

Approaches and challenges for teaching Spanish as a Second Language in South Carolina-USA, Indian Land Case

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Abstract

This research proposes a critical and pedagogical analysis of the teaching-learning processes of Spanish as a second language in level three students at the Indian Land School in South Carolina, USA. For this purpose, a qualitative methodology of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) type was implemented, with the participation of students in Spanish classes at the indicated level, a group composed of 54 students divided into two classes. The study focused on the characterization of the teachers' practices, through the technique of participant observation, the questionnaire to the administrative team of the institution and the students who participated. The results presented in this article correspond to the phase of characterization of teaching and learning practices, which showed that in Spanish as a second language classes, the use of varied methodologies was observed, some traditional ones in which the student has a passive attitude and others, to a lesser extent, active ones. This demonstrates the need to rethink the curriculum of Spanish classes, both in terms of content and methodologies used, in order to focus on those based on the cognitive development of students, such as Project Based Learning, where the different learning profiles can be integrated and a connection with the real life and interests of the learners is established.

Keywords: *Teaching Spanish as a second language; Teaching methods; Project-based learning.*

Introduction

The teaching of foreign languages is important as it contributes to economic and national development, both in the European Community and in the United States. Within the recommendations presented to the European Commission in the "Education and Training 2018" work program, eight key competencies were identified within which language competence was included. In the U.S., President Barack Obama in 2006 declared the need to prepare students to compete in the 21st century, so that a child born in Dallas competes with a child born in New Delhi (Duncan, 2010). Despite having identified the need for foreign language instruction so that students can be competitive in the 21st century, monolingualism remains one of the characteristics of Americans, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018) only 21% of Americans can converse in two or more languages, while 56% of Europeans are bilingual (Jeffery & van Beuningen, 2019).

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Students' language skills are rarely developed in school and therefore it is often necessary to hire foreigners to meet the country's multilingual needs. This is even more troubling when one sees that the number of students in the United States taking language classes has been declining in recent decades. One of the causes of the dropout rate in the world's language classrooms may be that little has been done in school classrooms and traditional methods continue to be used where the teacher dominates classroom interaction, and the student adopts a passive position. Relatively few states offer bilingual education or language instruction beginning in elementary school. Specifically in South Carolina, where the present research was conducted, the profile of a graduate stipulates that he or she must have world-class knowledge, world-class skills, and life and career characteristics (Department of Education SC, 2015). Within world-class knowledge, multiple languages are highlighted, however, this does not happen. Students begin studying a second language in ninth grade compared to other states where they begin foreign language learning in elementary school, or even attend bilingual schools.

In the United States, each state has different requirements for college entrance; thus, in only 27 states do colleges require students to study at least two consecutive years of the same foreign language. However, there are still 23 states that do not require it, with a large number of high school students thinking that second language study is not a requirement for college entrance. These students miss out on opportunities to enter prestigious universities such as Stanford and Harvard, which prefer students who have taken three or more years of the same language, with a proficiency level of low intermediate or above according to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) language proficiency guidelines, over the study of several languages in a cursory way.

The field of study for the present research is Indian Land High School (ILHS), which is part of the public schools in Lancaster County, South Carolina. This county is the fourth fastest growing county in the state, according to 2019 U.S. Census estimates. Lancaster County's population jumped 24.5% from 2010 to 2018 going from 76,652 residents in 2010 to 95,380 in 2018 (Deloitte Datawheel, 2020). Percentage-wise, the growth at IHLS is even greater as the number of students was under 900 as of January 2016 and in 2022 it exceeds 1700 based on registered student numbers. The percentage increase of students is directly reflected in the mandatory classes for graduation such as Mathematics, English and Social Sciences; however, it is not reflected in Spanish as a second language classes. At the intermediate levels, the problem is even more critical, as only 5% of students entering level one Spanish as a second language reach level 5/AP.

A change in the methodologies used in the ILHS Language Department is required, promoting the classes and reflected in the number of students taking Spanish as a second language at the basic and intermediate levels. An alternative curriculum supported by Project Based Learning (PBL), would allow the teaching of Spanish to focus not on the teachers, but on the students, giving them active participation in their own learning and allowing them to develop the skills that have been catalogued as indispensable for a citizen of the 21st century: personal and social responsibility, critical thinking, reasoning and creativity, strong communication skills, both for interpersonal and presentation needs, intercultural understanding, visualization and decision making, knowing how and when to use technology and choosing the most appropriate tool for the task (Bogler, 2018).

In this sense, this research proposes a critical and pedagogical analysis of the learning processes of Spanish as a second language in level three students at the Indian Land School in South Carolina, which allows to derive in the construction of didactic proposals that strengthen this process at the state and national level.

