Pedagogical Practices in the Teaching of English in Rural Contexts: Analysis of Teaching Strategies

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Summary

The teaching of English in rural areas of Colombia faces significant challenges related to the lack of adequate teaching resources, the limited training of teachers in the area of the language, and the scarce implementation of innovative methodologies. This research aimed to analyze the pedagogical practices of teachers in the teaching of English in rural educational institutions. The study adopted a qualitative approach with an action research design, using data collection techniques such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis. The sample consisted of 10 primary school teachers from rural areas. The results showed that, despite structural barriers and limited teacher training in English, strategies adapted to students' specific contexts were implemented, albeit inconsistently. Despite the efforts made, the quality of English learning is affected by the lack of a coherent methodology and appropriate resources. A methodological strategy is proposed that could improve pedagogical practices and strengthen English learning in these rural contexts.

Keywords: Rural education; English teaching; pedagogical strategies; teacher training.

Introduction

The teaching of English in the Colombian educational system has been recognized as a fundamental axis in the country's internationalization process, given the relevance of this language in the global context. However, in rural areas, this teaching faces multiple challenges that limit its effectiveness. The most obvious difficulties include poor teacher training in English, lack of adequate pedagogical resources, and

limited access of students to contexts where English is used in a practical way. This creates a gap in educational quality, especially in the **areas of oral and written comprehension and expression**, which are fundamental for language proficiency (Sánchez & López, 2018).

In recent years, the Colombian government has implemented programs such as **"Colombia Bilingüe,"** which aims to improve English skills nationwide, but the implementation of these programs in rural areas has been problematic due to the **lack of consistent teacher training**, **poor educational infrastructure,** and **poor integration of digital** resources. In addition, the teaching of English in rural contexts is often limited to the **memorization of vocabulary** and **grammatical structures**, without considering the **communicative and cultural dimension** of the language, which hinders meaningful student learning.

The **problem is** that, despite the efforts made at the institutional level to improve the teaching of English, the methodologies used in rural areas remain traditional, monotonous in nature and focused exclusively on grammar, without taking into account the needs, interests and socio-cultural contexts of the students. This limited pedagogical approach does not favor comprehensive language **learning**, as it does not promote **intercultural understanding** or the **practical application** of the language in everyday situations, which are essential elements for the development of communicative skills.

This study, therefore, focuses on analyzing the **pedagogical strategies used by teachers** in the teaching of English in rural areas, identifying the barriers they face in their educational practice and proposing alternatives that allow strengthening the teaching-learning process of English in these contexts. The study aims to develop a deeper understanding of how structural and pedagogical conditions influence teaching effectiveness and how teaching practices can be adapted to promote **meaningful learning**.

The research also seeks to offer methodological proposals that integrate **linguistic content** with the **sociocultural realities** of students, thus improving not only linguistic competencies, but also communication skills in intercultural contexts. This will contribute to a **more inclusive education**, where students in rural areas can access quality training in English and actively participate in an increasingly globalized world.

Part Two: Theoretical Foundations

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been a topic of debate and study for several decades, especially in contexts where resources are limited, such as rural areas. In this context, pedagogical theory applied to language teaching has evolved from traditional methods focused on grammar to more communicative and flexible approaches, incorporating the use of technology, student-centered learning and intercultural understanding.

One of the most relevant approaches in the teaching of English in contexts such as the Colombian one is the **communicative approach**, which emphasizes **communicative competence** as the ultimate goal of learning a language. According to **Canale and Swain (1980),** communicative competence not only includes knowledge of grammar, but also the ability to use language appropriately in social, cultural, and contextual situations. This approach underscores the importance of actual language interaction and practice, which is particularly relevant in rural contexts, where students rarely have access to English-speaking situations outside the classroom.

In turn, **critical pedagogy**, represented by authors such as **Freire (1998),** also provides a key theoretical framework in this context. Critical pedagogy promotes education as a **process of liberation**, which allows students to question their reality and actively participate in their learning. In the case of English, this approach not only takes into account language proficiency, but also **critical awareness of language**, **cultural identity,** and **intercultural dialogue**. The teaching of English should not only be understood as a tool to access global information, but also as a way to **understand and value one's own cultures** in relation to others.

