

Definition of an Action Plan for Learning English

Maira Bastidas¹, Juan M. Jaramillo¹, Raúl J. Martelo¹,
Lina M. Meza-Andrade² and Meredith Jimenez³

¹ INGESINFO Research Group, GIMATICA Research Group
University of Cartagena, Colombia

² Investigadores del Futuro Research Group
University of the Guajira Riohacha, Colombia

³ CRECIENDO Research Group, University of the Guajira, Riohacha, Colombia

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to define an action plan for learning the English language, at the University of La Guajira. The study was typified as non-experimental, cross-sectional and descriptive, oriented to determine the key factors and determinants that affect the learning of the English language. The key factors in the results were Attention, Interest, Reading, Ease, Hours and Number of modules, which must be included in the action plan, because these were essential for learning. It is concluded that the factors obtained (Hours interest, attention, the number of modules, Reading, Easiness) not only influence locally, but also internationally, which is why they are useful for future research.

Keywords: MICMAC, English Language, Pedagogy, Higher Education

Introduction

At present, the world is totally globalized and all people can interact regardless of where they are, which is why language learning is a great tool when it comes to progress not only on a personal level, but also in the professional and academic field. In this sense, the strategies used in the process of language learning play a transcendental role, studies have shown the importance of these strategies to make language learning more efficient and to produce a positive effect on the use of language by of the students [1]. In [2] it was shown that learning English through

the use of communication strategies is more favorable to learning than traditional approaches. In addition, it can no longer be assumed that learning English takes place only in the classroom [3]. Therefore, it must be taken into account that learning strategies are not only the result of internal mental processes of the individual, but also the social interaction during the teaching of a language [4].

On the other hand, the English language is the most studied language in the whole world, it is spoken in the five continents and its use is majority because it has been introduced in the younger levels as part of the formal education system, since each once more recognized as an international language [5]. In this sense, several authors have shown interest in finding out how students learn the English language as is the case of [6], who established learning and vocabulary strategies that Chinese university students of English used and the relationship between their strategies and the results they obtained in learning English. Similarly, [7] investigated how English language learning strategies are presented and described and how learning strategies for reading and hearing can be treated in teaching. Likewise, [8] they investigate the strategies of learning the vocabulary in English adopted by students of ethnic minorities in a university. In this sense, researchers learning strategies such as [9], [10] and [11], found that there is a positive link between the use of strategies and the results of language learning in students.

Therefore, it is clear that formulating an action plan to guide the learning of the English language will allow good results as long as it is carried out properly, because one of the most common problems in language learning is the need of an integral approach where all the variables that influence said learning are manipulated [12]. Similarly, at the University of La Guajira there is evidence of a deficiency in the learning of the English language due to factors such as interest, the methodology of the study, the number of hours dedicated to the study, among others. For this reason, the objective of this study was to define an action plan that guides students in learning so that they obtain the proper way to learn the English language. To achieve this, a technique was used that made it possible to demonstrate the key factors and determinants in which one must work to obtain the appropriate plan of action for learning.

Methodology

The present investigation was typified as non-experimental, cross-sectional and descriptive. Not experimental because studies are carried out without deliberately manipulating the variables and the phenomena are observed in their natural environment to analyze them [13]. Similarly, it is cross-sectional because the study variables are observed at a single point in time and their interaction at that time [14]. Descriptive, because it is measured, evaluated or collected information independently or jointly on the variables of the phenomenon under investigation as they occur naturally [15]. For the type of research, the design used to be non-experimental, transversal and descriptive. Transversal, because the incidence and interrelation of the variables were described and analyzed at a given moment [16].

Research instruments

At this stage, different sources of information were consulted, which served as bases for the research, and a documentary review was implemented to obtain the factors that affect the moment of learning a language. The search included electronic journals, databases and libraries and found work that detail: aspects of the English language as a discipline of higher education and the main factors that affect the teaching of it. Similarly, eight (8) expert teachers were consulted in the teaching of the English language to evaluate the degree of relationship between the different factors, for which the MICMAC technique was used.

Data analysis

For the analysis of the data, the MICMAC technique was used through the SoftProsp platform, which is a web tool developed at the University of Cartagena, which allows the monitoring of prospective studies. This technique consists in the fact that through the completion of a matrix, it allows to show the variables that are the determinants for the system and therefore, they must be taken into account in order to improve it. The variables determined in the previous phase were evaluated by the eight expert teachers, in a matrix, for which the influence exerted by one variable on another was taken into account, so that, with the consensus of the participants, it was marked in the intersecting box a number from zero (0) to four (4), which represent the following degrees of influence: no influence (0), weak influence (1), media influence (2), strong influence (3), and potential influence (4). The objective of the above was to demonstrate the variables that must be taken into account for the elaboration of the action plan.

Methodology

The literature review allowed to obtain information about the factors that affect the learning of the English language from an investigation carried out by [17]. Next in Figure 1 the variables that were entered in the MICMAC module of the SoftProsp platform are observed.