Theoretical framework

Methods of teaching Spanish as a second language

Among the best-known traditional methods for teaching - learning foreign languages in the USA are the Grammar Translation (G-T) method, the direct method, the Audio-lingual method and finally the teaching of foreign languages through content.

The Grammar - Translation method

It was mostly used during the 18th and 19th centuries. One of the main characteristics of this method is that the second language is taught using the mother tongue. The main objective is the knowledge of the words and grammatical rules of the target language. The learner comes to understand sentences and to construct them, thus not only learning a new language but also deepening his or her own. As a result, the learner is expected to come to appreciate the culture and literature of the new language (Armas, 2019).

In this method, learning is developed in three basic steps, the first is the memorization of vocabulary, the second is the knowledge of the grammatical rules necessary to join and relate those words in correct sentences, and finally, the third is the realization of exercises, basically of translation, both direct and inverse. It is considered an exclusively deductive method, which always starts from the rule to arrive at the example. The basis is the written form of the language, fundamentally literary, guided by formal criteria, and practically no attention is paid to aspects of pronunciation and intonation, also excluding any hint of a communicative aspect (Alcalde, 2011).

In the Grammar-Translation method, the student's role is passive. He sits down to receive what the teacher has for that day; if it is vocabulary, he will repeat it until he learns it and then produce it from memory. Grammar is the medium that will later enable him to read, translate and write in the target language. The student usually "works individually and reflects on complex and subtle grammatical aspects, which help him solve language problems: how to interpret a text, what is the best translation of a text, which rule applies in a specific case?" (López, 2016).

The direct method

This method is the most widespread of the natural methods. It is based on naturalistic assumptions of language learning, i.e., that the second language is learned in a similar way to the process of first language acquisition. This method is a product of the ideas of the reform movement that emerged at the end of the 19th century. According to the Centro Virtual Cervantes (s/f):

It was one of the first attempts to construct a language teaching methodology based on the observation of the process of mother tongue acquisition by children. It was introduced in France and Germany at the beginning of the 20th century and widely known in the United States thanks to L. Sauveur and M. Berlitz, who applied it in their schools (p.1)

The main characteristics of this method include the exclusive use of the target language, the teaching of everyday vocabulary and structures, and the inductive learning of grammar. Oral communication skills are acquired in a progressive and graduated manner through the exchange of questions and answers between teachers and students. In this way, the direct method allows the student an active role; he demonstrates his ability to communicate in everyday situations.

Audiolingual

In a method based on linguistic and psychological approaches to learning with behaviorist ideology, i.e., to the elements of repetition and habit formation. According to Alcalde (2011):

It is clearly influenced by linguistic structuralism and Bloomfield's theory of language description, whereby the system of rules of a target language is no longer considered as the starting point of language analysis. The basis of this method is the analysis of spoken language, and the procedure is descriptive and inductive (p.15).

The audiolingual method is closely linked to the Second World War, which is why it was called the "Army Method" in English. This method for learning foreign languages is similar to the direct method. Like the direct method, the Audio-Lingual Method advises students to use direct language, without the need to use the mother tongue to explain new words or the grammar of the foreign language (Cabrera, 2014).

Teachers using this method organize their lessons through grammatical structures that are presented in short dialogues. Students listen several times and repeat, seeking to imitate the pronunciation. Grammatical structures are learned intuitively. The student's role in the audio-lingual method is passive, reduced to memorization of dialogues and imitative repetition; there is no room for the student's spontaneity. The teacher guides, conducts and controls the learning process.

Content-based study

This method is based on the hypothesis that the learning of language and concepts is reciprocal: language is learned through content and content through language. The learner is motivated by focusing on meaningful concepts and content. Grammar is not considered the main objective, but the means by which the student will be able to express him/herself and understand what others say, be it oral or written language (García, 2004). Language through content is mostly used in immersion programs and "dual language" schools in English. These programs are growing in the United States due to national language policy. To prepare students for the 21st century requires that they be multilingual, in that sense, Genesee and Gandara (1999) state that:

This need is driven in part by a growing awareness that Americans need multilingual skills in order to keep pace with an increasingly global economy. In addition, the importance of developing knowledge of other cultures is evident, and reciprocal immersion programs have a strong cultural component (p.58).

