

# Research Impacts



Centro Cultural  
Colombo Americano  
Cali | Palmira | Buga  
*Inglés y mucho más!*



**EDITORS**

JoEllen M. Simpson, Ph.D.

Brayan Portilla, MA

**Research Impacts**

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# Preface

05

JoEllen M. Simpson, Ph.D.  
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The paths that lead English teachers to take on the challenge of research usually bring them to an improved learning and understanding of their teaching and professional practices while also positively impacting their teaching contexts. These paths, as happened in 2018 at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano (CCCA), brought many teachers together to explore their own research projects in applied linguistics as a professional development activity. As an institution, we hope that this focus on research will have a positive impact on the subjects, our language learners, who provide us with our primary motivation.

This volume, presented to the public as part of our celebration of 65 years in the language teaching industry, is a compilation of the first research reports of 9 studies conducted at the CCCA. This research has been made possible by the restructuring of the Academic Area, in which the new position of researcher allowed the academic community to view research as an opportunity to foster teachers' professional development.

The title of this book can be read both as a sentence, "research impacts," or as a noun, "research impacts" because we believe both are true. This publication highlights research that impacts both the teacher and the learner, which offers English teachers an informed and practical view about the interests of individual authors as well as collective concerns of English teachers at our institution and elsewhere.

This volume starts with an article by Brayan Portilla, which is the first publication adapted from his Master's thesis (2016) "A Calibrating Mentoring Course at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano - Cali - Palmira - Buga." Brayan focused his attention on the creation of a course for the

academic supervisory staff using the teachers and mentors' beliefs and expectations on the role of the mentor and the Mentoring Program being implemented at the institution. One of Brayan's conclusions was that research practiced by the mentors was necessary in order to have a positive impact on the classroom practices of our teachers. This study sparked the motivation for the creation of a course to lead the entire academic staff at the CCCA to become teacher-researchers, and the articles presented below are the first fruits of those labors. All of the articles presented here benefitted from Brayan's constant supervision and support in the process of researching and preparing the final chapters for publication.

Second, Martha Orobio and Melissa Arango have focused their attention on the teacher's role in making the students' process of learning English successful. Martha focuses on the type of adjustments that teachers in lower levels make in order to meet students' needs and interests while introducing the concept of Differentiated Instruction (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014) as an appropriate path to help learners succeed. She makes a strong argument for training teachers in order to better deal with mixed-ability classes. In a similar vein, Melissa presents a view of promoting English learners' success by correctly diagnosing and dealing with Specific Learning Disabilities (SDLs), and she explores how teachers perceive young learners with an eye towards helping other teachers incorporate inclusive practices in the language learning classroom. Her study invites a reflection on teachers' awareness of and ability to promote inclusion in their classrooms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Salend & Garrick, 1999) to ensure the role of the teachers as true support providers.

Our teacher-researchers also gave a close look at students' English learning development through metacognitive strategies. Claudia Gutiérrez describes the effect of two types of written feedback techniques aimed at perceiving students' understanding of their own learning process while revisiting the concepts of feedback from the perspectives of reciprocal communication (Klimova, 2015; Leng, 2014) and assessment (Nicol 2010; Nicol & Macfarlane Dick, 2006). Claudia encourages teachers to look for new ways to give feedback to students to not only make specific corrections in their language, but also to go beyond the superficial to promote awareness of their language learning process. This interest in learning awareness is shared by Jacqueline Ramirez as she explores the competence of learning to learn as an effective teaching strategy for lifelong learning (Council of Europe, 2001) in her English classroom. She proposes the implementation of metacognition and critical thinking strategies to maximize students' language development based on comprehensive definitions by Veenman, Van Hout-Wolters and Afflerbach (2006), Zimmerman (1995), and Paul and Elder (2007).

Technology was also a consideration in the creation of these research projects. Judith Puertas and Nelson Jaramillo both look at how teachers interact with technology in the language learning process. Judith examines how a group of pilot teachers dealt with the new blended learning (BL) program, Flex English, and based on this analysis she makes a proposal about how new teachers in the program should be trained. She highlights the importance of the most relevant features of BL as being necessary for the success of teaching and learning in this semi-digital learning format, in particular synchronicity (Skrzypek, 2013; Stein & Graham, 2014) and the appropriate use of a learning management system (Compton, 2009; Kakasevski, Mihajlov, Arsenovski & Chungurski, 2008; Wilson & Stacey, 2004). Nelson looks at the effect of flipped reading activities through Power Point presentations on the in-class performance and critical thinking of a group of students. He argues that using flipped learning (FL) allows students to develop new channels for becoming more aware of critical thinking (Egbert, Herman & Lee, 2015; Enfield, 2013) and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956). By observing how one group of students interacted with the FL material designed, Nelson provides us with food for thought as more and more teachers look to invert activities for learning success into their classrooms.

Grammar, as a key component of language teaching and learning, is also one of the foci discussed by Jaime Ramirez and Diana Aguilar. Jaime helps us understand how grammar (Flognfeldt & Lund, 2016), exposure to the language (Muñoz, 1999), motivation (Benson, 2001), pronunciation (Cook, 1996), vocabulary (Çelik & Toptaş, 2010), and teacher's attitude towards language teaching (Archana & Rani 2016) are key areas English teachers should take into consideration to facilitate learners' achievement of oral competencies. And Diana's attention is on describing grammar teaching from the perspectives of learners and teachers as a means to facilitate the understanding of grammar instructional modes, the materials, and the classroom activities in light of theories on grammar instruction (Oxford & Lee 2007; Brown, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2001).

With this volume, we exalt our teacher's hard work and great contribution to the transformation of the CCCA academic community through each of the studies conducted and the impacts these projects have had and will have on the teaching and learning in our institution. We invite our teachers to explore these impacts of research and to give a strengthened voice their teaching practices, always looking at students' progress towards the goal of learning English.

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# Perceptions on The Role of the Mentor and The Mentoring Program at The Centro Cultural Colombo Americano<sup>1</sup>

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1. This research article is a partial report on the study “A Calibrating Mentoring Course at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano Cali – Palmira – Buga” conducted by Brayan Portilla as part of his 2016 MA thesis at ICESI University, Cali. The study focused on the creation of a course for teacher educators-supervisors, taking the teachers and mentors beliefs on the mentoring program as key input.

## **Abstract**

The Centro Cultural Colombo Americano Cali- Palmira - Buga (CCCA) has a Mentoring Program in which 15 mentors guide the academic and professional development processes of the present teaching staff at the institution. With the intention of identifying Adult Program teachers and mentors' beliefs and expectations on the role of the mentor as an academic figure and the Mentoring Program being implemented, the primary data collection for this study came from an online questionnaire that 46 teachers and 15 mentors responded to in February 2015. Results of the questionnaire show that both audiences, teachers and mentors, perceive the role of the mentor and the Mentoring Program as a positive strategy for professional development in the teaching of English as a foreign language, and they note specific opportunities for improvement.

### **Key Words:**

Mentoring, teachers and mentors' beliefs, expectations on supervision. EFL teaching and supervision.

## Introduction

The Centro Cultural Colombo Americano - Cali - Palmira- Buga (CCCA) is an English institution with a long trajectory in the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Colombia. This institute has also had a constant interest in accurately preparing its English teachers to perform with high teaching quality. Therefore, the institution established a set of corporate pedagogical procedures for teachers resulting in the creation of a Mentoring Program in which a group of 15 well-prepared, experienced and talented teachers, known as mentors, help guide teachers' academic and TEFL pedagogical practices in both the Kids and Teens and Adult programs.

However, the positive image English teachers have towards a comprehensive and supportive mentor-mentee process fails to exist because of multiple factors that inhibit a proper development of mentoring. As Puertas (2009) states in her CCCA TEFL Certificate Course research project report, mentors in the Adult English Program are very busy people carrying out many administrative duties which sometimes restrict the optimal development of mentoring support to help teachers grow professionally. Hence, both mentors and mentoring program are perceived as supervisory structures in the academic life of the institution.

These assertions provide a guiding curiosity to explore teachers and mentors' perceptions and expectations on the role of the mentor and the Mentoring Program at the CCCA as a program aimed at enhancing teacher professional development and not at supervising language teaching.

## Literature Review

Discussing about EFL teacher education and teacher professional development in language is a relevant task to do in educational contexts where academic and pedagogical process aim at benefitting learners. Regardless of the type of teacher education, evaluating current supervisory and academic support practices and understanding the impact they have on EFL teachers as recipients of such advising process makes it necessary for institutions to revise their objectives and implementation procedures. This research paper focuses on describing mentoring and its participants –along with their roles and beliefs, in order to provide a detailed picture of the expected role of the mentor and the Mentoring Program at the CCCA.

The key elements defining this revision of literature directly relate to the concept of mentoring, teacher education in EFL and TESOL contexts, and English language teacher supervision as well as the participants of such processes of teacher professional development. Initially describing

mentoring as part of pre-service educational contexts guides the discussion on the type of EFL teacher education that is suited for an English institute like the CCCA, which mentors provide through the roles described considering well-known authors like Bailey (2006), Randall and Thornton (2001), Kayaoglu (2012) and Malderez and Bodóczy (1999). Next, a brief discussion about the risks of the mentor-mentee relationship in TEFL academic contexts is presented with a relevant background piece (Puertas, 2009) and Bailey's (2006) dimensions of the advisor-advisee rapport while the final part explores teachers and mentors' beliefs about teacher education and supervision.

### **Defining Teacher Development and Mentoring**

This popular method of providing feedback started in British education systems in 1992 and, according to Malderez and Bodóczy (1999), is increasingly used in ELT contexts where pre-service teaching practice takes place. Randall and Thornton (2001) remind us that the ultimate goal of mentoring (counselling in their words) is to engage teachers in their professional development by assuming an autonomous perspective (Randall & Thornton, 2001, p. 2). Daresh (2001) puts the term in a bigger context by indicating that mentoring aims at facilitating instructional improvement in the quality of the educational process taking place. This view implies that mentoring in EFL contexts is a process of qualification of teaching practices while also maintaining and improving the current standards (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Kayaoglu, 2012; Knop, 1980).

Another perspective, presented by Bailey (2006, p. 5), could be added to the discussion of what mentoring is when she defines ELF teacher development as "helping language teachers achieve their full potential." She supports her definition by citing Gebhard (1990) who states that, "language teacher supervision is an ongoing process of teacher education in which the supervisor observes what goes on in the teacher's classroom with an eye toward the goal of improved instruction" (Bailey, 2006, p. 5). Additionally she discusses that there is a substantial difference between *supervision vs teacher development* as supervision includes, "less rewarding and rather unpleasant responsibilities such as providing negative feedback, ensuring that teachers adhere to program policy." Daresh (2001) cited by Bailey (2006, p.7) concludes that the literature on educational supervision or mentoring has rebounded in the incapability to fully describe what mentoring should be like; however, it does seem relevant to note that the supervisory objectives of a program should be separated from the objectives that focus on improving teaching instruction and promote EFL teacher professional development.

Randall and Thornton (2001, p. 2) explain that much of what had been developed in the literature about helping teachers develop their skills as language professionals is directly linked to the concept of counselling, which as the authors describe, “has to be ‘owned’ by the teacher and not merely imposed from the outside” if it is to be effective; otherwise mentoring would only draw on supervision and inspection. Additionally, Shwartz and Dori (2016, p.150) express in their study that effective mentoring programs should “help teachers gain more confidence in their professional capability, translate educational theory into practice more effectively and improve communication skills.” Most importantly, Randall and Thornton (2001, p.3) argue that a mentoring program should lead to empower teachers considering “how to provide the necessary structures which will allow teachers and trainees to develop autonomously.”

These nuances in what supervision and teacher education are, and the ultimate goals of such supervision, allow us to view mentoring as an academic activity only if the educational contexts envision it as an opportunity for their EFL teachers’ professional growth, giving this research paper a relevant framework for the CCCA to orient the Mentoring Program goals towards teacher education and development, and not towards EFL teacher supervision.

## **Types of Teacher Education**

Kayaoglu (2012) asserts that there has been a shift in the goal of supervision from maintaining the current qualities of the teaching programs to providing teachers with opportunities for professional growth. However, this shift corresponds to the emphasis of supervision and the settings where it occurs. A classification of contexts in which teaching occurs is presented by Randall and Thornton (2001) as a means to illustrate the type of advising that occurs in educational settings. The initial category is pre-service teaching ranging from teaching practice supervision, mentoring and “private” sector TEFL certification; while In-Service teaching occurs in “private” sector TEFL diplomas, internal appraisal, and inspection and colleague to colleague supervision. Based on these contexts, the type of advising that is implemented at the CCCA is pre-service teaching, which, based on the Randall and Thornton (2001, p. 4), “influences the areas that advisors will discuss with the teachers, on the content and focus of the teacher learning process and on the degree of experience which the teacher brings to the discussion”.

As it is said that the type of teacher education depends on the roles of the supervisors (Bailey, 2006, p. 6), moving from judgmental to evaluative or “highly directive” to “hands-on” teacher supervision, Kayaoglu (2012)

refers to Bailey's (2006) compilation of models as a rather complete review of the teacher supervision spectrum in TEFL education. Types of supervisory approaches listed by Bailey (2006, p. 8-13) are Wiles' (1967) idealistic supervision in education and Abrell's (1974) Humanistic Supervision characterized by the love of the supervisor of the teachers. Goldsberry's (1988) Three Models of Teacher Supervision aim at (a) maintaining the status quo by complying with the institution's requirements in a limited time for supervision, (b) providing a diagnosis and treating the problems while the supervisor is perceived as highly knowledgeable and experienced, and (c) reflecting upon teaching in order to provide changes and improvements in teacher's behavior.

Clark's (1990) Six Roles of Pre-service Teacher Supervision specifically describe the roles supervisors have. These roles are judgmental, non-judgmental, cooperative, responsive, clerical and clinical supervision, while Acheson and Gall's (1997) Six Types of Teacher Supervision are mentor, counsellor, coach, consultant, cooperating teacher and inspector. Finally, Kayaoglu points out Freeman's (1982, 1989a) Three Options for Language Teacher Supervision discuss (a) the supervisor as an authority, (b) the supervisor as a provider of alternative perspectives and (c) the supervisor as a non-directive figure. Bailey (2001, p. 42) cites Gebhard (1984) by indicating that the author goes beyond Freeman's (1982) model by adding other 5 models of supervision, (1) directive, 2) alternative, 3) collaborative, 4) non-directive, and 5) creative.

Reviewing these approaches locates the CCCA in the need for defining the type of supervision its Mentoring Program expects mentors to carry out while also addressing an explicit approach to EFL teacher development that entitles teachers to be autonomous and the bearers of their own processes.

## **Describing Mentors and Their Roles**

Malderez and Bodóczy (1999, p. 4) define a mentor in EFL teacher education programs as a "classroom teacher who accepts a novice into their classroom for a period of teaching practice [...] These teachers, in fact, provide extremely helpful advice and guidance to young trainees." However, at the CCCA, teachers' experience ranges from novice to very experienced, and all are assigned a mentor; hence, the mentor is indeed a figure of academic and professional support for EFL teachers with diverse teaching experience and backgrounds.

The dimensions of the mentor's role appear to be professional/developmental and also institutional, with an assessment function (Randall & Thornton, 2001). Among the institutional/assessment roles, mentors can be asked to coach teachers, inform the teacher of wider curriculum issues, help

in goal formation and clarification, and evaluate classroom performance. At the personal/developmental role, mentors can be asked to motivate the teacher, boost confidence, counsel or listen to problems, reduce feelings of anxiety, and problem-solve situations as well as help teachers settle into the school. As Fish (1995) and Smith and We-Burnham (1993) (cited by Randall and Thornton, 2001) describe that the functions of development are the highly important roles attributed to mentors and trainers. These are some of the current mentors' qualifications at the CCCA which are also combined with the description of their pedagogical and academic activities described in the Resource Teacher Job Profile.

However, supervisors in education carry out different duties that, according to Bailey, "are more or less inherently to supervisory in nature," even if those supervisors perform organizational roles and are also "expected to be instructional experts, diagnosticians, curriculum developers, instructional planners, problem solvers, innovators, clinical observation specialists, and managers of the processes of teaching and learning" (Bailey, 2006, p. 7).

Regardless of the term being used to define the role of the mentor (supervisor, advisor, coach, leader, mentor), it is extremely relevant to note that, for the purpose of this research project, the mentor is a figure of academic orientation who seeks to provide appropriate academic and logistic support to EFL teachers and novice teachers at different levels of experience. This is the reason for having also applied the questionnaire to teachers following the adaptation from the Alberta Teachers' Association, *Mentoring Beginning Teachers' Handbook* (2003).

A relevant issue defining mentorship is the advisor-advisee relationship; there are three dimensions that have an impact on the area of teacher education (Randall & Thornton, 2001), which are the interpersonal climate, the institutional role and the purpose. These areas commonly have a powerful effect on mentoring. The first dimension, the interpersonal climate, relates to those advisor-advisee relationship risks present due to the perceived status of the advisor and the degree of formal and/or informal interaction resulting from the external and social relationships between advisors and advisees. This is also due to the lack of agreement upon the features required to become a supervisor (Kayaoglu, 2012; Randall and Thornton, 2001). As this dimension notes, expectations and beliefs on the type of advising that mentors provide may be highly influenced by the interpersonal climate among the participants of any Mentoring Program.

The second dimension, the institutional role, appeals for the understanding of the role of the advisor within the framework of the institution where teacher education is happening. Randall and Thornton (2001) suggest that the role of the advisor is explicitly determined by "discourse" that the

institution has developed around the counselling of teachers and that this specific dimension generates positive and negative perceptions about the image of the supervisor, mentor, or inspector, which may possibly result in ineffective mentoring and support.

The third and last issue having an impact in the support provided to EFL teachers is the purpose of the program of mentoring. These two authors emphasize the problematic side of the relationship between the advisor and the advisee, as the purpose of the feedback to teachers can be assessment or development. Its approach should be confronted by the advisor in relationship to the institution discourse and expectations.

Bailey (2006, p.6), who also provides a review of literature on the roles of the EFL supervisors in varied professional contexts, contributes to listing the names and surnames given to the role of the supervisor/mentor because of the supervision duties that the profession has gained in the education contexts of language teaching. As she states, “[those] phrases indicate a certain level of tension in the relationship between teachers and supervisors”.

These perceptions of the role of the mentor that Randall & Thornton (2001) and Bailey (2006) present are outstanding concepts leading the discussion of the analysis of the answers that teachers and mentors at the CCCA provided in the questionnaire about the beliefs and expectations about the mentors and the Mentoring Program. The interpersonal aspect of the relationship among mentors and mentees (professional/personal roles) and the purpose (development/assessment) are a latent reality visualized in the pre-service context that the CCCA offers for teaching education and that this paper explores in the result section.

Additional to these three dimensions, Puertas (2009) explores the intricate relationship between the mentor and the mentee, and the purpose of the advising in her in-situ research project conducted at the CCCA in which she intended to demonstrate that the mentors at the CCCA spend more time developing their supervisory duties than supporting their teachers. This author also discusses other issues affecting the mentoring purpose, which also constitute the closest caveats affecting the Mentoring Program in this institution. The first risk she notes is the time and the amount of administrative activities the advisors have plus the distribution of academic/administrative activities in specific periods of working time. The second risk of the purpose of mentoring, as described by the author, is the “uneven number of mentees assigned” (Puertas 2009, p. 3) per mentor. This risk has a direct impact on the quality and the type of relationship that advisors-advisees have, and that could also intervene with the mentor’s mentoring style, which at the CCCA are evidently influencing mentoring duties and perceptions of what effective academic mentoring should be.

## Empowering Teachers

It is relevant to define that the role of the mentor should also be explained at the level of facilitator of reflective practitioners and teacher autonomy developers. Randall and Thornton (2001, p. 41) illustrate the empowerment and agency that teachers/mentees should be exposed to thanks to a mentor who is able to “emphasize intermediate zones of practice” (areas that the teacher needs to pay attention to and learn next) by drawing concepts obtained from “reflective conversations with the materials and the situation.” This role also has a considerable impact on the way teachers and mentors conceive the role of the mentor and the Mentoring Program at the CCCA which should be built around the understanding of a mentor as coach or advisor guiding the teacher into a dialogue that is critical of the practices in the language classroom.

Further to the understanding of the mentor as a guide who targets new learnings, Wallace (1991, p. 26) notes that mentors are to foster EFL practitioners’s reflections who are not “followers of instructions but professionals who are open to new ideas [and who are]... flexible, capable of further independent study [and] able to resolve problems in a rational way.” As this should be a defining role of mentors at the CCCA, mentoring should move to promoting teacher’s agency because advisors cannot have a permanent accompaniment. It is key to allow teachers to “help refine their views of the teaching process and their own learning” (Randall and Thornton, 2001, p. 42) and help them voice the process they undergo.

## Teachers and Mentors’ Beliefs about Teacher Supervision

Kayaoglu (2007, p. 15) points out that the term supervision generates unpleasant and disturbing feelings because of there seems to be a response that is defensive and hostile even if supervision is a regular aspect of many institutions. To this view, authors like Stoller (1996, p. 2) and Kayaoglu (2012) add that EFL teachers perceive “supervision as a threat when interacting with their supervisors in a notably hierarchical context” even if from the part of the supervisors, teachers should provide testimony of the supervisor’s positive contributions to the quality of teaching teachers are developing. An account of the literature observing supervision and the perception from teachers notes:

The connotations of the term supervision in the related literature “cold war” (Blumberg, 1980, p. 2); “snoopervision” (Schön, 1983, p. 14); “ghost walk” (Black, 1993, p. 38); “assessment and evaluation” (Kayaoglu, 2007, p. 16) are so negative that even a new word is needed to denote the essential functions of supervision. This perhaps

describes the prevailing effect of the type of traditional supervision characterized by the perfunctory visits of the supervisor in an authoritarian and directive rather than democratic, cooperative, and collaborative manner (Kayaoglu 2012, p.104).

In concordance with these connotations assigned to teacher supervision, studies like that by Moradi, Sepehrifa and Khadiv (2014, p.122) show that there is a pessimistic view of current supervision practices, which they depict as a "negative experience" while supervisors are called mere "bureaucratic administrators." This conceptualization of the role of the supervisor indicates a conflict in the aspects of real academic support and authoritative supervision in teacher's educational contexts while this study also suggests that supervisors in the field of EFL teaching do not possess the level of expertise required. This can be also read in Bailey (2006) and Kayaoglu (2012).

On the other hand, EFL teachers recognize the importance of their success in classroom practices when mentors and mentoring programs are designed based on what they do, what they know, what they would like to know, and their attitudes and beliefs towards language teaching and learning (Farooq, 2016). However, perceptions of teachers indicate that teachers may also be regarded as "blank slates" or recipients of training opportunities which the institute considers them to be all at the same stage of professional development. This perception indicates that there could be a shift in the type of reflections fostered among teachers through academic and guiding practices EFL teacher educators propose.

In her study, Kayaoglu (2012, p. 116) discusses that to bridge the gap generated by EFL teachers' beliefs, it is compulsory that a collaborative and professional relationship be established among teachers and supervisors. Huang (2010) advocates for structured programs that allow professional development through activities like self-evaluation and engagement in critical evaluation and performance analysis. The challenge, in Stoller's (1996, pp. 1-2) words is, "how to turn negative attitudes towards supervision around so that teachers (and our programs) can reap the rewards and benefits-in the form of professional development and improved instruction."

Mentors also hold expectations and beliefs about their jobs and practices as mentors. In their study results, Shwartz and Dori (2016) discussed how mentoring EFL teachers requires addressing aspects at the affective, professional and technical levels on a daily basis which they perceive are the foundation of effective mentoring programs. These authors describe, for instance, that mentors expect teachers to be self-driven, and open to discussing their teaching and being provided with feedback. In

addition, they conclude that mentors consider that a mentoring program should be characterized by key components such as trust, respect and role modelling.

Although there are reviewed cases in which a mentor's role is perceived to be misguiding and useless in approach and techniques of directing a teacher's process (see Chen & Cheng 2013), more encouraging studies indicate that mentoring and teacher education are perceived as positive. In the study of 542 mentors in New York, Huling and Resta (2001) found that mentors engage in obtaining different benefits such as professional competency, reflective practice, renewal of teaching practices, collaboration, and leadership. Huling and Resta also indicate that for mentors, mentoring is "a growth-promoting experience for mentors as well" (p. 16) while also benefitting both mentors and teachers equally.

Perceptions on mentoring, EFL teacher education, and supervision oscillate from positive to negative depending on the approach adopted by the educational context and the effectiveness of the mentoring practice and the perceived results in both teachers and mentors. Therefore, identifying English teachers and mentors' beliefs and expectations on the role of the mentor and the Mentoring Program at the CCCA can be viewed as a step forward in the generation of a discussion about mentoring and the need to revisit successful supervisory practices that build up solid professional development processes in teachers and in mentors.

Literature about teaching education and supervisory activities indicates that the impact of supervision in professional development is relevant and significant depending on the approach explicitly acknowledged by the school community. Therefore, understanding the role of the mentor in educational programs facilitates establishing boundaries and setting objectives for mentoring programs in specific settings. Also, as mentors and their supervisory and academic support activities are inherent in a bigger teacher development structure that encourages pre-service and in-service teachers to autonomously explore new paths of professional development and achievement, observing mentoring as an effective tool for schools is a must for institutions like the CCCA.

Finally, this review of literature on mentoring, its participants, and their roles opens a space for reflection towards the true objectives of the Mentoring Program at the CCCA where both mentors and teachers converge in the beliefs and expectations held on the impact of mentoring.

**Context: The Mentoring Program**

The CCCA Quality Management System established in 2004 regulates the Mentoring Program. The implementation of the quality system at the CCCA formalized the procedures, control and follow-up activities that mentors should use with teachers and which evidence the academic and professional development support they provide. These procedures and activities are described in the job profiles and documents in the Quality Management System, including the Lesson Plan Checklist and the Observation Form, and the In-Services and Mentor-Mentee Meetings are key procedures that nourish the training and guidance that mentors conduct with their mentees in the General English Program for Adults. Therefore, the Mentoring Program at the CCCA is not described as a program itself. It is rather a set of instructions, procedures and activities described in the teacher and mentors' job profiles that seek to ensure that high quality teaching practices are carried out and which are evidenced through different activities and forms that measure teaching performance and compliance of procedures within the Quality Management System indicators.

As the Mentoring Program is not completely described in a specific document, the Institutional Educational Project makes several references to the Mentoring Program.

Our teachers receive periodic follow-up from their mentors and they receive constant feedback on their performance in order to implement personal action plans. The Academic Director assesses the teachers' performance in order to implement personalized teaching improvement action plans with those teachers who do not fulfill the institution's minimal required performance and competences. The Academic Director also conducts an annual Teacher's Performance Evaluation that determines salary raises. This evaluation considers: Teacher's performance in regards to the required communicative competences, teacher's self-evaluation, students' satisfaction with the teacher, attendance to in-service and training sessions, complying with the institution's policies, and the direct supervisor's evaluation (Centro Cultural Colombo Americano, 2015).

The clearest explanation of mentoring procedures comes from the description provided in the *Resource Teacher's Job Profile*. In the profile, mentors are referred to as *Resource Teachers*, a term adopted in the institution for the mentors' role. Mentors' activities are divided into two different main categories: administrative and academic.

## Research Design

In order to achieve the main objective of this study and identify the beliefs and expectations that teachers and mentors had about the role of the mentor and the Mentoring Program, the following steps were carried out. Two specific sets of subjects were identified: the teachers and their mentors. To understand their attitudes toward the Mentoring Program, each group responded to an online questionnaire. The first stage was the administration and analysis of a teachers' questionnaire to 46 teachers out of the 139 teaching in the Adult English Program in all CCCA branches, and the second stage was the administration and analysis of a mentors' questionnaire to 11 mentors and 4 Adult English Program coordinators from the sites who also carry out mentoring activities.

The first stage of this research study included the adaptation and administration of a questionnaire in Google Forms adapted from the Alberta Teacher's Association Mentoring Beginning Teachers – Teachers' Questionnaire (2003) to 46 teachers in the Adult English Program. Its purpose was obtain tangible data on these three variables: a) what a mentor is or should be like, b) how the Mentoring Program at the CCCA is perceived, and c) what could be done to improve the Mentoring Program in terms of the academic approach mentors have.

The second stage of this study was the administration of a Google Forms questionnaire adaptation of the Alberta Teacher's Association Mentoring Beginning Teachers – Mentors' Questionnaire to the 15 mentors. The beliefs and expectations explored through these questionnaire variables were a) what a mentor is or should be like, b) how mentors perceive the CCCA Mentoring Program, and c) what could be done to improve the Mentoring Program in terms of the pedagogical approach used to conduct mentoring in the Adult English Program. For the purposes of this article, only information from the first two questions (what a mentor should be like and how teachers and mentors perceive the program) will be reported.

The analysis of the data provided in both questionnaires was carried out by identifying emergent patterns.

## Results and Discussion

### **a) Teachers' Beliefs and Expectations about the Mentors and the Mentoring Program at the CCCA**

Forty-six teachers whose teaching experience at the CCCA and exposure to the Mentoring Program ranged from 9+ years to 1 year replied to the online questionnaire that sought to explore teachers' beliefs and

impressions about the mentors and their role and the Mentoring Program at the institution. The following section presents the corresponding analysis of the data processed.

When defining the figure of mentor, teachers who replied to the questionnaire mentioned different roles. Teachers made 31 references to the role of guidance and teaching practices, while 8 other citations refer to the administrative role they have. Being an experienced teacher and a role model, leader and reliable person follow with 5 and 4 citations each. Three citations are given to the role of supervision and reliability that mentors represent for teachers. A feedback provider, an observer, and a neutral person received 1 citation each.

