A very important implication needs to be pointed out in the sense that although a curricular innovation (such as the institutional curricular innovation process) has to express on paper parameters for different aspects (i.e. materials, objectives, teachers, and learners desired practices), one of the primary participants in the teaching-learning process, teachers, will have to become aware of the fact that they are not whatsoever dealing with a set of homogeneous individuals who will absorb “packaged” solutions for their learning.

Not acknowledging such variety in learners’ ways of approaching language learning would inevitably lead to what Holliday (as cited in Larsen-Freeman 1999) calls “otherization of ‘foreign’ educators, students, and societies” (p. 4). As Oxford (2003) states “It is foolhardy to think that a single L2 methodology could possibly fit an entire class filled with students who have a range of stylistic and strategic preferences... Instead... L2 teachers would do better to employ a broad instructional approach...” (p. 16). Therefore, curriculum developers need to acknowledge learners’ individual differences in relation to gender, age, proficiency levels, and learning styles and strategies among other aspects so that naïve methods are not dogmatically prescribed to teachers and learners. The results obtained from this study, therefore, draw attention to the fact that curriculum developers have to keep in mind that not only do freshmen learners start their B.A. studies bearing heterogeneous learning styles and strategies, but also that these styles and strategies do not seem to be significantly shaped by their progress in the Proficiency levels. As Oxford (2003, p. 14) points out “as some students progress toward proficiency, they no longer need affective strategies as much as before.” On the contrary, as observed in chapter 4, such diversity seems to accompany learners throughout their entire progress across Proficiency levels. Consequently, curriculum

developers must decide upon the most appropriate ways to raise teachers' awareness about the potential benefit that learning strategies instruction has upon learners' university years.

Implications for teachers

The previous paragraphs have drawn attention to the fact that learning strategies cannot be separated from the decisions curriculum developers take upon the teaching methodologies desired to be permeated down to teaching and learning practices. Nevertheless, although such policy makers play a very important role in the process of language teaching and learning, it is the actual participants (teachers and learners) who take the final decisions upon this subject.

In order to identify learners' learning styles, which could eventually trigger an expansion of learning strategies use, teachers have to get the training and resources necessary for this endeavor. As Oxford (2003, p. 9) claims "Skilled teachers help their students develop an awareness of learning strategies and enable them to use a wider range of appropriate strategies." It is a very difficult task (if not impossible) to plan an English lesson that responds to every single learning style. Particularly, if teachers do not acknowledge the fact that a homogenized lesson (in terms of techniques, activities, and teaching strategies) would not necessarily meet learners' language learning styles and trigger the use of different learning strategies. As Salmani-Nodoushan (2006 p. 14) asserts "Teachers must not only decide on the kind of task but also on the order, pacing, products, learning strategies, and materials for the task." The results of this study show that learning strategies among the learners are varied and heterogeneous. This significant information for teachers because they can help learners discover their own learning styles, and, consequently, activate the appropriate learning strategies in the EFL classroom. In addition, the results draw attention to the fact that learners do seem to

use a good deal of learning strategies in the EFL classroom. This information is useful for teachers because it seems to be necessary for them to plan lessons that activate such a variety of learning strategies.

Implications for learners

As attractive as the idea of renewed autonomous learners may sound, such a characteristic is, by no means, an attribute of all learners, especially when these learners have been immersed in an educational system dominated by the traditional method of knowledge transmission. The results of this study are relevant for learners because they are active participants in the process of language learning and they can greatly influence the practices within the classroom. As Ali-Salmani (2006, p. 15) argues "The other half has to do with what learners do when they achieve successful learning strategies. Learner autonomy, coupled with the use of strategies, implies that learners may succeed despite the teacher's method rather than because of it." Ultimately, this could lead to an increase in the learners' strategies repertoire. Therefore, learner autonomy cannot be a prescribed attribute for language learners. On the contrary, it has to be a capacity to be developed. A possible starting point for such an aim could begin with raising learners' awareness of the importance of identifying their own learning styles and activating appropriate learning strategies throughout their learning lives.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

Due to its cross-sectional nature, this study does not aim to generalize the results previously described. The possible limitations of this study are linked to the fact that learning strategy research needs to be undertaken on a permanent basis. Therefore, a possible line of investigation which could lead this study is the variety of learning strategies that successful language learners use in the process of learning English at the research context. ■

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Appendix A

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

Name: _____

Use the separate Worksheet for recording your answers and for scoring. Answer in terms of how well the statement describes you, not in terms of what you think you should do, or what other people do.