Students participating in these programs study all subjects through the foreign language. The objectives of the foreign language classes are supported by the content objectives of classes such as math, science, social studies, etc. Homework assignments use the same language in which the subject matter is taught in school. For example, if mathematics is learned in Spanish, the homework will be in Spanish. For Madinabeitia (2008):

The fundamental idea of content-based teaching is the prioritization of content over grammar in the L2 classroom, as well as the opportunity for learners to speak and think in an L2 using it in a relevant, authentic and meaningful way (Ellis 2004), improves not only learners' competence in that language but also enriches their cognitive development (better understanding of concepts and improvement of higher psychological functions) and their cultural growth (better integration in a multilingual and multicultural context; tolerance and solidarity) (p37).

The content-based approach focuses on the four language skills as they do in the national standards of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The standards are divided into interpersonal communication mode, which includes speaking and listening; interpretive communication mode, which includes reading and listening without interaction; and presentational mode of information, concepts, and ideas, which is assessed through speaking or writing (Schwartz, 2004).

The content-based methodology is used from the first level and has demonstrated its effectiveness over other methods, since students learn about concepts previously studied in their native language, which facilitates comprehension. If the contents are interesting

and known by the students, it will be easy to relate and learn (Schwartz, 2004). Through the content-based methodology, students will be able to perform activities aimed at the development of the four skills, listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The objectives are presented to the students through "I can" statements.

Project-based learning (PBL) as a methodology for teaching Spanish as a second language

Many advances and trends in curricular matters have taken place in the world since Henry Barnard published in his *American Journal of Education* in 1869 the evolution of the curriculum in several American schools. For UNESCO (1958), the "Curriculum are all those experiences, activities, materials, teaching methods and other means employed by the teacher or taken into account by him, in the sense of achieving the aims of education" (p.49). This concept of curriculum, aims to guide educators on techniques and strategies that can be used in teaching-learning in educational classrooms; the curriculum includes the plans, programs and guidelines that help the fulfillment of educational objectives (Heredia, 2020). In turn, Malagón (2008) affirms that:

The multiplicity of definitions of curriculum is based on the fact that some authors characterize it as a syllabus, as an a priori proposal, others as results, others as experiences, which leads to the conclusion that curriculum is a very complex concept and therefore polysemic" (p. 138).

The curricular organization is supported by the conceptualization of the curriculum that guides decision making in relation to the criteria and elements of curriculum design and development, in order to guarantee the pertinence and coherence of the curriculum with the existing demands at all levels; economic, cultural, social, scientific and technological (Soto, 2002). The curriculum must therefore not only meet cognitive objectives, but must also take into account the social context, the tastes of the students and the technological tools available.

The new trends have migrated from the theoretical and rigid curriculum to the flexible one, to the one that includes ICT in various applications, to the one integrated through cooperative processes and focused on competencies and strategic planning, to the hybrid, multi- and transdisciplinary one, to one with a competency-based approach and to the one that incorporates project-based pedagogy, among others (Barreto, 2009). Among the most important changes in curricula in the last decade is the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The curricular integration of ICT is defined by Sánchez (2002) as the process of fully integrating ICT into the curriculum, joining educational objectives and didactics. In other words, by having a clear definition of "what to teach", "how to teach" is sought, the emphasis is not on the use of technology, but rather on learning.

Within the curricular theory, different curricular models are recognized: the scientific-technical, the technological-systemic, the socio-political-critical, action research and the modular system models.

PBL is one of the constructivist learning trends that have been widely used in the field of technical education. In this educational model, students work actively, plan, implement and evaluate projects based on the real world (Galeana, 2016). The root of this method is directly linked to problem-based learning, which is why the two methods will be included at the beginning of the study. ABP will be referred to in order to jointly refer to two methodologies: problem-based learning and project-based learning; and the acronyms ABPm and ABPt will be used to refer to each of them respectively students as they used it (García and Pérez, 2018).

It is important to note that project-based learning often involves authentic tasks that solve real-world problems, while problem-based learning uses scenarios and cases that are perhaps less related to real life (Larmer et al. 2015). Likewise, the European Association

for Engineering Education (SEFI for its French name, Société Européenne pour la Formation des Ingénieurs) agrees on this same definition. It states that in PBLm, learning is stimulated by what we know as "open-ended and ill-structured problems", while in PBLt it consists of learning through the assignment of a work or task carried out by the students (García and Pérez, 2018).

Method

This research implemented a qualitative methodology, Denzin and Lincon (2012) define it as "a situated activity, which places the researcher in the world (...) consists of material and interpretative practices that make the world visible and transform it" (p.22). For Ballesteros (2016), this type of research does not seek to explain or modify reality but to understand it. For this reason, the development of the research is carried out in the environment where the facts occur, with a holistic vision and with the participation of the researcher, according to Blasco and Pérez (2007), who point out that qualitative research works the reality in its natural environment and how it happens, demonstrating phenomena according to the people who are part of the studied reality.

