Teaching English as a Foreign Language, based on an Open Framework model to Preschool children

Lic. Kelyn Yurandy Fernández Rojas
kelynfernandez@gmail.com
Facultad de Educación
Universidad Hispanoamericana de Costa Rica

ABSTRACT

Teaching English in Costa Rica has been greatly supported by the corresponding government institutions as well as the private sector. The main entity in charge of public education has made sure most people have the privilege of receiving this language instruction. Nevertheless, teaching English in early stages (Preschool) presents a great empty void to the public sector regarding its relevance, teachers training, research and evaluation of processes. Accordingly, this project seeks to lead the English Teaching as a foreign language process based on an Open Framework methodology through the creation of a manual that guides the educational praxis from this methodology perspective. A qualitative approach was used based on an exploratory case study modality at Centro Infantil Laboratorio Ermelinda Mora (2017-2018). Interviews were addressed to teachers, a researcher on the topic, and the English teacher of the center. Although, there is no aprecise curriculum or syllabus for the English teaching process based on this methodology, children in an Open Framework environment seems to have more confidence in acquiring the foreign language. This model perspective in education allows a wide variety of significant experiences for children learning processes.

Keywords: English, acquisition of a language, Preschool Education, Open Framework model, eco-analysis

Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera basada en un modelo de marco abierto para Niños en edad Preescolar

RESUMEN

La enseñanza del inglés en Costa Rica se ha apoyado inmensamente por los entes correspondientes tanto gubernamentales como no gubernamentales, y gran parte de la población tiene acceso al aprendizaje de esta segunda lengua. El principal ente rector de la educación pública ha logrado que la mayoría de poblaciones tanto urbano como rural tenga el privilegio de formarse en este idioma. No obstante, la enseñanza del inglés en edades tempranas (Preescolar) presenta un gran vacío en el sector público en cuanto a su relevancia, capacitación docente, investigación y evaluación de los procesos. Por esta razón, este proyecto busca beneficiar a este sector educativo mediante la elaboración de un manual que guíe la labor docente en la enseñanza del Inglés como segunda lengua desde una metodología de marco abierto. Se centró en un enfoque cualitativo basado en una modalidad de estudio de caso exploratorio en el Centro Infantil Laboratorio Ermelinda Mora (2017-2018). Se dirigieron entrevistas a una investigadora, docentes regulares y la docente de Inglés. A pesar de no existir un curriculum concreto para la enseñanza del Inglés desde esta metodología, los infantes reflejan mayor confianza en la adquisición del idioma permitiendo más experiencias de aprendizaje significativo.

Palabras clave: inglés, adquisición de una lengua, preescolar, modelo Marco Abierto, eco-análisis.

INTRODUCTION

The key to a significant learning process for each person lays on raising conscience about teaching as a valuable and essential element in society. When technological advances, the four communicative skills, theoretical, psychological and philosophical currents are put together in an interactive, dynamic and participative environment, it all helps to the internalization of their learning and lately to the use of the information acquired. (Rueda Wilburn, 2014: 26). This article highlights the importance of keeping up with the well-grounded theories to enhance and polish the teaching labor to achieved the second language acquisition. Furthermore, Open framework model in initial education has a lack of investigation, and the studies found are more than 10 years old. Regarding the Open Framework Models, Weikart (1971) asserts that the Open framework curriculum is organized to reach a cognitive and language progress based on a theory of intellectual development. Learning is obtained through the active participation of the kid in the environments proposed and structured by the teacher. On the other hand, Rio et al (2014) in the research "Natural acquisition of the Second language (L2) through routine movements in children" propose working with method named "Total Physical Response" by Asher (1996) as a natural strategy for the acquisition of the English language. The program is addressed to seizing the Physical Education lessons as the opportunity for English learning. Also, Iram Siraj-Blatchford (2009) tries to better understand those pedagogies that support and apply children learning by means of games and reinforces the idea of the educative potential games have in the learning process in these stages. It makes emphasis on the game as the means of learning that stimulates an important and meaningful context in the life of the infants.

