EFL Students' Experiences Using ICT in their English Learning Processes: A Narrative Study[1]

Experiencias de los Estudiantes de Inglés en el Uso de las TIC en sus Procesos de Aprendizaje de Inglés: Un Estudio Narrativo

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a narrative analysis that looked into some EFL students' experiences related to their English learning processes and the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies). The study was carried out at a university in southern Colombia. The main objective was to understand the participants' experiences in the institutional English courses at a university while using ICT during their language learning process. The data was collected through in-depth interviews and life stories. The English students' experiences are relevant to validating a new teaching tool or strategy in a specific context. The main conclusion indicates that ICT in language teaching needs to be articulated with other appropriate tools, practices, methodologies, and approaches to achieve meaningful learning.

Keywords: English language learning; EFL students; ICT; Narratives; Experiences

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de un análisis narrativo que indagó en las experiencias de algunos estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera relacionadas con sus procesos de aprendizaje del inglés y el uso de las TIC (Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación). El estudio se realizó en una universidad del sur de Colombia. El objetivo principal era comprender las experiencias de los participantes en los cursos de inglés institucionales de una universidad mientras utilizaban las TIC durante su proceso de aprendizaje del idioma. Los datos se recogieron mediante entrevistas en profundidad y relatos de vida. Las experiencias de los estudiantes de inglés son relevantes para validar una nueva herramienta o estrategia de enseñanza en un contexto específico. La conclusión principal indica que las TIC en la enseñanza de idiomas deben articularse con otras herramientas, prácticas, metodologías y enfoques adecuados para lograr un aprendizaje significativo.

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje de inglés; estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera; TIC; Narrativas; exoperiencias.

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Resumo

Este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma análise narrativa que indaga nas experiências de alguns estudantes universitários relacionadas com sua aprendizagem do inglês e o uso das TIC (Tecnologias da Informação e a Comunicação) por parte do docente durante este processo. O estudo foi realizado em uma universidade do sul da Colômbia. O nosso objetivo principal foi compreender as experiências dos estudantes dos cursos de inglês ao usar as TIC durante seu processo de aprendizagem do idioma. Os dados foram obtidos através de entrevistas em profundidade e relatos de vida. As experiências dos alunos são um aspecto relevante a considerar na hora de validar uma nova ferramenta ou estratégia didática em um contexto concreto. A conclusão principal indica que as TIC no ensino de idiomas deve se articular com outras ferramentas, práticas, metodologias e enfoques pertinentes para lograr uma aprendizagem significativa.

Palavras chave: Ensino de inglês; TIC; Aprendizagem de língua, narrativas, experiências de aprendizagem de idioma; Experiências com as TIC

Introduction

For the past fifty years, society has engaged in a digital connection, screen-based communication, and global knowledge exchange and ideas. Warschauer and Meskill (2000) state that in the 1950s, blackboard support was implemented in the grammatical translation method to facilitate language learning. Some teachers decided to use the cassette tape holder to improve their speaking and listening skills in the audio-lingual method. Thus, in the 1980s, the computing device was officially established in education and became a potential tool for developing learning materials. Subsequently, communicative approaches to language learning emerged, focusing on the interaction of students in meaningful exchanges. Consequently, it is a fact that ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) has become part of the educational system.

In such a way, ICT began to have importance in language learning. It became fundamental in developing new teaching didactics, which led to the emergence of virtual education and meaningful and innovative classroom tools to support teachers and students. Today, ICT integrates strategies to motivate, support, evaluate, and improve learning. Although the curricula cover ICT, it is up to teachers to know how to adapt and introduce such tools in their contexts and students' needs. In short, every day, the role of ICT in language learning evolves according to the students' needs.

Some scholars have narrated the great impact ICT has had in the educational field in recent years (Castañeda-Trujillo & Rincón, 2018; Fu, 2013; Livingstone, 2012; Okauru, 2011; Wang, 2005). For example, Wang (2005) stated, "we can definitely agree that technology has done a great job in helping language learning, but this is just the beginning of the era of technology-enhanced education" (p. 42). Additionally, according to Kumar and Tammelin (2014), "in the last decade, changing conceptions of learning and rapid technological advances have been accompanied by changes in language teaching and learning" (p. 5). However, this one seems unknown when it comes to students' perception of including technology in the classroom.