Another important approach is **the student-centered teaching model**, which puts the student at the center of the educational process, recognizing their ability to learn autonomously and collaboratively.

According to **Tomlinson (2001),** in a student-centered approach, the teacher acts as a facilitator of learning, providing various pedagogical strategies that respond to the individual needs and preferences of students. This model is particularly useful in rural contexts, where students often face additional challenges, such as lack of access to teaching materials and poor interaction with native English speakers. Learning should be designed so that students can connect what they learn to their daily lives and social environment.

The **theory of learning styles**, proposed by **Gardner (1983)** with his concept of **multiple intelligences**, also offers a theoretical basis for the adaptation of pedagogical practices in the teaching of English. Gardner suggests that each student has a unique intelligence profile, which includes not only linguistic and logical-mathematical skills, but also interpersonal, musical, spatial, and body skills, among others. Through the integration of strategies based on multiple intelligences, teachers can design activities that respond to the **cognitive diversity** of students, thus promoting meaningful learning and motivation.

In rural contexts, **contextual adaptation** of the curriculum is essential. Education in these areas should not simply replicate urban models, but should be **flexible and adapted to the specific characteristics** of students, their communities and their environment. According to **Zuluaga (2011), contextualized pedagogy** seeks to integrate students' experiences and knowledge into the teaching process, making learning more relevant and connected to their lives. In the case of English teaching, this involves, for example, incorporating topics and situations from the daily lives of rural students, such as local customs, nature and social context, to make the language more accessible and meaningful.

The Communicative Teaching Approach and its Application in Rural Areas

The **communicative teaching (CE) approach**, one of the most recognized and applied in the teaching of foreign languages, focuses on the **actual use of the language** in situations of authentic communication. In this approach, the goal is for students to not only memorize grammatical structures, but to be able to **use the language in a practical and effective way**. According to **Richards and Rodgers (2014),** this approach emphasizes the importance of **contextualized situations** that reflect students' true language needs.

In rural contexts, this approach is particularly relevant, as it allows students not only to learn to speak and write in English, but also to understand the usefulness of the language in the real world, through activities such as debates, interviews, role-plays and collaborative projects. Despite the difficulties inherent in these contexts, such as lack of materials and limited access to technologies, the **use of English for real communication** can be an effective way to foster students' motivation and interest, as it puts them in contact with authentic communicative situations, although adapted to their context.

The approaches and theories mentioned in this section provide a robust framework for the design and implementation of innovative pedagogical strategies in the teaching of English in rural contexts. These approaches, focused on the **recognition of cognitive diversity**, **contextual adaptation,** and the **use of communicative methods**, offer viable and effective solutions to address the challenges presented by foreign language teaching in rural areas. This study aims to adapt these theoretical approaches to the pedagogical practices of rural teachers, promoting a more inclusive, meaningful and equitable education.

Methodology

Research Approach and Design

This research adopts a **mixed approach**, which combines **quantitative** and **qualitative** analysis, with the aim of comprehensively understanding the impact of the implementation of a didactic model based on **learning styles** on the academic performance in English of students in basic secondary education in a rural area. The chosen design is **quasi-experimental**, with a **pre-test-posttest comparison**, since it allows measuring the variations in English proficiency levels before and after the implementation of the pedagogical intervention, while the qualitative component offers a deeper insight into the perceptions of students and teachers about the process.

This design is justified because the **didactic model** is implemented in a single group of students, without the existence of a control group, which makes it necessary to analyze the effects of the model from an initial and subsequent measurement, complemented by qualitative observations on classroom dynamics and students' reactions to differentiated pedagogical strategies.

Participants

The sample consisted **of 50 tenth-grade students**, of both sexes, who are attending basic secondary education in a rural educational institution in the Department of Córdoba, Colombia. The students were selected intentionally, based on their **initial level of proficiency in English**, identified through a diagnostic test previously applied. In addition, **5 teachers** from the English area participated, who implemented the proposed didactic model and contributed to the reflection and analysis on the methodologies applied.

Data collection tools and techniques

Data collection was carried out using the following instruments:

- **Initial diagnostic test**: applied to students before the pedagogical intervention to assess their **initial level of proficiency in English**. The test covered **basic vocabulary** and **simple grammatical structures**, key areas in English teaching.