Example

1. Never or almost never true of me.
2. Generally not true of me.
3. Somewhat true of me.
4. Generally true of me.
5. Always or almost always true of me.

Read the item, and choose a response (1 through 5 as above), and write it in the space after the item.

I actively seek out opportunities to talk with native speakers of English. _____

You have just completed the example item. Answer the rest of the items on the Worksheet.

Part A

1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.
2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.
3. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember.
4. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.
5. I use rhymes to remember new English words.
6. I use flashcards to remember new English words.
7. I physically act out new English words.
8. I review English lessons often.
9. I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.

Part B

10. I say or write new English words several times.
11. I try to talk like native English speakers.
12. I practice the sounds of English.
13. I use the English words I know in different ways.
14. I start conversations in English.
15. I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.
16. I read for pleasure in English.
17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.
18. I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.
19. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.
20. I try to find patterns in English.
21. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.
22. I try not to translate word-for-word.
23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.

Part C

24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.
25. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.
26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.
27. I read English without looking up every new word.
28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.
29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.

Part D

30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.
34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study.
35. I look for people I can talk to in English.
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.
37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.
38. I think about my progress in learning English.

Part E

39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.
40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.
41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.
42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.
43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.
44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.

Part F

45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.
47. I practice English with other students.
48. I ask for help from English speakers.
49. I ask questions in English.
50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.

(From Oxford 1990)

Writing intervention from a psychological perspective: Graduate Writing Seminar

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Abstract

The current article presents the results of exploring changes on habits and attitudes of a cohort of professionals as they go through incorporating writing as a complex part of their academic work. The present research focused on psychological barriers that seemed to block productive writing; the most common barrier reported was “lack of time”. The research identified changes in habits and attitudes during the process of incorporating writing as well as if those changes persisted after a period of time.

Key words: academic writing, habits and attitudes, productive writing.

Resumen

El presente artículo explora los cambios en hábitos y actitudes de un grupo de profesionales en el proceso de incorporar la redacción a su trabajo académico. La investigación se enfocó en identificar las barreras psicológicas que parecía bloquear la redacción productiva; la barrera más común fue “la falta de tiempo”. La investigación identificó cambios en hábitos y aptitudes de los participantes durante el proceso de incorporar la redacción a su trabajo académico así como si los cambios persistieron después de un periodo de tiempo.

Palabras clave: redacción académica, hábitos y actitudes, redacción productiva.

Introduction

It is generally accepted that writing brings professors and teachers benefits in their professional development (Borko, 2004). Writing could be seen as a step in teachers’ development, which brings prestige, promotion or in some cases publications. Writing by teachers is also regarded as a type of self-education process, where teachers have the possibility to continue learning and growing professionally through their writing in various forms (Burton, 2005). However, in spite of all the benefits, few teachers write (Burton, 2005). The most widely given reasons for this are: lack of time, lack of support to write, lack of confidence in their abilities to write, lack of reward or recognition as teachers when they do write (Burton, 2005, *Conclusion*).

To date, there are few systematic studies that go on to attempt to explain how teachers actually regard writing (Burton, 2005). Studies of this nature are certainly called for because of the widely accepted benefits of writing for development, both professional and personal. Teacher research and writing are especially important for understanding the classroom and learning. The low participation of teachers in this area denies the field of education access to the knowledge that teachers have and can potentially construct and perpetuate educational results that affect everyone (Allwright & Bailey, 2004).

There are some theories about the reasons why teachers do not write on a regular basis, and particularly why they do not write for pub-

lication. Burton's (2005) reasons above hint at the possible explanations. They indicate a need that goes beyond linguistic issues. Boice (1990, pp. 7-14) provides a list of the six main sources of writing problems that go beyond language management: *internal censors, fear of failure, perfectionism, procrastination, early experience, mental health, personality types, working habits and attitudes, and work habits and busyness*. This study attempts to fill this gap by examining a cohort of graduate students as they go through an academic writing seminar based on dealing with psychological barriers to productive writing.