Teachers' definitions of the role of the mentor at the institution are only based on their experience at the institution thanks to their contact with their assigned mentor and their role as mentees. Nevertheless, teachers value the role of guidance of their mentors, as 31 of them mentioned this aspect as a defining characteristic of their role at the Colombo Americano. However, teachers placing the figure of a mentor in the teacher administrator's role with 8 different citations (second highest number) also indicated that the figure of the mentor in the Adult Program is also an administrative position. The number of citations of other roles listed (leader, supporter, advisor, etc.) offer a good opportunity for the Mentoring Program to strengthen the academic value of these roles among its crew of mentors.

It is important to highlight that these roles listed by teachers do not seem to reflect the perceptions of a mentor as a guide and academic support in designing effective teaching and learning strategies or in terms of evaluation and self-evaluation opportunities among the activities that promote teachers' professional development. As a result, mentors are not observed from the perspective described in their job profiles. Instead, teachers regard the mentor as a person they can consult to help them with issues of different kinds, but not only as an academic authority who also evaluates their performance. It would be interesting to conduct a new survey about teachers' perception of mentors as authorities, either academic or administrative, since the questionnaire did not provide information on this matter, even if it seems one of the aspects influencing their positive or negative perception of mentors is because they are seen as figures of academic support.

### **Mentor's Support and Feedback**

In the teachers' questionnaires, teachers were asked about the type of support mentors have provided during their time as teachers at the institution. The support is expressed in terms of the initial help provided to

the teacher, the feedback received from class observation, the reachability of mentors and how comfortable they make teachers feel when they need help. Teachers graded mentors' support and feedback in the questionnaire using a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is POOR, 2 is SOMEWHAT POOR, 3 is EFFECTIVE, and 4 is VERY EFFECTIVE. Results show that there is a high level of effectiveness of mentors' support at the beginning of their teaching at the institute because 19 teachers saw mentors' guidance as very effective while 16 others considered such support as effective. This indicates that 35 out of 46 teachers were happy with the initial support provided by mentors when they started their jobs at the CCCA. On the other hand, 11 teachers were not satisfied with their mentor's support, classifying it as either somewhat poor or poor. This lack of satisfaction shows that the Mentoring Program should provide more support and follow-up for teachers during their beginning at the institution.

Another way of measuring effectiveness in mentoring support is feedback teachers obtain after class observation. Twenty-five teachers consider mentor's feedback after class observation as very effective, and 15 teachers consider it effective. These 40 mentions in effectiveness oppose the 6 teachers' perception that mentor's feedback is somewhat poor. It would be worthy to explore these teachers' ideas on why they perceive feedback after class observation as not effective so that specific improvement of the Mentoring Program procedures and activities can take place.

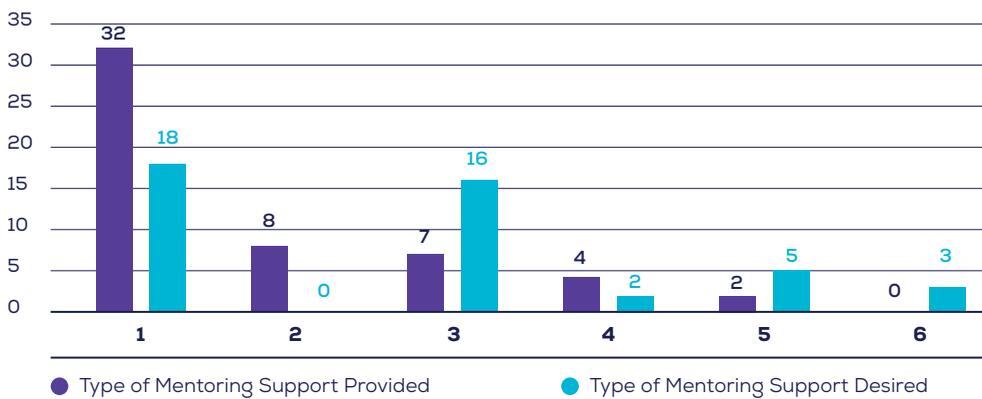
Effectiveness in support and feedback after class observation consequentially relates to how comfortable teachers are feeling at asking for help and approaching mentors to find solutions to their academic and administrative activities. The comfort felt when seeking help from mentors is reflected in the 39 teachers who ranked how they felt as very comfortable (34 citations) and comfortable (5 citations.) These measurements show a positive view of the quality of support mentors are providing their mentees; plus, these results may be directly linked to the type of assertive-based relationship teachers are seeking with their mentors as teachers express how comfortable they have felt when asking for help.

Teachers were also asked about the expectations they have in regards to the type of support they want from a mentor. These expectations are categorized in *Graph 1. Type of Mentoring Support Received vs. Type of Mentoring Support Desired* according to the number of citations in the online questionnaire. Additionally, this graph shows the type of support mentees have really received as cited by teachers in the online questionnaire.

Graph No.1 shows how expectations about the academic role of the mentor are important for teachers, as 32 citations refer to the role as a provider of guidance, suggestions and feedback that a mentor should be. Compared to the reality, only 18 citations claim that mentors do such

**GRAPH — NO.1**

*Type of Mentoring Support Received vs Type of Mentoring Support Desired*



**1.** Academic (guidance, suggestions, feedback, strategies and action plan) | **2.** Availability and companionship | **3.** Professional development (innovative ideas, reflection and research) | **4.** Psychological - emotional (motivation and courage provided in difficult situations with students) | **5.** Administrative support.

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activities. With 8 citations, teachers describe that mentors are available; however, they did not think of this as variable when considering this as an aspect they would like to have in their mentors.

Teachers would like their mentors to provide them with opportunities for professional development, as 16 citations describe this desire in opposition to the 7 citations that indicate the current type of support being offered to teachers. Therefore, a stronger type of support is a need presented by the teachers in the Adult Program so that expectations are met. However, teachers do acknowledge the support mentors represent in their daily activities, as one teacher commented:

Apart from rather typical things such as methodological strategies, ideas for activities, etc. I think mentors are key when it comes to handling specific cases: learning problems, uncommon behaviors... I don't expect my mentor to know everything, but it's always good to know you have the support of a fellow teacher to help you figure out what to do in a moment of distress (Teacher D.)

Additionally, teachers highlight the type of administrative support received with 5 citations. Hence, aspects explained in *Graph 1. Type of Mentoring Support Received vs Type of Mentoring Support Desired* indicate that teachers are willing to have academic support from their

mentors just as much as they have received it. However, it is suitable for the Mentoring Program that mentors keep on working in increasing their image as academic support providers as much as key figures at the institution who offer valuable professional development opportunities more than just guidance on what to do in specific teaching dilemmas and situations.

Nevertheless, a revision of the aspect of *availability* in teachers' expectations about mentoring support shows 8 citations, which is the second highest number in the type of support teachers would like to get. Mentor availability is a key factor to keep on improving the Mentoring Program as it is recorded through the online questionnaire.

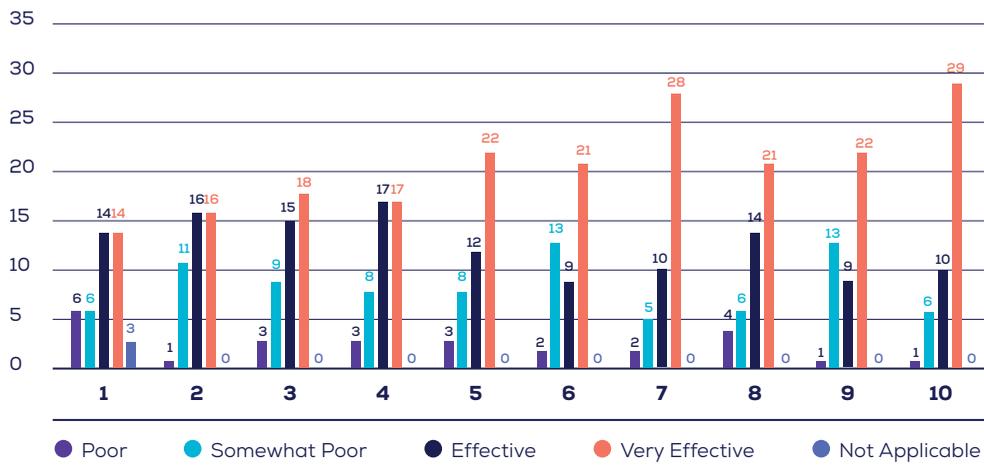
It can be argued that the graph shows the gap in the expectations teachers have about mentors' type of support in contrast with the reality of what is happening with the support actually offered. There are aspects like availability that teachers note is happening, but it is not something that they are necessarily demanding, while they are not getting as much professional development as they would like.

When teachers were asked about the type of guidance received from mentors, they assessed it using a scale of POOR, SOMEWHAT POOR, EFFECTIVE and VERY EFFECTIVE. Results in Graph No.2 account for effectiveness of this type of mentoring activity. This graph shows that mentors' guidance in terms of curriculum is high with a total of 28 citations for effectiveness. However, with 12 citations, some teachers think that guidance is poor or somewhat poor. This overall favorable perception of the type of guidance mentors provide to teachers is also observable in the variables of student assessment (32 citations), instructional strategies (33 citations), classroom management (34 citations) and in discussing CCCA's expectations on teachers (34 citations.) These high percentages help conclude that mentors are effective in providing guidance to their teachers even if there are percentages that range from 25% to 15% in lack of effectiveness of guidance in the same aspects described above. It would be necessary to expand information about how to improve on giving more support in the different areas of academic work with the teachers as well as the reasons why teachers consider that there is not effective support.

Completing forms and paperwork is one of the strengths of the guidance that the Mentoring Program is offering teachers. Thirty-nine citations mark it as effective in opposition to the 7 citations that ranked it poor or very poor. Additionally, receiving orientation about the CCCA rules and policies had 37 citations for effectiveness in contrast with the seven citations that considered that this type of guidance to be poor or somewhat poor. This means that mentors have a strength in effectively guiding teachers in their administrative/operative activities and classroom management techniques; however, it also suggests that they could work harder in increasing their

**GRAPH — NO.2**

*Guidance Provided by Mentors*



1. Curriculum | 2. Student Assessment | 3. Instructional Strategies | 4. Classroom Management | 5. Colombo Americano’s Expectations of Teachers | 6. Finding or Developing Resources | 7. Becoming Oriented about the Colombo Americano Rules, Policies and Instructivos | 8. Communicating with Students | 9. Assisting Struggling Students | 10. Completing Forms, Paperwork, etc.

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effectiveness in academic areas of support if they want to keep on having the perception of effective guides in teaching practices.

**Effectiveness of the Mentoring Program**

Effectiveness of the Mentoring Program was also an aspect that teachers assessed in the online questionnaire through the questions about their learning and their growth from their participation of the Mentoring Program at the CCCA.

Twenty-four teachers consider they have taken advantage of their exposure to the Mentoring Program at the CCCA while 10 teachers add positively to this high percentage as well. In contrast, 7 teachers assessed their learning as somewhat poor and 1 teacher assessed it as very poor. Hence, it would be interesting for the Mentoring Program to discuss with those teachers why they assessed their learning as Not Applicable. For this study, this was impossible due to the anonymity of the questionnaires.

About teachers’ professional growth thanks to the participation in the Mentoring Program, 32 describe it as either an effective or very effective consequence of their participation of the Mentoring Program, whereas

8 teachers assessed it as a somewhat poor. Allowing mentees to grow professionally explicitly marks the achievement of the Mentoring Program and the mentoring duties which are to promote reflection, self-assessment and thoroughness, as is described in the Mentor's job description. This result is a relevant indicator of the effectiveness and success of the Mentoring Program at the CCCA. The effectiveness is also evidenced in teacher's replies about their perceptions of the aspects they had been able to improve thanks to mentoring.

Number of citations in areas like lesson planning (11 citations), teaching awareness (8 citations) and student-centeredness (6 citations) indicate the Mentoring Program has a positive impact on academic activities that teachers carry out on a daily basis and that lead to awareness of their teaching practices. However, aspects mentioned only once (dealing with struggling students, timing, technological resources, providing feedback to students, teaching techniques and cooperative work) offer an opportunity for mentors in the mentoring program to evaluate the conditions and situations for not reaching a thorough support. There is a latent need for improvement in these specific areas that can be approached through the implementation of the calibrating course for mentors.

It is noticeable that mentors need to help teachers develop their competences in the implementation of the communicative approach, especially if this approach is considered the reason why there is a Mentoring Program at the institution in the first place. Teachers are to implement the communicative approach in their classes; therefore, mentors are there to provide them with sufficient insights and instructional strategies to succeed. Moreover, the aspect of lesson planning may be interpreted as a mere paperwork activity that mentors have helped teachers with rather than as true strategy for designing classes where evidencing students' communicative competences is the real concern because this activity is a requirement from the Quality Management System at the institution.

### **Conclusion from Analysis of Teacher's Online Questionnaires**

In general, the participation of teachers in the surveys and questionnaires represented a very positive and active role in the development of this research project. Their perceptions and beliefs about the role of mentors at the CCCA indicate that they regard the figure of the mentor as a guide in academic practices as well as teacher-administrators with specific tasks to carry out in the support they are to give their mentees.

Furthermore, mentors' support to teachers reaffirms the achievement of a strong Mentoring Program evidenced in the type of support and feedback provided in different areas of academic and teaching performance

through class observation and an effective mentor-mentee relationship which teachers observe as positive and which contributes to the success of the figure of the mentor.

On the other hand, teachers' perceptions also express interest in making changes to the Mentoring Program in the areas of mentors' availability and time, which would combine with a positive impression of the effectiveness of the Mentoring Program. Moreover, analysis suggests that there is room for mentoring improvement in areas such as providing teachers with strategies to strengthen student assessment and to deal with struggling students (tutoring.) Aspects for improvement suggest that mentors can establish concrete courses of action as a team and in pro of maintaining a positive perception of effectiveness and impact of the Mentoring Program at the CCCA.

Teachers were confidently able to propose changes in the Mentoring Program by pointing out concrete actions to take in regards to the time and availability and academic activities in order to favor observation of their role as a bridge between them and the administrative staff in the institution. In addition, teachers appeal for recognition of their time spent as recipients of the Mentoring Program by including payment of their attendance to training sessions and mentor-mentee meetings.

The variables and emergent patterns presented in this section are the result of the exploration of the teachers' expectations and beliefs teachers have about mentors and the Mentoring Program. It would be interesting to conduct further research in which the variables resulting from the analysis of different questions are provided as mandatory options for selection and not as open questions as the questionnaires were designed. By limiting the answers teachers could provide to questions, results would give a more detailed radiography of what teachers really believe a mentor is and how they have positively or negatively influenced their professional development.

## **b) Mentors' Beliefs and Expectations about the Mentors and the Mentoring Program at the CCCA**

Questionnaires about the beliefs and expectations of the Mentoring Program at the CCCA completed by 15 mentors were processed by identifying the emergent patterns and discussions in each of the answers. Presented below are their responses and interpretations of such emergent patterns and ideas resulting from the anonymous survey administered to mentors which was adapted from the surveys in the document by the Alberta Teacher's Association Mentoring Beginning Teachers (2003).

## Mentors’ Participation in the Mentoring Program

The first response to the questionnaire describes the amount of time that the 15 mentors who replied to the surveys and questionnaires for mentor have spent being mentors at the CCCA. There are 7 mentors with more than 9 years of experience while 2 mentors have between 3 and 6 years of experience. An even number of mentors (3 in each time range category) has been working as mentors for less than a year and between 1 to 3 years. This indicates that mentor staff is a solid one in terms of continuity in the institution with 9 members with more than 3 years of experience; however, having 3 mentors with less than a year in the Program shows that it is important to consider their experiences and levels of expertise as factors enriching the activities and practices in the Mentoring Program.

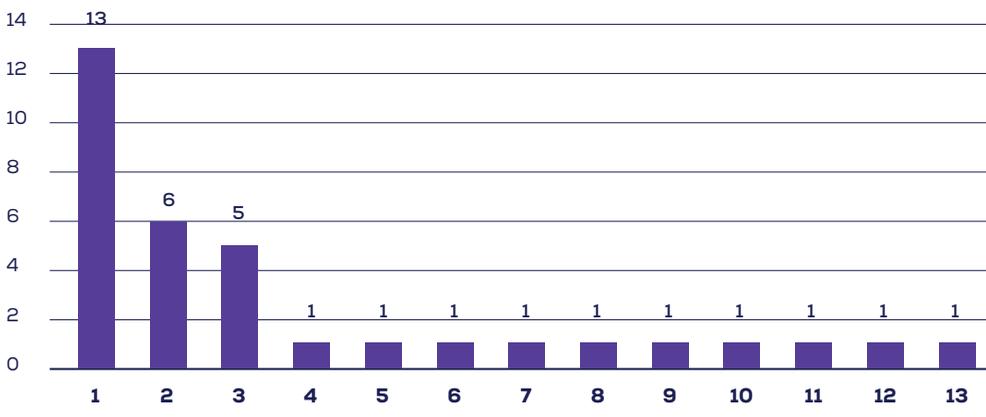
## Defining a Mentor according to Mentors

Graph No. 3 describes mentors’ perception of what a mentor is.

With 13 citations, mentors agree that the role of the mentor is to guide and to provide advice to teachers in their teaching performance. The second and third definitions define mentor as a support (6 citations)

**GRAPH — NO.3**

*Defining a Mentor according to Mentors*



1. A guide and advisor | 2. A support | 3. An experienced and successful teacher | 4. A role model | 5. A listener | 6. A facilitator | 7. A researcher | 8. A tutor | 9. A leader | 10. A person you trust | 11. A teacher with charisma | 12. A provider of professional growth opportunities | 13. A supervisor.

and as an experienced and successful teacher (5 citations). Other words defining mentor are role model, a listener, a facilitator, a tutor, a researcher, a leader, etc. with only one citation each. Only one mentor identified the supervisory role of this position. These definitions show that the perceptions mentors have of the figure of mentor is a very academic one.

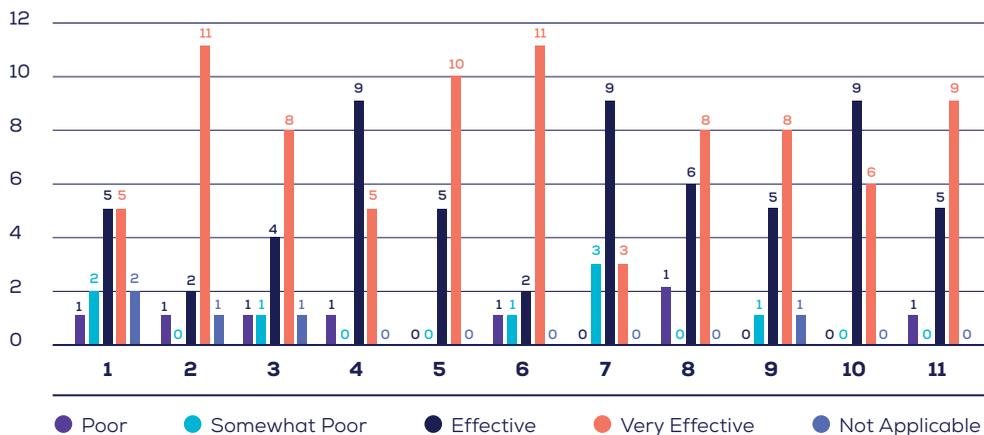
Definitions provided by mentors also show that they do not perceive their role of mentors as researchers, as it is stated in the Resource Teacher’s Job profile. This aspect suggests that mentors need to strengthen the research component of their role at the institution since research is expected from their role and contribution.

### Mentoring Program Effectiveness

Graph No.4. reveals how mentors perceive they guide their mentees in different aspects of the academic life at the CCCA by grading it on a scale of VERY EFFECTIVE, EFFECTIVE, SOMEWHAT POOR and POOR.

**GRAPH — NO.4**

*Effectiveness in Providing Guidance and Support to my Mentees*



1. Curriculum | 2. Lesson Planning | 3. Student Assessment | 4. Instructional Strategies | 5. Classroom Management | 6. Colombo Americano’s Expectations of Teachers | 7. Finding or Developing Resources | 8. Becoming Oriented about the Colombo Americano Rules, Policies and Instructivos | 9. Communicating with Students | 10. Assisting Striggling Students | 11. Completing Forms, Paperwork, etc.

This graph shows two types of guidance mentors provide to teachers, the administrative-related guidance and the academic-oriented guidance. It is relevant to note that mentors believe they are very effective

at providing support in administrative areas in general. Describing CCCA expectations on the teachers obtained 11 citations as very effective and 2 citations as effective. In the area of becoming oriented to the policies of the CCCA, 8 citations were marked very effective and 6 citations were marked effective. Finally, when completing paperwork 9 mentors marked very effective and 5 others marked it as effective.

Although lesson planning can be considered an academic-related activity, lesson planning can also be characterized as administrative activity in which mentors guide mentees because having a lesson plan for each of the classes is a requirement described in the Quality Management System procedures for the Academic Area. Revising the academic support provided to teachers through lesson planning is an activity that would be suitable for all mentors to discuss and clarify so that there is a real impact on the teachers' academic and professional growth.

Areas of academic guidance like curriculum shows that 10 mentors identify this type of support to their teachers as very effective and effective with 5 citations each. It would be interesting to provide more support to teachers in the area of curriculum as 2 mentors described their guidance as somewhat poor and 1 of them described it as poor. Additionally, mentors consider that they provide effective guidance in student assessment, with 8 mentors ranking it as very effective and another 4 ranking it as effective. The area of instructional strategies got 5 citations as very effective and 9 as effective. Helping teachers develop or find new resources got 3 citations for very effective and 9 citations for effective. Revising the characteristics that make instructional strategies and finding and developing resources more effective and not very effective is a suggestion for the team of mentors.

Classroom management got 10 citations as very effective and 5 as effective while the area of assisting struggling students obtained 6 citations as very effective and 9 as effective. Also, a positive perception of mentors' guidance can be observed in the area of helping teachers communicate effectively with students as 8 citations describe this activity as very effective and 8 as effective.

The general perception mentors have about their guidance is either effective or very effective in both administrative and academic areas. This is a strength in the Mentoring Program at the CCCA.

Mentors ranked how helpful the feedback they give to their mentee is after they have observed their classes. It can be noted that there is a perception of high effectiveness in the feedback mentors provide to teachers as 5 citations indicate very effective and 8 indicate it as effective. It would be necessary for mentors to discuss how they are providing feedback to teachers, as 2 mentors described this crucial activity as somewhat poor.

## Type of Mentoring Support and Mentoring Strategies

Mentors were asked about the type of mentoring they do. Their responses to this question suggest that all of them are attached to the procedures described for the Mentoring Program and the Quality Management System which include the observation of classes three times a year, a monthly revision of lesson planning and paperwork guidelines. However, the following are the perceptions mentors have about the roles and their influence on teachers' professional development through their type of mentoring and the activities that they do to support their teachers.

- **Following established procedures.** Five mentors described that they limit their support to what is described in the procedures of the Mentoring Program; that is, they carry out the number of observations agreed and the corresponding monthly paperwork revision.
- **Limited to observation and post-observation chat.** One of the mentors explained he/she only limited his/her mentorship to observing and providing feedback on observation. This description of the current duties may be the result of a lack of time to conduct other kinds of mentoring activities that facilitate the completion of his/her role as guide and constant support because he/she also conducts more administrative activities related to coordination of an English program offered at the CCCA.
- **Not that deep.** This simplistic type of mentoring is described by a mentor through this vague three-word phrase. It would be interesting to ask all mentors what the ideal type of mentoring is like in order to compare it with these "realities" they are expressing here.
- **Respectful of the teacher.** This mentor described the type of mentoring as a very conscious activity in which he/she gets to elaborate a clear image of who the teacher is in terms of the strengths and weaknesses. The quote below describes the part of the mentoring he/she does but that is not described in the Mentoring Procedures.

When I get a new mentee first I have a chat in which I get to know his/ her teaching style. I ask the teacher what s/he feels s/he does very well as a teacher and the areas s/he thinks s/he needs to improve. Then I set the first two observations in which I try to get a sense of how the teacher usually handles his/ her classes. In those first two observations I don't usually fill out the observation

form and during the POCs I get the teacher to tell me how s/he felt about the class and what s/he could have done better. Based on that I schedule a third observation and then an action plan. This I try to do within 3 months. With a current mentee what I do is that I set an objective for the observation based on the action plan set before. In case the teacher has been able to comply with the action plan, I encourage him/ her to do research on an area of his/ her interest. Mentor E.

- **Non-judgmental.** There is no further explanation by the mentor on what being non-judgmental is; however, it implies that there is an explicit effort in not providing evaluation but guidance and reflection instead. This is a valid pattern for the mentors to discuss and agree upon so that they avoid misunderstanding of mentoring activities as activities in which teachers' actions are judged and the mentor establishes a position power.
- **Not observing as often as I want.** This other pattern discussed by two mentors relates to the two previous ideas. This shows that mentors notice that they are not fulfilling their duties as academic guidance. Also, it may indicate that the mentors could increase the number of observations they do as a way to increase the effectiveness of the type of support provided to teachers.
- **Face to face careful interactions and willingness to listen and guide.** Mentors perceive these two ways of mentoring as a strength in their style of providing support to their teachers.
- **A two-way learning process.** This perception of the type of mentoring indicates that the mentor is observing the teacher as a genuine source of learning experiences as much as a recipient of his/her mentoring activities. Mentors also indicated that they are learners by being mentors.
- **By incorporating other academic activities (sharing activities and materials, encouraging topic research informally, interaction through blogs and permanent communication.)** This kind of mentoring goes beyond the idea of only following the established mentoring procedures from the Quality Management System. It would be interesting to discuss effectiveness in the creation of a solid mentor-mentee relationship.

## Conclusions from Analysis of Mentors' Online Questionnaires

There was a high percentage of mentor participation in the survey and questionnaire with 15 out of 16 mentors completing the questionnaire. Moreover, this participation allows a comparison of mentors' understanding of the role of the mentor and their expectations of their duties and the Mentoring Program itself.

Mentors should be able to agree on what mentoring is as a team. This discussion may lead to general agreements about the type of mentoring and the activities mentors would like to do and the way they would like to conduct the support they offer teachers on a daily basis in the different activities they carry out.

Perceptions of the role of the mentor and the Mentoring Program also indicate that mentors are expecting to have more support from the institution itself so they can carry out their mentoring activities under optimal conditions in what has to do with time, number of mentees, training, and feedback on their work and reports to the Academic Director.

## Conclusions

This study constituted a revision of the perceptions and expectations Adult English Program teachers and mentors the CCCA had about the academic figure of mentor and the Mentoring Program adopted by the institution. Moreover, this study provided the institution with a valuable diagnosis of the current needs of the staff as it revealed information on aspects that both audiences, teachers and mentors, felt needed to be improved in academic, administrative and interpersonal areas of the Mentoring Program.

Through the analysis of EFL teachers and EFL teacher educators' perception of the role of the mentor, mentors are viewed as guides and figures of academic support with a positive acceptance of their activities among the 46 English teachers who replied to the questionnaires. Their expectations of their mentors revolve around the idea of having more time to share with their mentors as they increase availability to discuss, share and engage on teachers' empowerment through reflection.

Through the questionnaire, teachers also expressed they would like a more academic-oriented practice from the part of the mentor as they mentioned their interest in having mentors being more supportive and encouraging at reflection and training. This aspect is considered a pivotal feature that the Mentoring Program ought to implement if a real mentoring companionship, not supervision, is desired by the institution.

The Adult English Program mentors regard their role as guiding and supportive; however, the call for a more academic-oriented role indicates that they are complying with the administrative aspects related to supervision rather than providing academic help for their mentees. Moreover, mentors indicate a clear interest in offering non-judgmental guidance, implying that they have the impression that they need to work on the aspects of the mentor-mentee relationship relying on trust, confidence and assertive communication. As is described in the analysis, mentors' administrative duties framed in the Quality Management System of the institution do not allow them to reach a full academic mentoring activity with the EFL teachers under their guidance.

This study also reviewed the Mentoring Program in light of the expectations teachers and mentors have at different levels including the administrative area and organization, and the academic activities directly affecting the perception of the mentors and their activities. First, since the description of the Mentoring Program resulted in a compendium of procedures and activities framed in the quality management system, the Institutional Educational Project, and the Job profiles, the elaboration of an official document determining the type of mentoring program and the type of support provided to the English teachers is a valid suggestion for the institution. This would emphasize the academic nature of the Mentoring Program as opposed to the set of administrative and operative activities that are also part of the negative view teachers and mentors have of the role of the mentor and the Program itself.

This revision of teachers and mentors' perceptions on the role of the mentor and the Mentoring Program at the CCCA opens the doors for other educational institutions in the region to explore mentors, coordinators, and teacher supervisors' perceptions on the effectiveness of their companionship programs with the aim at constructing real and solid academic programs for teacher professional development.

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# Teaching Instruction Adjustments to Enhance Students' Learning of English

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## **Abstract**

This research project aimed to find out which adjustments teachers at the elementary levels at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano (CCCA) made to their EFL classes to offer their students different paths to succeed in their language learning processes. The data collection was carried out through the analysis of 6 lesson plans, the class observations conducted on 5 different classes, and an online questionnaire responded by 4 teachers. The findings suggest that there is a need for teachers' awareness on how to respond to their students' needs and differences and that the Academic Area of the institution should plan to train teachers on the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) as an approach to achieve that goal.

