Research Article

CAUSES OF LOW EFL LEVEL IN INCOMING UNIVERSITY TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM STUDENTS

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Abstract

This article is a case-study that interprets the possible causes of low English as a Foreign Language (EFL) communicative competences of certain incoming students in the course Introductory English A1 of a bachelor's degree in foreign languages, English in a university in Bogotá, Colombia in the first and second semester of 2023 regarding the perceptions of professors of this subject. Data was gathered through interviews. Results evidenced that high-school EFL education quality and experiences, Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), lack of autonomous work, of motivation and of extracurricular opportunities to practice the language were the main causes of this low EFL level. Concluding, to address this issue, some practical EFL learning strategies are proposed to enhance a more successful EFL learning process of these students bearing in mind they are going to be teachers of this language.

Keywords: Causes of low EFL communicative competences, EFL autonomous learning strategies, EFL communicative competences, EFL professors' perceptions, Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), High-school EFL education quality, Motivation in EFL learning.

INTRODUCTION

English is regarded as one of the most globalized and spoken language in the world allowing people to respond to higher academic, labour requirements and opportunities in Colombia and around the world to improve their quality of life by mastering English as a first, second or foreign language. in Colombia, according to the guide No. 22: Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Languages: English by the [1] Ministry of National Education (MEN), (2020), it is imperative to master a foreign language in this country and in this global village. Therefore, its inhabitants can interact with others in different socio-cultural contexts and interchange knowledge being globally competitive using English as a means of Communication or lingua franca. Thus, the [1] MEN, (2020) states that through this guide, it is sought to improve Colombians' life quality by providing them with high quality education in English Language Teaching (ELT) with greater efficiency, making proper and pertinent adjustments when necessary. That way, the National Education System can meet the current and future needs of the inhabitants of this country; likewise meet the needs and requirements of this increasingly globalized world, allowing Colombian citizens to have better academic and employment opportunities quality through a more efficient and practical EFL learning processes. In this research, certain incoming students of the course Introductory English A1 of a bachelor's degree in foreign Languages, English were chosen to interpret the possible causes of their low EFL level bearing in mind their and their professors' perceptions to later propose some strategies that can be used effectively by professors of this course. This is a relevant topic to research because these students are being educated to be EFL professional teachers. Hence, they must provide high quality EFL education to make Colombians meet the requirements, needs, job, and education opportunities of this country and this globalized world.

However, in this undergraduate degree certain incoming students do not start their course with a minimum EFL level which might create difficulties when starting their EFL learning process. According to the Coordination from this degree, in a personal communication on June 28th, 2023, in a report for the renewal of the accreditation of this major, there is an average of 157 incoming students. In the first and second semester of 2023, there were around 6-7 Introductory English A1 groups. Each group had an average of 25 to 30 students. These students were chosen because they needed to build up strong EFL bases during their first semesters to assure an EFL C1 level at the end of their majora requirement of the [1] MEN guidelines for higher education EFL teaching degrees, (2020). If they do not acquire strong basis during their first ELF courses, in the advanced ones, they might have several deficiencies and fossilizations that can be difficult to overcome such as lack of accuracy, grammar, fluency, lack of vocabulary and pronunciation, among others. According to some Introductory English A1 professors, several incoming students did not have an appropriate EFL level or, at least, the level they considered required to start this kind of bachelor's degree. This study is aimed to interpret the main causes of their low EFL level considering the professors' perceptions because the issue can be professionally addressed professionally to later propose some strategies to improve these students' EFL level from the beginning.

Theoretical Framework

EFL Communicative Competences

EFL communicative competences involve several definitions that have changed throughout history as linguists and experts have been constantly inquiring to make this concept evolve. It has been used for more than 50 years; and it has had a huge influence on ELT. One of the experts who came up with the notion of "linguistics competence" was [2] Chomsky (1957) stating that social factors were outside and are not related with

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the domain of linguistics. His main idea with the concept of "communicative competence" is that it was purely based on the linguistic competence, which involves grammatical rules, vocabulary, standard pronunciation, spelling, etc. (as cited by [3] Aljumah, 2020). Furthermore, [2] Chomsky (1957) remarks that there are no other factors that influence the communicative competence of an individual (as cited by [4] Edelman, 2023). In this regard, he concluded that [5] Chomsky's (1965) concept of competence is "the ideal speaker-listener knowledge of his language", as cited by [6] López, 2023, p. 333). Moreover, [5] Chomsky (1965, as cited by [7] Mootoosamy, 2022), defines "competence" and "performance" in which he makes a great linguistic study of the learner's mental process, building the distinction of these two concepts. He affirms that competence is the knowledge that someone has of the language regarding the grammatical and structural properties of the language, allowing a person to generate possible grammatical sentences. Performance is the transformation of that competence to the use of spoken and written language in daily situations. Later, [8] Hymes (1972, as cited by [9] Whyte, 2019) points out that the term of "communicative competence" is not straight related with just with grammatical competence, but also with the sociolinguistic one. Hence, he built some important concepts "Linguistic competence" which is the tacit knowledge of language structure, and "Linguistic performance" which is the process of applying the knowledge to language use. He holds that effective communication requires more than linguistic competence, which in some cases grammar would be partially useful. That is, to communicate effectively a speaker must not only know how to correctly produce grammatical tenses, but also how to use them appropriately depending on the sociocultural context people are involved in.It means the speaker should befamiliar with this context to communicate accurately. Then, [10] Savignon (1972, as cited by [11] Garcés Rodríguez, 2019) supports the idea of Hymes by stating that communicative competence is an ability for functioning in real communicative settings. Likewise, [12] Savignon (1983) defines competence as the knowledge to use the language effectively in a determined situation considering its sociocultural traits. Additionally, [13] Canale and Swain (1980, as cited by [14] Guebba, 2021) propose a new model. They take the idea of Hymes, and some other linguistics who mention "sociolinguistic competence" by blending it with other competences not overlooking the term "grammatical competence". Hence, they define 4 competences that build up the concept of communicative competence:

Grammatical Competence

It is directly related to lexical items, rules of morphology, syntax, grammar and phonology. It represents the underlying component of a language that determines how to express accurately within a language.

Sociocultural competence

It is based on the sociocultural rules to interpret and use a language within different contexts. Thus, individuals should know in what specific contexts they are to express and communicate properly.

Strategic competence

The ability to compensate for deficits in communication. It means that people using this competence can choose appropriate expressions, paraphrasing strategies and body language to make their ideas clearer and understandable when there are gaps in the previous 2 competences.

Discourse competence

It is based on the capacity to combine language structures, and functions into a coherent and cohesive speech or text. Moreover, it is considered that to master discourse competence it is necessary to master all other competences. Afterward, [15] Krashen & Terrel (1983, as cited by [16] Baddipudi& Krishnan, 2023) agree with the definition of Hymes affirming that communicative competence is social communication; but it does not have a direct relation with grammatical competence. They conclude that language is better taught when it is used to communicate, and not explicitly to teach for conscious learning. Over the years, there have been theories and hypotheses that go to the same point of concepts already created. However, a concept, raised by [17] Alcón (2001), defines three main concepts for communicative competence:

Discourse competence

It comprises linguistic, textual, and pragmatic competence.

