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Research Report
Instituto de Lenguas Fray Bernardo de Lugo O. P. (ILFBL)

1. Title

Narrative English learning experiences: an exploration to students' goals and their relationship to course aims

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Abstract

This study aims at exploring students' narrative learning experiences from an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course in Monte de Galilea-Usme, as part of the university outreach work. Researchers are interested in considering the impact of "English for Hotels and Catering" course on students' personal, academic and work goals so that curriculum and classroom dynamics can be considered as socially constructed, negotiated, and adapted to the learning environment. This project belongs to a qualitative, descriptive and interpretative research study in which narrative inquiry methodologies are applied in order to achieve its research aims. The outcomes of the study will shed some lights on the role of the Fray Bernardo de Lugo Language Institute outreach work, its relevance and pertinence of the ESP program and the recognition of the importance of students' voice in their learning processes.

Key words

Learning experiences, Narrative research, Outreach work, Second language acquisition, English competences, English for Specific Purposes (ESP)



Statement of the problem

As one of the university foundations, the outreach work needs to be constantly revised and reconsidered so that it achieves its institutional and social goals. The “English for Hotels and Catering” course cannot be the exception and there is the urge need to assess the effectiveness of its development, considering students’ personal, academic and work goals as the core of the program.

Bearing in mind that this program has not been explored yet, we want to consider students’ narratives as a way to unveil the lived learning experiences inside the actual English classroom and see how they shape the curriculum and classroom dynamics. For the Language Institute, it is important to be aware of the academic and social outcomes of its English programs as well as share the successful experiences with the academic community. That is why, we consider really important to take a close look at the students’ narratives since they will give us enough information to make informed decisions about the Language Institute outreach work and its role in Usme community.

Research questions

- What do students’ narrative learning experiences inform us about the impact of “English for Hotels and Catering” course at Monte de Galilea (Usme) in terms of students’ personal, academic and work goals?
- How do students’ learning goals shape the learning experiences that are lived and told inside the English classroom?



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General objective

- To describe the impact of the “English for Hotels and Catering” course on students’ personal, academic and work goals.

Specific objectives

- To explore students’ learning experiences through narrative inquiry.
- To identify students’ personal, academic and work goals.
- To analyze the influence of students’ goals on the learning experiences inside the English classroom.

Justification

Outreach work is a community development project carried out by the University, in which both students and teachers participate and work with realities and needs of our communities. In this social work, both research and teaching are integrated through projects where the problems and the needs of populations which are marginalized or excluded from development are identified, the proposed solution is raised and the university works together with communities in order to improve their quality of life.

According to the above, the Language Institute Fray Bernardo de Lugo, OP, is aware of the need to join such practices through social projects in order to contribute to the development of the various communities where the USTA is present in its outreach work through the teaching of the English language to benefit the vulnerable population and fulfill the objectives of social work. Therefore, the topic of this research is important because according to the institutional philosophy, the Language Institute of the University should support the provision of social services to the community. In this particular case the Institute has created a project called "English for Hotels and Catering " in order to help the



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community to obtain the necessary tools to expand its labor opportunities with an economic impact for the improvement of living standards over the medium term.

But what has not been done yet is to analyze whether or not the ESP course has achieved its objectives in terms of students' academic, professional and social needs, and to what extent the curriculum and class methodology fit those needs or, on the contrary, are being modified by the living learning experiences. The conclusions will lead, in the first place, to assess the role of the Language Institute outreach work, and second, to contribute to the curriculum design of the ESP course.

State of the art

During the whole development of the ESP course, there has not been a research study that analyzes, in any way, the outreach project that the Language Institute is applying at Monte de Galilea and there is no information about learning and teaching goals so far. However, there have been certain studies in the international community that have examined the outcome of ESP programs by means of self-report data, such as interviews, questionnaires for learners, teachers and administrators (Murray, 2011). Such studies have contributed to evaluate the relevance and pertinence of content integrated language in relation to workplace literacy and language skills, especially in migrant communities and adult education.

