

# Tips for Teachers on Teaching Culture-based Lessons through Authentic Materials: An Action Research Experience

## Consejos para profesores sobre la enseñanza de lecciones basadas en la cultura a través de materiales auténticos: una experiencia de investigación-acción

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### Abstract

This paper aims to provide some useful tips for teaching culture-based lessons since the analysis of the data stemmed from an action research experience. The research question was focused on how teachers could improve culture-based lessons for students of the second grade of High School at "Pujilí" Educational Unit through authentic materials. During the action research process, a secondary question emerged: What tips can be recommended for teachers to implement culture-based lessons through authentic materials in an English as a Foreign Language [EFL] high school class? The participants were 26 students of the second grade of High School of "Pujilí" Educational Unit. The results showed that selecting authentic material considering students' level, planning meaningful activities, promoting classroom interaction, spending time planning to impact on students' learning, giving clear instructions, motivating students, and, making corrections, were aspects that allowed students to reinforce their cultural knowledge and understanding. Then, these elements can be considered as tips for teaching culture-based lessons. However, the students' poor cultural knowledge was the main drawback of the research, because not all students were able to interact during the lessons. Finally, the research findings affirm that teaching culture in the EFL classroom through the proper implementation of culture-based lessons and authentic materials supports the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language.

**Keywords:** Authentic material, cultural knowledge and understanding, culture-based lessons, EFL

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## Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo proporcionar algunos consejos útiles para la enseñanza de lecciones basadas en la cultura, desde el análisis de los datos obtenidos por una experiencia de investigación-acción. La pregunta de investigación fue: ¿Cómo pueden los profesores mejorar las lecciones basadas en la cultura, en los alumnos del segundo grado de Bachillerato de la Unidad Educativa “Pujilí” a través de materiales auténticos? Durante el proceso de investigación-acción, surgió una pregunta secundaria: ¿Qué consejos se pueden recomendar a los profesores para implementar lecciones basadas en la cultura a través de materiales auténticos en una clase de Inglés en bachillerato? Los participantes fueron 26 estudiantes de segundo año de Bachillerato. Los resultados mostraron que seleccionar material auténtico considerando el nivel de los estudiantes, planificar actividades significativas, promover la interacción en el aula, dedicar tiempo a la planificación para incidir en el aprendizaje de los estudiantes, dar instrucciones claras, motivar, y, realizar correcciones, fueron aspectos que permitieron a los estudiantes reforzar su conocimiento y comprensión cultural. Entonces, pueden ser considerados como consejos para la enseñanza con lecciones basadas en la cultura Sin embargo, el escaso conocimiento cultural de los alumnos fue el principal inconveniente de la investigación, pues no todos los estudiantes pudieron interactuar durante las clases. Finalmente, los resultados de la investigación afirman que la enseñanza de la cultura en el aula de EFL, a través de la implementación adecuada de lecciones basadas en la cultura y materiales auténticos, apoya la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera.

**Palabras clave:** : Material auténtico, conocimiento y comprensión cultural, lecciones basadas en la cultura, EFL

## Introduction

Nowadays, learning English has become a fundamental communicative tool, as it is a lingua franca used in different fields such as education, medicine, science, etc. In addition, English is a language that allows the achievement of personal and professional goals (Rajathurai, 2018). In this sense, Ecuador cannot remain on the sidelines of the use of this universal language as a form of communication and interaction between different individuals around the world. Ecuador is made up of diverse nations, languages and cultures. Its population is mainly composed of indigenous people, blacks, whites and mestizos; this ethnic diversity makes Ecuador a culturally rich country (Guarderas, 2009).

According to the Ecuador Ministry of Education (2016), one of the skills that Ecuadorian learners need, in order to engage successfully in local and international communities in the 21st century, is to develop their understanding of the world, of other cultures and their own, and to communicate their understanding and views to others through

English. In that sense, English is not only a tool for personal, academic and professional development, but also a tool for world cultural understanding. In addition, the Common European Framework, which was published in 2001 (See Appendix A), highlights intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as a key element of second language learners, who have to become interculturally competent by understanding, recognizing and evaluating their own cultural background and that of the target language (Ragoonaden, 2020).

