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Percepciones de los profesores en formación acerca de la implementación de lecciones basadas en cultura en aulas de inglés como idioma extranjero

Pre-service teachers' perceptions about implementing culture-based lessons in EFL classrooms

Percepções de professores em formação sobre a implementação de aulas baseadas na cultura em salas de aula de EFL

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Resumen

El uso de contenido cultural en las aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) se considera una estrategia útil para adquirir una segunda lengua (L2) porque ayuda a aumentar la Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural (ICC) de los alumnos. Varios investigadores revelan que los profesores y estudiantes muestran actitudes positivas hacia la integración de la cultura como parte del estudio del idioma. El propósito de esta investigación fenomenológica cualitativa es analizar las percepciones de los futuros maestros sobre la implementación de lecciones basadas en la cultura en las aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera. Se analizaron las respuestas a una encuesta abierta y las reflexiones docentes mediante el proceso de análisis temático. Los principales hallazgos muestran que las experiencias de aprendizaje con contenido cultural de los participantes les ayudaron a planificar y enseñar sus lecciones de cultura. También afirman que desarrollaron conocimiento y conciencia cultural al enseñar cultura con materiales auténticos como videos, carteles y segmentos de películas. Por otro lado, también enfrentaron algunos desafíos debido a su falta de experiencia en la planificación, manejo inadecuado del tiempo, problemas tecnológicos, falta de comprensión de los estudiantes, falta de participación y falta de conocimiento previo de la cultura materna. Estos hallazgos sugieren que los programas de formación de profesores de inglés deben proporcionar conocimiento y prácticas explícitas sobre la enseñanza de la cultura en las aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera para mejorar su desarrollo profesional.

Palabras Claves: Profesores en formación; conciencia cultural; aula de EFL; conocimiento cultural.

Abstract

The use of cultural content in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms is considered a useful strategy to acquire a second language (L2) because it helps to increase learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Several researchers reveal that teachers and students show positive attitudes toward the integration of culture as part of the language study. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to analyze pre-service teachers' perceptions about implementing culture-based lessons in EFL classrooms. Answers to an open-ended survey and teaching reflections were analyzed using the thematic analysis process. The main findings show that participants' learning experiences with cultural content helped them to plan and teach their culture-based lessons. They also assert that they developed cultural knowledge and awareness by teaching culture with authentic materials like videos, posters, and segments of films. On the other hand, they

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also faced some challenges due to their lack of experience in planning, inadequate time management, technological problems, lack of understanding, lack of participation, and lack of mother culture knowledge. These findings suggest that English teacher education programs must provide explicit knowledge and practice about teaching culture in EFL classrooms to improve their professional development.

Keywords: Pre-service teachers; Cultural awareness; EFL classroom; Cultural knowledge.

Resumo

O uso de conteúdo cultural em salas de aula de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL) é considerado uma estratégia útil para adquirir uma segunda língua (L2) porque ajuda a aumentar a Competência Comunicativa Intercultural (ICC) dos alunos. Vários pesquisadores revelam que professores e alunos mostram atitudes positivas em relação à integração da cultura como parte do estudo da língua. O objetivo desta pesquisa fenomenológica qualitativa é analisar as percepções de professores em formação sobre a implementação de aulas baseadas na cultura em salas de aula de inglês. As respostas a uma pesquisa aberta e as reflexões docentes foram analisadas por meio do processo de análise temática. As principais descobertas mostram que as experiências de aprendizagem dos participantes com conteúdos culturais os ajudaram a planejar e ministrar suas aulas baseadas na cultura. Eles também afirmam que desenvolveram conhecimento e consciência cultural ensinando cultura com materiais autênticos como vídeos, cartazes e segmentos de filmes. Por outro lado, eles também enfrentaram alguns desafios devido à falta de experiência em planejamento, gestão inadequada do tempo, problemas tecnológicos, falta de compreensão, falta de participação e falta de conhecimento da cultura materna. Esses achados sugerem que os programas de formação de professores de inglês devem fornecer conhecimento e prática explícitos sobre o ensino da cultura nas salas de aula de inglês para melhorar seu desenvolvimento profissional.

Palavras-chave: Professores em formação; Consciência cultural; sala de aula de EFL; Conhecimento cultural.

Introduction

Culture is a fundamental element in second language learning. Damen (1997 as cited in Vernier et al, 2008) explains that it can be considered the fifth skill along with listening, speaking, reading, and writing because the study of cultural elements of the target language promotes learners' cultural

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understanding. In fact, language learning is more than memorizing vocabulary and grammar; social, cultural and discourse conventions are areas that must be included in the classroom (Vernier et al., 2008). In recent years, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers have recognized the importance of developing students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which allows using the target language properly, building relationships, and understanding individuals from different cultures (Gunes & Mede, 2019).

Thus, English language educators must be competent in the target culture and be able to incorporate culture in their classes. Curricular programs devoted to training language teachers must provide theoretical and practical knowledge for planning, teaching and assessing culture-based lessons. The pre-professional practice is one of the most appropriate sceneries to make pre-service teachers have their first experiences with different approaches, methods, strategies, activities, resources, etc. to teach culture. There is some research exploring experiences of teaching and learning culture in English Language classrooms (eg. Gunes & Mede, 2019; Olaya & Gomez, 2013; Peterson & Coltrane, 2003); however, little is known about the experiences of pre-service teachers. Thus, this paper aims at describing pre-service teachers' perceptions about implementing culture-based lessons in EFL classrooms. Two research questions guided the study:

What are pre-service teachers' opinions about learning and teaching culture?

What are pre-service teacher's main challenges in applying culture-based lessons in their teaching practice?

We hope this study increases awareness in administrators and educators of English teachers' education programs to pay more attention to the development of pedagogical and intercultural communication skills. We also want to raise other researchers' interest in studying pre-service teachers' training programs to incorporate culture in EFL classes effectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pre-professional practices and learning experiences

One of the most fundamental components of teacher education programs is the pre service practice. "It is the most meaningful and influential portion of professional preparation for teachers" (Tantoy & Gemota, 2019, p.1). Naylor et al, (2015) explains that pre-service teachers' education experiences and their vision of teaching influenced their prior knowledge. In addition, Othman & Kiely (2016)

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found that preservice teachers' teaching practices during their pre-professional practices were based on their previous second language learning experience with teachers, instructional activities, and classroom organization. The authors explain that this finding is consistent with a few others (eg. