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**Analysis of teaching strategies in rural areas, to teach vocabulary in context
among young learners**

**Análisis de estrategias didácticas en zonas rurales, para enseñar vocabulario en
contexto a jóvenes estudiantes**

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RESUMEN

La presente investigación pretende desarrollar la destreza del vocabulario inglés con materiales gamificados y estrategias innovadoras en el aula. La metodología del estudio de investigación fue una investigación-acción y el enfoque fue cualitativo. Debido a su naturaleza cuantitativa también, se aplicó un pre-test diagnóstico al inicio del estudio, para conocer una línea base del nivel de sub-habilidades del estudiante de acuerdo al vocabulario con formato Cambridge. A continuación, en la intervención en clase se tuvo en cuenta una secuencia de entrevistas y listas de comprobación. Finalmente, después de un mes de enseñanza con diferentes estrategias, los estudiantes presentaron un post-test. Una vez finalizado este proceso de investigación, se comprobó cómo las estrategias de enseñanza en zonas rurales desarrollan la habilidad de vocabulario en contexto entre los jóvenes estudiantes.

Descriptores: EFL; zonas rurales; estrategias; actividades gamificadas; vocabulario en contexto. (Tesauro UNESCO).

ABSTRACT

The current research aims to develop English vocabulary skill with gamified materials and innovative strategies in the classroom. The study methodology was an action research and the approach was qualitative. Due to its quantitative nature as well, a diagnostic pre-test at the beginning of the study was applied, to know a baseline of the student's sub-skills level according to vocabulary with Cambridge format. Continuing this, a sequence of interviews and checklists was taking into account in the class intervention. Finally, after one month of teaching with different strategies, the students took a post-test. At the end of this research process, it was amply demonstrated how teaching strategies develop vocabulary skills in context among young rural students.

Descriptors: EFL, rural areas, strategies, gamified activities, vocabulary in context. (UNESCO Thesaurus).

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INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English as a foreign language is a process that has advanced gradually over the last 20 years in Ecuador. It went from being an optional subject to being part of the curriculum from elementary to high school. Although, in the year 2022, a change in the public education system was achieved; in this last period new distributions were arranged in the schedule regarding the teaching of EFL, which faced the challenge of adjusting to a virtual educational model due to the pandemic of Covid 19 and this made it difficult to adjust to the globalization growth in relation to ICTs use in rural areas of Ecuador. In public education, the number of hours at the higher basic and high school levels was reduced from 5 academic hours to 3 hours per week. Despite this, in the intercultural bilingual system in rural areas of Ecuador, especially in the central highlands, the distribution remained relatively unchanged.

In addition, substantial changes have been made in the pedagogical area, specifically, in the management of human talent, in the curriculum and in the educational resources used at the fiscal education, fiscal-community and rural education levels as well as in the linguistic competencies that an EFL teacher must have. These restructurings were necessary knowing that Ecuador has been occupying a very low position in the world and Latin American rankings; position 90 out of 112 and 18 out of 20 respectively (EF EPI, 2022). As English teachers, we recognize that the ability to speak a foreign language allows our students more opportunities for personal, academic and professional development in a globalized world. For this reason, we dedicate a large part of our working hours to planning lessons that are substantive and entertaining for our students. In rural areas, this is no exception; on the contrary, we must devise strategies that are appealing to students and involve their active participation (Cuñez, 2020).

As has been pointed out, EFL teaching strategies should be fun and objective when teaching in a rural education context; otherwise, students lose concentration and interest in learning a new language, which, by the way, they do not practice in significant

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quantities. It is worth mentioning that the barriers or lack of technology in the rural area has been a negative factor for teaching any subject, in this case, EFL. Students have a tendency to drop out of school or high school. This is due to factors such as: lack of economic resources, support from family members or representatives, pregnancies, among other factors. Thus, EFL teachers must innovate in such teaching strategies with the limiting and challenging factors.

English language teaching strategies can be grouped into several types and vary according to the authors and the pedagogical currents that are practiced. According to (García, Pérez, Martínez, & Alfonso, 1998), they describe 6 types of didactic strategies: repetition, simple elaboration, complex elaboration, affective, metacognitive and social strategies. On the other hand, the authors (Rodríguez & García, 2005) mention the following classification: cognitive, metacognitive and resource management. Emphasizing the meaning of strategy and linked to the teaching-learning process of the English language, it is understood that they are processes, actions, steps or activities performed by both the educator and the learner. Each has its specific function within the process of applying a strategy, it can be to retain information, practice and internalize what has been learned, or simply transfer a novel action that allows the student to use the language in a communicative and linguistically correct way.