Study significance

The significance of this study lies in the importance of examining a cohort of graduate students as they go through incorporating writing as a complex part of their academic work. Writing involves more than becoming a successful writer; it deals with psychological barriers to write productively and to eventually enjoy writing. All writers have had their own experiences in writing that affect directly or indirectly their processes of writing. Boice (1990) suggests that becoming a successful writer includes the need for changes in both writing and attitudes. It means the need of a change in often ingrained writing habits to more regular and disciplined habits of writing regularly in modest amounts.

The present study

This study looked at a cohort of 15 graduate students who participated in a three month writing seminar that addressed the five elements that inhibit writing presented above (internal censors, time management, fears, perfectionism, and procrastination). The study particularly focused on the elements of time management and personal psychological barriers and how the students responded to knowledge of those factors and how that awareness affected their writing during the seminar and in the following eight months after the seminar.

The product goal of the seminar was a prepared manuscript for publication. The educational goal of the seminar was the changing of writing habits and attitudes toward writing via Boice's "Four Step Program" (1990).

The primary aim of the study described in this thesis was to chart and record the changes evident in the students using data primarily from their weekly writing records submissions and their discussion board comments in several forums. Another source of data was follow-up interviews with the seminar students. The following three research questions guided the study.

RQ1: How did their language and attitudes seem to evolve throughout the course?

RQ2: What changes persisted in the students' writing habits and attitudes six months after the seminar?

RQ3: what might explain the permanence or lack of permanence of the habits and attitudes? – according to the participants)

Literature Review

It is generally accepted that writing brings professors and teachers benefits in their professional development (Borko, 2004). Writing could be seen as a step in teachers' everyday activities, which brings prestige, promotion or in some cases publications. Writing by teachers is also regarded as a type of self-education process, where teachers have the possibility to continue learning and growing professionally through their writing in various forms (Burton, 2005).

There are some theories about the reasons why teachers do not write on a regular basis, and particularly why they do not write for publication. Burton's (2005) reasons above hint at possible those reasons. These reasons indicate a need that goes beyond linguistic issues. Boice (1990, pp. 7-14) provides a list of the six main sources of writing problems that go beyond language management: *internal censors, fear of failure, perfectionism, procrastination, early experience, mental health, personality types, working habits and attitudes, and work habits and busyness*.

Internal censors

Boice (1990) considers Freud's idea about the internal censor as a major impediment to productive writing. Freud, in *Interpretations of Dreams*, called it the 'watcher at the gate'. Those watchers are our internal sensors about our own work; their main job is to examine the ideas by "rejecting too soon and discriminating too severely" (Boice, 1990, p. 8).

Common strategies of these ‘watchers’ (‘internal critics’ as Boice calls them) involve inducing “bad feelings about our own writing... [and undermining] our ability to generate ideas, creativity, and confidence” (1990, p. 9). These watchers or inner critics have enough power over the writer to provide a serious block to productive writing. If the writer does not first recognize the existence of the inner critic, and second try to suppress it, productive fulfilling writing is doubtful.

Fear of failure

Psychologists have dedicated many studies to the understanding of different kinds of limitations in human activities, but they still know very little about fears of failure in writing. Those are commonly related with: “1) negative self-attitude, 2) negative self-statements, 3) phobias and 4) self-fulfilling prophecies” (Boice, 1990, p. 9). Considering the sources of fears of failure mentioned in the previous paragraph and the common early experiences of almost every grammar student and writing, it is easy to see sources for this phobia in writing (Reeves, 1997). The experiences do not end with grammar school but continue on in all levels of formal education where teachers tend to focus on problem areas of writing rather than success areas.

Communication researchers have provided the best information about fears of failure in writing. Daly and Miller (cited in Boice, 1990) developed a standardized test that assessed writer apprehension. This is generally recognized as the first attempt to systematically investigate anxiety as it relates to writing. Daly and Wilson (1983) identified two broad categories of writers, ‘low apprehensives’ and ‘high apprehensives’. The latter characterize people who have high levels of anxiety related to writing. People in this category find writing “unrewarding” and even “punishing” and as a result of these attitudes tend to avoid situations which could potentially involve writing (Daly & Wilson, 1983, p. 327). High apprehensive also tend to be afraid of public exposure as a failure and fraud via their writing, and thus, limit themselves or stop writing in order to not face failure.

