



Innovation in English Teaching: Application of Exelearning and Task-Based Learning to Improve Reading Comprehension

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Summary

The incorporation of digital technologies in education has transformed traditional approaches to teaching, especially in the field of languages. In this context, task-based learning (TBL) has established itself as an effective methodology to improve communicative skills, particularly in reading comprehension in English. This study investigated the impact of Exelearning, an open-source digital platform, as a tool to promote English reading ability in elementary school students in a rural educational institution in Colombia. The qualitative approach and the action research methodology allowed to carry out a pedagogical intervention focused on the creation of interactive didactic sequences through Exelearning, using reading activities designed to stimulate autonomous and collaborative learning. The results indicated that, despite the difficulties of technological infrastructure, the use of Exelearning managed to motivate students, improving their reading comprehension and vocabulary in English. Students actively participated in the interactive tasks and expressed an increased interest in the reading activities. The conclusions underline the need to continue incorporating educational technologies and active methodologies in the classroom, especially in rural contexts, to improve the teaching-learning processes of foreign languages.

Keywords: Exelearning, task-based learning, ICT, reading comprehension, English, rural education.

Introduction

The teaching of foreign languages, and especially English, faces multiple challenges in rural areas of Colombia, where structural and material conditions are often more limited than in urban contexts. In many cases, students have few opportunities to interact with the language outside of the classroom, which limits their exposure and affects their ability to develop communicative competencies, particularly in key areas such as reading comprehension. This gap in access to adequate educational resources and poor training in innovative methodologies are some of the factors that contribute to low academic performance in the area of foreign languages.

Public policies, such as the "Colombia Bilingüe" program, have tried to close this gap by focusing on teacher training and the diversification of pedagogical methodologies, but the results have not been uniform, especially in rural areas. Despite the importance of English as a tool for accessing new job and academic opportunities, rural educational institutions continue to face technological difficulties and a lack of educational resources, which limits the effective implementation of the strategies proposed by the Ministry of National Education.

Against this backdrop, the use of digital technologies is presented as a possible solution to improve access to teaching resources and diversify pedagogical approaches. The Exelearning platform, a free open-source tool, offers an interesting alternative for creating interactive and personalized learning materials. This platform allows teachers to design didactic sequences and student-centered reading activities, using multimedia resources that encourage more dynamic and autonomous learning. In this sense, the use of Exelearning in combination with a task-based approach (TBL) could represent a significant innovation in the teaching of English in rural contexts.

The objective of this study is to investigate the impact of the Exelearning platform on the reading comprehension in English of students of basic secondary education in a rural educational institution. Task-based learning will be the central methodology, as this methodology has been shown to promote motivation, autonomy and collaboration among students, which is crucial to improve performance in learning a second language.

The need to improve English language skills in rural Colombia has been widely recognized. However, the implementation of new methodologies in these regions remains a challenge due to contextual conditions, such as lack of technological resources, teacher training, and low exposure to English outside the classroom. This study seeks to contribute to the transformation of pedagogical practices in the area of English through the implementation of digital tools such as Exelearning, which can increase access to educational resources and offer more interactive and personalized learning experiences.

Investigating the use of Exelearning in a rural educational institution, this study provides an analysis of how educational technology can help overcome the barriers rural students face in learning a second language. Through this intervention, students are expected to improve their reading skills in English, become more motivated in their learning and develop greater autonomy in their educational process.

Introduction

Context and Problem Statement

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Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to evaluate the impact of the Exelearning platform on the development of reading skills in English in tenth and eleventh grade students of a rural educational institution. To this end, it is proposed:

1. Design and apply an interactive didactic sequence in Exelearning focused on reading comprehension activities.
2. To evaluate the progress in students' reading performance before and after the intervention through the application of diagnostic and final tests.
3. Analyze students' perceptions of the use of Exelearning and task-based methodology through surveys and interviews.