In addition, due to the negative factors that are present in rural areas, it is necessary to innovate day by day in the planning, to carry out games or activities that do not depend solely on the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's), but rather, on complementary materials elaborated with elements adapted to the rural environment. In rural areas of Ecuador, parents and adults in general, have stated that learning English is valuable, because this skill is used in various facets of the development of life itself, for example: to study inside and outside the country, to get a job and a better job opportunity, to travel for leisure or business to other continents, among other activities. Each skill is

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practiced as a dynamic axis by performing activities with cognitive objectives (Cassany, 1999).

The methodological strategies used in English language teaching are not different from those used in other subjects. They do differ, for example, in the teaching objective to be achieved by applying a linguistic methodological approach, involving in turn the learning of a new language communicatively (López, 2016). However, there are a couple of impediments that continue to hinder the application of such strategies at the forefront, and this is the access to 100% internet connectivity and the use of 100% of electronic devices, both in teachers and students. For this reason, in rural areas it is still difficult to apply teaching and learning strategies with the use of electronic devices and internet connectivity (Ortega & Auccahuallpa, 2017). Despite this, it has not been an impediment for the teacher to apply the best teaching method and innovate in the classrooms to which he/she has been assigned, rather, it has become a challenge and a goal to all the actors involved (managers, teachers, coordinators, advisors, etc.) who have joined to contribute and improve the English level of the high school students in the country's public system. Continuing with the analysis on the level of English in rural areas of Ecuador, (Ortega & Auccahuallpa, 2017) affirmed that the level of English language proficiency resulting from an analysis of a group of 272 students in their last year of high school, from 8 rural parishes in the south of the Andes, showed an unsatisfactory level. Therefore, the lack of oral expression in everyday life events or situations implies one of the reasons why students in rural areas of Ecuador do not have a better performance in the expression of the foreign language.

Therefore, the learner needs sufficient linguistic elements and tools in his or her domain to be able to develop the expressive activities required in the learning and practice of English. Thus, the mastery of new vocabulary is an essential part for developing the skills, such as reading, speaking, writing and listening, and these activities could not be fully accomplished if each word or group of words is not internalized as a set of expressions

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and not as terms in isolation, without a context or without the use of the language practice itself (Zambrano & Insuasty, 2001).

The methodological strategies used in the classroom should be orderly, clear and objective in order to correctly guide students to learn the content appropriately, this in the case of teaching and learning EFL. In addition, the activities to be carried out should be planned with the students and according to their age, preferences, language proficiency, identity, among other variables; in this respect, (Perlaza, 2022) states that learning a new language means becoming communicative when used it in real situations.

As for the teacher's planning, it is known that several aspects must be considered, such as: the approach, methodology, strategies and techniques, all of which must be aligned under the same teaching parameter that was previously chosen and analyzed. The communicative approach being the most congruent when teaching a foreign language, involves a number of collective activities, each of them with a strength and characteristic to denote.

Several professors and managers at the national level have stated that it is, in fact, a necessity (Llanos Encalada & Criollo Quími, 2022). Considering this requirement, the EFL subject has its own curriculum with skills, indicators and evaluation criteria updated since 2016. The public education system has its own digital resources such as modules and free access audios. Learning English as a foreign language is considered a necessary activity both for students in institutions located in urban, public and private areas, as well as for the intercultural bilingual system in rural areas (Paronyan & Cuenca, 2018), the latter being the key system for the current study.

Based on this educational level, there has been an increase in gamification strategies used through technology, such as cell phones, mobile applications, internet, computer programs, etc., but little is said about the challenges they pose in rural areas. The communicative strategies for teaching and learning English are characterized by being cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective. According to (Perlaza, 2022), the language

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learning process should be carried out progressively and with content appropriate to the learner's level using new methodologies based on the communicative approach that focus on adapting expressions to everyday situations.