On the other hand, narrative research has been used in order to explore the educational field in terms of both teachers' and students' understandings and experiences. An example of these type of studies is the one carried out by Bense (2012) in which she explores the experiences of German migrant teachers in Australia with the purpose to provide important insights into the teachers' experiences of adjustment to the Australian



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school system. The teachers' narratives revealed new perspectives on the cultural dimension of teaching practices and its effects on the individual in cross-cultural classroom situations.

A second study focuses on mature women's learning experiences in a vocational educational training course. The results showed some notions of learning as negotiated lived experience and called for a methodological approach that privileged the learners' perspective and opened space in which alternative notions of learning might emerge (Daniels, 2008). As Mendieta (2013) suggests, narrative research has been widely used in international contexts in order to explore educational settings but little had been done in the Colombian context and consequently, novice researchers should undertake these approach to contribute to the language learning knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

In order to achieve our research goals, we will present some theoretical constructs that will guide this research project.

The understanding of second language acquisition

Theories about Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have evolved from a mere linguistic view to a sociocultural and sociolinguistic perspective, where lots of other factors, besides linguistics ones, have also contributed, somehow, to the understanding of the process of acquiring a language. According to Long (1990) "theories on SLA are attempts to explain... relationships between process and product in interlanguage development and universals, and variance in learners and learning environments." (p. 649).

Due to the necessity of explaining external factors that may mediate SLA, the sociocultural theory emerges with some explanations about this topic. According to



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Zuengler and Miller (2006) “-sociocultural perspectives on language and learning- view language use in real-world situations as fundamental, not ancillary, to learning. These researchers focus, not on language as input, but as a resource for participation in the kinds of activities our everyday lives comprise” (p. 37). From a sociocultural view, learning is a mediated process, which means that it depends on face to face interaction and shared processes, and one of the mediators is language.

The most fundamental concept of sociocultural theory is that the human mind is *mediated*.... Vigotsky argued that just as humans do not act directly on the physical world but rely, instead, on tools and labor activity, which allows us to change the world, and with it, the circumstances under which we live in the world, we also use symbolic tools, or signs, to mediate and regulate our relationships with others and with ourselves and thus change the nature of these relationships. (Lantolf, 2000, p. 1)

Taking into account these conceptions, it is clear that humans do not learn alone, and the cognitive processes that occur in our mind are not just a matter of activating nodes and produce a speech. Quite opposite Vigotsky talks about self-regulation (where internalization and inner speech take place), scaffolding, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The first one is defined by Lantolf (2000) as “internalization is in essence the process through which higher forms of mentation come to be. Internalization, then, assumes that the source of consciousness resides outside of the head and is in fact anchored in social activity” (p.13). In this sense, the first step of internalization comes from the outside, from the contact with other individuals and contexts (ZPD) and it is regulated by them, but later each individual starts to organize and regulate his/her own mental activity based on the appropriation of the regulatory means employed by others (Lantolf, 2000). During this internalization, private and inner speeches appear. The private one demonstrates the children’s ability to regulate their own behavior and reflects its social



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origins in the speech of others, however, it occurs in the individual's mind, reflecting a cognitive process that go beyond activating nodes. The inner speech, thus, is the externalization of the private speech and appears when individuals "who can, and do, recover and utilize 'earlier knowing strategies in situations which cannot be dealt with by self-regulation alone.'" (Appel and Lantolf, 1994, p. 438).

In this way, the ZPD plays an important role in this social mediations and regulations. The ZPD provides the learners with opportunities to develop their mental abilities, thanks to the interaction with other individuals and cultural aspects. It is in the ZPD where learning is more likely to happen, and therefore processes of scaffolding¹ also occur in there.

