Communicative competence in English the digital age, an approach from upper secondary education

La competencia comunicativa en inglés en la era digital, un enfoque desde la educación media superior

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Abstract

This paper presents a theoretical and conceptual review of communicative competence in teaching English as a second language, analyzed within the framework of the Technological, Baccalaureate programs of the General Directorate of Agricultural and Marine Science Technology (DGETAyCM). To this end, an analysis was conducted using databases, specialized journals, and websites. The methodological strategy employed was action research, with three action loops conducted with fifth-semester students of the Office Automation Technician program. The development of communicative competence in these students was studied using various teaching strategies supported by digital tools. The study concludes that communication is an essential tool in the development of every individual, in which technology plays a crucial role, requiring the possession of the necessary skills for both oral and written communication.

Keywords: Communicative competence, English, digital tools, Technological Baccalaureate, Upper Secondary Level.

1. Introduction

In the globalized and highly connected world in which we live, proficiency in the English language has become an essential skill for the personal, academic, and professional development of individuals. In the context of Upper Secondary Education, learning this language acquires significant relevance, as it prepares students to face the challenges of a competitive environment. However, to achieve true mastery of English, it is essential to focus on developing communicative competence, centered on the ability to use the language effectively and appropriately in real communication situations.

This research work aims to explore and analyze the role that digital tools through the internet play in the development of communicative competence in English at the upper secondary level. Through a multidisciplinary approach, this research analyzes the development of communicative competence in the English language, supported by digital tools, examining previous studies, academic research, and pedagogical experiences related to the use of technology in language teaching, in order to identify good practices and effective strategies.

1. Problem Statement

The study stems from the need to respond to the transformations that education is undergoing in the digital age, especially in foreign language learning. At the upper secondary level, English teaching faces the challenge of adapting to the communication and knowledge dynamics of the 21st century, characterized by constant access to information. In this context, the proposal to develop communicative competence in English through the use of digital tools arises, with the purpose of strengthening the linguistic and communicative skills of students through more dynamic, flexible, and interactive learning environments.

Traditional English language teaching, historically centered on the transmission of grammatical rules and vocabulary memorization, has shown limitations in meeting current demands. Globalization, the digitalization of knowledge, and the growing need for intercultural communication now seek not only understanding of the linguistic system, but also the development of social, cognitive, and technological skills that allow effective interaction in real and virtual environments. For this reason, it draws on the competency-based approach promoted by international organizations such as UNESCO and the OECD, which proposes that learning should go beyond the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, orienting itself toward the development of transferable capabilities that allow students to act effectively in different contexts.

Regarding the research objectives, the general purpose was established as strengthening communicative competence in English among upper secondary level students through the use of digital tools via the Internet; the specific objectives were oriented toward designing and implementing didactic strategies that integrated technological

resources, analyzing their impact on learning, and evaluating the effectiveness of said strategies in the development of communicative skills.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of the research is based on constructivist principles of learning, particularly the contributions of Vygotsky, Piaget, and Ausubel. Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the importance of social interaction and language as mediators of cognitive development, which coincides with the role that digital tools play as mediators of collaborative learning in virtual environments. Piaget (1970) highlights the active construction of knowledge through experience, while Ausubel (1963) emphasizes the relevance of meaningful learning, understood as the integration of new knowledge into prior structures of comprehension. These perspectives are complemented by the sociocultural approach to learning, which recognizes the influence of context and interaction in the acquisition of communicative competences.

The digital environment becomes a sociocognitive space where students interact, applying the language in real or simulated situations. Therefore, the communicative teaching model, articulated with the integration of ICT through pedagogical models such as

TPACK (Technological Pedagogical

Content Knowledge) by Mishra and Koehler (2006), which underscores the need to balance three types of knowledge: technological, pedagogical, and disciplinary; the teacher's effectiveness in digital environments depends on their ability to combine these three domains in a coherent and contextualized manner. Additionally, the ASSURE model (Heinich et al., 1996), being fundamental because it is widely used in instructional design, proposes a sequence of steps for planning teaching with technology.

