ΣΟΦΙΑ–SOPHIA

Integrating ICT to improve the skills of foreign language learners in vulnerable communities*

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Abstract

This article identifies the limitations and impact of the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the classroom to improve the skills of students of English as a foreign language in the educational institution (E.I.) Los Fundadores sede Francisco José de Caldas that is characterized by serving population belonging to vulnerable communities. The students have difficulty in surpassing the level of a basic user (A1) established in the SABER tests, most of them obtained a level not included in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which is included by the Colombian institute for the evaluation of education as level A. In this research, a didactic proposal based on the use of ICTs to strengthen the learning of the English language in sixth grade students was adopted, which serves as a reference of good practices for the teachers of this area of the public institutions of the country and that attend vulnerable population.

Keywords: Learning, pedagogical ability, foreign language, educational resources, technology of information.

Introduction

Currently, the Colombian government has joined forces with the Ministry of National Education (MEN) to promote the learning of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in all public institutions in the country. Among those that stand out are the following: Law 1651: Bilingualism Law (Congress of Colombia, 2013) which modifies some articles of Law 115: General Education Law (Congress of Colombia, 1994) and includes clear policies on the teaching of the English language in all educational institutions in the country; the incorporation of the levels of the CEFR (European Council, 2002:1) and which are currently condensed in Guide No. 22: Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Languages: English (Ministry of National Education, 2006). According to the 2014-2018 bilingual program, the goal is to increase the number of high school graduates who, at the end of their last year of study, graduate at a B1 level (Ministry of National Education, 2014: 66). However, at present the results are still not as expected, most students in grade eleven graduate with a level below that of a basic user (A1), that is, in level A-. For this reason, the Ministry of National Education launched new guidelines and new materials that should be implemented in the country's public institutions in the area of English in order to improve these rates, these are: *Los Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje* or *DBA* (Ministry of National Education, 2015), *El Currículum Sugerido* (Ministry of National Education, 2016a), *Las Orientaciones y Principios Pedagógicos* (Ministry of National Education, 2016b) and books: English, Please (Ministry of National Education, 2016) for grades nine through eleven and the books: Way to Go! (Ministry of National Education, 2017) for grades six through nine, which are downloaded in digital format from the following link: http://aprende.colombiaaprende.edu.co/.

Despite the above, the level of bilingualism among Colombian high school students is significantly low (A-). Systematically, the results of the Saber 11 test indicate that the majority of students who complete their high school studies do not reach the equivalent of a beginner's level of English (Sánchez, 2013: 37).

Theoretical perspective

There are several researches related to EFL and the use of "ICT" (Congress of Colombia, 2009) in the classroom conducted in countries such as Iran (Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2011) and Malaysia (Normazidah, Koo, Y., & Hazita, 2012) where English is taught with a minimum hourly intensity. In these countries, English teachers have difficulty using technological resources, their experience is not proportional to their expertise in the use of technological resources, students are reluctant to learn a second language, the English level of students is low at the end of secondary education and the school population is in a vulnerable condition. These investigations are similar to others made in the Colombian context, which show similar results (Sánchez, 2013; Jaimes & Jaimes, 2014).

On the other hand, the research took into account the definition of some concepts and theories related to the teaching of English: the communicative approach (Luzón & Soria, 1999: 43), the DBA, the curricular standards (Ministry of National Education, 2006) and the role of the teacher as a "facilitator" (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999: 4). On the other hand, the following theories focused on the teaching - learning of English as a foreign language EFL, from social learning (Vygotsky, 1978: 57), and that allows educational communication (EC) (Sierra, 2000: 3), which clearly takes place in a special context "the educational environment" (Córica, 2004: 41), among its purposes is to create a favorable climate that helps in the optimization of learning activities (Medina, 2010: 4), therefore, there is a need to articulate the eco-system of communication with culture and education (Barbero, 2010: 35).

This research used Task Based Learning (TBL) (Nunan, 2003 :1) and the use of ICT as a pedagogical approach. The integration of technologies in the classroom (Hew & Brush, 2006: 225; Macario, 2008: 735; Seiz, 2008:48; Area, 2009: 91; Thomas & Reinders, 2010: 102; Villalustre & Del Moral, 2011: 224; Anwar & Arifani, 2015: 169) requires that teachers play new roles, transform their practices with new approaches that allow them to successfully respond to the demands of 21st century society (Gómez, Bernal, & Medrano, 2014: 46). In this

approach, students, in addition to learning a language, also acquire the necessary training to use a series of computer and office tools (Araujo, 2013: 12).

