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FLIPPED CLASSROOM TO FOSTER INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LEARNERS

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Artículos de investigación científica y tecnológica

FLIPPED CLASSROOM TO FOSTER INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LEARNERS

Aula invertida para fortalecer la competencia intercultural de estudiantes de inglés

Sala de aula virada para promover a competência intercultural em alunos de inglês

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Abstract: This article introduces the results of an experimental intercultural English class (IEC) using the flipped classroom methodology. Thematic units were developed with the 5 E's instructional model (Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate) based on the constructivist approach to learning. A mixed- method research approach collected data from 20 students at Atlántico University. The questionnaires used in the analysis of the 2 survey rounds rate Students' responses in relation to learning of contents, methodology of the class and autonomy. Results based on the second round led to four major conclusions: (i). There is satisfaction with the use of the Flipped Classroom strategy, in terms of time management and freedom to prepare classes. (ii). Practical activities are more engaging to work collaboratively. (iii). Teachers have a subtle presence which provides more opportunities for students to negotiate control and participation. (iv) Although autonomous learning is possible, teacher support is pivotal to increasing it. These findings are discussed within the framework of the didactical component of teaching and its implications for this public university.

Keywords: Foreign Language Teaching, skills development, blended learning, in-person learning, intercultural communication, instructional approach.

Resumen: Este artículo presenta los resultados de un curso experimental de inglés con enfoque intercultural utilizando la metodología del aula invertida. Las unidades temáticas se desarrollaron con las 5 E de un modelo instruccional basado en el enfoque constructivista del aprendizaje. Un enfoque de investigación mixto permitió recoger datos de 20 estudiantes de la Universidad del Atlántico. Se analizaron los cuestionarios de dos rondas de encuestas que midieron las respuestas de los estudiantes en relación al aprendizaje del contenido, la metodología de la clase y la autonomía. Los resultados de la segunda encuesta nos permiten colegir las siguientes conclusiones: (i). Satisfacción con el uso de la estrategia del aula invertida en relación con el manejo del tiempo y libertad para preparar clases. (ii). Las actividades prácticas favorecen el trabajo colaborativo. (iii). La sutil presencia de los profesores brinda mayores oportunidades a los estudiantes para negociar el control y la participación. (iv) Aunque es posible aprender autónomamente, el apoyo del docente es importante para incrementar el aprendizaje. Estos resultados se



discuten en el marco del componente didáctico de la enseñanza y sus implicaciones para esta universidad pública.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza de una lengua extranjera, desarrollo de competencias, aprendizaje combinado, educación presencial, educación intercultural, enfoque de apoyo didáctico.

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta os resultados de um curso experimental de inglês com uma abordagem intercultural usando a metodologia de sala de aula invertida. Cada unidade é desenvolvida com os 5 E's, um modelo instrucional baseado na abordagem construtivista da aprendizagem. Uma abordagem de pesquisa mista coletou dados de 20 estudantes da Universidad del Atlántico. Foram analisados os questionários de duas rodadas de pesquisas que mediram as respostas dos alunos em relação à aprendizagem de conteúdo, metodologia de aula e autonomia. Os resultados da segunda pesquisa nos permitem reunir as seguintes conclusões: (i). Satisfação com o uso da estratégia de sala de aula invertida em relação à gestão do tempo e liberdade de preparação das aulas. (ii) Atividades práticas favorecem o trabalho colaborativo. (iii) A presença sutil de professores oferece maiores oportunidades para os alunos negociarem controle e participação. (iv) Embora seja possível aprender de forma autônoma, o apoio do professor é importante para aumentar o aprendizado. Esses resultados são discutidos no âmbito do componente didático do ensino e suas implicações para essa universidade pública.

Palavras-chave: Ensino de uma língua estrangeira, desenvolvimento de habilidades, aprendizagem combinada, educação presencial, educação intercultural, abordagem de apoio didático.