However, there has been no lack of complementary materials based on games or playful activities, as mentioned by Cuñez, (2020), who states that teachers must be creative and transformative people, with the vision to adapt to adversities, but at the same time, turn inconveniences into a playful and profitable pedagogical strategy. Knowing that students tend to become unmotivated with a subject that they do not practice as much as they would like to and, consequently, they get low grades or even lose the year due to their demotivation, the specific objective of this study is to identify those gamification strategies that help teachers to better interact with students.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study was the action research; the approach was qualitative and due to its quantitative nature, a pre-test provided by (Cambridge, 2021) for level A1 movers, was also conducted at the beginning of the study, which substantiated a baseline of the students' skill level according to vocabulary.

During the intervention, a total of 16 lesson plans were implemented. Also, a non-structured and open-ended interview was applied to each grade, with the objective of identifying which part of the test seemed to be more complicated and easier for them. The numbers of students were 24 learners, between the ages of 12 and 18 years old. The groups of students belonged to 8th, 9th and 10th years of general basic education at the higher level; and the rest belonged to 1st, 2nd and 3rd years of technical high school.

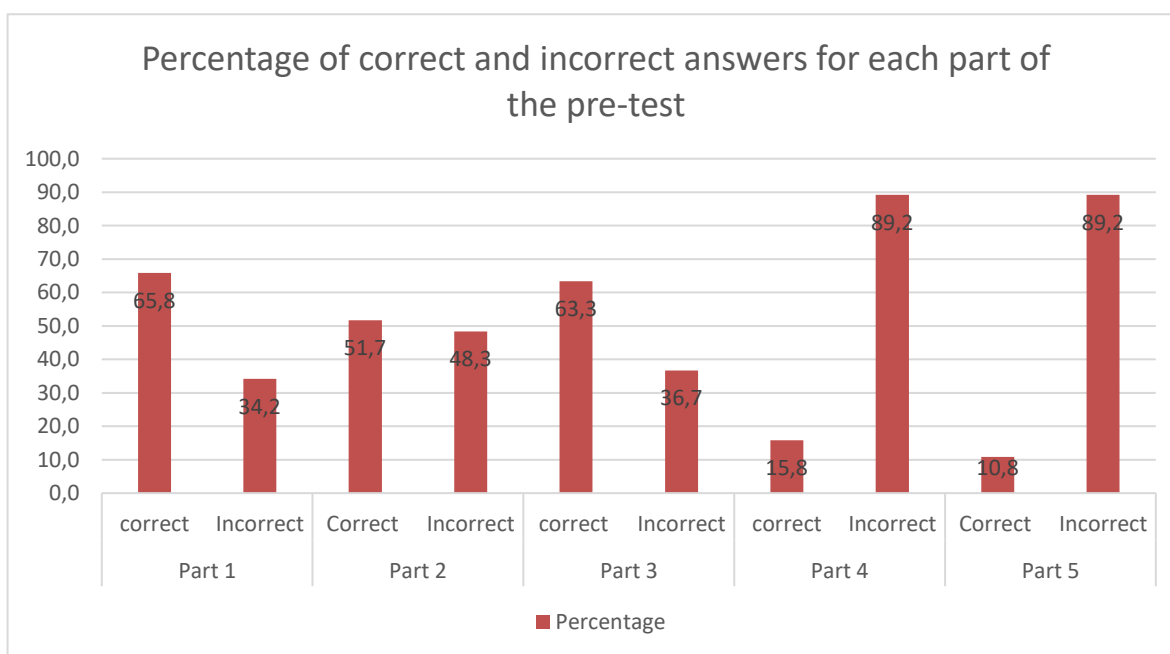
After the English classes, the post-test was applied to finally perform a comparative analysis and verify the results of the pre-test and post-test. It is worth mentioning that the strategies and activities used in the classes were without the use of ICT.

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RESULTS

This section details the results of the tests applied both at the beginning and at the end of the intervention. Both analyses were carried out taking into consideration the 5 parts of the Cambridge test in the reading and writing section. It is worth mentioning that each part of the reading and writing section was strategically designed to assess English proficiency in different contexts, i.e., the student's level of proficiency at word spelling, phrase or sentence level and in paragraph contexts.

