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Methodological strategies and techniques implemented by teachers in the teaching-learning process of English in Spanish-speaking students

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Abstract

This article, a research product, analyzes and reflects on the impact of the methodological strategies and techniques implemented by elementary school teachers in an official educational institution in Barranquilla (Colombia), regarding the teaching-learning process of the English language in Spanish-speaking students. The theoretical review of the literature is based on the contemporary methods of active pedagogy, the study is descriptive, from a rationalist epistemological approach and a complementary paradigm. Data collection was based on non-participant observation directed to teachers and a survey applied to students. The results show that in the development of the pedagogical processes, teachers apply conventional methods, so it is concluded that teacher qualification is necessary to improve the educational processes of English language teaching in elementary school students with innovative didactic mediations that favour the learning environment and the active participation of students, the use of authentic didactic materials, and the articulation of technological resources that become a tool that enhances the teaching and learning process at all levels for the development of communicative competencies in the English language.

Keywords: Mediation, teaching strategy, qualification, foreign language.

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1. Introduction.

In Colombia, the efforts of government entities in the educational field to promote policies that impact the mastery and management of a second language by citizens, have focused on strengthening the processes of teaching and learning English in educational institutions, whether public or private and at all established levels of education. Starting in 2015, the plan to strengthen the processes of teaching and learning English in educational entities was intensified, consequently the Ministry of National Education (MNE,) implemented the strategy called: "Colombia Bilingüe in 2025", which seeks greater investment in the national bilingualism program, improve the level of English of teachers who teach this language in the official sector, which in turn allowed new actions such as the accompaniment of foreign natives in official entities, greater teacher training, the design of a new suggested curriculum, mobilization and immersion programs abroad for elementary and middle school students and teachers in order to level to some extent the students' level of communication in English, in accordance with the English language proficiency standards established by the Common European Framework. [6] [7] [8]

In this order of ideas, it is necessary to reflect on the importance of implementing in the classroom didactic mediation strategies by the teacher in the teaching-learning process of English in elementary school. Therefore, based on these considerations, it is necessary to answer the following question: What strategies and methodological techniques implemented by teachers at the elementary school level for teaching English have generated a significant impact on the students of the educational institution targeted for the study?.

1.1 Strategies for teaching English.

Strategies are the intelligent direction of a process and from a broad and global perspective, they are the actions aimed at solving the problems detected in a given segment of human activity. Problems are understood as contradictions or discrepancies between the current state and the desired state, between what is and what should be, according to certain expectations arising from a given social and educational project. Their design implies the dialectic articulation between the objectives (goals pursued) and the methodology (ways to achieve them) [11]. In this sense, the methodological strategies for teaching English establish challenges for the country's guidelines and curricula, in which, according to the report of the national plan "Colombia Bilingüe", significant progress has been made in competitiveness indexes, in attracting foreign tourism and in the supply of goods and services. However, in order to respond to the demand of these sectors, the country faces an undeniable reality: the vast majority of Colombians do not know how to communicate in English. The above has a very simple explanation, and it is that the English teaching has never been a real priority in our official educational system. [8]

1.2 Skills needed for the development of English communication skills.

Communicative skills are defined as the dynamic relationship of knowledge, attitudes, feelings, interests and values that favour the successful realization of the communicative process, based on the characteristics and regularities of the different subjects and contexts [10]. To carry out this activity in the English language, four mega-skills are necessary: listening, speaking, writing and reading [2]. In this regard, listening is associated with oral comprehension and in this process, it is considered the active and complex integration of the different components of perception and linguistic knowledge, whose cognitive nature, involves perception based on the internalized knowledge of the rules of language [1] [13]. With which, the message is decoded, sound patterns are identified and the messages are interpreted and the meanings are built. Speaking, is related to oral expression and in this process, the productive skill of speaking and the receptive skill of listening comprehension are considered [3] [13]. The process of reading comprehension has to do with the relationship of the psychophysiological mechanisms through which the reader interacts with the written text and actively decodes its content until he understands it and makes critical evaluations based on his own previous knowledge [5] [13] and written expression is the complex process that integrates the development of a system of signs through the correct use of grammar, spelling, coherence, unity and creativity to express ideas and feelings in writing [5] [13].

