

A Case Study: A Teaching Model for English Teachers as Foreign Language to Be Reproduced in Rural Areas in Developing Countries

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1. Introduction

English as a Second Language (SL) is widely considered the language of opportunities in developing countries. Coleman (2010) states that English may contribute to employment and facilitate international mobility as well as access to research. In the last years, according to Jesenská (2010) the spread of outsourcing services has impacted the main income in countries located in Latin America, Middle East, and North of Africa. This fact has created an extrinsic need to learn English; more people see the command of this language as a way to climb the pay scale. Nunan (2003) conducted a survey to explore the impact of English in the Asian-Pacific Region. He found out that in spite of the investment on sources to provide English in Asian Countries, there should be educational policies to ensure appropriate teaching training and adequate methodologies depending on the target audience.

The diverse range of pedagogic methodologies can be limited by the specific linguistic needs of the addressed population. Gallagher (2014) points out that Noam Chomsky affirmed that the semantics or meaning of language is derived exclusively from syntax and not social context. According to Krashen (2002), “the study of grammatical morphemes has been particularly fruitful for understanding the mechanisms involved in second language acquisition.” Thus, learning the grammatical rules overtly can facilitate the language acquisition process. Saville-Troike (2012) explains that the scope of SL depends on its “function in our lives. These differences may determine the specific areas of vocabulary knowledge we need, the level of grammar complexity we have to attain, and whether speaking or reading skills are more important.”

Teaching and learning English as SL in Costa Rica has meant the use of a variety of pedagogical techniques and methods in the different public institutions. English was institutionalized in 1825 when the first state high education place, the *Casa de Enseñanza de Santo Tomás*, opened. After 1854, foreign English teachers offered private classes with pedagogic strategies that may have been the Grammar Translation Method; common those days in modern languages teaching (Cubillo, 2011). English has also been taught in high schools since 1887 with the Direct Method. On May 8th in 1997, English becomes compulsory in the course plans in the Cycles I and II of the Costa Rican educational system (Ramírez, 2014). Since the 90's, the teaching methodology has been the Communicative Approach (Ramírez, 2014).

Traditionally English programs as SL began in primary and high schools. Nevertheless other institutions have contributed to the teaching of English in the country, mainly, when multinational companies started to settle down in Costa Rica in the late 90's. By the mid-2000s, there were a considerable number of local and foreign enterprises operating in Costa Rica and private English institutes as well (Herrero, 2011). Currently, English is still a key linguistic skill required when getting a job or improving employment conditions in the country. Most of the local and international companies demand highly proficient English-speaking employees (Herrero, 2011). However in 2007, Herrero states that 2000 vacancies were not occupied due to the low proficiency levels in English command showed by the applicants.

State and governmental institutions, such as (UNED, UCR, UNA, TEC) the *Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje* (INA) and *la Coalición de Iniciativas para el Desarrollo* (CINDE) concerned about the low-English skills among the professional population, made some decisions in order to solve the language weaknesses. First, in 2009a group of 3200 volunteer MEP English teachers applied the TOEIC proficiency test; 65% were placed in A1 level, 24% in A2, 6% in B1, 3% in B2 and 2% in C1 (European Common Framework of Reference). Second, this diagnosis was conducted in order to implement future remedial solutions to the linguistic limitations. (Costa Rica Multilingüe, 2009)

Then one option to improve the low English Proficiency Level (EPL) of the Costa Rican English MEP Teachers working in primary and high schools is implementing remediation which is an effective response to learning difficulties. Here are some successful remedial courses having positive results worldwide (Cho, et al, 2012, De Paola and Scoppa, 2014, Sheu, 2011, Monk, 2007). An Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) in the Community College of Baltimore showed better outcomes in terms of English 101 completion and English 102 completion among students who enrolled in the highest level developmental writing course (Cho et al., 2012). Remedial courses in Math and Language for Italian College students which had effects on the number of passing credits and the drop-out percentage becoming a model of remediation in European Countries (De Paola and Scoppa, 2014). A General English (GE) online remedial course enhanced student test performance, learning strategy, and self-efficacy in Taiwan (Sheu, 2011). Remediation may be also helpful in rural areas which “are impoverished by inherent characteristics like small size, sparse settlement, narrowness of choice, distance from population concentration and sometimes tandem with tourism.” (Monk, 2007)

Rural areas in Costa Rica show significant weaknesses in economic and social development. Two well-known Costa Rican rural places are San Marcos de Tarrazú and Santa María de Dota (Los Santos). The social development rating percentage of Tarrazú was 30.4 and 28.0 in Dota. In San Marcos, the average of unemployed population (15 years and older) was of 49.9 in 2000 and 48.8 in 2011 while in Dota it was 50.7 and 48.8 for the same years (Estado de la Nación, 2013). Also out of the Costa Rican population, 1.8% migrated to the United States during the last decade and from that percentage 53% were from Los Santos region. In order to support these rural zones, the Governmental and International Cooperation funds have been assigned to the following sectors: Poverty, Education, Health, Environment and Energy, as well as Telecommunications. (Ministry of National Planning and Economic Politics, 2011).

English becomes an opportunity to improve life conditions in these zones because of their reliance on touristic activities. Nevertheless, English rural teachers also show flaws in linguistic skills. In 2005, the Union of Cooperatives in Los Santos and Carraigres (UNCOSANTOS) and CR-USA conducted a project with the Costa Rica Institute of Technology (TEC) to assess the Proficiency English Level in a group of English MEP teachers in Los Santos. The results showed that most English teachers were placed in A2 in oral production, B2 in reading comprehension, B2 in grammar structure and B1 in listening comprehension. Thus based on data, eight remedial courses were designed and implemented. This study presents the results of a pilot program aimed at improving oral production and grammatical structure skills in two years in Los Santos. By using a set of linguistic parameters and the repetition of drills, teachers were trained following Chomskian constraints of language acquisition. The experiment focused on encouraging the notion of structure since that group of English teachers required to improve semantics and syntax.