In a complementary way, the sociolinguistic approach according to Tarone (2007):

[shows] the relationship between social context and second language use and acquisition, which shows that learners' second language (L2) input and processing of L2 input in social settings are socially mediated, that social and linguistic context affect linguistic use, choice, and development, and that learners intentionally assert social identities through their L2 in communicating in social contexts. (p. 837)

The sociolinguistic approach again sees the language as a mediator in social activities and interactions, but also takes into account the role of social variables such as gender, power, ethnicity, etc., that provide access or not to the target language and therefore, determines the acquisition of the language. Tarone (2007) identifies three types of variables that produce changes in the learners' L2 linguistic knowledge:

¹ Scaffolding is understood as a process of supportive dialogue which directs the learner's attention to key features.



a) social contextual factors such as interlocutor, social setting, task, communicative purpose, learner intention, role, and identity; b) linguistic contextual factors in the surrounding discourse; and c) time, that is, the time in the life of the learner when the L2 item or grammar was acquired relative to other linguistic items or grammars, and the demonstration that the rate or route of SLA can be altered over time by contextual factors favoring explicit and/or implicit processes of acquisition. (p. 845)

The Sociolinguistic perspective allows us to understand and notice social variables that are also present in an EFL classroom and that do have an impact on the students' performance, not only in L2, but also in their construction of identities, ideologies and experiences.

Communities of practice (common goals) (common customs and experiences)

For Wenger (1998), communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Communities of practice, in this sense, are determined by common interests and a well-defined identity. From this point of view, learning, knowledge and identity are interconnected and the three of them happen only through social contact with other people that also share the same interest, and with whom, they may construct a common understanding of such aspects.

Narrative inquiry as means of understanding learning experiences

Language teachers and researchers are usually concerned about successful (first or second) language acquisition processes and therefore they tend to take a look at teaching and learning practices in order to understand, improve or question what it is going on in the classroom setting, in a way that they are able to transform those practices in favor of



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learning goals. One of the approaches that enables a close observation and analysis of learning experiences is narrative inquiry due to the fact that “stories can definitely help us understand the world of teaching and learning since teachers and learners, like any other human being, are storytellers who engage in narrative acts to make sense of their and other’s knowledge and experiences” (Mendieta, 2013, p. 136).

In addition, “narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. Three commonplaces of narrative inquiry, temporality, sociality, and place, specify dimensions of an inquiry and serve as a conceptual framework. Commonplaces are dimensions which need to be simultaneously explored in undertaking a narrative inquiry... Through attending to the commonplaces, narrative inquirers are able to study the complexity of the relational composition of people’s lived experiences both inside and outside of an inquiry and, as well, to imagine the future

possibilities of these lives” (Clandinin, D. J., & Huber, J. (in press) p. 4) In this sense, narratives can give us a wider perspective of learners’ experiences, thoughts and expectations about their English language learning process since, it is through narratives that it is possible to connect, organize and structure most of the elements and variables that are immersed when somebody learns.

Consequently, a narrative experience is understood as “...sequential and meaningful, definitively human...[it] re-present[s] experience reconstituting it, as well as expressing it... [it] displays transformation or change” (Squire, 2008, p. 42). Therefore, narratives will provide us information about a life turning point, past, present and future stories about others as well as oneself, they will give us the opportunity to socially reconstruct learners’ experiences and will show us the way learning has been transformed and modified by the context and the individuals.



Community education: Background

Defining community can be a difficult task because its objectives may change over time. Although one thing is clear: Its methods and curriculum are different from the traditional education.

According to Tett (2010):

Community education is about encouraging and engaging people throughout life into learning, that is based on what they are interested in. Education is developed that is relevant to the participating learners and is responsive to community priorities identified with people rather than for them (p. 1)

Community education originated in the early nineteenth century when rapid economic growth and industrial development led to the first demands for social reforms (See Crowther, 1999; Shaw, 2003). Community education was developed by several organizations which believed that their purpose was involving young people and adults in a range of activities to make them better citizens.

Early in the nineteenth century many people started to worry about the deteriorating economic conditions in which young people and adults had to work. The solution which was proposed was to give them opportunities outside of these environments in order to improve their character and sense of responsibility (Smith, 1988). Therefore, many organizations were created to achieve these objectives. The Young Men's Christian Association - YMCA was founded by George Williams in London in 1844. The YMCA

was quickly followed by many other organizations that had similar intentions and the work was developed mainly by different Christian Churches.



