

Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Professor Pally

Mexican Group

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Mexican Cultural Background and the Curriculum Design for English Foreign Learners

Brief Introduction:

After researching unique challenges found in Mexican English Foreign Learners (EFL) classrooms, we have identified a student population and designed a curriculum that is tailored to their specific needs. We narrowed down general EFL challenges found in our previous paper to smaller, more precise challenges that affect our student population almost exclusively. From there, we identified several education theories and pedagogies that would help us address these challenges, and developed a month-long curriculum based on these approaches.

Main Idea: Our target EFL students are 24 students in a Mexican teacher training school, who are intermediate English learners and who will become English teachers in public secondary schools. We found that some challenges this student population is facing include: insufficiency of content and pedagogical knowledge, and low motivation of learning English among their future students. Our goals are to enhance the future English teachers' communicative skills and meanwhile to equip them with knowledge of different teaching methods. In order to address the first challenge, we use Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Contextual Learning as our approaches in the four-week lessons. Teaching our lessons using CLT is imperative considering some teachers use the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) for the sole reason that it's the only teaching approach they know. In order to address the second challenge, we teach cultural sustained and teaching grammar in context to make learning more relevant to students, which will elevate participation and motivation to learn.

I. In Mexico, teachers are cultivated either by TESOL programs in universities or by teacher training schools. Graduates from TESOL programs usually become language teachers in private schools, who are proficient in English and command contemporary approaches to teaching language. By contrast, students in teacher training schools will teach English in public secondary schools. Their shortcomings are inadequate language skills and limited knowledge of teaching methodology. Optimizing teacher training can contribute to providing more qualified language teachers for public secondary schools.

II. The first challenge English teachers in Mexico confront is that the language training they obtained from teacher training schools cannot fulfill the teaching requirements and goals put

forward by the Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica (the National English Program for Basic Education, or PNIEB).

1. Learning English through grammar translation methods, Mexican English teachers tend to lack communicative skills, which restricts them from organizing various classroom activities and determines that they have to resort to the traditional language teaching methods.

1.1 There are historical reasons behind the popularity of GMT. Mexican colonial history produced social stratification and differentiated educational resources. English became a symbol of high social status, which led to the worship of English and the dislike of Spanish linguistic features. As a result, Mexicans paid more attention to correctness and accuracy when using English, and the most commonly-used method of English teaching would be GMT, focusing more on surface structure and linguistic analysis.

a. "English has long been highly regarded among the middle and upper classes of Mexican society" (Borjian, 2015). "All Mexicans know that English is the language of the elite" (Despaigne, 2010).

b. "In situations of a sharp or extreme disparity in prestige, a highly integrative motivational posture is often associated with negative perceptions on the part of the learner toward the transfer of linguistic features from first language to second language". However, "the transfer of first language phonological elements and grammatical structures" is inevitable in second-language acquisition (Francis & Ryan, 1998).

c. "Exaggerated attention to surface forms and structures in production, often associated with feelings of shame and inadequate mastery, results in a number of negative consequences. It shifts the focus of language learning away from comprehension and toward the mastery of surface forms and unnecessarily and artificially extends the "silent period" (Francis & Ryan, 1998).

1.2 Influenced by the prevalent phenomenon of teaching English with GMT, teacher training schools also adopt GMT to train English teachers, though the educational outcomes are not necessarily compatible with students' real needs. After graduating, students, who become English teachers in public schools, not only lack communicative competence but also lack the model of teaching English in a communicative, interactive way.

a. The findings suggest that over a half of English teachers in public schools "reported learning English through traditional approaches that are characterized by" "native language instruction of grammatical structures", "text translations", and "reproduction of isolated lexical items" (Romo, Romero, and Guzmán, 2015).

b. "The national English program urged teachers to emphasize the social practices of the language by modeling language in action during social interactions. However, this study found that, for the most part, teachers themselves did not learn English through that approach and may not know how it is to be done" (Banks, 2017).

c. "Organizing more open-ended, communicative lessons and giving students more control places greater linguistic pressures on" English teachers who have insufficient communicative skills (Sayer, 2018). "PNIEB EFL teachers with a lower level of English

proficiency seemed to be more structured in their teaching methods and engaged students less in language development as well as classroom activities” (Quezada, 2013).