On the other hand, Teaching English as a foreign language in initial education has showed various limitations mainly in the public sector. It is considered that there exists a great void in terms of the development of learning processes, evaluation of such processes, relevance in the academic field, and its projection to a national level by its own governing body. Initially, the statement of the problem in this research rises from the awareness of having limitations for Teaching English as a foreign Language in preschool levels in Costa Rica. This fact is true at least in the public sector, considering the lack of information concerning educative processes, plans for the future, evaluation, administration, and teachers' training that directly influence the learning of children and

of course the teachers' endeavor itself. On the other side, work methodologies have been expanding and adjusting better to the necessities of the children which must be satisfied to the fullest. In Costa Rica there are few public Children's Centers which employ innovative methodologies. Centro Infantil Laboratorio Ermelinda Mora (CILEM) is one of the institutions that applies the Open Framework model in its curriculum, but there is not a precise nor concrete curricular program for English as a foreign language teaching rooted in this method.

There is the "critical period" in which kids in their early ages obtain in a full and better way all the information they get from their environment thanks to their brain plasticity (Marder & Borzone, 2016, pp.153). Learning a foreign language has always brought along a series of benefits not only to an academic but also to a personal level. Due to the lack of concrete investigations, this research aims to create a tool of great importance that contributes to enhance the Teaching English as a foreign language in preschool and early ages. This theses project innovates and dwells on a methodology that embraces the changes that continue to be observed in preschool education. Also, the significance of the project lays on its social relevance, contributing to the teaching of English as a foreign language based on an Open framework model for the CILEM, and consequently, to the public system of education. Likewise, the design of a manual for Teaching English as a foreign language from the perspective of the Open Framework methodology represents a significant methodological implication on the field. In addition, the results of this investigation are a great contribution for Teaching English in this institution and the public educational system as it gives room for future research, representing a guide for a concrete curricular proposal for Teaching English in this context. Thorough the present research it has not been possible to find anything specifically related to the creation of manual or Open Framework proposals for English teaching in preschool, much less curricular designs based on this framework and specialized on second language teaching in preschool. Therefore, the milestone of this process is designing a Manual for the teaching of English as a foreign language from an Open framework model perspective for preschool children.

The project is divided in four main sections, the first relates to the introduction and the core of the investigation. The second section embodies the different theoretical expositions in regards the acquisition of a second language, the learning process in early

ages, the composition of the Open framework model, and the eco-analysis in education. In the third section, it is shown the results or data interpretation from the methodology applied, and finally the conclusions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The elaboration of a curricular proposal for the teaching English as a foreign language at early ages from the perspective of an Open Framework model is not common subject and much less studied or searched in depth, nationally or internationally. As a result, it is necessary to analyze the main theoretical fundaments that have great significance to the objective of this research. Moreover, education is the cornerstone of any human being development. Education consists on the preparation and instruction to wisely and intelligently inquire and search, increase the knowledge, give sagacity to thoughts, learn from experience, learn from others (León, 2007). Through education people acquire language, costumes, knowledge and current moral norms of their present time. Likewise, teaching must lead students into critical thinking and develop their own skills. According to Nicoletti (2006), the teaching processes involve the transmission of knowledge as well as the interest seen in the learner. Furthermore, Robbins, as quoted by Ferrer (2010), asserts that learning is any change in behavior, relatively permanent, introduced as the consequence of an experience. As a result, learning is perceived as the acquisition of new knowledge where new behavior is observed.

Likewise, this research considers the fundamentals of the curriculum. Jimenez (2008) considers curriculum as a social process whereby elements such as the individual, society, context, political decisions and interests, interact with one another and will always affect curricular creation. Additionally, aiming to address curriculum and relate this to preschool education, it is found among literature that Weikart (1971) mentions different models of attention embedded in the learning process in preschool based on the interaction teacher-student. These models are based on the teacher and child´s role within the class. These models are based on teacher initiates, teacher responds, child initiates and child responds. Also, Weikart (1971) mentions four different educational practice models in preschool, these are the Programmed model, the Open Framework model, the child-centered model and the custodial model, where the initiates and responds roles of people within the educational process are involved.

