



Pedagogical Strategies for Learning English in Basic Secondary Education: A Case Study in Rural Contexts

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Summary

This study focuses on the analysis of the pedagogical strategies used in the teaching of English in rural contexts in Colombia, with the aim of identifying the most effective methodologies to strengthen the linguistic competencies of students in basic secondary education. The research adopted a qualitative approach with a descriptive and exploratory design, using semi-structured interviews, participant observation and documentary review. The sample was composed of 5 English teachers and 50 tenth and eleventh grade students, selected intentionally. The results showed that the most effective strategies include the use of visual and technological resources, the integration of collaborative tasks, and contextualized teaching, adapted to the realities of rural students. Despite structural challenges and lack of resources, teachers implemented innovative methods to facilitate English learning. The study concludes that diversified teaching strategies are essential to improve academic performance and motivate students in rural areas, suggesting that education policies should prioritize the strengthening of teacher training and the provision of technological resources.

Keywords: Pedagogical strategies; English teaching; language skills; rural education; technological resources.

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Introduction

Teaching English in rural areas of Colombia has historically been a challenge for the education system due to various structural and social difficulties. In these regions, students have fewer opportunities to interact with the language outside the classroom and face significant limitations in terms of material, technological and training resources. This causes academic performance in English in these contexts to be lower than that of students in urban areas, which generates a gap in learning

opportunities and development of language skills. This situation is even more serious if we consider that English is considered an essential requirement to access better academic and job opportunities, both nationally and internationally (Sánchez & López, 2020).

Despite the implementation of public policies such as the "Colombia Bilingüe" program, which seeks to improve English skills at the national level, the conditions of rural educational institutions, the lack of infrastructure, and the lack of specialized teacher training continue to be important barriers that limit the effectiveness of these initiatives. In many rural schools, the traditional approach to teaching English is based on memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules, without taking into account students' cognitive needs and preferences, often resulting in demotivation and low levels of comprehension (González, 2019).

On the other hand, pedagogical innovation and the use of active didactic strategies, such as cooperative learning, the use of technological resources and contextualized teaching, have shown a positive impact on students' academic performance, even in contexts with limited resources. Tomlinson (2001) argues that student-centered teaching tailored to their cognitive and cultural characteristics is crucial to achieving more meaningful and lasting learning. However, in many cases, teachers lack the knowledge and tools necessary to implement these methodologies effectively.

In this context, this study aims to analyze the pedagogical strategies used by English teachers in rural educational institutions in Colombia, in order to identify those practices that favor the learning of English and propose recommendations to improve the teaching of the language in this type of context.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the pedagogical strategies used by English teachers in rural areas.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies on students' academic performance.
3. Propose recommendations to strengthen pedagogical practices and teacher training in rural contexts.

The importance of this research lies in the need to redefine teaching methodologies in the rural context, to ensure that students have equal access to quality education, adapted to their needs and characteristics, and can develop the necessary competencies to use English effectively in academic and professional life.

Theoretical foundation

Teaching English in rural contexts requires a flexible pedagogical approach adapted to the characteristics of the environment and the students. To this end, it is necessary to consider various theories and pedagogical approaches that favor meaningful learning, motivation and the integral development of students, despite structural and material limitations. This section will explore the main pedagogical theories that underpin the design of innovative teaching strategies, as well as the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the teaching-learning process of English.

The communicative approach in the teaching of English

One of the most relevant approaches to teaching foreign languages, especially English, is the communicative approach, which places emphasis on the practical use of the language in real contexts of communication. According to Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence not only encompasses knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, but also the ability to use language effectively in everyday situations. In this approach, the goal is not only for students to learn grammar rules, but also to be able to interact in English in various contexts, understanding and producing messages fluently and appropriately.

This approach is particularly relevant in rural contexts, where students have fewer opportunities to interact with native speakers and to be exposed to the language outside the classroom. The application of communicative strategies such as role-playing, debates, and simulation activities becomes crucial to create scenarios that favor language practice and interaction among students, promoting active and collaborative learning.