Psychomotor skills

It includes the four macro skills of a language. That is, listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

Strategic competence

These are the strategies used to compensate for the lack of linguistic or sociolinguistic competence. Those concepts were regarded very important because they included the four macro skills with other competencies in the process of learning a foreign language, something that should be developed to have a successful learning process. Hence, the author concludes that communicative competence is based on all the competencies created above including the four macro skills of a language (reading, listening, writing and speaking). They interact with each other, to form the concept of communicative competence. In contemporary ages, the concept's definition varies among authors. [18] Herdiawan (2018) emphasizes the necessity of developing cognitive and metacognitive competences, not merely for effective communication, but also for acquiring knowledge across various domains through language. This approach unveils learners' socio-cultural perspectives within their target language use. [19] Fantini (2020) underscores interculturality, with institutions fostering globalized professionals through internationalized curricula, promoting intercultural communicative competence, language mastery, and information exchange across cultures. Furthermore, using the Intercultural Communicative Competences ([20] Byram, 1997, as cited by [11] Garcés Rodríguez, 2019) enhances EFL students to use the language in real life settings. [21] Reid (2015) seeks to put aside traditional classrooms to engage students to develop successfully interaction skills through the usage of real-world scenarios. In the end, is known that the last descriptors given by the [22] Council of Europe (2020) were considered different from the ones stablished before, because the focus on communicative purposes to use the language within different context in the real life of people. Therefore, this competences are composed by activities and strategies with both of them are categorized with the same name

(reception, production, interaction, mediation) they have to do with previous communicative competences and have the purpose to students collaborate and interact within different context to build meaning and in that way be proficient in a language. Having in mind this, to be proficient in language there a need of do activities and use adequate strategies to complete them. Although there is a wider perspective nowadays of EFL communicative competence, ELT has become a great challenge for teachers owing to guide their students' learning process to master the language. Implementing all the theories mentioned above is recommended using TICS, cooperative learning among others. In this regard, it has been possible to enhance EFL learning process, to acquire and use the foreign communicative competences efficaciously and flawlessly.

Causes of low EFL communicative competences

In a scientific article of low EFL communicative competences [23] Islam & Stapa (2021) delve into the issue of low EFL communicative competences among students at private universities in Bangladesh, where English serves as the medium of instruction (EMI). These institutions mandate a minimum IELTS speaking score of 6, both in and outside the classroom. However, speaking tests reveal frequent interruptions marked by pauses and hesitations. This complexity in spoken English poses a significant challenge, as students grapple with coordinating various language aspects while striving for accurate vocabulary and grammatical structures to convey their thoughts effectively. Furthermore, the authors suggest that some instructional methods wrongly employed by teachers may contribute to students' low EFL proficiency. They argue that students often lack opportunities to apply what they've learned in real communicative situations. Instead, many classroom activities predominantly focus on grammar and vocabulary, leaving limited room for students to engage in practical language practice. This imbalance in teaching approaches may hinder their overall EFL communicative development. [24] Aras *et al.* (2022) assert that students cope with psychological problems experimenting anxiety, low confidence, fear of being judged and worry about people thoughts when using EFL especially when speaking, defined as Foreign Language Anxiety ([25] Mohamad *et al.,* 2022). They may cause low proficiency. Furthermore, [26] Al-Mahrooqui (2012) affirms that not accurate learning environments may affect the EFL learning process because it does not allow students to practice output with the input learned in class, crowded classes are seen, students are mixed regardless their English level and administrators of the school do not create an accurate learning-environment.

Based on [26] Al-Mahrooqui (2012) the classroom environment should have an atmosphere that stimulates the EFL learning process practicing English all the time with the relaxed feeling of participating without the fear of being judged ([27] Fievre, 2021), having less students in class to have a more personalized class, including in the same classroom students that have similar English levels, to ease the EFL learning process encouraging them to be keen to learn it. Finally, motivation is a key factor when students are learning EFL; [28] Souriyavongsa *et al.* (2013) state that the lack of motivation has caused students to fail in their EFL learning process. Hence, keeping students motivated is advised in their EFL learning process as they will enjoy the process increasing their EFL proficiency. [29] Santovac, & Popović (2022),

consider that motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, is essential when learning a foreign language. For that reason, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation items should be carefully studied to obtain much better results for these students.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the perceptions of Introductory English A1 professors from the bachelor's degree in foreign languages with emphasis in English, this qualitative case study based on the interpretive paradigm mainly explained the possible reasons why some students start this undergraduate degree with an EFL low level. Additionally, these professors and this major's strategies were described to tackle this issue. That was done to later assess their efficiency and provide further recommendations to foster these strategies and create new ones.

Participants

5 professors were chosen using the Convenience Sampling Procedure provided they were teaching Introductory English A1. There were 2 part-time and 3 full-time professors. All of them had a master's degree in areas related to ELT and they had a considerable experience teaching EFL courses for beginners. Choosing that sample provided us with the possibility to obtain in-depth, professional and reliable information about the topic. During the interviews they were informed about the objectives of the project and the applied data collection instruments. They accepted their participation and signed a written consent to protect their identity. Students, around 25 per each professor, came mainly from public schools (62%); just 38% of them came from private schools. Some (19%) had studied in EFL academic courses, and very few (1,4%) had travelled to English speaking countries. Some of them started with an acceptable EFL level (A1) according to the results their Colombian high school exit examination Saber 11 results. Nevertheless, others did not commence with a minimum EFL level. That fact made them difficult to start and progress rightly in their Introductory English A1 subject. That fact impacted negatively on their academic performance with the contents of the subject.

Data Collection

Data was collected using open-ended interviews to 5 EFL professors. To have a deeper understanding and interpretation of the issue, participants were allowed to answer freely providing the interviewers and moderators the facility to ask follow-up questions. This instrument aimed to elicit participants' perceptions bearing in mind that the reality of the object of study was based on what they comprehended about it. The interviews lasted between 10 to 15 minutes.

Data analysis

To validate the data collected was necessary to compare results of this studies with other which allow to have reliability to the study. ([30] Creswell & Clark, 2017). Then, a codebook was necessary to build based on the information collected to organize and know what categories are appropriate based to this ([30] Creswell &Clark, 2017). They were, then organized and represented in graphics such as mind and concept maps to describe and analyse the data to ultimately answer the research question. [31] Creswell & Creswell (2018) assert that creating

categories based in information collected is chief as it captures the main gathered information to interpret based on the perceptions of the participants.

RESULTS

Through the data analysis of the answers of these 5 professors, the following categories emerged:

Causes of low EFL communicative competences based on students' and professors' perceptions
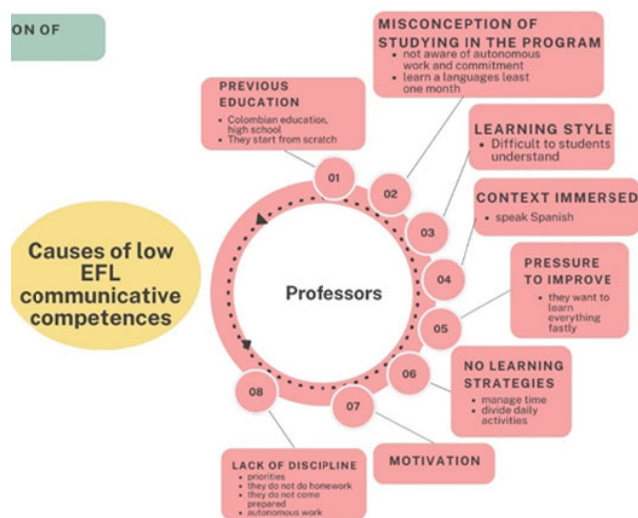
Source: Own elaboration based on interviews implemented to professors in charge of the English learning process of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO.