2. Methodology

2.1 Study design

The study was carried out under a rationalist epistemological approach, which is conceived as a product of scientific knowledge, the design of abstract systems endowed with a high degree of universality that imitate the generation and behavior processes of a certain reality. According to this, knowledge is more an act of invention than of discovery, in which reasoning prevails over the senses and from a complementary paradigm, because it has characteristics of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. [12]

2.1 Techniques and instruments

The techniques and instruments that were used within this investigative paper, are justified according to the type of research and the proposed objectives. Therefore, for data collection, non-participant observation was used as a technique, which was carried out with teachers to identify the strategies they use in the praxis and the survey applied to students, allow establishing the impact of the methodological strategies on learning and as an instrument the checklist which was applied to three educational institutions as a pilot test and after that it was reviewed by an expert who carried out an analysis and validated the instrument. On the other hand, the surveys are carried out on groups of people with similar characteristics from whom information is desired. [4]

3. Results

3.1 Non-participant observation

Within the framework of the research study, the non-participant observation process is directed towards the teachers in charge of teaching English in elementary school. From the systematization of the aspects observed, relevant results are derived for the research. On some occasions, the teachers, upon entering the classroom, choose to modify the class schedule to avoid teaching English, or express a lack of competence in that language. Similarly, a group of teachers stated that in this institution English classes are not offered in the first grades of elementary school, focusing on teaching the foreign language only from fourth grade onwards. On the other hand, another group of teachers focuses their attention mainly on the areas of Spanish language and mathematics. It should also be noted that some teachers were always willing to be observed, despite the fact that English was not their specialty, and they opened the doors of their classrooms to this process of inquiry.

3.2 The survey carried out on the students yielded the following aspects as results.

Regarding the pleasure they have or not to learn the English language, 87% of the students indicated that they feel interest in the English language, which makes it evident that a high percentage of students find it attractive to learn a foreign language. According to the observations made to primary school teachers, it can be established that they rarely take advantage of the high interest that exists among primary school students for learning the English language, which would be positive if it were worked on as it would reinforce the intrinsic interest of the kids.
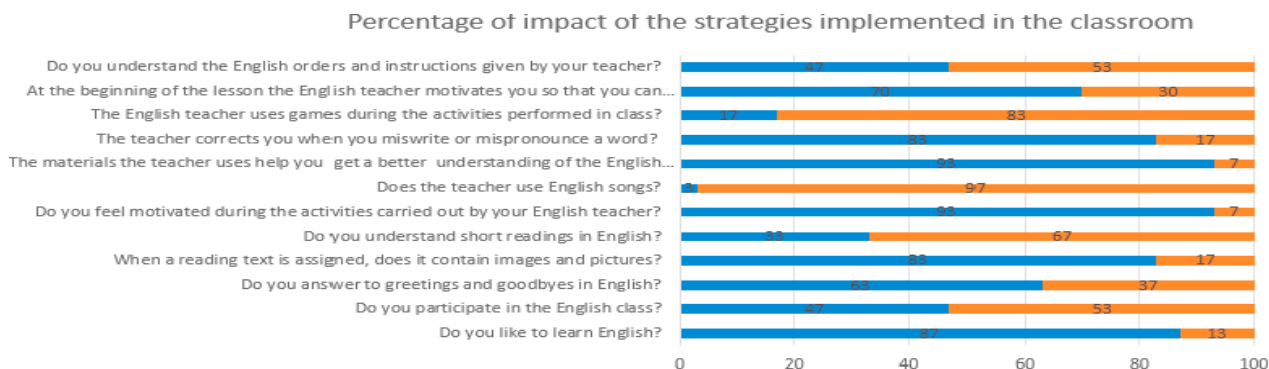

Fig. 1. Result of the survey carried out on the students to determine the impact of the strategies in the classroom. [9]

In this order of ideas, it can be affirmed that it would be a great opportunity to take advantage, from now and on, of the taste that students have for English in order to develop their communication skills to the maximum since the acquisition and mastery of the foreign language is easier for them due to their age and the high interest they have in learning it.