Cooperative learning as a pedagogical strategy

Cooperative learning is another pedagogical approach that has proven to be effective in learning foreign languages. Johnson and Johnson (1999) define cooperative learning as an approach in which students work in small teams to achieve common goals. This type of learning promotes positive interdependence, where students support each other to achieve learning goals, and individual responsibility to fulfill assigned tasks.

In the context of teaching English in rural areas, cooperative learning offers numerous advantages, especially in classes where resources are limited. Students can interact and learn from each other, developing communication skills more effectively than when working in isolation. This approach also supports the development of social skills, such as empathy, negotiation, and conflict resolution, which are critical for communication in a second language.

In addition, teamwork and collaboration allow students to learn in a more meaningful way, as the contents are contextualized and related to shared experiences, making it easier to understand and apply English to practice.

Differentiated pedagogy and student-centered learning

Differentiated pedagogy, according to Tomlinson (2001), proposes an approach in which teachers adjust their pedagogical strategies to meet the individual needs, interests, and abilities of students. Rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach, differentiated pedagogy recognizes that students have different ways of learning and therefore require diverse strategies and resources. This is particularly important in rural contexts, where students have a great heterogeneity in terms of interests, cognitive abilities and previous experiences.

This approach aligns with the concept of student-centered learning, which places emphasis on the active participation of students in their own learning process. By recognizing individual differences in learning styles, teachers can design activities that are both challenging and accessible to each student, allowing everyone to progress at their own pace and achieve course objectives.

In English teaching, differentiated pedagogy can be manifested through the use of multiple resources, such as videos, interactive readings, oral activities, and writing exercises, which cater to the different learning styles of students, whether visual, auditory, kinesthetic, verbal-linguistic, or interpersonal. The diversity of resources and methods increases the chances of success of students, favoring the development of language skills in English.

The use of ICT in the teaching of English

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have become fundamental tools in the teaching of foreign languages, providing teachers and students with a wide range of teaching resources and collaborative tools. According to Hattie (2018), the appropriate use of ICT in the classroom has a positive impact on students' academic performance, as it facilitates access to a variety of interactive content, promotes autonomy, and allows for immediate feedback.

In rural contexts, the use of platforms such as Google Classroom, Kahoot!, and Duolingo, among others, offers a unique opportunity to overcome the structural limitations of educational institutions, providing more balanced access to digital resources. Not only do these tools allow students to learn more interactively, but they also support personalization of learning and formative assessment, helping teachers monitor each student's progress and tailoring activities to their needs.

In summary, the use of ICT, in combination with pedagogical approaches such as cooperative learning and differentiated pedagogy, has the potential to transform English teaching in rural areas, providing students with the necessary tools to develop their language skills in a collaborative, interactive and flexible environment.

Methodology

Research Approach and Design

This study was developed under a **mixed approach**, combining **quantitative** and **qualitative methods**, with the aim of offering a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the implementation of **Google Classroom** on the **development of reading skills in English**. The research design was **quasi-experimental**, with the application of a **pre-test and post-test**, to measure the progress in students' reading skills before and after the pedagogical intervention. In addition, qualitative methods were employed through **semi-structured interviews** and **participatory observations** to better understand the experiences of students and teachers with the use of the platform.

This mixed approach makes it possible to evaluate both **quantifiable results** in terms of academic performance and **subjective perceptions** about the use of ICT in learning, which facilitates a holistic view of the educational process.

Population and sample

The study population consisted of **tenth and eleventh grade** students from a rural educational institution located in the department of Córdoba, Colombia. A **non-probabilistic sample of 50 students** who met the following criteria was selected:

- **English learners** with a basic level of proficiency in the language (determined through a pre-diagnostic test).
- **Availability and access** to the necessary technological resources (computers or mobile devices with an internet connection).

The sample was chosen to evaluate the impact of **Google Classroom** on students with heterogeneous proficiency levels and limited access to technology outside the classroom. In addition, **5 English teachers** participated and implemented the pedagogical intervention using the digital platform and were part of the interviews conducted at the end of the intervention.