Perfectionism

Research on this construct is generally lacking and there is no agreed on definition of it. However, it is

generally characterized by undue aversion to making mistakes, high personal standards, the excessive concern about authority figure perceptions or evaluations, a low tolerance for criticism, and doubts about one’s ability to successfully carry out an action (Frost, et al., 1990). These characteristics in writers can be manifest as the inability to finish off a piece of writing for fear that it is not yet in perfect submission quality. These writers check and recheck their writing to make sure it conforms to their often unreasonable expectations of quality (Boice, 1990).

Procrastination

Like many of the barriers to productive writing thus presented, procrastination has its roots in fears of failure, irrational expectations, aversion to the task, and various associated anxieties (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). Although procrastination is one of the most common phenomena associated with why writers do not write as a habit, like perfectionism, it is not yet well understood (Steel, 2007). What we seem to know is that its origins are in self-regularity failure, i.e., a person’s inability to fully control their actions. Writing is particularly susceptible to procrastination because it is generally carried out as a ‘non-recurring task’ and generally comes with no immediate rewards (Boice, 1990, p. 10). Therefore, in a world where individual actions are fighting for attention and completion, writing often takes a second position to actions that offer more immediate rewards or those actions that must be carried out in the course of a period of time. Studies cited in Steel (2007, p. 3) indicate that procrastination is almost a “way of life” for students. The studies indicate that 80-95% of students procrastinate; 75% consider themselves procrastinators, and 50% do it consistently and to their own detriment (ibid). Most procrastinators wish they could control it in some way.

Early experience

Primary and secondary school teachers are often the ones blamed for the negative writing experiences that lead to the pathologies reviewed above. Almost everyone has memories of receiving written assignments back from the teacher with the notorious red pen editing marks all over it. This type of writing response has been blamed

for undermining students' writing confidence, for making writing a tiresome chore, and for not providing any useful instruction for improving writing (Boice, 1990, p. 11).

Mental health

There is a kind stereotype that good writers are characterized by psychological problems: subject to various kinds of addictions, are antisocial, pessimists, and suicidal. At the same time, it is put forward that mental health conditions derail productive writing (Boice, 1990). Studies reported in Boice (1990, p. 12) indicate writers have above normal representations of psychological disorders. The nature of much writing could contribute to mood disorders. Writing done in binges and under pressure "induces tension, irritability, and ... obsessiveness." Writing involves high levels of concentration which for some can lead to psychological imbalances especially when coupled with the stress of having to complete writing within tight deadlines. If not managed properly writing can lead to serious emotional problems.

Personality types

Again in this area, stereotypes and mythologies tend to influence attitudes towards writing. Studies have found that writers are classified as silent types, unsociable, skeptical, and overachieving. Men have been identified in studies as "mass producers, highly competitive, and energetic" but tend to lose interest or ambition when their peers do not respond as anticipated to their writing. Women have been seen as "silent" and "perfectionist" as writers (Boice, 1990, p. 13). These negative opinions and stereotypes about writers could cause resistance to writing by writing novices. Our opinions of ourselves may be in conflict or contrast to the general conception of writers creating a kind of 'dissonance' between how we conceptualize ourselves and how in general writers are typified.

Working habits and attitudes

As clearly evidenced in this study reported in the conference, writing tends to be fraught with bad habits. In particular writing tends to get done after every other obligation is dealt with. It tends to not get done until the writer is 'in the mood' or

there is a looming deadline. Many writers engage in 'binge' writing. However, research on successful and productive writers indicates that regular habitual writing that follows a set schedule tends to lead to writers feeling less stressed, less resentful towards writing, and more relaxed (Boice, 1990). So it seems clear that establishing healthy writing habits is the key to productive writing.

Work habits and busyness

Why do we not write more? We do not have enough time. As mentioned before, teachers' most common excuse for not writing is the lack of time. Almost all professors argue that they have a lot of work during the workweek, which are typically 60-80 hours long (Boice, 1990, p. 14). They are all very busy. However, beyond self-reported conceptions of how busy teachers are, there are studies which examine time allotted to various activities that show gaps in schedules where writing on a regular basis can be added (Boice, 1990). Most people conceptualize writing as needing large blocks of time, but according to Boice, small regular blocks of time dedicated to writing are much more efficient in terms of productive writing than waiting until there is ample time to write, which tends to lead to binge writing and all its detractors. It is much more essential for people who have very little time to engage in time management than those who have lots of 'time to manage'.