Considering the above, we decided to focus on what happened at Universidad Surcolombiana and the perceptions EFL students have about the use of technologies. Universidad Surcolombiana offers all students the possibility of enrolling in four English courses. These courses are called Institutional English courses, which consist of four hours of instruction accompanied by an English teacher. However, since using technologies in the classroom is not a must, only some English teachers use them as part of their classes. So then, how have EFL students from institutional English courses experienced ICT use in language learning?

Our research study took as context the advanced course of the English for general purposes Program at Universidad Surcolombiana in Neiva since this is the last of the

four courses EFL students take. So it is expected that they have been more exposed to environments where ICT was implemented in EFL learning than in the other program courses. Furthermore, this program is regulated by agreement 065 of 2009; it is responsible for certifying the communicative competence in a foreign language that students must present as a requirement for the degree (Universidad Surcolombiana - USCO, 2009). Therefore, our research study is valuable to the university's Education Program and EFL faculty and students since it seeks to provide an overview of students' perspectives. That is why we decided to set ourselves the main objective of understanding EFL students' experiences of the Institutional English Program with ICT in language learning.

Theoretical Framework

The primary constructs that underpinned this research study were ICT for Education, and English Language Learning and ICT, which are presented from the point of view of different authors.

ICT for Education

Information and communication technology (ICT) has to do with an integral component of a learning program for many teachers and students (Wilkinson, 2007). Some of the most usual functions of ICT are the digital processing and use of information, which includes the storage, retrieval, conversion, and transmission of information by electronic computers, the Internet, and electronic transmission systems such as radios, televisions, and projectors, among others (Fu, 2013; Okauru, 2011). Although this technicist vision is limited, ICT plays a role that goes beyond learning to use the media and mediations provided.

The use of ICT in education is assumed as a demand nowadays. As a result, students in educational institutions are increasingly accustomed to ICT use inside and outside the classroom (Castañeda-Trujillo & Cruz, 2012; Wilkinson, 2007). Additionally, globalization has driven this need to include ICT management within educational processes by presenting it as a desirable and indispensable competence for countries' social and economic development. In this sense, the inclusion of ICT is an indicator of the quality of teaching and the standards managed by the educational institution (Castañeda-Trujillo & Rincón, 2018; Livingstone, 2012).

ICT contributes to maximizing the teaching outcomes of traditional education (Livingstone, 2012). The primary purpose of the inclusion of ICT is not to help students understand how to use these tools themselves, but to contribute to the development of their cognitive skills, the development of critical thinking, intrapersonal competencies,

and self-directed learning (Castañeda-Trujillo & Rincón, 2018; Livingstone, 2012). In a formal learning environment, ICT serves as a tool for students to discover learning issues and solve and provide solutions to problems in the learning process (Brush et al., 2008). Additionally, ICT can help students memorize, comprehend, and interact within classes (Ciroma, 2014) and contribute to dynamizing learning scenarios and provide learning alternatives that are not usually possible in regular classrooms.

English Language learning and ICT.

The use of ICT for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has been very present during the last decades. According to García Chamorro and Rey (2013), English teachers believe that ICT helps with the learning and reinforcement of grammatical structures and vocabulary at the same time it contributes to the development of the four communicative skills such as reading (Ariza & Suárez Sánchez, 2013; Rátiva Velandia et al., 2012), writing (Guzmán Gámez & Moreno Cuellar, 2019; Ortiz Navarrete & Ferreira Cabrera, 2014; Pascual, 2019), and speaking (García Trejos, et al., 2018; Neiva Montaño, 2021; Sánchez Narváez & Chavarro Vargas, 2017).

However, the development of communicative skills has not been the only purpose of incorporating ICT in EFL teaching. Some scholars have found that the use of ICT contributes to autonomous learning (Ariza & Suárez Sánchez, 2013; Ballén, 2014), as well as to collaborative learning (Castañeda & Cruz Arcila, 2012; Cote Parra, 2015). Similarly, evaluation processes have been integrated into the use of ICT within academic activities (Picón-Jácome, 2021). The varied approaches given to the use of ICTs in EFL teaching have allowed expanding the possibilities of what is generally taught in a classroom, integrating with a process of literacy in language and in the use of ICTs itself.