Regarding the type of research, a design based on the models of Participatory Action Research (PAR) was proposed, in view of the pretensions of transformations in pedagogical and learning practices. The above, since PAR is a methodology that supports the development of a participatory analysis, where the subjects involved become protagonists in the process of building knowledge of the reality being studied, in the discovery of problems and shortcomings and in the development of proposals and solutions (Zapata and Rondán, 2016), an approach consistent with that proposed by Martínez (2009) "the method of action research, so modest in its appearances, hides and implies a new vision of man and science, more than a process with different techniques" (Zapata and Rondán, 2016, p. 28),

Thus, a spiral research pathway was posited in light of the McNiff (2014) model, a procedure also described as cycles of reflexive action by Lewin (1946). McNiff's (2014) model is a "cycle of cycles" or "spiral of spirals" that has the potential to continue; it is also visualized as a "self-reflective spiral" that begins the identification of a practical problem that is analyzed and reviewed with the objective of improving it, the plan must be implemented simultaneously with observation, reflection, analysis and evaluation; at which point the cycle begins again (Latorre, 2004).



Figure 1 Route of the investigation

Note: IAP model proposed by McNiff (2014)

This research model is described as a sequence of steps, which are represented as a spiral of cycles. Each cycle has several stages that wrap around each other and the initial plans either become obsolete or are changed as a result of what has been learned.

Study Units and Research Subjects

The setting for the research is the Indian Land High School (United States), which has a population of 1,600 registered students, 52% of whom are female and 48% are male.

The research subjects are the students in the Spanish as a second language level three classes, a group composed of 54 students divided into two classes. The first class has a total of 26 students, 15 girls and 11 boys; 61.5% are Anglo, 19% are Hispanic, 7.6% are of African descent, 7.6% are two Asians, and 4.3% are multiracial. Nineteen percent of the students speak a language other than English at home. Of the total students, 19.2% are in tenth grade, 57.8% are in eleventh grade, and 23% are seniors. Only one student has a modified study plan that allows her more time in subjects and evaluations. Also, because of her level of anxiety, she is allowed to make presentations and oral evaluations only with the teacher and not in front of all the students. 57% of the students take advanced classes and 36% take college credit classes. 45% of students work after school or on weekends and 40% play sports with the school.

The second class has a total of 28 students of which sixteen are girls and twelve are boys; 18% are seniors, 57% are juniors, and 25% are in tenth grade. Fifty-seven percent of the students are Anglo, 14.5% Asian, 14.5% Hispanic, 10.7% African American, and the difference multiracial. Forty-seven percent of students take advanced classes and 23.5% take college credit classes. No students have a modified curriculum. Eight of the students speak a language other than English at home, four of them Spanish. 15% of the students work after school and 60% of the students play sports.

The research subjects are what Hernández et al. (2014) define as a homogeneous sample, since the subjects possess the same profile and share similar traits, they meet the following requirements: 1. be students at Indian Land High School; 2. have passed levels I and II of Spanish as a second language; 3. registered to take Spanish III during the first semester of school year 2021-2022.

Instruments and data analysis

The objectives set at the beginning of the research served as a guide for the analysis of the data obtained in the field diaries, interviews and questionnaire, research instruments implemented in the study. Selective coding was also used through CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis), a tool that synthesizes, orders and organizes the information collected; in the same way, it simplifies the presentation of the research results. It is important to establish that the programs do not do the analysis automatically, but that it comes from the interaction of the researcher with the program. The programs for the qualitative analysis used in this research is Atlas ti, because it is a tool that facilitates the work and organization of the information in various digital formats; likewise, it allows to collate and compare the results, and above all it optimizes the time in the stage of analysis of the information collected.

Results

Pedagogical practices of Spanish as a second language

The first of the specific objectives of the research was oriented to the characterization of the pedagogical practices for the teaching of Spanish as a second language in the research scenario, for this purpose, observations of the language classes were carried out.

In this sense, it became evident that the traditional transmission-reception methodology was used in all classes, however, it was the only methodology used in the French class; although the purpose of the research does not include this language, the researcher incorporated it as it is under the world language department. The classes where the main methodology is transmission-receptive, the teacher is the owner of the knowledge, and the students are the passive receivers of the instruction. It was observed how only a small minority were trying to follow the teacher's instruction, following the textbook. Most students were doing homework from other classes, watching videos, entering and leaving the classroom with the excuse of going to the bathroom or to the counselor, and three students were sleeping.

