

The influence of audiovisual materials as a teaching technique in seventh-grade students' English learning process

La influencia de los materiales audiovisuales como técnica de enseñanza en el proceso de aprendizaje del inglés de estudiantes de séptimo grado

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at analyzing the influence of audiovisual materials in the English learning process among seventh-grade students from a Colombian high school. To this end, a case study was conducted; this approach emphasized an exploration of the interactions, attitudes and behaviors of the students and the teacher inside the classroom. Data was collected through five non-participant observations, seven semi-structured interviews and sixteen open-ended questionnaires. The information comprised the opinions and the attitudes from the teacher and the students when audiovisual materials were used while learning English. The analysis of the data signaled a positive influence of audiovisual materials among the students, since it increased their vocabulary, pronunciation and motivation. Furthermore, it allowed the English teacher to explore innovative teaching techniques.

Keywords: audiovisual materials, English learning process, teaching techniques.

RESUMEN

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar la influencia de los materiales audiovisuales en el proceso de aprendizaje del inglés en estudiantes de séptimo grado de una escuela secundaria colombiana. Para ello, se realizó un estudio de caso; este enfoque enfatizó una exploración de las interacciones, actitudes y comportamientos de los estudiantes y el maestro dentro del aula. Los datos se recopilaron a través de cinco observaciones no participantes, siete entrevistas semiestructuradas y dieciséis cuestionarios abiertos. La información comprendió las opiniones y actitudes del profesor y de los alumnos cuando se utilizaron materiales audiovisuales durante el aprendizaje del inglés. El análisis de los datos señaló una influencia positiva de los materiales audiovisuales entre los estudiantes, ya que aumentó su vocabulario, pronunciación y motivación. Además, permitió al profesor de inglés explorar técnicas de enseñanza innovadoras.

Palabras clave: materiales audiovisuales, proceso de aprendizaje de inglés, técnicas de enseñanza.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has proposed countless technological advancements. Each one of these "victories" has found a specific purpose in different fields. One of the areas that has profited the most from technological advancements is education. This phenomenon has fostered the diversification of pedagogical approaches, which allow teachers to implement cutting-edge techniques to motivate students.

Similarly, another consequence of the technological era and the globalization is the necessity of communicating in a foreign language. According to different studies, the methods that are being applied when teaching a foreign language have increased exponentially thanks to the innovations that have been born in the incipient century. A study conducted by an Ecuadorian university revealed that the use of YouTube as didactic resource in a high school English course, contributed to the improvement of the proficiency of oral communication (Montesinos, 2014).

Hence, video material can be used as authentic material input and as a motivational tool. In general, students find the experience of using video material to be interesting, relevant, beneficial and somewhat motivating in class (Bajrami and Ismaili, 2016). Research indicates that videos are among the most suitable materials when teaching a foreign language since they help students to develop their oral skills while "getting in touch" with a different culture, and they allow teachers to apply innovative techniques (Cakir 2006). Furthermore, Meskill (1996), states "Multimedia-based practice in listening skills development can be viewed as rehearsal for face-to-face interaction with multi modal processing contributing to the larger L2 acquisition process" (p. 197).

However, some research has discovered that teachers do not use videos as much as they should. On this subject, it is imperative to teach educators how to use video materials, and to set objectives to show students and teachers the advantages of using technological tools in the classroom (Medina Palencia, 2014).

In this regard, many Latin-American countries, including Colombia, understand that "students who speak more than one language will be the ones who are going to have the opportunity to study abroad. It offers a greater exposure to diverse cultures and builds bridges between them" (Kalkan, 2014, p. 2). In other words, Kalkan asserts that there are several advantages inherent in speaking more than one language. That is why, the Colombian Ministry of Education has

implemented the National Bilingual Program, that is intended to improve the English skills of Colombians. This program is expected to transform Colombia in the country with the best English level in South America in 2019. The National English Program has been identified as COLOMBIA Very Well! (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016).

However, "in Colombia only 1% of the students of the schools of the official sector achieve a Pre-Intermediate B1 level at the end of their secondary studies" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016). According to Rodríguez, (2014) "discouraging results regarding English learning stems from the lack of activities in the classroom, the monotonous repetition of topics, the constant use of the mother tongue, and the excessive use of the dictionary" (p. 108). That being the case, the aim of this study was to examine the influence that audiovisual materials (films, songs, TV series, among others) have on the foreign language learning process among seventh-grade students. The study examined seventh-grade students' perceptions and preferences towards the use of audiovisual materials in a Colombian bilingual high school.

METHODS

According to Creswell (2013), "a case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system" (p. 465). In other words, this method allows the researcher to fully understand the phenomenon under study. Thus, since the purpose of this investigation was to examine the influence of audiovisual materials on the foreign language learning process of seventh grade students, a case study was deemed the most accurate approach.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was carried out to select the participants. According to Patton (2005) in this type of sampling "participants are selected or sought after based on pre-selected criteria based on the research question". The participants of this study were six seventh-grade students from a private Colombian bilingual high school and their English teacher; the students were aged between 11 and 13 years old. These students speak Spanish as their first language and came from urban backgrounds.