On the other hand, communication is an essential part of society, and it is a tool that leads to comprehension. Communication transmits knowledge and creates bonds among individuals. Beltran & Salgado (2010) refer to language development as the communicative process that involves language and tongue as the cognitive capacity of men to communicate their ideas through a system of gestures, a system of verbal and written communication of a specific community, respectively. Both mother tongue and language (any other language) work simultaneously during human development. According to Chomsky as quoted by Beltran & Salgado (2010, p.16), the process of acquisition of language is as natural as the fact of learning how to walk. Besides, Cameron (2001) quoted by Alvarez (2015) asserts that the cerebral plasticity of the child and his/her susceptibility towards new learning favor the importance of initiating learning of a second language at these ages given that the mental and cognitive effort is less and therefore natural.

In regards the Open Framework model, "The open framework approach provides the Teacher with a strong pedagogic structure (or framework) that supports the child in their explorations and interactions with, and reflections upon, the learning environment." (Siraj, 2008, p.12). The action of the teacher lays on the his/her contribution to the planning and organization of the educational process. The pace and interests of every student are essential (Chavarría & Pérez, 1995, p. 18). Each teaching process must be outlined by a previous analysis of the critical learning process pupils have been part of.The implementation of the model in second language learning environment as that one of English, would allow the natural acquisition of this tongue given that it is a model that strives for learners' independence and motivation. It helps students acquire knowledge through their interests, turning their experience into meaningful learning. Also, the model highlights that consciousness and understanding go together and beyond the simple fact of knowing, with the purpose of social transformation (Chavarría, 2006, p.6). Therefore, this model is rooted to a contextual holistic view that is part of the different world views. For this reason, the eco-analysis is the methodology that allows the implementation of the Open Framework model in classroom. According to Chavarría (2006), the eco-analysis approach involves decoding the quotidian, a principle that is based on Paulo Freire´s education contributions. It consists on the analysis and reconsideration of daily actions and what these actions intrinsically teach to people through the learning development.

The eco-analysis is blended to the scaffolding concept and zones of proximal development from Vygotsky theories among other principles such as Montessori ideals and the collaborative learning in daily cultures from Rogoff and Lave (Chavarría & Orozco,2006). The eco-analysis methodology proposed the concept of situation-environment as a scaffold method among the way children interact with their space and how they learn through it. A situation-environment is any physical and spatial space where an individual invests his or her time. This methodology attempts to give the active role of the learning process to the children involve. However, teachers have a relevant role in the develop of this approach in regards analysis, design, arrange, and think about the cognitive challenges among the materials that students need to develop and accomplish learning

METHODOLOGY

This research project has a theoretical purpose. It seeks to gather the required information to produce a better understanding about the main subject. It is considered to be a cross-sectional study, given that research is developed in a specific moment in a deep and precise way. Besides, regarding the nature of the investigation, this is predominantly considered qualitative based on observations and interactions of the education process at the Centro Infantil Laboratorio Ermelinda Mora (CILEM), and interviews make to specific people from this context. Likewise, the data analysis from content and text interpretations from sources are fundamental for the development of the investigation. Furthermore, this research has an exploratory character given the little information found on the subject to be addressed, that is why it seeks to ground future research in the field of language teaching in preschool education in Costa Rica. The participants and sources of information were divided into two specific sections. The first hand subjects were the third and fourth level preschool students at CILEM as well as the teachers. Among the first-hand sources of information are research documents such as theses of distinct levels on the field of study. Also, the second hand subjects are Universidad de Costa Rica Professor, Mrs. María Celina Chavarría González who is a well know researcher thanks to her research done at CILEM in previous years, and other scientific articles from different renowned magazines, experts' articles, and diverse books retrieved from trust worthy websites. The instruments for the data collection were, first interviews, these interviews attempt to discuss about questions which request comments, opinions,