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This approach was the first step to what we now know as “Integral Education”. This led to much youth work, particularly that targeted at boys as having three main objectives: recreation, education, religion. Recreation was what attracted people into the clubs, education included physical, moral and mental training, and religion comprised all the impalpable influences which give a club a grip on its members and tend to awaken their higher nature (Russell and Rigby, 1908:20).

But these educational efforts were not aimed only at young people. The industrial revolution had created the need for a new kind workers: workers with new skills and knowledge. But religion also played an important role in this process. The influence of Calvinism and Presbyterianism where the ideals of thrift, discipline and self-improvement generated a culture that supported education as a means of acquiring spiritual salvation and material advancement (Crowther and Martin, 2006: 20).

In the 1850s and 1860s employers in the UK trying to woo skilled workers started to offer them better opportunities for education and sponsored libraries, educational lectures on science, history and culture, and social and musical activities. During this period socialist educators, such as John MacLean, led “radical” education and this group gave evening classes in the Glasgow engineering shops and the Clydeside shipyards to workers’ study groups. The curriculum was framed by Marxist texts and the aim was to equip workers’ leaders intellectually to play their part in the anticipated revolution (Crowther and Martin, 2006:20).



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Working with poor communities

Work in poor communities has its roots in the early social reforms in health, housing, social work, local government and town planning carried out in the late nineteenth century in response to the growing discontent of the new urban poor (Yeo and Yeo, 1988).

Community work in the UK is also embedded in the history of British imperialism and colonialism where growing independence movements led to the recognition, after the Second World War, that there was a need for social and economic development to meet the new political and social expectations of the working classes (Shaw, 2003; 13). Community development techniques were used primarily as a method of both ensuring the growth of democratic institutions based on the British model and integrating colonial territories into the capitalist economic order, Mayo (1975) argued that this form of community development fulfilled political, economic and ideological functions for the British state through the incorporation of local populations into the development project.

Community

As can be seen from this brief review of the antecedents of community education the reaction to the social fragmentation brought about by the industrialisation and urbanisation in the nineteenth century led to a wide variety of provision for young people, adults and communities. The ideology behind this provision created tensions between the solutions offered in response to major social and economic changes from dominant groups who were concerned to prevent dissidence and the different ideas of those that were excluded from power who were more interested in changing the status quo.

So the ways in which “community” is used as a descriptive category are first considered and then how the concept is interpreted in policy is explored.

Community as a descriptive category can be broadly divided into three main areas of meaning:



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1. Place or locality. This is the most frequently used meaning and refers to people who have in common that they live in a particular geographical community such as a neighborhood or village.
2. Interest. This refers to people who are linked together by factors such as religious belief, sexual orientation or ethnic origin and so they share a common characteristic such as their membership of their Christian, Gay or Chinese communities.
3. Function. This refers to groups with the same profession, such as teachers, or the same role, such as community representatives, or those who have common interests such as football, which leads them to acquire a common sense of identity through the actions that they engage in together.

From these uses of the term it can be seen that “community” involves boundaries, because if the members of a group have something in common with each other that is going to distinguish them in a significant way from the members of other possible groups. These boundaries may be physical, religious or linguistic and, as Cohen argues “they may (also) be thought of as existing in the minds of the beholders (Cohen 1985; 12). Community thus implies both similarity and difference and so it is an idea that focuses on relationships. However, it is important to think about how boundaries also construct difference where particular groups such as asylum seekers or disabled people can be seen as the other, to be tolerated as conditional members only (Shaw, 2008; 29). This suggests that, far from generating positive social relations, community can reinforce “social polarisation and potential conflict (Shaw 2008; 29) as happens in, for example, “the Mafia”.

So, clearly, the word “community” is a difficult notion to understand but remains an idea that is important because it describes something essential and irreducible about everyday reality of people’s lives and the spaces where those lives are lived. It also means that those engaged in the practice of community education need to be clear about how they are defining community and the relationships within communities because these definitions have strong implications for action.