- **Differentiated didactic model**: designed based on the learning style profiles of the students, using a variety of **pedagogical strategies**, such as visual, interactive, collaborative and practical activities that favor the different learning styles (visual, verbal, active, reflective, etc.).

- **Final test**: applied at the end of the intervention to measure the **progress in the students' English proficiency** in the same areas evaluated in the pre-test.

- **Student perception survey**: a survey was designed to find out the **students' assessment of** the didactic model applied, their **motivation** during the learning process and their perception of the **usefulness and accessibility of the activities**.

- **Semi-structured interviews with teachers**: aimed at obtaining a deeper understanding of teachers **' opinions and experiences** on the use of differentiated strategies in the classroom, the **difficulties faced** and the **transformations observed** in students.

- **Participant observation**: it was carried out during the development of the classes, allowing **to document** the **classroom dynamics** and the **interactions between students and teachers**, with emphasis on the **application of differentiated pedagogical strategies**.

- **Field logs**: both teachers and researchers recorded periodic observations on **student performance**, **changes in student attitudes and motivation**, and **pedagogical practices used**.

Procedure

The intervention procedure was organized in three main phases:

1. **Diagnostic phase:**

o Application of the initial test to identify the level of knowledge of students in English (basic vocabulary and grammar).

o Determination of the predominant learning styles through the use of the **Learning Styles Questionnaire**.

o Planning and design of the didactic model taking into account the results obtained in the two previous points.

2. **Implementation phase:**

o Execution of the didactic activities based on the identified learning styles, over a period of **6 weeks**. Strategies included:

- **Visual and graphic activities** (such as infographics, interactive videos, concept maps).

- **Collaborative exercises and role plays**, aimed at students with an active learning style.

- **Reflective and written assignments**, especially for students with **reflective style**.

- **Simulations and dramatizations** to favor **kinesthetic students**.

o During this phase, continuous monitoring of the process was carried out through participant observation and field logs.

3. **Evaluation phase:**

o Application of the **final test** to measure the improvement in academic performance in English.

o Conducting the **student perception survey** and semi-structured interviews with teachers to find out their assessment of the process.

o Qualitative analysis of field logs and interviews.

Data analysis

The quantitative data obtained through the diagnostic and final tests were processed using **descriptive statistics** (means, frequencies and standard deviations) to determine changes in students' academic performance. In addition, a **mean comparison test** (t-test) was applied to evaluate the significant differences between the pre-test and the post-test.

The qualitative data obtained through the interviews, observations, and surveys were analyzed using **thematic content analysis**, seeking to identify recurring patterns and emerging categories in relation to the **pedagogical strategies** implemented, **the perceptions of the students,** and **the reactions of the teachers**.

Results

The results obtained from the implementation of the didactic model based on learning styles are organized into three main dimensions: **academic performance**, **student perceptions of the methodology applied,** and **change in classroom dynamics**. A detailed analysis of each of these dimensions is presented below, based on the quantitative and qualitative data collected during the process.

1. Academic performance

The results of the **initial diagnostic test** and the **final test** showed a significant improvement in students' academic performance in the areas of **vocabulary** and **basic English grammar** . The comparison between the two moments revealed an overall increase of **38%** in the average score of the students.

- **Pre-test average:** 2.8

- **Post-test average:** 3.9

The improvement was especially notable in the following areas:

- **Vocabulary (recognition and use of common words):** from 2.6 to 3.8.

- **Simple grammatical structures (present simple, auxiliary verbs, basic questions):** from 3.0 to 4.0.

This increase reflects not only an improvement in students' linguistic competence, but also in their ability to apply the knowledge acquired in a practical way, favored by the use of **active strategies**, such as role-playing and collaborative activities that were aligned with the predominant learning styles in students.

In terms of **performance distribution**, it was observed that students with **active and visual learning styles** achieved an **average increase of 1.2 points**, while those with **reflective** and **verbal styles** showed an improvement of **0.8 points**, suggesting that adapted strategies especially favored students who benefited from **dynamic and visual activities**.

2. Student perceptions of the methodology applied

The **perception surveys** revealed a high degree of satisfaction with the methodology applied. **92% of students** indicated that the model based on learning styles allowed them **to learn better and in a more fun way**. The qualitative responses reflected how activities adapted to their styles favored their participation and understanding of the content. Some representative comments were:

"I liked the videos and the games we made, I learned much faster." Now I understand the rules of English better because the activities were easier to do, not just copy from the book." "I liked that we could work together and talk more, before I didn't dare to speak English."