This inclusion of ICT in the EFL teaching has not been limited to searching for information on the Internet. Some teachers have implemented various strategies to achieve the objectives of language learning and strengthening the use of ICT in teaching. For this purpose, approaches such as Flip Learning (Chivatá & Oviedo, 2018; Ramírez, 2018; Ramírez & Buitrago, 2022;), telecollaboration (Ramírez-Lizcano & Cabrera-Tovar, 2020), web-based activities (Ballén, 2014; Cariaga, 2016; Cote Parra, 2015; Galvis Pinzón & Callejas, 2017; Guzmán Gámez & Moreno Cuellar, 2019; Pineda Hoyos & Tamayo Cano, 2016), wikis or blogs (Fandiño Parra, 2012; Ortiz Navarrete & Ferreira Cabrera, 2014; Pascual, 2019), learning management systems (LMS) (Castañeda & Cruz Arcila, 2012; Correa Díaz, 2012; Gunduz & Ozcan, 2017), blended learning (García Trejos, et al., 2018; Gómez-Orjuela, 2021; Quitián Bernal & González Martínez, 2022), and the most recent, emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Castañeda-Trujillo & Jaime Osorio, 2021; Cohen & Calderon Aponte, 2021). All these uses, resources, strategies, and achievements obtained from the inclusion of ICT with

EFL teaching present a panorama of possibilities that can be applied in educational contexts such as the rural context (Rojas Rojas, 2019); or teaching education programs (Rincón-Ussa et al., 2020). However, this review also shows that there are many more avenues to explore in terms of the integration of ICT and EFL.

Methodology

This research study is based on the qualitative paradigm because the main interest is analyzing a social phenomenon in which people and facts are the most relevant (Merriam, 2009). In addition, this study was structured based on an interpretive/ constructivist perspective, which allows us to interpret and understand the particular points of view of individuals without the need to make generalizations or establish patterns of behavior (Creswell, 2009) since we only focused on the participants' experiences to understand the role of ICT in their learning process.

Consequently, we have adopted narrative as a research approach, as it allows us to inquire about aspects of participants' lives, experiences, impressions, and perceptions (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008). Narratives are used as a data collection instrument and a type of data (Conle, 2000). These narratives can influence the understanding of other phenomena in different contexts, not only in those in which the research is conducted, so they have a transformative meaning (Weiler, 1988).

Context and Participants

Participants in our research study were five students from an EFL (English as Foreign Language) advanced level course of the English for general purposes program offered by the Universidad Surcolombiana. The data collection and analysis took place over seven months, from May 2020 until November 2020. Unfortunately, there were setbacks due to the unexpected events resulting from the covid-19 crisis, making it challenging to communicate with the participant students. Despite everything, the study was developed in three cycles: narrative, interview, and final consensus.

In this research study, ethical issues were taken into account to ensure the proper conduct of the research. Each participant signed an informed consent form divided into three critical aspects (see Annex 1). First, they were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study if they wished. First, participation in the research study was voluntary, and it was not an obligation for them to take it if they did not want to participate. Second, their information was kept with the utmost confidentiality and was used for academic purposes only. Third, the names of the respondents will not appear in any publication resulting from this study unless

they agree. Therefore, at the end of the research study, the students who conducted the interview will receive a copy of the abstract and the complete research.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

In conducting research, it is essential to decide the techniques and instruments in charge of collecting the data. Among all the possible options, the ones that best fit our research and contributed to achieving the stated objectives were in-depth interviews and life stories. It is essential to highlight that the inquiry was divided into three cycles (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Cycles followed throughout our project
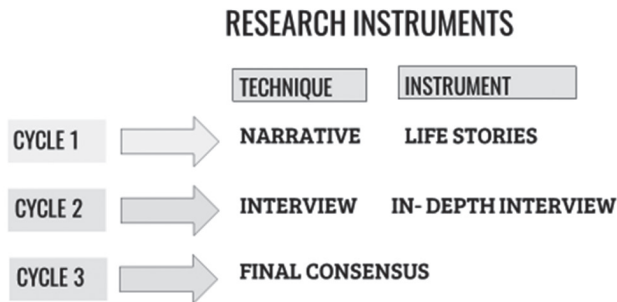
Note. This figure shows the three cycles taken to consolidate the data for this research**.**

In the first cycle of the research study, a life stories instrument was applied in Spanish (see Annex 2). This kind of narrative allowed the teller to tell their story through their memories, the experiences they lived, their view of their past, and their plans for the future, among other many layers necessary for a complete interpretation of a life experience (Etherington, 2009). Moreover, that instrument was handy to attend to the context and the local details where the story was built and as a reflective exercise since in-depth interviews are helpful when you want detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviors or want to explore new issues in depth.