### **Key Words:**

DI approaches, adjustments, modifications, needs, students' differences, EFL (English as a Foreign Language), ESL (English as a Second Language), TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language)

## Introduction

For about twenty years, at the in-service sessions and training courses at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano (CCCA,) it has been said that students are individuals with lots of differences in ages, interests, abilities, backgrounds, learning styles, and that they are smart in different ways. It has been expected that teachers plan their classes in such a way that they adapt what they do in class to suit students' differences and provide them with the opportunities to perform to the best of their ability as pointed out by Stevens (2014) in Harmer (2015, p.143).

Some years ago, the concept of *Differentiated Instruction (DI)* appeared as a response to the above-mentioned need of responding to students' differences and to this particular type of approach to teaching in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. According to Tomlinson and Harvis (2009) as referred by Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, and Hardin (2014, pp.112-113), DI has to do with responding to differences in students' levels of readiness, their profiles as learners and their interests to optimize their learning opportunities. They also pointed out that students' differences can be addressed by adjusting the contents, processes, outcomes and the learning environments.

At the CCCA, class observations are mostly used to help teachers improve their teaching practices. Through those observations, it has been evidenced that teachers implement a variety of activities to facilitate learning to all the different types of students they may have in class. In consequence, taking into consideration the definition by Dixon et al. (2014, p. 113) and the current interest in improving teachers' practices in the institution's context, the goal of this research was to find out which adjustments teachers at the CCCA are making to their EFL classes to offer their students different paths to succeed in their learning processes.

This study was conducted with 5 courses and 11 teachers at the elementary level because this cycle represents the biggest population of students at the institution, which provided a more meaningful and higher impact sample to the analysis of the data collected on the adjustments made to the EFL classes aiming DI.

## Literature Review

In this research paper the following aspects are presented: a) the concept of differentiated instruction (Harmer,2015 and Tomlinson, 2001); b) the distinction made between what DI is and what it is not; c) some of the students' needs and differences teachers face in the English as a

Second Language (ESL)/EFL classroom; d) the benefits of implementing DI approaches to enhance the learning of the language (Lawrence-Brown, 2004); e) struggles in the implementation of DI approaches (Moon, Tomlinson, and Callahan, 1995; and Schumm & Vaughn, 1992); f) adjustments and accommodations teachers can make in their English classes to tackle students' differences and facilitate their learning of the language (Hall, Strangman and Meyer, 2009; and Harmer, 2015). Finally, g) some ideas on what the institutions and teachers can do to implement DI and succeed in its use. The main objective of this paper is to know the different kind of adjustments teachers can make to their classes suiting students' needs and differences and aiming successful language learning experiences. Therefore, concluding information is presented on this matter.

Teaching in the EFL or ESL classroom has several challenges –and dealing with mixed– language ability classes is one of them. Many English teachers have experienced teaching students within a group with different needs, different strengths and weaknesses, different attitudes towards the tasks assigned, and with differences in their language levels, among other characteristics. In response to those differences and aiming students' success in their English learning process, teachers are to make adjustments and accommodations to the contents, processes and products as suggested by authors such as Dixon *et al.* (2014); Tomlinson, Brighton, Hertberg, Callahan, Moon, Brimijoin, and Reynolds (2003); and Tomlinson (2001), among many others.

Reality is that for different reasons, and despite the schools and institutions' efforts to try to make homogeneous groups of students, teachers have students in their classrooms that either have different proficiency levels or abilities. As Harmer (2015, p. 143) pointed out, these classrooms are called mixed-ability classrooms. Ur (1996) in Nusrat (2017, p.9) was in tune with this statement when she strongly argued that there is no such a thing as a homogeneous class, since students are not like each other. Then, classifying students according to their abilities does not have any impact on them and the differences among them will still be there. Additionally, Richards and Schmidt (2010) in Nusrat (2017, p.9) claimed that the differences among students are not evidenced only in the language aptitude but also in their motivation and ways to learn.

As a response to these differences among students, and the heterogeneity found in the ELT classrooms, teachers are finding ways to cope with them and try to facilitate learning and the achievement of students' goals. Consequently, Steven (2014) referred by Harmer (2015, p. 143) presented the DI as the adaptation of the teaching approach for all the different students within a class, so everyone has an opportunity to maximize their learning of the language. Moreover, Dixon *et al.* (2014, p. 3) added that DI

provides students with different paths to understand content, how this is learnt, and how students respond to it. To sum up, as Tomlinson (2000) and (2008) as quoted by Dixon *et al.* (2014, p. 3) “differentiation is a philosophy or a way of thinking about teaching and learning rather than a single instructional strategy.”

Although the concept of DI seems to be clear and easy to apply, authors such as Tomlinson (2001) offer a more complete view of it by stating what DI is not. According to her, DI is not individualized instruction or a way to provide homogeneous grouping (pp. 2-5). It addresses a range of learner needs instead of planning something different for every single student; and it rather allows teachers to include purposeful activities and use flexible grouping that benefit students’ interaction and learning of the language. Besides, Tomlinson affirmed DI is qualitative and dynamic. That is to say, DI focuses more on the nature of the task rather than the adaptations to its quantity. And, this approach urges teachers to constantly monitor the learner and their learning and make adjustments to ensure effective language learning. With this in mind, knowing CCCA teachers’ understanding of the concept seems a crucial task to do, and it should be correlated with what is happening in the classroom and the results that can be evidenced in students’ learning of the language.

One of the most important aspects to be considered in the implementation of DI approaches is recognizing students’ needs and differences and being aware that every group of students is unique, and within each group, students’ differences and goals change. Therefore, there is a need for teachers to raise consciousness on the kind of differences they might find in their language classrooms and a need to help their students know they are different and that they should accept their differences. Nusrat (2017, p. 10) listed nineteen differences a teacher might find in a heterogeneous language class. Among others, he mentioned intelligence, knowledge of the world, maturity, personality and confidence. Likewise, Tomlinson (2001, p. 18) linked a set of reasons why teachers needed to address to differentiate what Brandt (1998) in Tomlinson (2001, p. 18), called powerful learner characteristics. Those characteristics had to do with the pace in which students learn a language, their backgrounds, their learning styles, and their levels of competency. She also pointed out that all those characteristics led to differences in the students’ views of their classroom, the way they build their knowledge, collaborate, receive feedback and use the learning strategies they need for their own learning and achievement of their personal goals. The recognition of students’ needs and differences offer English teachers a wide view of the group of students they have and represent a starting point to the actions they are to take to the achievement of the English language learning goals.

Different studies on the use of DI have evidenced the impact of it on students, and their reported learning processes is very positive. The benefits range from students' attitudes towards learning and their lessons, to the academic success and the rapport with their teachers. It has been found that DI increases students' positive attitude towards the learning of English. That was concluded by Karadag and Yasar (2010, p. 1397) in their study on students' attitudes towards Turkish courses in which it was evidenced that students' interest and attitudes towards the lessons were impacted positively after the implementation of differentiation. The same study coincided with those of McAdamis (2001), Tieso (2005, 2001) and Fahey (2001), as referenced in Karadag and Yasar (2010, p. 1397), in reporting that the use of DI approaches increases students' motivation as well as teacher's positive attitudes towards the class. Valuable results were also presented by Koehler (2010, p. 34-39) in his research about the effects of adjustments made to readiness, interest and learning profile on student engagement and understanding conducted on 110 seventh grade science students in which he informed that 77% of them indicated they were engaged or very engaged in the DI lesson given. He also mentioned that students who were highly motivated reported being more motivated with the DI lessons than with the traditional ones, and 84% of students liked the DI lessons. On the other hand, 71% of the students in the study felt the way information was presented through DI lessons helped them. And 63% of students felt their connections to the material and their interest in it helped them. In addition, Koehler found a positive relationship between the students' level of engagement and their confidence in their understanding of the material presented. Since engagement in the lessons and achievement of the learning goals seem to be some of the main benefits of DI implementation, it would be paramount to incorporate them at the CCCA as this literature review and this study itself offer a starting point for an improvement of the English teaching practices among English teachers at the institution.

A second benefit found in the implementation of differentiation in the teaching instruction has to do with helping students have a sense of achievement. This is possible because all students benefit from the varied methods and support provided by teachers. Also, because teachers give students an appropriate balance between challenge and success, as asserted by Lawrence-Brown (2004, p. 36). Studies carried out by Baumgartner, Lipowki and Rush (2003), Fahey (2000), and Beecher and Sweeny (2008) cited by Karadag and Yasar (2010, p. 1397) also showed the benefit of DI implementation since they demonstrated that those classes in which DI was used, students had higher academic success, interest in the lesson, and students' participation was enhanced.

The third benefit of conducting DI approaches could be classified into the category of more positive teacher–student and student–student interactions. Burns (2004, p. 56) reported how positive the teachers’ perceptions on the DI implementation were, based on his study. They mentioned that differentiation facilitated students’ interactions and provided them with opportunities to learn at their own pace. In addition, Nusrat (2017, p. 10) ratified that the interactions between different kinds of students were favored and added that peer teaching and collaboration could be fostered. Likewise, he pointed out that more life experiences, interests, ideas and knowledge could be found in individuals and be used in class activities which allowed students to know each other better and improve their relationships. The CCCA has been known as a place where positive teacher–student and student–student interactions take place. It might be feasible that this research project ascertains whether those positive interactions are a result of the DI implementation by teachers or not.

Other advantages of DI implementation were identified by Ur (1996) and Ireson and Halam (2001) cited in Nusrat’s research (2017, p. 10). The former author said that it helps teachers become more creative, innovative and helps them improve on professional development. The latter claimed that DI offers authenticity to the learning of the language and prepares students for the world they will face.

All in all, the use of DI in the language classroom brings varied benefits to students and teachers such as academic success, students’ engagement in the lessons, better interactions among students and between students and teachers, and creativity. Comparing these benefits to those gathered from the CCCA’s current teaching practices would provide a wider idea of what DI implementation or the use of some of its components offer to the achievement of the language learning goals.

Despite all the advantages of implementing DI approaches, there are some perceptions English teachers have that either inhibit them from using differentiation or make its usage difficult. One of the most commented difficulties teachers have faced is fear: the fear of losing control of student behavior (Tomlinson 2001, p. 2), the fear of letting the classroom dynamics be affected by students’ awareness of the differences among them (Nusrat 2017, p. 9), the fear to change the teaching practices they have used for years (Valiande and Koutselini 2009, p. 13), the fear and pressure of failing to meet the state’s or institution’s standards (Tomlinson, 1996 in Koehler 2010, p. 20), and the fear of not achieving effectiveness of the language learning for every student in the class (Nusrat 2017, p. 11) and (Harmer 2015, p. 144), especially in large classes.

In the ELT context, one of the biggest challenges teachers have faced when conducting DI classes refers to planning and applying their lesson

plans. Some teachers think DI would make them plan more activities; some others consider it more time consuming; some argue they have “extra work”. Harmer (2015, pp. 143-145) exemplified this challenge by commenting that some teachers consider that it is hard to find extension tasks and ways to provide satisfaction of completing the tasks to both the early finishers and slow learners. On the other hand, Dixon *et al.* (2014, p. 3) pointed out that those teachers who do not recognize students’ differences or do not feel ready to implement DI struggle with it. That is why it is key that English teachers understand their students’ differences and use that information to make adaptations to their lessons to facilitate learning for all students. It is precisely because of this that this research focused on finding out if the teachers at the CCCA are aware of the different kinds of students they have and are responding to that by providing them with successful language learning experiences as a result of the adaptations they make to their lessons.

For some teachers, the reluctance to use DI goes beyond their fears. Nusrat (2017, p. 12) reported that the teachers used in his research mentioned the linguistic barriers, students’ unawareness of their needs, dependence on the teacher; wrong placement, lack of enthusiasm and motivation in students, teacher’s indifference towards students’ progress, teachers’ failure to understand students’ needs, students’ backgrounds and lack of variety of activities as the main factors for mixed ability classes; therefore, they felt overwhelmed by all these factors and found it difficult to deal with them through differentiation. Moreover, Valiande and Koutselini (2009, p.13) reported on their research conducted on 450 fourth grade elementary students and 24 teachers from Nicosia Educational District, that some teachers who had heard a lot about DI claimed they had misconceptions about it and did not know how to use it. Finally, Dixon *et al.* (2014, p. 4) commented on what other studies concluded about the reasons for teachers not to implement DI: Moon, Tomlinson, and Callahan (1995) reported 50% of the teachers in a survey they conducted did not see a reason to use DI. Meanwhile, Schumm and Vaughn (1992) reported difficulties in identifying students’ differences as one of the reasons to not implement it. Although it is uncertain whether teachers at the CCCA are familiar with the concept of DI and what their attitudes towards it are, it would be relevant to know them. It would also be relevant to develop a Teacher Professional Development Course on DI implementation that allows the discussion on the CCCA teachers’ perceptions and attitudes towards this approach.

Other studies have also highlighted the struggles students have been through with their DI lessons. For example, Nusrat (2017, p. 10-11) pointed out that students also fail to ensure effectiveness in their learning of the

language. Weaker students can struggle because they can find activities too difficult, whereas learners with higher abilities can find them easy and enjoy them. On the contrary, some activities may seem boring to students with stronger abilities whereas the weaker students may find them easy. Then, motivation can be affected in both cases. Another situation that can be seen in a mixed-ability class and that affects students in the DI classroom has to do with participation in class. Higher-ability students might feel very confident to participate in class while the weaker students might not find it easy to do it. Then, the latter group does not evidence much progress in their learning of the language. These ideas provide valuable information for teachers during the implementation of DI approaches in the English language class and the awareness of these aspects could set a moment for an adjustment to the lesson.

Although there are challenges and fears in the implementation of DI approaches, it is suggested by Nusrat (2017, p. 10) that teachers do not focus that much on them, but on the beauties or benefits DI brings to students' interactions, teachers' practices and most importantly, to students' learning of the language, as seen before. Therefore, all those struggles and fears from both students and teachers should be considered by institutions and be included in their training programs, so teachers reduce their anxiety levels and learn new strategies to cope with them. Besides, teachers can provide tools to their students to succeed in the DI class. This is a step that could be taken as a product of this research after the identification of the adjustments made to the class on the part of the teachers at the CCCA.

Once the teachers overcome their fears and embark on the implementation of DI approaches, there are some steps teachers should consider that might contribute to a smoother use of the approach and to positive involvement and attitudes from students towards the DI lessons. As pointed out by Hall, Strangman and Meyer (2009) and referred to by Dixon *et al.* (2014, p. 3), DI requires flexible teaching approaches that allow modifications to the curriculum and presentation of information to students. Meanwhile, Tomlinson (1999) as commented by Nusrat (2017, p. 10), suggested that teachers accept students' differences and plan their classes according to their students' needs for effective learning. It is also important to consider Koehler's claims for teachers to focus DI on areas such as student readiness, interest and learning profile (2010, p. 11). Readiness is defined as where a student is at in terms of understanding, and interest is explained as a student's likes and curiosities. From recognizing and understanding these fears and their implications on English teachers' perceptions about the implementation of DI approaches, CCCA's teachers may become observers and may assume reflective practices that facilitate the identification of moments of their classes where DI can be implemented.

At the CCCA and other ELT contexts, teachers seem to take further steps to reach students' differences and provide them with successful learning experiences. Some practices such as trying different grouping techniques, assigning different roles to students, a conscious materials selection –to mention some– that have been evidenced at the CCCA, go in the same direction of the use of DI approaches, although it has not been confirmed that it is what teachers intend to do. Therefore, the validation of teachers' awareness of the different steps and activities conducted in class aiming at the implementation of DI is necessary for the development of this project. Some of the practices mentioned before match some of the suggestions presented by Tomlinson (2001, p. 2), Harmer (2015, pp.143-145), and Nusrat (2017, pp. 11-13). According to them, teachers are to identify each student's needs and interests for learning, use flexible grouping, try different group formation, make sure groups enhance learning, give students different tasks and roles, encourage different kinds of responses from students, select materials and classroom activities carefully, have contingency plans for different kinds of students, and allow students to learn from their peers, among other ideas.

There is another set of ideas that both teachers and institutions need to apply to help teachers succeed at the implementation of DI. As suggested by Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) as cited in Dixon *et al.* (2014, p. 4), institutions need to develop teaching education programs to prepare teachers to focus on processes and procedures in order to provide effective learning for all kinds of students. This could be done at the CCCA, through its Professional Development Courses and its Coaching Program through the bridge built with this literature review on the adjustments teachers make during the instruction to help students succeed in their learning of the language. This training could also help increase teachers' motivation and positive attitudes towards DI as suggested by Valiande and Koutselini's (2009, p. 13), who confirmed through their research that teachers needed to be motivated and trained by their institutions. They also added that there is a need for schools to offer their teachers practical and meaningful help during the implementation of DI approaches. Along with this, Dixon *et al.* (2014, p. 5) also recommend that institutions foster peer observations among teachers, including sessions of feedback to each other and some time to plan differentiated lessons collaboratively. Another step schools or institutions could take to help during the DI implementation process is to provide practice and guidance to help teachers succeed in the analysis of the learning goals, continual assessment of students' needs and adjustments to the instruction as a response to the information collected about students' levels of readiness, their interests and learning profiles.

And, it is also suggested that syllabi need to be designed with a balance in their complexity (Nusrat 2017, p. 9).

Besides the institutions, a big part of responsibility in the success of the implementation of DI has been placed on teachers. There is a call for awareness of their role as organizers of learning opportunities, assessors of students' readiness and providers of ways in which students can demonstrate understanding as suggested by Tomlinson (2001, p. 16). In addition, teachers must be aware of the need for developing some skills such as the one for organizing the curriculum, forgetting about stereotypes, providing agency, diagnosing students' needs, and troubleshooting, among others. All those actions that both teachers and institutions can take to implement DI in their contexts validate the relevance this research project could have to the CCCA.

In conclusion, defining DI, recognizing what it is and what it is not, finding out about the students' differences teachers can identify in their ELT classrooms as the key step to implement DI approaches, acknowledging the benefits it brings to the students' learning of the language, analyzing the struggles teachers can encounter through the implementation of differentiation, listing some of the adjustments teachers can make to their classes to contribute to the differentiation, and pointing out what teachers and institutions can do to succeed in the use of DI were necessary sections to provide a clearer idea of the concept and to understand how to relate it to the CCCA context in which this research project was carried out.

Thus, it might help to have a better understanding of the modifications teachers are making to attend their students' needs and goals and if those are in favor of their students' success in the learning of English; at the time that it could formalize good practices that might have been implemented by some teachers and might have had positive impact on students' learning processes. Also, it could provide some tools to incorporate in the Professional Development Program and the regular practices carried out by the Academic area while it develops a sense of awareness among teachers on the benefits and successful practices of language teaching at the institution.

## Methods

This research paper aimed to identify the different kinds of adjustments teachers at the CCCA make to their classes to suit their students' needs and differences and help them succeed in their English language learning process. The techniques used to collect data were: the revision of six (6)

lesson plans from six different classes in the elementary levels (Elementary levels in the CCCA Adult Program are Fundamental 1, 2, 3 or 4), five (5) class observations within the same levels chosen, and, an online questionnaire to six (6) teachers from the levels chosen. It is relevant to mention that the teachers who provided the lesson plans were not the same teachers whose classes were observed. But those observed were the ones requested to participate in the questionnaire.

The first tool to collect information was the lesson plans. Fundamental teachers' lesson plans from different schedules at the CCCA were revised. The analysis of lesson plans was intended to determine if teachers were implementing differentiated instruction and which adaptations they were making to foster achievement among their students. Also, they aimed to provide evidence of relevant information to be asked to teachers during the questionnaire stage that helped clarify whether they were using DI approaches for their students' English language learning. Once the lesson plans were collected, a list of the modifications identified was made and classified into curriculum and presentation as referred by Dixon *et al.* (2014, p. 3) and pointed out by Hall, Strangman and Meyer (2009) to define if teachers were considering the implementation of DI to benefit their students in their learning of the language.

A checklist with ten statements (see appendix 1. Lesson Plan Checklist) was used to determine if the teachers in the sample had planned for differentiation or were going towards that path as evidenced in aspects such as setting objectives for the lesson, trying different group formation, allowing students to learn from their peers, having a contingency plan the group or for individuals within the class, assigning roles to students, etc. Notes on additional relevant findings were also taken.

Class observations were conducted on five teachers in the elementary levels (see appendix 2. Class Observation Checklist.) The main objectives of this tool were to see if teachers were paying attention to how different their students were and if they were addressing their efforts to help them achieve their goals. From these observations, the noticeable differences among students were checked on a list taken out of the 19 differences among students in a heterogeneous language class proposed by Nusrat (2017, p. 10). Then, the adaptations made by the teacher to the content, process and results were listed to, later on, be described.

The final technique used to gather information was an online questionnaire that was carried out through Google Forms. Six teachers, from whom classes were observed or whose lesson plans were reviewed, were requested to answer a set of questions on the effectiveness of their teaching methods, their awareness of their students' differences and needs, and the adaptations made to their lessons in order to get further input on their

general understanding of the adjustments and the responses to students' differences and needs.

## Results and Discussion

Three methods of data collection were used in this research paper to identify whether teachers in the elementary levels at the CCCA are adjusting their lessons to provide students with successful language learning experiences, and the following is the presentation of the findings.

Two out of six lesson plans evidenced that teachers are strongly going in the direction of DI implementation. That is to say, in their lesson plans they complied with between the 60 to 80% of the items in the checklist: the planning of a variety of activities, the planning for using different group formation, the incorporation of activities in which students take different roles, contingency plans for particular students, the planning of activities in which students are allowed to learn from their peers, and clear goals establishment. It should be noted that none of the lesson plans evidenced the planning for making adjustments for individual students or based on students' achievement of the goals, and there is no planning of activities or a moment of the class to confirm that the activities planned are effective and students achieve the goals of the class.

On the other hand, all the lesson plans in the sample indicated that teachers set objectives for the lesson and plan a variety of activities, presumably intended to benefit students with differences in styles, intelligences, language abilities, motivation, etc. It was also noticeable that just one out of the six lesson plans (lesson plan No. 3) presented information about the teacher planning on doing some reinforcement with one of her students. In the same lesson plan, there could be seen a couple of attempts to use DI by making adaptations: the first one to the outcome of one of the activities planned (the product,) and the second one when the teacher stated, "wait for students' reactions and explain the meaning of each word" (the content.) However, there is no information on whether the teacher's intention was to implement DI approaches.

Unfortunately, the information gathered through this method did not provide any kind adjustment made to the lesson by teachers in the sample; therefore, there is not classification of modifications as discussed in the literature review. It is important to mention that the results of the lesson plan analysis were not very conclusive since the lesson plans collected did not provide enough information to say that there was clear evidence of the planning for the use of DI. That is why more than one method was used to collect information.

The second tool used in this research project to gather information was the class observations done to 5 teachers in the Fundamental levels. First, the different kinds of student differences were analyzed from the list of 19 differences presented by Nusrat (2017, p. 10). Within the five classes observed the strongly noticeable differences shared by all the groups were age, maturity, genre, confidence, learning experience and language learning ability. It is important to mention that the age ranges in all the classes varied from 16 to 45 years old and three of the groups were composed mostly of men. Some of the characteristics on the list were difficult to observe, say for example, self-discipline, knowledge of other languages, world knowledge and intelligence. Another characteristic that was not checked as a difference was mother tongue. All the students were Spanish speakers. However, these differences are key only if teachers plan their classes accordingly, taking them into consideration to enhance students' learning of the language. Because of that, the checklist used for the lesson plan analysis was also implemented during the observations. Although some aspects of DI are present, both the observations and the lesson plan analysis stages showed that teachers are not really considering the elements of DI listed in the checklist for their planning.

A further analysis on the observations provided similar results to the ones in the lesson plan analysis. Teachers are conducting varied activities according to the objectives of the lesson and aiming at the achievement of those goals. However –as evidenced in the observations– in three out of the five classes observed, the class objectives were explicitly established. In four of the classes there is evidence of the teachers using different group formations and just in 3 of them students were taking roles in a particular activity. In only one of the classes the teacher implemented an activity in which students could learn from each other.

On the other hand, one of the adjustments that could not be evidenced through the observations was allowing students' different responses to a task. In all the activities from all the classes observed, students were asked to come up with the same kind of product response to the different tasks. Other aspects of DI that were not evidenced in the observations were contingency plans for certain students, use of modifications based on students' reactions to the activities conducted, and the use of activities or moments of the class to check the achievement of the class goals. In addition, it was evidenced that at least 4 of the teachers observed did some monitoring, but it cannot be said that it was purposeful since they just answered students' questions and did not seem to be observing students' reactions to the activities. Some students were presenting difficulties with the tasks because they did not understand the task itself, they could not communicate well with the teacher and their classmates, or they did not

have enough vocabulary to develop the exercise. Despite this, the teachers just limited themselves to answering questions, repeating instructions and moving on with the activities. No further attention was paid to those students. Despite the identification of some of the differences among students, it is not clear if teachers are aware of it and it cannot be said that the variety of activities implemented by them lead to a conscious implementation of DI.

The third method used for data collection was an online questionnaire. It was sent to six teachers, but only four of them submitted their answers. The aim of this survey was to get further information on teachers' awareness of students' differences and the steps they take to make their learning successful. Question 1 was about how conscious teachers were of the effectiveness of the activities implemented in class. Three teachers said they recognize the effectiveness of their activities when their students do what they are asked for and can use the language taught. To question 2 –about the identification of struggling students– all four teachers responded clearly on the students' attitudes when they do not achieve the goals. That is to say, confusion, constant request for repetitions, switch to mother tongue, and disruptive behavior. All of them are indicators that students might need to be addressed differently in order to achieve the class goals.

The steps those teachers take when identifying this kind of students varied: some offer their students after-class tutoring sessions<sup>1</sup>, others try to act immediately by repeating instructions or approaching the student and clarifying the task. Just one teacher –TEACHER 4– suggested revising the strategies taught and modifying her planning. This last answer indicates a higher level of awareness of her teaching methods, also noted in the lesson plan analysis in which this teacher was the only one planning for personalized reinforcement to one of her students and a couple of attempts from her to use DI.

Questions 4 and 5 have to do with the identification of students who do especially well in a lesson and the steps taken by teachers when this happens. The four answers refer to the average of students who do well in a class. Teachers mentioned that they can identify them because of the roles those students take in the class –leaders, mistake correctors– or simply because they use the language properly. However, once again TEACHER 4 came up with a valuable answer: “they achieve the learning objective and are aware of what they learned” (TEACHER 4, online questionnaire, November 2019).

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1. Tutoring session: it consists of giving students the study strategies they need to deal with the difficulties they face in their learning process.

What is very interesting to highlight are the steps teachers said they take when students that excel in class are identified. They make several adjustments to their lessons such as making those students leaders of group activities, planning and giving them activities that are more appealing and/or challenging to them, and asking them for greater outcomes. Although the point is to identify the adjustments teachers make in their classes to facilitate learning, this last question might indicate that teachers find it easier to make adaptations to students who do particularly well in class than to apply adjustments to the struggling ones.

To sum up, the information provided through the instruments used say very little on the adjustments teachers make to their classes and whether teachers identify their students' needs and differences because in the lesson plans collected and the class observations it was hard to evidence adjustments. This might have been due to fact that classes were not observed entirely, or it is complex for a teacher to specify the adjustments they might make on a lesson plan. A very low percentage of the participants of this project demonstrated a high degree of awareness of students' needs and differences and the DI implementation. However, teachers at the CCCA seem to be unconsciously on the right path towards the use of DI because they are implementing activities that are varied and could benefit students with learning differences and needs but not reflecting on why they proceed in specific way. Besides that, those activities aim to achieve the established class goals and some teachers are taking steps to help students with differences achieve the learning goals and are using flexible groups. Additionally, in their classes there are a number of opportunities to provide students with differentiation.

## Conclusions

This research project was intended to identify the types of adjustments CCCA teachers in the Fundamental levels are making to their lessons in order to help their students succeed in their learning process.

Through the analysis of the lesson plans it can be concluded that CCCA teachers plan a variety of activities that could be beneficial to different kinds of students within a class, although it does not seem to be the result of the identification of their students' needs and differences. However, knowing these differences is key only if teachers plan their classes accordingly, taking them into consideration to enhance students' learning of the language. As a result, it is suggested that teachers at the CCCA get trained on the identification of students needs and differences and on the implementation of adjustments that suit different kinds of students.

It is also inferred that teachers do set learning objectives for each class, although there is no planning for a final activity or reflection that those objectives were accomplished. Therefore, teachers are losing opportunities to detect students' needs and adjustments that need to be taken to respond to them.

The class observations did not provide further conclusions on the kinds of modifications teachers make to their classes to facilitate learning. Instead, they provoked serious thought on the need of teachers' awareness of their role as observers to identify opportunities to adapt their lessons according to students' reactions to the tasks and contents, or to their needs that can change and vary every class. Consequently, CCCA teachers also need to be trained on the use of DI as a means to respond to their students' needs.

As indicated by the results of the questionnaires, it seems easier for teachers to address the adjustments they could implement in a class as a response to students' needs when asked about it than when it comes to planning or performing it in a class. Also, it could be said that teachers found it easier to identify students who struggle in a class rather than the ones that excel. However, when it comes to the steps they take to accommodate those students, they can easily think of the adjustments they would implement for those who do particularly well rather than for the struggling students. This is an aspect that needs further discussion with the teachers at the institution as well as extensive training.

Because of the information gathered in this research project and aiming out better results in the achievement of the students' language goals, it is suggested that the Academic area of the CCCA intervene by doing further research on DI that could give more insight on whether the activities and methods used by teachers respond to the institutions' practices rather than the students' needs. Also, there is a need for the creation of a Teacher Development Course that allows teachers to discuss their concerns and struggles when it comes to responding to students' needs and to raise consciousness on the topic. It is also recommended that this topic should be addressed in the Coaching program, since the coaches are aware of these issues at a higher level and could provide more guidance to the teachers.