Description of Boice's Four-Step Program

The 'plan' attempts to assist writers in changing both writing habits and attitudes towards writing. The plan consists of four steps: 1) *automaticity*, 2) *externality*, 3) *self-control* and 4) *sociality*. Boice (1990) recommends following these four steps upon starting a new project, resuming a disrupted project, revising rejected projects, and when working on lengthy projects, in other words, anytime where writing becomes blocked because of psychological barriers. The plan is intended to be used until the new patterns become habitual.

Each of the four steps is explained in the following sections. All of the discussion is based on Boice (1990) so to avoid repetition of the citation, only the page numbers of direct quotations made in the text are provided.

Automaticity

According to Boice (1990), Automaticity in writing establishes momentum via techniques such as 'spontaneous' and 'generative' writing. Some writers have experienced the same negative feelings when they start writing a new project, and some inexperienced writers express the strong feeling of not knowing what or how to start writing. Boice (1990) cites Dorothea Brande's writing technique called 'effortless writing.' This technique involves writing thirty minute to one hour at a specified time of day such as first thing in the morning. The writing is characterized by writing fast and writing anything that comes into mind. This technique helps writers to see writing as a smooth and unconscious process. This should eventually lead to changes in attitude towards writing as something arduous or tedious to an action that flows.

Externality

Externality means "external controls that ensure writing" (Boice, p.96). Writing productively requires techniques to ensure regular writing through making writing an essential part of each writer's daily life. In this way, writing becomes a habitual activity. Boice illustrates externality with a principle called The Priority Principle. Boice (1990) relates this principle to the Law of Delay which states: That which can be delayed, will be (p. 77). Although meant as a humorous observation of human behavioral faults, Boice (1990) questions this law of delay because it encourages passivity instead of ensuring the performance of successful writing. In other words, it gives us an excuse for not disciplining ourselves sufficiently to accomplish our writing goals. The Priority Principle means that a writer can improve writing by making writing a realistic priority just as many others daily activities, such as shower. Some writers consider writing as a low value activity, as compared for example to eating breakfast or the daily shower. For this reason they can stop or quit writing easily. To change this attitude, writers need to place writing in a higher level so that they cannot manage their schedule without a writing session. Writing becomes an important part of the everyday schedule. Boice (1990) suggests when starting a new project externality means considering writing or prewriting an equal or higher priority than other daily activities.

Self-control

Consciousness operates for the most part by means of inner conversations and directives. Boice (1990) defines self-control as the control over one's consciousness, especially over its tendencies to distortion and negativism which result from what Boice (1990) calls self-talk. This feature of consciousness helps us in a number of ways: it makes us aware of time; it carries on our ongoing narratives; it makes us aware of who is the author of those narratives – gives us a sense of self as an entity unique to other selves. But at the same time, self-talk can be the voice of the damaging 'inner critic'. It can be the means for blocking writing. Controlling the self-talking helps writers to overcome difficult moments in the process of writing.

Sociality

The last step in the "four-step-plan" is Sociality. Many writers tend to regard their writing activity a private event. This loneliness brings writers into an internal fight, which can be manifest in some patterns such as anxiety, depression, suspiciousness, and blocking. Boice (1990) suggests a solution for these patterns of social isolation is no different than with other form of "social skills deficits". It consists of helping writers become more socially skilled. Boice (1990) proposes a program of social skills that has four basic components: 1) Soliciting comments/criticism on writing across stages, 2) Preparing for negative criticism, 3) Building social networks, and 4) Developing a sense of audience. In starting a new project sociality means to share ideas with other writers via arranging social meeting with other experienced writers, and looking for a group of experienced writers to give feedback about writing.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this research were 15 graduate students, 3 males and 12 females enrolled in the same English language teaching (ELT) masters' program. All of them were English language teachers with a variety of teaching experience. The course designer and leader was a full-time researcher-instructor at the same university.