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The outreach work at Universidad Santo Tomás and the ESP course

One of the foundations at Universidad Santo Tomás is the outreach work in which the other two foundations (teaching and researching) merge as means of serving to the social community. According to the PEI, “through the teaching, studying and research, the University works as a collective intellectual of the Colombian society, with the purpose to help it to understand its historical situation and accompany it in its search for a new sense in order to change” (p.91)². For the University, the outreach work must respond to the context needs and in that sense, it must be as pertinent as possible. It strongly believes that college education should fit the challenges of the changing society and in that sense keep updated with the new technologies and language competences.

As a consequence, the language institute Fray Bernardo de Lugo offers a ESP course that, as defined by Murray (2011) “can be considered to be a form of content-based instruction [which] is an approach to curriculum design used in a variety of setting from school to universities to adult education” (p. 75). The acquisition of English competences for using in the work place course intends to develop employment skills as effective communication as part of the language learning process, and also seeks to help students to achieve their personal, academic and work goals.

Contribution to the research line of the group

This study belongs to the research line “language, context and power” and as it is closely linked to the sociocultural and sociolinguistic perspective of language acquisition, its

² Researchers translation. The original quote goes as “ Mediante la docencia, el estudio y la investigación, la Universidad opera como intelectual colectivo de la sociedad colombiana, con el fin de ayudarlo a comprender su situación histórica y acompañarla en la búsqueda de un nuevo sentido para su devenir”



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outcomes will enrich the theoretical constructs and understandings of how language is socially acquired and negotiated, and how learning is a mediated process in which students' goals, students' interactions and the vocational curriculum merged in order to create successful (or not) learning experiences. Consequently, it will contribute to the study of second language learning within sociocultural contexts and sociolinguistic variables.

Methodology

This research project belongs to a qualitative, descriptive and interpretative research study since it aims at exploring students' learning experiences, understand and describe them through a narrative inquiry approach that "is unconstrained by the characteristic objectivity of positivism and focuses instead on interpretation and the understanding of meaning" (Mendieta, 2013, p. 139)

Population

The context in which this project will be carried out is the Monte de Galilea (Usme) outreach center, in which the acquisition of English competences for using in the work place course is developed. There are around 25 students that belong to the Usme community and who are between 20 and 45 years old. They have been taking the course for a year and a half.

Instruments for data collection

In order to collect useful data to be analyzed, we are going to carry out narrative semi-structured interviews, that will provide us information about students' reconstruction of



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their learning experiences, as well as the changes through time and their accomplishment of their personal, academic and work goals. We will also keep a record of students' interactions during the lessons by means of field notes which will provide us with information about the lived learning experiences inside the classroom setting and how they shape the way the course is developed.

Results

As explained in the theoretical framework, learning experiences are shaped by temporality, sociality and situations. It was possible to identify the past, the present and the future of those experiences, having in mind that the course impact could be evidenced into the present and the future ones.

Background experiences: Looking into our socio-cultural contexts

This first category highlights the importance to know our students. What they told us definitely changed our perceptions regarding methodologies, evaluation and classroom dynamics. Among this category we can subdivide those socio-cultural experiences into:

Learning experiences which were mediated by cultural perceptions

It was possible to identify how students faced some difficulties in their first learning experiences. Some due to their parents' beliefs or cultural related aspects or because institutions and the government did not consider English as an important competence to have. Let us have a look at the following sample:

Nelson, 39, says:

“Pues en un comienzo inicié estudiando digamos aquí en Tunjuelito, inicié estudiando en un colegio privado y pues era de esos colegio de que... ¡sí! a nivel privado y me fue



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bien. Y luego nos cambiamos de barrio a donde estoy viviendo en este momento que es ahí en el barrio Castilla, acabe de hacer quinto grado luego ya continué bachillerato, lo continué primero en el colegio Cafam; ahí me fue muy bien, pero resulta que mis papás querían que yo ingresara a un colegio técnico, que fue en el Instituto Técnico Central La Salle, pero entonces por entrar a ese colegio tocaba empezar de nuevo desde primero de bachillerato, entonces yo, yo pasé muy bien primero en Cafam pero me tocó repetir de nuevo primero en La Salle. Pues ahí me fue muy bien en sexto, me fue también bien en séptimo, pero ya empecé un poquito a notar que para mí no era un punto muy fuerte lo de las técnicas, eso de... por ejemplo lo del dibujo técnico, o lo de la modelería, esas cosas no me fue muy bien; en cambio por ejemplo mis campos fuertes eran las matemáticas y otro tipo de cosas; si, entonces al final en séptimo grado lo perdí porque por motivos de dibujo técnico y otras dos materias.”