2. Methodology

2.1. Place of the Study

The study was conducted in two Costa Rican rural areas, San Marcos de Tarrazú and Santa María de Dota (Los Santos) located in the province of San Jose. They present the following characteristics: small size, distant from population concentrations, reliance on agricultural industries and tourism, high migratory rates, the lowest positions in the social development rating of Costa Rican regions. (Estado de la Nación, 2010).

2.2. Pre-Remedial course Test

The Union of Cooperatives in Los Santos and Carraigres (UNCOSANTOS) and CR-USA Foundation piloted a project with the Costa Rica Institute of Technology (TEC) in order to assess the proficiency level of a group of 36 rural English teachers who worked in primary and high schools located in Los Santos and recruited by the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) of Costa Rica. The study had three assessment periods: (i) Diagnosis in 2005, (ii) a mid-evaluation in 2006 and (iii) a final examination in 2007. The proficiency test was beforehand designed by the Costa Rica Institute of Technology in 2004, and it was the testing tool used in all the periods.

2.3 Proficiency test

2.3.1. Design of the proficiency test

The proficiency test was constrained to four skills out of broadened linguistic competences, such as lexical, phonological, syntactical knowledge and other dimensions of language:

Listening comprehension, grammatical structure, reading comprehension, and oral production. Purdy (1997) refers to listening comprehension as "the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal), needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings." Huddleston (2002) describes grammar as a set of rules that dictates "the form, the meaning of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences." He adds that it is divided in two main groups: Syntax (the way words are combined) and morphology (the formation of words). Irwin (1993) defines reading as a reciprocal interaction between the reader and the text, resulting in the creation of a new text in the mind of the reader. It is also defined as "the ability to utilize the conceptual and linguistic knowledge a reader has and simultaneously the ability to increase its depth and scope by constructing more advanced mental structures." Finally, by gates (1991) points out that speaking is the competence that leads from abstract sentences to circumstances that happen at the moment of speaking. Oral production is the ability to make decisions about what to say, how to say it (specific context), and what to do (negotiate meaning).

2.3.2. Scale rate system

The proficiency test used a rating system with scales in order to systematize errors through general standards, and then place the applicants into levels. The items let us monitor the type of error in speaking and grammatical structure, for example tense agreement, frequency adverbs, vowel accuracy pronunciation. The scales and levels are described in the following table:

Proficiency Level	Listening comprehension Rating Scale	Grammatical Structure Rating Scale	Reading Comprehension Rating Scale	Oral Production Rating Scale
SUPERIOR	31-40	31-40	36-40	61-80
ADVANCED	21-30	21-30	26-35	41-60
INTERMEDIATE	11-20	11-20	11-25	21-40
NOVICE	1-10	1-10	1-10	0-20

Table 1: Proficiency levels and scales

For updated criteria, the levels have been mapped into the descriptors used in the Common European Framework of Reference-CEFR (2001) which "provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe." It mainly refers to "what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively." In the process to adapt the levels into the CEFR guidelines, three main categories in language performance have been identified:

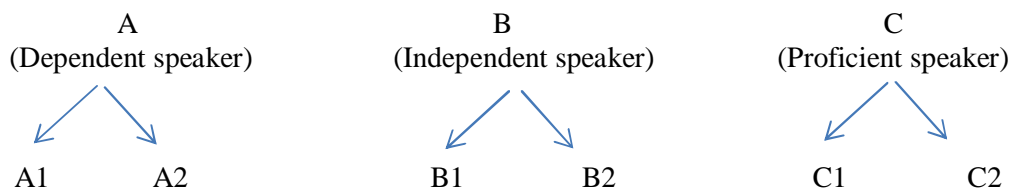


Figure 1: Broad Proficiency Levels A, B, C

Then, the in-house proficiency test scale rating system was adapted to the three broad levels: A (Dependent), B (Independent), C (Proficient). In tables 2 and 3, see the scales for oral production and grammatical structure and their equivalent to the 3 sets of broad language performance according to CEFR.

Oral Production Rating Scale In-house Test	Grammatical Structure Rating Scale In-house Test	Broad Proficiency Level CEFR
61-80	31-40	C
41-60	21-30	C
21-40	11-20	B
0-20	1-10	A

Table 2: CEFR Equivalency

2.3.3. Test validation

The validation of the proficiency test was assessed in a piloting application of the examination to a group of TEC students and then filtered through a quantitative item analysis. The Item Facility System is a measure between the proportion of correct answers and the number of candidates. The correct answers have a value of between 0 and 1; 0 means no-one answered the question correctly, and a value of 1 means that everyone answered the question correctly. It seems to be that questions with facility values of around the pass mark for the assessment (e.g. pass mark = 70%, facility = 0.7) will be the most reliable items.