It is expected that this research project will encourage teachers to be more observant of their students to identify the moments of the class or course development that require adjustments, that they assume more reflective practices, that they become more flexible when it comes to making adjustments to their lessons, and that they get to know their students better, so they can easily identify their needs and differences. Also, it is expected that the CCCA take the necessary steps to conduct DI approaches and

make the benefits of its implementation more visible, and its students benefit from them.

Moreover, this study provides the Academic area with a significant starting point to further research, the need for a Professional Development course on the topic, and the possible implementation of DI approaches at the institution.

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**APPENDIX — NO.1***Lesson Plan Checklist*

**Research Education Course**  
Martha Orobio

**Lesson Plan Checklist**

The aim of this checklist is to determine if teachers are planning their classes based on DI and which adaptations they were making to foster achievement among their students.

	LP 1	LP 2	LP 3	LP 4	LP 5	LP 6
	Teacher:	Teacher:	Teacher:	Teacher:	Teacher:	Teacher:
1	There is evidence of variety of activities					
2	There is evidence of the use of different group formation					
3	There is evidence of students taking roles in a particular activity					
4	Different kind of responses from students is encouraged					
5	Materials and activities seem to be planned to achieve the learning goals					
6	There is planning for contingency plans for different students					
7	There is planning for allowing students to learn from their peers					
8	There is planning for adjustments to the lesson or activities based on students reactions or attitudes / individual students					
9	Class goals are established					
10	There is evidence of confirmation of achievement of the established goals					

**APPENDIX — NO.2**

*Class Observation Checklist*



**Research Education Course**  
Martha Orobio

**Class Observation Checklist**

	<b>Differences between learners by NUSRAT (2017)</b>		<b>Class 1</b>		<b>Class 2</b>		<b>Class 3</b>		<b>Class 4</b>		<b>Class 5</b>	
			Level:	Teacher:								
1	Language learning ability											
2	Language knowledge											
3	Cultural background											
4	Learning style											
5	Attitude to the language											
6	Mother tongue											
7	Intelligence											
8	World knowledge											
9	Learning experience											
10	Knowledge of other languages											
11	Age or maturity											
12	Gender											
13	Personality											
14	Confidence											
15	Motivation											
16	Interest											
17	Independence											
18	Self-discipline											
19	Educational level											





# Teachers' Perceptions on Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perspective teachers have about the Kids and Teens Program students with specific learning disabilities (SLDs) during the first academic semester of 2018 at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano de Cali (CCCA). The data collection consisted of the analysis of six cases reported in the organizational software (SOFI) and an interview with the five Kids and Teens teachers who reported the cases of students with SLDs. The findings showed the teachers do not know what characteristics and strategies they can use in a class that might have students with an SLD.

### **Key Words:**

Teachers perception, Specific Learning Disabilities, Inclusion.

## Introduction

Through the years, education has been concerned with the issue of inclusion. This is because students with disabilities were being educated in separate schools or excluded from “normal” classes making education only accessible for a few. Smith, Polloway, Patton, Dowdy and Doughty (2015, p. 22), for example, affirm that there is a knowledge barrier between teaching and inclusive teaching, which creates an impact on the way teachers interact with young learners that have specific learning disabilities (SLD) in a “normal” class. As Tharp (2018, p. 11) concludes, the teachers have the responsibility to lead students and their learning beyond a classroom, in order to help them become part of a culture. Therefore, our goal is to empower teachers and students to make a transformation in the way they see the culture of learning.

The concept of inclusive education was given to promote the idea of *Education for All*. Putnam (1993, p. 5) shows that “students’ diversity and their cognitive abilities... SLD; sensory impairments; and different cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds” have a big impact on how teachers interact and perceive them and influence to the point of excluding students with special needs in the same class. This could be because teachers do not have the strategies or knowledge of inclusive teaching.

In the same way, the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano is a nonprofit institution that offers English classes to all of the community in Valle del Cauca. The CCCA has a “non-discrimination policy in all of its programs and services as its social objective, stating the right of its students and other users to study in an atmosphere that is free of discrimination. The CCCA does not make decisions based on race, ethnicity, origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, social class or other status in its processes of admission or participation in classes, services, or activities” (CCCA, 2017). In this process of inclusion, the institution found a necessity of creating the Student Welfare Department to train and guide teachers on the use of different strategies in the classrooms to teach all the community in order to go beyond the learning and help students with SLDs be part of the class and learn. As a result, the Department has found that the teachers’ perspective towards students with SLD is prejudicial. This could be due to the misunderstanding of how to teach students with special needs and SLDs. That is why it is relevant to conduct a study on the perspective teachers have about the Kids and Teens Program students with SLDs during the first academic semester of 2018 at the CCCA.

## Literature Review

First, this literature review will describe previous studies that intend to explain the general term of SLD, such as Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) and Reid, Lienemann and Hagaman (2013) who concluded that based on their research that SLDs not only affect multiple psychological processes but also involve the way students understand and use the language. Second, important authors like Taylor and Ringlaben (2012), Norwich (1994), Triandis (1971) and Bowman (1986) address the impact of teachers' perception of students with LD, showing how it influences their attitudes and actions toward students, and as a consequence affects the learning processes of the students. Third, the term inclusion is discussed by Salend and Garrick (1999) and others as a strategy for teachers, focusing on academic gains for all types of learners. All these factors will be discussed in this literature review, plus taking into account our context and focusing primarily on what perception teachers have about students with SLDs in their academic lives.

### Specific Learning Disabilities

Knowing what an SLD is can provide an understanding of the concept that is the framework of this study. Different disciplines like education, psychology, medicine and others try to have a precise definition of SLDs according to their studies and perspectives, making an extensive "umbrella" term that labels a student and their learning difficulties (Kemp, Smith & Segal, 2017). However, for this study the definition taken into account according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) integrates all those disciplines and defined it as,

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding, or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, spell, or to do mathematical calculation (Pierangelo and Giuliani, 2008, p.1).

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) believes there are different neuropsychological or neurobiological processes that collectively make the learning process happen differently in the brain, and these do not affect only one particular type of skill or area of learning. Besides, Lienemann and Hagaman (2013) point out that this condition does not only affect the academic area, learning skills and the way students process the information, but also self-esteem, behavior, organization skills and social-emotional areas which makes a spiral of school failure. As a result, it makes the acquisition and use of the language a big impediment on the students'

lives that becomes a lifelong challenge (Lerner, 2000). Therefore, students with SLDs have a disadvantage compared to “normal” learners when it comes to learning a second language, because they have to make an extra effort to understand, organize, analyze, and produce new vocabulary.

Most SLDs may be noted during the pre-school years; others related to behavior, language production, and social-emotional areas may appear in adulthood and become self-evident in the classroom. These characteristics correspond to the diagnosis given by a professional in the field that identifies it, such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, memory, language processing, processing speed and executive functions (Reid, Lienemann & Hagaman, 2013).

All of these authors mentioned above have concluded that students with SLDs are capable of learning, and in the majority of cases with students that have difficulties in their learning it is because teachers do not have the knowledge and the strategies to guide their learning so that they can make the process of metacognition. That is why it is importance to see how teachers of an English learning institute such as the CCCA perceive their learners with SLDs as they acquir a second language and how their perception affects the students learning.

### **Teachers’ Perception**

The perception is considered to be the teachers’ perspective towards students with SLDs that shows how they interact and understand the concept of SLD, which is influenced by their experiences, their current state of mind and the belief the teachers show when dealing with students that have SLD. Additionally, Stoneman (1993) observes that the cognitive, affective, and behavioral areas of a teacher influence the manner in which they review the world and interact with all the students. Therefore we can see the importance of the teacher’s attitudes, according to Triandis (1971) who reports that his participants (teachers) encouraged their students to develop a relationship among children with and without SLD in the same class, creating an accepting environment for everyone, and facilitating the children’s learning. In the CCCA context, teachers need to be aware of their impact on their students if solid rapports are established, especially with those students who have SLDs.

For the purpose of this literature review, the definition of perception is understood as the way people interpret and respond to the behavior of others and what inferences they draw from others’ actions and outcomes (Kruglanski 1989; Molden & Dweck, 2006). The perceivers expect and interpret circumstances very easily, and at the same time they gather information about how the other responds to different types of situations as

Kammrath, Mendoza-Denton & Mischel (2005) mention in their study. Thus, teachers perceive students with SLD based on their academic background, as most studies and research on teachers' attitudes or perspective of students with SLDs look at in the interactions the teacher has in their classroom. In addition, Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin (1989) and Norwich (1994) showed in their studies that the principal and administrative personnel of schools have a more positive attitude towards integration, who followed by special education teachers, and last, the classroom teachers, manifest a negative image that they perceive from their students who have SLDs. This demonstrates that their students have a low academic performance as compared to students whose teachers study special education. That is why it is important to train teachers at the CCCA or teachers in general in Colombia to identify and help students with SLD to have a positive learning process in the classroom and a good environment, because most of the teachers do not have a degree in pedagogy or are prepared to offer special education. Having English teachers offer appropriate help to students with SLDs makes a big difference in the way students with SLDs will learn.

Providing this literature review as a reference for the CCCA allows us to show the necessity teachers have of understanding and changing their perspectives on LD and the impact it has on their teaching and their students with SLD. Bowman (1986, p.30) in his study concluded that other factors may affect the perspective of teachers with students that have SLDs, and he/she noted that in countries which had a law requiring integration, teachers expressed more favorable views, while teachers from countries which offered the most sophisticated segregated educational provision were less supportive to integration.

These previously mentioned studies have shown that an effective learning for students with SLDs only begins with the perception and attitudes of the teachers. According to Stafford and Green (1996), Avramidis and Norwich (2002) and Leatherman and Niemeyer (2005) the perception of the personnel involved in planning a class and teaching in an inclusive program is vital to the success of all of their students because it gives opportunities to participate and feel part of the class. Training the teachers at the CCCA is important and vital so they can focus on encouraging each student to learn, focusing on their abilities, providing a healthy learning environment for every student in order to make a big difference on their lives, and showing them that everyone has a different way of acquiring a second language.

## Inclusion

Inclusion programs on academic performance has many gains for students with SLDs. One of the components of successful inclusion is the way which the student with SLDs feels has been a part of the classroom and community, making a positive interaction with peers and improving attitudes toward school and learning. Therefore, the importance of the teachers because they have the responsibility to use many strategies to help the students achieve a sense of belonging to the class.

Authors like Salend and Garrick (1999) and Avramidis and Norwich (2002) support the importance of having an inclusive environment and its positive impact on all of the students, including students with SLDs. Having an inclusive program at the CCCA has many implications not only for the academic community, but also for the administration area. These implications are: 1) receiving training, in order to understand what are SLDs, giving tools and strategies they can use, and ways they can help the students with SLD achieve the objectives of the class, 2) flexible schedules to provide teachers with sufficient time to collaborate and to coordinate the delivery of the services they provide to students (Idol, 1997; Alther-Thomas, 1997), and 3) establishing inclusion practices, policies and programs that address the need of students and teachers. Applying the implications mentioned above can be beneficial and life changing for students with SLDs, in addition, a support to their families as Bennett, DeLuca & Bruns (1997) and Giangreco, Edelman, Cloninger & Dennis (1993) discuss in their studies.

In conclusive classrooms, we can find that students with SLDs have multiple talents and that having one of these conditions does not mean that they cannot achieve academic goals and become professionals. However, they cannot do it by themselves. They need the help of an adult, in this case the teacher, that first understands what they are going through because this condition of learning difficulties does not only affect the academic area but also emotional and social areas of the individual. Important authors like Armstrong (2012) argue that in this century learning does not only require memorizing definitions and formulas, but also requires critical thinking, collaboration and creativity of the teacher to identify of the tales, intelligences, abilities, and capacity of every student with SLDs. Therefore, if teachers have a negative perspective of SLDs they will label their students, cutting their wings and minimizing their learning and self-image. This is why it is important to understand and identify teachers' perspectives at the Colombo Americano, because by changing the negativity and reinforcing the positive thinking or perspective on LDs they will help their students have a better acquisition of the second language.

Inclusion is a method to use in class with different types of students making not only an impact on students with SLDs, but a positive impact on the teacher as well. As the teachers perceive they are becoming positive role models to their students in general, immediately their confidence in teaching will increase, making their students get engaged faster in the class and their learning will be significant (Salend, and Garrick, 1999).

In conclusion, the authors and studies cited in this literature review show that students with SLDs do not only have the obstacle of learning in a regular education system that was created to learn and evaluate in one way, but also the lack of knowledge the teachers have towards their disability, leading to an incorrect perception that affects the positive learning of these students. This way the CCCA can help to improve the learning of students with SLDs by designing training to provide the teacher with the skills to teach students in inclusive settings and working as a cooperative teaching team (Downing, Eichinger, & Williams, 1997; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

## Methods

This research paper is aimed at identifying the perceptions that teachers have of the Kids and Teens Program students with SLDs during the first academic semester of 2018 at the CCCA. In order to reach this goal, the data collection methods included; 1) the analysis of six reported cases of students in the CCCA organizational software (SOFI) and 2) an interview with the five Kids and Teens teachers who reported the cases of students with SLDs.

The subjects of this study were the six reported cases taken from the module called "Bienestar Estudiantil" (student welfare module) in SOFI, in which the Kids and Teens teachers report students' difficulties that they consider are caused by an SLD or that have been diagnosed by a professional in the area. In order to identify the teacher's perceptions of students with SLDs, the cases were analyzed creating a detailed list and further categorization of the terms and expressions describing student academic and behavioral issues that contained qualitative judgement about students' difficulties.

Three (3) personal recorded interviews were conducted with the five teachers who reported the cases of students with learning or behavioral difficulties. The questions of the interview focused on a) identifying the perspective of the teachers on the students they reported, b) what strategies teachers know they can use to support the learning of students with SLDs, and c) teachers' emotional reactions when approaching students

with SLDs. These interviews were analyzed creating a categorization of the use of explicit and implicit terms used to describe the behaviors and characteristics of students with a SLD, which were chosen when it contained a qualitative judgement (positive and negative).

The language used in the interview and the cases were compared to see any correlation between the written perceptions described and the perceptions shown orally by the teachers in the interviews.

## Results and Discussion

This study included two data collection techniques, which were used to identify the perceptions of teachers from the Kids and Teens Program at the CCCA have about students with SLDs, and the following is the presentation of the findings.

The 6 cases reported in the SOFI Module for Welfare showed these categories of analysis: 1) the identification of the student with SLDs is limited to the description of academic problems; 2) the identification of the student as a bearer of an academic problem and not an individual who can succeed if adequate help by the teacher is provided; and 3) the identification of students' need for help not coming from the teacher.

Out of the six (6) case studies, three (3) were categorized by the teachers as academic situations and three (3) referred to the difficulties in the behavior of the students. The three cases reported by the teachers as an academic situation evidenced that expressions like "low performance" and "cognitive difficulties" were constantly mentioned to describe the learning difficulties the students had in one of the learning skills (listening, reading speaking, and writing.) This indicates that the teachers have the ability to identify the characteristics and behavior of a student that might have an SLD. However, it shows that the teachers tend to "label" a student that presents similar characteristics under the concept SLDs and do not take into account the real meaning and description of each SLD. This brings the teachers to a misguided perception of what SLDs are and, therefore, to make incorrect assumptions on how to accurately provide help to students.

Teachers' reports in SOFI also permitted the observation a partial understanding of the student with SLD. Teachers focus on the difficulty the student presents, but not on the integrative view of the student as an individual with difficulties who is also in the learning process. This can be read in expressions like, "solve the situation" and "detect possible deficiencies", suggesting that the perception some teachers have towards students with an SLD is a situation that needs to be solved in order for the student to be capable to learn. This limits the view of seeing a student

with the capacity to learn and be successful in all of the areas (academic, social, emotional, etc.) Therefore, the perspective teachers have about the student with an SLD is relevant to interact and make the student have a meaningful learning.

According to the reports in SOFI, four teachers indicate that the students with difficulties in their learning find it hard to work with them, and they think students require help from a person other than the teacher. One of the reported cases read, "the student depends of [sic] a sibling that is on the same class to develop the activities" (Teacher 3, report in SOFI, February, 2018). This qualitative judgement shows the teachers' lack of understanding about SLDs because the student is perceived as having a low academic achievement because he/she asks for help to understand or looks for someone to explain the activities.

On the other hand, the three case studies of students with difficulties in the behavior of the students showed a qualitative judgement about the difficulties of students with SLDs because they used words like "low attention," "don't follow the rules," "hyperactivity," and "low concentration" (Teacher 4, report in SOFI, May, 2018) to display their perspective towards the students' behaviors in the class. This leads to understanding that teachers' expressions about students that present difficulties in their learning show that teachers only perceive the behaviors the students manifest because they do not understand what an SLD is and its manifesting characteristics.

The second tool used in this research project aimed at identifying the perspective of the teachers towards the students they reported in SOFI in the interviews done to 3 teachers. The results are categorized in these aspects, 1) teachers could not clearly identify what is an SLDs; 2) teachers could identify the characteristics of students with SLDs correctly; and 3) teachers had feelings of confusion and frustration towards having students with SLDs.

In the interviews, three out of five teachers did not know what SLDs are because they expressed that students with SLDs are the ones that have "attention problems," "anxiety," "low academic performance," "never can stay still," and "a lot of stress" (Teachers 1, 2, 3 and 4, Interview, August 18, 2018). This qualitative judgement also shows that the teachers' do not know the definition of what SLDs are, but they identify features of dyslexia and ADHD (attention-deficit and hyperactivity disorder) as the only two SLDs and the areas they affect. This result gives relevance to conducting this research study as it exemplifies the need for clarifying what SLDs are and how to proceed when facing them.

All teachers interviewed came to the conclusion that students with an SLD only manifest their difficulty in understanding by low attention,

hyperactivity and high anxiety. A very common feeling the teachers had when having students with an SLD was “frustration”, a “challenge”, “puzzle” and an “overwhelming” feeling.

A further analysis of both the case studies and the interview of the teachers was that the way they feel when they have a student with an SLD might be a possible explanation for the lower academic achievement, which in turn may influence teachers’ perceptions of students with SLD. When the reports and the interviews are analyzed together, teachers’ perception of students with SLDs indicate that they do not understand what SLDs and students’ difficulties are, hence they generate strong negative feelings towards students and they can be reflected in the way they reported the cases, using words such as “*solve the situation*” and “*detect possible deficiencies*”.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions teachers have about the Kids and Teens Program students with SLDs during the first academic semester of 2018 at the CCCA.

Through the analysis of the case studies and the interview done with the teachers that reported students with difficulties in their classes, we see that teachers’ perspective is critical to a better understanding of an SLD as it plays out in the learning of a second language. Also, the teachers have to learn what is an SLD, to see what their students are going through because these conditions do not only affect the academic areas but also emotional and social areas of the individual. It is suggested that teachers at the CCCA receive training in order to understand what SLDs are, giving tools and strategies they can use and ways they can help the students with different types of learning disabilities in order to achieve the objectives of the class. Also, educators need to understand their attitudes and perspectives have an effect on students with learning difficulties, especially affecting students’ confidence. Therefore, it is suggested that the Colombo Americano establishes inclusion practices, policies and programs that address the need of students and teachers.

This study gives the CCCA a starting point to further studies that should include more teachers to identify the perceptions as well as the need for professional development courses on strategies for teachers with student that have an SLD. Having classrooms with inclusive policies and teachers with an overview of SLDs, trying to meet everyone’s needs means a big step towards the effective learning of students with SLDs.

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# The Effect of Two Written Feedback Techniques on Students' Learning Awareness

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this research project was to measure the effectiveness of two written feedback techniques, emails and post-it notes, on language students' learner awareness. The data collection was done through three methods: diagnostic survey to students, individual interviews and a final survey. The results demonstrated that the feedback provided through the emails and post-it notes was effective, but that further work should be done on how to provide feedback that helps students identify specific areas of improvement in learning English.

### **Key Words:**

Feedback, Expressive Feedback, Formative Feedback, Language Learner Awareness.

## Introduction

Feedback plays a very important role in the English as a foreign language learning process. It allows learners to identify their weaknesses and strengths, and therefore, to be able to establish an action plan for improvement. According to Klimova (2015, p.172), “feedback is the information about current performance that can be used to improve future performance.” Providing feedback is then, a very important part of a teacher’s job, and the lack of timely and personalized feedback to students may result in poor performance.

Klimova (2015, p.172), also states that “the more frequent and constructive this feedback is, the more performance improvement can be done [by students].” Providing feedback with these characteristics becomes an arduous job for a teacher depending on factors such as class size, time constraints, and institutional policies. For instance, in a large group, teachers may end up providing very general feedback on students’ class performance. This unfocused feedback might not contribute to students’ awareness of their own learning strengths and difficulties, and consequently, it may not have a positive impact on the improvement of students’ language skills.

Foreign language teachers have tried to solve the issue of providing effective feedback to students in different ways. Written feedback is commonly used to respond to students’ written work and has been proven to be successful (Ellis, 2008; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Klimova, 2015).

Because of this discussion on the importance of feedback and the search for the best techniques, this research seeks to assess the effectiveness of two written feedback techniques: post-it-notes and e-mail messages, to increase students’ awareness of their own learning process in a Pre-independent class (A2 level according to the Common European Framework CEF) at Centro Cultural Colombo Americano Cali (CCCA.)

## Literature Review

Feedback is a very important component of the teaching-learning process in an EFL context. Teachers have a great responsibility to provide “adequate” feedback to students, but students are also responsible for processing feedback received and using it as the guidance for improvement. This research project tries to demonstrate that the use of two written feedback techniques (post-it notes and e-mails) to respond to students’ performance can help them develop a better understanding of their weaknesses and strengths, which may be the first step in order to be able to establish an action plan for improvement.

Hence, this literature review aims to discuss the concepts that help establish and clarify the objective of this research project: importance of feedback and its effect on generating students' learning awareness; views of written feedback; characteristics of feedback according to different authors; and types of feedback.

## **Feedback and its Importance in the Language Learning Process**

In general, feedback is seen as a positive component in the language learning process. Well-structured feedback should aim to provide an improvement on students' performance. Most of the times students and teachers feel that feedback should come mostly from the teacher and that it should show students the path to improvement and learning. However, studies have shown that students have a very important role in the feedback delivery process. Authors like Burke and Pieterick (2010) define feedback as a reciprocal arrangement between teachers and students, where students use the written comments provided by the teacher to establish an action plan to better performance. This definition of feedback implies a more active role from the student, perhaps an agreement between teacher and student on the process itself.

It is important to highlight that even though feedback is usually thought as the information provided by the teacher that will help students improve, several authors like Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) and Nicol (2010) agree that feedback is not just a transmission of information from teacher to student. They explain that students need to understand the information before they can actually use it for improvement.

In this interpretation of feedback, students not only receive the information from the teacher, but they need to do something with it. Nicol (2010) concludes in his research that feedback on its own does not automatically lead to improvement. These actions that need to be taken by students in order to effectively use feedback may include understanding, analyzing, asking questions, in other words interacting with the information provided as feedback. This process followed by students may be seen as the process of gaining learning awareness.

Following this view of feedback, this study focuses on the impact of written feedback techniques to generate students' understanding of their weaknesses and strengths, which in other words means developing learning awareness.

## Types of Feedback

The most common type of feedback and the one students probably expect to receive from their teacher is Corrective Feedback (CF). Ellis (2008) describes CF as the strategies used by teachers to point out students' mistakes and guide them to correct them. In his article he describes 3 types of feedback: Direct Corrective Feedback, Indirect Corrective Feedback and Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback. He also describes strategies used by teachers to provide CF and discusses several studies that show their impact on students' progress on their language learning process. After all this discussion, his conclusion states that there is not strong evidence to suggest one type of feedback is more effective than the other.

McCord (2012) studied the effects of different types of feedback on students' progress. His research focused on the students' perception of Direct CF, Indirect CF and comments. He developed a case study with one of his own students and was able to demonstrate that this student benefitted from all three types of feedback. Nevertheless, he mentioned the student felt the direct corrections helped him identify areas of improvement faster. He felt he needed to work a little more on formulating questions and comments that helped the students find the areas for improvement without generating confusion.

On the other hand, authors like Burke and Pieterick (2010) and Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) present the advantages of formative feedback, feedback that is focused on the task and encourages students to work and improve the process rather than concentrating on a final result.

"Therefore, the most helpful type of feedback focuses on the learning task; it provides specific comments about task-related performance and offers specific suggestions for improvement, as well as encourages students to focus their attention thoughtfully on the task and their approaches to it rather than on simply 'getting the right answer to get a good grade'"(Burke & Pieterick, 2010 p. 18).

Leng (2014) sees feedback as a form of communication between the student and the teacher. In this sense, he presents in his research two types of feedback: Directive and Expressive, and divides these types of feedback into two subcategories each: Directive-Instruction, Directive-Clarification, Expressive-Approval and Expressive-Disapproval. This research presents feedback beyond the concepts presented by Ellis (2008). The types of feedback presented here have an extra component which is emphasis on instructions for improvement and correction. This view of feedback can be very useful on helping students develop awareness of their learning process, considering that it not only points out mistakes, but also provides instructions and comments to students about their work that

may encourage them to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in the language learning process.

This discussion on different types of feedback helps narrow this research to the use of two written feedback techniques (post-it-notes and emails) that combine expressive feedback as presented by Leng (2014) and formative feedback presented by Burke and Pieterick (2010).

## **Written Feedback**

Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) discuss the importance of written feedback as a response to EFL students' writing process and students' perceptions of this written feedback provided by their teachers. Their study concludes that students and teachers think written feedback could be time consuming, but it is helpful and desirable. According to their results, students valued their teachers' feedback and thought it was useful to help them identify their mistakes and ways to improve. They also felt happy when feedback included positive comments about their writing and highlighted their strengths. However, they also reported that some students found it negative when the feedback included too many corrections and too many comments that were vague. These results may lead to the conclusion that written feedback should include a balance between comments on the most important areas to improve and comments that emphasize students' strengths.

Nicol (2010) analyses several studies on written feedback and their effect on student self-regulation process. He mentions several disadvantages of written feedback, among them the difficulty of the students to decipher the message. He also proposes that feedback is seen as a dialogue and a two-way process. Throughout the article, he emphasizes on the opportunity that written feedback provides for students to interact with the information provided. This is probably one of the biggest advantages of written feedback in relation to the development of students' awareness on their language learning process.

Although most studies on written feedback relate to it as the response to students' written work, this research will use written feedback as a response to students' overall performance in a pre-independent level at CCCA, Cali.

## **Effective Written Feedback**

This section of the literature review will discuss what different authors consider effective feedback. Leng (2014) defines effective feedback in

general terms like feedback that is clear to students and encouraging. Klimova (2015) on the other hand, mentions some aspects that make written feedback effective:

1. Teacher should respond to students' writing as a reader, commenting on what interests him.
2. Feedback should include positive comments.
3. Comments should be specific.
4. Feedback should ask for clarification.
5. Feedback should make suggestions that encourage global corrections.
6. Teacher should comment in general terms and not focus on editing.
7. Teacher should avoid negative comments.

These aspects focus on the type of comments that a teacher should write to respond to students' written work and that may guide students to improve their performance. On the other hand, Sadler (1989) cited in Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006, p. 204) explains that feedback is a tool for self-regulated learning and describes three general conditions for students to benefit from feedback: students need to understand clearly what good performance is, how students' current performance relates to "good" performance, and what students should do to go from their current performance to good performance.

These conditions are very important because they bring attention to the need for the students to know what the requirements of the task are beforehand. Providing the requirements and clear criteria might facilitate not only students' production but also the understanding of teachers' feedback afterwards.

This list of conditions for feedback to be effective help establish some of the elements that will be taken into account in the feedback delivery process done through post-it-notes and emails with a Pre-Independent group at CCCA Cali.

This literature review about feedback shows that feedback is a very important part of the language learning process. Feedback can directly influence students' progress and motivation and that is why it becomes a corner stone in the teachers' job.

The understanding of the concepts discussed in this literature review: 1. Definition and importance of feedback, 2. Types of feedback, 3. Written feedback and 4. Effective written feedback provided a clearer perspective in terms of teachers' and students' roles in the feedback process and helped to determine the characteristics of feedback that may benefit students the most.

Even though most research focuses on written feedback as a response to students' written work, and it is not common to respond to students' general performance through written comments, this research project will use two written feedback techniques (post-it-notes and emails) to respond to students' performance to nourish students' awareness on their own learning process. Studying the effect of written feedback on students' generation of learning awareness is important because this process is the first step for students to be able to build a plan for improvement.

Finally, this description of literature on feedback, its importance in the language process, its types and the conditions of written feedback are crucial to the understanding of the implications and the impact well-structured feedback can have on students at a Pre-Independent level at CCCA Cali.

## Methods

This research project has as a main objective to measure the effect of two written feedback techniques, post-it-notes and email messages, on students' level of learning awareness in a Pre-independent group with eight (8) students at CCCA Cali. The level of English in this group, according to the institution's program should be an A2 level as described by the CEFR. The research was developed during three course periods, eight classes each, Pre-independent 1B, Pre-independent 2A and Pre-independent 2B.

The written feedback techniques were used to respond to six specific class activities during the period of implementation of the research study. The feedback provided intended to aid students to identify their strengths, their weaknesses and the action plans needed for improvement. The written feedback provided through the emails and post-it notes was a combination of Expressive Feedback (Leng 2014) and Formative Feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick 2014). Regardless of the technique, the feedback provided followed this structure: positive comments highlighting strengths, a mention of the aspects that needed revision, and a question that encouraged students to analyze what needed to be done in order to improve.