Culture is important in people's lives because it represents what they think, do, and the products or materials they produce from generation to generation; it is also a set of learned values, beliefs, ideas and behaviors that a group of people share in a given community (Lebrón, 2013). Thus, teaching English in the EFL classroom is not only about teaching language skills, but also about teaching culture that makes up the target language. Thanh (2019) considers that “teaching culture is suggested

as a way to enhance authenticity of communication. If students know the foreign language and foreign culture, they may be more successful interpreting English texts and using the language" (p. 10). So, teaching culture helps students to acquire cultural and historical knowledge of the English language and, in turn, to achieve adequate language proficiency. Brdarić (2016) states that "teaching culture has not always been as important as it is today. Its importance increases along with the changes in the world, such as globalization and multiculturalism" (p. 6). In fact, the different global changes have produced teaching-learning about culture become to become seen as a fundamental part of the curriculum of education worldwide.

There are different strategies for culture learning such as cultural collections, web quests, cultural informants, role plays, cultural observations, and culture journals (Frank, 2013). In the case of authentic materials, when students are exposed to them and tasks based on culture, they have the opportunity to develop their intercultural competence not only by expanding their knowledge in language as a code, but also by being exposed to real language - to real situations that occur in their contexts (Bernal, 2019). Akbari & Razavi (2015) found that teachers had a positive attitude toward providing authentic materials in their classes because these materials allowed them to improve students' skills as they were exposed to the real English language. However, there is not enough evidence from research that present insights on how to teach culture through authentic materials, based on the feedback and practical experiences of teachers and students who have been involved in the process of teaching and learning culture-based lessons, as well as on tips for teachers to implement this kind of strategy. Based on this weakness in research, it was decided to conduct a study considering the mentioned aspects, selecting an educational institution of secondary level. Therefore, this research aims to answer the research question posed: How can teachers improve culture-based lessons in students of the second grade of High School at "Pujilí" Educational Unit through authentic materials? During this process, a secondary question emerged: What tips can be recommended for teachers to implement

culture-based lessons through authentic materials in an EFL high school classroom?

## ■ Literature Review

*Language and Culture* Language is considered a medium of communication, and this in turn almost always takes place in a social context. It reflects the individual characteristics of a person, as well as the beliefs and practices of his or her community. Language can affect many facets of human cultures, such as religion, politics, society and economics (Amberg & Vause, 2009). Lebrón (2013) states that "culture is defined as a set of values and beliefs, or a cluster of learned behaviors that we share with others in a particular society, giving us a sense of belongingness and identity" (p. 126). In other words, culture is a way of looking at people's lives in a given context.

Language and culture are closely related, as one affects the other, and language represents the entire culture of its speakers (Kuo & Lai, 2006). Thus, "the integration of culture in language teaching is based on the assumption that one cannot be explored without the other; they are interrelated" (Kramsch, 1998; Lesow-Hurley, 2000; Sellami, 2000, as cited in Bernal, 2019, p. 33). In fact, one of the main purposes of learning English is to develop intercultural communicative competence.

Cultural knowledge has become a vital part of the EFL curriculum so teachers can assist language learners to become successful communicators in English by teaching culture (Thanh, 2019). Cultural aspects that a language possesses include knowledge of the ways of living of the people belonging to a particular community where a language is spoken, so it is important for students to understand the target culture to be able to understand how people use the language (Aldawood & Almeshari, 2019). Foreign language learners who have been taught cultural knowledge along with the language will be able to communicate much more than just needs and ideas. They will be able to interact within the culture of the target language and participate in an intercultural exchange (Mohammed, 2020).

In sum, cultural knowledge represents an essential part of foreign language teaching, as it provides a meaningful tool to help students communicate and understand the use of language in a specific context, it means to be not only an appropriate language user but also culturally competent by acquiring an integral conception of the language learned.

### *Teaching Culture in EFL Context*

Teaching culture is not a new idea; on the contrary, there is a history of using culture in the teaching of a foreign language (Bernal, 2019). There are many ways to incorporate cultural content in regular English lessons.

Teachers should take into account the realistic elements of culture in their lessons as they include notions such as when and what people eat, the ideas they have towards their friends and families, how they show their approval or disapproval of something, educational attitudes, patterns of time and space, work values, among others. (Barekat & Nobakhti, 2014, p. 1060)

Also, "elements of culture refer to things like the beliefs, values, customs, products, and the communication styles of a given culture or society" (Cohen et al., 2003, as cited in Frank, 2013, p. 3). In this way, teachers give students an intimate idea of what life is like in the target culture considering that it is a way of looking at people's lives in a given context, their way of thinking, communicating, and constructing a knowledge set that they share. Furthermore, the transmission of culture requires the learning of language for the transmission of attitudes, ideas, and values to the next generation thus, people follow the customs, norms, and values inherited through a social system, so no human society has ever existed without developing language and culture (Emitt & Komesaroff, 2003, as cited in Soomro et al., 2015).