2.4 Remediation Courses

After the diagnostic assessment, the data collected on proficiency levels, and the analysis of errors identified in the incorrect items, we designed 8 remedial courses which aimed to solve linguistic weakness over the initial assessment among the selected group of English teachers. It was carried out in two years, from 2005 to 2007. Decisions were made about the target linguistic areas to be included in the courses, all the board in charge agreed on working grammar, phonetics, and phonology over the pilot. Each course presented the same pedagogic methodology; Chomskyian view of language in which L2 need to acquire a set of unconscious constraints to learn cognitively the new language. All the exercises, tasks, and drills were designed in order to guarantee repetition and accuracy. The proposal to the target population was eight no-sequenced, and each course lasted 10 weeks. The main characteristic of the remediation program was to follow the same planning structure to guarantee a unified pedagogic methodology:

1	2	3
Course Program	Teaching planning	Teaching Package
Course Description	General description of the lesson	Specific objectives
General and Specific Objectives	Activities and contents of the lesson	Sequence of the activities
Methodology	Assignments	Materials
Contents		Materials of the evaluation
Materials		Description of the evaluation
Bibliography		Description of the activity evaluation
		Description of the student material
		Description of the Instructor's material
		Description of the technological tools used in the lessons
		Description of the teaching strategy

Table 3: Design of the remediation courses

2.5. Proficiency Test and Application Periods

In the first period of diagnosis, the test was performed by 36 rural teachers who held a degree in either English Teaching or English language. From the assessed group of 36 teachers, just 14 decided to attend the remedial lessons. In the middle of the remedial program, a second identical assessment process was applied to the attendees in order to make adjustments to the coming courses. Then, at the end of the remedial program, a final equal assessment was conducted to determine whether the teachers had overcome their linguistic flaws.

2.6. Data

In 2005, once we applied the diagnosis to 36 English teachers, we classified the applicants according to the rating system. Data was collected from the three tests which were analyzed based on the distribution of points, then percentages according to the proficiency levels, and later converted to the Common European Framework. Each section of the in-house test: grammar and vocabulary, listening and reading comprehension, was analyzed individually and mapped with the CEFR levels for this survey. For the speaking section, the mistakes, in terms of structure and pronunciation, with the highest frequency were classified and averages were calculated to get the distribution of percentages.

In tables 4 and 5, you may see the obtained points for each group.

Group	Number of Applicants	Obtained points
1	1	7
2	9	11-20
3	15	23-30
4	11	31-37

Table 4: Grammatical Structure

Group	Number of Applicants	Obtained points
1	15	9-16
2	14	33-39
3	6	56-58
4	1	79

Table 5: Oral Production

During the second assessment period, there were 14 participants. Besides classifying the applicants into levels, the evaluation aimed at identifying weaknesses in grammatical topics through the overall frequency in the incorrect answers. In table 6, there are the 10 grammatical structures with the highest incorrect answers.

Topic	Frequency of incorrect answer
1. Connectors	13
2. Conditional	19
3. Determiners	17
4. Modals	11
5. Unreal conditional	14
6. Comparatives	15
7. Gerunds	13
8. Connectors	15
9. Word order	20
10. Prepositions	17

Table 6: Grammatical topics

3. Results

3.1 Diagnostic Test

Figure 2 shows the results of the diagnostic test (Test 1 for future references) in the four different skills evaluated. The results reach in listening comprehension confirm the highest percentages on B1 50% and B2 33%. A low percentage in C1 3% and a significant 14% in A2 is also shown in this skill. On the other hand, reading comprehension and structure and vocabulary concentrate more of their percentages in the highest proficiency levels with 63% in B2 and 3% in C1 and 42% in B2 and 31% in C1 respectively and only 3% in A2 for each skill. Then, the tendency towards the lowest proficiency levels in speaking is clearly seen with a 42% of the teachers place on A2 and 39% in B1 and only 17% in B2 and 3% in C1. In short, the lowest percentages are located in the highest proficiency level C1 being the opposite a more positive result for linguistic purposes.

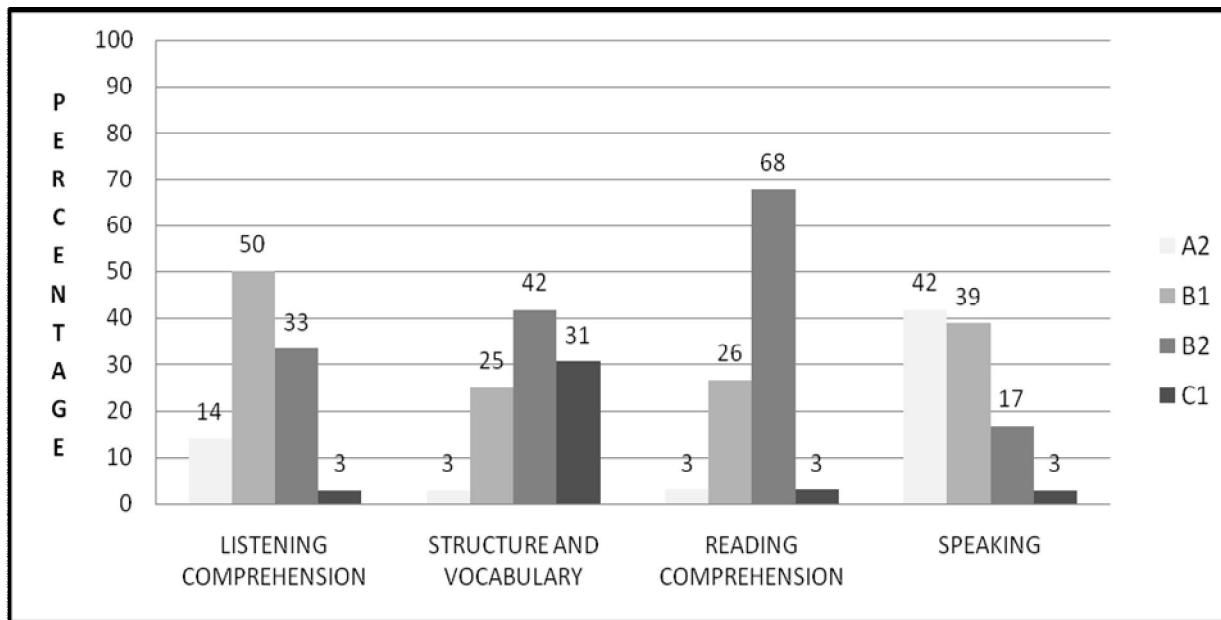


Figure 2: Test 1

Based on the results obtained in Test 1 and as explained in Figure 2, speaking gets the highest percentages in the lowest proficiency levels. Figure 3 presents in more detail the most common grammatical mistakes made by the teachers during the interview. Word order together with the use of determiners reaches the highest point with 62% and 61% correspondingly. There are six grammatical areas that show a significant percentage that ranges between 51% and 32%, they are conditionals 51%, connectors 41%, modals 38%, prepositions 33%, superlatives and connectors 33%, and gerunds and infinitives 32%. The incorrect use of tenses such as verb combination and present perfect tenses represents 22% and 14% respectively. Finally, passive voice 12%, possessive adjectives 6% and demonstratives 3%.

