MASTER’S PROGRAMME
PEDAGOGY OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE
A HUMANISTIC APPROACH-BASED DIDACTIC STRATEGY TO IMPROVE RURAL STUDENTS’ ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

ARTÍCULO CIENTÍFICO:
UNA ESTRATEGIA DIDÁCTICA BASADA EN EL ENFOQUE HUMANISTA PARA MEJORAR EL APRENDIZAJE DEL IDIOMA INGLÉS DE LOS ESTUDIANTES DE ÁREAS RURALES

PRIOR TO THE MASTER’S DEGREE ON:
PEDAGOGY OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

LINE OF INVESTIGATION:
INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

In order to design a Humanistic Approach-Based Didactic Strategy to improve rural students’ English language learning, a qualitative investigation of an exploratory scope was carried out in some rural areas of Esmeraldas-Ecuador with a population of 30 rural English language teachers and a sample of 10 of them, who were selected intentionally. The methods of investigation used were the analytic-synthetic, inductive-deductive, and hermeneutics with the technique of the survey. The results revealed that teachers of rural areas mostly used cooperative, direct, and traditional teaching strategies. It was also shown that the teaching-learning process was mainly teacher-centered because most of the activities were developed around the teachers’ interests. Some humanistic elements such as collaborative learning and freedom at choosing the topic that students want to learn were occasionally applied in the English language teaching-learning process and finally, actions and procedures rooted in the principles of the humanistic approach were implemented in the proposed didactic strategy which consisted of five stages: pre-planning, activation of previous knowledge, learning immersion, feedback and community’s involvement. To sum up, even though some rural teachers’ teaching practices may be focused on certain humanistic principles, it did not imply that they had a broad knowledge about the humanistic approach that enable them to create humanistic based didactic guidelines to be followed in the rural students’ English language learning.

Keywords: English language learning, humanistic approach, rural areas, didactic strategies.

RESUMEN

A fin de diseñar una estrategia didáctica basada en el enfoque humanista para mejorar el aprendizaje del idioma inglés en estudiantes de áreas rurales, un estudio cualitativo de alcance exploratorio fue llevado a cabo en ciertas áreas rurales de la provincia de Esmeraldas con una población de 30 profesores de inglés pertenecientes a dichas áreas y una muestra de 10 de ellos, quienes fueron intencionalmente escogidos. Los métodos de investigación usados fueron de análisis-síntesis; inductivo-deductivo y hermenéutica con la técnica de la encuesta. Los resultados revelaron que los profesores usan mayormente estrategias de enseñanza cooperativas, directas y tradicionales. También se mostró que el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje fue mayormente centrado en los profesores porque la
mayoría de actividades se desarrollaban en base a los intereses del maestro. Algunos elementos humanísticos como aprendizaje colaborativo y la libertad en escoger el tema sobre el cual los estudiantes quieren aprender fueron empleados ocasionalmente por los profesores en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del idioma inglés y finalmente acciones y procedimientos fundamentados en los principios del enfoque humanista fueron implementados en la estrategia didáctica propuesta la cual consistió en 5 etapas llamadas pre-planificación, activación de los conocimientos y experiencias previas, inmersión en el aprendizaje, retroalimentación y participación de la comunidad. Para concluir, aunque algunas prácticas docentes de los profesores de inglés de áreas rurales podrían estar enfocadas en ciertos principios humanísticos, esto no implica que los profesores tuvieran un conocimiento extenso acerca del enfoque humanista que les permitiese crear pautas basadas en este enfoque y así aplicarlas en pro del proceso de aprendizaje del idioma inglés de estudiantes de áreas rurales.

**Palabras clave:** Aprendizaje del idioma inglés, enfoque humanístico, áreas rurales, estrategias didácticas.

**INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, the English language appears as an indispensable tool in today’s globalized world. Hence, it is the most used language in fields such as science, teaching, and technology. In the English language teaching field, the humanistic approach has arisen as an innovative mainstream since it involves many principles that have to do with psychological theories. Therefore, it is focused on learners as individual human beings whose principal needs must be met.