Materiales y métodos

This research is part of the research line: Technology management and knowledge transfer, with a mixed approach (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2014: 30), with a methodology and a research-action type of study (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2014: 500), which is subscribed to in the field of education, empirical-analytical, longitudinal and descriptive in scope. Among its variables, the didactic use of ICT is defined as the independent variable and the level of English as the dependent variable. For the population sample, 15 sixth grade students were selected; equivalent to 28.84% of all students enrolled (52 students), see Table 1. The objectives of the research were: to diagnose the English level of the sample, to design a teaching strategy based on ICT, to apply the strategy and to evaluate the level of English achieved.

Table 1. Characterization of the Population Sample

Characteristics	Description (in numbers)
Male participants	9
Female participants	6
Ages	10 – 14 years old
Male participants with mild cognitive impairment	2
Female participants with mild cognitive impairment	1
Socio-Economic Level	1
Mothers' profession	15 housewives
Fathers' profession	3 miscellaneous trades employees, 1 welder, 1 banana grower, 1 trader, 1 farmer, 3 unemployed, 5 children without a known father
Beneficiaries *Familias en acción* (Law 1532/12)	may-15
Lunch beneficiaries	5
Snack beneficiaries	10

Source: Information consulted in the registration database of the educational institution 2017

Table 2 describes the data collection techniques and evaluation instruments, as well as the educational resources of the educational proposal. For data analysis and processing, the Microsoft Excel 2016 spreadsheet data for the two tests were tabulated. For the statistical analysis, the software IBM SPSS Stadistics version 2015 was used. The tests are presented in the form of a response sheet that can be downloaded from the following web address https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B2MzzEC35LGAQURCcWtZNDF6Yk0, and the sheet at https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2MzzEC35L- GAVTU5ems1YzBSOWc/view.

Table 2. Evaluation instruments

Variables to be measured in the diagnosis/ Resources	Operational concept of the variable	Technique / Instrument	Informants
Level acquired in the English language (Variable)	Statistical comparison between students' initial and final English language levels, according to the CEFR	Field diary (Record of digital and written observations of face-to-face classes), documents. SABER (Pre-test & Post-test) tests for grade six of the Way to go! book program implemented by the MEN and available at: http://aprende.colombiaaprende.edu.co/es/node/94010	Teacher / students / parents Teachers
Resources that were used in the development of the didactic proposal	Implementation of learning guides and rubrics focused on the use of technological resources in the classroom that facilitate student interaction with online resources for learning the English language and the Way to go! books, interactive version and PDF version that are published on the following web page that was designed for this purpose: https://afrapi1.wixsite.com/caldas6	Observation of face-to-face classes (field journal) and digital record, documents.	Teacher / students / parents
Websites and applications used in the didactic proposal	Gmail, YouTube, Facebook, Duolingo, Google Translator, website and WhatsApp	Written field journal and digital record of evidence, documents	Teacher / students / parents

Source: Techniques/assessment instruments/resources contained in the ICT didactic proposal

In table 3, the distribution of the modes in time is specified. For the research project there were 15 sessions of two (2) hours, always in the search to promote both the use of electronic media and websites to learn English, students had to interact virtually and outside the school for approximately three (3) hours a week in the performance of complementary directed or autonomous activities.

Table 3. Parameters followed to design the offline course, level A- /A1

Mode	Mixing of modes	Face-to-face classes 90%	Virtual Classes 10%.
	Distribution of modes	15 sessions (2 hours)	Autonomous work (3 hours)
	Choice of modes	Course consisting of the use of guides oriented to the use of ICT and digital files downloaded from YouTube that are stored on the tablets	Downloading guides and content from the websitehttps://afrapi1.wixsite.com/caldas6, uploading files, playing songs, using translators
Modelo de integración		Educational context: https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B2MzzEC35LGAa05QYXhwd0ZMTjQ Integration model design: https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B2MzzEC35LGAaERubkl3Tjc0M1k	
Distribution of learning content, objectives and assignment of goals		6 learning guides printed, in digital or accessible from the website https://afrapi1.wixsite.com/caldas6 . These have been adapted to the objectives, use of ICT media, activities and evaluation	
Teaching method		Task-based learning (Group tasks_ Names on the board)	Computer assisted learning, autonomous, flexible, remote
Participation of authors in learning, students, tutors and teachers		Individual Activities Vs. Collaborative Activities. Teacher as facilitator and knowledge manager. Teacher's role see pictures 10 and 11	Monitoring and evaluation by the teacher, autonomous learning and supervised by parents
Place		Classroom with tablets, outdoors, computer room	Home and other environments with access to ICT

Source: Based on Neumeier's chart (2005:167) and adapted to the level of students in relation to the use of virtual tools both in and out of the classroom.