As Nelson says:

“I started studying here in Tunjuelito in a private school and I did very well. Then , we moved to our current neighborhood, Castilla, and I graduated from the Cafam school but I did not pay too much attention to English there. I did not like it very much and my strengths were mathematics and similar subjects. I failed seventh grade because I was jnot good at technical drawing”.

We also have the testimony from Blanca, who talked about the type of teachers she dad to deal with:

Blanca, 46, says:

“Una profesora que me maltrataba en tercero de primaria. Que todavía la veo y siento ...cuando voy al pueblo porque ella está allá, siento algo acá (se toca la garganta) que... es que ella me pegó tanto tanto que perdí el año. Y me trataba mal porque mis papás no me han comprado los zapatos del uniforme, entonces yo iba con las cotizas eh...me trataba mal



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por eso y porque a veces llegaba tarde y me pegaba... Eso lo hace sufrir ¡si! , y ahora veo a mis hijos y pues obviamente los profesores no sin así pero cualquier cosa yo estoy muy pendiente de mis hijos...”

Blanca says:

“There was this teacher who treated me badly in third grade. When I go to my hometown and I see her I feel something inside me, that..is; she hit me so many times that I failed the year. Therefore, I never had the chance to have a good English teacher in my school. Obviously, teachers are not the same but I am always looking out for my children.”

Alice says:

“La primera vez que tomé inglés fue, el año pasado (risas)”

The first time I studied English was last year (laughter)”

Learning experiences that were mediated by social and economic situations.

Even though not all the students had to deal with bad teachers or parents who made them studied in a different school, most of them had in common their socio economical background. This variable is important since most of them were denied from education because they did not have enough incomes to go to school.

Ludivia,53, says:

“No estudié en mi infancia ni adolescencia. No habían los recursos, realmente, no habían, era muy difícil, a uno cuando pequeño lo más importante era que si ya caminaba, ya esto, ya podía producir algo, entonces trabajar. De hecho a uno cuando tenía 8, 9 años lo llevaban ya era a las casas de familia y lo dejaban allá. Entonces ya, pues uno no pudo, ya después uno tuvo sus hijos, entonces la prioridad eran los hijos, darle la oportunidad a ellos.”



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Ludivia says:

“I did not study during my childhood or in my youth. My family did not have the resources to send me to school, so I had to start working since I was a little girl. In fact, when you were 8 or 9 years old you have to start producing money for the family. That is why I could not study but now I have my children and I want something better for them”.

It was possible to identify how social, cultural and economic backgrounds shaped students' learning experiences in the past. Those experiences made them realize that even though they did not have good memories (in most cases) about their school time, they did want to change their way of learning, they wanted to improve their quality of life and be a participant in their kids or grandchildren's education. That is why they decided to continue learning despite their age and bad experiences.

Current experiences: What has changed? Am I the same?

The second category deals with the impact of the course itself. Students were asked about their new experiences when learning English and if anything had changed since then. From their answers we got two subcategories that we have named as: “I want, I can, and I will” and “We're not the same women”

I want, I can, I will

From this subcategory we could identify that students are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses when in their English learning process. We could identify that they are doing their best to overcome their difficulties and they are working really hard to achieve their goals. They work in groups, they have practices outside the classroom and they look for their relatives when something goes wrong. They are working hard because they feel they can help their grandchildren or their children.



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Sylvia says:

Me gusta el inglés pero es un poquito difícil. Lo que me dificulta es el vocabulario y lo que se me facilita es como escribirlo, un poquito, ¡sí! Al principio me pareció terrible, o sea muy complicado pero ya después dije: “No, es que es ‘cheverísimo’ uno hablar en inglés” o sea para mí ha sido como algo muy chévere y eso, por eso, seguro por eso a veces como intento pero no puedo, entonces a veces me llena como de tristeza pero digo: “No Señor tú me vas a dar sabiduría para aprender”

Sylvia says:

“I like English but it is a Little hard to learn. I find vocabulary difficult and the writing is a little easier.. Oh! Yes, at the beginning I thought it was terrible but then I said to myself: It is wonderful to speak in English but sometimes I try and I cannot speak it I feel sad and I say: Lord, you are going to give me the wisdom to learn.”