The Spanish teachers also used the transmit-receive methodology; however, they relied on PowerPoint or Google Slides to share the information with the students, which provided a roadmap in class, reinforcing what they were saying with images, graphics and other multimedia elements such as audio to clarify understanding and support different learning styles. Not only did the teachers stream it on the screen, but the students had the file open in their ChromeBooks. It was observed that the Google Slides were of great didactic support for the students; the pages contained information such as vocabulary, grammatical explanations, activity sheets to complete and as well as other pages included links to web pages with videos, and web-based exercises. It was evident that the teachers had spent a lot of time preparing the unit and the Google pages, so it can be stated that they provided the students with the necessary tools to successfully obtain the target knowledge of the class.

The Grammar-Translation methodology was used by all Spanish teachers, providing sentences for students to translate from English to Spanish. The teaching-learning under this methodology is done by memorizing vocabulary, knowledge of grammatical rules and application when translating sentences. The researcher was able to verify that, although it is a traditional methodology, it has effective aspects since the students learn grammar in a deductive way, first they go over the grammatical rules and then through examples the students make connections. Another benefit of this methodology is the learning of grammar in the mother tongue; this was evidenced when the teacher asked for an example of direct and indirect object and the students could not answer, after the teacher explained the concept in English, and the same question was asked in the target language and the students answered correctly.

Similarly, it was observed that when teachers make use of the Grammar-Translation methodology, low-level students did not know how to approach the exercise. Some tried to take the easy way of doing it using translators, however, the teachers had blocked them using the Classroom Management Software used at ILHS. Two of the teachers interrupted the students' work and used the moment to communicate the importance of honesty and the use of available resources that do not involve the easy way. The vast majority of students made use of the tools provided by the teachers. It was evident that in these activities only two skills are practiced, writing, and reading.

The cooperative methodology was observed in Spanish class two, where students in groups worked actively in the collaborative resolution of a situation, a conversation. The members discussed, clarified concepts and self-evaluated by writing and recording the conversation. It was evident that this methodology not only reinforced language skills, but also developed leadership skills and promoted interaction among students. It was evident how students corrected, laughed, and scolded each other when team members were not actively involved.

In all Spanish classes, the use of the ludic methodology was observed, students applied game values in class, interacted and collaborated with their classmates while using the target language. It was found that the use of interactive computer games awakened the students' interest and allowed the association of the concepts studied, whether

grammatical or lexical. One of the Spanish one teacher, since the beginning of the school year, writes the results of each class and has established a competition by levels. The students found that their results were better than those of the other class.



Figure 2 Methodologies in modern language classes at ILHS. based on field observations

Source: own elaboration

Figure 2 shows the summary of the methodologies used in Spanish as a second language classes. The first two methods are found in traditional contexts that, although they have achieved good results in the past, the data show the need for change, as evidenced in the interviews with the ILHS administrative team. Likewise, it is crucial to take into account that learners, who are part of a new generation, require a method that awakens their interest, that involves their skills and interests, a change in teaching methods is required. Thus, the second methods used, cooperative and ludic, being cognitive learning that includes active learning and knowledge formation had a greater impact on the instruction and motivation of students.

On the other hand, the analysis performed in Atlas.ti in the analysis of field observations, yielded five emerging codes: didactic strategies, communication, inclusion of ICT, frequent difficulties and student participation. It is important to highlight that the results of the French class are found in this network, however, they are only mentioned in the analysis.