Humanism considers that the way students feel about themselves plays a fundamental role in how effective their English learning process is. In addition, learning achievements are directly related to the inclusion of their personality in the classroom. It means, students are allowed to express their feelings, likes and dislikes, thoughts, own experiences and, these are intended to boost their communicative, critical language skills, as well as their personal development. (Kathib, 2013)
In respect to teaching strategies, it is considered that personal development, together with the use of a language are linked to the social and cultural context. Humans need the language to communicate, so it should have been seen as an instrument to create development and social interaction. That is why strategies such as group work and pair work are frequently used in the humanistic approach. (Vygotsky, 1978)

Positive and encouraging teaching practices, that highlight the learners’ strengths over their weaknesses, are required with this method. However, encouraging teaching practices should not be understood as a substitution of the cognitive aspect in teaching the English language; rather, as a contribution to the process. Hence, making use of a humanistic approach implies not only trained teachers who have the language qualification to teach language contents but also training about humanistic teaching practices that benefit the English language competence and performance of students. For instance, a humanistic English language teacher is perfectly able to teach a grammar pattern and include the students’ likes, dislikes, and feelings simultaneously.

In Ecuador, English as a foreign language remains as a compulsory subject in the standardized curriculum proposed by the Ministry of Education. It is taught from Primary to Senior high school levels. However, for the latest years, Ecuador has been ranked as one of the countries with the lowest levels in English language proficiency in Latin America. Catholic, public, as well as private schools in rural and urban areas of Esmeraldas-Ecuador, must teach English as a foreign language; nevertheless, it has resulted in some emerging issues. On one hand, qualified English language teachers are not enough to cover the educational needs in the whole territory and, on the other hand, most of the people in rural areas of Esmeraldas still have a mindset that maintains the English language as an unnecessary, complicated, and boring subject.

Due to the qualified English teachers’ shortage, in many schools belonging to the rural area, the English teacher is the same who teaches the other subjects, causing a lack of effective methods and strategies to teach English in the classroom environment. Rural teachers of Esmeraldas are trained enough to teach principal subjects such as Mathematics and the Spanish Language, but they do not have the required English level proficiency to teach English. Even worse, teachers lack knowledge about how to handle methodologies and resources to make students learn the English language causing unmotivated and discouraged learners whose general view of this subject is that of a very difficult and boring one.
In contrast to traditional methods, Humanism involves innovative, flexible, social interactive methodologies and strategies. It is mainly centered on learners rather than on teachers, putting the authoritarian teachers’ role aside, making them facilitators of the teaching-learning process. Likewise, the humanistic method is intended to provide comfortable learning ambiances that eradicate students’ fears and anxiety towards the foreign language. Given that, the application of Humanism as a teaching approach could influence positively on the English language learning of students from rural areas, so the following question is posed: how can a Humanistic Approach-Based Didactic strategy contribute to improve rural students’ English language learning?

In order to offer an accurate answer to that question, the following objective was proposed: to design a Humanistic Approach-Based Didactic Strategy to improve rural students’ English language learning in rural areas of Esmeraldas province. To accomplish it, the specific objectives were: to determine English teachers’ didactic strategies to teach English as a foreign language; to identify rural students’ English language learning needs; to determine who has the central role in the English language learning process and to create some actions based on a Humanistic approach that English teachers can use to improve the teaching-learning process.

The current research was intended to propose the humanistic approach as a way to innovate, break the ice, and somehow eradicate the wrong perception of English as a complicated and unworthy subject. It will help teachers to find out more didactic and interactive ways to teach English as well as to hold a closer relationship with their students. It will benefit their teaching-learning process in order to boost their communicative skills and personal thriving simultaneously.

**Teaching English as a foreign language**

Teaching the English language plays a different role according to the place it is taught. In countries in which English is the native language (L1), English is taught as a second language (L2) to speakers of other languages because they need it in order to coexist and to be better adapted to the English language environment they are daily exposed. However, in most Latin America countries, English does not play this role and consequently is taught as a foreign language.

Teaching English as a foreign language implies that it is taught in schools, often widely, but it does not play an essential role in national or social life (Eggleston, 1980). In this
context, English does not mean an actual need for learners because the sole language they use as an instrument of communication is their native language L1.