Nelson, 39, says:

“En este momento las fortalezas, me gusta, me gusta todo, me gusta leerlo, me gusta hablarlo me encanta, y las debilidades un poquito al oído al escucharlo porque he visto que así uno pueda tener un buen conocimiento del inglés que tenga pero sea para escucharlo o para hablar con una persona toca, toca tener muy bien el listen, el oído; pero de resto me parece un idioma muy sencillo para expresar las cosas, para decir las cosas muy rápidamente, muy fácilmente, de una forma muy sencilla, muy clara. Me parece un idioma muy efectivo. ¡Sí!, me gusta mucho, aprendí pues en un principio tal vez por la forma en como me lo enseñaron me dijo que pues era en una mesa redonda teníamos que rendir las tareas, entonces teníamos que hacer las tareas así en grupo y oralmente y eso me ha ayudado como a que no me de miedo hablar el inglés, me gusta mucho; pero es por el listening pienso que de pronto”



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Nelson says:

“At the moment one of my strengths is the reading part and my weaknesses are the listening and speaking. But in general I think it is a language easy to learn and effective to express oneself. Yes, I like it very much maybe because I learned in a fun way and that is why I am not afraid of speaking in English. The only problem is the listening.”

Flor, 53. says:

“Yo estudié muchos años, osea el tiempo que estudie, estudié en el campo entonces ya llevo muchos años sin estudiar tipo cuarenta años entonces pues por eso se me ha dificultado un poco... Se me ha dificultado sea como sea porque como le comentaba al profesor de que era la primera vez de que yo estudio inglés entonces pues se me ha dificultado un poco pero...tengo la esperanza y la fe en Dios que voy a aprender. Nosotras estudiamos en grupo porque lo que uno no entiende, de pronto la otra persona entiende y lo que yo entiendo de pronto la otra persona no lo ha entendido, entonces en grupo uno pues socializa más y entiende más”

Flor says:

“I studied many years in the country where my parents had a farm but I haven’t studied for more than forty years and that makes me difficult to learn new things... As I told the teacher it is the first time I study English but I hope and have faith in God that I will learn. We study in a group, so we can help each other with the learning process.”

We are not the same women!

Probably, one of the most important and interesting findings was to see how the role of women had changed in their communities. They have empowered themselves by means of education. They had given a new meaning to their lives and to their role in their families.



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Martha, says:

“El curso ha influenciado de manera positiva, porque cuando converso con mi hijo él me pone a prueba para que le demuestre lo que he aprendido y esto es muy gratificante porque sé que fue una buena decisión y estoy muy satisfecha por los logros obtenidos “

Martha says:

“The course has changed me in a positive way because when I speak with my son I have to show him how much I have learned and that is a great experience because it was the right decision and I am very satisfied with my accomplishments.”

They have also taking control of their lives which have given them the power of deciding what they want for them and for their relatives.

Liliana says

“A nivel familiar puedo colaborar en tareas a mi nieta, ya podemos decir que yo soy colaboradora en ese aspecto. También en aspecto familiar, mis hijos me dicen que se sienten orgullosos del papel que estoy haciendo y enseñando y que estoy como consintiéndome entonces que eso es bueno porque ya... pues dicen ellos que yo ya dicen ellos he hecho arto entonces que es bueno que yo empiece a recibir cosas; la vida me está brindando y que no hay que dejar pasar esas oportunidades.”

Liliana says:

“At family level I can help my granddaughter with her homework and we can say that I can collaborate with them in that aspect. My children tell me that they feel proud of my new role in the family and they feel that I should take advantage of these new opportunities”.



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Women have also become important members of their communities. They are empowering their close friends and acquaintances inviting them to participate in the courses and setting their experiences as examples to be followed.