### *Teaching Culture with Authentic Materials*

Akbari & Razavi (2015) say, "by using authentic materials students know how to use language in the real world and improve their proficiency level in four skills of language learning" (p. 108). The use of authentic material in foreign language classes can

be useful for teachers and students because it does not only allow them to develop linguistics skills but also to improve the students' comprehension skills by being able to recognize the language taught in the classroom and the language that can be used in a social context (Bernal, 2019).

Authentic materials are useful tools that have a great impact on English language teaching and the learning process, because they make teachers and learners creative in understanding various topics and, in turn, reinforce reading skills (Puspita et al., 2020). Authentic text materials help reading development, and reading aids the acquisition of new vocabulary, the retention of prior learned vocabulary, and the learning of new content (Guo, 2012). Reid (2014) argues that "authentic materials are without doubt the best materials for teaching cultural aspects, as they bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world and they bring reality to the classroom" (p. 162).

Therefore, this study allows encouraging educational institutions to implement culture-based lessons during the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language by using authentic materials, taking into account the recommended tips to plan and improve the implementation of such lessons. By incorporating authentic materials in English classes, the English teacher's practice and students' cultural knowledge and understanding as well as their reading skills are strengthened, as they are exposed to the real language (Bernal, 2019; Akbari & Razavi, 2015; Hayikaleng, 2019; Albiladi, 2019).

### *Planning Culture-based Lessons*

In the same way teachers plan for teaching any other language skill, they need to plan culture-based lessons. In fact, planning has to be seen "as a process for developing desired organizational change focused on creating an alternative future more conducive and different from the one anticipated" (Beach, 2020, p.19). For instance, strategies suggested by Frank (2013) are the same teachers use for language teaching, but there is a specific aspect to be considered: the cultural content. Teachers need to know what element of the culture they are going to teach. The 3Ps model is useful for this purpose. Frank (2013) describes this model as follows:

- Perspectives (what members of a culture think, feel and value). - It includes some ideas about what is important in life, beliefs, and values about how young people should relate to older members of their society.
- Practices (how members of a community communicate and interact with each other). - It includes the traditions and behaviors of culture as well as the way that people communicate, which can vary greatly from one culture to another, not only in terms of language but also in what people talk about, to whom, how direct they are in communicating, the gestures they use, eye contact, among others.
- Products (things that members of a community create, share and pass on to the next generation). - It can be technology, toys, music, food, etc. of a society.

Having selected the cultural element to be incorporated in the lesson, the teachers have to look for the authentic material that contains the cultural element. Important factors in choosing authentic material are suitability of content, exploitability, readability, and presentation because what is sought is that the content to be taught is appropriate, adjusted to the interests, and needs of the students (Berardo, 2006).

Another consideration may be the students' English level. It does not mean that there are authentic materials classified by level, but teachers must analyze the level and needs of the audience to whom the selected text or material is directed. As authentic materials are not intended for teaching, it may contain vocabulary that is difficult for students to understand causing their lack of understanding and participation (Srinivas Rao, 2019). For this reason, Hayikaleng (2019) states that "the teacher should choose authentic materials which are familiar with the learners in order to help them understand easily" (p. 23).

To facilitate students' understanding, the PWP framework can be useful because within this, the activities from different stages are conducted in such a way that the student can follow them sequentially. According to Toprak & Almacioğlu (2009), learners should be encouraged to use effective strategies

when reading in a foreign language and, therefore, the teacher should develop easy exercises to gather information through specific strategies, thus, these exercises can be divided according to the stage of reading in which they are:

- Pre-reading (warm-up, into, before reading) -the activities in this stage introduce the learners to a given text, providing background knowledge as well as generating interest and helping them to approach the text in a meaningful way. This stage helps students define the criteria and central theme of the text they have been presented with.
- While-reading (during, through reading) -during this stage, exercises help students develop reading strategies, decode messages and improve their control over the target language. At this stage, the teacher should explain what strategies the students need most to practice their reading, in addition to offering "guided reading" exercises.
- Post-reading (after, follow up, beyond reading) -the exercises at this stage check the students' comprehension and then lead them to a deeper analysis of the text, i.e., it is not intended that students memorize what they are reading but that they can summarize what the author mentions from their point of view.