Justification

The need to improve English language skills in rural Colombia has been widely recognized. However, the implementation of new methodologies in these regions remains a challenge due to contextual conditions, such as lack of technological resources, teacher training, and low exposure to English outside the classroom. This study seeks to contribute to the transformation of pedagogical practices in the area of English through the implementation of digital tools such as Exelearning, which can increase access to educational resources and offer more interactive and personalized learning experiences.

Investigating the use of Exelearning in a rural educational institution, this study provides an analysis of how educational technology can help overcome the barriers rural students face in learning a second language. Through this intervention, students are expected to improve their reading skills in English, become more motivated in their learning and develop greater autonomy in their educational process.

Theoretical foundation

The incorporation of educational technologies in the school environment has proven to be a key factor in improving academic performance in various areas, including the teaching of foreign languages. In this sense, platforms such as Exelearning and web-based tools have revolutionized the way teachers can present content, promote active student participation and facilitate their autonomous learning. The theoretical foundations that underpin the use of Exelearning and the Task-Based Learning (TBL) methodology in teaching reading comprehension in English are presented below.

Educational Technology and English Learning

The use of educational technology in the teaching of English has been widely studied, and various studies highlight that technology-assisted learning offers students opportunities to access content that would not be available in a traditional format. According to Warschauer and Kern (2000), digital platforms allow greater interaction with the language and the possibility of practicing language skills (reading, writing, listening) in a more flexible and personalized way. This type of technology

encourages autonomous learning, by allowing students to progress at their own pace and get immediate feedback on their performance.

In particular, the use of Exelearning as a teaching platform allows the creation of interactive materials, including texts, comprehension exercises, quizzes and collaborative tasks. This makes it easier for students to actively participate in their learning process, helping them to apply what they have learned in a practical way and promoting their autonomy and responsibility in the study of English. The ability to incorporate multimedia and interactive activities into the platform also helps to keep students engaged and motivated, as these elements make learning more dynamic and visual.

Task-Based Learning (TBL)

Task-based learning (TBL) is a student-centered methodology that focuses on the use of language in real contexts through tasks that simulate authentic situations. This approach was developed by Prabhu (1987) and has been widely adopted in foreign language teaching because of its emphasis on language production and problem solving. In the context of English language teaching, TBL enables students to use the language in a functional way, developing reading, speaking, writing and listening skills in practical situations.

One of the main advantages of TBL is that, by focusing on solving authentic tasks, students have the opportunity to use the language in meaningful contexts. According to Willis (1996), the learning process in TBL involves three phases:

1. Pre-task: In this phase, the topic is introduced and students are prepared for the task, which may involve activities to activate prior knowledge and learn vocabulary.
2. Homework: Students complete an actual task, such as reading an article, solving a problem, or creating a project, using the language naturally.
3. Post-task: After completing the task, students reflect on the process and content, and are provided with feedback to correct errors and improve their performance.

This approach has been highly effective in contexts where content and activities are directly related to students' real lives. In this case, the use of Exelearning as a tool to organize tasks, provide them in a structured way and track the progress of the students, is key to the success of the pedagogical intervention.

Reading comprehension in English

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in the learning of any foreign language. In English, this skill involves not only the ability to decode words, but also to interpret texts and make inferences about the information presented (Anderson & Lynch, 1988). Reading comprehension also encompasses the ability to identify main ideas, understand the meaning of words within their context, and relate the texts read to students' prior knowledge.

Using platforms like Exelearning in teaching reading comprehension allows students to interact with a variety of texts and resources, including interactive readings and comprehension exercises. These resources help students construct meaning more effectively and integrate their understanding of texts with the practical use of English in different situations. The possibility of carrying out complementary activities of reflective practice and self-evaluation also fosters the autonomy of students, allowing them to monitor their own learning and improve progressively.