Setting

The setting for this research project was in a faculty of modern languages in a large public university. The research as mentioned above examined the reactions of a cohort of masters' students as they went through an eight week academic writing seminar that focused primarily on psychological aspects of productive writing. The course was part of the graduate program in English language teaching. The students were at the end of their first year of the two year program. In the first week of the seminar, students met for four hours daily. After that first week the course was conducted online using the Blackboard course management platform.

Data handling – online component

The data were collected during the seminar. Students were asked to post at least one comment in the online discussion boards expressing their feeling about their weekly writing. Other discussion board forums were used to respond to assigned readings.

Data analysis – discussion boards

This section describes the analysis procedures used on both the discussion boards and the follow-up interviews. The online data obtained were from selected online usage statistics, the discussion boards writing-progress-reports, and comments on the readings.

The discourse of the students did not show clear evidence of the eliminated codes. In other cases, the categories were combined as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Revised discussion board codes

Categories were combined on subsequent coding passes of the data. Symbols indicating negative (e.g., -HA) or positive (e.g., +HA) were added creating sets of codes which could indicate those orientations as expressed by the participants.

Code	Category
-HA	Working habits and attitudes (incorporating negative attitudes: fears of failure, censors, perfectionism)
+HA	Working habits and attitudes (comments indicating positive attitudes)
-HB	Work habits and busyness (incorporating procrastination and time management)
+HB	Work habits and busyness (comments indicating positive changes)
-IS	Reverting to old habits but showing knowledge of the strategies
+IS	Incorporation of strategies (comments about changes made specifically associated with strategies presented in the course readings and lectures)
-CN	Internal censors working to undermine writing productivity
+CN	Internal censors under control and no longer undermining writing productivity

Results

Discussion board analyses (RQ1)

In order to answer RQ1 a description of this classification and an interpretation of the students' comments about their writing products were needed (the WPC and the papers they chose to revise for publication). It used to express students' habits and perceptions of both their own and other classmates' writing processes. The data that follows reports comments from different phrases and includes negative feelings and psychological problems expressed from the beginning of the course.

Overall the changes apparent in the students' attitudes are shown in Fig.1 below.

WEEK 3: 14 - 20 JUN				WEEK 4: 21 - 27 JUN				WEEK 5: 28 JUN WEEK 6: 04 - 11 JUL				WEEK 7: 12 JUL WEEK 8: 18 JUL				WEEK 8: 19 JULY +			
HA	HB	IS	CN	HA	HB	IS	CN	HA	HB	IS	CN	HA	HB	IS	CN	HA	HB	IS	CN
2	-1				-1	4		1	-1			2							
	-1	-1						1	-1	5						2		3	
-1	-1	-1	-3	2	-1	0	0	3	1	4		5	1	7	2				
-1	-4	1	-1					6	1	5	1			-1					
				-1	-1	-1		-1		0		1	-1	1		-1			
0	-2	0	-1	3		10	3			3		1		1	2				
-1	-1		-2	1	1	1	-1	-2		0		-1	-2	1	1				
1		0		3		4	1	1	2	8	3	3	-1	3		3	1	1	
1				6	2	10	3	4	4	6	-1	2	1	4	1	2		3	
1	-10	-1	-7	14	1	28	6	13	6	31	3	12	-2	16	6	6	1	7	0

Figure 1. Changes in students' attitudes through the course.

The figure is divided into the five principal time frames of the discussion boards (14 June through 19 July). The dark colors indicate negative conditions in the codes (Table 1) as expressed by the participants ($n=9$). The light colors indicate positive changes in the codes as expressed by the participants. The figure shows a gradual replacement of negative codes by positive codes as the time progressed through the course.

Through the eight weeks students had experienced some changes in their habits and attitudes toward writing. In some cases the feelings changed into positive ones. But in other cases students still showed an internal fight with their psychological barriers. There are expressions of disappointment, of not meeting goals but other more positive comments.

Lack of time is probably the most common excuse for not writing. However, as Silva (2007) points out, this is often a misguided excuse for not writing. He astutely observes that we manage to find the time to get to all our classes and even find time to relax. Our lives are full of 'schedules' which we have to adhere to, so why can't we manage time to write? Boice suggests that writers can also

schedule time for writing, considering small regular blocks of time dedicated to just writing. Thus, very busy students should have in their schedule time dedicated to writing just as another activity in their weeks.