2. PNIEB promotes communicative approach and Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, which expects students to work on the social practices of English through communicative interaction and student-centered activities (SEP, 2010). However, in reality, because of the insufficiency of language training, teachers cannot conform to these guidelines so that English in the classroom is still taught in the traditional, isolated way.

a. “More than 15 years after this reform, many of the classes we observed in conjunction with this research we would still not characterize as ‘communicative’ (Romero, Sayer & Irigoyen, 2014).

b. “Field notes from observations in schools and interviews with students show that in many cases the main content that is being taught is the alphabet, basic vocabulary, and phrases and short sentences but they are being presented in an isolated manner and from a grammatical point of view” (Romero, Sayer & Irigoyen, 2014). “These practices do not correspond to the sociocultural perspective which considers that grammar is implicitly internalized through social interactions” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

III. The second challenge is that English teachers have to confront students’ low motivation to learn English, which is related with Mexican nationalism and the negative perception towards English.

1. Because of the geographical proximity, the U.S. politically and economically predominated Mexico, which aroused Mexican’s defensive attitude towards the U.S. in order to protect their own sovereignty and cultural identity.

a. “The defense of national sovereignty became an issue when the United States government threatened to take military action to protect both U.S. investments in Mexico and the intervention of other countries in what the U.S. considered its geopolitical sphere. The presence of the U.S. capital and the threat that the U.S. would intervene in internal affairs once again aroused a strong Mexican nationalism” (Ryan & Terborg, 2003).

2. As Mexicans always related English to America, their hostility towards the States is transferred to the resistance of learning English, particularly among the lower class.

a. English “cannot be detached from its original cultural context because it does not represent a neutral nor a transparent code. In Mexico, English is a synonym for the United States, ‘el gran Norte’ (The Grand North), the American dream” (Francis & Ryan, 1998).

b. “Colonialism created a class based society divided between dominant and dominated cultures. This relationship creates this special ‘rejection’ to English in a very unconscious way as English represents the symbol of the dominating culture such as imperialism” (Francis & Ryan, 1998).

3. Negatively influenced by the affective factor, the majority of students, who come from lower class, in public schools are low-motivated to learn English. However, teachers do not have a good preparation to address this prevailing problem.

- a. “Significant factors that influence language learning in different contexts are the students’ cultural identities and the way in which the target language is contextualized within their own cultural framework” (Barbier, 2002; González, 2001; Gutierrez, 2005).
- b. Almost half of the English teachers in Banks study “described their students as either lacking interest in English, not being interested in learning a second language, or not being motivated to learn English” (Banks, 2017).

IV. Goals:

SWBAT (Students will be able to) set appropriate objectives and delivers presentations.

SWBAT give clear oral instructions to organize student-centered activities and lead the class discussion.

SWBAT evaluate students’ assignments and creates rubrics.

SWBAT design a detailed, collaborative, communicative, content-based and culturally-responsive lesson plan for Mexican EFL.

	Communicative Goals	Pedagogical Approaches	Sample Activities
1	SWBAT brainstorm ideas on how to use authentic texts to teach grammar features (simple present, present continuous, etc) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share an authentic text and explain why it can be used to teach grammar rules and what is the grammar point. 	CLT; Peer Review;	Group discussion
2	SWBAT teach one grammar feature of their choosing in the target language - English. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design an appropriate activity to teach grammar - Create Cloze exercise using authentic materials 	Peer Review and feedback	Cloze exercise
3	SWBAT write present tense verbs using Bloom’s Taxonomy in order to create language objectives	Modeling CLT	Group discussion

4	<p>SWBAT describe the sequence of a procedure (explaining something step-by-step with details).</p> <p>SWBAT Give oral directions (during the opening activity)</p>	Modeling CLT	Group discussion
5	<p>SWBAT summarize the objectives and procedures of a lesson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliver a clear and effective closure 	CLT	Group discussion
6	<p>SWBAT give clear and detailed homework instructions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe what they want students to achieve by following the homework instruction. - Analyze whether the homework instructions are designed according to the objectives and class activities. 	CLT	Writing Workshop Group discussion
7	<p>SWBAT give evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - state their opinions and arrange their ideas in the deductive way with proper linking words. - use evidence to support their opinions. - use hedging words to soften their opinions. 	CLT Culturally sustaining pedagogy Scaffolding	Mind map
8	<p>SWBAT give examples of informal vs formal / formative vs summative/ traditional vs authentic assessment in their own words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - analyze multiple models of assessment activities by comparing their strengths and weaknesses. - analyze a model of a clear, detailed, measurable, achievable 	CLT, Scaffolding,	Design an assessment rubric

	assessment rubric by discussing its strengths and weaknesses in order to design their own assessment rubric		
9	SWBAT deliver a mini-lesson according to their lesson plans.	CLT	Presentation; Reflection