Rural Education and the Use of Technologies

In rural contexts, where infrastructure constraints and access to resources are more evident, educational technologies such as Exelearning offer a viable solution to overcome some of these barriers. The use of digital tools allows students to have access to learning resources that would otherwise be out of reach, such as interactive materials, multimedia readings, and collaborative

online exercises. In addition, the use of platforms such as Exelearning encourages students' autonomy, allowing them to learn at their own pace and access content flexibly.

Rural teachers also benefit from using platforms such as Exelearning, as these tools provide them with an alternative way to organise and manage learning in the classroom. Through Exelearning, teachers can create interactive didactic sequences tailored to the needs of their students, making it easier to teach in areas where teacher training and pedagogical resources are often limited.

The theory on Exelearning and Task-Based Learning (TBL) offers a robust framework for implementing effective pedagogical strategies in English language teaching. In this study, it has been shown that the use of these digital methodologies and tools can significantly improve students' reading skills, even in rural contexts. The use of technologies such as Exelearning allows not only better reading comprehension, but also greater motivation, autonomy and participation of students in the learning process.

Methodology

Research Approach and Design

The study adopted a mixed approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, with the purpose of providing a comprehensive view on the impact of the use of Exelearning on the development of English reading comprehension of students in a rural educational institution. A quasi-experimental design was implemented, with the application of pre-test and post-test to evaluate academic performance before and after the pedagogical intervention. In addition, a qualitative analysis was included to understand the perceptions and experiences of students and teachers regarding the use of the digital platform in the classroom.

This mixed design allows exploring both the measurable results in terms of academic improvement, as well as the subjective experiences that students and teachers have in relation to the implementation of the technological tool, providing a complete vision of the impact of the intervention.

Population and sample

The sample consisted of 50 tenth-grade students from a rural educational institution located in the department of Córdoba, Colombia. The students were intentionally selected based on their level of proficiency in English, determined through a diagnostic test applied before the intervention. This selection made it possible to guarantee a sample with a diversity in English skill levels. In addition, 5 teachers from the English area participated in the study, who implemented the activities and didactic strategies using Exelearning in the classroom.

Data collection tools and techniques

To evaluate the effects of the pedagogical intervention, the following data collection instruments and techniques were used:

- Diagnostic test (pretest): This test was applied before the intervention to measure the initial level of reading comprehension in English of the students. The test included reading, vocabulary and short text comprehension activities.
- Final test (posttest): Applied at the end of the intervention, this test had the same items as the pretest, in order to evaluate the progress in reading comprehension, vocabulary and inferential skills of the students.
- Student Perception Survey: A closed and open survey that allowed to collect students' opinions on the use of Exelearning, their motivation during the learning process, and their perception of the usefulness of digital tools in their educational process.
- Semi-structured interviews with teachers: Conducted at the end of the intervention to understand the opinions and experiences of teachers regarding the use of Exelearning, the

pedagogical strategies implemented and the difficulties or advantages encountered during the process.

- Participant observation: Through direct observations in the classroom, class dynamics, interactions between students and teachers, and the use of the Exelearning platform during reading activities were recorded.
- Analysis of interactions on the platform: The activities uploaded to Exelearning, the time of interaction of the students, and the frequency of participation in the reading comprehension exercises were reviewed, in order to evaluate the commitment of the students with the proposed activities.

Procedure

1. Diagnostic phase:
 - Application of the diagnostic test to measure students' reading skills before the intervention.
 - Initial data collection through the perception survey to learn about students' views on English teaching and educational technology in general.
2. Intervention phase:
 - Over an eight-week period, students participated in reading comprehension activities through Exelearning, which included interactive readings, vocabulary exercises, collaborative tasks, and online assessments.
 - Students received immediate feedback on their answers, allowing them to correct errors and reinforce their learning.
 - During this phase, teachers used the platform to manage activities, follow up, and provide personalized feedback.
3. Evaluation phase:
 - Application of the final test (posttest) to measure progress in reading comprehension.
 - Conducting interviews with teachers and analyzing the responses in perception surveys to obtain a qualitative evaluation of the use of Exelearning.
 - Analysis of students' interactions with activities on the platform, observing their level of engagement, their participation in tasks, and the quality of their work.