In order to reach the objective, the data collection methods included 1) A diagnostic survey, 2) a final survey and 3) an interview with each of the students in the class. Both, the diagnostic and the final surveys were done in Spanish. These data collection methods allowed the initial diagnosis of students' learning awareness at the beginning and measured the effect of the feedback techniques at the end of the project. The interviews also showed students' individual perceptions of the techniques used. The surveys used both at the beginning and at the end of the project followed the model

of the questionnaires used in research like McCord (2012, p.43) and Saito (1994, p. 49).

- **The initial diagnostic survey** to eight students in the Pre-independent 1B course at CCCA presented numerical questions that helped measure their level of awareness at the beginning of the project. The survey also contained open-ended questions that provided information on their understanding of feedback, the feedback techniques they have identified previous teachers have used and their perception on how these techniques have helped them understand their strengths and weaknesses in their language learning process.
- **The final survey** was done in course number 3 (Pre-Independent 2B) and it helped compare students' level of awareness at the beginning and at the end of the project and therefore measured the effectiveness of the two techniques used to provide feedback. The questions included in the survey collected students' opinions about the techniques and their perceptions of how the feedback techniques helped them increase their understanding of their weaknesses and strengths.
- **Every student was interviewed** by the teacher separately during the second course (Pre-independent 2A). This interview helped identify which of the two techniques used to provide written feedback contributed the most to help raise their learning awareness. The interviews also helped evidence students' preferences in terms of feedback techniques. Even though this was not part of the objective of this research, it helped the researcher identify the technique students connected more to.

All data obtained from the diagnostic and final surveys were grouped by questions and the percentage of the answers was compared as a quantitative means to measure the effectiveness of the two written feedback techniques. The individual interview was analyzed by comparing the answers to the surveys and the ones provided in the interview and establishing points in common in order to measure the effectiveness of the two written feedback techniques qualitatively.

## Results and Discussion

To measure the effect of two written feedback techniques, post-it-notes and e-mail messages, on students' awareness of their own learning process in a Pre-independent class at CCCA Cali, three data collection methods were used.

The first data collection method used was a diagnostic survey that was responded by 8 students. In the survey, students were asked to explain what they understood by feedback. The answers to this question revealed that 4 out of the 8 students had a clear understanding of what feedback is and its objective. Student 1 for example, said: "Lo que entiendo por retroalimentación, es que es el proceso en el que el docente me da su opinión o respuesta a partir de alguna actividad realizada y así podré identificar en que debo mejorar" (Student 1, Diagnostic Survey, July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018). The other 4 students did not have a clear idea of what feedback was, Student 2 said "Entiendo por feedback el resultado de un método o proceso ejecutado por parte del profesor, con el fin de buscar un aprendizaje más efectivo o significativo" (Student 2, Diagnostic Survey, July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018). This misunderstanding of the concept of feedback by learners may impede the interaction students should have with the feedback provided by the teacher and therefore hinder the increase of learner awareness.

The diagnostic survey also asked students to grade themselves in terms of the level of awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. Their answers showed that only 1 student graded himself 5 on a 1-5 scale in the level of awareness of his strengths, and 4 students graded themselves 4 in the same scale. The rest of the group (3 students) graded themselves 3 or lower in the level of awareness of their strengths. This result shows that 5 students felt that their level of awareness of their strengths was high (between 4 and 5 in a 1-5 scale.) While none of the students graded him/herself 5 in the level of awareness of their weaknesses and only 3 students graded themselves 4 in the level of awareness of their weaknesses. The other 5 students graded themselves 3 or lower in this aspect of learning awareness. This may show that students were more conscious of their strengths than they were of their weaknesses. In addition, when students were asked to mention some of their strengths and weaknesses, 7 students listed the language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. There was not a trend that pointed out that one skill was most commonly mentioned as a strength or weakness, because the answers provided by students covered all of them in very similar numbers. This also may indicate that students were not able to identify their specific strengths and weaknesses as they mentioned skills in general, not a specific aspect of the language learning process.

The second data collection method was the final survey that allowed to compare the answers students had given in both diagnostic and final surveys. In this survey, students were asked to identify the feedback methods used by the teacher and to select the one they considered was most useful in terms of helping them identify strengths, weaknesses and action plans for improvement. The final survey was taken by seven out of the

eight students who took the diagnostic survey. Six out of the 7 the students identified the two techniques used by the teacher to provide feedback (e-mails and post-it notes,) only 1 student was not able to identify the two methods used. When students were requested to identify the technique that helped the most to identify their strengths and weaknesses and actions for improvement, 4 out of 7 students, felt that the post-it-notes were more useful. They mentioned that they felt the post-it-notes were more personalized and guided them to question themselves about how to improve. Again, when asked to list some of their strengths and weaknesses, 7 students listed the language skills in general. This result indicates that the feedback provided through emails and post-it notes did not help students identify the specific aspect of each skill they needed to improve.

When comparing the results of the diagnostic and final surveys in the questions where students had to grade themselves in terms of the level of awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and the actions for improvement (see graph 1. Entry and Exit Survey Comparison), the analysis revealed that there was an average of 67% increase in the awareness of students after the feedback techniques were used. The individual analysis of the questions demonstrated that 4 students increased their understanding of their strengths, 7 students increased their awareness of their weaknesses, and 4 students increased their recognition of the actions they should take to improve. It can be noticed that the highest percentage of increased awareness (7 students) was in the question referring to the awareness of weaknesses. This result demonstrates that the feedback given through emails and post-it notes was effective on increasing learner awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses.

Another important aspect that came up after comparing the diagnostic and final surveys is the lack of connection between the actions taken by the students to improve their weaknesses and the weaknesses identified by them. In the diagnostic survey 4 students listed actions that were connected to the skills mentioned as weak and the other 4 students listed actions that did not relate to the weak skills. This result changed in the final survey, 6 students listed actions for improvement that related directly to the areas mentioned as their weaknesses, while only 1 student listed actions that did not directly relate to their weak areas. These results evidence an increase in another aspect of learner awareness: the ability to generate action plans for improvement.

### **Entry and Exit Survey Comparison**

The third data collection method was the individual interview, given to 5 out of 8 students in the middle of the project. In this interview, students

were asked to point out the feedback techniques used by the teacher, and to select the one they felt had helped them the most to identify their weaknesses and strengths and establish an action plan for improvement. All of the students were able to point out the two techniques used (post-it note and emails). One of the students said that he preferred the e-mails but the other four students preferred the post-it notes; the reason for this preference was not clearly explained by the interviewed students. All of the students mentioned that the feedback provided was helping them to identify their weaknesses and strengths, and they all emphasized how the feedback was encouraging them to reflect on the actions they needed to take for improvement.

## Conclusions

This research project had as an objective to assess the effectiveness of two written feedback techniques on improving the level of learning awareness of a group of students with an A2 level of English at CCCA Cali. Four main conclusions were reached after applying the feedback techniques and analyzing the results of the data collection methods.

The first and most important conclusion was that the feedback provided through emails and post-it notes helped students to increase learning awareness in the three areas revised through the data collection instruments. This conclusion was reached by comparing the results of the diagnostic and final surveys which showed an increase in awareness of weaknesses, strengths and identification of actions for improvement. The analysis also revealed that the students gained higher awareness of their learning weaknesses or difficulties. In short, the information provided in the emails and post-it notes was effective on improving learner awareness, especially the understanding of their general weaknesses.

Another conclusion that can be stated is that the students showed, during the diagnostic and final surveys that they could identify their strengths and weaknesses by relating to the four language skills, but not to the specific features of the language skill they needed to improve. This lack of understanding of the specific features of the language skills that need improvement may delay students' language learning progress. This suggests that the feedback given through emails and post-it notes was not effective in this sense. However, there is not sufficient evidence to explain how the feedback should be written in order to help students gain understanding of the specific aspects of every skill they have to improve. It is recommended for the teacher to keep working on providing quality

feedback that helps students gain a better understanding of the specific features of the language they need to improve.

A third conclusion is that the feedback provided through emails and post-it notes facilitated students' identification not only of their weak areas as general skills, but also the establishing of actions plans that impacted them directly. Even though the feedback provided did not supply direct instructions on the actions to be taken for improvement but presented a question that intended to generate reflection on the part of the students, the results demonstrated that there was an increase in the number of students who were able to establish assertive actions plans on their own. Thus, the feedback provided encouraged students to reflect and establish suitable action plans to improve their weaknesses.

A final conclusion refers to the personalized nature of feedback. During the final survey and the individual interviews, students called special attention to how they felt the post-it notes were more personalized than the emails. This preference for the feedback provided in the post-it notes might reflect the students' preference for feedback that includes comments on the step by step process rather than on the final result of the task. This highlights the need for feedback to go beyond corrective and instructional guidelines to comments that make the students reflect on their own performance and the techniques that can improve this performance. To summarize, the feedback provided through post-it notes during class performance gave students a sense of personalization of feedback that was considered by them a positive feature.

In conclusion, the implementation of the two written feedback techniques (emails and post-it notes) and the analysis of the results of this implementation generated four main findings. First, the feedback provided aided students to increase their understanding of their own weaknesses and strengths. However, further work should be done in terms of providing feedback that helps students to go beyond merely identifying their weak language skill to identifying the specific aspects of the language skill that should improve. Feedback that encourages reflection on the areas of improvement has a positive effect on the students' ability to establish appropriate actions plans. And finally, students prefer feedback that provides guidance on the process rather than the final result. It can be said then, that the feedback provided through emails and post-it notes was effective in generating language learner awareness. Considering this conclusion, it would be interesting to take further steps on analyzing the type of feedback that teachers at CCCA Cali provide to their students and how this feedback can be improved so it helps students gain awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses and therefore be able to improve their language skills.

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# The Effect of Learning to Learn Competence on Students' Learning Skills at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano

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## **Abstract**

This paper reports on a research about the effectiveness of the implementation of Learning to Learn (LL) and its two components, Critical Thinking (CT) and Metacognition in an A2 level course according to Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) at Centro Cultural Colombo Americano (CCCA) Cali. The first data collection came from lesson planning which CT learning strategies were implemented; teacher and students' note taking where Metacognition was applied, and finally, an exit questionnaire to perceive students' impressions was administrated. This paper reveals that applying LL makes a significant and effective impact in students' learning skills. The results suggest that students are aware of the importance of their own learning, of getting learning skills (which facilitate the achievement of learning goals), the ability to acquire the language and communicate. They also highlighted the desire to continue applying LL in their learning process.

### **Key Words:**

Learning to Learn, Critical Thinking, Metacognition, Effectiveness, EFL

## Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century suggests that school graduates should have specific key competences in different frames of reference, instructional, or commonly of life at the end of specific studies. Learning to Learn is one of the eight key competences which are vital for personal fulfilment for people to be included in society, for employability and active citizenship. This reasoning connects to what is required by The Common European Reference Framework of the key competences of learning for lifelong learning (Council of European Union, 2006). This paper wants to give relevance to the competence, “learning to learn” in order to apply it along with its two components critical thinking and metacognition to find out its effectiveness in six English language learners’ learning skills of a Fundamental Plus one , A2 level in accordance with CEFR, at the CCCA.

In this context, the CCCA could have a strong, significant, and trustworthy part of this trend by fostering or developing learning skills in language learners as well as encouraging their appreciation of cultural diversity and interest and curiosity in languages and intercultural communication.

## Literature Review

The goal of this review of the literature is to understand the definition of Learning to Learn LL as a key competence, how important it is when acquiring knowledge or studying a subject matter the different levels of meaning of LL in a learning process, and how some of its components like metacognition and critical thinking consolidate the basis of awareness in students. Presenting this literature review broadens the knowledge about the effectiveness of LL in students’ learning skills in basic levels at the CCCA.

This literature review does so by presenting different perspectives from some authors like the European Parliament and the European Council (2006), Rožman and Koren (2007), Coco (2012), Drăghicescu, Cristea, Petrescu, Gorghiu and Gorghiu (2015); Marin and de la Pava (2017) who discuss LL, its components, and its benefits in a meaningful and effective learning.

## Learning to Learn and Its Benefits

In order to respond to globalization and employability, it is necessary to prepare the coming generations for the future through lifelong learning. Therefore, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union decided to define and provide a framework with new basic competences in which one of the key competences is learning to learn and two of its

components are critical thinking and metacognition. In this framework, LL is defined as the capacity of one to be persistent on the quest for learning and to be able to be autonomous, organized, and aware of one's learning process. In other words, it is a competence to identify learning needs, overcome difficulties, and to be able to interact with others (European Council, 2006, para.5).

LL competence has a fundamental position because it allows the successful use and development of other competences and learning awareness. Most importantly, it is noticeable why many researchers have conducted studies to find out the impact and benefits of the implementation of LL and metacognition in education, and in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) acquisition as well. For instance, Rožman and Koren (2007) highlight that when students discern the notion of LL and know how to use this competence in practice, they can expect confident effects on their learning process and learning results.

This standpoint is shared by Drăghicescu, Cristea, Petrescu, Gorghiu and Gorghiu (2015) who point out that LL represents a key competence in the current society, and it makes a positive impact on students' learning, personal and social development. Parallel to this, Coco (2012) concludes that students perceived significant learning while implementing LL since their perceptions were positive regarding how to learn things. However, they recommend that to strengthen LL competence, the active participation of students and the communication and collaboration from the teachers' side are crucial.

Another significant finding regarding LL was by Hoskins and Frederickson (2008). They questioned The European Council that suggested a framework with the key competences for lifelong learning and education because it evaluates the knowledge gained at the end of the schooling process and not LL itself as a competence for lifelong learning. This article is intriguing because it also questions the relevance of conducting research on this area in a context such as the CCCA since LL is not being evaluated as a competence itself, but just its effectiveness by its implementation.

### **Defining Metacognition and its Implications as One of the Components of Learning to Learn**

Veenman, Van Hout-Wolters and Afflerbach (2006) present a profound and varied understanding of metacognition and its implication within a broad context of learning procedures. They cite Flavell (1979) who proposed metacognition as the understanding and management of one's mental actions in learning process. From this basis, there are numerous definitions of metacognition in the literature, for instance Zimmerman

(1995), Winne (1996) and De Soete, Roeyers and De Clerg (2003). It is noticeable that all the definitions share a common basis which refers to individuals' awareness and management of their learning processes and the effectiveness of the implementation of metacognitive strategies. For instance, in Meniado (2016) by implementing problem-solving strategies in reading, students could manage any problem they had in reading a text as well as increasing interest and confidence.

Furthermore, evidence supporting the positive impact of metacognition in English as a foreign language learning can be found in Nosratinia, Saveiy and Zaker (2014) who found a relevant connection between language learning strategies and metacognitive awareness. Students with a high degree of metacognitive consciousness use more learning strategies, are more autonomous, and have successful results as well. In light of the evidence from these studies, we have a better understanding of the effectiveness of the implementation of metacognition and how relevant it is for a meaningful learning as well.

Everything mentioned above raises important considerations regarding LL implementation and its components critical thinking and metacognition at the CCCA as a search for pedagogical alternatives to improve English learning as a foreign language and learning skills in students.

### **Defining Critical Thinking and its Implications as Another of the Components of Learning to Learn**

One of the pillars this research paper leans on to define critical thinking is by Paul and Elder (2006) who have provided important insights into the concept of critical thinking, since they say that it is a crucial element that interfaces with disciplines since it emphasizes the affective and the cognitive dimensions of thought and organizes instruction in every subject area at every educational level from different perspectives. Besides this, if students are Intellectually engaged, they take ownership of content through actively thinking. In addition to this, students learn how to learn using disciplined reading, writing, speaking, and listening as modalities in learning as an integral part of their learning processes- elements which this study precisely attempts to discover in learning language at the CCCA. Due to their relevant knowledge about the matter, other researchers like Marin and de la Pava (2017) cite Paul and Elder' definition (2006) in their efforts to reflect on critical thinking defining the term as the mode of analyzing and evaluating thinking with an objective of improving it. In their own words, "the endowment of our life relies upon our thinking and it should be refined through self-discipline, self-monitoring, and self-corrective thinking" (p. 4). They discovered in their study, that it is necessary to develop critical

thinking in EFL, beginning with teachers so they can teach critical thinking strategies to their students.

Another important project is to reformulate the curriculum and learning outcomes to approach critical thinking promotion in EFL with academic rigor as well as with social and educational responsibility. Parallel to this, we can find Tous, Tahriri and Haghighi (2015), who claim that implementing critical thinking strategies promoted reading comprehension abilities and students could get more involved in the learning process.

Another recent project by Gayazov, Zamaletdinova, Amirov, Kostryukov and Tikhomirova (2016) recommend the efficacy, relevance, and how crucial it is to implement critical thinking in tertiary education, since it would lead to a new generation of future specialists' formation for the modern labor market, possessing scientifically based critical thinking for lifelong learning. Based on the relevance of critical thinking from this finding and knowing that the CCCA is currently implementing the series called LIFE,<sup>1</sup> which encourages in a meaningful manner the use of critical thinking especially in reading, further research suggests that by applying critical thinking learning strategies, teachers at the CCCA can make an impact on students' reading comprehension abilities in their language learning process.

Above all, this repertoire of literature accomplishes the objective of broadening the knowledge regarding LL competence as a key competence for lifelong learning and its effectiveness in EFL. In addition to this, this literature review also contributes to understand LL's nature in a deeper manner, its characteristics and implications of LL, the significance of its contribution to student's learning process, and how its components like metacognition and critical thinking provide appropriate cognitive tools which facilitate more comprehensive and meaningful learning. Everything mentioned above demonstrates that this competence can be applied at the CCCA to enhance in students an effective language learning in students.

## Methods

The objective of this project is about the implementation of LL at the beginning of students' learning process with a group of seven students of Fundamental Plus one course (A2 according to CEFR). They had four hours of English per week for one month in the Adult Program at the CCA North Branch.

The methodology to achieve the goal was conducted as follows: a) design and implement six lesson plans that described how critical thinking

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1. *LIFE* series by Nat Geo Learning. Cengage.

strategies were incorporated into the activities and implementation, b) note-taking from teacher and students to keep record how metacognition was incorporated and how student's behavior and success developed during the activities in class, and c) an exit questionnaire to evaluate the effectiveness of LL in students' learning skills.

This first data collection, design of lesson plans, was used as a tool to incorporate critical thinking learning strategies to promote students' learning skills such as recalling, comparing, associating, creating, analyzing, describing, and personalizing. Each activity of the lesson plan contained a critical thinking learning strategy and its steps, following the three main stages of a class which are PRE-WHILE-POST. These steps described the purpose of the activity according to learning objective set out, the language skill to develop, and procedures. The name of the critical thinking learning strategy was written on the board and explained to make it visible, the purpose and steps of the task were explained as well, so students could understand what they were to do and achieve.

The second data collection technique was used to maintain evidence of the implementation of metacognition: how students reacted and achieved the learning objectives established in class. Strategies were implemented as follows:

When performing or developing activities in class, metacognitive strategies like outline, monitoring/identifying problems, evaluating, making sense of the task, and self-reflection were used to support the importance of the critical thinking process and to build awareness in students on how they were acquiring the content in class and to identify bad study habits that were interfering with their learning process.

Every second class, the teacher and students opened a space to reflect about their learning process to comment on how the metacognitive strategies worked to accomplish the activities and learning objectives in class and what action plan to follow if necessary.

For the teacher and students' notes, students took notes in their notebooks on some pages assigned for the learning to learn process to write the tips or strategies recommended and the reflection made. And the teacher took notes to keep record on how metacognition was incorporated, student's reaction when implementing metacognitive strategies, and how they performed while developing the activities in class.

Finally, students answered an exit questionnaire at the end of the course which contained seven questions to perceive students' impressions, experiences, points of view, and effectiveness of incorporating LL and its components critical thinking and metacognition in their learning process. This questionnaire was conducted in Spanish to help students feel more confident when expressing their ideas. They consented and signed the

questionnaire they answered. The information gathered was measured as part of the analysis. The answers were classified according to similarity in meaning and number of times the same answer was mentioned.

## Results and Discussion

This section presents information of the results about the effectiveness of learning to learn in students' skills at the CCCA gathered from the data collection techniques used for this research paper.

Six lesson plans were designed and implemented. The design of the lesson plans had the three stages of planning, which are PRE-WHILE- and POST, the name of the critical thinking strategy, and description of the steps of the critical thinking strategy implemented.

These are the results obtained by note taking on the teacher's side: It was noticeable that incorporating the critical thinking component in the lesson planning helped greatly to have the class more structured where students were guided dynamically and systematically. It also contributed as a factual source to establish an action plan to overcome difficulties immediately for both parties (students and teacher) since students.

It was evident that in implementing critical thinking, students gradually showed more commitment towards the development of the tasks and even more, they showed interest for their own learning as well. In addition to this, making thinking visible to students facilitated greater understanding among students, enhanced students' engagement and independence. Nevertheless, two remarkable results that emerged by implementing CT in lesson planning, were that students showed surprise and perplexity when carrying out the tasks, and they expressed they were not familiar with using critical thinking learning strategies in class and LL in class. At the beginning it was difficult for them to adjust to LL and its components. Ergo, this aspect of the research suggests that students need to be exposed constantly to the implementation of learning to learn competence, so they may be able to consolidate strong learning skills and self-discipline to become successful learners. Consequently, learning to learn competence should be an important pillar in daily classroom instruction as mentioned by the European Council (2006).

On the other hand, the results from students' note taking, students claimed they felt more committed when doing the activities, and it made them think or reflect on how to use the language in context and to be more responsible for their learning. Besides this, they said they experienced their learning as more dynamic and exhilarating.

Another result they mentioned was that note taking helped them be more diligent with solving problems by themselves, since they chose metacognitive strategies. For instance, identifying the problem, planning and monitoring, and evaluating results allowed them to become more autonomous in their learning process. So, metacognition played a remarkable role. These results are similar to what other authors found (Coco, 2012).

From the third data collection technique, these are the results obtained from the questionnaire:

Question 1 highlighted that out of the six questionnaires completed, just one student had heard about LL competence before. The student explained that she knew about it because she had taken one week of class of Fundamental 2 level with the researcher who conducted this research study. The results of this question indicates that English teachers at the CCCA do not currently make visible LL in class or take it into account in their lesson planning.

Questions 2 is about activities students usually do to learn or study on their own; the answers showed different options, for instance to review topics seen in class, listen to songs, to use the platform [agendaweb.com](http://agendaweb.com), to read something in English, watch movies in English, speak with a native speaker, or nothing. However, students did not describe the frequency, steps or strategies they used to accomplish the study goals and the benefits or effectiveness by doing those activities. It questions about how much awareness students gained about their learning process and how they learned or studied on their own.

Questions 3 and 4 were about what LL meant to students and strategies they learned after implementation. Results demonstrated the following opposite aspects in comparison with the answers from questions 1 and 2. Firstly, the six students described LL as an excellent method to study, to organize knowledge, to establish a plan to study, to study dynamically, and as an effective way to reflect what is learned in class. Secondly, the six students said they were more autonomous and guided when developing the activities in class, that they managed time better, that they identified difficulties and found solutions, and that those strategies encouraged them to create study habits. It means that LL competence implementation along with its two components critical thinking and metacognition applied in this study indicated that there was effectiveness since students were more aware of their learning and knew how to use their learning skills in practice, just as questions 1 and 2 revealed. For instance, they were able to identify the following strategies: key words from a conversation model, describing scenarios, inferring main ideas from a listening or reading task, analyzing elements involved in the learning goals to study, comparing information

with their partners, creating new conversations, applying new vocabulary and grammatical targets learned, and personalizing dialogues based on their real context. In addition to this, by being more self-directed they had the chance to identify difficulties, to evaluate the possible causes, to design an action, and self-monitor to overcome those problems. This result resembles those reported in Rožman and Koren (2007).

Questions 5 and 6 were to describe the benefits and strategies learned from LL competence implementation. The results indicated the effectiveness of LL competence since the six students from the sample answered that they used learning strategies like describing, identifying, compare, analyze, evaluate, create, and personalize which helped them gain knowledge of the language, feel more confident while interacting with others, be aware of their learning process, and to build up learning skills as well. They all also answered that since LL competence implementation was a meaningful experience, they would like to continue implementing it in their English language learning.

The answers obtained from this data contributed partially to validate the effectiveness of LL implementation in students' learning skills at the CCA, since more awareness training is needed.

## Conclusions

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this study, it is possible to state that implementing LL competence and its components critical thinking and metacognition make an effective impact on students' learning skills, since they underline the importance of critical thinking learning strategies implementation and makes a more meaningful and comprehensible way to acquire the language in students. Besides this, incorporating metacognitive strategies and having students take notes to reflect about the way they perform helps students be more aware of their learning skills by being more self-monitored, more autonomous to identify, evaluate, and solve problems. These strategies help learners make sense of the content and learning objectives to achieve; to recognize bad study habits, and to establish an immediate action plan. Similarly to this, from the teacher's perspective, scaffolding critical thinking in the lesson planning contributes to carry out a more organized, structured, varied, more meaningful, and effective class where students can perform activities at a low order of thinking, like for instance recalling and describing to a higher order of thinking, like creating, planning, or personalizing. Another conclusion is that adding metacognitive strategies and taking notes facilitates teachers to have a real view of the teaching-learning process by reflecting on how

to plan lessons in a way that is dynamic, challenging, and meaningful for students. Parallel to this, the teacher needs to be more attentive to students' behavior and tackle any problems they may have by training them to be more self-directed and responsible, and to be more aware of their learning process.

The evidence from this study suggests that effective learning relies upon on thinking by learners and that this thinking should be refined and founded in self-discipline, self-monitoring, and self-corrective thinking, as authors have pointed out (Paul & Elder, 2006 and Ritchart & Morrison, 2011). The ability of students to know how to use this thinking successfully, in other words, learning how to learn needs to be clearly addressed in class. The results of this study are therefore aligned with the perceptions on effectiveness in students' learning skills described by Rožman and Koren, 2007, Coco, 2012, and Drăghicescu et al., 2015.

This paper provides a good starting point for discussion, and further research should be taken in consideration at the CCCA regarding the continuity of the implementation of LL competence throughout both the Adult and Kids and Teens Program to identify the impact and effectiveness on students' learning. And that it should start especially from initial basic entry levels - A1 in accordance with the CEFR to build solid learning skills in students to facilitate effective learning of the language.

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# Blended Learning Applied to an English Program at Centro Cultural Colombo Americano

Cali – Palmira – Buga

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to expose the concepts related to Blended Learning (BL), its features and application in a new program at Centro Cultural Colombo Americano (CCCA) Cali and from there, analyze the understanding of such approach among the teachers who served as pilot teachers in the BL course of this institution. The research work was done based on questionnaires given to the pilot teachers and the revision of the work they posted on the Learning Management System (LMS) used in the BL program at CCCA. Findings suggest that considering BL has great potential among learners seeking flexible schedules to access education, institutions aiming at the implementation of a BL model require careful planning with qualified and knowledgeable staff on the use of LMSs and clear guidelines that match the features of BL approaches which can be applied in BL formats with efficacy.

### **Key Words:**

Blended Learning features, Blended Learning activities, Perceptions on Blended Learning, Blended Learning Implementation.

## Introduction

Teaching has evolved as a process in which there is exchange of information rather than impartment of knowledge, and such information is available for both teachers and students thanks to the internet. Since it became massive in the early 2000s, the Internet has made an impact on entertainment, communication and education. In education, the Internet made information and web tools more accessible for students and teachers who were in need to transcend the classroom walls; in this transcend, Blended Learning (BL) emerges.

Trying to respond to the needs of a dynamic world in which learners and instructors no longer need to be in the same place at the same time to participate actively in a learning environment, the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano (CCCA) – Cali decided to launch in April 2017 its BL course called Flex English (FE). With the intention of reviewing how the FE Program is designed and how much of the features of BL are applied, this research project explores the concepts related to BL and its application in the FE Program at CCCA.

## Literature Review

Blended learning (BL) has become a trend in education due to its flexibility and accessibility. BL is flexible because it combines the best of onsite sessions with online sessions in such a way that students can organize their own work and cover material at their own pace yet with the guidance and help of an instructor. Another reason why BL has become popular in education relies on its accessibility, because once Internet connection is provided, you can get information anytime, anywhere.

The literature review below aims at presenting the main aspects related to BL, its features, and the role Learning Management Systems (LMS) play as the environment in which BL takes place. Authors like Stein and Graham (2014) and Garrison and Vaughan (2008) offer a very clear description of BL and the characteristics of a BL course. In addition, Marsh (2012) presents the advantages of BL and the role of the teacher for BL to work. Authors like Kakasevski, Mihajlov, Arsenovski and Chungurski (2008) and Wilson and Stacey (2004) support the importance of LMS in BL. The information presented in this section connects to the objective of this research project so that the reader understands BL and its application in a language course.

## Blended Learning

Stein and Graham (2014, p. 12) define BL as the combination of onsite and online sessions that support learning. The authors also state that although the concept of BL started in the corporate world as a means to offer training to staff members who work long hours in different schedules, in education, BL has taken instruction to the next level by offering flexible times and sites to access learning.

Driscoll (2002, p. 1), on the other hand, defines BL as the action of mixing or combining various pedagogical approaches with technology. In the study done by Kim (2007, p. 2) BL is described as “the combination of classroom learning and e-learning,” and the author even goes deeper in the definition by acknowledging that BL has three learning dimensions in the sense that learning can be physical (face to face) or virtual, formal or informal and scheduled or self-paced. Keeping those dimensions into consideration, Kim gives a more precise definition of BL as “a combination of two or more of all possible learning types” in which one type is e-learning (p. 4).