	Grammar Goals	Pedagogical Approaches	Sample Activities
1	SWBAT identify different parts of speech in an authentic text in the target language. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify a grammar feature that is commonly taught in Secondary schools in Mexico EFL classes. - Explain the grammar features clearly and understandably to students with examples. 	CLT; Contextual Learning Approach;	Peer review
2	SWBAT know the function of different transition words and different hedging words.	Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy modelling	Writing assignment

V. In order to address the challenges that are unique to this population, our curriculum adopted a specific theory or pedagogy that will help ready our teachers to meet teaching requirements set forth by PNIEB

1. The learning model that was implemented within the curriculum is CLT methods. CLT can effectively train students' communicative skills by providing them more practice of speaking and writing in English. With assistance and encouragement, students can gradually move from dependence to independent learners to transform his or her speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills to become proficient English learners and teachers.

1.1 Considering students lack pedagogy training, we design the mini lesson project so that they will have the opportunity to design their own lesson plan and deliver a mini lesson by using new language teaching methods. The project is divided into four parts: objective and introduction, procedure and activity, closure and homework, assessment and rubric. Students need to finish the project in groups. Modelling, discussion, feedback and revision are required in each phase. Students' communicative skills would be improved in the process of finishing this task.

1.2 In Week 1 Lesson 2, students will learn how to write the language objective using the Bloom's Taxonomy Action Verb Chart. Utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy will ensure that the language objective is student centered, attainable and engages in higher order thinking in order for students to master. Students will discuss the language objective with a peer. In the discussion, students will share, offer feedback, and critique the language objective. Towards the end of the lesson, students will explain why their language objective fits under the category (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) of Bloom's Taxonomy chart.

1.3 In Week 2 Lesson 2, after watching the model videos, students need to compare two videos and reflect on those teaching practices. They need to use adjectives and comparative sentence structure in their group discussion. Their ability of oral expression would be improved in the exchanges of ideas.

2. The second approach we use is Vygotsky's Scaffolding. When giving students lessons on content knowledge, we used a lot of scaffolding to reach out to students' zone of proximal development (ZPD).

a. Vygotsky's scaffolding is a teaching method that helps students learn more by working with a teacher or a more advanced student to achieve their learning goals. The theory behind instructional scaffolding is that, compared to learning independently, students learn more when collaborating with others who have a wider range of skills and knowledge than the student currently does. These instructors or peers are the "scaffolding" who help the student expand her learning boundaries and learn more than she would be able to on her own.

b. The ZPD is the set of skills or knowledge a student can't do on her own but can do with the help or guidance of someone else. It's the skill level just above where the student currently is.

2.1 For example, in Week 3 Lesson 1, they will also work with the instructor to examine what authentic materials can be used to teach grammar rules in an EFL class.

2.2 In Week 3 Lesson 4, students will be engaged in small groups and work with other students to do a peer review activity and give each other editing suggestions.

3. Modeling is also largely used in our lessons. Before letting students practice or present what they learned, the instructor would model how to do it and explain first.

a. Modeling is an instructional strategy in which the teacher demonstrates a new concept or approach to learning and students learn by observing. Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them on what to do. (Salisu & Ransom, 2014)

3.1 In Week 3 Lesson 2, we model a student-centered activity and how to deliver oral instructions before letting students brainstorm and discuss those two in order to let students observe and experience first.

3.2 In Week 3 Lesson 4, the goal for that day is students will be able to write clear homework instructions, so we designed that the teacher should model first by showing how he/she writes homework instructions based on students' background knowledge and the objectives.