Figure 1. Causes of low EFL communicative competences based on students' and professors' perceptions

To answer the research question and achieve the main objective of this research, the previous graphic was created, presented, described and analyzed below. The figure derives that the causes of these students' low communicative competencies based on their professors' perceptions were lack of discipline since students did not set priorities, they did not do homework, they did not come prepared to class specially in flipped learning lessons, and they did not do autonomous practice outside the classroom. Other professors stated that students had low levels of motivation; so, they evidenced EFL low levels. Equally, other professors pointed that students did not implement appropriate EFL learning strategies because they did not manage their time adequately to study and to practice their EFL in their daily life. Furthermore, other professors exposed that students had the pressure to learn quickly because they wanted to learn everything in a short period of time. Subsequently, other professors stated that because of the context students lived. That is a Spanish speaking country where there is no manner to practice English as second or lingua franca like in bilingual countries such as Singapore or India. Other professors evidenced that the learning styles of students were different, so they had different ways of learning, and not all students could learn English when same types of activities were implemented in class. In addition, other professors identified that students had a misconception about studying this program because they were not committed, and they did not autonomously study with a high motivation. Similarly, others regarded that student thought it was a long language course. Likewise, other professors expressed that students' previous education did not allow them to obtain an

efficient level, so some of them had to start from the scratch. Introductory English A1 professors were inquired about the biggest issues students had in class, evidenced in their teaching journey.
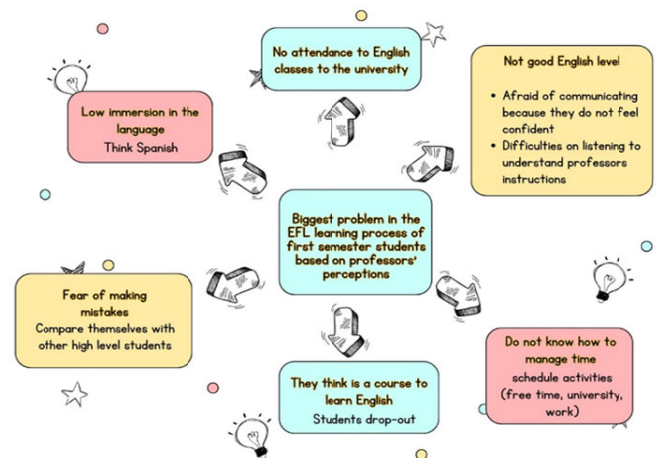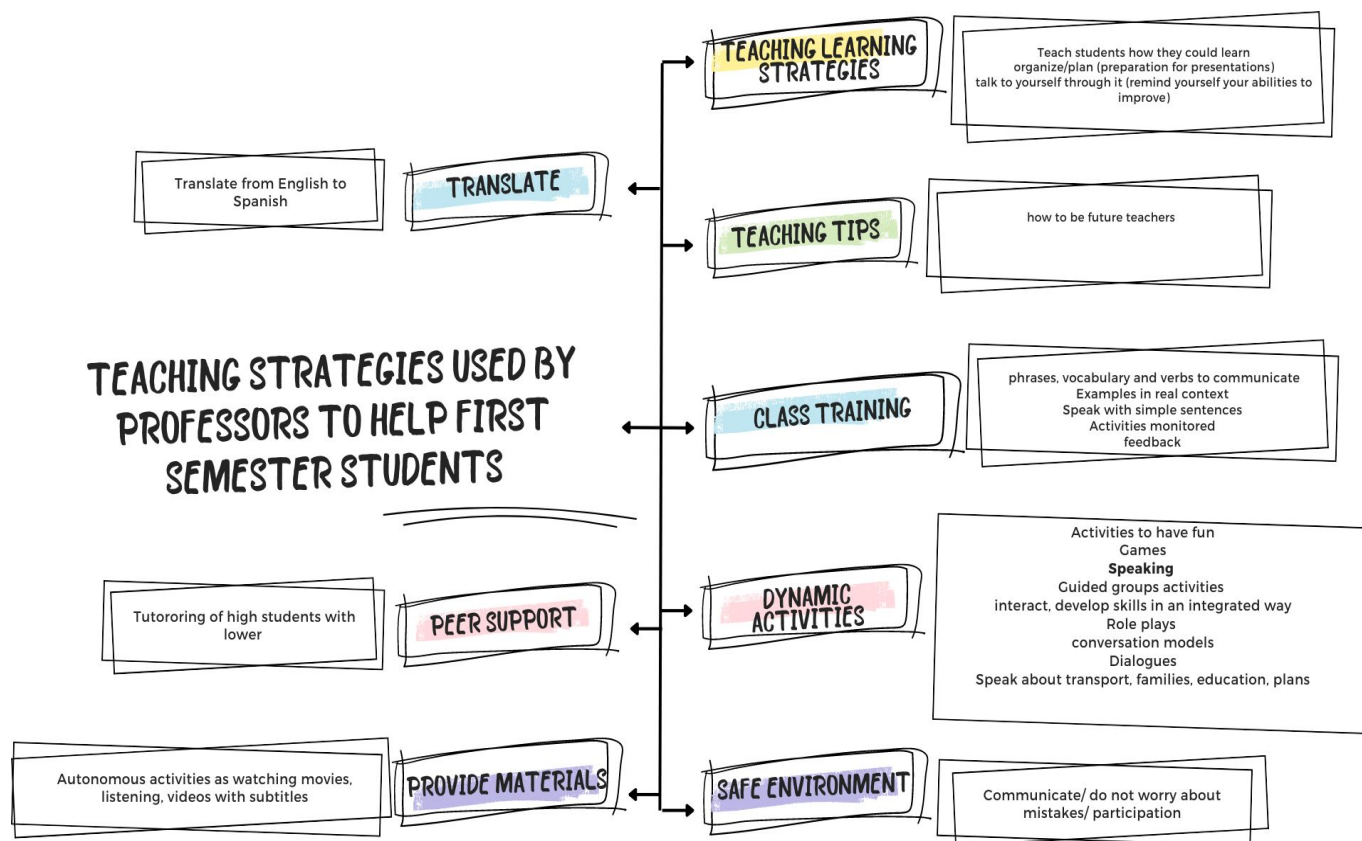

Figure 2. Biggest issues first semester students had in class based on professors' perceptions.

Source: Own elaboration based on interviews implemented to professors in charge of the English learning process of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO.

The figure above aimed to confirm the causes of the main difficulties students faced with EFL learning process evidenced in their professors' teaching journal. Firstly, professors stated that their students did not start with a minimum English level. That was evidenced as sometimes they did not understand professors' instructions. On top of that, some did not attend regularly class, and they did not frequently participate in class as they did not feel confident enough to do it. Afterward, other professor supported that students did not know about practical time management regarding university workload and the time required to learn a foreign language. There is a need to manage time to schedule activities for work, university assignments, and leisure, making emphasis on their priorities. Then, another professor exposed that many students thought the program was going to prepare them in other random jobs like in a bilingual call center, but not to be EFL teachers, so students dropped out of the program when they thought deeply about the idea that they were educated to be EFL educators. Moreover, other professors conveyed that as the university allowed education for everyone, students gave up because they did not evidence improvements in their EFL level. Besides, other professors stated that students usually feared making mistakes, especially because they compared their level with others who had a higher level than them. Moreover, other professors said that low immersion possibilities to use the language in different real life or daily life situation outside class impede them to practice the target language. So, they just practiced in class or on their own, but they are not constantly practicing it. Finally, a professor underlined that some students tried to convey ideas using complex sentences in English that they could not do properly because of their basic level. In contrast, the student in the native language could. That is called a communicative burden.