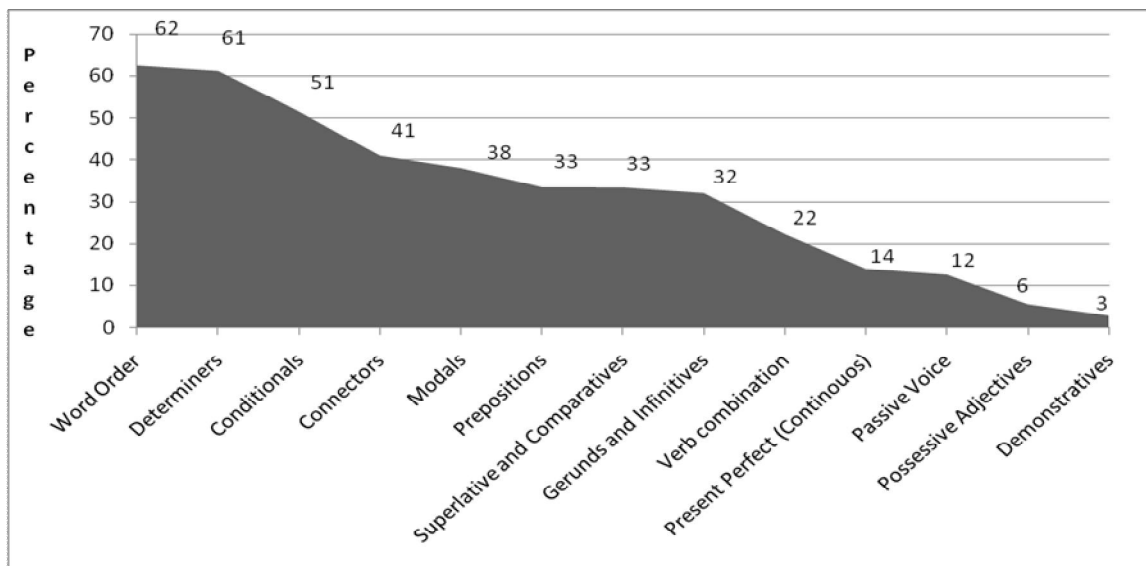


Figure 3: Average of incorrect answers in Test 1

3.2 Course Proposal

Figure 4 presents the training program proposal with all the steps to be followed during the whole process, from the application of the diagnostic test to the third test where the results could be measured. Based on the obtained percentages clear improvement was confirmed as a result of the methodology applied and the approach of the remedial courses.

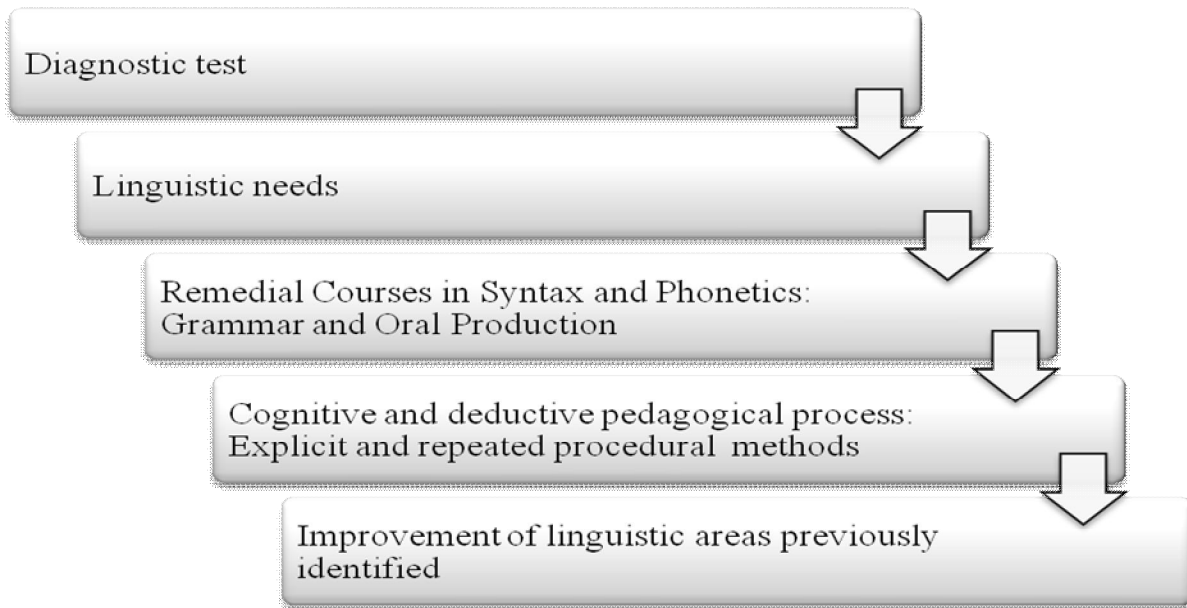


Figure 4: Training Proposal

Figure 5 presents the components of the remedial courses in more detailed. These were designed considering the skill with the lowest proficiency level which is speaking as demonstrated in Figure 1. The instructional package was based on two main areas: phonetics and grammar and included not only the program and the materials, but also the lesson plans and the evaluation instruments.