According to Eggleston (1980), in foreign language situations learners of English tend to have an instrumental motivation for learning the foreign language. Because of that, the reasons why they study English are practical, such as learning to be able to communicate with native speakers or to get a certain level of proficiency or just to understand a book. At this point, the teachers’ job is a little more complicated because the learners’ motivation to learn English is not permanent and in most of the cases, learners are forced to learn it, since it remains as a compulsory subject in schools.

**The language learning process**

The current working world has increasingly demanded gifted professionals throughout the years and the mastery of at least one foreign language is a key point to grow, not only professionally but also spiritually. However, it is paramount to English language teachers to understand what aspects come into play in a language learning process.

According to Brooks, (1966) “language learning occurs in specific contexts for specific purposes, such as learning about a particular topic, participating in the community, and pursuing work and leisure activities” (p34). It means that language learning is a heuristic and continuous process which is supposed to enable learners to discover knowledge, while at the same time they are engaged in positive teaching practices. Learners start from what they already know to what they do not in order to enhance new learning.

The learning outcomes will be clearly reflected in the following language arts domains:

Listening and speaking: Learners who develop these domains are fully able to use the language to communicate and express feelings, needs, and thoughts, as well as to understand others. In addition, fluency and self-confidence are also developed as part of the learners’ skills.

Reading and writing: They imply reading and writing strategies that help students to interpret a wide variety of texts as well as to clarify ideas before expressing them, using a proper style according to the context.

Oackley (2018) states that “language learning is one of the most helpful ways to learn how to learn” (p3). Because language is a complex symbol system that includes rules and...
is used as a means of thought and communication, so is impossible to think about learning without language.

**Rural students’ peculiarities**

Currently, education has been established as a human right almost all over the world that is why in urban as well as rural areas every single human being must have access to a good quality of education. However, the quality of education in rural areas may differ from urban ones due to some peculiarities, such as misconceptions that rural families have about English language instruction, isolation, motivation, and infrastructure (Ramos and Aguirre, 2016).

- **Misconceptions about English language learning**
  The Socio-cultural families’ backgrounds seem to influence in the conception that rural students have about English language instruction. In fact, a high percentage of parents in rural areas are illiterate. Thus, it increases the probabilities that make them unable to guide and supervise their children’s learning process, which is an unavoidable requirement for education (Gomathi, 2014). Even worse, some families believe that the learning of basic reading, writing, and math is enough, they do not consider the learning of English as a foreign language as something relevant for their children (Ramos and Aguirre, 2016).

- **Isolation**
  Specialized teachers in teaching English as a foreign language are generally settled down in urban areas and as it is known rural areas are commonly located far from cities (Dasadarhi, 2016). That is why, most of the teachers are reluctant to teach in these areas. Teaching in rural areas involves hours of travelling or moving to a new place with a different lifestyle. The remoteness of rural areas also brings a lack of technological resources such as computers and internet access. In addition, “chances for exposure to English in cities are galore whereas it is scanty in rural areas” (Dasadarhi, 2016, p.276).
  It avoids the English language mastering in rural students.

- **Motivation**
The lack of motivation in rural students is another big issue. Rural students do not see English as a priority in learning and moreover their socio-economic situation in many cases makes them even ignore the existence of a foreign language as a tool of professional development. In other cases, some students show a certain attitude toward language, but they are discouraged by other students who find English uneasy, boring, and unworthy (Dasadarhi, 2016).

- **Infrastructure**
  Rural areas keep a growing population. Therefore, rural schools lack of enough room to cover the physical space the students need. It has led to the obligatory formation of multilevel and multitasks classrooms, which causes the English teaching-learning ineffective and meaningless. In addition, well-equipped classrooms are required to teach English as a foreign language and this equipment includes tape recorders, projectors, and computers, which is not easily given by governing authorities (Ramos, 2016).

- **Rural students’ English language learning needs**
  The current globalized world has resulted in the high demand of making students learn English as a foreign language worldwide. However, the students’ opportunities to learn this useful language seem to be strongly determined by the learners’ location. According to Hossain (2016) “many educators, researchers, legislators, and the general public believe that students from rural schools mostly receive an education that is inferior compared to the students that live in the urban areas” (p.3) and the situation is even worse in terms of English language learning. After some rural learners’ peculiarities have been exposed, it is important to establish their teaching English language needs (Hossain, 2016).