Pre-test analysis

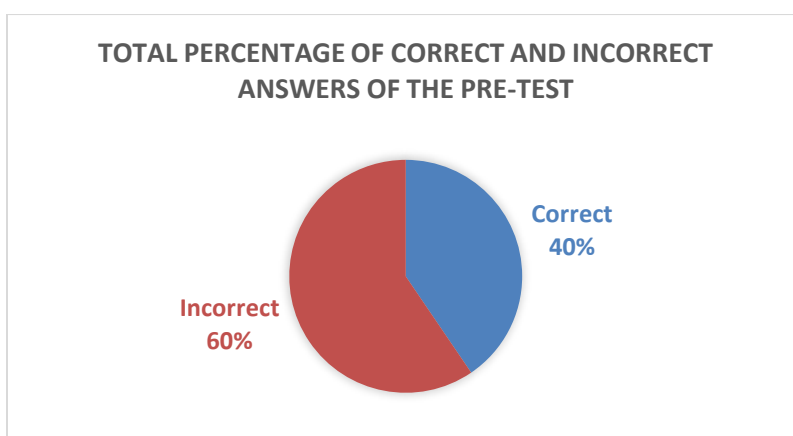


Graph 1.

Source: Pre-test results, 2023.

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Graph 1 shows the percentage of correct and incorrect answers for each part of the exam, being 5 parts in total, each one with a different complexity, it can be compared that parts 4 and 5 are the most difficult to answer, obtaining 89.2% and 89.2% of incorrect percentages respectively.



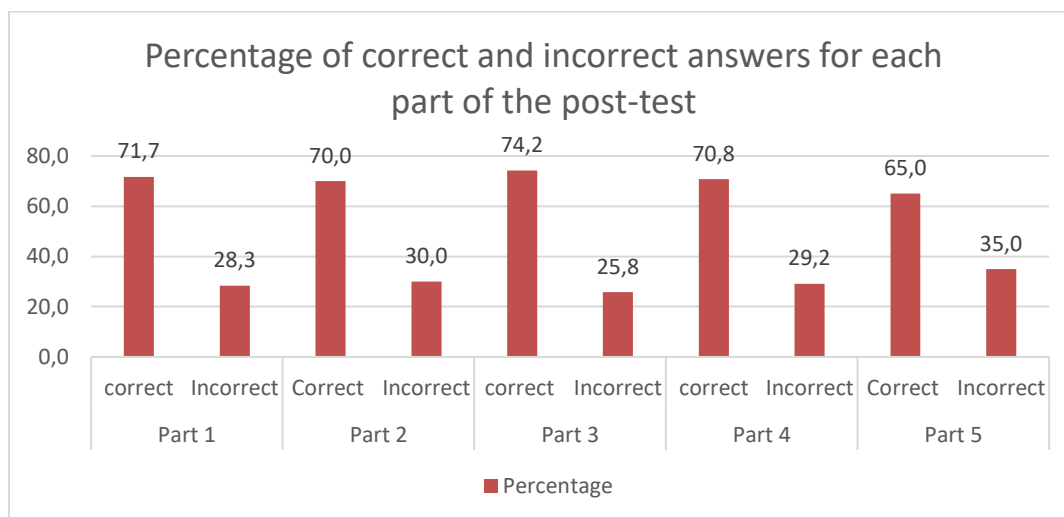
Graph 2.

Source: Pre-test results, 2023.

Graph 2 analyzes the total percentage of correct and incorrect answers of the pre-test solved by the 24 students of the institution. It is interpreted that the level of knowledge of the skills evaluated is low; therefore, their level does not reach Pre A1, according to the scale of analysis of the Cambridge tests and in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL), exam that was applied.

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Post-test analysis

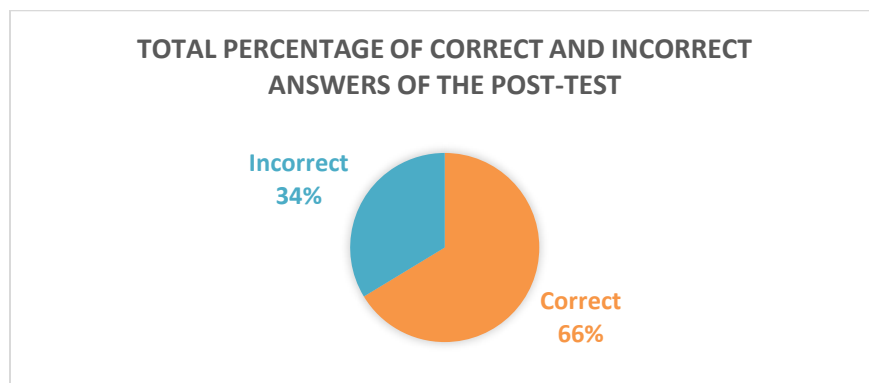


Graph 3.