Interviews were also used to provide context to other data, offering a complete picture of what happened in the program and why (Boyce & Neale, 2006). After analyzing the first intervention results in the second cycle, we applied one in-depth interview in Spanish to deep down and collected more information about English for general

purposes of Program students' experiences with ICT. Using this qualitative research technique, we could ask the participants about their experiences and expectations related to the language learning process throughout their lives, the thoughts they had concerned, processes and outcomes about any changes they had perceived in themselves, and the different levels of the program as well. After these two cycles, we analyzed all the information collected. As a result, each participant's composition of a narrative story with the most critical information was obtained (see Annex 2).

Finally, there was a third cycle in which the main objective was to give their opinion and say if they agreed with the story created or wanted to make any changes. The five students decided on the stories, and there was no need to make any changes. Based on these narratives, we created the final one. The interviews were recorded and transcribed as verbatim as possible to proceed to the analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted guided by the paradigmatic principles of narrative analysis (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). First, an iterative reading was conducted to find the most relevant themes within the narratives related to the overall research objective (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). These themes were then organized graphically (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Second participant's categories
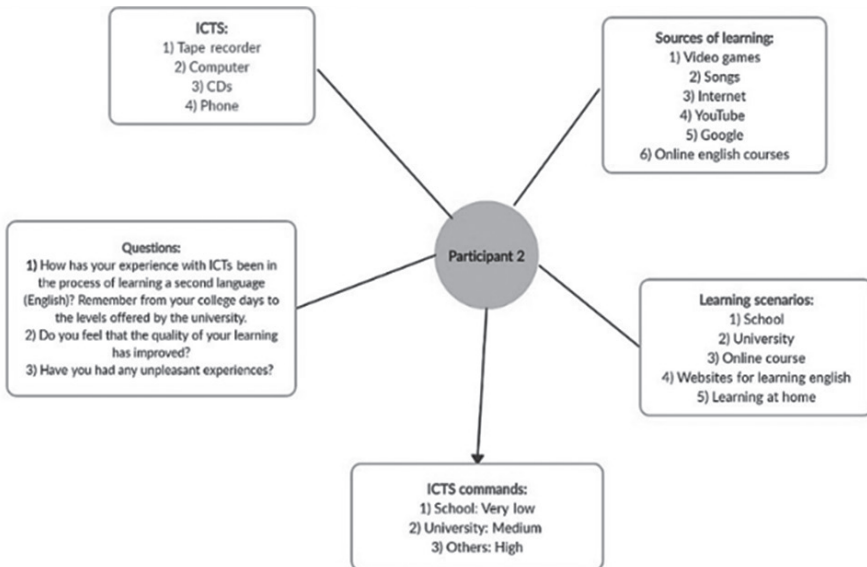
Note. Elaborated by the authors.

Next, we identified information gaps relevant to the research, so we formulated questions labeled into themes and subthemes for the next interview cycle (see Figure 3). Then, once the second cycle interview was conducted, we extracted the most substantive information and compared it with the data from the previous categorizations. In this way, we were able to complement the data collected to create a meaningful narrative for each participant at that time.

Finally, we shared their respective narrative with each participant to review and argue whether they agreed, disagreed, or suggested any modifications before creating the final narrative based on each participant (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2018).

Figure 3. Labeled questions for cycle 2 interview of the third participant

Engagement of ICTs: *the variation of motivation in ESL:*
- ¿Cómo te sentiste aprendiendo inglés utilizando a través de un dispositivo? ¿Podrías especificarnos los aparatos que utilizaste?(1)
- ¿ Cómo describirías la vivencia de aprender inglés a través de estas plataformas como meet, zoom y las demás?
- ¿Aumento tu interés por aprender inglés utilizando estos dispositivos?