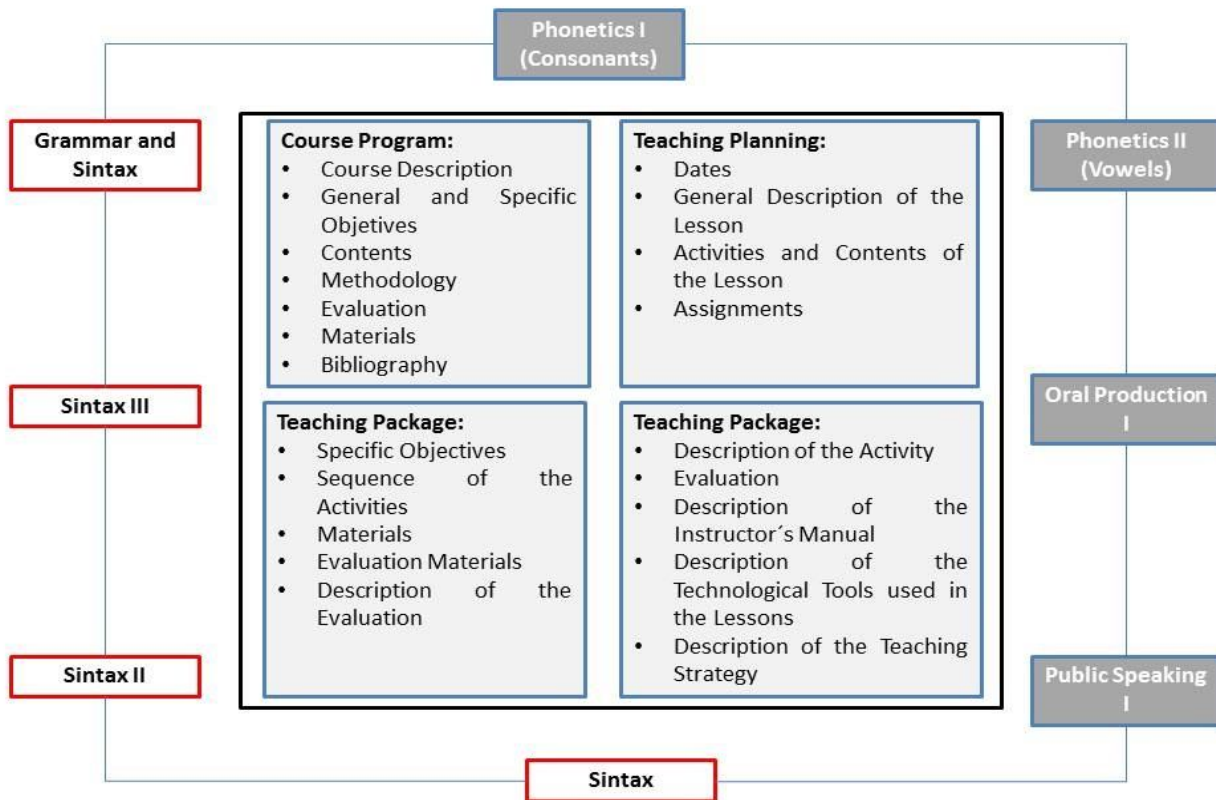


Figure 5: Instructional Package

3.3 Periodical Evaluation

The comparison of the test applied in three different moments of the training process is shown in Figures 6, 7, 8 and 9 by skills. The following graphs in Figure 6 compare the results of the listening skill by proficiency level. In the lowest proficiency level in these results, Level A2, there is a 14% in the first test, and then it rises to 18% and falls to 0% in the last test. Level B1 presents 50% and 43% in the first and second test correspondingly and drops to 40% in the last test. There is a positive increase in Level B2 from 33% in test 1 to 60% in test 3 going through 39% in test 2. However, the last level, Level C1 starts with 3% in the first examination and gets down to 0% in test 2 and 3.