Ludivia says:

“Yo le dije a una muchacha que está estudiando aquí, la traje, tiene como 28 años y tiene ya ahorita tres niñas, pero eso es así, una bebecita (inaudible) Ya me decía que no sentía ni ganas de venir ni nada porque o sea, como que todo... uno ya se dedica es solamente a los hijos y se perdió la mujer, se perdió las ganas de como de cumplir sus metas porque toca primero hacerle cumplir las de ellos.

Ludivia says:

I encouraged a girl to come to center and start studying English. She is 28 years old and has three little girls. She said to me that she did not feel like doing anything; a woman's role was to take care of her family and she should forget her dreams. She finally decided to come and is taking the English course.”

Opening a window into the future: What's next?

The third and last category reveals what they plan to do after finishing the course. This part will show us if the language institute has accomplished the objectives proposed in its outreach work goals and if students want to continue learning in other contexts. We could find two subcategories:



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Studying and working in different fields from Hotels and Catering

Students who still have the possibility to access a university or that probably have the means to pay for another English course (who are just the 3% of them) told us that in order to get a better job they will continue studying English. Some others will continue studying in a different field and hope to apply the acquired English knowledge into their future jobs.

Diego, 23, says:

“Pues yo tenía un inglés muy básico entonces quería mejorarlo para en un futuro poder usarlo; entonces lo que espero del curso es poder llegar a un nivel bastante alto, porque pienso estudiar en una universidad pedagogía tanto música como inglés, así que después de eso un viaje al extranjero y tal vez convertirme en profesor de inglés y de música”

Diego says:

“I had a very basic English and I wanted to improve it to use it in the future. I hope to reach a high level in this course because I am planning to study music as well as English at the Pedagogica University. Maybe, traveling overseas and becoming a Music and English teacher.”

Ismael says:

“Me visualizo a largo plazo, donde pueda tener mi negocio y poder hacer negocios en otro idioma y competir laboralmente”

“I see myself having my own business in the long term and being able to communicate in a different language”.



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Helping the community.

It is very important to point out the sense of community that these students have. They all want to share their knowledge and help others. They would like that everybody had the chance to study and have a better quality of life. Encouraging more people to study English

Martha

“Puedo aportar a mi comunidad transmitiendo el conocimiento por ejemplo a niños o adultos mayores. En mi entorno hay personas interesadas en tomar el curso y me felicitan por los logros obtenidos”

Martha says:

“ I can help the community by sharing my knowledge with the children or adults. In my neighborhood there are people who are interested in taking the course and they congratulate me for my accomplishments.”

Conclusions and implications

The following chart will give us a clear idea about what the Language Instituted aimed at, and what students really wanted or needed.

Course objectives	Students' goals
1. To offer a training program in English to the less advantaged communities in Bogotá in order to help them to accomplish better standards of life through the acquisition of a foreign language, like English, according to the local, regional, national and institutional	1. Students recognize that the course has given them English competences that they did not have before. Therefore they are now able to communicate (in an A2 level), help others by sharing their experiences and acquired knowledge.



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policies as a fundamental element for the development of the country	Also, they have started to dream about travelling and having new cultural experiences.
2. Generate a working, academic and institutional impact to trigger the University's social outreach work in the communities mentioned before.	2. It was possible to identify how despite of successful or unsuccessful learning experiences, students are willing to keep learning. (English, technical, professional) They all want to learn English, they acknowledge their weakness but are working very hard to accomplish their objectives. The classes have given them strategies to learn Most of the participants do not have a job or won't have it due to their ages. Therefore, an ESP curriculum is not the best option for them. Very few students see English as a way for getting a job different from Hotels and Catering
3. Support the mission and vision of the Santo Tomás University by integrating and implementing the essential policies of the Language Institute.	3. Women have changed their role in society and within their families. They have empowered themselves when they have had access to education. (outreach work goal)



Recommendations

The researchers strongly recommend to change the approach of the course because as they said in the conclusions students will not be able to use English in a working environment due to their ages of lack of working skills.

The best option is to offer General English Courses in depth according to the students' goals and objectives.

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