Introduction

Teaching English from an intercultural perspective using computer-mediated activities increases learners' opportunities to have more control of course contents while anticipating their chances to participate in face to face classes with more informed interventions. Indeed, English teachers who embrace flipped learning combine online materials to provoke online interaction with in- class activities. Assumptions behind this combination show that students' achievement reflected greater blended learning experiences compared to fully online or fully in-person learning experiences (Butt, 2014; Zainuddin & Halili, 2016; Siemens, Gašević, & Dawson, 2015).

As English teachers whose ideas and practices have been oriented toward developing both communicative competences in the English language (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary acquisition) and intercultural competence in academic English (Soto, 2018), we designed an experimental intercultural English class with the following specific objectives: 1. To develop communication and intercultural functions and competences. 2. Value the importance of using technology to learn academic English. 3. Apply the constructivist and cognitive methods as a cooperative learning strategy to learn academic English. 4. Properly use educational software and / or a virtual platform for learning academic English.

In an attempt to foster intercultural and digital competences, we invited a group of 20 students to be part of an experimental intercultural English class. Most of them were not familiarized with flipped methodology or with a content-based English course. To make



matters worse, students' resources were limited both at home and at the university itself. Although the preparation of this report coincided with the incorporation of virtual platforms to complement face to face teaching at university, we cannot deny some benefits in relation to flipped learning (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015; Zeynep Turan & Birgul Akdag-Cimen, 2019), but we also acknowledge that some challenges must be faced in public universities as is the case of Atlántico University.

IMPLEMENTING FLIPPED LEARNING WITH BARE NECESSITIES

The preference for face to face class encounters have dominated the university scenario in our Caribbean contexts. Although the incorporation of technology is nothing new at the curricular level, there still exists some resistance to incorporate computer mediated activities in lessons. The reasons for this rejection are multiple: a). Most teachers are not familiarized with virtual learning environments. Given such situation and the lack of knowledge about technology benefits, these teachers underestimate virtual learning environments' potentialities to improve students' learning and their own professional development (Méndez and Guerrero, 2018). Digital literacies are ignored as a source of knowledge production to create relevant contents for English classes (Reinhardt, 2018), b). Students are familiarized with everyday social media technologies but not with virtual learning environments, c). Resources at University are scarce; there are connectivity problems, limited numbers of computers and access to these. A culture of blended or mediated learning is not favored by these just-mentioned conditions. In our case, we implemented a flipped classroom to confront this reality with the expectation of providing legitimate information about flipped learning in L2 processes.

Flipped Classrooms are environments in which students take major responsibility of their own learning process (Hao, 2016). The combination of on-line and in-class activities allows both direct teaching and self-regulated learning (Alegre, Demuth, y Navarro, 2019). Students have great opportunities to set the pace in learning, incorporate content or modify activities, review and recover information for learning purposes. In this case, the incorporation of a constructivist approach to learning gave to students major control of their learning process and the possibility to assess their own English learning (Lage, Platt and Treglia, 2000; Zappe, Lieicht, Messner, Litzinger and Woo Lee 2009; Buil-Fabregá, Martínez-Casanovas, & Ruiz-Munzón, 2019).



INTERCULTURAL CONTENT-BASED COURSE DESIGN

Planning stage

To design the contents of the course, we take into consideration some ideas of Byram's model for Intercultural communicative competence— ICC (Byram, 1995 and 1997, Byram and Zarate, 1994). Particularly, those related to the individuals' background and cultural knowledge(s) that signify their sociocultural identity. As this classroom was designed for learning/practicing English (situational and academic) with an intercultural focus, the contents of the course privileged activities involving a cultural polyphony between the 2 languages in contact (Spanish and English). In doing so, the theory of context (pragmatic) models was pivotal to casting situations paying attention to their relevance to the production of interactions within an intersubjective meaning (Van Dijk, 2012; Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shteynberg & Wan, 2010). In intercultural communication studies, intersubjectivity is a condition to avoid essentialized definitions of culture and monolithic thinking about cultures (Holliday and MacDonald, 2019). In this respect, the intersubjective construction of cultures in question (L1/ L2) opens up spaces for intercultural dialogues in which personal and ideological positioning in the quest for mutual comprehension become a pact for communication. Nevertheless, the recognition of similarities and/or differences does not exclude conflicts and contradictions. The intersubjectivity relations gives an account of an individual's capacity to negotiate shared meanings out of their own personal set of values and beliefs (Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shteynberg & Wan, 2010).