As shown in Figure 1, 15 variables identified as influential in learning the English language were obtained, which have three attributes: the number, the name and the description. The phase presented below corresponds to the matrix of influence and direct dependence, which was of dimension 15x15. Then, the experts filled the matrix of direct influence in an iterative process, whose completion was based on the level of consensus reached. In the present case, two iterations were necessary to obtain degrees of influence with general approval. Next, in Figure 2, the consented matrix is shown.

Factores		
Variables de entrada para aplicar MICMAC		
Nº	Nombre	Descripción
1	Pronunciación	La manera en que el estudiante habla una palabra o un idioma
2	Audición	La habilidad receptiva, con la que el estudiante decodifica el sistema lingüístico
3	Metodología	El estilo de aprendizaje, que utiliza el estudiante para aprender el idioma.
4	Pedagogía	Estilo de enseñanza que utiliza el docente para enseñar el idioma inglés
5	Profesores exigentes	Grado en el que el docente exige rendimiento al estudiante
6	Comprensión	Facultad del estudiante para percibir los temas y tener una idea clara de ellos
7	Atención	La manera en que el estudiante se centrarse y se concentrarse en las clases
8	Interés	Actitud motivacional del estudiante frente al aprendizaje del idioma inglés
9	Escritura	que se trata de escribir para transmitir conocimientos y compartirlos con los demás
10	Lectura	La forma en que el estudiante busca la máxima información, deteniéndose en los detalles y realice un trabajo autónomo de lectura.
11	Facilidad	Facilidad con la que el estudiante enfrenta obstáculos como: la producción de enunciados gramaticales, léxicos, sintácticos y fonológicos.
12	Horas	El número de horas que el estudiante dedica al aprendizaje del idioma inglés
13	Flexibilidad de horarios	La flexibilidad con la que se puede elegir un horario deseado
14	Componente socio-económico	Facilidad con la que el estudiante accede a clases del idioma inglés
15	Cantidad de módulos	El número de módulos que el estudiante recibe

Figure 1. Factors that affect the learning of the English language

Matriz de Influencia Directa (MID)															
Var	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1		3	0	0	0	3	3	3	0	2	3	3	0	0	0
2	3		0	0	0	3	3	3	1	0	3	3	0	0	0
3	0	0		3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
4	1	0	1		3	3	3	3	2	1	3	0	0	0	1
5	0	0	0	3		0	0	2	1	1	0	3	0	0	2
6	3	3	1	0	1		3	3	1	1	0	2	0	0	0
7	3	3	1	0	1	3		3	2	2	3	0	0	0	0
8	2	2	3	0	0	3	3		3	3	2	3	0	0	3
9	1	3	2	1	1	0	0	1		2	2	1	0	0	0
10	3	2	1	1	0	3	3	3	2		2	2	0	0	0
11	3	2	3	0	0	3	2	3	2	2		1	0	0	1
12	3	3	2	1	2	3	1	3	3	3	1		1	3	3
13	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3		2	2
14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0		3
15	2	2	0	3	1	2	1	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	

Figure 2. Matrix of influence and direct dependence (MID)

Figure 2 shows the results of the influence and direct dependency matrix, in which the influence exerted by one variable over another is observed, for example, the influence exerted by variable 1 (row) on variable 2 (column), for this case the consensus of the experts was three (3) because there is a relationship of influence between pronunciation and hearing, in this way the matrix is described. The characteristics of the MID were: 2 iterations, 98 zeros, 28 ones, 31 two, 68 three and 0 four. During the first iteration, the stability of the influence was 107% and for dependence, it was 110%, for the second iteration, the influence achieved 98% and the dependence 98%. As a result of the influence and direct dependency matrix, the direct influence and dependency plane reveals 6 key variables (7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 15) in quadrant I (link zone), 1 determinant variable (4) in quadrant II (power zone), 4 autonomous variables (3, 5, 13 and 14) in quadrant III (autonomous area), and 4 outcome variables (1, 2, 6 and 9) in quadrant IV (exit zone), as shown in Figure 3.

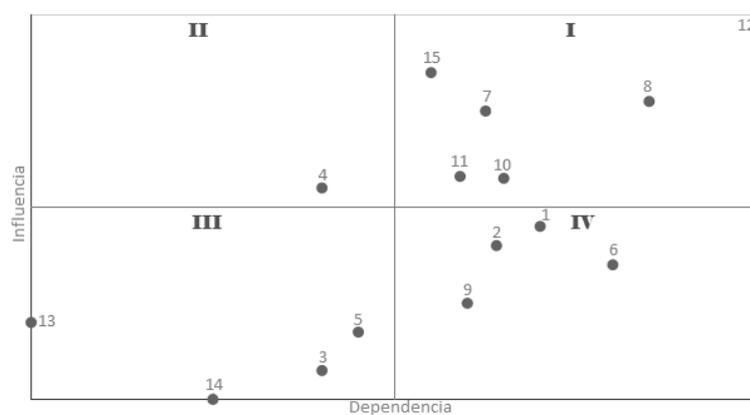


Figure 3. Plan of influence / direct dependence

To explain in detail the location of the variables in the plane of influence and direct dependence of Figure 3, based on the input variables of the MICMAC technique, the zones with their respective variables are described:

Link zone (quadrant I): in this area is the key variables, that is, those that in the future can become critical nodes for learning the English language, the results on the map so that in this area they were located six variables: 7 (Attention), 8 (Interest), 10 (Reading), 11 (Ease), 12 (Hours) and 15 (Number of modules). These results agree with what is stated in [18] who suggest that attention acts as a filter on the learning problem by amplifying a subset of environmental states while attenuating irrelevant ones, they explain that there is something similar to a two-way street between attention and learning, where attention facilitates learning. Likewise, [19] they affirm that one of the persistent problems that teachers face is that students maintain a genuine interest in continuing to learn English and use it once the exams are finished.

In the case of the reading variable, the results agree with what was stated in [20], where it was shown that study participants stated that the more they read, the more they learned vocabulary. Also the variable Ease, the results shows it as a key variable because this variable can be manipulated to improve it, these results agree with [21] where they provide two counterexamples that show how a greater learning facility does not result in a property being come back prevalent.

Power zone (quadrant II): in this zone is the determining variables, that is, the variables that are input to the system and therefore, require attention for learning the English language, the results in the plane show that variable 4 (Pedagogy) was placed in this area. These results agree with [22], for whom the role of the teacher goes beyond the pedagogical context, since it transcends the life of the students and works in the affective and social space in which they move, therefore, a good pedagogy is determinant if there is success in learning.

Autonomous zone (quadrant III): in this zone there are the variables that are autonomous, that is, they are variables that are difficult to control in the learning of the English language, the results in the plane show that in this area the variables were located. (Methodology), 5 (demanding teachers), 13 (Flexibility of schedules)

and 14 (socioeconomic component). These results are consistent, because these variables are unmanageable by the students; this is supported [23] by those who state that the objective of the learning methodology is to provide apprentices with the best available learning tools, so that they in turn can have a deep understanding, knowledge and skills relevant to the development of the topics, but they depend on the student to receive them or not.

Similarly, [24] states that the demanding teacher is one that sets the student in motion from the beginning of the course with the goal of achieving a deep and meaningful learning, however it is not in the hands of the student assigned a demanding teacher. Regarding the flexibility in the schedule, it is a variable that depends on the institution and the teacher, this is a variable that does not depend on the student. Likewise [25] established that there is a strong relationship between the socioeconomic component and the success of learning, however, this is a variable that does not depend on the learner.

Exit zone (quadrant IV): in this zone is the variables that are the result, that is, the variables that are a consequence of the way in which the remaining variables act, the results in the plane show the variables 1 (Pronunciation), 2 (Hearing), 6 (Comprehension) and 9 (Writing). These results are consistent with [26], whose findings show that the variables that are measured in the evaluation of English learning are pronunciation, writing, text comprehension and hearing.

Proposed plan of action

Taking into account the impact of the factors according to their appearance in the influence/dependency plane (Figure 3), the following action plan was designed:

- 1) Determination of needs: as a first stage of the plan, we proceed to determine which factors are the needs, insufficiencies and dissatisfactions in the learning process and students, to later act on these and provide an effective alternative to the problems in the English learning. In this case, they were selected and organized factors found in the linker region of the plane of Figure 3, in order of incidence of each, namely: Hours interest, attention, the number of modules, Reading, Easiness.
- 2) Profiling: as indicated by the topic under study, the profile for the plan is based on the skills that university students must acquire and possess in the English language. These capacities consist of those factors found in quadrant IV of the plane of influence / dependence (Figure 3).
- 3) The design of the training: based on the previous profile and the teaching autonomy, the training together with the chosen tools and methodologies revolve around the versatility and availability of these; the design and content of lessons and evaluations is based on the needs, insufficiencies and dissatisfactions. It should be noted that, in addition to the traditional tools, those of a virtual and mobile nature stand out. Through contents based on pedagogical guidelines and teaching experience, they allow to provide suitable and capable media to be at the forefront both methodologically and technologically, in other words, the trainings should be based on ICT tools accompanied by traditional material based on the needs, inadequacies and

- student dissatisfactions and learning processes, due to their versatility, availability and the level of accessibility with which these are available.
- 4) Implementation and evaluation: The tools of the previous point in the students are used, in order to obtain as a result, in the evaluations an improvement in the competences: Pronunciation, Writing, Texting and Listening. The previous competences or factors are pointed out, because they are in quadrant IV and are the direct result of adequately implementing measures to support and solve the needs, insufficiencies and dissatisfactions present in students and teaching processes.

Conclusions

The research made it possible to find, through applied techniques, key factors in the learning process of English. These factors, agreed in a large percentage with the results of other investigations, which indicates that the study was framed under real concepts and that the phenomena studied main concerns both locally and internationally. With the above, an action plan for learning the English language was created to serve as a tool for university teachers in the delivery of the language. It is concluded in the same way, that both the factors obtained and their relevance, as well as the plan formulated in this research, are suitable for the use of future studies.

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