- **Parental awareness building about the importance of learning English**
  Parents’ background has a big influence on language learners’ performance. The reasons why learners do not pursue the English language learning and instead of that prefer to be dedicated to farmland and trading activities has to do directly with their parents’ low expectations about personal growth through education.
• **Free access to a wide range of learning English resources**
  An effective learning English process implies the use of a variety of innovative resources like technology but, unfortunately, most of the families in rural areas lack enough income and in some cases, they live in poverty. They also experience abandonment by government authorities since their investment in rural students’ education is weak. Given that, learners should be supplied with materials and resources because this would contribute to improve their English learning process.

• **Logistic support**
  Multilevel and multitask classrooms are common in rural areas due to the insufficient logistic support, that is why for many years, rural schools have required classrooms and proper spaces to promote a high level education has been the main need of rural principals and teachers.

• **Better qualified teachers**
  Teaching the English language requires trained teachers not only with a suitable level of English proficiency but also with enough knowledge about teaching methods and techniques in order to enable students through language skills. Rural areas lack qualified English teachers and consequently, it affects the students’ learning negatively.

**A Humanistic Approach to teaching**

In relation to Humanism in education, Vasuhi (2011) affirms that “when humanism is applied to teaching, it gains relevance because learners spend most of the time with teachers who are responsible to teach academic knowledge as well as to mold students’ character and mind” (p.4). Consequently, a humanistic teaching approach is mainly focused on learners as potential change agents that is why its applying implies the empowerment of learners to be not only competent individuals but also to be aware of human beings with a high sense of commitment and values practices.

According to Freire (1972), “humanization is the process of becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons who participate in and with the world” (p.8). In this context, the main purpose of a humanistic teaching approach is to provide an education model that teaches students to be aware of
their real situation first and then to think about ways to improve their development to contribute to the world improvement. In this way, some aspects come into play: first, the educational curriculum should not be standardized but rather; it should be fitted according to the needs of the different sociocultural communities, second, the content knowledge should take into account the learners’ interests, beliefs, and tastes finally, teaching practices should be intended to develop critical thinking skills which are oriented to take action. In order to go further, Freire (1972) has proposed some basic principles of a humanistic approach:

- **The reality of the learner is crucial:** Learners must be set in their real context that includes the social cultural issues which are involved in their lives. Likewise, teachers are in charge of developing social skills such as self-knowledge and empathy.

- **Content is meaningful and relevant to students’ lives:** A meaningful content has to do with the inclusion of students’ interests, beliefs, tastes, and everyday situations. Learners will not be engaged in a teaching-learning process unless they feel identified with the topic. Motivation is increased when the teaching practices are addressed to make students think critically about any topic of discussion.

- **Students’ prior knowledge is linked to new learning:** In a humanistic approach, meaningful contents need to be taught in a logical sequence that permits the new knowledge to be closely connected to the previous one. It is vital that students always keep experimental knowledge as a starting point.

- **Trusting and caring relationships advance the pursuit of humanization:** In order to create a safe and comfortable class environment, educators must build amicable relationships which implies to listen to students’ interests, concerns, needs, and expectations in order to know more about their identities and promote feelings of capability and self-confidence. This means that the teacher is more a facilitator than a rigid or strict figure.

- **Students’ empowerment requires the use of learning strategies:** The enabling of students’ autonomous and understanding requires a set of procedures and practices that includes stages in order to notice students’ progress so, teaching-learning strategies are fundamental to realize how effective and beneficial the students’ learning process is.
Humanistic elements in ELT

Teaching strategies based on the humanistic approach comprise some elements that play a fundamental role in the learning process.

- **Learners centered class**: It consists of an education which is primarily focused on learners rather than instructors. This means that learning emerges from students’ interests and needs as well as it is deeply rooted in students’ knowledge inquiry, experiences, and exploration. It refers to the “balance of power between teachers and learners” (p.16). In that way, learners centered classes offer the flow of rapport in the classroom. (Chen, 2016)

- **Critical thinking**: The current teaching in school not only should teach subjects such as Math, Science or Language; but also teach learners how to think. Critical thinking refers to “the intellectually disciplined process of thinking actively and skillfully” (p.25) which involves thinking critically to understand how world works and adopt diverse stands. These stands will contribute to the learners’ personal development and consequently to optimizing their performances in the different life aspects. (Scriven and Paul 2003)

- **Collaborative learning**: As its name suggests, it is mainly based on group members’ cooperation, which involves dealing with a diversity of beliefs interests, and ways of thinking so, collaborative learning highlights personal values such respect and tolerance. Some of the most common tasks have to do with problem solving, requiring information, completing a task, or creating a product. The main characteristics of collaborative learning are a common task or activity; small group learning, co-operative behavior; interdependence; and individual responsibility (Lejeune, 1999).