PWP framework allows students to develop reading strategies that they can assimilate and use with the texts. One of the important roles of the English teacher is to design enjoyable and fruitful activities that engage learners' creativity and strengths to develop a unique foreign language learning experience (Díaz et al., 2019; Avila, 2015). Teachers' innovation and creativity are the keys to successful culture-based lessons. Thus, Díaz et al. (2019) indicate that "innovation is a key factor, which can help teachers and students to have significant learning experiences, by creating motivating and meaningful activities and tasks, as well as incorporating new components to the lessons" (p. 14). Moreover, "creativity in EFL classrooms improves acquisition and remembrance of EFL, encourages students improve their imaginative skills, and gives students a personalized experience



of EFL, which improves understanding and comprehension of EFL" (Al-Qahtani, 2016; Hofweber & Graham, 2017; Richards, 2013; Schoff, 2016, as cited in Aldujayn & Alsubhi, 2020, p. 164).

When teaching the first culture-based lessons, the teachers have to get prepared on how to deliver each activity of the lesson and how to give instructions. They also have to check how the materials will work beforehand. A good planning and preparation guarantees the quality of teaching, and thus, minimizes classroom problems and prevents disruptions and misbehaviors; also, several researches state that the key element contributing to a student's success is the quality of teaching shown by the teacher (Novozhenina & López, 2018; Cando, 2014; Mizell, 2010).

### *Teaching Culture-based Lessons*

One of the most important teaching skills is giving clear instructions because it helps teachers to develop lessons properly and to achieve correct classroom management. When giving instructions, there are several elements to take into account such as the time in which the instruction is given, the language used, and the purpose of the instructions as not all of them are to do a task or activity (Sowell, 2017; López, 2018). Thus, teachers must use simple and concise language avoiding wordy instructions and check the student's understanding before doing the activity to avoid wasting time or confusion.

Teaching culture does not mean neglecting the teaching of language skills. As authentic materials help in language learning, teachers can plan different activities for improving reading understanding and its sub-skills: vocabulary and pronunciation. Vocabulary activities can help to minimize the complexity of the text, and the authentic reading text can be used to practice pronunciation through a reading aloud. Moreover, post reading activities can include other language skills. Students can expand their knowledge of the cultural topics in speaking or writing activities that promote students' participation, critical thinking, and engagement in social practice so that they can develop their classroom relationships and identity (Issa et al., 2020).

It is true that the focus of a culture-based lesson is in the cultural topic itself; however, it is a good idea to monitor students' language learning and make corrections to direct the learner's attention to avoid fossilization of errors (Farahani & Salajegheh, 2015). With regard to error correction, there are different approaches with specific techniques to deal with the errors, depending on the kind of skills where the error was made (Debreli & Onuk, 2016), so it is important that teachers put them into practice, to help students improve their English language skills. In addition, providing feedback will make students aware of their performance and as a result, the student can be more successful (Kiliç et al., 2021).

Another aspect to consider when teaching culture based lesson is motivation, some contemporary points of view establish a relationship between motivation and the learning environment which can be promoted or inhibited due to different social and environmental circumstances (Schunk et al. 2014). Then, it is important to ensure adequate motivation as it is the "first condition to take on a learning task and is the engine that powers the process" (Meşe & Sevilen, 2021, p.12)

In the same way, promoting classroom interaction is an important element, because achieving appropriate interaction enables teachers to create a pleasant environment, that provides friendly relations among participants in the learning process and, in turn, encourages learners to become effective communicators of a foreign language; furthermore, classroom interaction encourages learners to actively participate and thus helps them to understand and improve critical thinking skills. Therefore, encouraging classroom interaction allows teachers to accept learners' opinions and motivates them to have a conversation during class (Nuraini, 2015; Issa et al., 2020; Asbah, 2015).

In addition, there are strategies that help teachers to promote appropriate classroom interaction such as (a) improving questioning strategies (it is advisable to ask students questions that they can answer in order to build their confidence), (b) attending to learners' linguistic levels (beginners should be exposed to fairly simple language that they can understand and the material used will depend on their linguistic level), (c) implementing cooperative

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learning (this is an effective way to help students to interact appropriately with others with different intellectual abilities and physical capacities), d) building positive teacher-learner rapport (a strong relationship based on mutual respect needs to be established between teacher and learners during the teaching and learning process), and, e) reducing classroom anxiety (teacher should help learners to understand that language anxiety may be temporary and not a long-lasting problem, so strengthening learners' self-esteem and confidence) (Jia, 2013).