Teaching strategies of professors

Finally, to overcome these difficulties, professors were inquired about the strategies they used to help students to improve these EFL communicative skills.

Source: Own elaboration based on interviews implemented to professors in charge of the English learning process of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO.

Figure 3. Strategies implemented by professors to students overcome difficulties.

The figure derives professors' strategies to develop successfully EFL communicative skills such as providing a friendly environment, so students can communicate freely without being worried about making mistakes allowing active participation in class. Subsequently, other professors stated that dynamic activities such as interactive activities or games, speaking exercises such as guided group activities, interaction to develop integrated skills in class, role plays, practice with conversational models, dialogues, and speaking about transport, families, education, and plans were stated to be used. Similarly, other professors indicated that speaking class training/ instructions were used to provide phrases, vocabulary, verbs, simple sentences to communicate in simulations of a real communicative situations, with constant monitoring and scaffolded feedback see more information about this concept in the discussion section.

Moreover, other professors affirmed that teaching tips were used to instruct students how to be future EFL teachers. Equally, other professors pointed that cognitive academic language learning approach - CALLA learning strategies are used to teach them how they could learn. CALLA strategies such as "organizing/planning" to be prepared for presentation, and "talking to yourself through it" to remind the abilities of students to improve were used. Furthermore, other professors considered that providing didactic and innovative material was used to encourage students to practice autonomously. They had to watch movies videos with subtitles. In addition, other professors stated that peer support was used pairing high-level students so that they tutored low level ones. Finally, other professors conveyed that translation from English to Spanish was used to compare both languages structures and functions.

DISCUSSION

Causes of low EFL communicative competences

It was found professors agreed that the causes of low communicative competencies are lack of discipline, students' motivation, EFL communicative and real-life context where students can be immersed in mainly using the language learned because they are in a Spanish-speaking country, there might be a negative family influence, misconception about studying in the program, previous EFL education, the fact that students did not have EFL learning strategies, students had a great pressure to improve, and not all students could learn English in the same way. Therefore, in the following is going to be supported with authors the reason given so that the research has reliable data. First, self-discipline is an important factor in learning a language because according to [32] Herawati (2018), learning is influenced by internal factors such as interest and discipline to have success and it does not just depend on the teaching process. Similarly, according to [33] Rofik (2022), discipline involves being aware and having the will to become a responsible person. Indeed, according to [34] Sunardi *et al.* (2022), self-disciplined people have self-control and full awareness to learn without being forced inside or outside a person. So, students who have self-discipline habits will study without being obligated to do it. Therefore, in this study, interest and self-discipline in learning English have an influence on the causes of students' low EFL level. According to [35] Mili (2020), motivation could be seen as orientation students have to achieve a goal in their learning process. Hence, students who have high motivation will perform better than students with low motivation because students' motivation

is goal-oriented, and they are more attentive to their learning process. Normally, they have the desire to learn and participate in their learning process ([35] Mili, 2020). Two types of motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation ([36] Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation is when a student does something because it is interesting and enjoyable inherently. Extrinsic motivation is to do something because there is an external outcome. That is why, the motivation of students could be affected by their own interests and needs, preferences. Also, that could be affected by the teacher, and the learning environment ([37] Madrid, 2002). First, the teacher plays an important role because they need to engage students to help them achieve their goals, and that way, they increase their motivation ([38] Ramage, 1990). For that, teachers can engage students by implementing different enjoyable ELT strategies to students learn motivated within a relaxed and friendly class atmosphere because some students can feel confident with positive attitudes from the teacher's inspiration, attitude and motivation to the class and their students ([39] Dörney, 2001). Equally, according to [35] Mili (2020) to motivate students, teachers are advised to use multimedia or new teaching aids in the classroom, they should teach about culture to students who are more interested in other aspects apart from the language. In the same way, another important factor is to build a positive teacher-student relationship and rapport to interact and share problems confidently which could help teachers be aware of what could demotivate students. [40] Oxford & Shearin (1994) show five important points teachers should consider motivating students. Teachers should know the reasons why students learn English to make them be positive to attain their goals. They should talk about challenges and implications to achieve their goals. They should show the benefits of learning a language to help students be more goal-oriented and motivated. They should not build a threatening environment to students feel free to learn in this context. Finally, it is advised to promote intrinsic motivation to students enjoy their learning process. Additionally, [41] Lightbown & Spada (1993) maintain that if student's motivation to learn a language is external, pressure students' motivation should be minimal, as negative attitudes to learn the language could be negative. Therefore, Gardener suggests that students need to have a motivation intensity, which people need to have the following characteristics: put effort to achieve a goal, be persistent, pay attention, have goals and desires (short or long), enjoy putting effort to achieve the goal, reinforce positive aspects of the success and is unsatisfied when fail, identify causes regarding the performance, the person is joyful when put effort to achieve the goal, and use strategies to achieve goals. (2001 cited in [42] Diaz, 2014)

Apart from this, according to [43] Chamot& Robbins (2005) in their proposed model of learning strategies CALLA in metacognitive strategies, state that to plan/organize is key to students know their goals, sequence, way, and preview the task they need to accomplish. In the same way, setting goals are crucial during the learning process for students because the achievement of goals involves reasons why students engage in certain tasks or actions and why they want to learn. That could be the guide teachers could use to motivate students ([44] Bin Abu Bakar *et al.,* 2014). Similarly, according to [45] ToFluency (n.d.) setting goals is important because it could give students clarity of why they want to study, it gives a deadline to work, and they indicate how to achieve it. Therefore, goals are helpful to keep motivated for a long term. It helps students to schedule activities on their daily life. In general terms, students setting goals can manage time to learn English by planning a deadline to learn specific things and doing the right things in their daily lives to achieve it. The main language spoken in the country influences students' level owing to is not the same as a country where English is used as a second language (all the time), instead of used as a foreign language (not in daily contexts). According to the British Council (n.d.) students studying English in a country where they are learning it as a first or second language have many benefits as they are more immersed in the context (cited in [46] Quimosing, 2022). Similarly, according to [47] Bodur & Arikan (2017), identified that the failure of students to learn English at universities could be because of parents' knowledge of English, or low exposure to the language in their daily lives because they cannot practice speaking with people in their daily life. However, not all students can afford to study in a country that uses English as a first or second language. Hence, according to [46] Quimosing (2022) learning English as a foreign language has consequences on pronunciation, grammatical errors, and vocabulary difficulties, which could be because, according to [48] Nurmalarasi (2020), if students learn previously English as not being in a first or second language country, they still face difficulties to master the foreign language. Other problems such as limited exposure to English because students just practice English in class ([46] Quimosing, 2022), and speaking difficulties even if students know many characteristics in English, but being in a no-speaking country affects their level, ([49] Hosni, 2014). Despite this, the way to solve this could be through stimulating students' interest in class, providing enough sources to students learn and get immersed in the language, teaching strategies to students, help students overcome difficulties ([50] Dingfang, 2006; [46] Quimosing, 2022).