As a theoretical component of the face to face sessions, concepts such as alterity and otherness in the culture encounters were discussed (Odina, 2009, cited in Soto-Molina, 2018) in order to increase awareness of the intercultural component of the course. Materials play an important role. These should be student-centered to guarantee students' capacity of reaction and creativity. We were particularly interested in the ways students will discuss contents. Personal positioning visa-vis situations served to revise language use, class preparation with supplementary materials, ideas and concepts. The intercultural approach will cover aspects such as: cultural diversity, intercultural empathy and introspection, openness and curiosity, self-awareness and behavior with cultural differences (Purdue University).

Based on the three-stage model by Estes, Ingram & Liu (2014), we follow the pre-class, in-class and post-class sequence to flip the classroom. As the levels of English proficiency differ, English for intercultural communication is introduced at advanced and intermediate proficiency levels. Each unit was developed with the 5 E's (Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate). The 5 E's comprises an instructional model based on the constructivist approach to learning, which is based on the idea that learners build or construct new ideas on top of their old ideas (Manichander, 2016). This model helped us to present clear



directions to students about expected outcomes. As each objective of the model is oriented toward a common goal, students and teachers can work together sharing knowledge and experiences while trying to understand a concept and constructing meaning. Audiovisual materials for the design of thematic units were inspirational to engage students in intercultural mode, explore materials and contents, explain ideas from an intersubjective relation, elaborate personal positioning and evaluate arguments in interaction (Tomas, Lasen, Field, Skamp, K., 2015; Tomas, Evans, Doyle and Skamp, 2019).

Implementation stage

The course designed for this purpose was called "English in an intercultural world". It was planned with the hope that this course will allow the students to gain valuable and necessary skills for both their academic and future professional careers. We provided content in English that they were able to both critically analyze and complement with an intercultural focus, ensuring the balance between the two cultures. Throughout the course the students look at various aspects of intercultural communication through various methods of presentation and practice. The advantages of flipped classrooms were several including e.g. students prepared actions that did not necessarily have to be done in class but at home, take responsibility for their own, and constructivist learning.

Consequently, at the initial stage of the course the students showed a great dependence on teacher instruction. But as the course moved forward and students got familiarized with Flipped learning this dependence decreased and students' autonomous work became noteworthy, a better use of time, and responsibility was achieved gradually as students were involved in their own learning. As part of the learning process, we examined and discussed cultures like our own as well as those radically different. We challenged students to work towards understanding and respecting all cultures, not only those that have similar core values to our own. Because it was easier for them to identify with the cultural values of other Latin American or "Catholic" countries, for example, we challenged them to react beyond their comfort zone. For this reason, we placed a special emphasis on countries and cultures that appeared at first sight to be quite strange. The purpose here was to achieve a mutual understanding based on intersubjective relations in which differences among cultures can be described as superficial difference (Soto-Molina, 2018).

Students then worked with contextualized idiomatic expressions around thematic units that gave cultural insights of the target culture. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) entails training students, usually in a higher education setting, to use language appropriately for study. it has been one of the most common forms of English for specific purposes, were the lexical components for thematic units. Units focused on authentic practice in listening to lectures, note-taking, and using videos. Also,



authentic written and spoken academic texts were included. Activities such as: note taking, group discussion, writing references, paraphrasing texts, essay organization, and a wealth of practice opportunities to enhance all academic skills were carried out or undertaken in order to help students develop academic language and critical thinking skills essential in academic contexts.

Pre-class: Some activities were offered the students consisting of a variety of pre-class assignments and tasks which enhances motivation and encourages students to do the pre-class work (Strayer, 2012). According to Manichander, (2016) an "Engage" activity should do the following:

- · Make connections between past and present learning experiences
- · Anticipate activities and focus students' thinking on the learning outcomes of current activities. Students should become mentally engaged in the concept, process, or skill to be learned.