ICTs as a learning strategy: *Autonomous language learning:* - ¿Cuando comenzaste tu proceso de aprendizaje de la segunda lengua?

videojuegos: ¿Has hecho uso de los videojuegos para aprender inglés? ¿Qué videojuegos usabas? ¿como te conectabas a través de la computadora, a través de una xbox? ¿Aun los sigues usando como una estrategia para aprender inglés y desarrollar tus habilidades lingüísticas?
- **celular:** ¿Has utilizado tu teléfono celular para aprender inglés? ¿Podrías mencionar las aplicaciones y los sitios webs que te ayudaron a mejorar en la lengua?
- **Computador:** ¿Has utilizado tu computador para aprender inglés? ¿Que paginas webs

Note. Elaborated by the authors.

It is important to note that the three researchers carried out each cycle, so a constant triangulation of the information was carried out to guarantee its reliability and trustworthiness (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Once the data was saturated, we organized the data according to what each participant reported in each of the themes.

Findings

Participant #1 Experience:

The first participant has a fascinating view of learning English as a foreign language using ICT. He recalled his school period when it was not common to integrate technology in his English classes, but he found out that he could learn English funnily and effortlessly in his spare time.

> *I used to go a lot to my neighborhood cyber to play videogames; at that time, dubbing and subtitles were not very common, so I played most of the games in English (or if they had subtitles, I didn't know how to configure their language), games like GTA San Andreas, the Simpson game, and some others made me learn new verbs and understand better the use of others I had already seen at school.*

He describes this experience as dynamic and satisfactory because he did not depend on a dictionary or ask his parents for the meaning of a single word. Using video games to learn new vocabulary makes him feel more autonomous in his learning process. He stands out the benefits of learning unknown vocabulary using songs. Thanks to the multiple times he reproduces the same song, he memorized the meaning of the previously unknown words. Moreover, he states his listening skills have improved a lot.

> *You are listening to eh... a song, emm, I don't know... and... it sounds like a strange word, emm, at first you don't understand it but when you learn it let's say it's easier to remember what it means or why it's used.*

He mentions the continuous use of some platforms such as Spotify to look for song lyrics, translators without Internet access to seek words' meaning, and Duolingo to learn English. He described them as useful and relevant in his language learning process. He expected an excellent English learning experience and a more effective teaching tool implementation as a university student. However, it was not as he wished; he describes his classes as "being in primary school once again," mainly because of the course's low English level and his limitations with a book. Because he has always been an autonomous young person in his learning, he had the opportunity to have a more enriching relationship with the ICT when it comes to learning since he does not highlight significant contributions in the academic field. Nevertheless, his experience with ICT in learning English has been productive; he emphasizes that he considers it a positive, satisfactory, and pleasant experience.

Participant #2 Experience:

Our second participant brought us new perspectives about ICT use in English classes. In primary school, he used a recorder, but this one was not very significant for English learning because, with this tool, he wanted to practice Listening and Writing, but the objectives were not clear.

> *In primary school, I never liked the use of recorders because the teacher didn't explain to us or anything but simply played the recorder, and that was it.*

As a teacher, you can be provided with the most advanced technology, but if the activities are unclear or do not have stated objectives, it will not be meaningful learning.

Later, he had more opportunities to experience and develop a closer and friendlier relationship with other technological tools. Thanks to them, he has been able to use them as a learning strategy to learn English. For example, video games such as *"Castlevania, Grand theft auto, ... Super Mario 64, and so on"* came pre-determined in English on platforms such as the computer or console he has played. It has managed to expand his lexicon in the second language, which was motivating. Thus, the topics studied at school, and the activities in the primers did not seem so difficult.

His story also carries an interesting factor. He took some English courses where most of his teachers used to record classes to reinforce the already taught topics and practice.

> *I mean, I really preferred the face-to-face classes, but those classes that allowed us to record were very good as a support, right? because we listened to the CD, we investigated something about the topic and then, right there, we were prepared for the class, and then, they asked us questions and made us speak compulsorily, and one lost his fear there. So, that was a very good tool for me.*

Unlike other participants, he found Duolingo very useless because all the topics, grammar, and vocabulary were unchallenging. He did not feel any improvement with the use of this app.

> *I tried Duolingo out, but I didn't really feel like I learned anything, I mean, I don't know if I did because I already knew it before, but it seemed to me, I don't know, very basic, very simple. So then, it was an experience that I didn't like, so I uninstalled the application.*

He describes his computer as generous support to practice his listening skills because he listened to songs in English. In the beginning, it was a bit complex because some songs he listened to contained many abbreviations or colloquial words that he could not understand, but his interest in the latter had already emerged, and he did not mind translating or consulting on Interner to understand them. He used these tools for an educational purpose and as a joy for himself, where he could learn and have fun.