3.3 In Week 4 Lesson 2, students also have the chance to use the sample article as a model, analyze and divide the text into pieces according to the organization, highlighting the linking words they can recognize.

4. Since students in Mexico are more used to the GTM and are unfamiliar with other more innovative approaches, we adopt Contextual Learning Approach in our lessons.

- a. According to contextual learning theory, learning occurs only when students process new information or knowledge in such a way that it makes sense to them in their own frames of reference (their own inner worlds of memory, experience, and response). The mind naturally seeks meaning in context by searching for relationships that make sense and appear useful.
- b. Contextual learning theory focuses on the multiple aspects of any learning environment. It encourages educators to choose and/or design learning environments that incorporate many different forms of experience in working toward the desired learning outcomes. In such an environment, students discover meaningful relationships between abstract ideas and practical applications in the context of the real world; concepts are internalized through the process of discovering, reinforcing, and relating. (Cord, 2016)

4.1 In Week 3 Lesson 2, we designed an activity where students are going to learn simple present tense by completing the cloze exercise, which uses Contextual Learning Approach. Afterwards, students will practice how to use appropriate authentic materials to create a cloze exercise to teach grammar features and how to use this approach in their own teaching.

5. We also adopt culturally sustaining pedagogy in our lessons to teach and let students familiarize how to incorporate culture in their own teaching.

- a. Culturally sustaining pedagogy refers to how to teach English on the basis of students' cultural background and their fund of knowledge. Or how to make use of their fund of knowledge to facilitate their learning of English.
- b. In Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory, the context and social practice of language are important for language learning. Grammar should be taught by being integrated into other language skills rather than taught separately.

5.1 In Week 4 Lesson 2, students need to think about the advantages and disadvantages of the policy of learning English in Mexico, relating their personal experience and their knowledge about Mexican education to this English class, which adopts the culturally sustaining pedagogy.

VI. There are significant differences between "English as a Second Language" (ESL) setting and "English as a Foreign Language" (EFL) setting that pose unique challenges and opportunities for language teachers. Some activities may be more helpful in an ESL setting but do not work very well in an EFL setting, and vice versa.

1. ESL students are constantly surrounded by authentic texts even outside the classroom, while EFL students have varying access at best. ESL teachers must work with the fact that students are very likely to encounter unknown words outside the classroom, while EFL teachers consider themselves the lone source of students' contact with the target language and culture. In our curriculum plan, we dedicated one day just to discuss authentic materials: what is considered 'authentic', how to select what to bring into the classroom, and how to best utilize them.
 - a. One of the vocabulary activities suggested by an ESL teacher textbook is one called 'word wizard'; where students are assigned a specific word they must 'hunt' in as many different places as possible (Peregoy & Boyle, 2011)
 - b. Mexican teachers in private schools have access to resources like technology equipment and bilingual books, while teachers in public schools are lucky to own a computer. This means Mexican students' access to authentic text is heavily dependent on the type of school they attend (Dietrich, 2007)
 - c. In an interview with transnational English teachers, a lot of them claim they bring a piece of American culture into their classrooms. However, when asked to elaborate, these teachers talk about how they teach American holidays and tell stories about Americans' competitive nature. They do not bring in authentic materials to expand their pedagogy. (Hernandez, 2019)
2. In an ESL context, college students have had exposure to a typical U.S. classroom which tends to be more collaborative and communicative. Even if they did not attend K-12 school in The U.S, they are still exposed to communicative classrooms in college. In our lesson, students need to be introduced to the CLT approach and then given the opportunity to compare it with the typical English classroom they're used to.
 - a. Most Mexican K-12 English classes involve a lot of notetaking and copying. This is especially true for public schools in less affluent areas. While private schools have relatively less copying activities, it is still present. (Sayer, 2018).

Conclusion

The quality of Mexican EFL lessons rest heavily on the quality of their teacher training programs. If we want to see more communicative K-12 classrooms, we need to show communicative classrooms to emerging teachers. That said, Mexican history and culture poses unique challenges that call for a custom-made approach. We believe the approaches we adopted in this curriculum would together create a learning experience that is more meaningful, relevant, and applicable to students' lives. By putting our emerging teachers in a collaborative, communicative learning space that allows for experiments and discovery, we believe they will create similar environments of their own.

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