Also, the process of exploration can be used as a pre-class activity.

· Explore: Provide a common base of experience. In doing so, students identify concepts, processes, and skills. During this phase, students actively explore their environment or manipulate materials.

In-class: In face to face classes the interaction and the quest for mutual understanding are important to develop intercultural communicative competence.

- · Explain: In this phase one sees interaction among participants to clarify concepts previously explored, communicate meanings and conceptual understanding. Teachers can help students by providing complementary information and challenging them to participate and give informed opinions.
- Elaborate: It is the opportunity for students to introduce extended conceptual understanding. They bring to the discussion deeper information about areas of their interests, having the chances to show autonomous work.

Post-class: Agreements with the students were made in relation to post-class activities in which formative and summative assessments took place. Some activities were accomplished in pairs and others collectively. They worked on a video forum and reported to the class the learnings obtained. Evaluation occurred both directly following every pre-class activity at home and at the end of each unit. After developing each unit there is a space given for both teacher and students to reflect on their practice.

As we were interested in assessing levels of intercultural competence accomplishment (or at least understanding it), we provided a grid with some items of an intersubjective approach to work course contents. It served as a self-assessment process for learning to discuss students' perceptions in relation to possible gains on learning.

At the end of this unit...



I was able to confront my personal beliefs and values with shared community construction of habits, codes, and culture features.

I was able to accept cultural codes that differ from my own culture.

I was able to problematize stereotypes, alienating content and superficial cultural components.

I was able to provide my own cultural background to balance L2 contents.

I was able to recognize mechanisms of acculturation presented in materials oriented to L2 acquisition.

I was able to position my role as a cultural actor with respect.

Table 1

Assessment Grid

Own Elaboration

Teacher's role: From the teacher's perspective, it may be argued that the planning stage is time-consuming and demanding since it requires previewing activities (the film or video) and designing adequate activities. But these pitfalls vanish when we think of the countless possibilities open to us when dealing with such activities: Digital literacies allow for constant reinforcement in the acquisition of a foreign language; these provide a good medium for self-study; also, they offer the learners the possibility of thinking critically as well as using their imaginations. The teacher's role to help students to understand the implications of an intercultural approach to learning is key to questioning L2 contents in terms of their alienating effects as well as their acculturation focus and submissive treatment to other cultures (Soto-Molina & Méndez, 2020).

Student's role: Autonomy and leadership as components of this new role of the student in a Flipped Classroom are essential for their own training. Flipped learning provides a number of significant tools that will have to be tested in both their personal and professional future. There are more responsibilities in the control of time and the learning process. The evaluation process is done on the go and is usually just a process without giving rise to debate or controversy due to the self-evaluation possibilities provided.

Method

The purpose of the study was oriented to assess the impact of a flipped classroom in students' learning of English with an intercultural focus. We used a survey research approach to describe students' perceptions about this methodology in education (Check and Schutt, 2012). A mixed-method survey research approach was conducted in the search of data complementarity where statistical analysis facilitated content analysis for the qualitative component (Gilbert, Booth, Betts and Goldberg, 2021). Two rounds of surveys were applied to participants, who responded to a questionnaire with a Likert scale to measure statements of agreement. Then an open interview was done to complement survey data. In the first instance, we chose directed surveys with closed questions related to inquiry about university conditions and students' openness to work with this methodology. As a second instance, we provided a questionnaire with alternative responses, and later on, we conducted informal interviews based on open-ended questions to obtain students' perceptions in



relation to learning and working in this flipped classroom (Viveka S, Sagar T V, Sudha M J., 2017).

Participants and context

Participants were selected from those students who agreed to facilitate answers to interviews and surveys. 20 students from 8 groups belonging to 4 different levels A. Beginners (A1), B. Intermediates (B1), C. Advanced (B2 +), D. Proficient C1 + / 2 distributed like this: A (two groups with 2 students each). B. (two groups with 2 students each); C. (two groups with 3 students each); D. (two groups with 3 students each.). It should be noted that the first two groups A and B had not been taught using intercultural teaching or in Flipped classroom methodology. The students belonging to groups C and D had only been taught in the intercultural approach of teaching English but not with the Flipped classroom methodology.