Although he has been able to experience the use of ICT to learn English for many years, his expectations have not been very high due to the lack of intrinsic motivation and the constant disappointment he carries with him. He usually lost interest and motivation in learning some of the topics covered in English or in the process of learning verbs with their respective tenses. Still, he did not lose interest in the applications or tools he had access to this language. Even so, his experience with ICT has been a little successful in acquiring English.

Participant #3 Experience:

This participant did not have much experience with ICT, and his interest in learning English was low. He expressed he could not remember which technological tools he used to learn English during his primary school years. And his experience with ICT did not have much impact during his secondary school years. Nevertheless, he decided to deep down into his experiences taking English online classes during the lockdown due to the pandemic caused by COVID- 19.

> *It is not the same as having a teacher there, to get out of the doubt, but it is a pleasant experience due to the situation in which we live but because it feels a little bit different, does not it?*

His classes consisted of completing dialogues and listening to audio files played on a tape recorder to improve his listening skills at school. He considers this process relevant to developing his listening skills and being used to all the different native English speakers' accents.

> *I think that suddenly it was important to develop the listening skill of a second language, emm ... It is different to listen, maybe, the native language in the recorder to listen maybe to the English of the teacher who speaks "normal" but it is not his native language where it was originated, so it is fundamental. [Once] one gets used to it, and it helps the ear.*

He understood English better using the tape recorder, translator, computer, CDs, and cell phone. However, he claimed to feel more comfortable using his cell phone to learn English. His story also carries some memories about his English teachers using technology who do not seem to be used to integrating these gadgets and platforms. However, he is comprehensive and empathetic with these issues.

> *Well, at first, the teacher did not have much knowledge, but little by little, she got immersed in the tools and their use, but one can understand these things.*

As time went by, when he entered the university, classes varied more between movies, recordings, and ICT, such as the computer, cell phone, video beam, and books.

This contrast gave him a more "understandable, fun, and entertaining" perspective on learning English. However, due to the current pandemic that the country is facing, he considers that things feel a little different and that they are not the same since teachers implement ICT only to read slides and assign workshops, becoming "boring" as if it were a traditional class. Nevertheless, he is consistent because he is not motivated to improve and practice the English language beyond the course's academic duties and recognizes that this is a cause of his low development in the English language. In general, he reports that using ICT for his English language learning has been an experience with a positive impact since he notices some improvements in his performance, but he is not satisfied. Again, he considers that this is due to his lack of motivation.

Participant #4 Experience:

The fourth participant is a young autonomous learner with a strong relationship with ICT. Since he was a child, he has remained in close interaction with them, but on his own.

"Since school, ICT has always been the basis for learning English."

He used to keep himself constantly surrounded by English by using video games, cell phones, and the Internet (a place where he could find videos, music, and web pages in English).

"I would say that, well, I learned the basic knowledge and the sentences I know in English mostly through the applications as I mentioned in my daily life, in my daily activities such as playing video games, listening to music, as I was saying. Not so much on the academic side because when you are young, you don't focus too much, or at least it happened to me that I wasn't very interested in school. I didn't find meaning in the classes".

He also said that he did not make much progress in language learning during his school years. He acknowledges having had teachers with little ICT management, given their age and lack of training. He says it was reflected in how complicated it was for his teachers to create didactic and practical educational content that aroused students' interest. For him, most of the classes seemed to be boring. Later, in high school, his perspective changed completely.

"On the other hand, there were the young and trained teachers, with wide knowledge about technology. They used great songs and games that awakened competitiveness among all and created a pleasant space in the classroom with only a video beam and a computer".

Later, in college, he had more consolidated strategies to continue learning English independently, such as using apps to learn English, listening to English songs, changing the phone's language to English, and communicating in video games with English speakers. But he also feels he cannot cover all the language skills in his autonomy, especially writing.

Finally, he recognizes and attributes to ICT the high command of English he currently has. The participant highlights the importance of learning a second language and emphasizes that although autonomous work is necessary, the guidance and tutoring of a teacher make the process really efficient; it is up to them whether or not ICT contributes to the process.