Data analysis

Quantitative data from the diagnostic and final tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics, calculating means, standard deviations, and performing a t-test for paired samples to compare the differences between pre-test and post-test scores. This analysis made it possible to assess whether there were significant differences in students' performance in reading comprehension.

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews and perception surveys were processed through thematic content analysis. Recurrent patterns were identified in the responses, which were grouped into key categories related to motivation, experience with Exelearning, students' perception of the activities, and teachers' opinions about the methodology used.

Results

The results obtained in this study are analyzed in three dimensions: students' academic performance in reading comprehension of English, student perceptions about the use of Exelearning and the impact on classroom dynamics. A detailed analysis of each of these dimensions is presented below.

1. Academic Performance

The analysis of the scores of the diagnostic test (pretest) and the final test (posttest) showed a significant increase in the academic performance of the students. The results were as follows:

- Pre-test average: 2.9 out of 5

- Post-test average: 4.1 out of 5
- Increase in academic performance: 1.2 points (approximately 41% improvement).

The increase was especially notable in the following areas:

- Vocabulary: from 2.7 to 4.0 (improvement of 1.3 points).
- Comprehension of short texts: from 2.8 to 4.2 (improvement of 1.4 points).
- Inference ability: from 2.9 to 4.1 (1.2 point improvement).

The students showed an overall improvement in reading comprehension thanks to the interactive methodology and the use of multimedia tools provided by Exelearning. Interactive activities, such as quizzes and online readings, allowed students to not only improve their vocabulary and comprehension, but also to practice inference skills and contextual application of words. Immediate feedback also played a key role in improving results, as it allowed students to correct errors as they progressed through activities.

2. Student Perceptions of the Use of Exelearning

The perception surveys revealed that students positively valued the integration of Exelearning in their learning process. 92% of students indicated that the platform allowed them to learn more dynamically and better understand English texts. Here are some representative comments:

"Exelearning made reading easier and more fun, because they gave me interactive exercises to better understand the text." I was able to watch the videos and then do the exercises. That helped me a lot to remember what I learned." I liked that the activities were not boring, but that we could do them online and at our own pace."

80% of students said they particularly enjoyed collaborative tasks, such as group projects and online discussions, which also allowed them to practice communication skills in English. The platform provided a space for students to work collaboratively, share resources, and help their peers, which contributed to a better understanding of the content.

Students also valued the feedback provided by the platform, as it allowed them to review their mistakes and adjust their learning immediately. This constant feedback fostered active learning, in which students engaged more deeply with the content and adjusted their approach according to corrections.

3. Impact on Classroom Dynamics

Classroom observations and activity logs in Exelearning showed a transformation in classroom dynamics. Prior to the intervention, English classes were predominantly teacher-centered, with few moments of active student interaction. However, during the implementation of the platform, a shift towards more participatory and collaborative classes was observed, where students worked together on solving tasks and shared their opinions in discussion forums.

In the post-intervention phase, it was observed that students felt more comfortable expressing their ideas in English, especially during interactive tasks and online discussions. The use of Exelearning provided a space for students to learn at their own pace, which increased their autonomy and responsibility in their learning. In addition, collaborative tasks allowed students to learn socially, exchanging ideas and correcting mistakes with each other.

One teacher observed:

"The platform facilitated greater interaction between students, which translated into a more dynamic classroom environment. Discussions and group work were much richer when students helped each other solve problems."

Summary of the Results

Table 1 Results of the Pre-test and Post-test Assessment in Reading Comprehension

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

The results indicate that the implementation of Exelearning in the process of teaching reading comprehension in English had a significant positive impact. The students improved markedly in terms of vocabulary, comprehension of short texts and ability to infer. In addition, they showed greater motivation and participation in activities, suggesting that the use of digital platforms can be highly effective in increasing student engagement in rural areas.