## ■ Methodology

To carry out the research, the action research approach was used, since it allowed answering the research question posed; however, during the research process, a secondary question emerged from the analysis of the results obtained. The participants were 26 students in 2nd grade of High School of "Pujilí" Educational Unit, which is a public educational institution. To select the participants, the purposive sampling was applied. The criterion was that the participants were part of a group of students in a course, in which two researchers acted as English teachers during their pre-professional internships, and it was possible to apply the action research methodology.

This action research study was developed following six steps (Ferrance, 2000). First, the identification of a problem area was done through observation of the regular teacher's practice and planning. The second step was to gather the data. In this step, the information from the researchers' observations permitted to identify the students' poor cultural knowledge and the lack of meaningful strategies, didactic materials and activities to implement culture content as a part of the lessons designs; in addition, a literature review was done in order to help us understand the problem. The third step was to interpret data. Once the data was analyzed, it was decided to look for a strategy to implement cultural content in English lessons.

The fourth step was to act on evidence, a plan of action was designed to help students improve their cultural knowledge. This plan consisted of designing four culture-based lessons following the

PWP framework, with emphasis in reading skills. These lessons included authentic material and the development of posters (cultural collections) according to the students' English level, and they were applied during four weeks.

The fifth step was to evaluate results, as an assessment of the intervention, a reflection process was implemented, by the use of several instruments such as my teacher's reflection table, my peer's observation table and my students' observation survey; these elements helped the researchers know the participants' different points of view of the implementation of the lesson plans. In addition, this evidence permitted the investigators to assess the intervention and understand the possible changes in the lesson plans designed to get better results.

Sixth, next steps, in this phase, after the analysis of the reflections, it was possible to improve the culture-based lessons and thus generate meaningful learning in the students.

For the data analysis, it was applied the bottom-up approach suggested by Creswell (2012) "qualitative researchers first collect data and then prepare it for data analysis. This analysis initially consists of developing a general sense of the data, and then coding description and themes about the central phenomenon" (p. 237). The information from the instruments (my teacher's reflection table, my peer's observation table, and the students' observation survey) was deeply analyzed to find out the teacher's, peer's and students' point of view about the strengths and drawbacks of the lessons. Finally, once all the information was analyzed, the investigators applied triangulation to validate the accuracy of the findings. This analysis helped them to better understand the results of the implementation.

Based on the researchers' experience, and on the analysis of the triangulated information from the reflection instruments (my teacher's reflection table, my peer's observation table, and my students' observation survey), a secondary question emerged: What tips can be recommended for teachers to implement culture-based lessons through authentic materials in an EFL high school classroom? Therefore, the researchers decided to reflect on

different tips to implement culture-based lessons through authentic materials.

In addition, by using the strategies proposed by Jia (2013), the investigators were able to achieve one of the tips for implementing culture-based lessons, which is to promote classroom interaction by asking accessible questions to establish communication and discussion between the teacher and students as well as among them, and by using material according to the students' level to foster their interest and motivation to participate during English lessons.

## ■ Results and Discussion

To answer the research question on how can teachers improve culture-based lessons in students of second grade of High School at "Pujilí" Educational Unit through authentic materials? we followed the six steps suggested by Ferrance (2000). This process permitted the researchers to have a deep vision about the different improvements in culture-based lesson planning.

The excerpts from the teacher, peer teacher, and students' reflection obtained through the instruments made: teacher's reflection table, my peer's observation table and my students' observation survey, were analyzed and diverse categories emerged. The bottom up approach was used for data analysis (Creswell, 2012), and finally, the findings were validated through the triangulation technique (Creswell, 2012).

Once the analysis was done, it was decided to convert the categories obtained in the research process to different tips for planning culture-based lessons, in order to answer the secondary question that emerged related to what tips can be recommended to be implemented in culture-based lessons planning through authentic materials. This process was done because the investigators considered it is useful for teaching practice. The main tips identified were:

### *Select Authentic Material Considering Students' Level*

Excerpts from teacher's reflection:

"I was able to find a text (authentic material) created by native speakers that matched the

students' English level. It helped them to learn new vocabulary, strengthen their reading skills and improve cultural knowledge and understanding" (Teacher's reflection 1).

"I found a blog created by native speakers (Cairo Airport Company) that allowed students to reinforce their cultural knowledge and understanding about cultural elements such as food, clothing and musical instruments" (Teacher's reflection 4).