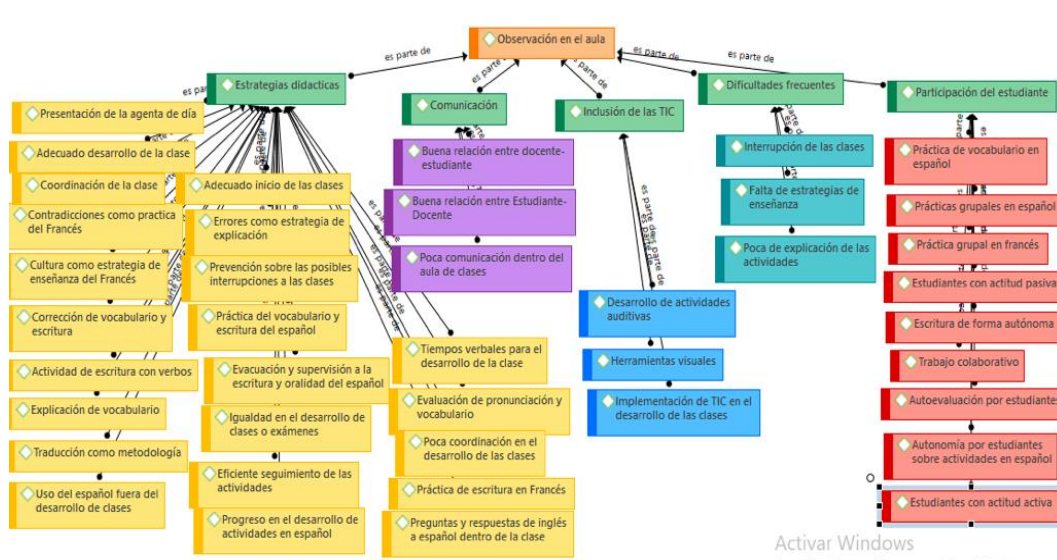


Figure 4. Semantic network - Class observation

Source: own elaboration

The first emerging code includes the didactic strategies observed in ILHS Spanish as a second language classes, which facilitated the adequate development and coordination of the class. The teachers began the classes with the presentation of the day's agenda, followed by a warm-up activity; level II began with the translation of sentences reviewing vocabulary from last year and level I with a grammar review activity with the verb “tener” (to have). In both levels it was evident that mistakes were used as learning opportunities, both in pronunciation and writing. The classes passed without interruptions. However, it was evident that few students used the target language to communicate; teachers encourage students to use the language outside the classroom with Spanish speakers in the community and/or movies. The classes observed evidenced a greater emphasis on two skills: writing and reading, with few opportunities for students to exercise listening comprehension (outside of the instructions issued by the teacher) and speaking. As mentioned above, the use of Google Slides in Spanish I & II classes allows students to efficiently follow up on activities such as Spanish vocabulary and writing practice. The Spanish curriculum is vertically and horizontally aligned, which was evidenced in the Spanish level I classes, the teachers taught the same material, and used activities, formal assessments were scheduled for the same day.

The second emerging code is the communication between teachers and students. In two of the Spanish classes, a positive relationship was evidenced, demonstrated by the students' confidence in asking questions at any time in class and asking to play again. The positive relationship was also seen in the way students maintained a positive attitude in class, smiling and following instructions, making learning more conducive. In one of the classes, it was evident that the students respect the teacher, but there was no real interaction between them; the students were quiet during the entire class, even during the play activity. In the same way, during this class the students made comments in a loud voice that the teacher ignored.

The inclusion of ICT is the third emerging code; the use of technology to present and follow up information, as well as to play games, was evidenced. Applications such as Quizlet live, kahoot, classcraft and plickers were used. Technology offers language teachers the perfect complement to language teaching, practice, and assessment. It is important that technology is used, however, the best available technology must be chosen for each skill, and meet the defined cognitive objectives. The use of ICT allows students to read, listen to, and view authentic, engaging, and timely materials from the target culture. Games for lexical review were used in both level I and II, also grammatical

tenses review was included in the second game of level II. Gamification supports different parts of the learning process, for world language classes it is possible to use them to exercise the four skills, namely reading, speaking, listening and writing.

The fourth emerging code has to do with frequent difficulties, specifically in the French class. As mentioned, it was included in the research because it is part of the world language department; the problems presented in this code are not related to Spanish as a second language classes.

Student participation in class is the fifth emerging code, observations of the Spanish classes reflected that students maintained an active attitude during most of the activities with the exception of the warm-up activity in Spanish II. As mentioned, the use of translations is a challenging activity for students, either because they do not know the vocabulary, do not understand the grammar, or are not interested in learning the language. For this reason, some students waited for others to finish the translations and write them on the blackboards and then copy them. The greatest participation was seen during the playful and cooperative activities.

Perceptions of the educational administration on the teaching-learning of Spanish

The information gathered through the instrument applied to the administrative team to identify perceptions about the teaching-learning of Spanish level three at ILHS allowed us to identify problems from this perspective, as follows. The first problem with a direct consequence on the number of students taking the class was defined by the rector: the requirements both for high school grades and for admission to the state universities.