Question 2 referred to participation during English classes, the graph shows that 47% of the students indicated that in English classes they have an active participation, while 53% indicated that in English study sessions they do not usually participate. From the above, the low number of students who participate in class activities carried out by teachers is perceived.

The third question, asked to the students, was related to the use of greetings and farewells in English. The graph shows that 63% of the students surveyed indicated that they respond to greetings and farewells in English. On the other hand, 37% indicated that they do not respond to greetings and farewells in the foreign language. According to the above, it is observed that the percentage of students who respond to greetings and farewells in English is low. On the other hand, according to the observations made, it can be established that only one (1) of five (5) teachers observed started the study session by greeting in this language. It should be noted that it is important that the teachers, at the time of their initial routine of the study session, make their intervention with greetings and farewells in this language, which will allow the students to gradually insert themselves in English, managing to develop their communicative skills, which will lead to better results in the acquisition of the second language. The results of question 4 are related to the reading of documents in English accompanied by images. According to those surveyed, 83% indicated that the readings that their teachers provide them usually have images or drawings. While 17% of the students responded that the readings that their teachers provide them do not usually have images or drawings incorporated. In this sense, according to the results obtained from the students, it can be said that their perceptions regarding this questioning are positive.

Question 4 allows to inquire about the comprehension of the content of short readings in English, 33% of the students indicated that they understand short readings in English, the remaining group, which corresponds to 67% of the students, indicated that they do not understand readings in English provided by their teachers, which indicates that the percentage of students who have a process of comprehension of short readings in English is very low. In this sense, it is important that elementary school teachers implement didactic techniques with which students can comprehend texts in the language, for example, teaching them one sentence in each English session, two common words per day, riddles, in order to expand their vocabulary in English so that they can understand some texts proposed by their teachers. Accordingly, reading becomes a source of linguistic experience that greatly improves comprehension and oral expression skills. Learning to read in an easy and comprehensive way contributes to learning new words and acquiring new knowledge.

Question 5 is oriented to the level of motivation of the students, with respect to the activities proposed by their teacher, 93% of the students feel motivated with the activities performed by their English teacher. On the other hand, 7% of the students indicated that they do not feel motivated in the activities carried out by their English teacher. In this sense, it can be distinguished that the percentage of students who enjoy the activities carried out by the primary English teachers to dynamize the study session is positive.

Question 6, which asks about the implementation and use of songs in English during the development of the lessons, it can be observed that 97% of the students responded that the teacher does not use songs in English in the study sessions. 3% of the students responded that their teachers use songs in English as a methodological strategy. In this sense, it is affirmed that the percentage of teachers who dynamize their teaching and learning processes with techniques that motivate students in listening activities is very low.

Question number 7 is focused on the use of concrete and supporting materials during class. Based on the observations made, it is evident that only one teacher utilizes concrete supporting materials to liven up study sessions, enabling students to observe and understand better. According to the responses obtained from the students, they express the importance of teachers using some form of concrete material to facilitate English classes. In this context, it is important to mention that teachers at the targeted institution should strive to employ didactic materials since they assist students

in focusing their attention during class and in developing their skills and knowledge for a better understanding of the English language.