The selection of authentic material according to the learners' English level is an important tip in the application and implementation of culture-based lessons. Teachers can use blog texts created by native speakers. These texts should be adjusted to the students' English level so that they can acquire new vocabulary, reinforce their cultural knowledge and understanding, and improve their reading skills. Therefore, when choosing authentic materials taking into account the students' English level, it is essential to consider three main criteria for evaluating potential materials, which are suitability of content, exploitability and readability. Suitability of content focuses on making learners interested in the material and adapting it to their needs. Exploitability aims to assess whether the selected authentic material can be used for academic purposes; otherwise, even if it is created in English, it will not be useful. Readability focuses on analyzing the structural and lexical difficulty of a text; thus, it is key to assess both the students' English level and the material selected (Berardo, 2006).

### *Plan Meaningful Activities*

Excerpts from teacher's reflection:

"I was able to develop the lesson appropriately by using the activities of the PWP Framework: picture matching exercise, true/false questions, multiple choice exercises, putting sentences in order, filling in a cloze passage, and making a poster. These activities allowed me to capture the students' attention from the beginning to the end of the class, and also helped students understand the topic" (Reflection 2).

Excerpts from peer teacher's reflection:



"The teacher took into account that the content of each activity was in accordance with the students' English level" (Reflection 1).

"The teacher used creative activities such as a picture matching exercise, true/false questions, putting sentences in order, filling in a cloze passage, and making a poster. These activities helped him to capture the students' attention and interest during the lesson" (Reflection 3).

Planning meaningful activities within culture-based lessons is useful because it allows teachers to develop creative activities such as a picture matching exercise, true/false questions, multiple choice exercises, putting sentences in order, filling in a cloze passage and making a poster. Teachers should develop simple exercises to elicit information using specific strategies and encourage students to use these strategies when reading in a foreign language (Toprak & Almacioğlu, 2009). In addition, teachers can use vocabulary according to the students' English level in the content of each activity so that students can build their own knowledge on each lesson. Therefore, the creation of meaningful activities is a critical aspect that helps teachers and students to have relevant learning experiences and to incorporate new components into lessons so that teachers teach various topics efficiently and students achieve adequate understanding (Díaz et al., 2019).

#### *Promote Classroom Interaction*

Excerpts from teacher's reflection:

"I was able to engage the students' attention and maintain their participation at all times by sharing my ideas and theirs" (Reflection 1).

Excerpts from students' performance or students' reflection:

"El respeto y la participación". [Respect and participation] (Reflection 3: Question 4 - Survey 3).

"La buena interacción en la clase". [Good interaction in class] (Reflection 4: Question 4 - Survey 4).

"Las clases son muy divertidas". [The classes are very fun] (Reflection 1: Question 4 - Survey 1).

"Hizo todo lo posible para que la clase sea interesante". [He tried his best to make the class interesting] (Reflection 1: Question 4 - Survey 1).

"Clase muy interactiva". [Very interactive class] (Reflection 2: Question 4 - Survey 2).

"Hace dinámica para entender mejor". [He makes dynamic to understand better] (Reflection 2: Question 4 - Survey 2).

"Su creatividad en la clase". [His creativity in the class] (Reflection 2: Question 4 - Survey 2).

"Todos los estudiantes deberían participar" [That all students should participate] (Reflection 1: Question 6 - Survey 1).

Excerpts from peer teacher's reflection:

"The teacher was able to maintain an active participation of the students in the development of each activity included in the lesson" (Reflection 3).

Teachers should bear in mind that promoting classroom interaction helps them to engage students' attention and maintain their constant participation during lessons. Moreover, teachers and students achieve a respectful atmosphere and an appropriate teaching and learning process through classroom interaction. Nuraini (2015) argues that "effective classroom interaction has two implications. The first one concerns a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom with friendly relationships among the participants of the learning process. The second one, encourages students to become effective communicators in a foreign language" (p. 30). As a result, promoting classroom interaction provides several benefits, such as the active participation of all students in each lesson with their ideas, opinions and knowledge, as well as fostering communication between teachers and students, making lessons more dynamic. Likewise, "students' classroom participation is considered an essential concept in developing an understanding of classroom learning and the improvement of

critical thinking skills in the case of students in higher education" (Loftin et al., 2010, as cited in Issa et al., 2020, p. 323). Therefore, teachers should take into account the participation of students and make sure that everyone is included in the class, as this is conducive to their learning.