Results

The research in its diagnostic phase begins with a pre-test that privileges the use of the Saber type tests in English containing 50 questions distributed in 5 parts. The test was constructed to measure the levels of English between A1 and A2 according to the CEFR and is scheduled to take 2 hours and 30 minutes; the first part refers to vocabulary, the second part includes questions or short sentences, the third part includes a text in which the use of simple grammatical topics in English is framed, the fourth part emphasizes reading comprehension in English, and finally, the fifth part includes a second text with ten (10) blank spaces, marked with a numeral and four (4) single answer options. On the other hand, for the design of the didactic proposal based on ICTs, an analysis of the context, materials and needs to implement it was made. It was found that the E.I. had a large number of electronic devices such as tablets, digital boards, laptops, intelligent televisions and the students have a smart cell phone and have registered as users in social networks, which allowed a greater acceptance of the proposal. In the implementation phase of the ICT-based educational proposal, 15 work sessions of 2 hours each were carried out, which allow the implementation in the classroom of tools that enable the student to experience and learn significantly new knowledge associated with social learning and the context of the second language. The distribution of the contents by sessions can be seen in annex 1 (at the end of the article).

For the evaluation phase of our proposal, we conducted a post-test that privileged the use of the Saber Pro type tests that the Ministry of Education delivers through its Way to go! books for sixth grade and that can be downloaded through the following link: https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B2MzzEC35LGATG5JSE5R-SEV2Vlk.

The English Language Proficiency Post-test contains 50 questions, distributed in 5 parts and these include 10 questions each. The test was constructed to measure English levels between A1 and A2 according to the CEFR. The test is designed to be taken in 2 hours and 30 minutes. The first part refers to a vocabulary associated with the culture, common activities, places and objects of the school, such as some professions. In the second part, questions or short sentences in English are included among which are everyday expressions and the weather. In the third part, the test includes a text in which the use of simple grammatical topics in English is framed, such as the use of verbs in the present simple and their conjugation with the third persons, Use of the words with WH, use of common irregular superlatives, some adverbs, and the use of some prepositions. In the fourth part, emphasis is placed on reading comprehension in English and, finally, a second text is included that alludes to the seasons and how they affect man.

After the tests are completed, an analysis is made, which is analyzed in Table 4 that shows the values obtained in the two tests. These are represented on a numerical scale from 0 to 5, where the value zero represents 0% and 5 represents 100% in relation to the number of correct answers. Thus, a statistical analysis is made to measure the degree of relationship between the two tests and to know if there are significant differences in the learning of the English language shown in both tests with a $\alpha=0.05$ based on the following data:

Table 4. Scores of the two tests on a scale of 0 (0%) to 5 (100%)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Pre-test	0	1.4	0.1	0.4	1.3	1.9	1.8	1.3	1.8	1.1	2	1	1.8	1.6	2
Post-test	1.5	1.1	1.3	1.5	1	1.3	2	1.6	2.1	2.2	2	1.4	1.7	1.7	1.9

Source: Own elaboration

The following are the two hypotheses H0 and H1 that we want to corroborate:

H0: The didactic proposal based on ICTs strengthens the level of English in sixth grade students in the educational institution (E.I.) Los Fundadores, sede Francisco José de Caldas.

H1: The didactic proposal based on ICTs does not strengthen the level of English in sixth grade students in the educational institution (E.I.) Los Fundadores sede Francisco José de Caldas.

Figure 1. NPar tests

Kolmogorov-Smirnov two-sample test

Pruebas NPar

Prueba de Kolmogorov-Smirnov de dos muestras

Frecuencias

	Prueba	N
Calificación	1	15
	2	15
	Total	30

Estadísticos de prueba[a]

		Calificación
Máximas diferencias extremas	Absoluta	,200
	Positivo	,200
	Negativo	-,067
Z de Kolmogorov-Smirnov		,548
Sig. asintótica (bilateral)		,925

a. Variable de agrupación: Prueba

Source: Own elaboration

Figure 1 shows the results. The value of the Asymptotic Significance, which is equivalent to 0.925, allows us to conclude that, since this value is higher than α=0.05, there are no significant differences in the two tests. In this sense, the null hypothesis can be discarded and the H1 hypothesis can be validated, which affirms that the didactic proposal based on ICTs does not strengthen the level of English in sixth grade students in the E.I. Los Fundadores Sede Francisco José de Caldas.