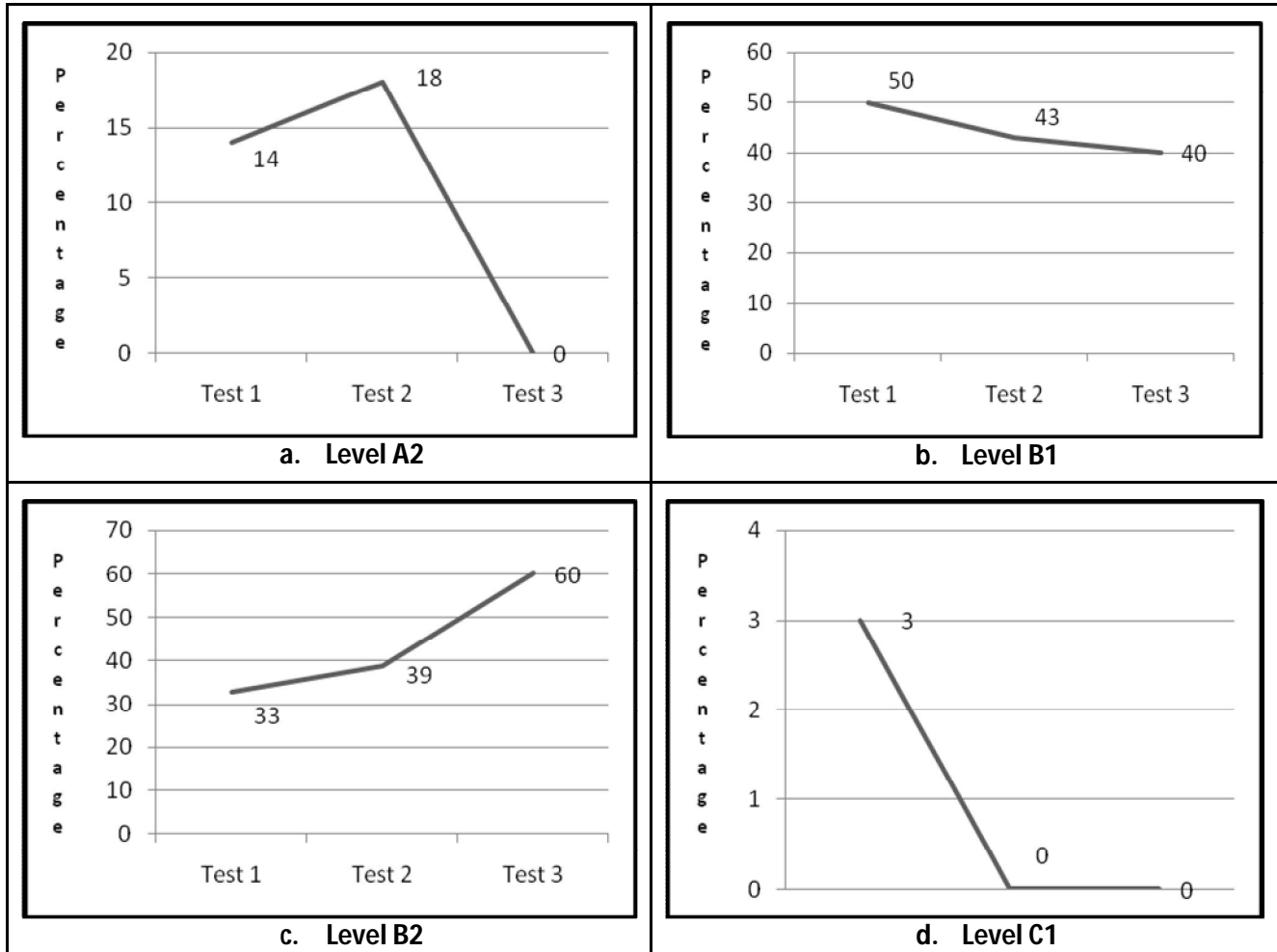


Figure 6: Listening comprehension results from a test applied in 3 different periods

In relation to grammar, Figure 7 demonstrates the results reached in the different stages. Level A2 goes from 3% in the first test up to 10% in the second one and then falls to 0% in the third one. In addition, Level B1 shows a dramatic fall from 42% in the second test to 13% in the third test. On the other hand, as seen in Figure 6, there is an increase in Level B2 and C1. Level B2 shows a slight fall from 42% in test 1 to 39% in test 2, but it goes up again in test 3 to 53%. Finally, Level C1 starts with 31% drops to 9% in the second test and rises to 34% in the last test.

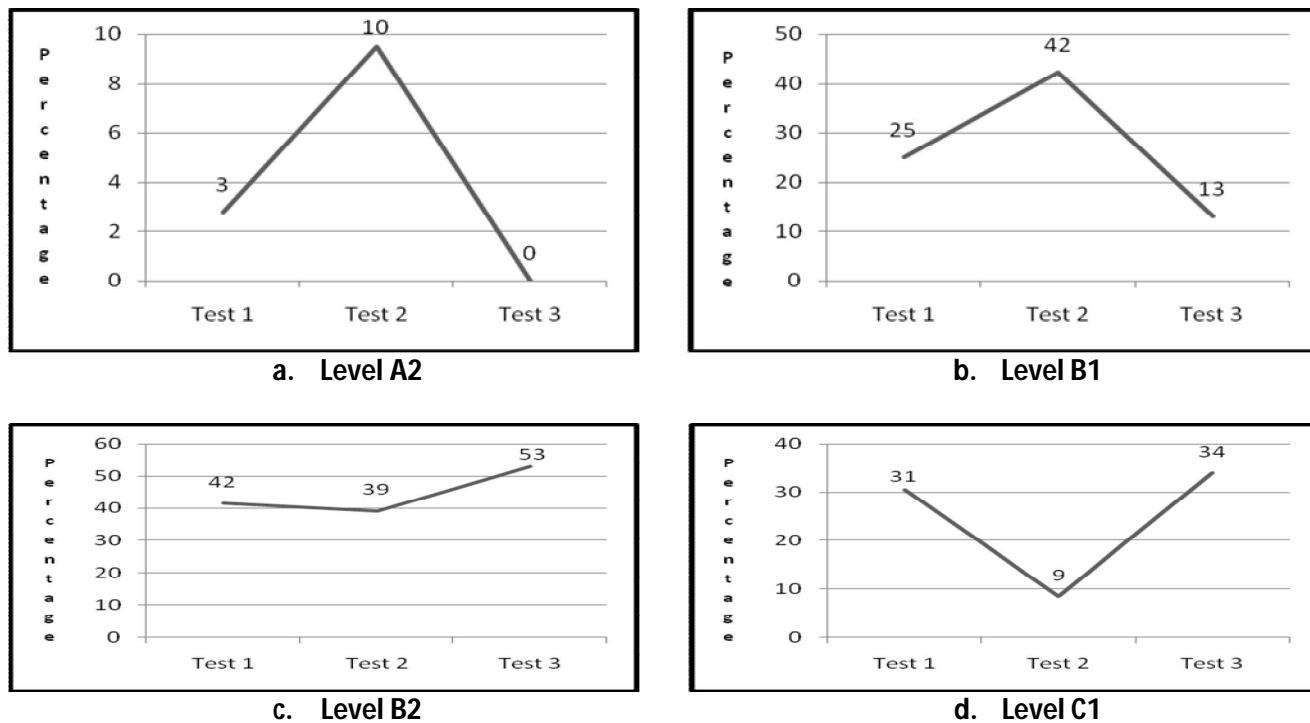


Figure 7: Grammar and vocabulary results from a test applied in 3 different periods

Concerning reading comprehension, Levels A2, B1 and B2 show a decrease from test 1 to test 3 as seen in Figure 8. Level A2 shows 3% in test 1, 4% in test 2, and 0% in test 3. Level B1 illustrates the decrease from 26% in the first test, 32% in the second one to 20% in the last test. In the third graph, the results for Level B2 drop slightly from 68% in the first test to 64% in the second one, and closes with 60% in the test 3. This skill shows a positive increment in the highest proficiency level from 3% in the first test to 20% in the third one.