Learning styles are the way students tend to or prefer to learn and must be considered as a complement to one another ([51] Reid, 1998). Learning style has an influence on learning because it is identified in students as useful to teachers provide materials and methodologies that allow students to enhance their achievement to learn within a specific time ([52] Al-Zayed, 2017). Equally, it could help students build study habits, improve learning flexibility, and performance ([53] Bailey *et al.,* 2000). Thus, learning styles are determining since they are the first step to teachers provide students with more effective learning environments that allow teachers to facilitate more research-based instructional methods for students to learn easily ([54] Oxford & Anderson, 1995). Different types of learning styles have been studied, but the last established one is the visual, auditive, reading and kinesthetic (VARK) model created by [55] Fleming (2006) which stated that visual, aural/auditive, reading, and kinesthetic students could be included in these different learning styles. They are pertinent for students because of the allocation of a medium for self-knowledge and exploring opportunities in class to make a more productive learning experience and enjoyment for students ([56] Murphy *et al.,* 2004). In this study a professor stated that students could not learn English because of different learning styles:

"I have always thought and it's that English is not for everybody, even if a person tries and it's really committed and has all the motivation and everything, maybe there is something about his or her learning style or something happens in his, her brain that English is not easy to learn." (Professor in charge of the English learning process of first

semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO)

Based on what was stated about the learning styles of students and comparing them with other studies, it is not a hindrance to student's EFL learning process. Both, teachers and students need to be aware of them to increase learning achievements. Another aspect that influences students' performance is anxiety because according to [24] Aras *et al.* (2022), anxiety determines success in learning a language, regarding the level of anxiety to learn the target language; it might determine if students have a successful or unsuccessful process. According to [57] Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986), anxiety is defined as the feeling of being afraid, worried, and frightened to speak which could be a main negative aspect when learning a second language. Furthermore, it does not just affect beginners, most students experience anxiety during the learning process ([58] Alrabai, 2014). Hence, anxiety affects the learning performance of students since in some studies it has been proved that if students present factors of anxiety, it might be because they lack motivation to overcome this aspect ([59] Ritonga *et al.,* 2020). The cause of anxiety could be because of three main aspects the teacher, the learner, and the instructional practice ([60] Aatif, 2022). First, the learning atmosphere and the teacher's role are important aspects of anxiety as according to some studies, students feel anxious when the teacher calls their names to participate in class, and the way of correcting students' mistakes can be the main cause of it ([61] Aydin, 2008; [60] Aatif, 2022). Other causes are low self-esteem, speaking in public, fear of getting low scores in exams, and failure in the learning process ([62] Young, 1991; [57] Horwitz *et al.,* 1986). That is why, the academic performance of students has a relation with motivation and anxiety ([63] Liu & Zhang, 2013).

Later, according to the [1] MEN (2020) students entering higher education are expected to reach at least a B1 level; thus, in the following the problem is identified by the director of the program at UNIMINUTO who stated in a meeting, which she presented the program that there are some difficulties because:

"Estudiante que dice no, pero es que no soy bueno para estudiar, por eso voy a escoger idiomas, uno le dice bueno. No es fácil, no es una carrera fácil, tenemos estudiantes que tienen dificultades para adaptarse a aprender 2 idiomas al tiempo y mas encima ir en la tarde o ir en la mañana a enseñarle a niños con el estrés que genera un colegio o un centro de idiomas, o hacer proyectos de investigación al tiempo, entonces no es una carrera fácil para perfilar nuestros estudiantes, esto es fuerte, pero bastante, al final los estudiantes tienen un perfil muy alto." (Paez, C., personal communication, 28th June 2023)

To confirm the causes of low EFL levels and to know more about difficulties students have had studying this Introductory English A1 course, professors were enquired for the biggest issues. Thus, the first problem identified by professors was to come up with an inadequate level:

"Students come with A2, B1, even B2 level, so those with A1 or even minus A, for them it's so difficult to communicate because they don't have vocabulary, or they are afraid of communicating…because they don't have enough vocabulary or the grammar, or they don't feel confident they are normally ashamed because of that." (Professor in charge of the English

learning process of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO)

"The students did have a lot of problems to come to class…the student missed most classes…it's difficult for the student because the student really missed a lot of information." (First semester professor in charge of the English learning process of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO)

[64] Henania& Hamlaoui (2011) states that it is important for students to participate in class; if they do not do it in a regular basis, it could block learning because they lack interest and understanding, and they cannot practice speaking in class. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers should know how to respond to students' differences by combining their teaching knowledge, experience, and creativity to make good instruction in class, and to keep students interested in the class. Afterward, another professor explained that because students do not know how to manage time to schedule activities for work, university, and free time. They put more emphasis on doing the most relevant activities considering their interests and immediate needs. Based on [65] Alyami *et al.* (2021) students who manage time can meet deadlines and have a high-quality performance. Therefore, in the study, it is recommended to make a diary, to-do list, or add important dates on a calendar to manage time effectively.

Another big issue conveyed by professors was that as everyone can be enrolled in the program, then students are not aware that they are going to be EFL teachers, so they enroll in the program to study English. That is why, they drop out the program because they do not feel authentically motivated to be teachers, or because they do not see improvements learning English:

"one of the strengths that this program has, it is that any person can enroll, they don't need to have a minimum English level from the ICFES exam…but that leads to another problem, and it's the desertion in the middle of the semester or second or third semester, a lot of students like they quit because they feel they cannot learn." (First semester professor in charge of the English learning process of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO in an interview)

"So sometimes they see it as a language course, which is fun. And they think that they are just starting a language course and later when they are starting the third semester or even later in fourth semester or something they realize they are studying to become teachers." (First semester professor in charge of the English learning process of first semester student in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO in an interview)

Other professors stated that because students do not speak when they compare their performance in class with others, the fear of making mistakes on their L2 learning process can be difficult for them to improve:

"They have a huge problem to say like, okay, I don't understand, or make a mistake." (First semester professors in charge of the English learning process of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO in an interview)

"Fear of making mistakes, they compare themselves with other students with a higher level." (First semester professor in charge of the English learning process of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO in an interview)

Based on [66] Muhamad *et al.* (2021) barriers to communication in EFL classes are due to fear, and lack of motivation. The causes of it are that students think all the time about how to pronounce or structure grammatical sentences correctly. Furthermore, students talking in front of people feel nervous as they are worried about making mistakes. Some of them are afraid to ask about the class content as they fear others criticize or judge them, including the professor. In the study, it is recommended that to students become calm in class, teachers should create a good classroom atmosphere building a supportive and respectful background to prompt motivation and confidence.

Next, other professors claimed that not being a country in which students speak English in their daily lives might be a difficulty.