Conclusiones

This research took into account the latest educational trends and their importance in a globalized world, which implements the use of ICT to strengthen English language learning.

Through the use of technological tools, a change is evident in the students, which allowed them to interact with web resources for learning English. Technological devices such as tablets, the digital blackboard, cell phones, laptops, public access and digital materials developed by the government of Colombia were activated.

In the initial stage, that is to say in the pre-test and through direct observations, it was found that the students considered the test as complex, that is why the answers in a high percentage were given at random. In general, students did not demonstrate knowledge of basic vocabulary or basic grammatical structures associated with the A1 level. This suggests that the students' level corresponded to that of user A.

Post-test results show a slight increase compared to pre-test results. It is evident that many of the answers with higher numbers of coincidences in hits are associated with certain topics seen in class, in that sense, it is thought that a greater number of sessions should result in significant improvements that will strengthen the learning of the English language. On the other hand, in relation to the time of exposure to the test, the students improved considerably their attitude and disposition. Also, students took more time to read and respond, such behavior did not occur in the pre-test presentation.

In that sense, and being a vulnerable population, with scarce resources, it is a matter of slowly appropriating the need to make use of ICT tools for academic purposes by the whole educational community and its environment. One could think that, when teaching in vulnerable communities, students cannot be at the academic level of educational institutions with excellent results in the synthetic index of quality and in relation to the results of the Saber tests.

In the application phase of the ICT-based didactic proposal, students were motivated to use technological means to learn a second language. One of the most important components of this didactics has to do with virtualization, which goes from one hundred percent (100%) presential methods to a mixed method, as a strategy that guides the student to be autonomous in his learning, to self-evaluation and educational exploration outside the classroom through the use of technological means.

Finally, it can be concluded that, although the expected results were not reached, the learning of the English language was strengthened in relation to the significant improvements that took place throughout the 15 sessions.

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Appendix 1. Distribution by sessions

Application Phase - Distribution by sessions		
Week 1		Time (Minutes)
Session 1	Introduction (Explanation of Saber Test)	5
	Handing out the question and answer sheet	
	Application of the pre-test	150
	Handing in the test	5
Session 2	Guide N° 1	
	Introduction: *Why to learn English* (Reflection)	10
	Objetives: Discussion of the objectives of the guide and all activities	10
	Listing the names and groups on the board and listing the activities	5
	Activity 1: Spanglish movie scene (*Why do we should learn English?* - Write 2 reasons)	10
	Activity 2: 10 reasons why you should learn English	10
	Activity 3: 30 *Reasons Why Young Kids Should Learn English* (The teacher types a sentence, using the virtual tool Google in its images option and tries to make the students identify its meaning. Students must select and write only 5 of the 30 sentences or they can include the sentences from activity 2). Although the group is autonomous in its work, the teacher's support is important since the level of complexity is higher.	15
	Activity 4: *Matching Pairs*	10
	Activity 5: Collage	10
	Activity 6: Exhibition of the collage (A video is optional)	30
Session 3	Guide N° 2	
	Introducción*: Introducing yourself* (Suggested video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDmWNJ144oY). Introduce yourself and give examples of everyday conversations, two pens, two puppets that are introduced, two children that are introduced with the teacher's voice, etc.	10
	Most common phrases in English (Cite some examples on YouTube) Must be prepared in advance	10
	Objectives: Discussion of the Objectives of the guide and all the activities	10
	Listing the names and groups on the board and listing the activities	5
	Activity 1: Develop a dialogue	20
	Activity 2: Describe yourself	15
	Activity 3: Listen to the song and fill in the blanks (The teacher should be patient and supportive of the student due to the level of complexity). The videos installed on the tablet contain the lyrics of the song. It is suggested that they listen to the song on the tablet to develop the activity. Another suggested activity is the use of a box with the unknown words on the board.	15
	Activity 4: *Pronouns* (Suggested video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNs-WmZ7ODA)	15
	Activity 5: *Interview*	20
Session 4	Week 2	
	Guide N° 3	
	Introducción: WH Questions (Suggested video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsQtJOnsRng)	10