BL has become the learning method by excellence in a world where more and more people connect and expect information to be available anytime, anywhere (Stein & Graham, 2014, p. 15). Some of the advantages of BL are; it is convenient and accessible, it is effective, it is flexible, it offers individualized learning opportunities, and it fosters social interaction (Stein & Graham, 2014, p. 16).

Marsh (2012, pp. 4-5) describes the following as other strengths of BL:

- It provides a more individualized learning experience;
- It provides more personalized learning support;
- It supports and encourages independent and collaborative learning;
- It increases student engagement in learning;
- It accommodates a variety of learning styles;
- It provides a place to practice the target language beyond the classroom;
- It provides a less stressful practice environment for the target language;
- It provides flexible study, anytime or anywhere, to meet learners’ needs, and
- It helps students develop valuable and necessary twenty-first century learning skills.

The advantages listed above help to understand the concept of BL applied to language teaching and the manner instructors expose students to a variety of channels through which English learning, interaction and practice take place.

## Features of Blended Learning

Stein and Graham (2014) list the following as the most important features of BL. First, a BL course must be learning-centered, which refers to having clear learning goals and outcomes. Second, a BL course must be measurable in the sense that the teacher has to provide clear, concrete assessment and feedback to keep students informed of their progress; and third, a BL course must have meaningful learning activities “that build knowledge, develop skill and shape behavior or attitude” (p. 68). This manner of conceiving a BL course is called a “Backwards Design Approach” which consists of planning a course with the end in mind. This new approach of constructing a course could be a little confusing for some teachers since they usually design a course thinking of the activities, then the assessment, and finally, the outcomes. Another key aspect to consider in BL is that the teacher constructs all of the content of BL lessons online, even though some of them happen onsite. Consequently, Stein and Graham (2014, p. 70) suggest the following backward design approach for a single lesson:

- Write goals and outcomes for one lesson.
- Describe assessments that cover the outcomes.
- List activities that lead to outcomes and prepare for assessments.
- Outline student workflow and create outline components.

The Backward Design Approach is relevant to this research project for the reason that this model will serve as a foundation when analyzing the content of Flex English classes in the virtual environment. On the other hand, this model will serve as a means to find out another aspect relevant to the structure of the online content in a BL course: synchronicity.

BL presents instruction and practice by synchronizing online and onsite sessions. In BL applied to language teaching, it is necessary to describe how English teachers present information in both the online and onsite sessions. Skrzypek (2013) considers synchronicity vital for student’s success in BL environments.

Considering that technology enables blended environments and that for BL to work teachers need to determine which tools will facilitate instruction and practice among learners in both online and onsite learning environments, Stein and Graham (2014) mention that if teachers do not understand the correlations among the tools and the instruction, the result will simply be technology-enhanced lessons. On the other hand, Garrison and Vaughan (2008, p. 16) note that sometimes the lack of understanding on how to use technology for education leads to the misuse of the tool; hence BL does not occur.

The fact that the success in the application of BL depends on how well the teacher uses the technology tools is connected to the importance of using those tools to enhance communication and interaction among students in such blended environments. In BL classes, instruction and practice happen simultaneously and coordinately; that is to say, that teachers in charge of a BL course are to plan how the activities in the onsite sessions weave with the online sessions in such a way that students see the connection between both types of environments. For Marsh (2012, pp. 3-4) BL is effective when the teacher has made “the most of the learning opportunities and tools available to achieve the ‘optimal’ learning environment.”

In BL, communication with students is very important and it can happen synchronously or asynchronously. Synchronous interaction happens when both the teacher and students share real time together and can be done during the onsite meetings or through live chat, while in asynchronous interaction, the teacher and students do not share real time together so they communicate via e-mail, for example, and an answer is not expected immediately (Stein & Graham, 2014, p. 19).

Regardless of the type of communication with students, the role of the teacher is to monitor and facilitate that communication and interaction among students and happens so that students have a significant experience in the BL environment (Marsh, 2012, p. 11). Understanding the role the teacher plays in fostering interaction with students in BL, FE Program teachers at CCCA will be able to maintain the successful communication conditions in the virtual environment, which matches the Backwards Design Approach and enhances the use of technology tools in BL.

## **Learning Management Systems**

Another concept relevant to the world of BL is that of Learning Management Systems (LMSs) that refers to the virtual environment in which BL occurs. Kakasevski, Mihajlov, Arsenovski and Chungurski (2008, p. 631) define an LMS as “an automated mechanism for delivering course content and tracking learner’s progress.” Stein and Graham (2014, p. 21) on the other hand, mention that LMSs foster the integration of the onsite and the online worlds.

In a LMS, teachers upload content, share practice material, create assignments, make quizzes, post news and create forums. Students can access that information and participate in a learning community (Kakasevski, Mihajlov, Arsenovski and Chungurski, 2008, p. 631). On the other hand, Goodyear, Salmon, Spector, Steeples and Tickner (2001) in Wilson and Stacey (2004, p. 4) consider the following to be the necessary competencies of online teachers:

- The role of content facilitator,
- The role of technologist,
- The role of designer,
- The role of manager/administrator,
- The role of process facilitator,
- The role of adviser/counsellor,
- The role of assessor, and
- The role of researcher.

When defining BL it is important to mention that the application of this method in language learning depends not only on the Internet and other technologies, but also on the teacher who plays a very important role in deciding which e-learning methods are used and how they facilitate language instruction and practice. The teacher mediates and supports the blend by determining the teaching and learning technologies that take place in and out of the classroom and how they align with the learning objectives and needs of the learners (Marsh, 2012, pp. 3). Any reference towards BL needs to involve the teacher as the person who makes BL work.

When analyzing the activities a teacher takes to an LMS and his role in the online environment, it is worth mentioning that the success on the use of an LMS depends on the knowledge and experience of the teacher using the tools provided in it for language teaching. Compton (2009, pp. 73-74) argues that teacher training in language instruction is crucial for the success of an online or a BL course since teachers need to develop new skills that allow them to provide students with both instruction and interaction for effective communication. That success also depends on how the teacher gets students to access content, interact among each other and understand the mechanics of the LMS itself. Because of that, training teachers in the use of a LMS constitutes of great value in the application of BL in an English language course, such as the one at the CCCA.

Hampel and Stickler (2005) cited in Compton (2009, pp. 76-80) list seven skills an online language teacher should have, "ranging from lower level skills (e.g. basic ICT competence, specific technical and software competence and awareness of constraints and possibilities) to higher-level skills (e.g. online socialization, facilitation of communicative competence as well as creativity, choice and selection.)" Keeping those skills in mind, the development of such skills could rely on the training an online English teacher gets before embarking on a BL course and the monitoring process he could get through coaching. This training should aim at facilitating the transformation from face-to-face teaching to online teaching (Baran,

Correia and Thompson, 2011, pp. 430) and therefore, improve English language instruction in a virtual environment. CCCA teachers may benefit from getting this type of training in order to become successful BL EFL practitioners.

Considering the fact that learners are looking for flexible times and places to get instruction, BL represents an alternative some learners may contemplate to access education. In the case of English language instruction, BL breaks the paradigm that instruction has to happen in a classroom with the close guide of a teacher who corrects and leads the learner's process. BL makes education more flexible, more autonomous and immediate and consequently, leads the English teacher towards bringing the content and practice to an environment different from the classroom. In this flip, English teachers are to reinvent themselves and acquire new skills to respond to the needs of the students. Part of reinventing the role of the English teacher relies on the knowledge they have on the use of LMSs and how they can facilitate instruction, interaction and practice in an environment that, if used appropriately, can maximize learning and teaching.

It is also worth mentioning that through the information collected in the literature review, the CCCA could have better understanding of the features of BL that would make the structure of such a method in the Flex English (FE) Program intelligible. The way English teachers instruct knowledge and provide practice of the language has changed, and BL combines the best of onsite and online teaching in a world upgraded by technology. What has been presented in this literature review could guide the decision-making on the design of activities, communication and interaction with students in the BL program of the CCCA.

## Methods

This research paper is founded on three specific objectives: a) describe the features of BL, b) find out the perceptions of BL among pilot teachers and c) list the activities that match the features of BL which could be applied in future FE Program courses. In order to reach the objectives mentioned above, the data collection procedure included: 1) the description of the FE Program of the CCCA; 2) the implementation of 1 questionnaire provided to the FE Program pilot teachers about their perceptions of BL, and 3) the revision of the activities done in the online classes in the Moodle LMS. The information collected through the data collection methods used for this research provided the researcher with the information needed to describe the context in which the FE Program occurs, the knowledge pilot teachers had about BL and the manner they applied that knowledge in the online sessions.

The FE Program had its first pilot in April 2017 and the second pilot was in August 2017. In April 2017, there were seven FE pilot courses: five at the CCCA North site, one in Palmira and one in Buga. In August 2017, there were two pilot courses, both of them at the North site.

The questions addressed in the questionnaire designed for this research project were: 1) what is BL?, 2) what are the features of BL?, 3) how did you complement online work with face-to-face sessions and vice versa? In the final question the pilot teachers were asked to write a description of an activity they carried out in their FE courses.

The questionnaire was done through Google Forms, which facilitated the filling out, keeping, and analysis of information. When conducting educational research, questionnaires prevail as an important tool to gather information from the participants in the given study since the data can be collected regardless of the presence of the researcher and that in the moment of analysis, data can be easily stored, compared and returned to (Wilson and McLean, 1994; in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013 p. 317).

Apart from analyzing the information provided by the pilot teachers in the online questionnaire, a lesson uploaded by the pilot teachers to the Moodle LMS was revised. The revision of the activities in a lesson consisted of going through the courses created in the Moodle LMS and taking note of the type of activities suggested in the lesson and its concordance with BL approaches. For this paper, six courses were checked in the platform. In the study done by Johnson and Turner (2003) they refer to this supervision as secondary data, which relies on information left behind for reasons other than research, in this case for course instruction. The procedure used in the revision of the information uploaded to the platform was, 1) The description of the different activities in the lesson was noted; 2) once all the activities in the lesson were noted, the ones with similar features were highlighted; and 3) the features of the activities in the lesson were compared to the features of BL based on the concepts learned from the literature review.

## Results and Discussion

The results of this research come from the careful and reflective analysis of the responses provided by eight of the nine pilot teachers who participated in the questionnaire as well as the systematic revision of eight courses in the Moodle LMS. All of this aims at getting an understanding of the features of BL among the pilot teachers and the way they applied those features in the FE Program.

Eight pilot teachers answered the questionnaire via Google forms: five of the pilot teachers have been working at CCCA for two to five years,

two teachers have for six to ten years and one teacher has for more than eleven years. Such diversity in terms of years of experience at CCCA brings interesting information about the manner pilot teachers cope with the application of a rather new concept and methodology for the Institution. Considering the FE Program started officially in February 2018, regardless of the amount of time they have been a teacher at CCCA, they are all novices in this Program, and the application of BL in their FE classes would rely on how much they know about this approach, not necessarily on their time working at the institution.

The first question in the questionnaire was *What is BL?* In the responses provided, all eight pilot teachers define BL as a learning process, method or program that combines virtual with face-to-face classes: "It's a space to learn something in virtual and face-to-face classes guided by a teacher" (Teacher 5, online questionnaire, February 2018). Another example is,

It's a learning process consisting of virtually-assisted classes where the student develops activities in their own pace towards the objectives proposed in the course. In addition to that, students get face-to-face sessions with the teacher to reinforce oral production and solve doubts that may come up during the virtual activities (Teacher 1, online questionnaire, February 2018).

Another answer by one of the pilot teachers mentioned the type of blended used in a program: "It is a way of teaching practice that uses a combination of two environments: brick and mortar and virtual. The percentage of each environment depends on the type of blended learning that is used" (Teacher 8, online questionnaire, February 2018).

The responses show that the pilot teachers understand that BL relies on the combination of online and onsite sessions and that an LMS facilitates that combination. Having this concept clear among the pilot teachers should facilitate the implementation of BL in their pilot courses. It is important to mention that in two of the responses, the pilot teachers addressed the role of the teacher/instructor and the student in BL. They refer to the teacher/instructor as the person who facilitates the blending and encourages the production of content from the part of the learner, and the student as the person who takes learning at their own pace with a high degree of commitment and responsibility. This response addresses the fact that the success of BL relies largely on how committed students are:

It is a program that combines virtual learning and learning in a classroom. It is a huge opportunity for people who want to learn but don't have enough time to go to an institute. The idea of this program is to study at home and in the classroom with the same responsibility (Teacher 6, online questionnaire, February 2018).

The second question in the questionnaire was What are the features of BL? This time the responses were more varied and showed different levels of understanding of the characteristics of BL. The recurrent feature in the responses was flexibility in the manner students access information; the pilot teachers mentioned this feature in five of the eight responses:

Flexibility for students, use of technology, innovation and creativity (regarding the way activities are planned and developed) (Teacher 3, online questionnaire, February 2018).

Some characteristics are that students could have traditional classes and they continue their learning and knowledge at home. There are many online learning materials. Students can have access to the materials anywhere and at any time (Teacher 4, online questionnaire, February 2018).

Another feature mentioned was the use of a platform and the Internet as the means in which the blend occurs; this appears in two of the eight responses. "Students have a multitask platform that allows them to work in their skills depending on the activities proposed by the teacher" (Teacher 1, online questionnaire, February 2018).

Based on the information learned in the literature review, the features of BL are it is learning-centered, it is measurable, it provides meaningful learning activities, and it offers synchronicity between the online and the onsite sessions (Stein and Graham, 2014). The responses provided in this part of the questionnaire reflect that the pilot teachers consider flexibility the main feature of BL. Only one of the features found in the literature, synchronicity, was mentioned by one of the pilot teachers,

another feature is that blended learning is not supposed to be completely separated from the traditional class setting, the idea is that they work together to make the best out of the process (Teacher 7, online questionnaire, February 2018).

This finding is revealing since synchronicity is vital in the implementation of BL courses. If the pilot teachers did not perceive this as a feature of BL, it could imply that they did not favor synchronicity in their pilot courses, subsequently, they did not apply BL in their courses, and they used the LMS as a means to enhance technology in their classes and not to work on it as a real BL-oriented class. This is addressed in more detail below.

In a response provided by a pilot teacher, the issue of commitment and responsibility was mentioned as features of BL: "You need to carry out some assignments with huge responsibility (...) Students need to give importance to the whole process" (Teacher 6, online questionnaire, February 2018). Even though the literature does not mention commitment and responsibility

as features of BL, the online teachers who need to be in close contact with students foster them. Therefore, when the online teacher notices that a student is not actively involved in the process, the teachers should take charge and promote a change in this behavior, otherwise, students will not perceive the benefits of taking charge of their own learning process as a means to improve their language skills.

This understanding of the role of the teacher and student, synchronicity and commitment as features of BL is key in the effective application of this approach in the FE Program in future FE courses; otherwise, teachers could end up having technology-enhanced lessons rather than fostering actual blend between the onsite and online classes.

The third question in the questionnaire was *How did you complement online work with the face-to-face sessions and vice versa?* The responses for this question were also varied: three pilot teachers mentioned that they uploaded material to the platform which would be used during the onsite sessions. Below a sample response on the use of the LMS to upload material that students were to study on their own:

All the activities from the face-to-face sessions were based on the tasks given in the platform so the student knew that the only way to be able to participate in class was to work on the activities on the platform (Teacher 1, online questionnaire, February 2018).

Two teachers mentioned that they would upload content for self-study and an assignment that would apply what the students learned and use the onsite sessions for face-to-face interaction among students and clarification of doubts.

We used a 50-50 model (...) the idea was to have 50% of face-to-face classes where students interacted mostly orally and we reviewed what was done online as well. Regarding the online part, students had to work on different lessons from the ones studied in class (...) and create an activity where they demonstrate what they were taught during the lesson (Teacher 8, online questionnaire, February 2018).

The earlier response relates more to Flipped Learning than to BL; the latter is more in accord with BL (Marsh, 2012). The rest of the responses mentioned assignments and guidance of the teacher; however, they did not demonstrate how the pilot teachers synchronized online work with face-to-face sessions and vice versa. The fact that only two of the eight responses were more in accordance with synchronicity, one of the most important features of BL, indicates that training is required for the FE

Program teachers to know how to weave the activities in both the onsite and online sessions through the Moodle LMS.

In the final part of the questionnaire the pilot teachers were asked to describe an activity they carried out in their FE classes; this information was complemented with the revision of a lesson of one of the pilot courses on the platform. The pilot teachers described activities in which they integrated different language skills and used a variety of tools for students to access information and to interact with their classmates: YouTube videos, chats, forums and links. For example, "Students were given an assignment on the platform where they introduced themselves and publish a picture of themselves; they also had to reply to one of their classmates' introduction" (Teacher 5, online questionnaire, February 2018). Two of the descriptions provided by the pilot teachers not only demonstrated integration of skills but also synchronicity between the onsite and the online sessions as stated in the example below:

In one of the units about routines, students were sent some videos from YouTube about people describing their routines. (...) Once they had checked this out, they had a website with some information about frequency adverbs and some paragraphs they had to complete following the information. Finally, each student had to make a video about their own routines (...) once in class, students checked their classmates' videos (...) and write some of the details they got from the rest (Teacher 7, online questionnaire, February 2018).

By having students access content and practice in the Moodle LMS and by connecting this information with the upcoming onsite sessions, the pilot teachers signal that the activities done online were as relevant as the ones done onsite. As a result, students got a sense of connection between the different format sessions and a sense of progress in the development of the lesson. Nevertheless, only two of the descriptions provided by the pilot teachers reveal actual blending since they describe synchronicity between online work and onsite work. One of these teachers had mentioned synchronicity as a feature of BL in the second and third question in the online questionnaire while the other six teachers describe features of a technology-enhanced class through the Moodle LMS, not of a blended class.

After having read the responses provided by the eight pilot teachers in the online questionnaire, six pilot courses were checked in the Moodle LMS. The activities in the lessons fostered interaction among students through the forum and chat features provided in the Moodle LMS. The pilot teachers had students participate by expressing opinions on a given topic, sharing personal information and asking each other comprehension questions on a

text assigned. In addition to uploading chats and forums, the pilot teachers shared websites with students with additional practice on the topic of the lesson and YouTube videos with tutorials or samples students were to use as a guide for upcoming tasks. Finally, the pilot teachers uploaded assignments, which were used as assessment. This revision was done to get an understanding of how the pilot teachers applied BL in the FE courses. This revision led to acknowledge the fact that the content uploaded to the platform does not favor the synchronicity between the online and onsite sessions. In none of the six courses checked in the LMS there is reference to the onsite sessions; therefore, if a student had been absent, he could not have had access to what was covered in the onsite session. This situation hinders the principle of flexibility the pilot teachers mentioned as one of the features of BL in particular in the getting of information in BL settings from the part of the student. Additionally, based on the responses gathered in the online questionnaire, most pilot teachers seemed to understand the concept of BL and the importance of fostering interaction among students in the Moodle LMS, yet they disregarded the application of BL in their classes by not synchronizing the onsite and the online lessons, which in the end, is how BL happens.

## Conclusions

BL is an approach that offers many possibilities for learners to access information with the guidance of a teacher who understands both the online and onsite worlds and the different tools to make learning flexible, accessible and meaningful. The academic benefits of implementing BL approaches in English Language Teaching (ELT) range from taking advantage of the advances in technology to make learning and practice meaningful, to reaching students who want to learn the language but that lack the time to enroll an institute with fixed schedules.

With the analysis of the information provided by the pilot teachers in the questionnaires and the revision of the activities posted by them in Moodle, a more objective perspective of the FE Program English teacher's understanding of BL was obtained, providing the upcoming teachers with tangible information on how they could apply BL effectively in this program at the CCCA.

In closing, as BL is implemented at CCCA, training and follow-up on the use of the Moodle platform and web tools is a priority among the teachers who will be in charge of the FE Program. It is recommended that such training be extended to the people who offer academic support to the FE Program teachers.

The FE Program requires clear guidelines that the teachers in this program need to follow so that they plan their lessons in accordance with the most important features of BL: learning-centeredness, meaningfulness, measurement and synchronicity.

Having achieved the objective of this research project regarding the understanding and application of BL among the FE Program pilot teachers, there is room for improvement in the application of BL in the FE Program at the CCCA - especially in the use of the Moodle LMS as the environment that facilitates the blend. The FE Program teachers need to understand the LMS in terms of the features / tools that it offers, and use the LMS to upload content for both the onsite and online sessions.

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# Flipped Reading Content Can increase Student's Critical Thinking

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## Abstract

Recent advances in technology have helped to evolve many aspects in people's lives, and education is not the exception, and to respond to the big intersection of education and technology, teachers are urged to seek different approaches to innovate and update their teaching practices. This paper explores the concept of Flipped Learning (FL), its features and explore how the flipped reading content through PowerPoint presentations (ppps) could impact in the development of critical thinking (CT) in an institutional course at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano-Cali. The research work was done based on 4 flipped reading contents and 4 forums uploaded in the learning management system Schoology (LMS), and a checklist proposed by Kol and Scholnick (2008) was adapted and applied to students' forum replies in order to identify the signs and markers of reflection related student CT behavior. Among the findings the sequence of the presentation to deliver the reading content forced students to scaffold information from the reading which helped students to answer and participate in the forums as this virtual environment enhanced students to critically form their own opinions, reactions and ideas. Furthermore, there was evidence that students reacted critically when the questions were related to their work context.

### **Key Words:**

Flipped learning, critical thinking, flipped reading content, LMS forum, PowerPoint presentations.

## Introduction

Nowadays, new technologies have helped students to have more control over their own learning process. These technologies have made them think rationally and analytically, and at the same time, work collaboratively. The opportunities technology has provided in education do not have limits or boundaries, and a great number of English teachers are trying to find different ways to incorporate technology into their classrooms to promote better learning opportunities for students (Koehler, Misha, Hershey, & Perusky, 2004 in Basal, 2015).

In addition, technology has led to the development of many teaching tools, and with the increasing online educational courses, video instruction has become very important and common. Regarding this aspect, the use of videos has been an effective teaching tool when used properly (Hartsell & Yuen, 2006; Shephard, 2003 in Basal, 2015), and teachers have been using them to deliver and support instructions. These instructions, that years ago were introduced or performed by the teacher in front of the classroom, are nowadays recorded and made available to students via online sharing websites such as YouTube, or management learning systems (LMSs) like Neo, Schoology or Blackboard. This learning approach is known as Flipped Learning (FL) or inverted classroom that is defined by the Flipped learning Network (FLN) (2015, p. 1) as:

A pedagogical approach in which direct instructions moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter. lipped Learning Network (2015) , describe:

Considering FL as a valuable approach to EFL teaching at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano (CCCA) because of the benefits it may have in the development of students' CT, the aim of this research is to explore how flipped reading content through Power Point presentations (PPPs) as an alternative to videos can have an impact on the development of the CT skill in an institutional course.

## Literature Review

In this research paper presentation, the concept of FL, a description of the features of flipped instructions, and the perceptions and vision about this approach (given by teachers and students) will be discussed in order

to understand how beneficial FL can be for the English learning process. Furthermore, the connection between FL and the development of critical thinking (CT) through flipped reading will be mentioned in the light of authors such as Bergmann and Sams (2012), Bormann (2014), and Webb, Dorman and Pusey (2014) among others, with the aim of determining if FL reading content increases CT.

## Flipped Learning

The new education approach called Flipped Learning is an approach in which pre-recorded videos or screencasts are uploaded for students to watch at home, allowing them to learn course concepts outside the classroom while class time is spent in more active, problem solving based and hands-on activities (Bergmann and Sams, 2012, pag.13).

Therefore, the FL approach has grown in popularity across teaching venues and age levels and may offer some distinct benefits and some drawbacks in its implementation. The approach focuses on a productive use of class time, which accommodates to different learners, engages with problem-based learning, increases student-teacher interaction, and allows students to take responsibility for their learning process so that they may transfer these skills to other contexts. Yet, the FL first stage is critical, concerning the transition from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach, and it is there where teachers need to get training on how to provide support to their pupils.

In the implementation of FL, students become self-paced learners as they can review the online material as many times as they want and at any moment. Thus, in the classroom, teachers and students are available to help other students as they apply the acquired knowledge to solve more relevant class activities (Gannod, Burge & Helmick, 2008). This is consistent with Enfield's theory (2013), who shared that FL fosters CT by shifting the use of class time and also by pushing the lower levels of "Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives" outside the scheduled class time. Enfield also discovered that many of the instructors were able to provide more meaningful activities that put into practice CT skills related to their content areas, and that in most cases, this also led to an increase in student's achievements (Egbert, Herman and Lee, 2015).

Second, FL provides more freedom for students to interact with the content, according to their own learning style, and to work easier with mixed-ability classes. Moreover, with FL, students have more time to enrich their learning process with the flipped content; for example, with PPPS, screencasts or podcasts that students can rewind or reread at any moment and at the pace they want (Egbert, Herman and Lee, 2015). In this

perspective, FL helps teachers to maximize class time in order to meet the individual needs of each learner rather than following a rigid syllabus. Then, FL can “improve learning experiences and capture the attention of millennial students (people born in the 80’s and early 90’s)” (Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013, p. 44-49). This is an interesting fact, taking into account that most students are now exposed to many technological resources. For instance, at the CCCA, students have a varied range of devices and technological resources they can use to work on their English skills, such as multimedia rooms, Ipads, ebooks and an online library they can access freely. With that in mind, the teacher could use these resources to guide students to learn what they need through the technological world millennials are used to live in, while they provide opportunities to develop students’ CT.

There are not many studies on the field of FL- or they are very general such as the study conducted by Alsowat (2016), in which he aimed to explore the impact of EFL Flipped Classroom Teaching Model (EFL-FCTM) to develop the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). The findings of his study revealed that the flipped model was effective in increasing students’ foreign language (HOTS) due to the fact that the activities students did out of class provided them with opportunities to: 1) review the lesson, 2) get a clearer idea about the content, 3) learn the lower-order thinking skills at their pace, and 4) take notes and make comments regarding the lesson. Therefore, flipped content supported their learning process in class and allowed the teacher to do more meaningful and student-centered activities such as discussions, CT, pair work, group work, etc., which represents the core of flipped classroom learning.

Finally, research conducted in teaching and learning English language using FL dealt with increasing students’ foreign language HOTS from different perspectives. Some studies made by different researchers such as Basal (2015), AlRowais (2014) and Mehring (2014) explored students’ perceptions and attitudes toward using FL. Others such as Engin (2014) and Farah (2014) applied flipped classrooms in teaching English language writing and found that FL was effective and had a positive impact on students’ writing performance. In addition, the study of Obarry and Lambacher (2015), which aimed to investigate using mobile technologies in FL, revealed that it had a positive impact on English language achievement.

As it has been said, the FL approach has many benefits that can be taken advantage of at the CCCA considering that the institution uses a communicative approach, it can be seen that there are some similarities with the FL. For instance, the communicative approach promotes student centeredness and autonomy, sees the teacher as a facilitator or guide and at the same time students become the central figure of the education process - from passive recipients of information, they become builders,

designers, leaders of their own knowledge, features that are also evident in the FL approach.

## Features of Flipped Instruction

There are not set guidelines for what Flipped Instruction should look like. However, FL has recently increased in popularity throughout education, with entire public schools and even districts are applying their own versions of it (Egbert, Herman & Lee, 2015). Even though little research has been conducted in contexts like Teaching English as a Foreign language (TEFL); reports on flipped classrooms lead to a list of elements that generally characterize certain features. In this review, some of these features provide a framework for the implementation of the flipped reading content activities of the study, which guarantee that such activities are indeed within the FL approach.

To start with, podcasts, PPPS, digital lectures and the use of instructional videos are an important key element in the delivering of FL. This video can be prepared by the teacher, students, or someone hired to make them, or they may be found available online and used with little or no modification as suitable. In FL, Strayer (2007) mentioned that it is important to store these videos on a Learning Management System (LMS) such as Schoology. This virtual environment system helps teachers store their videos, present the course syllabus, deliver course announcements, send e-mails to students, provide feedback, support online submission of assignments, and host teacher and student posted videos.

After going through the delivered content, students are meant to be prepared for the next face-to-face class, which is essential since class time is dedicated to actively engage in knowledge construction through extensive interactions with peers and the teacher (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). This knowledge construction occurs through learning tasks in a collaborative manner such as, whole class brainstorming, group-based hands-on assignments and peer reviews, feedback exchange and helpful feedback etc. (Bergmann & Sams 2012). This type of activity involves the learner in the analysis and evaluation of the information and finally the accomplishment of the learning task. With all this in mind, students in FL are exposed to potential knowledge in order to promote a model shift from a teacher-centered approach to a learner-centered approach, as the learning tasks in FL depend heavily on learner-driven preparation outside of formal class time. Finally, students are exposed to materials while teachers reach and involve students and encourage them to continue their learning process through online material. Hence, these benefits brought to a language classroom at the CCCA, can evidence the achievement of EFL in the learners while also helping develop language and CT skills.

## Flipped learning -Ups and Downs

An important benefit of FL is the possibility to increase meaningful engagement, taking into account that students have more time to 1) interact and explain the material; 2) explore concepts more deeply, and 3) learn and practice objectives with active learning (Boucher, Robertson, Wainner, & Sanders, 2013). Another benefit of FL that Bergmann and Sams (2012, p.22) noted is the possibilities it gives to students who missed classes, since they can be brought up to date by watching the videos or lectures, so they do not miss out on learning, and teachers do not have to teach the topics again. With that in mind a FL approach can be used to deliver reading content, and students can benefit since they have the time they need to read, process and understand the information, something that does not always happen in the classroom.