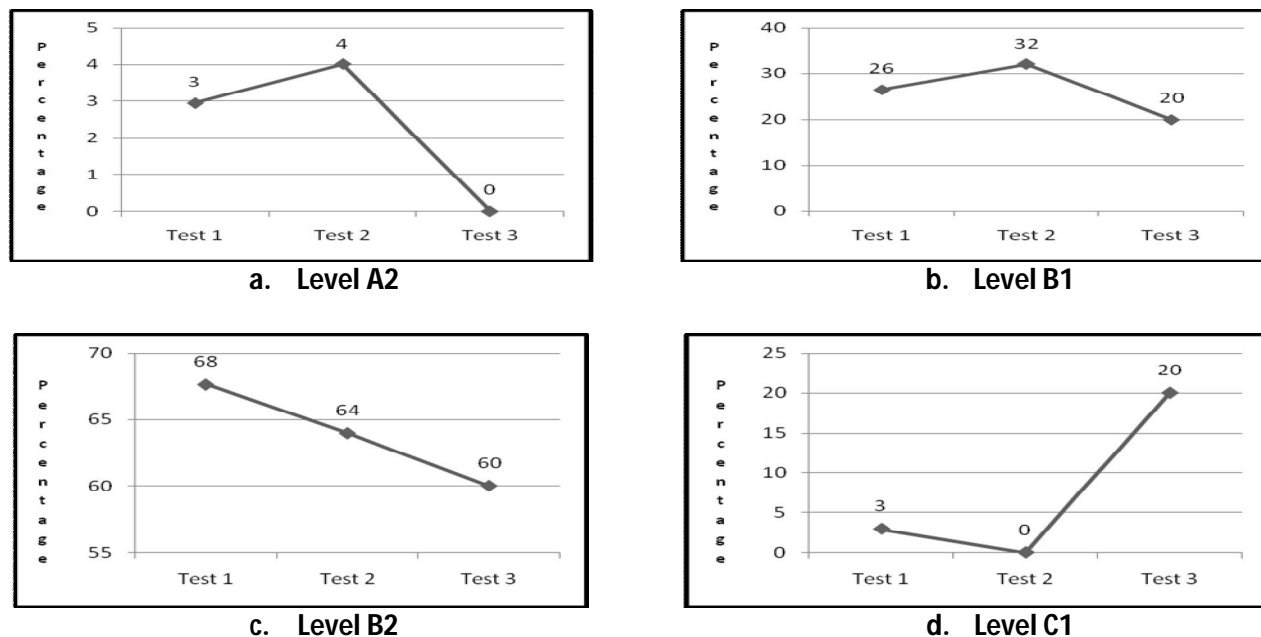
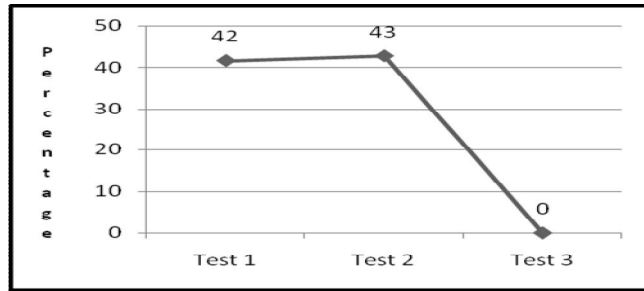


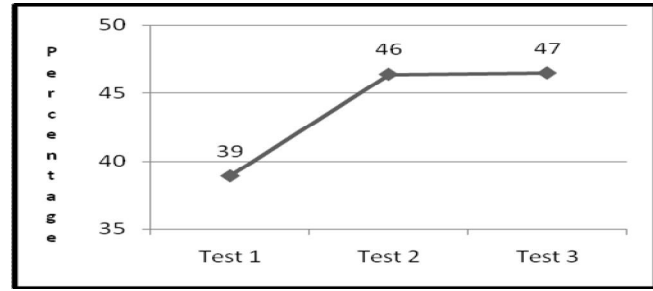
Figure 8: Reading comprehension results from a test applied in 3 different periods

After taking the first test, 42% of the participants are placed in Level A2 (Figure 9), but it goes down to 0% in the last test. On the other hand, Level B1 increases from 39% in test 1, 46% in test 2, and 47% in test 3. Level B2

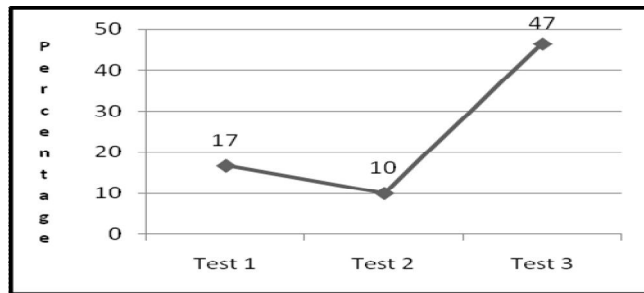
goes from 17% in test 1, decreases to 10% in test 2 and goes up in test 3 to reach a 47%. The last increment is shown in Level C1 from 3% in test 1 to 7% in test 3.