Participant #5 Experience:

The last participant provided more arguments that support the perspective that previous participants expressed about the need for a meaningful implementation of ICT by teachers or tutors, as they alone do not impact the language learning experience. In her primary school education, she had no exposure to ICT, and her English classes were based more on textbooks, drawings, and other traditional strategies. She does not recall any autonomous experiences in those years either.

> *I think the English classes were very few, and no, ICT was not used. At that time, I think it was mostly drawings and words, but it was all very basic. I don't remember much.*

On the other hand, in the last two years of her secondary education, ICT started to be part of her learning experience thanks to a new teacher with proficient ICT skills. The teacher used to take them to a classroom with audiovisual devices with which she developed activities with songs, and web applications, among others. In addition, the 5th participant began to autonomously use the Duolingo app, to which she dedicated 5 to 15 minutes a day. This new stage gave her a different perspective on language learning that she still considers ideal today.

> *On my own initiative, I kind of downloaded the application, and it gave me the possibility to have a lesson of 5-15 minutes a day, and I kind of used it for a while, didn't I? And I thought it was interesting because despite the short time, it was something constant, so I think it was helpful to learn.*

During her university years, she expressed dissatisfaction with the English classes she received, describing them as not very didactic, based on books, and with a dull use of ICT since the professors continued to use the same traditional and passive methodologies even with computers and video beams. The participant relates this

experience to her disinterest in learning English and the little use of ICT autonomously for language learning.

> *Instead of motivating me to learn this language, it kind of did the opposite, didn't it? When I realized that nothing was different, that it was always textbooks, and because I didn't have a good English basis, I attended classes more for the requirement than to learn.*

Finally, the participant concludes that

"Anyone can use a video beam and a computer, but then you [should be able] to create dynamic activities with it. I think I've seen websites useful for teaching English, and I think they are ludic and have good activities."

This suggests that teachers are who have in their hands the possibility and the duty to use ICT tools for truly fruitful language learning. Consequently, teachers are required to be trained in ICT regularly for them to be updated. This training must be provided by institutions that are also interested in improving the quality of education.

Discussion

After analyzing the narratives of the five participants, we identified two relevant themes that helped us complement our understanding of their EFL learning experiences. The first theme is oriented to the contributions derived from the use of ICT outside the classroom; the second theme is related to the dynamics of the in-class experience and those limitations that the participants encountered.

Contributions of the use of ICT inside and outside the classroom

The experiences of the five EFL students show that the use of ICT in English language learning has become an everyday occurrence. Within the classrooms, ICT becomes an integral component that helps students maximize learning outcomes (Wilkinson, 2007; Livingstone, 2012). Many of them expect the use of ICT to go beyond the completion of decontextualized grammar or listening exercises. Moreover, they expect that through ICT, they will perform activities that are not possible in the classroom (Ciroma, 2014). However, some participants do not see innovation happening in the classroom. Instead, they agree that the everyday use of technology is to perform common activities in an English class and repetitive movements that often do not make sense.

That is why EFL students look for other ways to learn and effectively resort to ICT for this purpose, but outside the classroom settings. For example, in their daily lives, students use applications, video games, websites, podcasts, and videos, among others, that allow them to have direct contact with English. In this way, some participants complement or reinforce what they see in their English classes. Moreover, although some of the participants focus on learning only vocabulary or strengthening only one of the communicative skills, it is remarkable how using ICTs outside the classroom motivates them to continue learning and improving their skills. That is why it is so important to promote autonomous work. Many of the students do have resources at home for meaningful ICT-mediated activities, so it would be helpful for teachers to create opportunities to use ICT to reinforce what they see in class more traditionally.

Call for more dynamic uses of ICT

Something in common for some EFL students is the lack of effective use of ICT in the classroom to learn English. They claim that these classes are developed in a very traditional style, i.e., oriented with a book, doing exercises to fill in gaps that make no sense to them, listening to scripted audios with accents that are difficult to understand, etc. This dynamic in the classroom has led to frustration and confusion, especially when students understand that learning English is vital to the globalization process. For the same reason, participants called for better integration of ICT in the classroom, with contextualized activities and providing an understanding of the sociocultural dynamics of English speakers in other countries (Tan & Liu, 2016).

Likewise, EFL learners agreed on teachers' inexperience in using ICT. According to Castañeda-Trujillo and Cruz-Arcila (2012), university teachers require constant training in ICT use. However, if such training is achieved, teachers will be able to offer much more flexible scenarios for the integration of ICT and the work of communicative competence along with others that are necessary for the personal and professional development of university students (Castañeda-Trujillo & Rincón-Ussa, 2018).

