Research Reports

Perceptions of Students and Teachers in an English Course: Reconstructing a Syllabus

Percepciones de estudiantes y profesores de un curso de inglés: Reconstruyendo un syllabus

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Abstract

This initial research report aimed to explore the impact on students' and teachers' learning and teaching expectations of an English Course containing English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Saber Pro samples, and the use of graded audiobooks by interpreting students and teachers' perceptions. Data was gathered through a survey and a focus group interview. The initial findings revealed that the current syllabus was designed efficiently in terms of layout, but certain aspects concerning content, language level, methodology, and evaluation needed to be adjusted. The interpretation of this academic community's perceptions resulted in the reconstruction of the course syllabus.

Key words: English for Specific Purposes, graded audiobooks, perceptions, Saber Pro, and syllabus

Resumen

Este estudio preliminar de investigación cualitativa tiene como objetivo explorar el impacto de un curso de inglés en las expectativas de aprendizaje y enseñanza de estudiantes y profesores mediante la interpretación de sus percepciones. El curso contiene inglés para propósitos específicos (ESP), simulacros de Saber Pro y el uso de audiolibros. Los datos se recogieron mediante una encuesta y una entrevista focal. Los resultados revelaron que el syllabus actual estaba diseñado de manera eficiente en términos de estructura, pero que era necesario ajustar ciertos aspectos en relación con el contenido, la organización y el material. La interpretación de las percepciones de esta comunidad académica dio lugar a la reconstrucción del syllabus.

Palabras clave: audiolibros, inglés para propósitos específicos, percepciones, Saber Pro y syllabus

Introduction

Throughout our teaching practices in Colombia, particularly in Boyacá, we have observed that foreign language learners have presented issues with learning English as a foreign language. Despite the fact that undergraduate students have spent over eleven or even more years studying this language throughout their schooling and independently, they usually start their English process at the university with poor grammatical skills and difficulty communicating in English. Part of the issue comes from a lack of exposure to the language and an unsuitable curriculum.

In order to resolve these issues, the current syllabus for a level V course at a language institute in Tunja, Colombia decided to restructure the current syllabus. Part of the restructuring process involved interpreting the students' and teachers' perceptions of their learning and teaching environments. Teachers and students have encountered thoughtful challenges while meeting the demands of their personal and professional development regarding English. As a result of listening to our participants' perceptions, we can propose aspects to improve the syllabus to make the course more effective and meaningful. Collecting students' and teachers' perceptions regarding the syllabus during two semesters resulted in an encouraging outcome in order to meet their learning and teaching expectations. To start the design process, we took into account the responses taken from a survey that was applied to a large group of students and teachers in order to identify their needs and interests regarding the English learning process. Among their responses was the desire to learn English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and exam preparation. Likewise, due to the lack of reading and listening skills in the classes, a third component was considered, which was the use of audiobooks. According to Breen (1987):

> An important characteristic of the process syllabus is that it is an infrastructure rather than a learning plan, with the syllabus designer no longer pre-selecting learning content, but providing a framework for teacher and learners to create their own on-going syllabus in the classroom thus allowing for changing

abilities, learning needs, and perceptions in the learners, without specifying particular content, methodology, lexis, structure, or grammar. The teaching-learning process therefore provides significant lesson content, and it is unnecessary and unrealistic to plan content without consulting the participants simultaneously. (p.166)

The main objective of this study was to explore students' and teachers' perceptions of the English level V course that contained English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Saber Pro samples, and the use of graded audiobooks. Therefore, the main research question that guided this study was the following: What are undergraduate students' and teachers' perceptions about a pilot syllabus based on the communicative competence approach and ESP, Saber Pro, and graded audiobooks for an English level V course in a public university language institute?

Theoretical Framework

The main constructs of this research study are communicative competence approach, integration of skills, the role of materials like English for Specific Purposes, Saber Pro, and the use of graded audiobooks in language learning.

Communicative Competence Approach

The current syllabus for English level V adopted the roles of this approach as a vital aspect to deal with English as a foreign language, intending to guide the students in their ability to express themselves but also to be understood in different settings. Simultaneously, the teachers would have the chance to reframe their pedagogy, methodology, and resources to bypass the traditional teaching methods for a more dynamic process. The objectives of the communicative competence approach may be achieved when a syllabus is well-designed and responds to all the participants' needs and interests.