- **Experiential Learning**: It refers to the learning that comes from the experience. According to Kolb (1989) “Knowledge results from the combinations of grasping and transforming the experience”(p.74). It means that learners’ experiences are the base above the coming learning is constructed. Likewise, learners’ backgrounds and feelings have a great influence on the language teaching learning process.
Didactic strategies for English language teaching

The word didactic comes from the Greek word “Didaktikos”, which means “apt at teaching” (Cambridge Dictionary). According to Medina (2003) the term didactic is conceived as a discipline which puts emphasis on the teaching objectives and it is highly committed with the permanent change which consists of the learners’ growth and development as well as the inputs to the teaching-learning process.

Dinuta (2013) affirms that “didactic strategies offer solutions for teaching and learning, by combining different methods, processes, didactic means and forms of specific organization” (p.299). In addition, strategies involve activities that are based on a teaching method and represent a fundamental approach. Ferenczi-Fodor (1996). Therefore, didactic strategies could be defined as a set of rules that permit to put a teaching-learning process into practice.

The Sociocultural Approach to Language teaching

The social interaction and the learners’ cultural backgrounds play a determinant role in their personal development which, integrates the cognitive and the humanistic aspects. Lev Vygotsky (1978) stated that “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on the individual level” (p.57). Therefore, people learn a language due to the use of it in the community they are raised and then, they internalize it and construct learning being able to produce their own utterances.

The Zone of proximal development

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) has been explained as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

This theory has had great implications in the teaching-learning process because it suggests that the teacher’s role is being a facilitator who supports the students’ learning process and encourages them to move from the things they can do by their own to what they can do with help and guidance, what means the use of mediators. Hence, the knowledge
development is a permanent and continuous process and the learners’ position is relative because there is always something new to be learned.

**Antecedents**

Schmidtke and Chen (2016) conducted a research to show how the inclusion of humanistic elements in teaching could enable teachers to be more efficient at helping students to learn. The results revealed that they used some methods and strategies that could be perceived as humanistic elements. However, they seemed to be unaware of it because they never mentioned the humanistic approach in the interview they were applied. Among the humanistic elements used in their teaching were working in teams and learners-centered which clearly helped students to succeed.

In order to investigate the importance of the humanistic approach, Jin (2014) recorded a lesson that was taught using this approach in an English as a second language target group. The group was formed by multicultural learners. Moreover, the utilized methodology included the Communicative language teaching approach. Firstly, the humanistic aspects applied on this lesson consisted of giving freedom to the students at choosing the type of ceremonial speech they like, in that way their self-confidence increased because they selected a topic they were interested in; secondly, the students were allowed to work in groups using cooperative learning and social interaction and finally, the teacher was a facilitator who supported students all the time and encouraged them to try their best. At the end of the lesson the students were glad and motivated to continue improving their learning process.

Korobchenko and Khmelnitskiy (2015) did an investigation throughout a critical analysis, the investigation concluded with the need of designing an educational reform which includes the following humanistic principles: respect for the personality of a child and teachers as the main characters, consideration of individuals’ age special characteristics of pupils as well as their skills; the individualization of the instruction process and the respect for the man’s right to make his life and career choice by himself. Mora and Villegas (2019) carried out a research whose main objective was to propose a humanistic pedagogical model to improve the 5th level students’ results in external tests. The study concluded that even though humanistic practices are somehow perceived by the students, they are not well stablished due to the fact that they are barely applied by teachers in the classrooms.
Ramírez, (2020) designed a Humanistic Theoretical Approach to Educational Research on English language teaching at PUCESE University in Esmeraldas, Ecuador. There, three fundamental dimensions have been stablished in order to help teachers and students to research about real and significant educational problems as well as finding solutions to benefit the educational community. The dimensions are ELT contextualized assessment, ELT innovative intervention and ELT experiment projection. From these dimensions, three qualities emerge: ELT educative context appropriation, ELT educative context intervention and ELT educative context evaluation. The qualities orient researchers to diagnose teachers’ and students’ needs and create teaching strategies or didactic materials, implement these tools in the classroom, evaluate the results and finally share the information obtained with the community.