 Question number 8 is centered around pronunciation correction. 83% of the students responded that the teacher does correct them when they write or pronounce a word in English incorrectly, whereas the remaining 17% stated that the teacher does not correct them when they make a mistake in speaking or writing a word incorrectly. Given the provided percentages, it is clear that teachers do attach importance to errors that a student may make when expressing or writing a word incorrectly in English. Considering the observations made in the educational institution focused on primary school teachers in English classes, it was possible to perceive that of the five teachers observed, the majority do correct when the student says or writes a wrong word in English, the student is corrected through oral participation, by going to write on the board and in the activities carried out in the notebook. According to the percentages obtained in this question answered by the students, it is evident that the teachers are ready to solve any difficulty that the student may have when expressing themselves in English.

Regarding the implementation of recreational activities to dynamise the classes, 83% of the students responded that the teacher does not use any type of games in the activities carried out in the English classes, on the other hand, 12% of the students gave as an answer, that the English teacher does use didactic games in the activities developed in the learning classroom, therefore, it can be evidenced that teachers do not apply games that help the student to feel more motivated to learn the foreign language. Regarding the above and in accordance with the observations made to the primary school teachers of the institution focused on the present study, it can be established that of the five teachers observed, none of them use games in the English activities they carry out which would facilitate the motivation of the students to learn English and thus in the same way they can develop skills and knowledge in an easier way in the foreign language.

With respect to the affective or motivational phase, to encourage interest, it can be observed that 70% of the students answered that the teacher does motivate them at the beginning of the English class, and the remaining 30% of the students answered that the teacher does not motivate them at the beginning of the English class. According to the results expressed, it can be seen that the majority of teachers motivate learners when starting their classes so that their class is more enjoyable, however, some teachers are not applying this strategy to start their English classes.

The last question was aimed at understanding orders and commands in English, 53% of the students answered that they understand the orders or instructions in English that the teacher gives them in class and the remaining 47% answered negatively. Due to the percentages obtained, it can be seen that most of the students do not understand the instructions in English pronounced by the teacher through the development of the class. On the other hand, in the observations that were made to the primary teachers in the English classes, it was possible to show that only one teacher of the fourth and fifth grades used different orders in English. The other teachers do not give any type of orders and instructions in English to the learners, since most of the class is carried out using the mother tongue, this means that they are not giving importance to those orders that are very useful for them so that the student can understand much more the foreign language.

4.   Conclusions

It is important that primary school teachers implement pedagogical strategies aimed at developing the students' communication skills and abilities in the various spaces of interaction in the classroom, which makes it easier for them to minimize the use of the native language and increase the use of English in real situations of communication or in circumstances of their daily life.

The use of innovative methodological strategies in the processes of teaching English fosters in the student the will to acquire the language in the development of their communicative skills, increases motivation and arouses interest in educational processes, which allow them to greater appropriation of what they learn and therefore a better command of the foreign language. One of the strategies that arouses interest and motivation for the study of English is the game. Recreational activities foster and create favourable learning environments, energise teaching processes and encourage greater participation of students in educational action. Although with the game as a strategic tool, the teacher manages to capture the attention and maintain the best disposition of his directed towards the work, he must always be focused on the purpose that he has proposed to achieve within the academic exercise that he carries out to develop the

communication skills of his students. The development of communication skills in an integrated manner promotes a greater mastery of the foreign language, which allows the student to express himself orally and written and understand what he reads and hears in English. In this sense, it is essential to take into account the level of language proficiency, to implement general training and pedagogical strategies, articulated with the learners' needs.

To meet the needs of students, teachers must implement appropriate pedagogical strategies with appropriate authentic and instructional materials. Although at present the management of technological resources has become an obligation and a requirement to develop teaching and learning processes at all levels, it is essential to make appropriate use of them, in such a way that they become means that facilitate the relationship between teachers, students and parents, to carry out the educational action. It is then necessary to carry out other research studies that promote the design of methodological strategies in the processes of teaching English, based on the use of relevant technological resources that respond to the learning needs of students today, considering that educational practices have become a real challenge for teachers in these moments of social change due to the pandemic that is affecting the entire world.

Acknowledgement

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