Research instruments

Survey 1: A first survey with closed questions that were answered with a simple yes or no. This binary yes/no helped us to get to know conclusive answers in relation to the following aspects: 1). Teachers' personalized attention, 2). Establishment of performance and learning goals, 3). Evaluation system: Monitor the system and 4). Use of digital technologies with a proper design.

Survey 2: A second survey with optional questions to be answered with a given option (Annex 1). The Likert scale allowed us to trace students' perceptions about several aspects: a) their learning experiences in the Flipped Classroom in comparison to only face-to-face work, b) the values given to learning, time management and freedom to prepare classes, c) the benefits of a content-based course with an intercultural focus to learn English into a flipped classroom.

Open Interviews: Once we obtained data from survey 2, we designed a series of questions to verify positive and negative extremes of answers in relation to learning and to complement our further analysis. Students were chosen randomly among those who volunteered to answer questions.

Results

Teacher personalized attention

As small working groups were established, teacher personalized attention was easier to provide. Interaction flows better and it is possible to identify students easily by their names, relating their previous work. Figures 1 and 2 show that the majority of students agreed on the importance of support and clear orientation for learning goals. Additionally, they recognized



having enjoyed freedom to perform tasks and propose supplementary activities. They considered that teacher presence and support were conditions for improving understanding and assessing course progress.

Figure 1
Personalized attention and learning goal
25
20
15

Si

10 5 0

Figure 2
Establishment of performance

20
15
10
5
No

Figure 1 & Figure 2
Personalized attention and learning goal - Establishment of performance

Evaluation system provided

No

Computer-mediated tasks on platforms (Moodle, Edmodo) have tools to assess progress and provide evaluation of activities. This feature of our experience in our intercultural flipped English course was not completely recognized as a positive tool. When we asked students to support this result, they argued that evaluation forced them to accomplish different tasks as an obligation. For this reason, figure 3 shows divisions in this particular aspect.

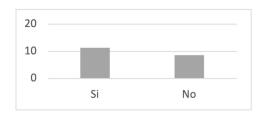


Figure 3
Evaluation system- System monitor

Quality Design of Technological Resources

Students categorically affirmed that technological resources at the university do not have the appropriate designs to achieve quality standards to conduct classes with aid or virtual platforms. This experience was achieved because out class activities were developed with their own equipment, internet service and facilities. They regretted that other courses did not succeed at university due to their connectivity conditions and lack of resources.



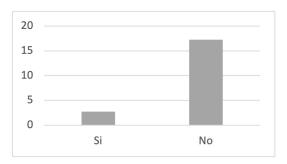


Figure 4
Use of digital technologies with a proper design

Flipped classroom learning experiences

Results in relation to learning experiences using this methodology were quite positive. The majority of the students (16 of them) agreed that this methodology helped them to have a more rewarding learning experience (see figure 5) due to the combination of autonomous learning work and face to face classes to cover course contents. They positively valued the alternative to work autonomously on some activities to prepare in advance face to face classes and the support of teachers to complement their work. Taking into account that this population had not been familiarized before with this methodology or the intercultural focus for English learning, they took advantage of the methodology to introduce their prior knowledge, to explore digital contents and for problematizing cultural issues. Although they also recognized that being at home learning on their own gave them personal and private conditions to work under, the importance that they gave to social contact, face to face interaction and teachers' role in an English language class is something unquestionable (Figure 6).

Figure 5
Flipped learning vs. fully
Classrooms are more rewarding
than totally in person classes

Figure 6
Learning experiences with Flipped

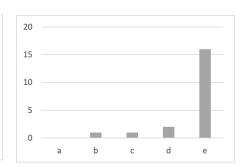


Figure 5 & Figure 6
Flipped learning vs. fully classrooms - Learning experiences with Flipped



Time and learning control

In relation to this item, results showed that students evidenced a high satisfaction with the Flipped Classroom because of its possibilities for time management and freedom to prepare classes. Students valued the strategy positively; pointed out the educational possibilities of carrying out practical activities in the classroom, and work collaboratively outside of it.