**METHOD**

The present investigation was conducted in some rural areas of Esmeraldas province where there are few educational centres and are composed of primary and senior high schools that are mostly public. English as a foreign language remains as a compulsory subject in the curriculum with three teaching periods per week or two in some cases. In rural areas of Esmeraldas, inhabitants are early involved in agricultural and livestock activities so that, some students’ parents have not completed their educational background. Consequently, parental support in rural students’ education is generally limited.

In regards to the investigation design, it was qualitative non-experimental because as Hernández, (2016) states it will be intended to “analyze a theme of investigation which has not been deeply studied and it has generated many doubts which have not been clarified before”. Rural communities experience vulnerability situations such as poverty, isolation and state of abandonment that is why it has been paramount to develop this investigation there, where this kind of research has not been developed before. In addition, it was a descriptive research because its purpose was to “specify relevant properties or characteristics of any phenomenon and describe groups or population trends” (Hernández, 2016, p. 382).
The population consisted of 30 teachers and the sample was 10 of them who teach at different rural schools. The following hypothesis was formulated: The design of a Humanistic-Based Didactic Strategy to teach English as a foreign language could improve students’ English language learning in rural areas of Esmeraldas. It means, to develop such a strategy in order to design a proposal which would improve the students’ English language learning. In addition, this investigation was rooted in two variables which are English language learning as the dependent variable and a Humanistic Approach-Based based Didactic strategy as the independent one.

The methods that were used were analysis-synthesis, inductive-deductive and, hermeneutics because the information revealed was carefully examined in order to organize it and on the other hand, the most relevant aspects were taken into account to conclude with accurate results starting from general aspects to the most specific ones. Hermeneutics was another method used in this investigation because the data obtained was interpreted, summarized, and explained trough statistical graphics. The investigation was supported on bibliographical reviews and a survey that involved a questionnaire. This last one consisted of nine questions posed to elicit answers from the participants that permit the fulfilment of the objectives. The only limitation presented during the investigation development was due to the Coronavirus pandemic, which impeded applying the instruments in a face-to-face way, so they were applied virtually instead.

The obtained information was tabulated automatically through Google forms and summarized in statistical graphics that were designed through Microsoft Excel Program. Then the information revealed permitted the author to design a Humanistic Approach-Based Didactic strategy to teach English in rural areas.
RESULTS

In relation to teaching-learning strategies that work better for rural teachers in the classroom (table 1), the results revealed that the main strategies were cooperative learning strategies such as dialogues and discussions in group work or pair work.

TABLE 1

Strategies that work better in teaching English as a foreign language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative teaching</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive teaching</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional teaching</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamification strategies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative language</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task based learning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey. Author’s own elaboration

In regards with the rural students’ needs, it is observed in table 2 that parental support and awareness about the importance of the subject is pointed as the greater need that students have in relation to the English language learning. Likewise, the free access to a wide range of technological resources, not adequate logistic support in the educational institutions they work and the lack of qualified teachers are other noticeable needs that students of rural areas face in their English language learning process.
TABLE 2
Rural students’ needs in the English language teaching-learning process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural students’ needs</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental support and awareness about the importance of English language</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free access to a wide range of technological resources</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistic support in their educational institutions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better qualified teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey. Author’s own elaboration

In respect to whom must be placed as the central role in the teaching-learning process, as revealed in table 3, the answers stated that teachers are greatly believed to be the learning center over the students in English language learning.