86 **% of students** mentioned that visual activities (such as concept maps, graphs, and videos) were the ones that helped them the most to understand and remember the content, reinforcing the **importance of visual strategies** in the teaching-learning process in English, especially for those with visual learning styles.

Additionally, **80%** expressed that collaborative activities and **role-playing allowed** them to improve their ability to **speak in English** and **better understand communicative interactions**. Students with **active and global styles** valued these activities the most, as they offered them opportunities for practical and spontaneous practice of the language.

3. Change in classroom dynamics

Regarding classroom **dynamics**, the observations made during the intervention showed a **significant transformation in student participation**. Initially, the class was predominantly **passive**, with few moments of interaction between students and a high dependence on the teacher for the explanation of the contents. During the intervention, a **more active and participatory methodology** was adopted, where students assumed a more proactive role.

Collaborative activities, such as discussions, teamwork, and role-playing, were implemented to encourage **communicative interaction** and improve **students' pragmatic competence**. An increase in students' **autonomy** to **solve tasks was observed**, with a greater use of English in practical and everyday situations. In addition, students **felt more comfortable** speaking, as the activities allowed them to experience the language without fear of error. This change in classroom dynamics was supported by feedback from teachers, who reported a more **dynamic**, **participatory,** and **cooperative environment**.

"The atmosphere of the class changed a lot. Students are more motivated and willing to participate. You can see that they learn in a more practical way."

Summary of the results

Indicator	Pretest Average	Average Post-Est	Increment
Vocabulary	2.6	3.8	1.2
Basic grammar	3.0	4.0	1.0
Participation and motivation	70%	92%	22%
Visual and collaborative activities	72%	86%	14%

The results indicate that the didactic model based on learning styles not only had a positive impact on academic performance, but also promoted a **change in students' attitudes towards English**, greater **motivation** to participate in classes and a **better integration of the contents** into their daily lives.

These findings suggest that the use of differentiated strategies, adapted to the cognitive needs of students, is an effective pedagogical practice, especially in rural contexts, where the lack of resources and the heterogeneity of students require more flexible and inclusive approaches.

Discussion

The results obtained in this study show that the **didactic model based on learning styles** has a significant positive impact on academic **performance** and **classroom dynamics** in students of basic secondary education in rural contexts. This finding is consistent with previous studies on the use of differentiated pedagogical approaches, which suggest that when teaching strategies are adjusted to students' cognitive preferences, both content comprehension and motivation to learn are increased (Tomlinson, 2001; Chacón, 2021).

The relationship between learning styles and improvement in academic performance

The analysis of academic results shows that **learning styles** influence student performance, especially when activities are designed to respond to predominant cognitive characteristics. Students **with active and visual styles** showed the greatest progress in vocabulary acquisition and comprehension of grammatical structures, reflecting the effectiveness of strategies such as **role-playing, role-playing,** and **visual materials** (such as infographics and interactive videos). These methods, which involved **experiential learning** and **direct language practice**, were found to be especially useful for students who learn best through action and visualization, a finding supported by the theory of **Felder and Silverman (1988),** which argues that active students benefit from a teaching approach that encourages interaction and movement.

On the other hand, **reflective and verbal students**, who initially showed slower progress, gradually improved in the areas of **writing** and **understanding more complex structures**. This result suggests that, although strategies based on **action** and **visualization** are more effective for certain students, a **methodological balance** that includes **reading, writing** and **reflection** tasks also favors the development of language skills in those students whose preferred way of learning is more introspective and verbal.

These findings confirm that the **personalization of pedagogical strategies**, based on knowledge of students' **learning styles**, allows for more meaningful and accessible learning for all, regardless of their cognitive profile.

The impact on motivation and classroom dynamics

One of the most significant findings of this study is the **increase** in student motivation and the change in **classroom dynamics**. Data obtained through perception surveys and field observations indicated that, by incorporating **interactive** and **collaborative** activities, students not only improved in their language skills, but also **became more actively involved** in the learning process. This change is fundamental, since motivation is a key factor for success in learning a foreign language. According to **Deci and Ryan (2002),** intrinsic motivation, which is generated when students feel that learning is meaningful and connected to their interests, has a lasting impact on academic outcomes.