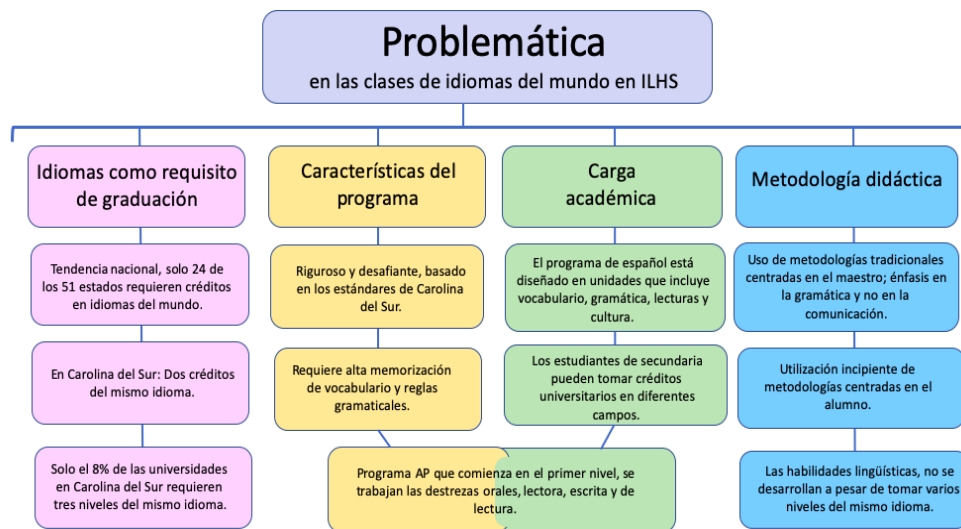


Figure 6 Perceptions of the administrative team on the problems in modern language classes at ILHS

Source: own elaboration

Of the 37 four-year colleges in South Carolina, only 8% require three levels of the same language. This results in most students only taking the required two levels to graduate. It was also evident that students do not continue with the study of world languages because of the demographics of the school and state population, the two most representative groups are White Anglo 63.5%, and African descent at 26.3%; only 7.47% of South Carolina households speak a language other than English as their primary language. World languages are not seen as an indispensable and fundamental tool to compete effectively in the 21st century, not for school administration, not for counselors, and not for students' families either.

In general, the Spanish program is seen as very rigorous and requiring a lot of memorizations on the part of the students, as mentioned by one of the vice principals. Both parents and students expect that since it is an elective class, it does not require a lot of study time and effort. One of the vice chancellors stated, "The program has a very heavy weekly workload for the students. Students often have difficulty keeping up with the program. It requires a lot of memorization and not so much of a hands-on learning environment." Contrary to other elective classes, such as the craft class, during the 90-minute class the student molds the clay, shapes it and at the end of class puts it on the shelf, only to pick up that object again the next class; they don't even have to think about what they are molding when they leave the class unless they want to.

The academic load of a high school student in the U.S. can be as light or as rigorous as the student wants, since from high school they have the opportunity to take college credits. This creates a problem for Spanish as a second language classes, especially for level III, IV and AP since as identified by one of the vice chancellors, students take only the credits in world languages that are required by the university and concentrate on other areas of interest "that they believe will be their chosen field of study and/or to include additional electives because there is a wide selection," such as science and mathematics. Advanced Spanish classes also compete with dual enrollment classes; classes that are offered by a community college for free and that students can take while in high school.

Another problem identified has to do with the didactic methodology used by the teachers in class; they continue to use traditional methodologies centered on the teacher and not on the student, which is why the student is a passive element in the classroom. The researcher observed that teachers as experts in possession of all the knowledge, continuously emphasizing the grammar of the language and not communication, during the classes observed there were few opportunities to practice the language in real contexts. This is one of the reasons why language skills, especially speaking skills, are not developed in the students, even though they have taken several levels, as stated by the school rector.

The problems of the Spanish as a second language classes at ILHS are the graduation and university entrance requirements in South Carolina, the characteristics of the program, the academic load, and the methodologies used. With respect to graduation or university entrance requirements, in order to make a change, it is necessary to join associations that promote the teaching of world languages such as ACTFL so that at the state and national level the teaching-learning of world languages is promoted. In the United States bilingualism is not seen as a priority, as has been mentioned since the beginning of the research, although it was identified as a problem at the security level of the nation by President Obama and is part of the objectives of the South Carolina graduate. The other aspects of the program issues such as program characteristics, academic load and methodologies used may be modified by using an alternative curriculum based on PBL; where teaching-learning is student-centered, incorporating cooperative learning, playfulness, and the flipped classroom among other educational strategies.

Discussion and conclusions

Project-based learning (PBL) implies that activities require continuous reflection by learners, such as managing the project as a team to complete it efficiently and effectively. Reflection in a PBL could be structured so that groups invest time in the initial phase of the project to organize and identify tasks, structure the monitoring of the project and obtaining feedback from participants, plan the exchange of knowledge and information within the group, and choose the final product (Prather et al., 2017). Continuous reflection is directly related to critical thinking, used according to the research results by 80% of the students to complete the project effectively and efficiently. For Abu Jadu & Nofal (2017), critical thinking helps students to have self-control, focus on detail, and

have clarity towards issues. Likewise, the critical thinking process requires training students in cognitive activities (Abu & Nofal, 2017). It has also been shown how students who think critically have important basic skills in the teaching and learning process; they critically investigate problems, produce and test relevant ideas, theories, and hypotheses (Issa & Khataibeh, 2021).