"The immersion of our language, always thinking in Spanish is a big problem." (First semester professor in charge of the English learning process of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO in an interview)

Later, another professor stated that students feel frustrated when they wanted to communicate complex ideas using complex grammatical structures but they do not have enough knowledge to do it:

"it's a student who wants to say everything as if she were speaking Spanish…communicative burden because she tries to express very complex things." (First semester professor in charge of the English learning process of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO)

Based on what the professor stated about the communicative burden, [67] Lippi-Green (2012) refers to the difficulty of effective communication in a specific situation. According to [68] Lippi-Green (1997), people have different language ideologies, language filters, and language repertoires which are built through their histories and social positions, so people can meet other people with different repertoires making communication difficult. Therefore, people can understand what a second language speaker says if they share these repertoires to understand the message. However, the problem identified by the professor in this study was that the student presented this problem because they had a basic language repertoire to communicate effectively:

"Very basic repertoire, so that case the main point is to help her Limits what she wants to say." (First semester professors in charge of the English learning process of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO)

Teaching strategies used by professors

Finally, to solve these communicative skills difficulties, researchers analyzed the strategies used by professors to help their students in their Introductory English A1 course.

According to [27] Fievre (2021), safe and friendly environments are characterized by students feeling free and relaxed to make mistakes without judgments or play the ridicule as they can engage in critical, honest, and challenging discussions about different topics. That is why, a safe learning environment is beneficial for students because [69] Western Governors University (2021) outlines it supports students to pursue knowledge, increases their curiosity, practice their speaking skills ([26] Al-Mahrooqui, 2012), makes them feel comfortable to participate in class ([69] Western Governors University, 2021). In this study, teachers are recommended to have in mind three main aspects such as the physical environment that involves how the classroom is arranged to support students' learning process and confidence to produce their EFL output. Equally, psychology that involves creating a friendly educational environment to participate, ask questions, take risks, and receive constructive feedback. At last, cultural aspects that involves celebrating diversity, self-expression, and achievements of students. Moreover, another strategy was the application of dynamic activities to learn English which are of great importance because they can provide fun, interaction, and engagement for students in class. The term engagement is considerable when talking about teaching EFL as according to [70] Woolfok& Margetts (2007) it enhances the learning outcomes of students and allows them to have higher academic performance in students' daily lives. Similarly, another concept that involves engagement was motivation since it is necessary for students to be engaged. [71] Ryan & Deci (2009) confirmed motivation is a requisite of engagement. In the same way, [72] Newmann (1992) interpreted that students who are engaged learn to be proud of their grades or indicators of success, and likewise, they aim to understand and internalize knowledge in their long-term memory and daily lives. [73] Schlechty (2001) conveyed that engaged students have the joy of learning to accomplish the desired goals even if there are difficulties, they have skills to work with others and they transfer knowledge to solve problems creatively because engagement allows creativity, increases curiosity, provides an opportunity to work with others and as a result the feeling of success ([74] Saeed &Zyngier, 2012). Hence, in promoting engagement, teachers have an influential role because it encourages students to boost their potential ([75] Krause *et al.,* 2006). If teachers understand that motivation and engagement have a determining role, teachers will have more abilities to provide a supportive environment to learn their foreign language ([76] Marsh, 2000). The way to do so, [77] Parra *et al.* (2012) recommend that to engage students it is necessary to use tables, pictures, and flashcards to foster a more efficient and practical positive learning environment and opportunities. Additionally, teachers should build strategies to engage students keeping in mind students' individuality, academic tasks, school, classroom environment, and external environment that influence them ([74] Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). Next, giving students training to improve in class is relevant. Nonetheless, teachers need to play other roles in class so that comprehensive learning is brought accurately. According to [78] Archana & Rani (2017), teachers have the role of not just teaching but performing other activities to motivate students to learn. It is recommended that teachers play other roles such as "teacher as learner" which involves thinking as learners, to plan classes, so students understand better the information. "Teacher as a facilitator" means that teachers are concerned about students to students feel they matter, becoming a facilitator supporting students to learn for themselves. That will help to create a positive learning

environment reflected on students' life, intellectual or linguistic elements. "Teacher as an assessor" is essential because they know the performance of students and give constant feedback. Assessing students' EFL output is determining because they can reflect on their teaching and guide students to master the language. The assessment could be done through formal or quantitative evaluation tools like quizzes, questionnaires, etc. Or it can be done through qualitative tools or strategies such as rubrics, elaborated or scaffolded feedback. Formative assessment is considered to not have as many benefits as the scaffolded or monitoring assessment since in formative assessment it just focuses on evaluative feedback, and it does not enhance students' learning ([79] Stiggins, 2002; [80] Broadfoot *et al.,* 1999). Conversely, scaffolded or monitoring feedback has many benefits because it provides a detailed feedback to students, includes several practices such as classroom questioning, self-assessment, peer-assessment, which allow students to modify learning practices and increase the autonomy of students to learn ([81] Broadfoot *et al.,* 2002; [82] Pat-El *et al.,* 2013; [83] Lee & Mark, 2014). In the same way, teachers can make adjustments in their instruction-based assessment ([82] Broadfoot *et al.,* 2002). "Teacher as manager" requires teachers to plan the time of the class implementing teaching techniques to students achieve success. "Teacher as an evaluator" involves being an effective evaluator. It should be done to do justice to a student's academic performance. Therefore, it implies that teachers recommend students to be aware that mistakes are a good and normal part of their learning process. Yet, students must be focused on areas of competence rather than weaknesses aimed to provide positive expectations to enhance their EFL learning process.

Besides, giving self-learning and teaching tips to students could be a good strategy because they can be more conscious of being in a bachelor's degree to be EFL teachers and not just to learn English. The following statement expresses what a professor stated about the problem of students who want to learn English but do not want to be EFL teachers:

"They decide this major for the language…maybe 30% of our students want to be teachers." (Professors in charge of the English learning process of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO in an interview)

Moreover, the strategy of professors to teach CALLA learning strategies can be efficient because they are characterized as a consequential aspect to students know how to learn, being effective and autonomous to make students have success learning EFL, ([43] Chamot & Robbins, 2005). The specific strategies used by professors of CALLA are "plan/ organize" which involves that before doing a task, students must set goals, plan the task or content sequence, plan how to achieve this task, and preview the result. The other one is to "talk to yourself through it" which involves using your inner sources, reminding abilities in the progress, resources available, and goals. In addition, the strategy used by professors to provide materials to promote autonomous learning could be useful and regarded as another CALLA strategy. That is because the one called "access information sources" involves using the dictionary, internet, and other reference materials, seeking sources of information, following a model and asking questions.

Later, another strategy professors can apply is asking EFL high-level students to support the learning process of EFL low-level students (peer-support scaffolding strategy). According to [84] Sari *et al.* (2017), it increases the academic performance of the low-level ones. However, peer support should not be considered as a replacement of the teacher as it is just an extra support on the learning process and improvement of the low-level students' output ([85] Tella, 2013). In the same way, peer support is weighty as [86] Schleyer *et al.* (2005) states that it helps students to increase their self-confidence, communication abilities, high reading performances ([87] Saenz, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005), development of positive behavior among classmates ([88] Plumer & Stoner, 2005), increase of the responsibility of students, and promotion of an outstanding learning environment ([89] Baillie & Grimes, 1999).

Finally, the strategy to translate from English to Spanish could be an efficient strategy, in certain cases because the use of the native language is regarded as a tool to learn a second language ([90] Ross, 2000). Therefore, the use of their mother tongue in class is a natural approach to learning English because if they are incapable of activating linguistic terms of vocabulary to do a task, they could relate the use of translation lexis and structures of the target language with the use of the native language (Harmer, 2001; Bonyadi, 2003). According to [91] Schweers (1999) a second language can be learned raising awareness of the similarities and differences between L1 and L2. However, [28] Souriyavongsa *et al.* (2013) said that university students considered that the use of the native language by the teacher in the class is not appropriate as it does not give them the possibility to get enough meaningful input. Furthermore, [92] Kaye (2009) states that translation is not that pertinent because it does not allow a progressing development of students' communicative skills. It encourages and tempt students to use more their L1 rather than their L2. Hence, translation could be useful just for students who prefer analytical or verbal learning strategies.