3. Methodology

The research was based on the qualitative approach, characterized by its flexibility, openness, and emphasis on deep understanding of phenomena, and on the action research method, due to its suitability for studying educational phenomena from the perspective of reflection, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

In this study, the method was applied through three intervention loops, where the initial situation was diagnosed, didactic strategies supported by ICT were implemented, and the results were reflected upon to adjust subsequent actions. This process made it possible to strengthen the communicative competence of the students and improve the integration of digital tools in English teaching.

The study subjects were the 17 students of group 5°A of the Office Automation Technician program at CBTa No. 285, who were enrolled in the English V course. They were selected considering their age, level of language proficiency, and familiarity with digital tools; a coding system was developed to preserve confidentiality, based on their list number, gender, and age.

The pedagogical intervention was structured in three loops or action research cycles, each composed of the phases of planning, action, observation, and reflection.

In all cases, the principles of the ASSURE model were applied: analyze the learner, state objectives, select resources and methods, utilize materials, require learner participation, evaluate learning and the process. Platforms such as Moodle and Zoom were used, combined with constant communication via WhatsApp. The incorporation of Duolingo supported autonomous practice of vocabulary and pronunciation.

4. Results

The action research process developed in the study on the development of communicative competence in English through the use of digital tools at the upper secondary level had the purpose of strengthening the linguistic skills of students through innovative strategies supported by ICT. Using the action research methodology, articulated with the ASSURE model, made it possible to design, implement, observe, and reflect on student-centered pedagogical strategies, which provided a flexible structure for integrating digital resources.

The analysis of the results obtained in the three action research loops showed gradual progress in the students' linguistic skills, as well as an improvement in their willingness to use digital tools. A notable increase was observed in their confidence to communicate in English, both orally and in writing, and a greater understanding of grammatical structures. Additionally, collaboration, self-learning, and responsible use of technology competencies were strengthened.

The ASSURE model proved to be an effective methodological framework, as it allowed the integration of ICT in a planned and reflective manner. The logical sequence of the model facilitated the coherent selection and application of digital resources, as well as constant evaluation of progress. Likewise, the flexibility of the approach allowed real-time adjustments according to the group's needs and feedback. In turn, students assumed a more active, reflective, and critical stance, participating in the construction of their own learning through collaborative digital environments.

5. Conclusions

It is possible to highlight the effectiveness of digital strategies in English teaching. The use of technological resources allowed students to develop the four communicative skills in an integrated manner, fostering meaningful and contextualized learning. Likewise, the flexibility of ICT enabled the personalization of activities and adaptation to the different learning styles present in the classroom, demonstrating that it is not a merely technical process, but essentially pedagogical. It was also identified that the implementation of digital tools contributes to equity and educational inclusion, provided there is sufficient access to technological resources and connectivity.

Therefore, the importance of institutional policies aimed at reducing digital gaps and

promoting equitable access to technology-mediated education is raised.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained, various recommendations are proposed to optimize the integration of ICT in English teaching. First, it is suggested to strengthen teacher training programs in the pedagogical use of technology, covering not only technical aspects, but also didactic and assessment strategies. In the same way, the development of comprehensive assessment systems that reflect communicative skills in digital environments is proposed. Similarly, the importance of promoting collaborative learning through interaction in networks and virtual communities, which stimulate cooperation, cultural exchange, and the joint construction of knowledge, is highlighted.

Finally, it is proposed to strengthen the institutional culture around the use of ICT. This implies having adequate infrastructure, technical support staff, clear policies for technological updating, and academic management oriented toward innovation; the creation of multimedia resource centers, teacher accompaniment programs, and spaces for pedagogical experimentation will favor the consolidation of a sustainable digital educational ecosystem. In this way, the English teaching-learning process is projected as a space for continuous transformation, where technology becomes a bridge toward global communication, critical thinking, and the construction of sustainable learning communities.

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