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THE EVALUATION OF A MIXED METHODOLOGICAL MODEL TO IMPROVE THE PRODUCTIVE AND RECEPTIVE SKILLS IN SPANISH AS A FL/SL: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

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Abstract

This present article seeks to provide a mixed methodological model for the development and implementation of a Teaching Module for Spanish as a Foreign Language in the face to face environment. The primary objective is to portray how methodological principles from different language teaching approaches - in this case, task based language teaching and cooperative learning - can be combined effectively in designing activities for face to face contexts. In this regard, empirical evidence is analysed in order to determine the effectiveness of the mixed methodology in the teaching-learning of Spanish as a Foreign Language in the said settings, in a study based on a longitudinal experimental design with pre-test and post-test, but without control group. The findings will help to provide researchers, educators and language teachers with valid guidelines as it relates to the development of Teaching Modules and Units for Foreign Language Learning. The results show an increase in the acquisition of specific knowledge in Spanish as a Foreign Language, thus improving the students' linguistic and communicative competence. It is therefore proposed that mixed methodological models be integrated and implemented when designing Teaching Modules for Language Learning, since they are the most suited for Second and Foreign Language Acquisition.

Key words: language, task-based approach, cooperative learning, mixed methodological model.

Introduction

In the ambit of Language Teaching & Learning, today, one of the principal concerns of researchers, educators and teachers revolves around the teaching methodology that is being implemented, or that which should be used, to execute the work units in the classroom to teach Spanish as a Foreign Language (FL) or Second Language (SL). They all agree that the methodological processes implemented should equip the students to substantially improve their linguistic and communicative competence in a determined language. In relation to this, language teachers should update and improve their teaching practises – which would influence the students’ learning process in one way or another – by experimenting with new teaching methods and approaches as it relates to Spanish as a FL/SL like the Communicative Method, Task-Based Language Teaching & Learning (TBLT), Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), among others.

The present study deals with the effectiveness of a mixed model methodology – Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) - for the teaching and learning of Spanish as a Foreign Language (FL). The objective of this model is to improve linguistic and communicative competence of beginners’ students at the University of Guyana, Guyana, South America.

The research data have been collected through a quasi-experimental longitudinal study with pre-test/post-test without control group. The purpose of the two tests is to collect valuable information about the skill levels of students before and after the intervention. Through this research it is expected that clear and accurate information be obtained in regard to the linguistic and communicative competence of the participants in this study, before and after implementing a teaching module for Spanish as a FL. Similarly, we want to emphasize how effective TBLT and CLL are in the learning and acquisition of specific knowledge.

Outline of the Problem

Guyana, my country of origin, presents a complex situation with respect to Foreign Language Teaching – Spanish, French, Portuguese. In secondary schools - President’s College, Queen’s Collage, St. Stanislaus Collage, Bishop’s High School, St. Rose’s High School among others - teachers of Modern Languages are trying desperately to make their students communicatively and linguistically competent. When the students graduate from High School, the students oftentimes do not demonstrate that they have the communicative competence necessary to express themselves when they are away from the language classroom. In fact, their proficiency is more

linguistic than communicative and the truth is that their communicative competence is not being developed nor practised sufficiently.

A careful examination of the situation in Guyana, as it relates to the number of students studying a foreign language, will reveal that the number is quite small. On carrying out a survey, it will be deduced that the students are bored with the way the language is being taught to them in the language classroom. They no longer have the desire to learn a foreign language since they do not feel motivated enough to do it.

The reason for this situation is that Modern Language Teachers in Guyana are not familiar with current methodological approaches and thus they conform themselves to teaching the language by way of the *Grammar-Translation Method*, the traditional language teaching method, through which they learnt a foreign language and the only one about which they have knowledge.

Given the emergence of these new methods and approaches for teaching language in the world, and the increasing use of them, the need to evaluate these methodologies to observe its effect on learning is becoming increasingly clear. Experience has shown that what is taught in language lessons are not learned the same way and in the same order by the students. Clearly, there are different teaching methods to teach a foreign language and consequently, teachers must find ways and means of upgrading their teaching practices.

Mixed teaching methodology used in this research

The birth of the communicative approach in the 1960’s brought a shift in the conception of language and its teaching. Before its appearance, language was conceived as a system of signs to convey ideas. Methods of teaching foreign languages (FL) such as audio-oral and audio-lingual rested in the formal teaching of grammar and translation. This was referred to as the *Grammar-Translation Method*.

Two of the new forms that emerge from the Communicative Approach are *Task-Based Language Teaching* and *Co-operative Language Learning*. These are the two methods used in this experimental study. Each one of these is discussed immediately below:

Task-Based Language Teaching

According to Zanón (1999), it deals with organizing the teaching in communicative activities that promote and integrate various processes related to communication. While being played in the classroom, students have to deploy a number of useful strategies to solve specific problems (fluency, meaning, etc.). Regarding the proposed task, Ellis (2003:276) argues that “the general purpose of the task-based methodology is to create opportunities for

language learning and for developing skills through the collaborative construction of knowledge.”