The fact that teachers are not sufficiently trained to integrate ICT in English classes negatively influences the perceptions of our participants since it is essential to understand that ICT is an adequate tool for learning and is determined by its pedagogical, social, and technological possibilities and not only by the ICT tool itself (Lin et al., 2016).

Although aspects such as intrinsic motivation and autonomy made language learning with ICT a pleasant and satisfying experience for the participants, the lack of ICT integration in the classroom leaves gaps that need to be filled. For example, the strengthening of interpersonal skills (related to collaborative work), self-directed learning (connected to cognitive development and autonomy), and critical thinking

(linked with decision-making and problem-solving) could be reinforced by using digital resources (Brush et al., 2008).

Nevertheless, these problems integrating ICT into English teaching and learning depend not only on the teachers' inexperience or lack of ICT knowledge but also on the lack of physical spaces and technical resources within the classroom. A teacher, for example, may want to adapt his class to technological means, but if he does not have the resources of Internet, software, or hardware, this will remain only an intention, and he will not be able to achieve his objectives.

Conclusions

Although the findings are valuable for the teachers' community, the number of participants was smaller than expected, limiting a broader view of the phenomenon and the context. In addition, the instruments pointed to a more face-to-face interaction at the time of application, which could not be achieved that way. All of these limitations stemmed from the COVID-19 pandemic contingency.

Addressing the lack of attention to the learner's perspective in implementing ICT in language learning, we found that most of the five participants' experience has been satisfactory and productive from an autonomous learning perspective. This stems from the significant problems we encountered throughout the research, such as teachers' poor management of ICT and the implementation of these tools without a clear and articulated objective. Furthermore, the participants had little common interest in traditional methodologies offered by teachers throughout their lives, such as the use of tape recorders and books just to complete writing exercises. But they also agreed on other ways of learning the language empirically through ICT tools such as video games, mobile applications, and websites. These testimonies led us to achieve our objectives, despite the limited sample, as we deepened their experiences with this phenomenon and succeeded in understanding them. Based on this, the research allows us to reinforce the importance of knowing the target population's perspective to achieve the meaningful application of new tools, especially in EFL contexts It also invites the teaching and education community to train in these new tools and to articulate them with approaches, methodologies, practices, and other suitable mechanisms, but above all, with the validation that the students' experience provides. Finally, this research calls for teachers to become more proficient with modern tools as ICT opens up new possibilities such as the use of interactive content, individualized homework assignments, and the provision of different resources and activities to meet the diverse needs of students (Castañeda-Trujillo & Cruz Arcila, 2012; Tan & Liu, 2016).

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Annexes

Annex 1.

Consent form for participation in the research study

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO DE PARTICIPACIÓN

PARTICIPANTE PARA INVESTIGACIÓN

████████████

Neiva, Huila

Estimado estudiante:

Cordial saludo,

Nos gustaría que nos brindará la autorización para realizarle dos entrevistas con fines investigativos. Los datos recolectados serán usados para un proyecto de investigación acerca de las TICS y el aprendizaje de idiomas, coordinado por el semillero de investigación GAIA. Estamos llevando a cabo la entrevista con el objetivo de indagar y comprender las experiencias de los estudiantes del 4to nivel del programa Inglés Institucional de la Universidad ████████ con las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación.

Cada entrevista tendrá una duración de 15 a 20 minutos. La participación en la encuesta es voluntaria y no existen riesgos conocidos o anticipados para la participación en este estudio. Toda la información proporcionada se mantendrá con la máxima confidencialidad y se utilizará únicamente con fines académicos y de investigación. El nombre de los encuestados no aparecerá en ninguna publicación resultante de este estudio a menos que se acuerde.

Una vez analizados los datos, usted recibirá una copia del resumen. Si está interesado en obtener más detalles, podemos poner a su disposición una copia electrónica (por ejemplo, PDF) de toda la investigación.

Si está de acuerdo, firme amablemente a continuación reconociendo su consentimiento y permiso para que realicemos este proyecto de investigación. Su aprobación para realizar este estudio será muy apreciada. Gracias de antemano por su interés y asistencia con esta investigación.

Atentamente,

████████████████████ y ████████████████████

Firma de autorización:

_____