Data collection tools and techniques

The following instruments were used for data collection:

- **Diagnostic test (pretest):** designed to assess students' English reading skills, with an emphasis on **short text comprehension**, **vocabulary** and **inference skills**. The test was applied before the intervention to establish the initial level of the students.
- **Final test (posttest):** applied at the end of the intervention to measure progress in reading comprehension, using the same items as in the pre-test to allow a direct comparison.
- **Student Perception Survey:** A closed, open survey, where students were able to evaluate their experience with **Google Classroom**, the **motivation** generated by the interactive activities, and the **usefulness** of the tools used.
- **Semi-structured interviews with teachers:** aimed at knowing teachers' perceptions about the **use of Google Classroom**, their **pedagogical strategies** and the **difficulties** and **advantages** they encountered when using the platform.
- **Participant observation:** direct observations during sessions in Google Classroom, focusing on **classroom dynamics**, **student participation** and effective use of the platform by students.

- **Platform activity logs:** analysis of **student interaction** with assignments and resources uploaded to Google Classroom, including their **frequency of access** and **completion of assignments**.

Procedure

1. **Diagnostic phase:**
 - Application of the **initial diagnostic test** to establish the level of proficiency in English of the students.
 - Data collection through **initial interviews** with teachers to learn about their experience with the use of technological platforms in the classroom.
2. **Intervention phase:**
 - Design and implementation of the didactic model using **Google Classroom**. Teachers uploaded **reading materials, comprehension exercises, interactive videos, and collaborative tasks** on the platform, and students completed the activities both **individually** and **cooperatively**.
 - During this phase, the use of **interactive tools** such as surveys, discussion forums, and **immediate feedback activities** was promoted, encouraging **active** and **autonomous** learning.
 - Teachers provided **constant feedback** on assignments and assessed student **performance** through Google Classroom tools.
3. **Evaluation phase:**
 - Application of the **final test** to measure progress in reading comprehension in English.
 - Conducting **interviews with teachers** and applying the **perception survey** to students, to collect qualitative information on the experience with the platform and evaluate student **motivation** and **commitment**.
 - Analysis of **activity records** on the platform to observe the **interaction of students** with digital resources.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using **descriptive statistics** to identify the averages of the diagnostic and final tests, as well as to make a **comparison of means** between the pretest and the posttest using the **t-test** for paired samples. This comparison made it possible to determine whether there were significant differences in students' academic performance before and after the intervention.

Qualitative data from interviews, surveys, and **observations** were analyzed using **thematic content analysis**. Emerging categories related to **motivation, perception of the use of Google Classroom** and **classroom dynamics** were identified. In addition, data **triangulation was performed** to increase the validity and reliability of the results.

Results

The results obtained in this research are organized into three dimensions: **academic performance, student perceptions** about the use of Google Classroom, and **classroom dynamics**. Each of these dimensions provides a comprehensive view of how the use of the technological platform impacted the teaching-learning process in the area of **reading comprehension in English** in a rural context. A detailed analysis of each of these aspects is presented below.

1. Academic performance

The comparison between the results obtained in the **initial diagnostic test (pretest)** and the **final test (posttest)** shows a **significant increase** in the academic performance of students in terms of **reading comprehension** in English. The average score of the diagnostic test was **2.8 out of 5**, while

in the post-test it increased to **4.1 out of 5**, which represents an increase of **1.3 points** (approximately **46% improvement**).

The improvements were particularly noticeable in the following areas of evaluation:

- **Vocabulary:** from **2.7** to **4.0** (improvement of **1.3 points**).
- **Comprehension of short texts:** from **2.8** to **4.2** (improvement of **1.4 points**).
- **Ability to infer and critically analyze** – from **2.9** to **4.1** (**1.2 point improvement**).