The communicative competence approach has been implemented in

different contexts in language teaching. This includes the integration of the four language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and its two components (grammar and vocabulary). However, communicative competence in language learning and teaching processes has been focused on the development of grammar and vocabulary instead of the functionality of the language per se.

According to Denkci-Akkas and Coker (2016), the communicative approach goes back to the late 1960s in Britain. During this period, it was discovered that the functional and communicative potential of language had a main role in language learning and teaching. Language is meant to be understood and expressed. This implies that there is a bigger role in the communicative functions of language instead of the traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary.

Consequently, Brown (2000) defines communicative competence as "that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts"

(p. 248). Richards and Rodgers (2002) mentioned that communicative competence deals with activities involving real communication, which allow the learner to use meaningful language to perform meaningful tasks. Harmer (1987) (as cited by Denkci-Akkas & Coker, 2016) explains that "the learning principles in accordance with the communicative approach puts the emphasis on communicative activities in which language is utilized as a tool to accomplish an interactive assignment" (p. 73). As a result, the integration of the four main skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) play an important role in order to see language as a whole. By integrating the skills, the participants have the opportunity to develop them all at once. Nan (2018) stated that the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are interconnected and interconditioned in terms of psychological and cognitive processes. Nan affirmed that in the language acquisition theory of psycholinguistics, the skills dealing with comprehension (listening and reading) precede those of linguistic production (speaking and writing). He concluded that linguistic comprehension is the foundation

for linguistic production, given that only sufficient understanding can lead to effective expression.

Considering the previous ideas, professors expected their students to have a communicative competence level where they were able to develop content of level V after taking four previous levels of English. This would allow students to achieve a B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference. In level V, a student is expected to talk about experiences, dreams, hopes and goals, as well as provide opinions and explanations about particular situations (Council of Europe, 2001).

As Nan (2018) mentioned, communicative competence should be seen as a process of comprehension which integrates the four skills to get effective and real communication. To obtain this, the present study tried to understand the students' and teacher´s perceptions in accordance with a supported theory to redesign a syllabus that better fits into the current academic situations. Richards (2006) highlighted that when teachers are asked to give a detailed explanation of what they mean by "communicative," their descriptions differ according to their perceptions. Mowlaie and Rahimi (2010) claimed in their study that teachers' beliefs regarding the approach do not match with what they really do in the classroom. Even if they are taught about the communicative approach at university, many of them continue to teach using grammar-based methods, and "they did not feel the need or necessity of implementing communicative approaches as they did not believe in enabling students to communicate" (p. 1527). Another crucial aspect in order to have a global understanding of foreign language learning processes deal with the role of material implemented by the teachers.

Materials in Language Teaching

Richards and Schmidt (2010) defined materials in language teaching as "anything which can be used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language" (p. 354). According to Tomlinson (2003), materials can be visual, auditory, linguistic, or kinesthetic, and they can be presented in print, or on CDs, DVDs, or the internet. Richards and Renandya (2002) claimed that materials

play a vital role in language teaching, regardless of whether the teacher uses a textbook or a set of materials made by themselves because they are the main source of information for learners.

Mishan and Timmis (2015) argued that materials in language teaching must follow certain principles. Firstly, they should meet psychological needs such as providing motivation or creating a sense of order. Secondly, they should provide exposure to the language through different genres, styles, accents, etc. Additionally, materials need to provide a wide range of information including grammar, vocabulary, and culture. Finally, materials should elicit learners to do extra activities, such as discussions, debates, projects, and learn about new topics beyond their experience.

Most language materials are in print, usually in the form of a textbook (Tomlinson, 2003). This is the case for classes in levels I to IV at the university language institute where this study was conducted. However, for English level V, it was decided to base the current syllabus on three pillars: English for Specific Purposes, Saber Pro exam training, and

graded audiobooks after taking into account a previous needs analysis.

English for Specific Purposes

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) commented that knowledge of a foreign language is seen as the sign of a complete education; however, the reason to learn another language was not well/defined. Thanks to the economic power of the United States after World War II, English became the language of science, technology, and commerce. Consequently, English has become the language in which technical manuals are written, business is conducted, and medical knowledge is updated. According to Nickerson (2013), English is still the most used language in business and education, more so thanks to the current technology options we have.

Considering that English has such high importance in our current world, it is not unusual that universities in Colombia make it mandatory to study this language, especially as a requirement to graduate. In the university where this study took place, students were required to take four levels of English, mostly focused on following a textbook and guided by grammar topics.

However, many students requested to learn English related to their particular areas of study. This is called English for Specific Purposes (ESP). According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), the ESP-based class is one in which the contents and goals of the course are set according to the particular needs of a group of learners, such as English for business, English for technology, etc.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) distinguish ESP courses into three broad categories: English for Science and Technology, English for Business and Economics, and English for the Social Sciences. Similarly, each category can be differentiated if the learners need English for academic reasons (English for Academic Purposes) or if they need it for their work (English for Occupational Purposes).

ESP is not simply used to learn a set of words or phrases from a work environment, but it is also about being able to freely and confidently express oneself about their fields of work/study by using the communicative functions of language. This means that learners should not close themselves off to only learning a language of a certain field (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). There are indeed differences depending on the context of each career; however, it is necessary to remind everyone who takes a class based on ESP that it is still the same language, and they should not neglect other aspects of the foreign language. In 1972, Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (as cited in Basturkmen, 2006) added that learners must have knowledge of basic English, such as vocabulary and grammatical structures, before studying more specific English for their careers. Coxhead and Nation (2001, as cited in Basturkmen, 2006) commented that once a learner knows the most useful words for English, it is necessary to start learning more specialized vocabulary depending on the goals of the learners. Considering that learners need to have basic knowledge of vocabulary and grammar in order to start a class based on ESP, it was deemed appropriate to start giving this classes in level V, where it is expected that students have a sufficient vocabulary and grammar level.

The goal with ESP is to prepare learners to use English in academic or professional environments. According to

Basturkmen (2006), the particular needs of the students should be the key feature when creating an ESP syllabus. She stated that this makes the course more motivating; however, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) warn that the choice of topics should not be narrow since that could be demotivating. This is paramount in courses where students do not belong to the same career, as it so happens in the university where this study took place. Nevertheless, it has been a challenge to accomplish this in the setting of the current study due to the great variety of students' careers in one single group. When designing an ESP-based course, Basturkmen (2006) recommended that it is necessary to take into account the type of language, what students already know, the topics that will make up the syllabus, and if the learners of that course have broader or more specialized needs.

Saber Pro

According to Law 1324 of 2009 (Congress of the Republic of Colombia, 2009), the *Instituto Colombiano para Evaluación de la Educación* [Colombian

Institute for Educational Evaluation-ICFES] has the function of evaluating the different educational centers through a standardized exam. One of these exams is the Saber Pro, which aims to assess the quality of higher education degrees[1]. Students who have completed more than 75% of their university credits must take this exam.

Students take the Saber Pro in two sessions. The first session consists of mandatory generic knowledge, and the second corresponds to more specific questions depending on the degree of the test-taker (ICFES, 2019). In the first session, students are evaluated in five generic competences or modules: critical reading, quantitative reasoning, citizen knowledge, written communication, and English.

The English module in the Saber Pro exam has 55 questions divided into seven sections dealing with vocabulary association, interpretation, grammar use, and reading comprehension. Listening, writing, and speaking skills are not taken into account for this exam. Since Saber Pro

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[1] As stated by the *Ministerio de Educación Nacional* [National Ministry of Education] in Decree 3963 of 2009.

has a great importance in terms of institutional evaluation, preparing students to take this exam successfully has also become a main concern for the university. For this reason, training students for Saber Pro has become one of the components chosen to be part of the syllabus of English V. Specifically, six weeks of Saber Pro training were included. Students had continuous training for this exam in the first three weeks of each half of the semester. During the training section, teachers have to explain the different sections of the exam, and students have to present mock Saber Pro exams.

Using Graded Audiobooks in English Teaching

English levels I to IV spend very little time improving listening skills. This is because there is a greater emphasis on the use of grammar in the textbooks being used. Although these books incorporate a number of listening sections, they are few and short in duration. According to Wilson (2008), among the four language skills, listening is historically the one that has been neglected the most. With the idea of improving those weak areas in students,

the intention was to improve listening skills when students reached level V.

Consequently, at a staff meeting, the use of graded readers with audio was suggested to accomplish this goal. Graded readers are

> books which are specially written or adapted for second language learners. This involves severely restricting the vocabulary that can occur, controlling the grammatical structures that can occur, and matching the length of the text to the vocabulary and grammar controls. (Nation & Wang, 1999, p. 356).

According to Nation and Wang (1999), some writers do not see a place for simplified reading material because they think that this type of language is not appropriate for learners. However, these authors claim that the biggest advantage of these books is that they allow learners to access the experience of reading in a foreign language without having to spend many years studying it. Not only that, but Hill (2008, as cited in Claridge, 2011) says that the main objective of graded books is

to provide text for extensive reading, or in Krashen's terms, to provide a large amount of comprehensible input for language learners, particularly useful in circumstances where they would be unable to get a great deal of it without the printed word. (p. 45)

The intention of the teaching staff was for graded audiobooks to work as a tool to improve students' listening skill and as a way for them to experience an activity they have not done before in the previous levels. Taking that into account, having to read a graded audiobook was included as an assignment in the syllabus of English V. Likewise, Waring and Nation (2004) said that graded readers should play an important role for second language learners because these books provide an ideal range of words depending on the language level of learners. Waring and Nation also mention that learners may increase their vocabulary from reading and that this can be encouraging for them. In fact, Nation and Wang (1999) affirmed that learners who read a set of graded readers not only find new words but also find them numerous times. This repetition of words gives a great opportunity to learn

vocabulary. In order to take full advantage of this, learners need to be consistent, and it is suggested that they should read several different audiobooks in one level (Nation & Wang, 1999). Likewise, learners should read one graded reader per week in order to obtain enough vocabulary repetitions (Waring & Nation, 2004).

Similarly, listening to audiobooks for a certain amount of time a day can be a very enjoyable and rewarding process with long term benefits in language learning (Wilson, 2008). According to Priyadarsini (2017), the use of audiobooks can help learners improve their vocabulary, pronunciation, and intonation patterns. Learners are also exposed to new dialects and unfamiliar accents through audiobooks. Nevertheless, listening to an audiobook might come with its own problems, such as the fact that the pace might be too fast or too slow or the narrator's voice might be irritating or dull. Similarly, Wilson (2008) mentioned some challenges when choosing an audiobook for a class; for example, finding one at the right level of language that the learner finds interesting.

Research Methodology

Type of Research

This initial research study was framed under a qualitative research method. According to Carr and Kemmis (1986, as cited in Pinto, 2018) "a qualitative research method is based on gaining understanding of the world and meaningful experiences lived by students" (p. 38). Similarily, this study relied on the case study method because perceptions were not only taken from the students, but they were also taken from the teachers in order to have a more holistic view of the process. As Yin (2003) asserted, it is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life-context" (p. 13). Here, both teachers and students are present in an EFL classroom and all their expectations, feelings, and opinions need to be considered. Similarly, Patton (1985, as cited by Pinto, 2018) stated that "qualitative research intends to understand the situations and interactions between people in a particular context" (p. 38). In this particular case, this study counted on comprehending specific academic situations by piloting a syllabus; we took into consideration participants' points of view to reconstruct it and obtain better educational results.

Setting and Participants

The initial research study took place in a public university in Tunja, Boyacá, Colombia. This public university hosts a majority of students from Boyacá, as well as other departments around Colombia. This university offers different majors and, in order to obtain their undergraduate degree, students have to have a B1 level of English or have passed four to six levels of English. In order to satisfy this prerequisite, a language institute is in charge of providing this service. The participants of this study were two groups of level V students and four of their teachers. The students' ages were between 16 and 24 years old. Some of these students were taking English as a requirement, while others were taking it because they wanted to continue studying the language.

Data Gathering Procedures

In order to pursue the main objective of this initial research proposal and to provide an answer to the research question, a focus group interview and a survey were used to collect data.

Focus Group Interview

According to Cheng (2014), "one of the key factors in focus group interviews is that participants can converse with other people in a comfortable way" (p. 381). A focus group is composed of three aspects: (1) classification of groups, (2) size of a group, and (3) number of interviews.

1. Classification of groups:

Nelson and Frontczak (1998, as cited by Cheng, 2014) mentioned that "no matter the participants are strangers or acquaintances, the difference in their opinions on the discussed topic is not significant, quantitatively or qualitatively" (p. 382). In this initial research study, the focus group interview was applied only to teachers due to time constraints. The focus group interview was based on questions related to the syllabus. Those questions were addressed to have more details about the pertinence of the syllabus in terms of materials, content, methodology, and evaluation among other aspects.

2. Size of the group:

According to Morgan (1998, as cited in Cheng, 2014), the size of a focus group depends on the recruitment conditions and the purposes of the research. However he recommended that the number should be between 6 and 10 participants. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there must always be that fixed number of participants since it depends on the circumstances of the context and the research. In this study, four teachers who were teaching level V were interviewed.

3. Number of interviews:

According to Krueger and Casey (2000, as cited in Cheng, 2014), "saturation of opinions" is the principle for adding or reducing the number of interviews. If new opinions are constantly proposed after 4-5 interviews, researchers should consider adding more interviews. If no more opinions or data are proposed in the discussion, the interviews can be either terminated or reduced. Insufficient interviews may lead to the loss of

important information, but excessive interviews may also cause a waste of time and cost. Cheng (2014) sustained that the number of interviews should be determined by the balance between research information and the research resource size of a group. In this particular study, only one focus interview was applied, and the interview lasted approximately an hour. The researchers managed the interview as a dialogue where they asked questions and the teachers contributed, complemented, and agreed with their coworkers' responses.

Survey

Survey research is used

to answer questions that have been raised, to solve problems that have been posed or observed, to assess needs and set goals, to determine whether or not specific objectives have been met, to establish baselines against which future comparisons can be made, to analyze trends across time, and generally, to describe what exists, in what amount, and in what

context. (Isaac & Michael, 1997, p. 136)

Kraemer (1991, as cited in Glasow, 2005) identified three characteristics of survey research. First, it is used to describe specific aspects of a particular population. Second, since the data is collected from people, it is subjective. Finally, survey research uses a sample portion of the population from which the findings can later be generalized. For this initial research study, a qualitative survey was applied to the students via email with the aim of collecting data regarding their expectations and experiences about the course.

Data Analysis

A detailed description of the data analysis procedure is presented below. To organize the data gathered, we made use of the material provided by Freeman (1998, as cited in Saavedra, 2014). Freeman asserted that the categories emerge from common patterns and four steps: naming, grouping, finding relationships, and displaying the data.

First, we organized the data gathered in each one of the instruments. We made use of the focus group interview as a means of identifying information about the quality of the syllabus, teachers' expectations and concerns, material, content, evaluation, and their employed methodologies. To contrast the information collected from the focus group interview, we made use of a written survey to make a comparison of what the students experienced while being in the course and the teachers' perceptions expressed in the focus interview. Information about the quality of the course, students' expectations, material, lessons, content, and evaluation and material were also asked in the survey. A survey was administered at the end of the course. It was applied by two of the teachers via email to get an idea about the participants' concerns related to the course. After tabulating the results, we compared the information provided by the students and teachers with some theories. Then, we classified the issues gathered from each one of the instruments by the process of naming, grouping, finding common patterns, and displaying to set the categories.

In order to add to the main objective and to provide an answer to the research question, the following processes were performed until the data was analyzed. Firstly, this initial study made use of a pilot syllabus that had been designed by the researchers. Consequently, we asked the participants to sign a consent form to carry out this initial research study.

Then, we classified the answers according to the differences and commonalities. These differences and commonalities were classified taking into consideration the main constructs. Common patterns were underlined using different colors. After this process, we determined the issues gathered from the focus interview applied to the teachers.

Once the information was classified, we started defining the main category. The answers from the participants were taken verbatim as they were said and written (including possible grammar and spelling mistakes).

The data collected from the instruments were analyzed and then categorized with the aim of finding the thematic axis. The data was also

interpreted by relating the main category resulting from the data collected in each one of the instruments: a survey and a focus interview supported with theory. The main category is presented along with a report of the research findings and the answer to the research question as well.

RESEARCH QUESTION	GENERAL OBJECTIVE	CATEGORY
Main research question: What are undergraduate students' and teachers' perceptions about a pilot syllabus based on the communicative competence approach and ESP, Saber Pro, and graded audiobooks for an English level V course in a public university language institute?	To explore undergraduate students' and teachers' perceptions about a pilot syllabus for English level V based on the communicative competence approach and ESP, Saber Pro, and graded audiobooks for an English level V course in a public university language institute	POSITIVE: It needs to be adjusted.

Findings

Main Category: POSITIVE: It Needs to be Adjusted

The main category provides an answer to the main question in terms of the impact of an English course on students and teachers. Initially, the teachers agreed that the overall quality of the course was satisfactory. However, they affirmed that some aspects needed to be adjusted. The following extracts were taken from the transcriptions of the focus group interview for the question: *What is the overall quality of the course (English V)?* The teachers responded:

> I thought it was sufficient, but I needed to implement the course quite a bit. (Professor JA)

> … the syllabus was well done. I think it does a little bit too much and I think some of the things can be cut back. I think there are better choices of books that we could also use. (Professor T)

> I think the syllabus was well done, I mean, it has many interesting things, but the time was not in favor…So, maybe we can distribute in a different way it was proposed because at the same time it is hard to cover. (Professor R)

The course syllabus presented some teaching objectives to be accomplished by students based on the three main aspects: Saber Pro, ESP (English for Specific Purposes), and an audiobook. Thus, regarding the objectives set in the syllabus, the teachers affirmed that they needed to change them as the course progressed. To the question: *Did you have objectives that were different than the objectives we had in the syllabus?* The teachers responded the following,

> I kept most of the syllabus, the schedule, the same, but I rewrote the syllabus objectives for my students' and for my needs…(Professor JA)

> I introduced some changes because I saw that what I was expecting in the beginning was different. (Professor S)

> …I stuck too much to the syllabus. Then, I realized it was not realistic, I was not going to go there, not written, I made some changes…(Professor R)

Regarding the students' opinions about content, they expressed that ESP, Saber Pro, and the audiobook were useful and important for their careers. These extracts were taken from the written survey. To the question: *What was your favorite lesson?* The students responded the following,

> English for Specific Purposes because it´s very important for my career. [sic] (Student A)

> ESP it's a helpful tool to improve in my career because every of the things I see are in English. [sic] (Student B)

> Those from the book in which we learnt new vocabulary, but I didn't like the most of it is not used to much, that it's from literature. [sic] (Student C)

> When we have read the book scarlet letter, for general the class was interesting. [sic] (Student D)

On the other hand, the course syllabus for Level V was designed for students with at least an intermediate level of English in which a communicative level was expected. The students' and teachers' expectations were mainly based on language level.

As for students, they asked for more time to practice English and, in particular, speaking. Even though they did not say anything related to the level they considered they had, they did want to be more exposed to language activities. The next extracts, taken from the survey, best express the ideas above. To the question: *What kinds of lessons/sessions do you wish we had done more of? (please explain).* The students responded the following,

Try to practice a little bit more student practice. [sic] (Student A)

I'd like to you focusing more in speaking skills and all related with this…[sic] (Student B)

I think that reinforce the speaking is very important. [sic] (Student C)

Vocabulary and speaks sessions. [sic] (Student D)

would have to have more dialogue session. [sic] (Student E)

Maybe if the course learn us about how to speak and have conversations in a better way. [sic] (Student F)

Here, we need to say, as Harmer (2007) affirmed, "students need chances to activate their language knowledge through meaning-focused tasks. This activation is achieved when they try to deploy all or any of the languages they know either to produce language (spoken or written) or to read or listen for meaning" (p. 79).

It may be said that, despite the students' level, students were not worried about their level but ways to obtain a higher one. This differed from that of the teachers who were mainly concerned about the students' language level and were expecting a higher command of English. The next extracts were taken from the transcripts of the focus group interview. To the question: *Did the course meet your expectations?* The teachers responded the following,

…it was impossible to cover everything and given that many students didn't have the level to be in level five. There are things that are very difficult to do. (Professor R)

I had a higher expectation of what the course would look like and what the students would look like, and that expectation was not met and it's because of the level. The reason I went from Level 1 and 3 to business was because it was a higher level of English, and business is my background. When I was offered this class, I was excited about having it because it was going to be new, but my expectation was that I was going to have higher level English students. (Professor JA)

…that being said, what struck me was the level of their speaking ability. But as far as the writing ability, it was fine, generally speaking. It wasn't perfect but it was good. Their grammar was really good. The listening ability was a little rough but overall they were okay. They didn't meet my expectations but they weren't far either. (Professor T)

… The problem was the level of the students, not the course itself. I'm not going to lie; I would make certain changes

but the fact that students didn't have the level was a drawback because there were many things that we could not do. If there had been a higher level of English, I would have been able to do much more. (Professor S)

The previous responses were related to language expectations. The teachers expected more from the students in terms of language. When the classes were taking place, teachers felt they could not advance due to a perceived lower level from the students. Harmer (2007) asserted that,

> Students are generally described in three levels: beginner, intermediate and advanced… These terms are used somewhat indiscriminately, so what one school calls it intermediate is sometimes thought of as nearer elementary by others, and someone else might describe a student as advanced. (p. 95)

The previous statement shows that teachers tend to place students in different levels based on teachers' expectations. The Common European Framework has set out a detailed standardized document about what students can do at various levels: A1- A2 Beginners, B1-B2 Intermediate, and C1-C2 Advanced. Hence, the objective of English V is to help students reach a B1 level. This means that it should not be expected that they start this course with that level. It could be argued that the level they were expecting is higher than what students in those courses are supposed to have. Teachers' and students' expectations are somehow barriers for them to develop the material of the course significantly. For example, a teacher has expectations when working with new students or with new approaches. According to Garcia, Scholes, and López (2013)

> Owing to educational and social demands, teachers expect students to develop and improve not only their academic and social skills, but also the skills needed to grow as a person in a changing society. These expectations not only influence a teacher's behavior and practice, but they also have an impact on their relationships with students. (p. 119)

Despite the students' level, they could enhance their vocabulary. They affirmed that learning new vocabulary,

while they were using ESP texts, Saber Pro samples, and the audiobook, helped them use it for their career. The vocabulary allowed them to be able to interact with their teachers and their partners. The next extracts were taken from the written survey to the question: *What was the most interesting thing you learned in this course? (please explain).* The students responded the following,

> It was good because I learn much vocabulary. [sic] (Student A)

> English for Specific Purposes because it's very important in my career. [sic] (Student B)

> Activity vocabulary of the carreer and speak to the class. ESP because it's a helpful tool to improve in my carreer because almost every of the things i see are in English. [sic] (Student C)

> The activities of the Scarlett letter, because it help [sic] me to understand and to learn more words. [sic] (Student D)

> Knowing plenty vocabulary, and interact with a teacher that just speaks English and also knowing how to read better. [sic] (Student E)

> When the teacher teach new vocabulary and the correct pronunciation of this. [sic] (Student F)

Lewis (1997) suggested that exposure to enough suitable input, not formal teaching, is the key to increasing the learner's lexicon', and that "most vocabulary is acquired, not taught" (p. 197).

The teachers perceived that students' lack of vocabulary is evident during the sessions that there should exist a balance between students' progress and teachers' efforts. The next extracts were taken from the transcripts of the focus group interview to the question: *What do you think about the components of the syllabus?* The teachers responded the following,

> I really like ESP, but I think it is not suitable for the level they have…(Professor S)

> They hate Saber Pro; they find it absolutely pointless. They say it is a waste of time…if they know some vocabulary, some reading comprehension skills, and they know the form of the exam, it's like 'voila'. They are going to get a good mark. (Professor S)

Students may have said that they have gained language skills, but the teachers did not perceive that as true. Another aspect that emerged from the

answers has to do with commitment throughout the course. Lack of students' commitment and autonomy were predominant factors for teachers. They expected more from these groups of students. They affirmed that they could not do much of what they wanted to because the students did not come to class with the assignments. Commitment and autonomy were not present in them.

> So the first 50%, I realized right away they weren't doing anything on their own. (Professor JA)

> And we didn't tell them that that was going to be the case. In my case I didn't tell them. But that shows that if they don't feel that there's some kind of need, if I don't give you something for it, so I don't do it it's not necessary, they are not going to do more than is necessary. (Professor S)

As Christenson, Reschly, and Wylie (2012) pointed out, "student engagement drives learning; it requires energy and effort; is affected by multiple contextual influences; and can be achieved for all learners" (p. 817). Gettinger and Walter (2012), on the other hand, claimed that "academic engaged time," that is, the amount of time students are actively involved, predicts academic achievement.

Furthermore, engagement is directly related to learning outcomes.

> Students don't know how to work autonomously. If we are going to do that, I need that they do a previous training in a way because the students… if you leave students to work on their own, they won't do it. I speak for my case, but I know it's my partner's case, I had to talk to them about the book a little bit, and we had to cover the book in class. (Professor S)

To contrast the previous statement, we present the answers from the students to the following question*: How would you consider your participation in class?* These extracts were taken from the survey.

> I participated in class and did the activities but I couldn't go to some classes. [sic] (Student A)

> I did not come to some classes at the end, but I tried do my best for the class and I lerned a lot. [sic] (Student B)

> I believe than this course was very important in new experiences and I learned new things. [sic] (Student C)

> Sometimes I didn't spend enough time to practice. [sic] (Student D)

> I don't spent so much time studying the lessons, however, I understand very well in class. [sic] (Student E)

Baralt, Gurzynski-Weiss, and Kim (2016) stated that emotional engagement may also include students' feelings of connection or disconnection with their peers in the class and, particularly, their task interlocutors. Cotterall (2000) suggested that raising students' awareness of ways of identifying goals, specifying objectives, and identifying resources will help them to realize these goals. Students are unlikely to be able to manage their own learning if they have no idea how learning works. As a result, by developing an awareness of language-learning theory, they are able to adopt learning strategies for themselves.

This means that we, as teachers, do not only have to complain about lack of autonomy or engagement, but we have to include those aspects as part of the course. As Harmer (2007) expressed,

> most teachers are keen to talk to students about the importance of becoming autonomous learners. But just telling students that autonomy is in some way a good thing will have little effect unless it is part of a wider course design — and unless we find ways of helping

students to become more independent. (p. 395)

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

There must always be a balance between students' needs, teachers' expectations, and institutional goals. The syllabus has been designed with aspects that the student community wanted as well as having the needs of the university in mind. The choice of topics has been adequate according to both professors and students, although there have been unfavorable observations regarding the amount of work directed at certain aspects, specifically the Saber Pro.

In the design of the syllabus, we have aimed at developing multiple more advanced areas, at least when compared to levels I to IV. This gave the impression of requiring a higher language level on the part of the students in order to carry out the classes in a satisfactory manner. However, the language level of the students may not match the expectations of the teachers. Because of this, the results may not be seen at first, but by analyzing the students' perceptions, it is possible to notice that

they have felt an improvement. This is why, future teachers at this level should have a more realistic view of what they will find in the classroom in order to not be disappointed, so that they can teach their classes more comfortably. In the end, teachers will be able to identify if there has actually been an improvement by the students.

The way teachers and students perceive their processes tends to be different from what actually happens in practice. Teachers felt that they could not work as they wanted to due to their perceived students' poor language level and lack of commitment. On the other hand, students claimed to have learned a lot from the course, especially in terms of vocabulary and reading. As a result, it is possible to see a lack of agreement between the teachers' and the students' perceptions in terms of learning. It is true that learning processes depend on the commitment of the student and that autonomy should be the core of any learning process. However, the teacher should not be dissatisfied to see low commitment. We suggest for the future that the design of the syllabus should include how to motivate autonomy and commitment.

In any teaching and learning process, it is suggested that both students' and teachers' voices must be heard in order to meet their expectations, needs, and interests. To reach that balance, it is necessary to have consistency and collaboration in the design of the existing syllabus. Therefore, there is a need to pilot a syllabus as a way to improve the teaching and learning process since they require constant assessment.

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