Conclusions

Collecting the biggest issues of students based on professors' perceptions, it could be possible to confirm some of the causes based on their perceptions, they agreed that the causes of low communicative competencies are:

Lack of discipline, students' motivation, context students are immersed in because they are in a Spanish-speaking country, family influence, misconception about studying in the program, previous education, the fact that students did not have learning strategies, students had pressure to improve, and not all students had the ability to learn English. Consequently, all of them give the possibility to analyze if strategies implemented by professors are adequate to students overcome the issues presented with the language regarding the causes; which indeed, strategies implemented by professors of these Introductory A1 English courses were accurate because the comparison with other studies confirms it. These strategies are promoting a safe environment in class, which results beneficial to increase engagement and motivation. Then, instructing students to they receive more input of the language results beneficial as they are beginners, so it is essential for producing output; however, professors need to play other roles which are to think and plan classes as students may perceive, and would like to have classes, to include students in class, to check

students' learning process, to implement teaching techniques to students have success and to assess the students' process through scaffolded feedback. In this process, it is necessary that professors take a supportive role in making students realize that mistakes are normal and instead of focusing on them students have to focus on their areas of competence. Besides, encouraging students to self-study and giving them teaching tips may be beneficial for their motivation, responsibility, competence and awareness of what involves being a teacher. Likewise, students knowing how to learn, how others learn and how they can learn in an effective way through professors' CALLA strategies training may have a significant impact on students' autonomy and confidence. Moreover, grouping low performance-students with high-achievers may have a significant impact on students' improvement; nevertheless, this aid should not be considered to be replaced for the one given by the professor. Finally, to translate from Spanish to English is accurate as students are beginners and using the target language may create confusions; but, this does not mean that students rely all the time in the translator-use since it may contributes in a negative way on students' performance. Despite of their accurateness, it is evidenced that students still considered themselves in the study as low English proficiency-users so that in the following section is proposed a model to increase students' level.

Suggestions

The proposed model aims to address the challenges faced by first-semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO. Figure 2 identifies these issues based on professors' perceptions, forming the basis for a new model created by researchers to tackle these problems. The model incorporates materials and tools designed to enhance students' communicative competences in EFL through autonomous work throughout the semester. Additionally, the model advocates for the establishment of personalized support spaces for students, where they can access tutoring on specific topics and skills that require improvement ([93] Harmer, 2007). Students are encouraged to seek assistance from tutors when they believe external support is necessary through UNIMINUTO that offers a platform called the "Centro de Apoyo a la Experiencia de Aprendizaje - CaEx" (https://centroapoyoaprendizaje.uniminuto.edu/comunicativas-en-ingles/) where first-semester students can connect with peer tutors, fellow UNIMINUTO students capable of helping them develop their English competences, these peer tutors provide guidance tailored to each student's unique needs.

Furthermore, regular monitoring or checking the progress of learning by the professors responsible for guiding first-semester English learning is essential to track progress and identify areas of attention-needing ([94] Nghipandulwa *et al.,* 2022). The model also emphasizes the importance of practicing English in immersive environments, encouraging pronunciation practice, followed by discussion spaces on various topics within different contexts; that way, it is promoted the intercultural competence for communicative purposes acquiring input through listening podcasts about expressions they may use regarding their context and applying the knowledge through speaking-practice activities ([22] Council of Europe, 2020). Collaborative learning in small groups is promoted to create a comfortable environment where students can practice the language without fear of making mistakes, fostering confidence ([95] Yin, 2019).

The use of authentic materials is central to the model's success, providing students with diverse content such as articles, videos, audios, and texts to enhance their language learning. Incorporating artificial intelligence-based resources as they offer immediate feedback, increasing students' engagement and motivation ([96] Shu & Xu, 2022). Finally, the model concludes with the taking-tests to assess students' progress, aiming to reach at least an A2 English proficiency level. The model's implementation aims to demonstrate significant improvements in students' communicative competences by the end of the semester. The proposed model focuses during the first week on students whom may have an A- English level, to work on vocabulary and grammar to establish a basic language foundation ([97] Sanmugan& Yamat, 2022). This foundation enables them to address various language competencies in the following weeks. Generally, in the model proposed studentshave to write in their notebooks as handwriting have some benefits identified by [98] Helkala (2017) which are students are more likely to remember later if they write things, and looking for notes you better recall information. Nevertheless, in some parts they have to use the page called Write & Improve with Cambridge to students check and correct possible mistakes. Moreover, it was considered important to let students choose in different activities topics of their preference owing to they can be more motivated and students can enhance productivity ([99] Donelson, 1976; [100] Yang, 2008). In some activities is considered necessary to students summarize the information they read because it boosts learning as they extract meaning of the material used ([101] Bretzing & Kullhavy, 1979).

Figure 4. Model to develop EFL communicative competences in first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO

Model to develop EFL communicative competences						
	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Reading	Grammar	Vocabulary
Week 1					**Grammar activity 1** Use the app to practice grammar, check topics you need more practice and improve with them https://test-english.com/grammar-points/a1/	**Vocabulary activity 1** Use the app suggested to learn vocabulary and expression within real life contexts https://www.memrise.com/es/
Week 2	**Speaking activity 1** Use this app to practice pronunciation. You have to upload it in your phone. Name of the app: Elsa speak	**Listening/ writing activity 1** Use the page to practice listening. Watch 3 videos per week. Write unknown vocabulary and summarize the videos by writing or saying your ideas. https://www.voicetube.com/levels/a1?sortBy=publishedAt&page=1 To practice writing you can write your summary of the videos, in this page that correct the possible mistakes https://writeandimprove.com/free	**Reading activity 1** Use the page to practice reading. Complete all the tasks suggested writing the development of them in your notebook. https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/skills/reading/a1-reading		**Grammar activity 2** Use this page to learn grammar. Complete tasks of each topic and write them in your notebook. https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/grammar/a1-a2-grammar	**Vocabulary activity 2** Use the page to learn vocabulary. Write in your notebook unknown vocabulary. https://www.vocabulary.com/vocabtrainer/
Week 3	Keep doing **speaking activity 1**	Keep doing **listening/writing activity 1**	**Reading activity 2** Use the page to practice reading. Complete two activities per week. Write unknown vocabulary in your notebook. https://continuingstudies.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/410/reading/		Keep doing **grammar activity 1**	Keep doing **vocabulary activity 1**
Week 4	Keep doing **speaking activity 1**	Keep doing **listening/writing activity 1**	**Reading activity 3** Use the page to practice reading. Write unknown vocabulary . The page provides different topics. You can choose one you like. https://www.englishclub.com/reading/		Keep doing **grammar activity 2**	Keep doing **vocabulary activity 2**
Week 5	**Speaking activity 2** Use the page to practice speaking like in an exam. https://www.speechace.com/speaking-test/#for-test-takers	**Listening activity 1** Use the page to practice listening. Complete all the tasks by writing them in your notebook. https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/skills/listening/a1-listening	**Writing/ reading activity 1** Use the page to practice writing. Read a new and write the summary of it in the page to correct your mistakes. Link of the page of news: https://www.bbc.com/news Link of the page to write and correct your mistakes: https://writeandimprove.com/free		Keep doing **grammar activity 1**	Keep doing **vocabulary activity 1**
Week 6	**Speaking/ listening activity 1** Work with three classmates. One of them have to tell a story or experience. Others have to be attentive and write important aspects. When the person has finished to speak they have to raise questions so that others answer with the information spoken. Change the role to everyone can speak and raise questions.		**Writing/ reading activity 2** Use the page to practice reading. Choose four per week and develop the tasks by writing in your notebook https://en.islcollective.com/english-esl-worksheets/search/reading+comprehension?level=elementary-a1		Keep doing **grammar activity 2**	Keep doing **vocabulary activity 2**
Week 7	**Speaking/listening activity 2** Listen a song of your preference. Write important aspects of the song such as the author, the context of the song, and topics of the song. Talk about this with another classmate and share your opinion about the song of your classmate		Keep doing **writing/reading activity 1**		Keep doing **grammar activity 1**	Keep doing **vocabulary activity 1**