Some studies report the positive perceptions towards FL from students' point of view. An example could be the study done by Webb, Dorman, and Pusey (2014) who reported that their students had positive attitudes towards FL and were more enthusiastic about the class compared to students enrolled in classes that are more traditional. Another example is the study done by Bormann (2014), in which it is reported that classes were useful and interactive and that they had advantages such as reaching and enabling students leading them to be prepared for the class and encouraging the use of CT skills. This is a very interesting aspect because helping students develop CT through reading might enhance the possibilities to force students to read the content, process information, react, and make them come up with their own relationship to the topic or question to see it from a different perspective as well as generate possible alternatives to integrate information for knowledge construction.

Another study that Webb and Doman (2016) mentioned is the one done by Zappe, Leicht, Messner, Litzinger, and Lee (2009), who found that the online component of FL permits the intensification of the teacher-student interaction and that students were prepared to watch the videotaped lessons out of class. Something else that is worth mentioning is that a great number of their students expressed that flipping the classroom was valuable and that time spent in class working on problem-solving activities enhanced their understanding of the concepts considerably. This shows evidence of how beneficial FL could be to develop CT skills among CCCA students, taking into account that CT is defined as "the capabilities to think reflectively and judge skillfully, so as to decide what information is reliable and what actions should be taken during reasoning and problem solving" (Ennis, 2002; Gut, 2011, cited by Kong, 2014, p. 161). Therefore, FL is favorable to develop CT due to the fact that the flipped reading content is delivered to be studied outside the classroom, so students need to make

decisions regarding how to approach this information and what actions are pertinent to take based on the outcomes of that study time.

The focus on FL is also the learner. Lately, research has shown that students called millennials (people born in the 80's and early 90's) and centennials (people born in the 90's and mid 2000's according to online Cambridge dictionary (2018) believe that doing is more important than knowing and that learning is a trial-and-error process (Frاند, 2000). FL accommodates these types of learners considering that teachers are available to monitor their process and to provide help if needed, as students are engaged in the learning activities. Students in FL environments use mobile devices which are wirelessly interconnected for completing learning tasks and especially accessing additional learning information from sources other than textbooks (Wong & Looi, 2011). In this sense, there exists a connection between reading and CT as Norris and Phillips (1987, p. 281-306) pointed, "reading is more than just saying what is on the page, it is reasoning." Moreover, Beck (1989, p.677) asserts, "there is no reading without reasoning." This connection enhances the idea that FL often requires students to properly process information from different sources and then critically assimilate information for knowledge construction.

Now, as FL involves both teaching skills and technology, teachers who would like to implement FL need to shift the way they prepare and deliver new content to a way that might require training and support, and therefore time that sometimes is limited for them. Moreover, teachers also need to have a clear understanding of the importance of developing CT among their learners to train them for real-world settings outside the classroom. This considers that FL includes a series of related problems that contain important realities to solve instead of just a series of related facts to memorize (Conklin, 2012). In this regard, teachers could guide students through their CT process by delivering content online through videos, PPPs (as is done in this study) or podcasts in order to define and clarify questions, and via online discussions through forums that allow students to judge complex information and make appropriate decisions.

Nevertheless, as good as the implementation of FL is, it could be said that some teachers might see this approach as a big battle between teachers and technology. However, as Bergmann and Sam (2012) quoted by Tucker (2012, p.83) said, "only a magic bullet is the recruiting, training, and supporting of quality teachers".

Furthermore, there is some skepticism regarding FL. Zwaagstra (2013), for example, discusses that teachers who have higher knowledge in the subject area are better than most video lectures, especially when these teachers have good pedagogical and communicative skills to cover content and interact with students profoundly. Zwaagstra also argues that videos

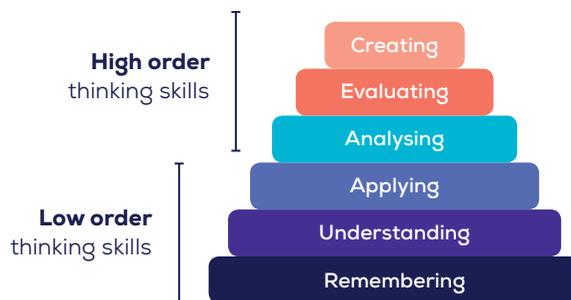
do not guarantee the effectiveness of the lectures for the subject area. Yet, Bergmann, Overmyer and Willie (2013) noticeably explain that FL is not all about the videos or courses uploaded online. Instead, there should be meaningful interaction through individual or groups activities in class. In this aspect, it can be said that flipping reading through PPPs is indeed an option that may affect the development of student’s CT and FL. Bearing that in mind, students have to practice remembering, understanding and applying their lower order thinking skills (based on Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives) at home, through activities such as watching videos, visiting course-related websites, listening to audios or at least reading the lesson (Hamad, 2016). Thus, this practice forces the Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives responsibilities to be turned upside down, which allows teachers to help students analyze, evaluate and create HOTS and the knowledge that has been assigned during class (See graph 1.).

Therefore, teachers spend their valuable class time with students as they engage in activities that require the upper-levels skills of Bloom’s taxonomy, which facilitate deeper learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2014).

To continue, FL requires the use of technology, which not all students and parents can guarantee access to, in order to view and interact with the lecture material which is a strong argument by Nielsen (2012). This is something quite noticeable in Colombia and more specifically Cali, as access and connectivity to technology might not be a priority, because of all the

**GRAPH — NO.1**

*High Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) and Low Orders Thinking Skills (LOTS) are treated in the FL according to Hamad (2016, p. 110)*



● ● ● At home      ● ● ● In class

extra expenses a regular Colombian family has in order to pay for student's education. Besides that, Ash (2012) mentioned that parents may or may not have the time, skill, ability or knowledge to help their kids develop an assignment. Therefore, they just depend on face-to-face sessions to find explanations to the different problems they may encounter, such as literal translations, misunderstanding instructions, or the lack of knowledge on how to use technological tools. In addition, and from a local perspective, some institutions may argue that they do not have internet connectivity or their access to it is limited, which would make teachers and students dependent on their own connectivity.

In conclusion, FL provides students with many opportunities to develop information and then apply it in literacy competence and CT skills in day-to-day learning of domain knowledge (Gut, 2011; Kang, 2015).

Through some previous studies conducted by very prestigious authors in the world of FL, this approach is still in a stage of innovation, but it seems that according to the perception of the new generation of teachers and students, it could be a style to impact the way English students acquire knowledge. And based on this literature review, this study opens a great opportunity to explore how flipping reading content through PPPS might increase students' CT as a means to achieve communication and how some characteristics of FL and the communicative approach can be linked together to bolster its educational power at the CCCA.

## Methods

In this action research, the FL approach was used to explore how flipped reading content could have an impact on the development of the CT skill in an institutional course at CCCA. This was a 6 week-course with 32 hours in total and its participants were 10 students with A2 level according to the Common European Framework (CEF). Most of them were between the ages of 19 and 35 with knowledge of computers and programming and all of them have a bachelor's degree in system engineering, because they were part of an institutional course at an engineering company. In order to accomplish the goal of this research paper, the following steps were carried out: a.) the design of four flipped reading activities for the level of the students, and b.) the measurement of the development of students' critical thinking skills through the implementation of 4 forums resulting from the four flipped reading activities.

In the first objective, the teacher created four flipped reading activities. All of them followed a pre-while-post sequence structure and uploaded to the Language Management System (LMS) Schoology once a week for a

period of four weeks. In general, all the flipped reading activities focused on objectives that were related to the topics proposed in the LIFE 2<sup>1</sup> textbook series as follows: unit 4: Abilities; unit 5: Food; unit 6: Money, and unit 7: Trips.

In order to measure the students' CT through forums, the checklist proposed by Kol and Scholnick (2008) was adapted and applied to students' forum replies in order to identify the signs and markers of reflection related student CT behavior. Afterwards, these expressions were categorized in 4 aspects of CT behavior: a.) critically answers the question, b.) expresses agreement or disagreement, c.) expresses insights/ideas, expresses reactions, opinions, conclusions, and d.) supports views through facts. These forums were activated once a week for a period of four weeks. All this sequence was created to enhance students' critical skills through flipped reading. Additionally, given that the forum questions were asynchronous, the length of the forum answers were not specified because the focus was the quality of replies in order to identify the signs and markers of reflection related to students' CT behavior, rather than the quantity.

## Results and Discussion

To achieve the first objective, design four flipped reading activities for the level of the students, the four reading activities were prepared and flipped, taking into consideration features of FL as explained in the review of the literature.

The same methodological teaching sequence was kept during the implementation of the flipped content activities of the research in order to make sure students were accustomed to the approach of FL. In each flipped reading activity, a PPP was used to deliver the content, and afterward uploaded in Schoology. These flipped reading activities had an objective based on the pacing of the LIFE textbook. The sequence or the structure was as follows **PRE**: the first slide of the PPP had a picture that was related to the topic of the unit, which had the aim to activate students' previous knowledge. It also contained a couple of questions about the topic. **WHILE**: the reading content was presented in the following slide, students had to read it and answer some comprehension questions. These questions were formulated to motivate students to read and analyze the flipped reading content and answer some questions using some CT skills. As a wrap up activity, or **POST**: there was a section called, "What about you?" with the objective to encourage students to answer more personalized questions.

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1. *LIFE 2* is a textbook series from National Geographic and Cengage. (Dummet, Hughes, and Stephenson, 2015)

Based on the flipped reading content delivered by PPPS, it can be reported that 8 students participated in the first and second flipped reading activities and 7 students in the third and fourth activities. These students were able to log into the LMS, read the material, interact with the flipped reading content, and answer the proposed activities. Additionally, these activities done out of the classroom setting gave students the chance to review the lesson and have a clear idea about the content. Some students took longer to log in and asked for an extension to submit their answers.

In terms of the effectiveness of FL to deliver the content through PPPS, it can be said that it was a successful way to foster students to continue their learning process outside the class, as they had to read the content and work at their own pace. Afterwards students went deeper into the reading to find specific information and answer in a critical way according to the reading presented.

Finally, the number of students mentioned before answered the section **What about you?** in which they, after acquiring and internalizing new knowledge through FL, were able to personalize their answers, make their own decisions, and work at their pace promoting also student autonomy in their learning process.

In regards to the second objective, the measurement of CT in the forum interventions, the following chart shows the CT behavior in students considering the specific criteria for CT adapted from Kol and Scholnick (2008).

**TABLE — NO.1**

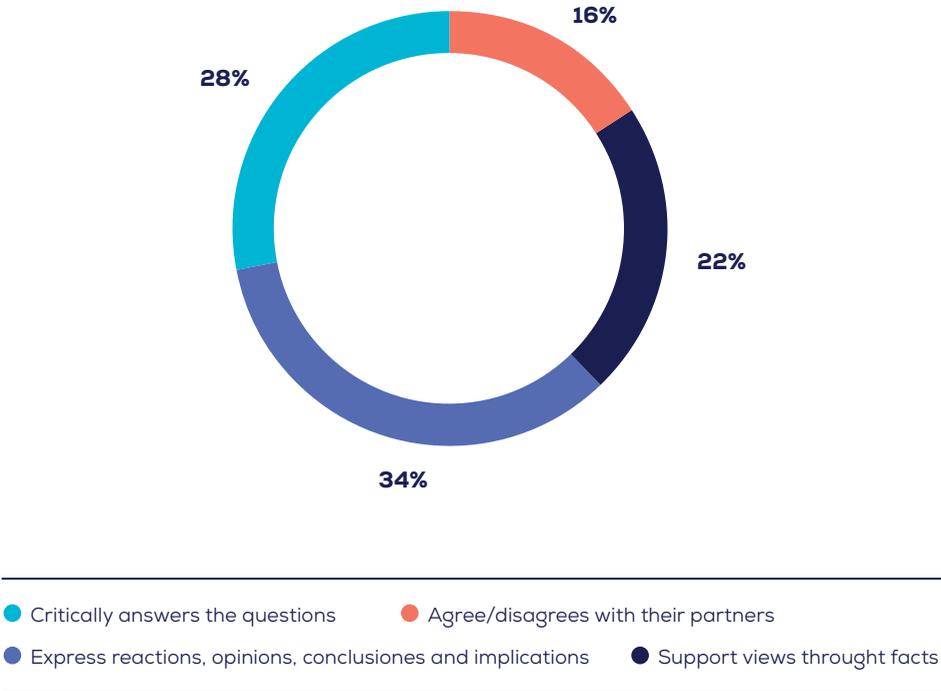
*Frequencies of CT in Forums*

CT criteria	Forum	St.1	St.2	St.3	St.4	St.5	St.6	St.7	St.8	St.9
Critically answers the question	1									
	2									
	3									
	4									
Agrees/ disagrees with their partner's point of view	1									
	2									
	3									
	4									
Expresses reactions, opinions, conclusions and implications	1									
	2									
	3									
	4									
Supports views through facts with examples	1									
	2									
	3									

In order to check the number of interventions and check the specific criteria of CT, the messages of students were read one by one after each forum was set. In terms of student’s participation, 9 students answered the question established for each forum. One student did not continue the course.

Based on the students’ answers, the criteria with the best results was “expresses reactions, opinions, conclusions and implications” with a total of 34 interventions. It was followed by “critically answers the question” with a total of 23 interventions. The next was “agrees/disagrees with their partner’s point of view” with a total of 22 interventions and “supports views through facts with examples” with 16 interventions. The students with the most interventions were student 3 with 17 interventions and student 2 with 13 interventions using expressions of CT. Because of the number of interventions in the categories, it might be understood that students responded easily to a certain type of questions while also noting the needs to develop HOTS and LOTS through all activities presented in the FL approach. This also may bring the possibility to incorporate other types of preparatory expressions so that students may balance their knowledge of how to express their opinions critically (see graph 2).

**GRAPH — NO.2**  
*CT Behavior in the LMS Forums*



In respect to the questions formulated in the 4 forums, the question in which students reacted to more critically and write the highest number of interventions was question No.1. How can people with physical limitations impact your work place? According to students' answers and interventions it reached a total of 35 interventions.

The questions in forum No.2 and No.4 had a total of 23 and 20 interventions respectively. Question No 3. had 17 interventions. It seemed students reacted less and less through some of the questions. This also might mean that, even though the questions were designed to get them to relate to their real life, as question No.2 asked about Colombians' eating habits, question No. 3 about money and questions No 4 about technology, it seems to be that topics related to their work could be more productive and appealing to students from institutional courses. This might mean that the topic question asked was more appealing to them and therefore had a higher impact on students' CT as they were able to contextualize it with their work setting.

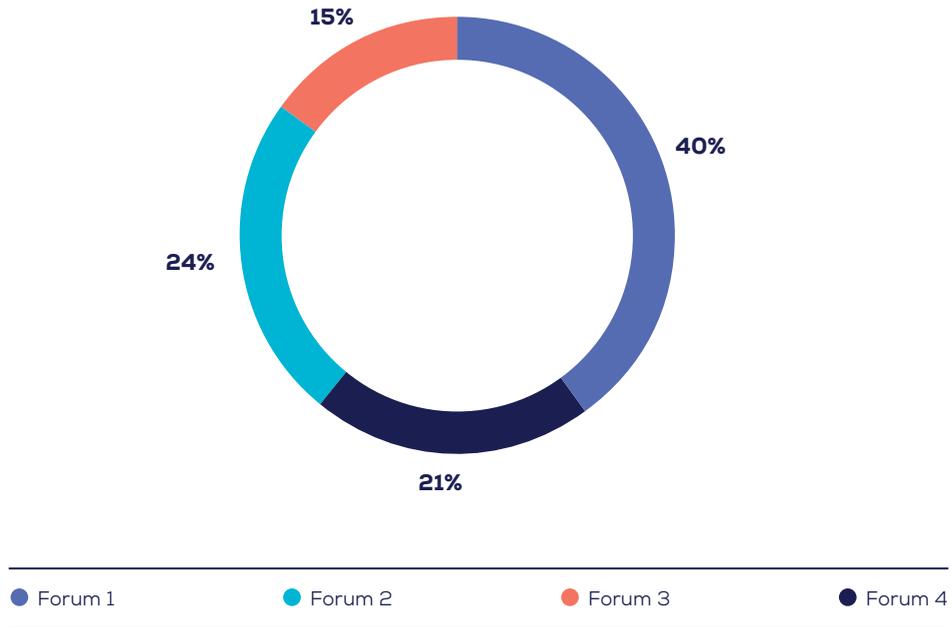
A finding that seems relevant is that even though the interventions done by some students in the forum No.3 were the lowest, these interventions had more structure and complete statements expressed with a good English level, vocabulary, grammar and with some signs and markers of reflection of CT that helped students to transmit their message or ideas better. This is an example:

I think that central point of Colombian diet issue is in the culture of high carbohydrates diet, we eat more than 3 carbohydrates by dish. A typical dish call "Corrientazo" brings first a soup this could brings potatoes, pasta, rice even corn all this carbohydrates just in the first dish. In the second dish that we call "el Seco" this could brings rice, pasta and fries this means that just in one meal we could eat until 7 carbohydrates, i think this issue borne in the economics and lazy culture cause is cheaper and easy cook the carbohydrates than meat or vegetables (student No 7. In the question No1, Forum 3).

The graph No.3, represents the interventions per question using CT.

Regarding the improvement of CT in students through flipped reading content, it could be observed that there was evidence of signs and markers of reflection related to student CT behavior with some expressions such as "I think, I believe, In my opinion, In my personal opinion, from my point of view, in my case, I agree with, I disagree with, I do not consider" - which helped students to express reactions, opinions, conclusions and some implications in the forums. It could be said that there was improvement in the CT of students as it was described in the graph above, but a stronger and more consistent approach to incorporating CT should be carried out with students at this level who were able to conduct the activities

*Interventions Using CT per Question.*



accordingly. Nevertheless, it can be interpreted that students analyzed the reading content, were open to participate freely and in their own pace in the forum, and then reacted to the manner of interest in a partially critical way.

With respect to the criteria of the measurement of the CT, the expression that was more difficult for them was criteria No. 4 “*support views through facts.*” It was difficult for them to support their ideas using facts instead of just their opinion. This can be interpreted that students might not have been able to relate the questions to previous knowledge or exemplify enough in order to translate the new knowledge, then criticize conclusions, and finally create or offer new arguments to expand their ideas, which is a criteria of CT.

### Conclusions

This research paper searched the concepts of FL, its features and explored how the flipped reading content through PPPs could impact in the development of CT in an institutional course at the CCCA. Additionally, this research flipped 4 reading activities and created 4 forums activities

uploaded in LMS and through a checklist, the signs and markers of reflections related to student CT behavior were identified.

Based on the results of the action research, the flipped reading content through PPPS was effective. These presentations are easy to upload, modify, and create. They are handy and a great asset to any classroom. Besides that, a flipped reading activity with a sequence of a pre-while and post encouraged students to scaffold information from the text which allowed them to go beyond the reading.

There was evidence that students reacted critically when the questions were related to their work context. It can be recommended to get information about students' interests or what they find more appealing for them to be more interested and participate more actively. The questions created for this research study were created with the intention to promote CT, yet they could have been more in number, or even more elaborated to encourage students to think deeply and provide students with the opportunity for a variety of responses.

Consequently, pedagogically speaking, the sequence established in this research paper helped students to develop their CT, as first, students had to read the information from the PPPS on which they had to scaffold information from the text. Second as students wrote about what they read, their prior knowledge provided information that may go beyond what they learnt in the required reading.

Additionally, from the point of view of the teacher, it is beneficial for teachers to create flipped reading content presentations or other materials that are suitable for each lesson and plan the in-class activities that provide learners with opportunities to deepen their understanding of the English language and accomplish CT, which is one of the main characteristics of the flipped learning approach.

Finally, participating in the forums provided students alternatives and different points of view. In this sense, students learnt how to manage different opinions and views. Seeing other perspectives helped them form their own opinions, reactions, ideas or could have helped them to make their own unique connections critically as the questions were designed to go beyond a yes or no answer.

This research is limited in terms of number of students, data collection and results as it examined the experiences of students to develop CT through Flipped reading content, but it sheds an important light on teachers and their willingness to foment this approach, and for that reason, FL is recommended to teachers for them to experience the benefits of this approach in their courses.

Yet, there are some challenges to overcome including the integration of technology at the CCCA. It is important to conduct more studies regarding the FL teaching approach for the language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, in addition to vocabulary and grammar as well as its contributions to CT awareness. Further research should examine different aspects that may contribute to the success of FL in language learning, such as students' attitudes, learning styles, cognitive and metacognitive strategies in relationship with FL.

It is also important to mention that these students from the institutional course usually work long hours, and they mentioned that their work schedules prevented them from dedicating more time to the reading content and participating more constantly in the forum discussions. This is something to take into consideration as not all courses or students are suitable to be participants of FL instructions.

Another suggestion to implement the FL is to prepare learners for this unfamiliar approach, since learners are more familiar with the traditional approaches. It is essential that learners should be trained to become accustomed to all teaching procedures and how to utilize the videos, PPPS or podcasts and other materials prior to learning in the actual FL approach. Moreover, classroom-based research in implementing the FL approach needs to be conducted as a valuable effort to transform traditional English classrooms and help learners to become successful 21st century learners of English in the CCCA.

Based on the positive results on the implementation of Flipped content through PPPs, school administrators and institutions such the CCCA should motivate and train teachers to reduce face-to-face learning and dedicate more efforts in adapting new teaching approaches that involve technology-integrated learning such FL. This can create a rich environment that motivates students to control and be more responsible of their learning time.

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Oral Production  
Barriers in B1 English  
Level Students at  
Centro Cultural  
Colombo Americano  
Palmira

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## Abstract

The Centro Cultural Colombo Americano is a non-profit organization that has been offering English programs to the community of the Valle del Cauca during the last 64 years and there has been great success and recognition. However, many students who finish their English program have difficulties in learning and using the language adequately due to different factors. For this reason, this study focuses on describing difficulties students of B1 level face that could affect their oral production. Twenty-four students participated in this project, answering a questionnaire, and an oral interview, and three classes were observed in order to determine what elements could affect students' oral production. Among the main results, it was found little practice out of the classroom, little independent work, lack of vocabulary and poor grammar structure among others. The difficulties that could affect students' oral production are also grammar, vocabulary, time of exposure, pronunciation, motivation, and teacher attitude.

### **Key Words:**

Oral Performance, Difficulties, EFL.

## Introduction

It is clear that not all of the students at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano (CCCA) reach a fluent level of English despite the fact that they have gone through the whole English program established by the institution. Therefore, it is of great importance to do research about the main barriers Independent level students face during their oral production at the CCCA. In this regard, Al Hosni (2014) affirms:

The study about Speaking Difficulties Encountered by Young EFL Learners revealed that the main speaking difficulties encountered by students are linguistic difficulties, mother tongue use, and inhibition. Students are unable to speak in English because they lack the necessary vocabulary items and grammar structures. They also lack sentence formation skills, which results in using the mother tongue. Students also think of making mistakes in speaking in front of their classmates very embarrassing, which results in preferring not to speak to avoid such situations. There are five main factors that contribute to the existence of these speaking difficulties: teachers' perceptions and tacit beliefs of teaching speaking, teaching strategies, curriculum, extracurricular activities, and assessment regulations (22-30).

Although the methodology at CCCA focuses on the four skills, it makes more emphasis in speaking and listening, thus it is surprising to encounter students with such a low level of oral production. It is also convenient to analyze how long students are exposed to the language in and out of the CCCA.

The purpose of this research is to find the different variables that have an influence on the low oral performance of some students at the CCCA Palmira branch.

## Literature Review

This literature review is about finding difficulties that affect oral production and that might be found in grammar structures, vocabulary acquisition, time of exposure to the target language, pronunciation, motivation, and teacher role. This study is based on authors like Al Hosni (2014) who did some research about speaking difficulties in young learners of English; Crivos and Luchini (2012) who affirm that grammar plays an important role, Çelik and Toptaş (2010), who have done research on the difficulties on learning vocabulary, and other authors. All this is covered as

an attempt to understand possible barriers Independent (B1) level students face during their oral production at the CCCA Palmira.

Since the objective of the CCCA is, as stated in its vision, to help the community of the Valle del Cauca acquire a second language, which in this case is English, and therefore obtain the tools for seeking better opportunities, it is of great relevance to have a good level of fluency and comprehension of the language. Better job opportunities, being more educated, learning about culture, and travel around the world are some of the advantages a person can have when speaking a foreign language.

Using the communicative approach as the CCCA methodology is supposed to assure that students will develop good speaking skills, thus teaching grammar is not the main objective during classes, consequently student would face some difficulties when trying to structure well elaborated sentences. "Grammar is a device for constructing and conveying meaning without which, effective communication would be impossible" (Crivos & Luchini, 2012, p.120). However, the pedagogical developments in recent years on grammar teaching area have not been sufficient to answer the needs of language teachers to enable learners to gain grammatical knowledge (Ellis 2002, 2006; cited in Richards & Reppen, 2014). On the other hand Flognfeldt & Lund (2016) state:

My impression is that a common frustration among English teachers is that no matter how much time they spend on teaching grammar, the students do not seem to utilize the rules and the structures when communicating, whether orally or in writing, which is referred to as the inert knowledge problem (p. 35).

Sometimes, it might be considered that grammar is a very important aspect of learning a new language. Teachers spend a big part of the class giving grammar instruction and students are able to solve complex exercises, but their oral skills are not at all that satisfactory, and when speaking, even having done lots of practice, students are ready to make many mistakes. Time has taught that there should be a balance when teaching grammar in a way that students can use it in meaningful situations but also be aware of what they are doing when using it in order to communicate orally in a proper way.

Besides grammar, learning vocabulary is another issue. It can be affected by several factors such as memory problems, strategies, and motivation. Despite the role of vocabulary in communicating effectively, learners experience many problems in learning vocabulary (Çelik & Toptaş, 2010, p.64). However, there are arguments against teaching vocabulary. Grimaldo, Vaughn and robers (2015) stated that pre-teaching vocabulary does not train students for real-life encounters with language, and that

English teachers are spoon feeding them rather than teaching them the skills to deal with unknown words.

Supporting students with pre-teaching of vocabulary is a great way to have the whole class on the same page, comprehension wise, so that those who would otherwise be lost can engage as well. Being taught vocabulary should not make them lose their will to enjoy the process of learning a new language. Vocabulary should be taught in advanced and then put into practice so oral production can be enhanced.

Besides the factors mentioned above, it is clear that time plays an important role when it comes to using the new language. Learning a foreign language demands time and dedication, if students do not invest more time than that required by the institution, results are likely to be less than what expected. Benson (2001, p.62) defines "out-of-class learning" as "any kind of learning that takes place outside the classroom and involves self-instruction, naturalistic learning or self-directed naturalistic learning." Exposure has been shown to be an important element in language learning. Muñoz (1999, p.21) insists, "exposure may be as crucial as the age at which initial exposure takes place, that is, the age at which pupils begin their instruction in the foreign language."

In foreign language learning (FL), unlike in naturalistic settings, there is a limited temporal exposure to the language, as well as other limitations such as the poor quality and quantity of the input received. As Harley and Hart (1997) note, exposure is very much reduced when the medium of instruction in the class is not the FL but the mother tongue, as often happens in formal settings.

On the contrary, some recent studies on the exposure factor, have challenged the "consensus view" in formal contexts. That is, it has been pointed out that the belief "the younger the better" does not always hold when a language is learnt only at school by receiving minimal input (García Mayo & García Lecumberri, 2003; Muñoz, 2006). In formal settings, older learners have been found to outperform younger ones in the short-run, but it is not evident that the Early Starters (ES) catch up with Late Starters (LS) in the long term (Singleton, 2004). Taking the information just mentioned, it could have some relevant importance beginning at an early age, but having good quality of exposure could surely fulfill the expectations of Late Starters.

Something certain is that being exposed to the target language is crucial. Students are to attend two-hour classes four times a week, four-hour classes two times a week, five-hour classes once a week which could be almost enough for a regular course, but once they have left the CCCA it is unknown how much and what kind of independent practice they have in their regular and normal daily routines.

In this regard, Corder (1967) is one of the pioneers among Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers who underscored the importance of language input for second language acquisition by drawing a distinction between input and intake. According to Corder, language input refers to what is available to be utilized by language learners for SLA, which should be differentiated from intake (the part of the input that is comprehended by the language learners.)

Another important factor that could be found when learning a new language and that might affect students to communicate orally is pronunciation, and in this review of literature it is not referred to accent, which is very different. Pronunciation is a set of habits of producing sounds. The habit of producing a sound is acquired by repeating it over and over again and by being corrected when it is pronounced incorrectly. Learning to pronounce a second language means building up new pronunciation habits and overcoming the bias of the first language (Cook, 1996). Students are exposed to different teachers that might have different ways of pronouncing a word which leads to confusion and mispronouncing the language, which along with the issues previously mentioned might affect student's oral production. As stated by Luksha and Solovova (2006):

In the European foreign language teaching tradition, which is highly successful in qualified promoting some kinds of language learning, the ideal teacher has near native-speaker proficiency in the foreign language, and comes from the same linguistic and cultural background as the learners. It is arguable, as a general principle, that non-native teachers may, in fact, be better qualified than native speakers, if they have gone through the complex process of acquiring English as a second or foreign language, have insight into the linguistic and cultural needs of their learners, a detailed awareness of how mother tongue and target language differ and what is difficult for learners, and first-hand experience of using a second or foreign language (p.122).

Hence, pronunciation is one area of teaching, which is sometimes not taken seriously by some teachers, maybe because it is seen as a difficult task. However, it is an area in which learners need teacher's guidance. English is not a phonetic language, which means that looking at the written word often does not help students say it. Avery and Ehrlich (1992) claim that: "the sound pattern of the learner's first language is transferred into the second language and is likely to cause foreign accents. The mispronunciations of words by non-native speakers reflect the influence of the sounds, rules, stress, and intonation of their native language." In order to have an adequate level of communication, students should learn the correct way of pronouncing the target language so as to have a clear speech.