	Objetives: Discussion of the Objectives of the guide and all the activities	10
	Listing the names and groups on the board and listing the activities	5
	Activity 1: *Match the questions to the answers*	15
	Activity 2: *Tick the correct Wh words*	15
	Activity 3: *Question word song*	15
	Activity 4: *Be a Singer*	15
	Activity 5: *Interview*	35
Session 5	Week 3	
	Guide N° 4	
	Introducción: *School objects*	10
	Objectives: Discussion of the Objectives of the guide and all the activities	10
	Listing the names and groups on the board and listing the activities	5
	Activity 1: *Word Puzzle (Look at the list, find and circle the words.)* (Other suggested videos: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41cJ0mqWses)	20
	Activity 2: *I want to go to school (Preguntar a los estudiantes why should they go to school?)* *(India's poor go to school under a bridge:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LcJ1iFPKm00)	25
	Activity 3: *Because there is not school (There is/ There are) (Suggested video Kids who risk their lives going to school:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0zwFPR5OVY)	25
	Activity 4: *how many books are there? (How many:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7hYjlV4AF0)	25
Session 6	Guide N° 4 (Continued)	
	Listing the names and groups on the board and listing the activities	5
	Review of previous topics. With the objects in the room ask the students *What is this/ that?*	15
	Activity 5: *Demonstrative pronouns (This/These, That/ Those) (What is this:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7hYjlV4AF0) *(What is that:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUazfCkQq84&t=18s)	25
	Activity 6: *How to make a pencil case* (The construction of the pencil case will be done with recyclable materials that the children must take with them during the school day, as well as the necessary tools such as *scissors, pens, pencils, crayons, paper*, etc.)	25
	Activity 7: *Oral presentations* (Video). Students can choose to make a short video where they talk in English about their pencil case. Or make a presentation where they speak in English about their pencil case.	30
	Activity 8: Interview	20
Sesiones 7,8,9,10, 11	Week 3 & week 4	
	Guide N° 5 (Duolingo)	
	Objectives: Discussion of the Objectives of the guide and all the activities	10
	Listing the names and groups on the board and listing the activities	5
	Actividad 1: Introduction to Duolingo	5
	Activity 2: Creating an email account	15
	Activity 3: Registering at Duolingo	10
	Activity 4: Start and develop the levels in Duolingo (Intro, greetings, travel, restaurant, people, clothes, school, business, animals and friends)	170
	Activity 5: Monitoring progress at Duolingo. Students practice on the smart	25

	board	
	Week 4 & 5	
	Book *Way to go!* Grado sexto (p.10)	
	Objectives: Discussion of the Objectives of the guide and all the activities	10
	Listing the names and groups on the board and listing the activities	5
Session 12	Activity 1: *Listen and repeat*	5
	Activity 2: *Competition of capital cities*	20
	Activity 3: *Write - mind map information*	20
	Activity 4: *Study tip - recall vocabulary*	5
	Activity 5: *Talk about your favorite country*	20
	Activity 6: Interactive games from the book *Way to go!* Grade sixth	35
	Book *Way to go!* Grade sixth (p.11)	
	Objectives: Discussion of the Objectives of the guide and all the activities	10
	Listing of names and groups on the board and enumeration of activities	5
Session 13	Activity 1: *Listen and repeat. Make a conversation*	10
	Activity 2: *Extra activity. Interact: Introducing yourself*	5
	Activity 3: *Listen and repeat. Spelling*	30
	Activity 4: *21st century skills: Locate places in a map*	10
	Activity 5: *Locate your city in Google earth and describe your neighborhood*	20
	Activity 6: Interactive games from the book Way to go! Grade sixth	30
	Week 6	
	Book *Way to go!* Grade sixth (p.11 & 12)	
	Objectives: Discussion of the Objectives of the guide and all the activities	10
	Listing the names and groups on the board and listing the activities	5
	Activity 1: extra activity: *phonemic awareness*	10
Session 14	Activity 2: *Match number words to figures*	30
	Activity 3: *Listen and write. Fill out an ID form*	10
	Activity 4: *Listen. Personal information*	10
	Activity 5: *Create my own ID*	15
	Activity 6: *Extra activity _ Write and speak, go around the classroom, exchange personal information/ WhatsApp web_* 2 cellphones_ Displayed on the smart board	10
	Activity 7: Interactive games from the book Way to go! Grade sixth	20
	Introduction (Explanation of Saber Test)	5
Session 15	Handing out the question and answer sheet	
	Application of the post-test	150
	Handing in the test	5