According to Estaire (2004-2005:3), it is an approach geared towards the construction of the communicative competence of students in all its dimensions. It focuses on action, developing the capacity of students to "do things" through language. This approach is based on a cognitive-constructivist conception of SL/FL learning in which the student is an active player in his own learning: he finds himself in a continuous process of constructing and restructuring knowledge. It is a conception of learning in which significant learning, work focused on student learning strategies, and self learning are particularly important. This approach is also based on a social conception of FL learning which considers the classroom as a social context, and offers a wealth of opportunities for the development of language.

A Framework For Task-Based Language Teaching and Learning

In task-based teaching, the lessons are focused on teaching units centred on a theme. This model uses the task as the organizing unit for planning the lesson. It is precisely the task that determines the content to be worked in the unit (Etaire & Zanon, 1990). Roca et al. (1990) emphasize that "the task involves solving a problem or filling a gap of information by activating a mental process using the foreign language and it is considered that through that mental process SL is internalised and acquired. The student concentrates on solving the task and "forgets" that he is in a SL classroom and thus he learns distractedly, unconsciously, playing, thinking and/or creating. "This model enhances work in groups and pairs which is indicative of Cooperative Learning.

Ellis (2003:238) emphasises that Estaire and Zanón (1994) proposed a framework for planning work units or teaching units. These have two stages: The first phase involves a general statement and is responsible for providing what is hoped to be achieved through the work unit. The general statement is accomplished in three steps in this order:

The first stage:

1. The determination of the topic or area of interest for the teaching unit.
2. Planning for the final task to be carried out at the end of the unit.
3. The specification of the objectives of the work unit.

The *second phase* consists of the details and stipulates how the teaching unit will be carried out. There are three additional sequential steps as follows:

The second stage:

1. The specification or determination of the content (thematic and linguistic) necessary for performing the

final task

2. Planning and sequencing of the communication and language support tasks to enable students to perform the final task

3. Planning and evaluation procedures throughout the unit.

Task-Based Instruction, in all its variants, has been and remains the guiding light of the teaching work of many educators. It has been decided that the only way to make a balance between the ideal and the real of a theoretical framework is to develop it in the classroom. In this way, teachers and educators can be guided in the techniques for developing teaching modules for their classes.

Cooperative Language Learning

This approach has been defined as “a group learning activity which is organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is responsible for their own learning, and is motivated to enhance the learning of others” (Olsen & Kagan 1992:8).

Fathman and Kessler (1993:128) define CLL as” group work which is carefully structured to enable all students to interact, share information and can be evaluated individually for their work”. Richards & Rodgers (2001:195) argue that the word “cooperative” in the CLL emphasizes another important dimension: the development of language classes that encourage cooperation rather than competition in learning. It is an approach designed to develop critical thinking skills and communicative competence through the activities of structured social interaction.

Trujillo Sáez (2002) states that in 2001 the California Department of Education defined the CLL in this way: “Most cooperative approaches involve small, heterogeneous groups, usually 4 or 5 members working together to carry out a group task, in which each member is individually liable for part of the final result which can not be complete unless group members work together, in other words, group members are positively interdependent”.

The Cooperative Method is used to develop linguistic and communicative competence, but also to improve cognitive and social skills, besides being a tool for integrating language and curriculum content, a key exercise in the SL and FL context.

Longitudinal Experimental Study

In relation to the hypothesis of this research a longitudinal experimental study was carried out with pre-test/post-test, without control group, to determine empirically whether the mixed methodology, grounded in the task-based teaching and cooperative learning, was effective for learning specific knowledge in Spanish as a

FL. The results should reflect that the mixed methodology, using the face-to-face method, based on the task-based and cooperative approaches is effective for increasing their learning in Spanish and thus optimize their linguistic and communicative skills.

Hypothesis

In this present work, the assumptions that guide this research are:

1. A mixed methodological model, supported by Task-Based Language Teaching and Co-operative Language Learning techniques, will be effective in learning and acquiring determined knowledge in Spanish as a FL/SL.
2. The students will be able to increase their knowledge in Spanish, as it relates to a specific subject matter, and therefore become linguistically and communicatively competent in that body of knowledge.

Objectives

The specific objectives of this research are:

1. Designing a methodological model for teaching and learning of Spanish as a FL supported by task-based and cooperative learning techniques for intermediate-level students.
2. Verify whether the work in pairs and in groups is effective in performing tasks and learning Spanish in a defined area of knowledge.

Methodology

Sample

This teaching module for Spanish was aimed at students from the University of Guyana., FL. They were from different fields of specialisation - Tourism, International relations, Education, Developmental Studies, etc. - and were at a basic level in Spanish as a Foreign Language (FL), thus it was necessary for them to improve their linguistic and communicative skills.

Selecting the Sample

In order to obtain empirical evidence of the learning process, and to evaluate the linguistic and communicative competence in Spanish, a sample group of 19 students from the University of Guyana was selected. The average age of the participants in the sample ranged between 20 and 45. Of the total number of the sample, 31.6% (6) were males and 68.4% (13) of them female.

They all spoke English as their mother tongue. In fact, all the students were studying Spanish driven by two needs: they wanted to have a better degree of linguistic and communicative competence, and they had an interest in learning more about Latin American culture and custom.

Design of the Experiment

To design the materials and procedures for

the combined learning model that was developed for this study, we conducted a review of the theoretical affirmations of the TBLT and CLL methodology as well as the components of face-to-face teaching. The cultural context of Chile was also considered for the design of all activities that supported the practice of the four language skills to facilitate language learning. The said activities were used to activate the processes of meta-cognition, reflection, analysis and opportunities for contact with the target language, thus allowing learning to be internalized, and achieved favourably.

It has been considered that the only way to make a balance between the real and the ideal of a theoretical framework is to develop it in the classroom. To this end, a teaching module for Spanish as a FL was designed and developed based on the mixed methodology already signalled. The aim then was to test the effectiveness of this mixed methodological model which, ultimately, could help to train teachers in techniques for developing teaching modules for their classes.

Description of the Mixed Methodological Model

The module for this experimental study was designed along the lines indicated by Zanón and Estaire (1990) for Task-Based Approach as it relates to Spanish as a FL/SL. These guidelines are based on the Framework for Task-Based Language Teaching and Learning which enable the creation of teaching units in six steps and will combine compatible elements from several proposals:

- (1) The theme/topic of interest
- (2) The final task
- (3) The Objectives
- (4) The linguistic and thematic contents which will be carried out throughout the teaching module
- (5) The sequencing of tasks (micro tasks) leading to the final task (macro task)
- (6) The evaluation

In the context of cooperative learning, techniques were identified that served to support language teaching. For purposes of this research, the techniques that were used in particular were:

Learning Together: The main assumption is that it should include all the basic principles of cooperative learning so that, in this way, all group members achieve the goal of the proposed task.

Group Investigation: It proposes that students organize their own groups and be dedicated to studying one aspect of the proposed theme for the whole class.

Jigsaw Puzzle: Each member of the group or each group receives a different part of the information of the specific topic to be discussed. After discussing the information that each group or each group member has, with a group of

“experts” on certain issues, they come together to produce a report. With students from other groups who have different pieces of information, they start to put together the project cooperatively.

Manual

One manual was designed: a *Student Manual*. This is described briefly below:

Student Manual: this consists of the six steps proposed by Zanón & Estaire (1990) and Estaire (2004-2005), which have been well planned: specification of the subject matter, final task, objectives, linguistics and thematic contents, sequencing of tasks leading to the completion of the final tasks, and the evaluative processes.

The manual is composed of a brief history of the evolution of the Spanish language, written in English, a map which shows the Spanish speaking countries of the world, some photos and basic information of eight (8) of the most important Spanish countries. Besides, there is also brief information about Spanish culture - music and dance; food; dress; religion and festive celebrations of great significance - through which the learner could come to appreciate Hispanic essence.

This *Student Manual* is divided into four (4) units or lessons. Each unit deals with a specific subject matter of the target language: Lesson 1 focuses on the date in Spanish and all that concerns it; Lesson 2 pays attention to the exchange of greetings with regard to getting to know someone for the first time, etc; Lesson 3 looks at telling the time in Spanish in reference to a visit to the doctor, and Lesson 4 stresses on knowing people, knowing how to describe

them, the difference in the use of “Saber” and “Conocer”, two verbs in Spanish which mean “to know” in English.

The objective of this manual is to enable the student to develop his/her linguistic and communicative competence in relation to the specific thematic areas studied.

In each of the units or lesson, the following can be found: a dialogue in Spanish and its English version, important points coming out of the dialogue and a brief discussion of these, a Grammar summary, the tasks to be executed, a list of useful vocabulary based on the topic in question, individual and group activities, as well as some electronic links by means of which the student could deepen his understanding of the specific area being dealt with.

The purpose of giving the university students a manual was for them to have some autonomy, thus allowing them to take control of their own learning, one of the principal objectives of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Thanks to this, the teacher is now able to fulfill his/her role as a guide and facilitator to the student.

Time-period for the Intervention Module

The theme of the teaching unit was “Vamos a Hablar” or “Let’s Talk!” Its duration was 24 hours of lectures spread over six weeks of classes, and for two days a week, two hours each day.

This mixed methodological model comprises 16 tasks or activities: 12 of these are *communication tasks* and the remaining 4 are *focus on form tasks*. In other words, these were designed on the basis of clear cut grammar and communication objectives with the purpose of helping to foster contact and allow for interaction opportunities in the target language. Table 1 shows the number of activities/ tasks per lesson.

Table 1
Number of Tasks per Lesson

Lesson/Unit	Number of Tasks/Activities
1	3 (2 communication tasks, 1 focus on form task)
2	3 (2 communication tasks, 1 focus on form task)
3	4 (3 communication tasks, 1 focus on form task)
4	5 (4 communication tasks, 1 focus on form task)
Final Task	1 (1 communication task)
Total	16 (12 communication tasks, 4 focus on form tasks)

Table 2
Time Allotted For the Intervention Module

Unit/Lesson	Duration
1	4 ½ hours
2	4 ½ hours
3	4 ½ hours
4	4 ½ hours
Final Task	1 hour

Distribution of the Teaching Module

Face to face classes	19 sessions
Evaluation (pre and post-test)	5 sessions

Face to face classes

Face to face contact	19 sessions
Group work	14 sessions

Distribution of the Language Skills in the Module

Listening Comprehension	15 sessions
Reading Comprehension	15 sessions
Written Production	15 sessions
Oral Production	15 sessions

Language Areas

Practice of grammatical structures	14 sessions
Vocabulary practice	14 sessions

Evaluation (pre-test & post-test)

Pre-test	2 ½ sessions
Post-test	2 ½ sessions

All these tasks were completed in a maximum period of 19 hours. The two tests - the pre-test and the post test – which formed part of the *Evaluation*, occupied the remaining 5 hours. Table 2 shows the time allotted for each task.

Furthermore, it is important to establish that the focus-on-form tasks are interwoven with the communication tasks so that students can centre their attention on them at the time of completing the communication task. In other words, the communication tasks are accompanied by

language support or focus on form tasks. The time scheduled for the latter includes the completion of both tasks: communication and focus on form.

To have a better organization of each class, a lesson plan was designed describing what would be done and how each session would be conducted, including the methodological approach and the delivery route of knowledge (in this case, face to face classes).

Following is a summary table with the specification of the number of sessions involved in this mixed methodological model:

The duration of the mixed methodological model was 19 sessions of face to face contact and the activities created for the said model were done during the allotted guiding the student to carry out the macro task (final task).

Implementation of the Teaching Module

The module was integrated into the subject plan "SPA 100/103/GSC 502" of the Department of Language & Cultural Studies of the University of Guyana. This was carried out between February and March 2009 in the Language Laboratory, located on the first floor of the School of Education & Humanities of the university. It had the capacity for the 19 subjects.

A decision was taken to give the students the material in part, instead of giving them the entire manual all at once, throughout the implementation period of the learning module. This was done in order to prevent the students from trying to complete all the tasks at home and not participating actively in their execution. Given this probability, which would undoubtedly jeopardize the effectiveness of the mixed methodology and the entire teaching module, we chose to give them the first two tasks, namely the pre-task and task 1, then task 2, etc.

Figures 1 & 2 illustrate an example of a communication task and a language support task, respectively, which were done by the students.

Insert the correct time in Spanish as shown on the clock into the spaces provided

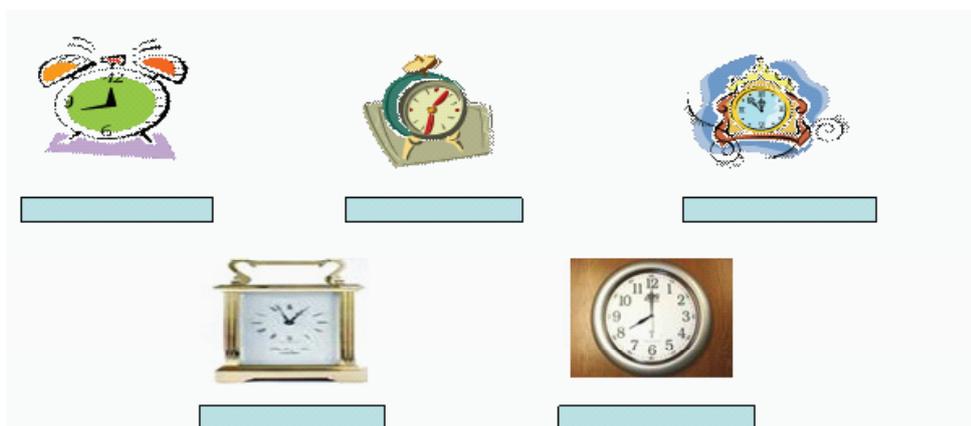


Figure 1
Communication Task

Figure 2

Language Support Task (Focus on Form)

Fill in the blanks determining which sentence will use SABER and which will use CONOCER, providing the correct form of the verb in each case. The first one has been completed for you.

1. Yo conozco a María Fuentes.
2. El hermano _____ español.
3. Mi tío _____ Argentina.
4. El padre de Julio _____ hablar.
5. Nosotros _____ a Señor Durante.
6. Tú _____ de la Navidad (Christmas).
7. Nosotros _____ donde está la iglesia.

Results And Discussion

This experiment considered an independent and a dependent variable. The independent variable referred to the face to face mode and the teaching methodology – task-based and cooperative approaches. By exposing students to this type of methodology, the development of language skills in Spanish would be greatly enhanced in contexts of face to face teaching. The dependent variable corresponded to the increase in learning that is observed in the results obtained by the participants, when comparing the pre-test with the post-test. The *Student t* statistical test was used to establish significant differences in the results.

It is important to note that the structure of the pre-test and post-test, which integrates the receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and written) have been adapted in some ways in accordance with the general objectives of assessing general communicative competence in Spanish. "If the rates of assessment are a total of 100%, 60% is allocated to the assessment of productive skills, and 40% to receptive skills" (Germany & Cabrera, 1999: 4).

The design of these tests were realised according to the parameters and format of the Modern Languages Examinations (MLE) of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) .

This evaluation scale is the same one that is being used currently in the Caribbean. Furthermore, this pattern of assessment was adopted for the pre-test and post-test applied; i.e., the scores used for the two tests were as follows: Listening Comprehension 20 points, Reading Comprehension 20 points, Oral Production 30 points and Written Production 30 points, giving a total of 100 points or 100%. The pre-test consisted of a written test to measure

language proficiency and an interview to measure communicative competence in terms of objectives, content and skills related to the topic of the teaching module. The post-test consisted of a test and an interview equivalent to pre-test, with the same format, which measured the same objectives, content and skills, but with different texts to the pre-test so as not to influence the results.

The quasi-experimental longitudinal study, which was conducted to test the effectiveness of a mixed methodological model, based on task-based teaching and cooperative learning techniques, yielded very favourable results. The results of two tests (pre and post) were analyzed in terms of the mean, median, mode, variance, standard deviation, percentage of variability and correlation in order to describe the behaviour of the sample and make a comparison between them.

Regarding the hypotheses, Table 3 presents the different results observed in the pre-test of the group. These are illustrated for each subject (S) of each group, by language skill (according to the test used, CXC).

To determine the median, the students were distributed according to the percentage of achievement. The calculation by the formula for linear interpolation gives a figure of 47.5. This means that 11 students (58% of the sample) had a score less than or equal to the median (41.88 – 47.5), while the remainder (42% of the sample) achieved a score greater than or equal to the median (48.13 – 56.56). In the pre-test, it can be seen that the average yield was 48.45 points out of 100. It is noted that of a total of 19 students, 11 (58% of the sample) are below the average obtained.

As for the average performance of the sample by language skill, the following results can be observed in Figure 3: (1) in relation to Listening Comprehension (item 1) the average gained is 8.99 points of a maximum of 20 (45% of achievement), (2) in terms of Reading Comprehension (item 2) the average achieved is 8.62 out of a total of 20 points (43% of achievement), (3) with respect to Oral Production (item 3) the average is 13.62 of a maximum of 30 points (45% of achievement) and , (4) as it relates to Written Production (item 4) the average obtained is 17.21 of a total of 30 points (57% of achievement).

Table 3

Results of the Pre-test (The 4 Language Skills)

S	Listening Comprehension (20%)	Reading Comprehension (20%)	Oral Production (30%)	Written Production (30%)	Total (100%)
1	8.1	10.09	14	15	47.19
2	6.05	6.80	14	16.90	43.75
3	10.9	9.23	11.2	19.07	50.4
4	11	9.25	15.75	19.38	55.38
5	10.2	8.36	16	18.57	53.13
6	8.5	10	11	16.12	45.62
7	5.5	7	11.6	19.65	43.75
8	7	9	12.88	18.62	47.5
9	9.8	8.75	12	16.33	46.88
10	8	6.25	12	12.19	38.44
11	8.05	8.07	16	17.26	49.38
12	9.8	9.2	17	19.88	55.88
13	8.9	8.06	16	18.92	51.88
14	10	9.68	16.5	20.07	56.25
15	11.5	9.06	9.5	11.82	41.88
16	9.7	8.88	12	12.42	43
17	8.6	8.5	12.9	18.13	48.13
18	10.9	8.94	15.8	20.92	56.56
19	8.4	8.75	12.7	15.65	45.5
Average	8.99	8.62	13.62	17.21	48.45

Table 4

Results of the Post-test (The 4 Language Skills)

S	Listening Comprehension (20%)	Reading Comprehension (20%)	Oral Production (30%)	Written Production (30%)	Total (100%)
1	15	17	27	23.53	82.53
2	17	17.55	26	28	88.55
3	12.5	13.7	22.5	16.8	65.5
4	17	18.5	24.5	23.43	83.43
5	13.8	12.5	19	18.25	63.55
6	16.5	19	20.5	28.94	84.94
7	10	14.5	19.5	15.19	59.19
8	15.5	13	23	20.78	72.28
9	16	11.6	28.5	21.91	78.01
10	12	15	23	18.73	68.73
11	13.05	14.8	22.5	22.09	72.44
12	15.8	18.2	22	20.96	76.96
13	14	12	26	26.61	78.61
14	13.6	19.1	23	17.19	72.89
15	16	16	18	17.55	67.55
16	11.5	13.2	24	21.8	70.5
17	16.8	17	18.5	17.58	69.88
18	19	20	23.5	21.84	84.34
19	11	16.8	20	17.2	65
Average	14.53	15.76	22.68	20.97	73.94

It should be noted that the distribution of pupils in percentage ranges of achievement in the pre-test sample intervals show that 41-50% and 51-60% present the highest number of students. In other words, all of the students were between these ranges: i.e. 12 students (63% of the sample) had an average of 41-50%, while 7 students (37% of the sample) had an average of 51-60%. It can therefore be summarized that 19 students (100% of the sample) were found between 41-60%.

Regarding the hypotheses, Table 4 illustrates both the scores obtained in the post-test by linguistic skill and the total score for each of the students in the sample (according to the test used, CXC).

In determining the median of the post-test, the students were distributed according to the percentage of achievement. The calculation by the formula for linear interpolation gives a figure of 72.44. This indicates that 10 students (53% of the sample) achieved a score less than

or equal to the median (59.19 – 72.44), whereas the other students (47% of the sample) had a score greater than or equal to the median (72.89 – 88.55). The average yield in the post-test is 73.94 points out of 100. Furthermore, it can be observed that from the 19 students, 11 (58% of the sample) were under the average: i.e., the same number as those presented in the pre-test.

As for the average performance of the sample by language skill, the following results are observed in Figure 4: (1) in relation to Listening Comprehension (item 1) the average gained is 14.53 points of a maximum 20 (73% of achievement), (2) in terms of Reading Comprehension (item 2) an average of 15.76 is achieved out of a total of 20 points (79% of achievement), (3) with respect to Oral Production (item 3) the average is 22.68 of a maximum of 30 points (76% of achievement), and (4) in terms of Written Production (item 4) the average obtained is 20.97 out of 30 points (70% of achievement).

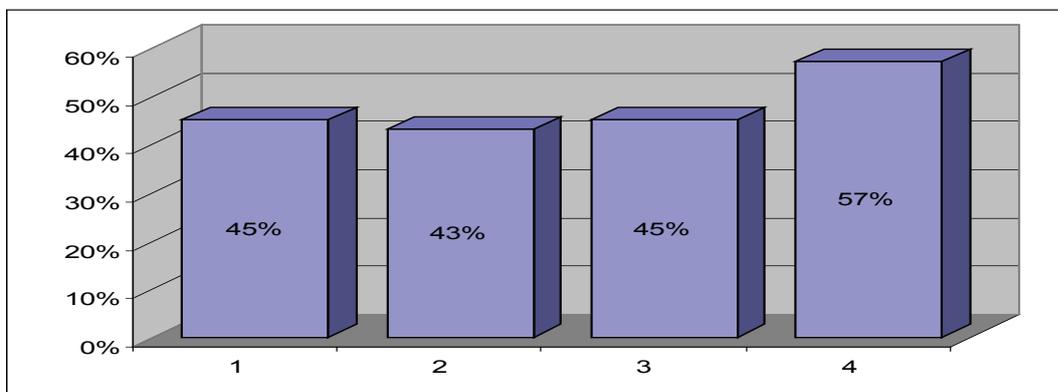


Figure 3
Average Performance by Language Skill in the Pre-test

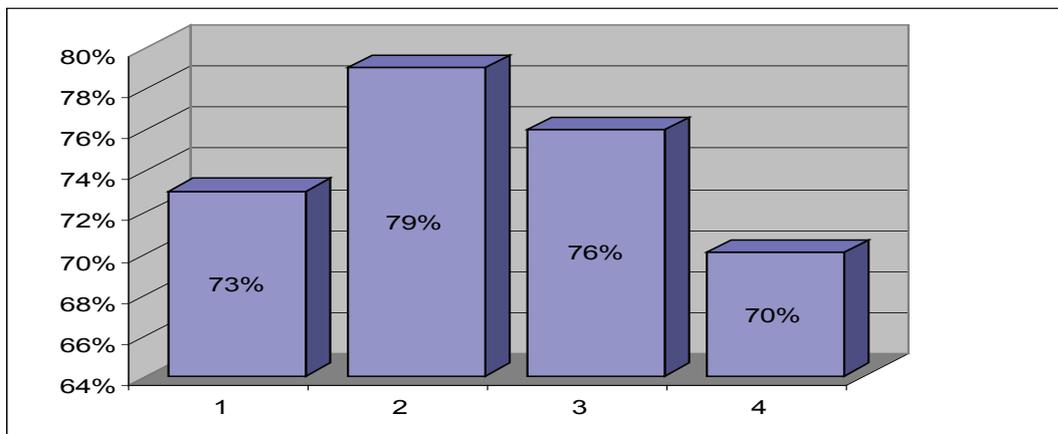


Figure 4
Average Performance by Language Skill in the Post-test

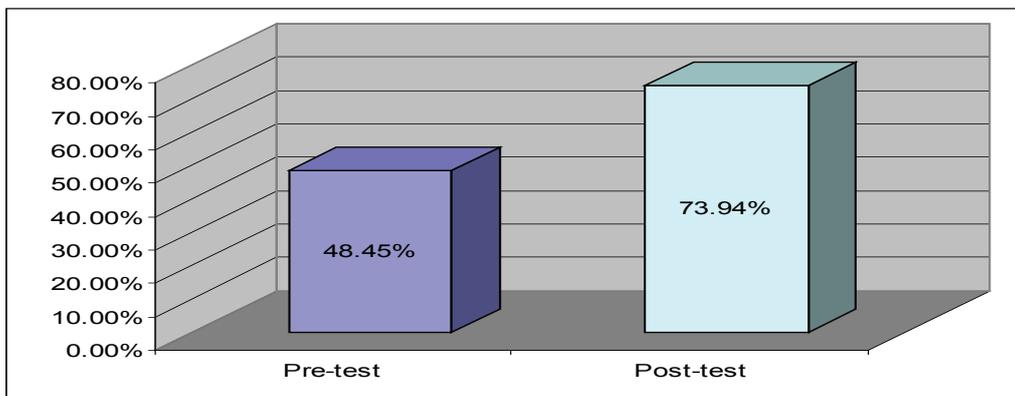


Figure 5
Averages Achieved in the Pre-test and the Post-test

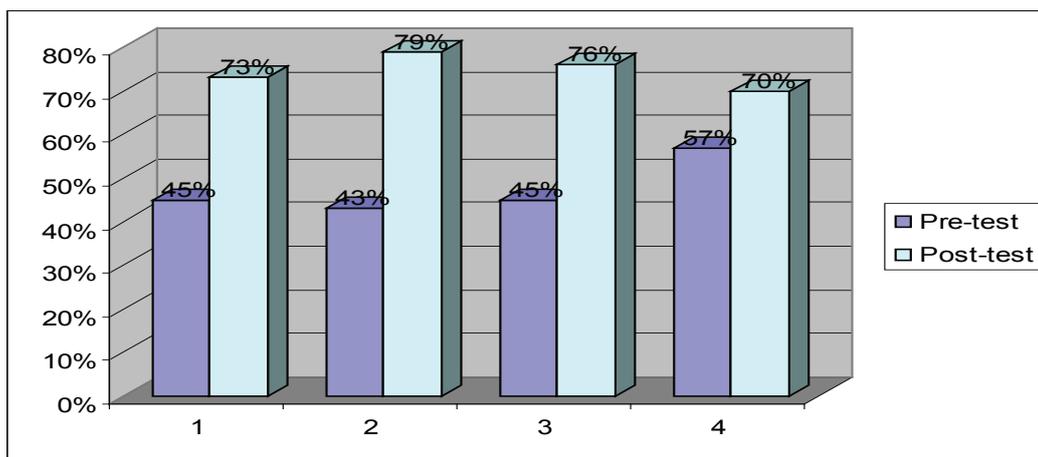


Figure 6
Difference between Performance by Language Skill in Pre-test and Post-test

The distribution of pupils in percentage ranges of achievement in the post-test shows that the ranges of 71-80% and 81-90% present the highest number of students. In other words, most of the students were between these ranges: i.e., 6 students (32% of the sample) had an average of 71-80%, while 5 students (26% of the sample) had an average of 81-90%. It can be therefore summarized that 11 students (58% of the sample) were found between 71-90%. The remainder (42% of the sample) were below this range.

From the results in terms of the median obtained in the pre-test (47.5%) and the median reached in the post-test (72.44%), one can observe an increase in it by 24.94.

As it relates to the average, if we contrast the values between the pre-test and post-test the number of students that fall short of it is 11 (58% of the sample). 7 of these students are the same ones who are below the pre-test average.

As for the average yield achieved in the pre-test and in the post-test, Figure 5 shows that the average in the pre-test is 48.45% while the average obtained in the post-test is 73.94%. As you can see the results, the mean of the post-test (73.94%) exceeds that of the pre-test (48.45%)

by 25.49%.

The difference established between the pre-test and post-test, according to the percentage scores also can be seen in the results obtained in each of the 4 language skills. The students performed better in the post-test than in the pre-test: (1) with respect to “Listening Comprehension”, the average achieved in the post-test (14.53) is above the average obtained in the pre-test (8.99) by 5.54; (2) in regard to "Reading Comprehension", the average in the post-test (15.76) exceeds the average achieved in the pre-test (8.62) by 7.14; (3) with respect to “Oral Production”, the average obtained in the post-test (22.68) exceeds the average in the pre-test (13.62) by 9.06; (4) as it relates to “Written Production”, the average achieved in the post-test (20.97) is greater than the average obtained in the pre-test (17.21) by 3.76.

In Figure 6, there is an increase in the average percentage obtained in each of the four skills: Reading Comprehension (2) that is by 36% (43% to 79%), followed by Oral Production (3) by 31% (from 45% to 76%); Listening Comprehension (1) by 28% (from 45% to 73%), Written Production (4) by 13% (from 57% to 70%).

Regarding the distribution of students according to the percentage of achievement, it is noted that the tendency in the pre-test to concentrate the students in the range of 41-60% changes, placing the post-test range above it (71-90%). As a result, students achieved a better performance in the post-test than in the pre-test.

To calculate the average percentage improvement in relation to the knowledge acquired by the 18 students, the difference in final percentage scores was divided (ΣD) by the number of students leaving a result of 25.49%. Ten students (53% of the sample) are above this average. 4 students (21% of the sample) are between 21-24%, and 5 students (26% of the sample) fall below these averages.

In summary, in accordance with the results from pre-test and post-test, the following can be highlighted:

- In terms of *Listening Comprehension*, it was noted that all of the 19 students had an increase in their knowledge. This means that there was a 100% improvement in this language skill.
- Relating to *Reading Comprehension*, it was observed that all of the 19 students improved their performance. This means that there was a 100% improvement in this language skill.
- With respect to *Oral Production*, there was an increase in the knowledge of all the 19 students. This shows that there was a 100% improvement in this language skill.
- In regard to *Written Production*, 14 out of 19 students performed better. This shows that there was a 74% improvement in this language skill.
- With regard to the final percentage scores achieved in the two tests, it was shown that 16 of the 18 students had an increase in their performance. This indicates that there was a 100% improvement at the end of the teaching module for Spanish as a FL/SL.

To determine whether the improvement in the learning and acquisition of a specific body of knowledge by the students was statistically significant, the difference between the average results of the pre-test and post-test was calculated using the paired *Student* test. The purpose of this was to quantify the difference between the average of the two tests, to verify if it was significantly different and to objectively establish the correlation between the variables. In order to establish the critical value, an error margin of 1% N-1 degrees of freedom (18) was considered, which is equal to 2.567. Any value above it would allow us to decide on the effectiveness of the mixed methodology used.

With respect to the statistical analysis, it was observed that the critical values obtained have surpassed that of 2.567. The critical values obtained for each language skill are as follows: Listening Comprehension: 9.709 $p > 0.01$; Reading Comprehension: 12.402 $p > 0.01$; Oral Production: 10.639 $p > 0.01$, and Written Production: 3.364 $p > 0.01$

A notable increase in each of the language skills must be appreciated. In accordance with what has been previously said, the hypothesis outlined in this research can be validated, therefore indicating the success of the treatment given that the values obtained are considered to be statistically significant. These, in no way, cannot be attributed to randomisation, to chance or to external stimuli. They are due to the intervention process which was carried out.

It should be stressed that when adding the averages of each of the 4 language skills, to get the total percentage score for the initial test and final test, it became clear that the value of t exceeded the critical value of 2.567 (12.959 $p > 0.01$). Here, a noticeable increase must be valued in the analysis of the said tests. According to the above, the research hypothesis can be verified, revealing that this value is considered statistically significant. There is no doubt about the effectiveness of the mixed methodological model based on the results obtained.

Considering these figures, it can be said that the learning gained by students in the experimental group was due to the design, and the way in which the materials and means of delivering them were presented (through face to face classes, using various resources of this kind) encouraged students to practice skills in an integrated and compact way, involving them in a profound way, in accordance with the objectives of the mixed methodological model.

Conclusion

This research has focused its attention on answering the question with regard to improving the linguistic and communicative competence through practicing the 4 language skills in Spanish as a Foreign Language in the context of a mixed methodological model, TBLT and CLL. But as the treatment period was relatively brief (19 sessions) and also the small numbers of subjects (19), there will have to be further studies to confirm the trends that have been observed in this work.

Throughout the intervention module, the performance and response of students in relation to this new teaching methodology was evidenced. In general, the results of the experiment highlighted that performance in the language skills in Spanish for students at an intermediate level was highly improved when applying a combined learning model. This suggests that the students were supported in their learning, in an effective way, by the use of the face to face mode, thus confirming the hypotheses.

The design of the mixed methodological model based on tasks and cooperative learning techniques promoted opportunities for interaction in the target language, thus achieving higher learning. The Task-Based Approach provided the essential theoretical bases for the execution of the activities with the face to face modality. Specific tasks were created with defined objectives and the students were placed in the context in which they had to

work, in order to carry out each task in a positive way. The idea of introducing real communication situations enabled them to reflect and focus more on the target language thus choosing the appropriate structures to produce texts.

Through this study it was possible to reach conclusions which try to contribute to the area of language teaching and learning and more specifically to the teaching of Spanish as a foreign or second language. The effectiveness of a mixed methodological model for teaching Spanish as a FL/SL for the purpose of improving the linguistic and communicative competence of a specific body of knowledge was proven.

There is empirical evidence which demonstrates that TBLT and CLL are focused on meaning and are effective for the development and improvement of linguistic and communicative competence (Lightbown, 2002; Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). However, there is not much evidence of experimental research in which TBLT and CLL might have been used in the teaching-learning of Spanish as a FL/SL. This makes it clear that the existing empirical evidence is related to other languages including English and German.

Presently in Guyana, the teaching methodology that is still being used to teach Spanish and other foreign languages is the traditional methodology known as the *Grammar-Translation Method* for which this study is an important contribution towards the teaching of these languages. In fact, *this research is the first of its kind in this country* since, to date, there is no documented evidence of the experimentation with mixed methodologies ever being done in Guyana to teach foreign languages.

This research may form part of the existing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these methodological approaches emphasising the fact that the TBLT and CLL are concentrated on meaning and the development of the student's instrumental and formal knowledge.

Undoubtedly, this research approach will enrich the area of language teaching and learning with respect to the language specified. There is no doubt that this study has a lot of importance and scope for researchers, educators and language teachers. Moreover, this mixed methodology could be successful the classrooms of secondary and tertiary institutions in those countries not yet using these new teaching methods for Spanish as a FL/SL.

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