Another factor that may affect oral production is motivation. When a student has a personal or professional goal for learning English he/she will probably try to strength his/her oral production. When there is this will for learning, the process is easier and joyful. Motivation is a process that can arouse and instigate behavior, give direction, continue to allow behavior to persist, and lead to choosing or performing a particular behavior. Motivation is a kind of desire for acquiring a new language (Dergisi 2001, p. 220).

Another factor that contributes to a low oral production besides lack of appropriate grammar, reduced vocabulary, time exposure, and pronunciation is teacher attitude. It is important to remember that in a classroom there are not only students but also teachers whose role is of major relevance since he/she is the person who eventually will be face to face with students, understanding the needs of each person and finding the right course of action.

A teacher should play various roles such as learner, facilitator, assessor, manager and evaluator. Before teaching the students, a teacher has to first place himself/ herself as a learner and think from the learners perspective. In doing so, students' interests can be captured. In the classroom, teacher roles can be discussed with learners as a part of student preparation, along with other characteristics of the curriculum. Learners can imagine what roles they wish for their teacher, how this inclination fits in with other aspects of their learning method, and why the teacher chooses every role (Archana & Usha Rani, 2017, p. 1-4).

Reeve, Nix and Hamm (2003) have conducted extensive classroom studies, which show that when teachers offer students choices, the choices are more likely to increase self-determination and intrinsic motivation when they are presented along with other facilitating conditions. Therefore, if students are not given the role of autonomous learners in the learning process no matter how hard a teacher tries, the learning of oral skills will not be as effective as it would be when having student-centered classes, which help students improve oral production skills.

Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Teachers can do their best in the classroom, prepare the best classes ever, and try to motivate their students in different ways, but if a student is not willing to learn and the reasons why he/she is learning a language differ from what he /she really wants, learning a new language might become in a difficult path.

Students that are in the process of learning a new language may encounter a series of obstacles that could make this process a little bit difficult and discouraging. Among them, as mentioned above, we can find grammar (knowledge of grammar helps the student in the correction of mistakes and improvement of written work), vocabulary (learning vocabulary greatly helps language learners master and perfect their English skills), exposure time

(activities such as having people speaking English around or being spoken to and English reading are shown to be significantly correlated with learners' listening comprehension improvement), pronunciation (pronunciation is a very important part of mastering English), and teacher pedagogical roles in the EFL classroom (which help students work out their limitations, overcome their fears, and go through the beautiful path of learning.)

Taking into account the different sources that have been presented and that these issues are found in different places where English is taught, this literature review might help describe the possible difficulties students face when they have to produce orally.

## Methods

This study is aimed at evaluating the barriers Independent 4 (B1) students at the CCCA Palmira site face when they have to produce orally. In contemplation of this, the data collection includes a) a focus group, b) a printed questionnaire answered by students, and c) a class observation using a format that evaluates specific aspects of oral production. All this was used to collect information regarding factors that could affect their oral production.

**TABLE — NO.1**  
*List of participants*

Level of English (CEFR)	Number of students	Schedule Course period: August - September	Number of hours per week
B1	6	4:00 – 6:00 Tuesdays and Thursdays	4
B1	10	6:30 – 8:30 Monday to Thursday	8
B1	8	8:00 – 1:00 Saturdays	5

Three focus groups were interviewed answering 10 open questions aiming to find out about individual and collective factors that might have an influence on students and affect their oral production. The sample per group was of five students, and each session was recorded. The students' responses were compared in order to find any common coincidences and put them in a table from the highest to the lowest number of mentions.

A printed questionnaire consisting of ten open questions regarding factors such as, grammar, vocabulary, exposure time, pronunciation, and teacher pedagogical roles was implemented to see how academic components could affect students' oral production. The answers gathered here were compared in order to find any common factors and put them in a table from the most to the least frequent.

The researcher observed three classes, and a chart used by coaches for class observation at the CCCA with the most relevant aspects of the communicative approach was used to see how teacher's roles and the specific variables stated above could affect students' oral production.

This data collection method of using questionnaires was applied in other study, which dealt with components that affect oral production in students of English made by Çelik and Kocaman (2015).

The data collected was initially categorized following the organization proposed by Çelik and Kocaman (2015, pp. 31-46) for results. Emerging patterns were then analyzed in terms of recurrences.

## Results and Discussion

There were some relevant aspects seen in B1 students' answers at the CCCA Palmira to the questionnaire that might indicate what aspects could make it difficult or might affect students' oral production. These answers given to the written questionnaire showed that students did not have much practice out of the classroom; there was very little independent work; there was not much vocabulary learned per day, and grammar practice was quite rare, and grammar was not given the importance it should have in order to use a language correctly. Students should be taught more grammar and in this way, they would be able to produce more meaningful messages not only when speaking but also when writing.

Besides this, twenty-four students answered the focus group interview and stated that it was difficult to use new vocabulary because they did not much practice out of the classroom, and that spelling also made it harder, this indicates that the new vocabulary should be given more practice in and out of the classes. Moreover, the average number of new words learned per day was four; this shows that there is not a considerable amount of vocabulary being learned, which could help them overcome their oral production. When being asked about their reaction to new words, students said that they had different ways of learning or memorizing them. In addition to this, only the 40% of the interviewed students read different books to the one they use in classes. This material was mostly about their

occupations, and the average amount of time students spent reading was between 10 to 15 minutes a day.

Based on the question that connects to the exposure of the students to English, it was also found that students miss an average of three classes per period, which represent the 20% of the level and this time, and the content seen in class is never recovered. When not being exposure to the target language the needed amount of time, oral production is negatively affected and communication becomes a difficult task.

When it comes to practice their pronunciation, students answers to the focus group interview

showed that 80% of students did it through videos and songs. They were also asked about other aids they might use to help their learning process, and the most common one was the use of Apps.

The findings in the oral interview revealed that Independent 4 level students at the CCCA Palmira have very little practice out of the classroom, which diminishes the exposure time to the language, the grammar is hardly practiced, but their comments about work done in class, textbooks, cooperative activities, and teacher's role in the classroom showed they feel the institution is fulfilling their expectations since many of them have been in other English institutions and are able to compare.

Observations showed that teachers were following the CCCA methodology, taking into account the implementation of cooperative activities, student centeredness, authentic communication, and participation.

All in all, the most important factors found were the low amount of vocabulary learned day by day, the little independent work done by students, the lack of grammar structures, the exposure time which sometimes is worsen due to the fact that students miss classes. Also, the low or high motivation have a direct impact on students' oral production.

## Conclusions

Carrying out this research with the participation of twenty-four students answering a questionnaire, an oral interview, and the observation of three classes in order to determine what elements could affect student's oral production could provide the institution with data that may be used to set an action plan in order to improve the aspects regarding oral production.

Based on the information gathered through the written questionnaire, it can be determined that the most important factor was the lack of vocabulary due to a very reduce number of learned words per day, the very little use of it, the reading habits that students have, and the poor grammar practice done by them. Taking this into account, the CCCA

teachers should implement strategies that could help students' improve oral production through an action plan that includes reading and writing in a more demanding way, preparing teachers for this task.

Besides this, students do not have much exposure time in order to practice what they see in their regular classes making it more difficult for language acquisition. The autonomous work done by students is quite little due to lack of discipline and dedication. It is understood that the CCCA has very qualified teachers who eventually could instruct students in more successful studying habits in these levels.

In addition to that, it is important to state that teacher's role is well seen by students, and the perception towards them is very positive according to the answers to the focus group interview. In addition to that, class observation shows that in most cases, teachers are following the Colombo's policies.

This study brought to light the weaknesses students have such as little reading, poor independent practice, and non-existing study habits, which lead us to take a close look at how much reading, writing and other sort of autonomous work the institution is assigning in order to increase students' level of English in favor of helping their oral production during the CCCA English Program.

Based on the results, teachers should assign students more meaningful and independent work, which will surely help students reach higher levels of communication in the target language.

This study, which has been carried out in the highest level of the courses offered by the institution could be applied at earlier stages of the English Program in order to identify issues in the near future, and take measures that will enable students achieve their goals.

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# Grammar Instruction in a Low and High English Level Course at Centro Cultural Colombo Americano

Cali – Palmira – Buga

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this research project is to describe the way grammar was taught in two groups at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano Cali-Palmira-Buga. To this purpose, a low and a high English course were chosen to be observed and to collect data from a questionnaire for the two teachers involved, and a survey was administered for the students of the two courses. Data collected evidenced that grammar teaching was focused on meaning and form in an implicit and explicit instruction mode. The student survey supported the class observation made of the two levels. This study suggests to go in depth to understand the effectiveness of those instructional modes in students' language acquisition.

### **Key Words:**

Grammar Instruction, EFL, Grammar Instruction Modes, High Level and Low Level Learners.

## Introduction

The study of how learners acquire a second language has helped to shape thinking about how to teach the grammar of a second language (Ellis, 2006, p. 83). This assertion by Ellis (2006) also shapes the philosophy of teaching at Centro Cultural Colombo Americano (CCCA), where according to its Institutional Educational Project IEP (2017) the English teaching –and grammar considered in it– is framed in the Communicative Approach in the Adult and Kids and Teens programs<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, grammar takes place in the classroom as a part of the language function that is being taught, not as the center of the class; grammar instruction helps students to structure their language by focusing on the meaning of the grammar structure. The teachers at this institution adapt their grammar instruction to fit the needs of the students according to their level, which may result in clear differentiation of grammar instruction practice in comparison to language function and the ultimate communication goal at different levels.

After several years of class observation, different ways of approaching grammar teaching have been noticed during grammar instruction at CCCA. Teachers use different grammar instruction in their classes from explicit teaching or implicit teaching, focusing on form or focusing on meaning. Hence, this research has been undertaken to describe the way teachers teach grammar and how it is integrated in the language function teaching of the lesson. Specifically, the main objective of this project is to describe how grammar is taught in two levels of the Adult English program, choosing a fundamental 3 level and an Independent 1 level, to not only describe the way grammar is taught but also to document if there are differences.

## Literature Review

This study has the purpose of describing the way two teachers at CCCA teach grammar and how it is integrated in their lessons. Thus, this literature review includes three moments: grammar definitions, instructional modes to teach grammar, and studies made based on the way grammar is taught to support the understanding the instructional modes of teaching grammar. In a first moment, grammar is defined according to Brown (2007), Larsen-Freeman (2001, p. 251), and Bandar and Gorhian (2017) in order to present how this definition has been modified according to the importance of it in

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1. Centro Cultural Colombo Americano- Cali-Palmira- Buga. Full description of the language institute and its manual de Convivencia. Follow the link <https://www.colomboamericano.edu.co/archivos/3a40628b.pdf>

language learning. In a second moment, Oxford and Lee (2007) and Brown (2007) are cited to mention instructional modes to teach grammar. In the third moment, Burgess and Etherington (2002) and Nazari (2013) have been included in the literature review to show the results of their studies about teaching grammar in different modes.

It is important to give definitions of grammar to highlight the position of teaching grammar in the learning process of a second language. Brown (2007, p. 420) defines grammar as a system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence. Larsen-Freeman (2001, p. 251) argue that grammar is about form and one way to teach form is to teach rules; however, grammar is about much more than form, and its teaching is ill-served if students are simply given rules (Bandar and Gorhian, 2017, p. 89). Grammar has been described as the regular system of rules that are used to weave sounds into the meaningful units with which ideas and thoughts are expressed. As a result, it is impossible to teach a language without taking into consideration grammar teaching. These three definitions of grammar show how grammar has been taken into account in the learning of a second language not only because of the structure, but also because its meaning and use in the communication. Understanding of the definition of grammar offers a conceptual framework to understand how grammar is evidenced in the teaching practices at the two levels at CCCA.

Oxford and Lee (2007, p. 117-139) describe four instructional modes teachers use for dealing with grammar in the classroom. They are classified in implicit and explicit instructional modes. The first two modes are implicit. Focus on Meaning (FonM) is the first mode. Learners are exposed to comprehensible samples of communicative L2 use in content-based or immersion classrooms lessons that are often interesting, appealing, and relevant for the learners. The way of teaching is based on avoiding grammar instruction. As opposed to FonM, the second implicit way of teaching grammar is Focus on Form (FonF). It refers to grammar instruction is planned to get learners attention to linguistic elements in context and its purpose is meaning and communication.

Oxford and Lee (2007, p.122) summarized some characteristics of FonF from Doughty (2003, p.267): "first, there is neither explanation nor any direction to figure out rules, although tasks do draw learners' attention to form as part of meaning. Second, any of the following might be involved: (a) tasks that promote meaning prior to form; (b) naturalness of L2 forms, that is, specific forms must be essential for the tasks, rather than the task being contrived as an example of the forms; (c) unobtrusiveness of attention to forms; (d) "noticing" of a form by the learner because of an instructor-assisted attention shift at the point of communication breakdown; (e)

selection of target forms through analyzing learners communicative needs; and (f) consideration of the constraints that the learner's interlanguage place on understanding and production of forms. Although linguistic elements are not taught explicitly, they are taken into account to help comprehension or error correction in the communication".

The second modes are explicit. Focus on Forms (FonFs)-explicit-inductive mode involves indirect but explicit teaching, teacher doesn't present the grammar rules instead creates conditions to get learners discover the rules and work out the rules by themselves. Focus on Forms(FonFs)-explicit-deductive mode is the strongest version of Focus on Form. In this mode, teachers present grammar rules and structures to have students apply what they have learn in specific instances. Brown (2007, p. 423) points out that grammatical competence occupies a prominent position as a major component of communicative competence noting that having the grammar competence is not sufficient for production and reception in language. He wonders if grammar should be presented inductively or deductively explaining that a deductive approach can be more appropriated for students since they can study the grammar without being exposed to exhausting grammar explanations. However, there would be moments when deductive approach or a blended between the two can be a better option.

On the other hand, Larsen-Freeman (2001) shows ways to teach grammar according to the challenge or the purpose of the grammar teaching. The author mentions three different approaches taking into account form, meaning and use of the grammar topic. She argues that giving isolated grammar rules and making students do repetitive exercises will not help communication; instead, form should be included in communicative activity which is meaningful for them. If the challenge is meaning, a practice activity should be planned to call for some associative learning where the students have the chance to associate form and meaning of the target structure. If the challenge is use, it is because the students have shown some difficulties in discriminating the differences among structure meaning.

The different ways to teach grammar that were described above are used to describe the way teachers at the CCCA teach the grammar topics in class for the purpose of this study.

In the study of the effect of implicit and explicit grammar instruction on learners' achievements in receptive and productive modes, Nazari (2013, p. 156-162) concludes that students who were exposed to explicit grammar instruction outperformed those who were exposed to implicit presentation of grammar structures. The study showed that students were more precise in detecting and correcting ungrammatical sentences; it has to be mentioned that students that were involved in this study were adult learners who were accustomed to traditional methods.

Burgess and Etherington (2002, p. 433-458) report teachers' attitude toward grammar and its teaching; some of the conclusions lead the researchers to understand that the teachers involved in the research favored and appreciated the value of grammar for their students framed in a FonF approach.

The positive relationship between FonF and FonM in wh-questions in Iranian senior high school supports the idea of not excluding but complementing (Bandar & Gorchian, 2017). Knowing the rule and memorizing it is insufficient to communicate. It is concluded that focused-based and meaning-based instruction is required. Accuracy, fluency and communication skills are likely best developed through instruction that is meaning-based but in which guidance is provided through form-based activities (Bandar & Gorchian, 2017).

These three moments of understanding grammar provided a solid foundation to understand different ways to teach grammar and helped to describe how grammar was taught in the two sample courses from this study.

## Methods

In order to conduct this study, the researcher did 3 non-participant class observations in the low level and 2 non-participant observations in the high level, and administered a survey for students, and a questionnaire for the teacher with a view to describe the way teachers teach grammar and how it is integrated in the language function teaching of the lesson. Two courses were chosen to be part of the study with levels A1 and B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

The non-participant observation check list task (Oxford and Lee, 2007) was taken into account to limit the behaviors and activities that were observed in class to accomplish the objective of this research. Those non-participant class observations were made during a course period that consisted of 16 classes. Instructional modes described by Oxford and Lee (2007, p.120) helped to categorize some behaviors seen in class while teachers were teaching grammar in the Implicit Modes Focus on Meaning or Focus on Form and Explicit Inductive or deductive Modes Focus on Form. The behaviors were analyzed to determine the way grammar was taught in those lessons.

A survey was designed to get students to identify the way grammar is taught by the teacher in class. Questions were multiple choice related to the instructional modes proposed by Oxford and Lee (2007, p. 120) to be compared with the non-participant observations. Choices made by students in the survey were tabulated to describe how students perceived

grammar teaching in their classes. The students from the English for Adult Program at the CCCA are 15 years old and above. In the low-level class were 8 students but only 7 took the survey. In the high level there were 14 students but only 4 took the survey because of external factors out of the control of this research study logistics.

The two Teachers of the 2 levels completed a questionnaire to find out their perception about what grammar was for them, the importance of grammar in the language teaching and language learning, the way they taught grammar in the level observed and how they integrated grammar in the language function teaching of the lesson. Those beliefs were compared with the non-participant observations to find out similarities between the beliefs, but mainly, the way grammar was taught.

These three instruments were triangulated and gave supportive data to describe how grammar was taught in class.

## Results and Discussion

The first data collected in order to describe the way grammar was taught in a lower and a higher level at CCCA South Site was from teachers' answers about what grammar meant to them, the role of grammar in their classes, the way they planned grammar instruction, material they used to teach grammar and if grammar was taken into account when giving feedback. Their answers and further analysis are presented below.

In the opinion of the lower level teacher, grammar represented the structure with which one could speak a language correctly without confusing times or moments of the conversation. It was the technology of a language. The high-level teacher defined grammar as a set of structures and formulas that are part of every language and that might reveal some of what the language and culture behind it is about. Both teachers agreed that grammar is structure and it plays an important role in communication. Those definitions can be supported by Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2016, p. 251). Grammar has to take into consideration more than the form of the language. It has to be considered in communicative practices.

About the role of grammar in class, the low-level teacher expressed that grammar was the main purpose, knowing it did not necessarily mean it was what one came into the classroom to teach. The teacher added that grammar instruction was integrated in the language function presented in the class in a way they were not exposed to grammar explanations, but they were aware of achieving the language function. The high-level teacher stated that grammar played the role of allowing those students who were more visual and logical realize the formula behind the communicative

activities done in class. The role of grammar the low and high level is different. In the low-level grammar is seen as the tool to achieve a communicative situation presented in the lesson while for the high-level it was the tool to make visual and logical students realize the structure of the sentences used in the communicative activities planned to practice language.

The way grammar instruction was planned by the low- and high-level teachers was different. The low-level teacher affirmed that a situation based on language function was planned, not a class itself. When planning a class, a discussion was planned, not a grammar rehearsal; however, when students had doubts and wanted to see how grammar worked, it was a nice challenge for them to try to figure it out. The high level teacher explained that planning grammar instruction depended on the level or course that was being taught, but what was usually done was to check the topics students would talk about, design a communicative activity so that they could start using the grammar without even knowing it, and then students were asked questions about what the grammar behind the activity was, so they could share what they knew about the target grammar and practice it with the book's activity. The grammar instruction described by both teachers can be placed in focus on Form (FonF) implicit mode and taking into account the affirmation of the high-level teacher about questioning the grammar behind the activities, this instruction can be classified in Focus on Forms (FonFs) explicit-inductive mode according to Oxford and Lee (2007).

The material used for grammar instructions by teachers were similar. The low-level teacher used videos, pictures, conversation models, role plays and the book. The high-level teacher used articles, sentences, role plays, music and the book to teach grammar. The kind of material used by teachers to approach grammar instruction could be seen as an instruction based mainly in language function.

The last question was if grammar was considered when giving feedback. The low-level teacher said that as teachers it was hard not to do it because of the progress students were supposed to be showing. In the teacher's opinion, one of the best ways of giving feedback was grammar errors. The teacher added that the best strategy was to speak about "the way things were meant to be said" in the situation students were in. The high-level teacher said it was done if it was noticed that the student couldn't communicate properly with his/her friends so that it could be reviewed and moved on. It could be inferred that grammar is considered a measurement of students' learning progress, and it also confirmed that grammar is considered as an important linguistic competence to be able to communicate accurately.

The teachers' questionnaire allowed them to describe the way grammar was taught during the level that this research took place. Grammar is seen as an essential competence that has to be taught and learned in class. It is the tool students use to communicate well.

The second data collected was a survey for students who took the level while the research project was being carried out. This 5-question survey was composed of 1 open-ended question and 4 multiple choice questions.

Asking students about what grammar rules meant to them, most of them agreed that grammar is the form or the structure of the language. Some of the students agreed that grammar is the form they can use to communicate coherently and correctly.

Second question of the survey for students was about how grammar was taught during the level the research took place. There is a great difference between how students perceived the way grammar was taught in the two courses. In the low level, 7 of the 8 students agreed that grammar was taught through explicit grammar explanations on the board and 6 out of 8 students agreed that grammar was taught through examples to get students figure out the meaning of the grammar topic in a context; 3 students perceived that grammar was taught by the teacher using reading or listening activities to analyze the form (structure) in the context; 2 students coincided that grammar was taught by the teacher using reading activities or listening activities to analyze the meaning of a grammar topic in the context and examples to get students figure out the grammar rule; only one student was in favor of being taught by reading activities or listening activities to analyze the form of a grammar topic. In the high level, the 4 students that took the survey agreed that grammar was taught in all the ways proposed in the survey. One student added that grammar was taught through dynamic activities made by the teacher. These results lead to the assumption that grammar was taught most of the time through explicit - deductive and inductive modes focus on forms according the assumption to Oxford and Lee (2007). However, some students recognized grammar instruction focused on meaning.

According to students' answers to the question how important the grammar instruction is in their learning process of English as a second Language, half of them think that grammar instruction is very important, and the other half is important. None of them thinks grammar instruction is not important. These results show that grammar instruction has great importance for students in their process of learning English as a second language, and their perception supported the answers teachers gave about grammar instruction and the role of grammar in the classes.

In the opinion of the students, teachers used all the activities proposed in the survey such as role-plays that required the use of the grammar topic seen in class, discussions in class that required the use of the grammar topic seen in class, writing exercises where the use of the grammar topic seen in class was required, grammar exercises to fill in the blank with the correct use of the grammar topic seen in class, and conversations with classmates sharing their own experiences using the grammar topic seen in class to put into practice the grammar taught in class. For the low-level students, role plays and conversations with partners sharing their own experience, using the grammar topic seen was the most common way to practice the target grammar. The high-level students agreed that the 5 different activities proposed in the survey were used by the teacher to have them practice the target grammar equally. The answers evidenced different approaches to practice grammar study in class. Those activities were FonM most of the time. The low-level students marked fill-in-the-blank exercises which is framed in FonF (Oxford and Lee, 2007) as one of the least common exercises.

As stated by low level students, the most common material used by the teacher to practice the grammar seen in class was fill-in-the-blanks exercises; 6 out of 8 students chose that option. Five out of eight students chose listening comprehension exercises to answer questions with the grammar seen in class; 4 out of 8 perceived that listening exercises to complete with the grammar structure heard was used as material to practice the grammar topic; finally, 2 out of 8 students selected exercises on internet to practice the grammar seen in class. High level students agreed totally that the teacher used fill-in-the-blanks exercises, listening comprehension exercises to answer questions with the grammar seen in class and listening exercises to complete with the grammar structure heard as material to have them practice the grammar seen in class; 2 out of 8 students selected exercises on internet to practice the grammar seen in class. Although fill-in-the-blank exercises are the most common material to practice the grammar seen in class, this opposed to the answer of the low-level students that according to them, fill-in-the-blank exercises were the least common activity done by the teacher in class to practice grammar in agreement with the results of the previous question.

The third data collected was non-participant class observations. Observations were carried out when the teacher let the researcher know grammar instruction was taking place. There were 3 observations for the low level and 2 observations for the high. When observing grammar instruction, it was classified according to teachers' practices during the instruction. Those practices were categorized according to the check list task (Oxford and Lee, 2007 p.120). These categories were primarily focused

on meaning; target form made explicit, target form enhanced or otherwise made noticeable, grammar rule supplied, and learners directed to deduce grammar rule.

Observations made in the low level evidenced that the teacher approached grammar instruction as target form made explicit and target form enhanced or otherwise made noticeable. In observation #1, the teacher introduced present simple third person by getting students read an article about someone's daily routine. Then some examples from the article were written on the board and by using a red marker, the teacher pointed out the use of *s* for the verbs with the third person. In observation #2, the teacher introduced simple present Yes/No questions. He wrote the auxiliaries in red to make students realize the use of them. He asked students those questions and encouraged them to answer with short answers. In observation #3 the target grammar structure was *there is/are*. The teacher placed some objects on a table. The teacher asked students what there is or are on it and then students were encouraged to answer *there is* or *are*. Teacher circled *is* or *are* in red to make students realize they had to be careful with singular and plural. The analysis of the observations categorized the grammar instruction of the low level in implicit mode FonF and explicit inductive mode FonFs according to Oxford and Lee (2007).

Observations made in the high level evidenced that teacher approached grammar instruction as a primary focus on meaning, target form made explicit and target form enhanced or otherwise made noticeable. In observation #1, the target form was present perfect. Students were asked to play the orchestra. Each student had a word, and one student was chosen to be the conductor of the orchestra. The conductor had the responsibility to organize the students and the paper as well. When students were organized in the correct order, the teacher wrote the sentences on the board. To finish, students were asked to open their books to study the grammar chart about present perfect. Then students were encouraged to discuss with a partner when present perfect was used. In observation #2, the teacher introduced the modals to make predictions. Students were asked to read an article. Then by playing Chinese whisper<sup>2</sup>, the teacher asked students some questions about the article encouraging them to use *may*, *might*, *will*. At the end of the activity the teacher wrote the modals on the board giving them some percentages of probabilities. The analysis of these observations categorized the grammar instruction into implicit modes FonM and FonF, and explicit-inductive mode FonFs. The condition of teaching grammar

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2. Chinese whisper or the telephone game is a children's game in which players from a line, and the first player comes up with a message and whispers it to the ear of the second person in the line.

in high levels could contribute the grammar instruction based on implicit mode. The level of English of students from the high level let the teacher teach grammar more focused on the meaning since students had more experience in learning grammar and had the ability to figure out structures.

These three data tools provided information to describe the way grammar was taught in a low and high level at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano South Branch. The different instructions observed and evidenced in the observation and students' answers provided in the survey allowed the researcher to describe that the most common instructional modes used by teachers, were the implicit mode FonF and the explicit-inductive mode FonFs (Oxford and Lee, 2007).

## Conclusions

This research project had the intention of describing the way grammar was taught in two different levels at the Centro Colombo Americano Cali-Palmira-Buga. This study provided the institution a brief description of teaching grammar practices and might be an opening for a course of professional development about how to teach grammar in different approaches.

Through the teacher questionnaires, it was possible to examine the role of grammar in their classes. The role of grammar in their classes could be read as the linguistic part that is behind the activities and topics proposed in class. Classes were based on language functions and each of them had a grammar topic to be covered. In addition, grammar was present in class preparation that included material to practice it, and it was present in students' feedback. Instructional modes were evident in the grammar teaching. Teachers from both levels used explicit inductive mode FonFs which means they led the grammar teaching by establishing conditions that made students discover the grammar rules by themselves. However, there were moments in which grammar teaching was framed in the explicit deductive mode and the rules were given by the teachers, but they were in the context of a communicative activity.

The students' answers to the survey permitted the researcher to examine different perceptions from students about what they thought grammar was and its importance in their learning process of English as a second language. Students from both courses marked grammar as a valuable linguistic competence they need to acquire to learn English well to communicate orally and in writing. Another view to look at is the way students distinguished grammar instruction. Students from the low level identified explicit grammar explanations on the board and examples used

by the teacher to get students figure out the meaning of the grammar topic in a context as the most common instructions in the classes they took during the research. However, the high-level students marked all different ways of grammar instruction proposed in the survey.

Non-participant class observations provided information to describe the way grammar was taught in a low and high level. The different instructions recognized during the observations permitted to describe that the most common instructional modes used by teachers were the implicit mode FonF and the explicit-inductive mode FonFs according to (Oxford and Lee)

These three data tools provided information to describe the way grammar was taught in a low and a high level. The results of this research project opened an opportunity to keep doing studies about grammar instruction. A further research project could be done with a bigger scope and number of teacher participants to explore if this fits the approach and the institution philosophy, and It would be assertive to consider studying the effectiveness of different grammar teaching instruction modes in the context of the CCCA.

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**R**esearch Impacts is what I would call “a labor of love.” The Research Area of the binational center in Cali started a journey two years ago which aimed at the building of a community of research at Centro Colombo Americano. This research book is a collection of 9 academic papers which reflect the everyday silent seed our teachers plant in the construction of knowledge that paves our way into the future of English language teaching. Any educator who has the chance to read these papers will feel an immediate connection based on the issues we face in the classroom and the multiple ways we try to deal with them.

Research impacts provides educators with a fresh and contextualized look at topics such as differentiated instruction, flipped learning, grammar instruction models, effective feedback and more. It also shows how academic research gives teachers the opportunity to look for answers and to provoke change. There is no doubt this first step provides a strong foundation for what will hopefully be seen as a highly prolific community of research in the years to come.

– WILLIAM SASTOQUE

*“Change will not come if we wait for  
some other person or some other time.  
We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.  
We are the change that we seek.”*

–BARACK OBAMA



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*Inglés y mucho más!*