In addition, creativity plays an important role in the application and implementation of culture-based lessons, as it allows teachers to promote classroom interaction and to make lessons more participatory for students, making them interested in learning and constructing their own knowledge on each topic. Johnson (2017, as cited in Aldujayn and Alsubhi, 2020) claims that "classroom creativity is generated through the interplay between teachers' and students' energies, arising much from teachers' facilitation as much as students' productivity" (p. 163). Hence, creativity in the classroom enables teachers and students to interact and communicate better with each other, as well as to be more productive in the teaching and learning process.

#### *Spend Time Planning to Impact on Students' Learning*

Excerpts from students' performance or students' reflection:

"Que siga enseñando como lo está haciendo". [He should keep teaching the way he is teaching] (Reflection 1: Question 4 – Survey 1).

"Pues que siga así de bien". [He should continue to do it well] (Reflection 1: Question 6 – Survey 1).

"La capacidad de dar clases". [The ability to teach] (Reflection 2: Question 4 – Survey 2).

"Enseña de la mejor manera". [He teaches in the best way] (Reflection 2: Question 4 – Survey 2).

"El esfuerzo de que la clase sea más interesante". [The effort to make the class more interesting] (Reflection 2: Question 4 – Survey 2).

"Todo está bien". [Everything is fine] (Reflection 2: Question 4 – Survey 2).

"Es un excelente profesor". [He is an excellent teacher] (Reflection 3: Question 4 – Survey 3).

"Es muy paciente". [He is very patient] (Reflection 4: Question 4 – Survey 4).

"La presencia y el respeto". [The presence and respect] (Reflection 4: Question 4 – Survey 4).

"El buen desempeño". [Good performance] (Reflection 4: Question 4 – Survey 4).

Teaching culture-based lessons requires teachers to make their students feel that they are able to perform well during lessons, that teachers have the right pedagogical skills and that they strive to make lessons interesting and interactive. Moreover, teachers should have a good presence and teach with patience and respect, which makes them excellent teachers; also, teachers should try to plan their classes in advance to have a positive impact on students. Furthermore, Beach (2020) states that "planning is presented as a process for developing desired organizational change focused on creating an alternative future more conducive" (p. 19). Novozhenina and López (2018) state that "continuing professional development becomes the key to effective teaching and thus a way to progress in the teaching-learning process" (p. 114). Likewise, Cando (2014) considers that "a teacher in close proximity to students not only shows support, but also prevents them from disrupting the class. Standing or sitting close to those students who are showing signs of losing focus will quell misbehavior" (p. 39). As a result, teachers need to be self-confident and perform well in order to carry out the activities and achieve the objectives set in the lessons efficiently. In addition, they should try to plan their activities in advance to create a conducive future within the teaching-learning process.

#### *Give Clear Instructions*

In order to recommend this tip, we analyzed the students' comments from the observation survey regarding the instructions explained by the teacher during the implementation of the culture-based lessons.

Excerpts from students' performance or students' reflection:

“Hubo una muy buena explicación”. [There was a very good explanation] (Reflection 1: Question 4 – Survey 1).

“Las explicaciones de las clases son muy claras”. [The explanations of the classes are very clear] (Reflection 1: Question 4 – Survey 1).

“Explica muy bien y es chévere”. [He explains very well and he is cool] (Reflection 1: Question 4 – Survey 1).

“Entusiasmo y explicación detallada”. [Enthusiasm and detailed explanation] (Reflection 4: Question 4 – Survey 4).

It is essential to give students clear instructions on what to do in each lesson, as this will enable teachers to ensure that students understand the topics fully and give reliable and accurate answers in the development of each activity. Sowell (2017) states that “good instruction-giving is an essential part of an effective lesson and an important part of classroom management” (p. 19).

Regarding giving instructions in a foreign language class, there is a number of factors to take into consideration, such as the moment instructions are given, the language used, the purpose of the instructions (as not all of them are about doing a task), the use of support, the check for understanding or the order and length of the instructions. (López, 2018, p. 20)

Therefore, teachers should give clear instructions during the development of lessons so that students can understand each topic and teachers can monitor students’ performance in carrying out the activities; thus, the objectives set for each lesson will be very comprehensible to students.

### *Motivate Students*

In the students’ observation survey, students mentioned some perceptions about their teacher’s development and/or suggestions for the culture-based classes.

Excerpts from students’ performance or students’ reflection:

“Que siga motivando a los estudiantes”. [That he continues to motivate the students] (Reflection 1: Question 4 – Survey 1).

“El buen ánimo que tiene”. [The encouragement he has] (Reflection 2: Question 4 – Survey 2).