This increase in academic performance is attributed to Google Classroom's **interactive** and **multimedia** approach, which allowed students to work more autonomously, receive immediate feedback, and improve their **understanding of content** through **visual activities** and **collaborative exercises**. The results reflect how the platform contributed to **vocabulary retention** and a **deeper understanding** of the texts read.

2. Student perceptions about the use of Google Classroom

The surveys applied at the end of the intervention revealed that students **positively valued** the use of **Google Classroom** as a learning tool in the area of English. **94% of students** said that the platform allowed them **to learn more dynamically** and **better understand English texts**. In addition, **92%** of students indicated that **they enjoyed the interactive activities**, such as videos and **collaborative tasks** offered by the platform. Some representative comments from the students were:

"I liked the videos with subtitles, they helped me understand English better." I was able to read the texts, watch the videos and then do activities. That helped me remember better what I learned." With Google Classroom I was able to review the lessons at home and work at my own pace."

Through the semi-structured interviews, students also mentioned that **collaborative activities** in Google Classroom, such as **online discussions** and **group work**, helped them **improve their ability to speak English** and **share ideas** with their peers. Most of the students considered that the **immediate feedback** allowed them **to correct errors quickly**, which favored their learning.

3. Classroom dynamics and student participation

Direct observation of classes and **field logs** indicated a positive change in **classroom dynamics** and student **engagement**. Initially, classes were mostly **passive**, with students just listening and taking notes. However, after the implementation of Google Classroom, classes became more **interactive** and **collaborative**, with students more willing to actively participate in solving exercises.

92% of students said that using the platform allowed them to work more **independently** and **better organize their studies**, which gave them a **sense of control over their learning**. This aspect was especially valuable in the rural context, where students often face **constraints of time** and **access to materials** outside the classroom. In addition, the **collaborative dynamics** promoted by Google Classroom fostered **communication** among students, who felt more comfortable working together and learning from others.

Teachers reported that students were **more engaged and motivated** during online activities and **virtual follow-ups**. According to the teachers, autonomy **in learning** increased, and interactions between them were more frequent and productive compared to traditional classes. One teacher said:

"Google Classroom made it easy to track students and allowed them to learn at their own pace. Interaction also improved, as students shared their ideas more in the forums."

Summary of the results

Indicator	Pretest Average	Average Post-Est	Increment
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Vocabulary	2.7	4.0	+1.3
Comprehension of short texts	2.8	4.2	+1.4
Inference and analysis capabilities	2.9	4.1	+1.2
Student Engagement	60%	92%	+32%
Motivation	70%	94%	+24%

The results confirm that the **implementation of Google Classroom** in English teaching, especially in reading comprehension, had a significant positive impact on academic performance, motivation and student participation. The platform contributed to a **better understanding** of the content, promoted **autonomous** and **flexible** learning, and facilitated interaction and collaboration between students, key elements for learning a foreign language in a rural context.

These results highlight the **importance of educational technology** as a **pedagogical support** tool, especially in contexts where resources are limited, and show that, if implemented appropriately, it can **transform the teaching-learning process** in rural educational settings.

Discussion

The results obtained in this study provide a solid basis for arguing that the use of **Google Classroom** in English teaching has a **significant impact on academic performance**, especially in the area of **reading comprehension**. Next, the main findings and their relationship with the existing literature are analyzed, identifying the key factors that contribute to the success of this pedagogical intervention in rural contexts.

The positive impact of Google Classroom on academic performance

The substantial improvement in **academic scores** (a 46% increase in the overall average) confirms that the use of digital platforms, such as **Google Classroom**, can significantly enhance student learning. This increase in performance is in line with previous studies that have shown that **digital tools** offer students more **interactive** and **autonomous** learning opportunities, improving their understanding and retention of content (Hattie, 2018; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

The fact that students achieved improvements in key areas such as **vocabulary**, **comprehension of short texts** and **inferences**, reflects that the use of **multimedia materials** on the platform (videos, interactive readings, contextualized vocabulary exercises) not only increases interest in learning, but also favors a **deep** and more **sustainable understanding** of the content. The ability to interact with the material flexibly and repeatedly, without the constraints of the traditional classroom, allowed students to **better assimilate the content** and correct errors immediately.