Follow-up group interview analyses (RQ2 / RQ3)

Eight months after the end of the course, students participated in group interviews and email interviews regarding their adoption of the writing strategies and permanence of attitudes or lack of.

RQ2: What changes persisted in the students' writing habits and attitudes eight months after the seminar?

The following table shows the summary of new habits and returned old writing habits.

Table 2. Participants (n=9) reported new writing habits and old habits that have returned

What has remained as a new writing habit?	What old habits of writing have returned?
Spontaneous writing Reading for writing	Not writing regularly
Avoided procrastination because of finding a dedicated writing time	No time for SW or GW
Using a research diary	No writing schedule (time management)
Spontaneous writing Generative writing More conscious of organization Doesn't see writing and a punishment anymore but as an enjoyable activity Sociality – shares her writing with others	Time management The internal censor is winning battles again – negative talk.
A writing journal Time management Generative writing	Lacks intrinsic mot to write. Time management
The necessity of writing to release feelings. Misses the sociality	Binge writing. Not worked collaboratively Not writing everyday Bad daily organization
More confident with writing. Open to criticism from others (sociality)	
Spontaneous writing for emotional release. Has formed a writing habit	No regular writing and other things interfere with writing times
Time management with scheduled writing times.	

Students were asked to try to identify why they think they may have lost some of the good habits and writing strategies. This provided clues to the answer for the final research question: RQ3: What might explain the permanence or lack of permanence of the habits and attitudes? – (according to the participants)

Table 3. Why old habits have returned

Why do you think the old habits have returned?
Does not have the habit of writing for pleasure It's something academic to hand in Too many other responsibilities No pressure to do it Reverted to long held old writing habits The old habits let her be in a comfort zone. New habits were not completely established. No support after the course. Has not been able to control daily organization. Time management procrastination No commitment to self. The course provided a kind of benchmark to work towards or maintain Can't concentrate on writing because of distractions

As summarized in Table 3, they needed things like deadlines and pressure to motivate them to write. Old habits are comfort zones which we return to again and again even when we know they are not good for our performance. Others mentioned issues of time management and responsibility or commitment to themselves as elements that stopped their good habits.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that teachers improved their writing by modifying their writing habits and perceptions. The focus of this research involved the psychological elements of writing classified by Boice (1990): *internal censors, fear of failure, perfectionism, procrastination, early experience, mental health, personality types, working habits and attitudes, and work habits and busyness* (Boice 1990, pp 7-14).

As explained in the Literature Review this component of the research was based on Boice's (1990) Four-Step-Plan for productive writing. By using Boice's (1990, p. 33) 'Writing Progress Chart' (WPC) students reported how well they conformed to their schedule writing sections from a psychological aspect rather than just a linguistic perspective. Students were highly motivated to participate in the course, even though, they showed from the beginning some negative attitudes. Through the course students showed some changes in their habits and attitudes while they were incorporating writing in their daily lives; although, some of them still showed internal conflicts.

Students' most common excuse for not writing was *Lack of Time*. Boice (1990) suggests that writers can also schedule time for writing as well as

for working or relaxing. Most of the students mentioned that they did not write because they were very busy: teaching, preparing classes, doing assignments, grading, etc. Despite of the lack of time some students experienced some self-rewards for regular writing; *time management*. After reading Boice's (1990) Four-Step-Plan students showed very positive attitudes towards the incorporations of the various strategies. Likewise, students' comments showed how they were under pressure by themselves; such as they really wanted to finish their writings but they were also afraid negative elements like criticism. Thus, the "internal critic" was one of the biggest barrier students faced when writing; they write and write their paper thousand times in order to do something beyond someone else's and their own expectations. It seems a clear intervention on psychological levels is needed in many cases; for that reason, this study tried to articulate these barriers and to start changing habits and attitudes.

Implications of findings

The implications of this study clearly raise the awareness of the importance of working with students-writers' psychological barriers associated with writing and moving beyond a linguistic elements approach. As Boice (1990) suggests becoming a successful writer includes the need for changing in both writing and attitudes. Most teachers have had their own experience in writing affecting directly or indirectly their process of writing. Through this study and the implementation of a writing seminar, students were face to face with those bad habits and they improved their writing by incorporating new habits and changing their attitudes, at least temporarily. ■

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