Instruments

For this investigation, instruments such as *observations*, *field notes*, *unstructured interviews*, and *questionnaires* were of paramount importance:

Observations were carried out to identify the nature of the interaction between the students and the teacher; field notes were used to write down significant information concerning the classroom dynamics. Unstructured interviews were conducted to identify students' attitude towards the use of audiovisual materials in the classroom; and questionnaires were administered to collect general information about the preferences of the students regarding audiovisual materials.

Since no useful instruments were found while reviewing existing research, the researchers decided to develop their own instruments. In that case, Creswell (2012) states that creating an instrument involves several steps such as: identifying the purpose of the instrument, reviewing the literature, writing the questions and testing them with similar individuals to the real sample (p.157).

Hence, aside from the observation checklist, which was adapted from an anonymous document online, all the instruments were specifically designed for this study. These are: in the first place, an *unstructured interview*, which consists of fourteen open questions, focused on the opinion of the participants in relation to learning a foreign language. In the second place, a *questionnaire*, which consists of nine questions designed to examine general opinions of the students. Finally, a *checklist* to analyze the interaction between the teacher and the students, the use of audiovisual materials inside the classroom, and the students' response towards the use of these tools.

Procedure

For this research, five nonparticipant observations were carried out; in this type of data collection technique "no participation of the observer in the activities of the group takes place and there is no relationship between the researcher and the group" (Singh, 2010, p. 2).

To carry out these observations, the investigators adapted a checklist to analyze *the interaction between the teacher and the students, the use of audiovisual materials inside the classroom, and the students' response towards the use of these tools*. The scale that was chosen to assess these three items ranges from *could improve* to *excellent*.

The researcher carried out the observations twice a week, on Tuesday and on Friday; every observation lasted one hour. The observations were conducted in March, April and May in 2018. The interviews were conducted in four sessions; in the first three sessions, six students were interviewed, and in the final session, the researchers interviewed the English teacher

of the high school. The interviews were all carried out within the facilities of the institution since most of the participants were underage students. All the respondents were briefed on the confidentiality of the information.

Finally, regarding the questionnaires, the researchers administered the questionnaire to sixteen students; four of them were the key informants. The investigators informed the students that the information collected through the questionnaire would only be used for academic purposes.

Data analysis

The data that was analyzed proceeded from five non-participant observations, seven semi-structured interviews and sixteen questionnaires. To analyze the information, the researchers first decided on a type of analysis, namely, interpretive analysis. According to Hatch (2002) "the interpretive analysis is based on generating explanations for what is going on within the data; it is about making inferences, developing insights and drawing conclusions" (p. 179)..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first finding corresponds to the *advantages* reported by the students and the teacher concerning the use of audiovisual materials when learning English. In this case, the teacher and the students stated that they conceived audiovisual materials as valuable tools since they entailed pedagogical, linguistic and psychological advantages. The *pedagogical advantages* refer to the positive influence of these materials in the teaching and learning process. It was stated that since not everybody learns in the same way, audiovisual materials represent an opportunity to teach a broader population, their characteristics are useful for every type of learner regardless of his/her level and aptitudes. Similarly, it was discovered that audiovisual materials are beneficial since they constitute an advantage when treating with low-grade students; these materials are versatile and function by developing different types of intelligence and by motivating the learning process among the students. Finally, it was asserted that audiovisual materials make learning more entertaining, probably unlike traditional and old-fashioned methods.

The *linguistic advantages* refer to the influence of audiovisual materials in the development of the English communicative skills. In this case, it was mentioned that all the activities that were proposed were meant to develop all the skills, some were meant to develop speaking and some others were meant to improve writing. As it was noticed, during the observations, some activities encouraged students to repeat some words found in videos or in songs, and other activities required them to listen and write down on a worksheet. Similarly, it was stated that these materials improved pronunciation. Thus, another aspect is highlighted, a factor related to comprehension and production.

Finally, about the *psychological advantages* of these materials, the students mentioned their feelings inside the classroom when these materials were used. In this case, since these materials represent an innovative tool, compared to traditional methods, students tend to be more interested and respond more efficiently to the activities.

The second finding corresponds to the disadvantages that were identified when audiovisual materials were used while learning a foreign language. When these tools were applied to teach English, the negative aspect which was emphasized the most, was indiscipline. This phenomenon was not only observed by the researchers, but it was also expressed by the participants. Hence, when classroom activities involved audiovisual materials, some of the students became restless since it was more difficult for the teacher to maintain the classroom discipline; she found it complicated to pay attention to every student when carrying out diverse activities. Thus, since audiovisual materials comprised activities, which required a well-defined procedure, it became arduous to pay attention to both, the students and the development of the classroom activities.