The stages of student learning in PBL must be systematic and limited by time. Reason why time management is one of the factors that determine success in the implementation of PBL; in traditional learning methodologies, the teacher is responsible for the time resource, however this is transferred to the students, and is evidenced through the establishment of specific goals, determination of priorities, organization of schedules of the different activities, punctuality in the fulfillment of each task, understanding in the division and delegation of tasks, demonstrating the ability to overcome the program/extracurricular activities and to recognize their skills and weaknesses (Santoso et al., 2020). Eighty percent of the students claimed to have successfully managed the time given by the teacher and it was reflected in the final products, however, within the 20% there were products that could not be presented due to technical problems that could have been solved beforehand, incomplete products and even one completely in English.

In the reflection that students did during PBL learning, only 66.6% of the students paused to reflect on the work and learning during the project, however, 33.4% did not. It is important for the teacher to include reflection time in the process. Teachers can encourage reflection and incorporate tools such as exit tickets, journals, videos, artwork, sketches, blogging, technology tools that showcase thinking, and annotation galleries. An essential part of PBL is continuous reflection, not just at the end of a project as 93% of students did in "Let's Go on Vacation." It is important that teachers provide students with different opportunities to reflect on the information needed and obtained, various ways to solve the problems presented, and on the decisions made; a skill that will prepare students for their careers and their future (Bueno, 2018). Only 66.7% of the students, the lowest percentage in this dimension, stopped in what they were doing and learning.

Successful PBL requires students to identify and explain why they are doing what they are doing and how it is supporting their final project, and in the event they require changing their path, how to do so to successfully craft their final product (Buck Institute for Education, 2019). Aswan, Lufri, and Sumarmin assert that reflection leads to critique and revision, making personal connections to the work they are involved in, making it more authentic and increasing student ownership and engagement. Reflecting on individual work and the work of their group around a public project being created develops a personal connection to the work and thus increases motivation (Aswan et al., 2018).

When the teacher plans the PBL, time for reflection should always be included, planning ahead for opportunities; to increase reflection in the students, a project evaluation map can be used to identify points of reflection, it is suggested that for the next projects one be used, since as stated before, reflection is fundamental in the process of a successful PBL. It can be said that the project was a success from the point of view of reflection, since 93.3% of the students reflected on their final product, identified and explained why they did what they did and how it supported their final project, and what they had to change along the way in order to reach their final product. Concluding, reflection is indispensable in all activities within PBL, as it leads to critique and revision.

For its part, world language education has been heavily criticized due to the inadequate preparation of students to successfully communicate in the target language and succeed in their studies and professional life. By implementing the ABP methodology and including the five C's of languages identified by ACTFL: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons and communities (ACTFL, 2016), language learning will have a different perception by the learner, it will be more than vocabulary, grammatical structures and

functional expressions; to include how to communicate, how to behave and how to interact, while integrating the most important skills of the 21st century: higher order thinking, problem solving, self-directed learning, communication and collaboration with the ability to demonstrate these skills using a language.

PBL establishes a content-enriched curriculum such that language is the vehicle that offers students a broad and authentic intellectual experience, allowing for the reconceptualization of communication by emphasizing the interconnected nature of interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes, presenting the analysis of culture through an anthropological lens based on the relationship between cultural products, practices, and perspectives (National Standards Collaborative, 2015; as reflected in the results regarding students' interpretive and writing skills. For example, interpretive communication is made use of, when students pay attention to understand a message heard, read, or seen. Other activities require listening, which is combined with speaking in interpersonal communication. Likewise, writing can be used to create a written, spoken, or mediated message, presentational communication. Writing, on the other hand, is combined with reading and emphasizes the exchange of interpersonal communication, as in text messaging (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015).

In short, in Spanish as a second language classes, the use of various methodologies was observed, some traditional ones in which the student has a passive attitude, and others based on cognitive theories that involve the student, making him/her an active participant in his/her learning. It is important to review not only the content of the Spanish curriculum, but also the methodologies used, in order to focus on those based on the cognitive development of students such as PBL, where different learning profiles can be integrated, and there is a change of attitude towards Spanish, making a connection with real life and topics that are of interest to learners. It is essential that, in the planning of Spanish classes, strategies are included that cover all learning styles and that meaningful, cooperative, associative and discovery learning are promoted, moving away from memorization. In the same way, teachers are required to generate more opportunities for the development of oral skills, which have been identified by students and the administration as the weakest of all.

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