TABLE 3
Central role in the English language teaching-learning process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central role</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey. Author’s own elaboration

In order to design a didactic strategy based on the humanistic approach, it was firstly necessary to research about the application of humanistic elements in the rural students’ English language learning process. As it is exposed in table 4, humanistic elements are occasionally employed by rural teachers.
TABLE 4

Humanistic elements in the English language teaching-learning process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humanistic aspects</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consideration of students’ interests before designing a teaching strategy</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free decision making about what topics they want to learn about</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning curricular or extracurricular activities that involve students’ parents or community.</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own elaboration

A Humanistic Approach - Based Didactic Strategy to improve rural students’ English language learning

Given that the analysis of the information obtained revealed that rural English language teachers used mostly cooperative teaching strategies, the English language learning process is defined as teachers-centered and some humanistic elements such as free making decisions, the inclusion of learners’ interests and the community’s participation are sporadically used by rural teachers in the classroom, the design of a Humanistic Approach-Based Didactic strategy has become an urging need in some rural areas of Esmeraldas. This diagnosis has enabled the creation of a set of actions by means of which the English language teaching-learning process may become totally learners centered, taking into account free decision making based on students’ interests, opinions likes and dislikes. The strategy consists of 5 stages called: pre-planning, activation of previous knowledge, learning immersion, feedback and community’s involvement. These are explained in detail in the following figure and table.
TABLE 5

A Humanistic Approach -Based Didactic Strategy to improve rural students’ English Language Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENERAL OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>TO IMPROVE THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF A HUMANISTIC STRATEGY</th>
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| **STAGE O: PRE-PLANNING**  
(The purpose of this stage is to provide students an amicable classroom environment which dismisses their anxiety or fear in relation to the foreign language) | **Teachers’ actions**  
- To propose a close dialogue among students in order to promote interaction among everyone.  
- Based on what the students have talked about, to allow them to choose what they want to learn among a variety of contents.  
- To plan the further lessons taking into account the staff that students have affinity with. |
| **Students’ actions**  
- To express their emotions, feeling, experiences and interests. (On this stage, students are allowed to use the L1).  
- To choose the topic they want to learn about in a democratic scenario.  
- To start creating expectations about the topic they have chosen. |
### STAGE 1: ACTIVATION OF PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE
(This stage is intended to activate the students’ previous knowledge in order to connect their former experiences with the further new knowledge and, consequently reach a learning internalization. In addition, motivation and encouragement in this part is a key aspect)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers’ actions</th>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Once the topic has been chosen, the teacher needs to contextualize it, this means that students are allowed to learn about a topic that belongs to their own environment and implies relevance and significance.</td>
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<td>✓ To introduce the topic and some techniques such as visuals, realia, and pose questions or problem solving that can be used to motivate, encourage, and inspire students.</td>
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<th>Students’ actions</th>
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<td>✓ To participate actively.</td>
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<td>✓ To incorporate any other topics of interest.</td>
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### STAGE 2: LEARNING IMMERSION
(this stage is the central point of the strategy in which students need to be involved in their English learning process. Even though students are responsible for their own learning, the teacher’s support and monitoring are vital to enhance autonomy and learners’ internalization.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ To offer students’ freedom to work cooperatively, it means in pairs or groups formed by few students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ To divide the topic chosen by subtopics, items or related aspects.</td>
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<td>✓ To provide clear instructions.</td>
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<td>✓ The activities to be done must be according to the students’ language level and intended to be explorative, inquiring and, interactive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ To provide freedom to choose the space where students want to work in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ To have a supporting, enabling, and monitoring role.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ To listen to and record the student’s mini presentations. The assessment is mainly focused on students’ efforts instead of students’ outcomes.</td>
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<th>Students’ actions</th>
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<tr>
<td>✓ To arrange groups according to the affinity they have with their classmates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ To select the topic taking into account the opinions of all their groups members, it means the topic is chosen democratically.</td>
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STAGE 3: FEEDBACK

Teachers’ actions
✓ Once the activities proposed have been finished, to suggest a dialogue that can be carried out with the students in a round.

✓ To project a close and confidence figure, listens to the students carefully and congratulates and recognize their efforts to work as better as possible.

✓ To correct some mistakes observed or listened to, during the activity development in a general way.

Students’ actions
✓ To make a round and feel close to their teacher and classmates.

✓ To express their feelings, impressions, difficulties or limitations in respect to the activities proposed by the teacher.

✓ To listen to the teachers’ corrections and make commitments for improving.

STAGE 4: COMMUNITY’S INVOLVEMENT

Teacher’s actions
✓ To plan a curricular or extracurricular activity that allows students to share the skills they have learned.