The third finding corresponds to *the preferences of the students* concerning the use of audiovisual materials when learning English, more specifically, the tools which students enjoyed the most, and the methods which students found less didactic. Thus, it was discovered that the material which students deemed more effective when learning a foreign language was songs; this tool allowed them to acquire a new language while being entertained by the rhythm and the melody. Hence, it could be observed that music had a positive effect on the students' learning process since it entailed "catchy" rhythms, which improved learning in an emotional and subjective level. Thus, the songs proposed by the English teacher when learning diverse topics allowed students to ignore the "traditional academic environment", an aspect which increased students' motivation.

Regarding the activities which students did not enjoy, it was discovered that they contrasted the innovative nature of audiovisual materials with the ineffectiveness of traditional methods like "just writing". Therefore, the students were not motivated when they learned English through traditional methods, which were based on a grammar-translation approach. Thus, when students noticed that the class was going to be based on a traditional approach, they exhibited some discontent or lack of participation in the activities.

The findings in this study provide information about the influence of audiovisual materials in the English learning process among seventh-grade students. Accordingly, it is focused on the advantages, the disadvantages and the preferences of the students regarding the use of these tools when learning a foreign language. In addition, it highlights certain forms in which audiovisual materials might be used in similar contexts to improve English learning. In this section, the findings were compared and contrasted in the light of previous investigations related to the use of audiovisual materials when learning English to analyze the three main aspects that guided this research, namely, the advantages of audiovisual materials, the disadvantages of these tools and the preferences of the students.

The advantages of audiovisual materials

This study suggests that audiovisual materials entail several linguistic, pedagogical and psychological advantages when used to teach English. These benefits include, the application of techniques to reach a wider population, the improvement of vocabulary and pronunciation and increased motivation. These findings resemble those described by Haghverdi (2015) since his study showed that the implementation of song and movie used in the study had a significant effect on student's language achievement in their listening, reading, vocabulary and grammar.

Since English learning in Colombian high schools have not met the expectations (probably due to monotonous teaching techniques), the findings of this investigation propose an alternative for teachers who want to apply innovative strategies to improve their students' English skills; similarly, these findings evidence how students can be motivated to learn English topics. In addition, these findings show English learners that an effective foreign language learning can be achieved through approaches different from traditional methods.

The disadvantages of these tools

An unexpected finding from this study was the disadvantages of using audiovisual materials when learning English, for it was discovered that these tools promoted indiscipline among the students. Since activities that involve audiovisual materials tend to be more demanding and complex, it is difficult for the teacher to manage the classroom discipline while carrying out the stages of particular activities. Previous research regarding the use of these tools did not involve this aspect, since most of prior investigations were conducted with older participants; adults tend to be more compliant when it comes to following orders inside a classroom.

These findings represent an advice for teachers who want to include audiovisual materials in their English lessons, since it might be beneficial for them to carefully prepare the stages of the activities, considering the pedagogical requirements and the students' response.

The preferences of the students

These findings revealed that students enjoyed audios better than videos since they expressed a positive opinion towards the use of songs to teach English. In this case, students mentioned that the melody and rhythm of several songs entailed a more pleasurable educational experience. These findings confirm those described by Kuśnierek (2016), who stated that "the use of music and songs can stimulate very positive associations to the study of a language, which otherwise may only be seen as a laborious task, entailing exams, frustration, and corrections". Teachers might find songs' popularity useful to generate a more comfortable environment when teaching English. In addition, they can ask for their students' favorite music genres and artists to increase their motivation and interest when learning a foreign language

CONCLUSIONS

English learning in Latin America has not met the expectations due to monotonous teaching techniques; the constant use of the grammar-translation method constitutes an obstacle, which hinders motivation and an effective learning among high school students. Considering how essential it is to speak English in the globalized world, techniques that expedite efficient foreign language learning should be highlighted in order to involve students in the advancements of the 21st century. This study was focused on one of these techniques, namely, audiovisual materials; furthermore, since research concerning the use of these tools was scarce in Colombian contexts, the findings of this investigation represent a valuable asset for teachers who intend to apply these materials to promote English learning in high school students. Accordingly, this research encountered that audiovisual materials not only increase students' motivation inside the classroom, but they also enhance vocabulary and pronunciation; thus, English teachers who might feel hesitant about the effectivity of these materials, may find, in this investigation, evidence of the advantages of these tools on a pedagogical, psychological and linguistic level. Similarly, this investigation might serve as an advice for teachers who want to apply these tools with high school students, since indiscipline may be a phenomenon present inside the classroom. Activities that involve audiovisual materials tend to be challenging since they encompass different stages that develop diverse skills. Thus, it is imperative for teachers to propose

well-organized activities for students not to misbehave or to ignore the purpose of the activities. As a final suggestion for teachers who might include audiovisual materials in their lessons, this study evidenced the effectivity of music and/or music videos since they arouse the students' interest in learning a foreign language by reducing the monotony of the academic environment.

However, this study does not discuss how teachers should choose these materials when teaching English; hence, results may vary depending on the context, the contents and the activities to carry out, this aspect that will be explored in further research

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