These findings underscore the importance of ICT as a valuable tool to enhance English learning, especially in rural contexts, where traditional educational resources are limited.

Discussion

The results obtained in this study on the use of Google Classroom and the Exelearning platform in the teaching of reading comprehension in English in rural contexts show a significant improvement in both academic performance and student motivation. These results not only reflect an advance in students' language skills, but also a transformation in classroom dynamics that favors collaboration, interaction, and autonomous learning.

Impact of Exelearning on academic performance

The significant increase in reading comprehension test scores (a 46% increase in the overall average) shows that the use of Exelearning effectively contributed to the improvement of students' academic performance. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have shown that the use of digital platforms allows students to have more flexible and personalized access to content, which favors a deeper understanding and better retention of knowledge (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). By incorporating interactive activities such as multimedia readings, vocabulary exercises, and comprehension quizzes, students were able to work at their own pace, receive immediate feedback, and apply knowledge more effectively. This strategy allowed students to not only improve their basic language skills, but also their ability to make inferences and understand texts in a broader context.

The use of interactive and multimedia tools in Exelearning aligns with the blended learning approach, which has proven to be effective in combining digital materials with traditional learning. This approach, as Garrison and Vaughan (2008) argue, favors dynamic, collaborative, and autonomous learning, which is particularly relevant in rural contexts, where students do not have as much exposure to English outside the classroom.

Student motivation and participation

One of the most positive aspects observed in this study is the increase in student motivation and participation, which highlights the effectiveness of innovative technology-based pedagogical strategies. 92% of students said that the platform allowed them to learn more dynamically and better understand English texts. This increase in motivation is consistent with the intrinsic motivation theories of Deci and Ryan (2002), who suggest that when students feel that they have autonomy in their learning and find the content relevant, their motivation increases, which facilitates the acquisition of new competencies.

The use of Google Classroom and Exelearning allowed students to access educational resources at any time, which increased their autonomy in the learning process. In addition, collaborative activities, such as online discussions and group assignments, promoted interaction between students, which favored a better understanding of the content and developed their communication skills in English. This aspect underscores the importance of creating socially active learning environments, where students can share ideas and learn from each other, which is particularly useful in rural areas where language access outside the classroom is limited.

Change in classroom dynamics

Another relevant finding was the change in classroom dynamics. Prior to the intervention, English classes were mostly teacher-centered, with few opportunities for interaction between students. However, after the implementation of Exelearning and Google Classroom, classes became more interactive and collaborative. Students began to take a more active role, participating in shared reading activities and group work, which favored more meaningful learning.

This type of classroom dynamic reflects the shift towards a more student-centred pedagogical model, in which student autonomy is promoted, collaboration is favoured and communication skills are developed in a more flexible and adaptable environment. Teachers, for their part, played the role of facilitators and guides, offering constant feedback and adapting the activities to the needs of the students, which promoted more personalized learning.

Challenges and limitations

Despite the positive results, the research also identified some challenges and limitations that need to be taken into account in future implementations. One of the main obstacles was limited access to technology in some students' homes, which made it difficult for some to fully participate in activities outside the classroom. While most students had access to mobile devices, internet connectivity issues affected the quality of the educational experience. This problem is particularly relevant in rural contexts, where technological infrastructure is often more limited.

Likewise, some teachers stated that, although Exelearning offered great potential, the training and adaptation time necessary to become familiar with the platform and its tools was a challenge. This highlights the need for continuous training in the use of educational technologies, especially in rural contexts where teachers may have less access to training resources.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that the use of Google Classroom and Exelearning can be highly beneficial for teaching English in rural contexts, especially in the development of reading comprehension. Digital tools have been shown to improve students' academic performance, increase their motivation, and facilitate more interactive and autonomous learning. However, the successful implementation of these tools requires overcoming certain challenges related to access to technology and teacher training. The research underscores the importance of investing in technological infrastructure, as well as ongoing training for teachers, to ensure that educational platforms can be used effectively and sustainably.

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