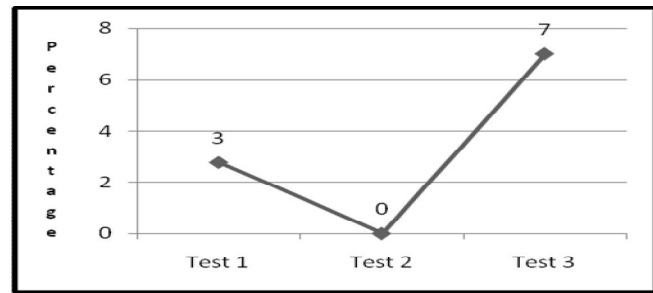
a. Level A2



b. Level B1



c. Level B2



d. Level C1

Figure 9: Speaking comprehension results from a test applied in 3 different periods

4. Analysis of Results

After implementing a two-year remedial program in a group of 14 English rural teachers, results showed improvement in language skills among the selected group. Comparing pre-course test scores and post-test course scores, we see participants' error reduction in the target language components embraced in the remediation. How much students benefit from the courses and the workability and efficiency in the educative product can be judged from the final results. The objectives achieved were due to a model that can be replicable as a teaching and learning program. The challenge was to design a model that helped non-native and rural English teachers improve their linguistic skills out of the university curricula. All the participants already had a major in the required field; however, they showed significant flaws in the language domains. Then, the efforts led to build a successful model which presented the following characteristics: three assessment periods, adjustments to ongoing courses, equal course planning in terms of a teaching package and an identical teaching method in all the remediation courses.

Thus, historically, with respect to the typical question: What should an English teacher know? Padilla asserts a command of the Foreign Language in order to be successful professors; he adds that it must be assessed by the state institutions. When examining the proficiency levels of the English teachers working with minorities in the mid 90's in the States, and to guarantee modifications to the university curricula addressed to English professors, the National Association for Bilingualism NABE in 1992 stated that, among others, it was compulsory to have the language skills and the ability to communicate them as well (Padilla, 1993). In Los Santos survey, the efforts were to assess the target population, identify the language limited skills, and reduce linguistic errors. In Japan, Goto affirms that in 2003, the "Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English abilities" was introduced to enhance citizens' English abilities. Then "the policy essentially asks English teachers to have sufficient oral communicative proficiency and pedagogical skills to conduct oral communicative activities in English. In fact, MEXT (2003) has indicated its support for a number of plans designed to ensure a high level of proficiency among individuals who conduct English activities in Japan. These plans include placing ALTs and secondary school English teachers in elementary schools, placing local residents with high English proficiency in elementary schools as resources, and providing select elementary school teachers with intensive teacher training."

The remedial programs, like Los Santos, are without a doubt, affective responses to non-native, rural, or no-rural teachers who urgently require improving their English proficiency due to changes in their country language policies.

In fact, Costa Rica's government has made different efforts to improve the proficiency level of English teachers working in public schools. One of these efforts was Costa Rica Multilingüe, which was part the English National Plan which main objective was to take high school students up to a B1 level according to the Common European Framework by the year 2017. This project started as an initiative of the Ministry of Public Education (MEP), Ministry of Foreign Commerce (COMEX), Ministry of Economy Industry, and Commerce (MEIC) among other non-governmental organizations. To start with, the project, 3200 English teachers, which represents 86% of in-service teachers, took the TOEIC test. The results showed that 38% had a proficiency level that ranged between A1 and A2, and 29% were in B1. Those results led the government to begin a teachers' training process nationwide to improve their proficiency level (Garnier, 2009). The four public universities in the country were selected to design and develop the training process. This new project started in 2009 but it was cancelled in 2011 due to a change in the government's policy.

It seems that the most common weakness among English teachers not only in Costa Rica but also in the Central America is the language proficiency level as confirmed in a study by the MEIRCA Project (Red MEIRCA, 2011). The MEIRCA Project is a Central American initiative which main objective is the improvement of the teaching of English in Central America. One of their studies points out the main critical characteristics shared by the countries involved in the study, it states "There were found seven main characteristics that were shared and distinguished among the four participant countries of the study (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua).

Those identified features were:

1. High level of unlicensed English teachers
2. Lack of training in current methods for teaching EFL
3. Low linguistic skills
4. Lack of didactic materials, equipment and resources
5. Lack of solid curriculum guidelines
6. Low salaries and inadequate classroom conditions
7. Large classes"

Remedial courses, like the ones designed for Los Santos project, can contribute to the linguistic improvement of English teachers with a low proficiency level.

5. Conclusions

When it comes to English education and rural zones in developing countries, the results of this survey suggest the need of remedial programs in order to overcome linguistic flaws. They expand the academic proposal from the public universities to impoverishing zones where English can be a tool to face global professional challenges. When remedial students achieved success through the courses, the educative responses to specific academic gaps seem to have a new place in the high education options offered today. Language acquisition involves two main aspects: accuracy and fluency. Being equally important and instrumental in the teaching of a foreign language, they were emphasized in the remedial courses. Teachers demonstrated improvement in both areas as shown in the results.

Though listening and reading comprehension, oral production, grammar, and vocabulary were assessed in the three tests, the emphasis during the remedial courses was placed on oral production and structure. The different skills of a language cannot be learned in isolation; however, for this particular population, the fact that oral communication and grammar were emphasized during the courses proved to have a positive effect on the other skills as well, as shown on the tests results. As far as the method used during the training process is concerned, it proved to be a valid method to make teachers aware of their own linguistic weaknesses. Chomsky's theory of language acquisition and the importance of accuracy while communicating in a foreign language helped these teachers improve their receptive and productive skills

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