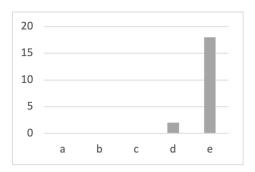


Figure 7Time and freedom

Intercultural English Learning

Students' answers to intercultural learning in the English language were totally positive (15), just positive (3) and neither positive nor negative (2), which indicates a high percentage of compliance with learning outcomes (Figure 8). They reported having increased vocabulary, academic competences to interact in English and a good average of knowledges to discuss cultural issues with an intercultural focus.

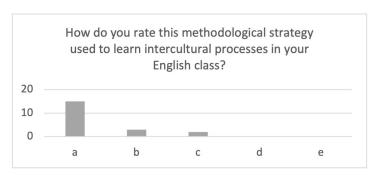


Figure 8
Perception of Flipped Classroom

When they were asked about their self-assessment in relation to English learning, they felt confidence to assert they had improved language proficiency and most importantly they had lost the fear of speaking. Levels of complexity in academic language acquisition were set to distinguish activities. They accepted that these levels of complexity assessed in the post-class activities were guidelines for them to work with. The theoretical component of the course helped them to understand the interrelated concepts of culture and also provided them a framework with



which to investigate and elaborate meanings in relation to intercultural treatment of contents.

In relation to intercultural competences they manifested having learnt aspects of interculturality to balance their role as English learners who have their own culture. In this sense, they argued in favor of their capacities to identify the alienation burden of some contents and at the same time provide/oppose their own L1 contents to balance the intercultural focus of the course. As a negative aspect, they struggled to set aside their personal values to make space for the intersubjectivity perceptions of cultural contents.

The following Table 2 gathered 20 students' responses to each intercultural aspect of the grid provided at the end of units. As can be seen, the responses for the last two units evidenced better results.

Learning goals	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4
I was able to confront my personal beliefs and values with shared	20	18	20	20
community construction of habits, codes, and culture features.				
I was able to accept cultural codes that differ from my own culture.	10	16	16	16
I was able to problematize stereotypes, alienating content and	13	15	20	20
superficial cultural components.				
I was able to provide my own cultural background to balance L2	14	15	18	18
contents.				
I was able to recognize mechanisms of acculturation presented in	14	15	19	20
materials oriented to L2 acquisition.				
I was able to position my role as a cultural actor with respect to the	14	15	18	20
target culture.				

Table 2
Learning goals

Discussion and conclusion

The emphasis on interculturality was well-placed by all participants, although we acknowledge that the theoretical component of it was difficult to understand due to its complexity and the language exposure. The support of L1 was necessary to make clear some ideas, concepts and doubts. As it was an exploratory course, we realized that in the future we need to cover more units and improve the quality of contents to have more control of it. In our view, flipped classrooms open up conditions and possibilities to expand English teaching to include an intercultural focus. That is, opportunities for both teachers and students to interchange roles and enrich the course. In the students' case, they can play a prominent role by preparing classes in advance and thus integrate their own learning expectations and personal content. To this respect, students were motivated to bring complementary materials to make their point heard. In the teachers' case, they can negotiate class control while getting to know better students' learning needs and capacities to go beyond grammar structures of the language. Interaction among students to plan activities help them to grow together. They can set their own pace and answer their own questions and even improve the thematic content in face to face encounters. Time devoted to face to face classes is being exploited more on account of pre-class and post-class cycle activities.



Despite the low number of participants in the course and taking into account the bare conditions of the university to favor blended learning, we consider that this study is relevant to show university administrative staff and curricula makers that students are demanding better conditions to integrate flipped classrooms as a component of their education. However, for future research it is suggested to have a larger sample of participants, including lab spaces at university to compare results and provide information to improve technological conditions. The invitation is also for teachers who work in places with poor technological aids to integrate blended learning in some course units thus taking advantages of the limited resources. Sometimes we can be taken by surprise by students' creativity and desires for overcoming difficulties.

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