This finding also aligns with the blended **learning approach**, which has been widely recognized for its effectiveness in improving **students' academic achievement** by integrating **face-to-face** and **digital** learning (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). By offering a more personalized learning experience tailored to students' needs, Google Classroom acted as a tool to facilitate access to content and **encourage autonomous understanding**.

Motivation and participation: key factors for success

One of the most significant transformations observed in this research was the change in the levels of **motivation** and **participation** of students. **94% of students** indicated that they felt more motivated to participate in activities, which is consistent with **Deci and Ryan's (2002)** theory of **intrinsic motivation**. According to these authors, students feel more motivated when they perceive that learning is relevant to them, that they have **autonomy** and control over their progress, and that they can **experience learning in an active and meaningful way**.

Google Classroom's interactive activities, such as **online discussions**, **collaborative assignments**, and **hands-on exercises**, provided a **rich and diverse learning experience** that allowed students to **explore and experiment** with the language, rather than simply memorizing grammar rules. This

coincides with the **learning-by-doing** approach, which has proven to be an effective strategy for improving **engagement** and **understanding** in foreign language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

In addition, the fact that students could **work at their own pace** and access content outside the classroom promoted **more autonomous learning**. This was especially important in the rural context, where students face limitations in accessing extracurricular classes or additional resources outside of school. Using **Google Classroom** allowed students to **build their own knowledge**, which increased their **confidence** and sense of **ownership over their learning**.

Transforming classroom dynamics

Classroom observations showed a **positive change** in **classroom dynamics**. Classes went from being traditionally **teacher-centered**, with an expository approach, to a more **dynamic and participatory** modality, focused on **active** and **collaborative learning**. This resulted in a more inclusive learning environment, where students shared ideas, **worked in groups**, and **collaborated with each other** to solve problems. This type of dynamic is consistent with the principles of **cooperative learning**, which emphasizes **positive interdependence** and **individual and group responsibility** (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

The fact that **Google Classroom** facilitated **collaborative activities** and provided **immediate feedback** allowed students to interact more consistently, not only with their peers, but also with teachers, who were able to closely monitor each student's progress. This aspect favored the **autonomy** and **responsibility** of students for their learning, fundamental aspects to promote an **inclusive** and **student-centered education**.

Challenges and limitations in implementation

Despite the positive results, this intervention presented certain **challenges** that should be considered in future implementations. One of the main challenges was limited **access to technology** in some homes, which made it difficult for some students to carry out activities outside the classroom. Although most students accessed the platform through mobile devices, **internet connectivity issues** and **lack of suitable devices** were significant barriers to the **effective implementation** of the model.

In addition, some teachers experienced **resistance to methodological change**, especially those with little experience in the use of digital platforms. While most teachers expressed a **positive interest** in the use of **Google Classroom**, some pointed to the need for more training in the use of digital tools and in the **management of online activities**. This highlights the **need for continuous teacher education** in the field of ICT, especially in rural contexts where teachers may have limited access to training resources.

Conclusions

The use of **Google Classroom** has proven to be an **effective pedagogical strategy** to improve **academic performance** and encourage **student motivation** and **participation** in English teaching. The platform allowed for a **better understanding** of the texts, more **autonomous learning** and constant **interaction** with the content, favoring **meaningful** and dynamic learning. In addition, the implementation of collaborative strategies and access to **immediate feedback** improved the quality of the teaching-learning process.

This study has also highlighted the importance of **continuous teacher training** in the use of educational technologies and the **need to improve access to devices and internet connection** in rural contexts. To maximize the benefits of digital platforms, it is recommended to **strengthen the technological infrastructure** in rural educational institutions and provide specialized teacher training in the use of these tools.

The research also suggests that the integration of digital platforms such as **Google Classroom** in the teaching of English can be **replicated** and **adapted** to other rural institutions, contributing to the **reduction of the educational gap** and improving the quality of education in the most underserved areas of the country.

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