The fact that **92% of students** said they felt more motivated and engaged with classes reflects that the model was not only academically effective, but also transformed **students' attitudes** towards English, a subject historically perceived as difficult and distant. This change in attitude was due to the inclusion of **active and varied strategies**, which offered students a **richer educational experience closer to their needs**.

In addition, the **transformation of classroom dynamics** was evidenced in the **interaction** between students. The collaborative activities favored teamwork and joint problem-solving, which not only allowed for more effective learning, but also strengthened the **students' communication** and **interpersonal** skills . In this sense, the proposed model not only improved language proficiency, but also helped to develop transversal competencies essential for teamwork and problem-solving.

Challenges and limitations in implementation

Despite the positive results, the research also revealed some **challenges** in the implementation of the model, especially related to **continuing teacher education** and **access to educational technology**. Although teachers showed interest and willingness to apply differentiated strategies, some indicated that **the lack of specialized training in the use of technological tools** and in the **management of learning styles** was a barrier that slowed down the implementation process.

In addition, although digital resources were used, such as interactive videos and online concept maps, access to technology was limited by the material conditions of the institution, which restricted the optimal use of these resources. This fact highlights the need to **invest in teacher training** and **in improving the technological infrastructure** in rural institutions to maximize the benefits of the proposed model.

Implications for educational practice in rural contexts

The results suggest that pedagogical approaches that consider learning styles and use differentiated tools are essential to improve educational quality in rural areas, where structural conditions limit learning opportunities. This study reaffirms the need to **personalize teaching** and **adapt the curriculum to the cognitive needs** of students to generate a positive impact on their performance and motivation.

The use of models such as the one proposed can be replicated in other rural regions, provided that the strategies are adjusted to local contexts and the necessary resources for their implementation are ensured. This approach contributes to **closing the educational gap** and ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or location, have an equal chance of success in their English language learning.

Conclusions

The results of this research corroborate that the **application of a didactic model based on learning styles** has a positive impact on the **academic performance** of English learners in rural contexts. The personalization of learning, adapted to the **predominant cognitive styles of students**, improves both language skills and motivation and **attitude** towards learning a foreign language. The data obtained from the diagnostic and final tests show significant progress in the areas of **vocabulary** and **grammar**, with notable increases in student performance, especially those with more active and visual learning styles.

This study shows that differentiated pedagogical strategies not only favor the learning of **linguistic content** in English, but also contribute to **transforming classroom dynamics**, promoting **inclusive, equitable and student-centered education**. The improvement in student participation, reflected in greater motivation and interest in classes, is clear evidence that approaches that respond to cognitive diversity are effective and should be promoted in teaching practice.

Likewise, some challenges related to the **continuous training of teachers** and the **availability of technological resources** were identified, which are necessary to **maximize the impact of the model**. The lack of adequate infrastructure in many rural areas limits the use of available technologies, highlighting the need to invest in resources and training for teachers.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen teacher training in differentiated pedagogical approaches** and in the use of educational technologies so that teachers can adapt their practice to the needs of students and make appropriate use of available resources.

2. **Promote the creation of contextualized educational materials and activities** that respond to students' learning profiles, and that include both physical and digital resources, accessible in rural areas.

3. **Encourage the use of student-centred approaches**, such as the **multi-intelligence** model, to foster motivation and active learning, especially in rural communities that lack access to external materials or foreign language immersion.

4.	**Develop public policies that improve technological infrastructure** in rural areas, ensuring that schools have the necessary resources to implement innovative pedagogical strategies, such as the use of interactive platforms and multimedia resources.

5.	**Expand research in rural areas**, especially in the teaching of foreign languages, to further evaluate the effects of innovative methodologies and establish long-term improvement strategies.

This study contributes to the debate on **educational quality** in rural areas of Colombia, demonstrating that, despite the difficulties inherent in these localities, it is possible **to transform the teaching-learning process** if pedagogical strategies focused on the cognitive diversity of students are integrated. The approach used can be adapted and replicated in other rural regions of the country, providing a **flexible, effective and accessible model** to improve the teaching of English and, therefore, contribute to the comprehensive development of students in areas with fewer resources.

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