Source: Post test results, 2023.

Figure 3 shows the change in the percentages of correct answers, making emphasis on the last two parts of the test, which obtained a very low percentage in the pre-test and resulted much better in the post-test. This analysis is necessary because during the study and the dialogues held with the students after the exams, most of them mentioned that parts 4 and 5 were the most complicated to solve.

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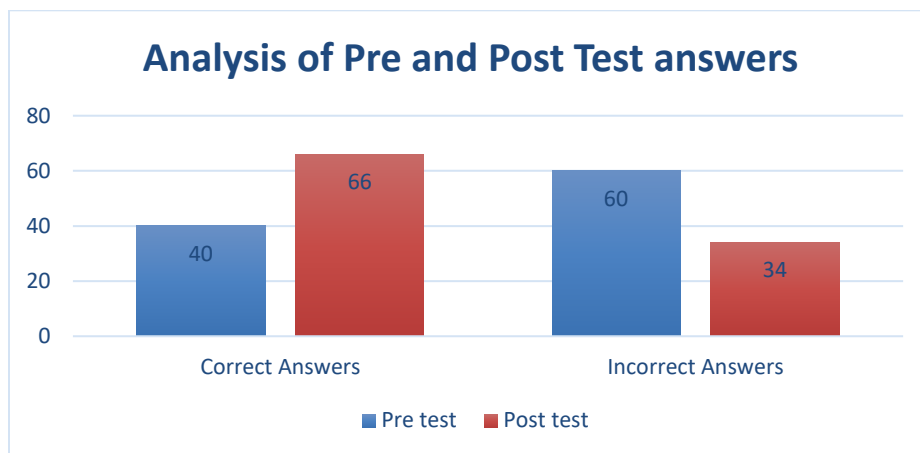


Graph 4.

Source: Post test results, 2023

Here, we may observe that Graph 4 shows the total percentage of correct and incorrect answers. It presents a significant variation in reference to the pre-test in Graph 2. The 24 students obtained 66% of assertive answers after applying the planned teaching strategies, compared to the 34% of wrong answers. They achieved more than 60% of assertiveness in the A1 movers level reading comprehension and writing knowledge assessment test.

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Graph 5.

Source: Pre-test and post-test analysis answers, 2023.

In the analysis corresponding to the percentage of correct and incorrect answers focused on the two tests applied before and after the intervention, graph 5 shows that the percentage of correct answers increased about 26% from the pre-test to the post-test

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the didactic resources, strategies and techniques used in the classroom with gamification considering cooperative, individual and continuous assessment, are alternative and effective tools for teaching English vocabulary in context, that is, when they are applied with a communicative approach. It means teaching words in sentences, phrases and paragraphs that are frequently used in the environment where the student lives and keeps active communication. This communication may be either with the English teacher, among classmates or even with small activities assigned by the teacher.

In this study, the students used the English language for a period of one month, approximately 80 minutes a day, taking classes of 40 minutes and doing homework from

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30 to 40 minutes. All this had to be planned without the use of ICT's; in fact, a high amount of didactic material and printed material was organized previously for the classes in the rural institution.

It was observed that the rural institutions focused their teaching process on grammar by using strict rules, structures and repetitions related to conventional methodologies as opposed to those referring to the communicative approach. In addition, the teaching-learning processes of intercultural bilingual institutions are decontextualized, being so that under the Pedagogical Model of the Intercultural Bilingual System (MOSEIB), they work with self-learning guides, and there is still a big gap to be analyzed in terms of the application of the content and activities proposed for each institution equally.

Finally, we conclude that the EFL teaching and learning process in rural areas is in a continuous evolution, both in training and external variables, such as the use and application of ICTs, printed materials, books, modules, among other resources. That is why in this research we analyzed and identified certain strategies to be used in classrooms where technological resources are still lacking.

The aforementioned strategies, having communicative, metacognitive, individual and cooperative work characteristics, represent a viable alternative to improve the lesson plans and activities within EFL teaching in rural areas. The effectiveness of the strategies has been demonstrated; therefore, teaching should be planned with a communicative approach, while rural institutions may achieve 100% ICT usage.

FINANCING

Non- monetary.

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