explanations, and analysis of the different topics developed in this research. The interviews were addressed to Universidad de Costa Rica Professor, Mrs. María Celina Chavarría González, the teacher from one of the levels (third level), and the English teacher of the institution. Finally, observation techniques are applied to collect more data information in regards the main objectives of the investigation, observation guidelines, pictures of the situations environments, and a journal were important tools to seek the necessary information.

DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Based on the interviews made and the contributions of each interviewer, they agree with the idea of the Open Framework model in education as a methodology that validate children's needs, their interests, and the way the learn. Also, it infers that interviewers have a general point of view about this model, and how it enhances learning opportunities through its methodology. On the other side, all the interviewers including the researcher María Celina Chavarría gave their contributions in regards the relevance that represent the Open Framework model in the education process. The considerations about this method are oriented to the importance of the integral learning process that occurs within the classes. Children learn and grow as a complete and integral human being, this model take into consideration every child´s peculiarity, need, and interests. Also, the analysis and reevaluation of daily actions, task, activities, and what these actions intrinsically teach based on the eco analysis are fundamental. Furthermore, the observations and interviews shown the importance of flexibility in the English classes. When the teacher has the chance to participate in different routines in the school day, teacher´s intervention is more enriching for the acquisition of the second language. There are more natural and integral opportunities of interaction to enhance and promote the English learning process. Related to the acquisition of the language, children in an Open Framework environment seems to have more confidence when producing or implementing the vocabulary learned with the teacher. Another important aspect to consider, is related to the teacher´s training process to apply in an effective way this Open Framework model in their praxis. The answers of both teachers pointed out that the knowledge they have of the Open Framework model is been built through the experience of working on the center, the observation of their colleagues, observation in other centers with a similar methodology, and focus groups or meeting with the personal of the institution to share experiences in the classrooms. There

is a need to create a manual that guides and introduces the teaching of English as a foreign language process in early ages based on this model of education.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research was to observe the implementation of the Open Framework methodology in the classroom, and how this methodology contributes the acquisition and learning process of English to propose a Manual for the teaching of English as a foreign language from this perspective. This model considers children from a holistic and integral way, as subjects and responsible of their own learning process with the proper guide and intervention of teacher among the process, it brings a new perspective of teaching and learning of a second language in the Costa Rican educational system. The Open Framework model considers children´s interest, pace of learning, and needs on an integral way, so learning can be joyful and not an obligation. Initially, the approach on this methodology revolves around an environment of empathy and care, in which educators enhances conflict resolution strategies among students and promote a peaceful environment in the class. Also, the role of the teachers as active investigators of the educational process allows students to be more analytical and critical in their educational process within every activity and material provided. On the other hand, in regards of the acquisition of English as a foreign language it was observed that children tend to be less inhibited in the production of isolated words or short phrases. In this environment, they are empowered and confident so most of them are encouraged to practice and implement the target language not only with their English teacher but also in the different activities they develop during the journey. Also, planning is a necessary and flexible process within the Teaching of English in preschool education based on an Open Framework methodology. English educators consider the lesson plan of the teacher in charge of each group, for the purpose of agreement between learning processes, interest and needs of each group. In the present research, the valuable information obtained from the different sources, the observation process in the CILEM context, the bibliography studied, and the interviews made enriched the results for the thesis project. These elements enlighten the Manual for the teaching of English based on the Open Framework model perspective. In addition, it is convenient to consider the development of focus groups or workshops that enhances the collective construction and comprehension of the Open Framework model in preschool English teaching and the methodology itself. The final purpose of the

research is to guide educators through the manual to implement the methodology on the classroom; however, there is the opportunity for future researchers to create a well stablish English teaching curriculum based on this method.

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