Week 8	Speaking/listening activity 3 Use the text you wrote for this week to expose it. Write the ideas you want to talk about the text to be prepared. Ask questions about the text. Work with four classmates to do the activity		Keep doing reading/writing activity 2		Keep doing grammar activity 2	Keep doing vocabulary activity 2
Week 9	Keep doing speaking activity 1	Listening activity 2. Choose the topic you prefer to listen. First, try to listen without checking the transcription and taking notes about your understanding when listenign the audio. The re-listen the audio checking the transcription of it and writing in your notebook unknown vocabulary so that later the definition is looked for. In the end, take the quiz proposed to check your understanding (https://learningenglish.voanews.com/)	Complete the reading activity 3. To practice writing you can write your point of view about the text. Use the page to correct possible mistakes: https://writeandimprove.com/free		Keep doing grammar activity 1	Keep doing vocabulary activity 1
Week 10	Speaking/listening activity 4 Propose the teacher to debate about the topic you choose with your classmates. The teacher has to assign three moderators and people who is expected to be for and against.		Keep doing reading/writing activity 1		Keep doing grammar activity 2	Keep doing vocabulary 2
Week 11	Speaking/listening activity 5 With the topic you are checking in this week in your English class, choose a specific scenario that allows you to practice the topic. Work with three people to interact within this scenario (cinema, park, university, etc), record a video.		Keep doing reading activity 2. To practice writing write a summary about it. Link of the page to correct your possible mistakes: https://writeandimprove.com/free		Keep doing grammar activity 1	Keep doing vocabularyactivity 1
Week 12	Keep doing speaking/listening activity 2		Writing/reading activity 3 Ask one classmate to share with you one text your classmate has written and write feedback based on the text, the feedback could be to write positive aspects or aspects to improve based on the writing		Keep doing grammar activity 2	Keep doing vocabulary activity 2
Week 13	Keep doing speaking/listening activity 3		Writing activity 1 Use the page to write an essay. The topic is your experience learning English during the last year. https://www.essaypunch.com/	Keep doing reading actitivy 1	Keep doing grammar activity 1	Keep doing vocabulary activity 2
Week 14	Speaking/listening activity 6 Use the page to speak with people around the world in the page you can see the level of the speaker choose your level and practice https://www.free4talk.com/		Keep doing writing activity 1	Keep doing reading activity 2	Keep doing grammar activity 2	Keep doing vocabulary activity 2
Week 15	Keep doing speakingactivity 2	Keep doing listening activity 2	Keep doing writing activity 1	Keep doing reading activity 1	Keep doing grammar activity 1	Keep doing vocabulary activity 1
Week 16	Use the following pages to taste your level: https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/es/test-your-english/general-english/ https://www.speechace.com/speaking-test/#for-test-takers https://www.efset.org/ef-set-50/					

Source: Material to enhance EFL communicative competences of first semester students in the bachelor's degree in foreign languages program at UNIMINUTO.

Speaking/listening activities

It was necessary to take into account models of other universities and activities proposed by authors to have an active listening practice, that exposed that is important to promote interaction and cooperation among students through practicing the language within different contexts, conversational groups, debates, and discussions ([102] Universidad del Bosque, 2015; [103] Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2015; [104] Worksmart blog, n.d.). Additionally, listening activities were important to be combined with writing or speaking to students practice them in an active way making them to be attentive to the information they understand so that they can produce information understood in an active way ([105] Boogaard, 2023).

Writing/reading activities

It is suggested to students give feedbackof linguistic errors to other students correct and improve, which is beneficial to improve writing skills ([106] Al-Ahmad & Al-Jarrah, 2023). In others writing/reading activities, students are advised to write a product so that they use new words learned in context and check their understanding ([107] Benettayeb, 2024).

Vocabulary

Students are recommended to use Memrise (https://www.memrise.com/es/) and Vocab Trainer (https://www.vocabulary.com/vocabtrainer/) for vocabulary enhancement. According to [108] Aminatun & Oktaviani (2019) is affirmed that AI sources such as Memrise are useful to learners practice expressions and vocabulary learned in specific situations.

Grammar

To improve grammar, students can utilize Test-English (https://test-english.com/) and British Council (https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/grammar/a1-a2-grammar), both offering explanations, exercises, and tasks suitable for A1-level students. Using apps such as the British Council are useful as based on [109] Qadar's (2020) studies, these apps are beneficial to students build English competency in an autonomous way.

Reading

Students are encouraged to read using British Council (https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/skills/reading/a1-reading), English Club (https://www.englishclub.com/reading/), and Continuing Studies at UVic (https://continuingstudies.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/410/reading/), selecting topics of interest for practice and writing unknown vocabulary in their notebooks as according to [110] Walters & Bozkurt (2009) state that having a vocabulary notebook students improve meaningfully their vocabulary showing a wide amount of words learned. In the same way, students selecting their topic of preference, they can enjoy reading, which are some factors that benefit students to become proficient ([111] Ontario Ministry of Education and training, 1999).

Writing

Two writing pages are suggested which are Write & Improve with Cambridge (https://writeandimprove.com/), and Essay Punch Online (https://www.essaypunch.com/) to students are guided to write an essay following steps and recommendations from the page to produce formal writing in the best possible way. According to [112] Alharbi (2023) affirms that these tools give writers and students human-like recommendations that help to assist during the learning process.

Listening

Students can develop listening skills through British Council (https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/skills/listening/a1-listening) which is beneficial since it provides many materials to students improve their EFL level ([113] Putri &Franscy, 2022). In the same way, using the application Voice of America: Learning English (https://learningenglish.voanews.com/) they can check expressions and conversation formats in different contexts, which could be beneficial to students receive the necessary input for communicative competences development ([22]Council of Europe, 2020).

Speaking

Practice Speaking English Online Free (https://www.free4talk.com/) and speechace (https://www.speechace.com/speaking-test/#for-test-takers) these apps are good because online resources to practice speaking help students to improve the level and to be more confident ([114] Styfanyshyn & Kalymon, 2021). In the final week, students assess their English level using EF SET (https://www.efset.org/es/) Speechace (https://www.speechace.com/), Cambridge (https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/es/test-your-english/general-english/) aiming to achieve at least an A2 proficiency.

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