“El docente incentiva la clase”. [The teacher incentivizes the class] (Reflection 3: Question 4 – Survey 3).

“El docente debería hacer la clase un poco más dinámica”. [The teacher should make the class a little more dynamic] (Reflection 1: Question 6 – Survey 1).

Motivation of learners is an essential element in the implementation of culture-based lessons, as this way teachers can make lessons more dynamic and entertaining. In fact, the success of students’ learning is linked to their motivation, which can occur in the learning context or their personality, as it influences the way they learn and when they choose to learn (Schunk et al., 2014)). Motivation influences human behaviors; in this sense, if students are motivated by a positive environment or by themselves, they can develop better performance and interest in learning. So, teachers should be interested in motivating their students and maintaining a good mood during lessons so that both teachers and students can successfully achieve the goals set in the teaching and learning process. Motivation can be defined as learners’ willingness to be part of the language learning process and is the first condition for taking on a learning task; thus, adequate motivation must be ensured to achieve learners’ engagement in the development and learning of lessons (Meşe & Sevilen, 2021).

### *Make Corrections*

Excerpts from peer teacher’s reflection:

“The peer suggested to the teacher that he should correct the students’ pronunciation after they have read the text so that he avoids interrupting the students’ participation” (Reflection 1).

Finally, it is essential for teachers to make their lessons smooth and motivating, and to do so, they should seek the participation and trust of the students. When students are reading, they make errors in pronunciation, so teachers should correct them verbally. For this, some suggestions for teachers during verbal correction are to correct without laziness, not to work under time pressure, to allow students to review their work, to be positive and constructive when making comments, and to plan the necessary time in class for self-correction (Debreli & Onuk, 2016). Also, Farahani & Salajegheh (2015) indicate that "the basic belief accepted by all is that correction that breaks the stream of speech should be avoided. In other words, learners should be given the opportunity to continue their communication even if some errors emerge" (p. 187). Consequently, teachers should ensure that students finish their participation before correcting them in order to avoid interrupting and inhibiting them.

## ■ Conclusions

This study recommends that the main tips for implementing culture-based lessons through authentic material are a) select authentic material considering students' level, b) plan meaningful activities, c) promote classroom interaction, d) spend time planning to impact on students' learning, e) give clear instructions, f) motivate students, and g) make corrections. By using texts as authentic and appropriate materials at the students' level, the teacher helps them to reinforce their cultural knowledge and understanding as well as their reading skills. The teacher should consider three important criteria when choosing the right materials for students: suitability of content, exploitability and readability. Planning meaningful activities enables learners to understand the topics taught properly. Promoting classroom interaction allows teachers to capture the students' attention and maintain their active participation during each lesson; therefore, creativity is an important element to achieve relevant communication between teacher and students. The teacher should perform well in the classroom, as this helps him/her to carry out the activities and to achieve the objectives of the

teaching and learning process successfully. Giving clear instructions allows the teacher to make sure that students do what is set out in each lesson. Motivation is an essential factor that enables the teacher and learners to construct new knowledge effectively. Making corrections to students is another key tip that helps the teacher to ensure that students learn from their own mistakes in a subtle and positive way, without interrupting or inhibiting their participation during lessons. Therefore, it is recommended that schools apply and implement culture-based lessons by using authentic material and tips suggested by the researchers.

These results are limited to certain aspects: a) sample size as students who attended the synchronous classes were a maximum of six, which limited the scope of the culture-based lessons. In addition, it is worth mentioning that in all the classes, the students who met were not the same, which made it difficult to have continuous results; b) lack of available and/or reliable data because it was not always possible to obtain the students' support for the survey-most of them took days to respond-. Moreover, it was not possible to obtain detailed results on students' observations because the survey included some closed-ended questions; and c) reflection process, as we made some mistakes in the development of the reflections so, we focused on explaining in some reflections only what happened and not why certain events occurred during the implementation of the culture-based lessons. Further research is needed on how to teach culture-based lessons by using authentic materials and what tips should be applied in the development of such lessons.

In the case of limitations, the sample size in synchronous classes due to the lack of internet could be resolved by unifying different courses that have the same level of English or the same level in terms of grade or course. Also the lack of available and/or reliable data could be overcome by having the students answer all surveys before leaving the class. In addition, the reflection process could be improved by considering the events that generated successes or failures during the lessons.

This study will allow future research to focus on investigating how the use of authentic materials and the implementation of culture-based lessons

as strategies help teachers teach culture in EFL and improve students' cultural knowledge and understanding.

## ■ Conclusions

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