✓ To organize a meeting to invite students’ parents to participate in the planned event.

✓ To encourage students to present their tasks in a public event involving the local educational community.

STUDENTS’ ACTIONS
✓ TO COOPERATE GIVING IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO CARRY OUT THE EVENT.
✓ TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DIALOGUE AMONG PARENTS AND TEACHER.
✓ TO PRESENT THEIR MINI PRESENTATIONS AND BEING PRAISED FOR THEIR EFFORTS BY THE COMMUNITY.

Source: Author’s own elaboration

DISCUSSION

Many teachers’ actions could be interpreted as humanistic teaching practices. For instance, the present study stated that teachers apply sporadically elements that could be understood as humanistic such as cooperative teaching strategies and freedom in deciding which topics students want to learn about. Likewise, Mora and Villegas (2019) revealed that the active participation of students in the class may be also perceived as a humanistic teaching practice and Chen and Schmidtke (2016) admitted that some humanistic elements such as learning centered classes are unconsciously applied by teachers. However, these three investigations agreed that it does not mean that teachers have a wide knowledge about this approach and moreover that they implement a set of actions and procedures that implies a Humanistic Approach-Based Didactic strategy.

Korobchenko and Khmelnitskiy (2015) conducted an investigation that revealed the urging necessity of designing a reform in the educational system of Ukraine. According to them, the mentioned reform should include humanistic principles fundamentally. This study highlights the increased role of students in their teaching-learning process in contrast to the present study which exposed that the English learning process in rural students is mainly teachers-centered.

Jin (2014) recorded a lesson that was taught using the Humanistic Approach in an English as a second language target group. The applied methodology was based on the Communicative language teaching method and included the fact of giving freedom to the students at choosing the type of ceremonial speech they were interested as well as the use of cooperative strategies as the learners worked in pairs. In the present study, the use of these elements in the classroom were inquired and some of them as cooperative learning strategies are widely employed by teachers in the classroom. Nevertheless, rural students
are occasionally allowed to make free decisions about what topics they want to learn about and their interests are never considered a relevant aspect in their English language learning process.

Mora and Villegas (2019) proposed a pedagogical model to improve the 5th level students’ results in external tests in a public school in Colombia. It was rooted in some operating foundations that are similar to the stages of this strategy: pre-planning, activation of previous knowledge, learning immersion, feedback and community’s involvement. However, in the proposed pedagogical model, there is no strategy that contemplates the involvement of children’s parents in the teaching-learning process. Probably because the students’ language needs diagnosis vary depending on the context, even more, taking into account that the mentioned pedagogical model was designed to improve the 5th level students’ results in external tests of an urban school, while the present strategy was designed to improve the English language teaching-learning process in rural areas.

CONCLUSIONS

English language learning has always represented a process full of difficulties and deficiencies for rural learners. Analyzing this problematic situation, in some rural areas of Esmeraldas, the present investigation found out that in respect to the use of teaching strategies, rural teachers use mostly cooperative, direct, and traditional learning strategies because according to them, they work better for delivering accurate results in students’ English language learning. Regarding to the central role in the teaching-learning process, rural professors consider that teachers are the ones who have a major role over the students in contrast to humanistic theories that set learners as the central point in any kind of methodological processes carried out.

Before designing a Humanistic Approach-Based Didactic strategy, it was paramount to diagnose the students’ needs in relation to their English language teaching learning process. The lack of parental support and awareness about the importance of English language learning was the most noticeable need in rural students that is why the proposed humanistic strategy is intended to involve the community to generate a higher level of awareness in parents and encouragement in students. Finally, despite of the fact that some humanistic aspects such as the consideration of students’ interests, freedom to make learning topic decisions and involvement of the community in the English language
teaching process are employed sporadically by rural teachers in the classroom, it does not mean that they have a broad knowledge about what the Humanistic Approach is and least, that they apply a set of procedures based on it. That is why the implementation of this strategy that details procedures based on humanistic elements and principles such as collaborative and experiential learning, critical thinking, learners’ centered lessons, relevant contents adapted to the students’ reality and a safe and amicable learning ambiance step by step is become a priority in rural communities of Esmeraldas Ecuador.

REFERENCES


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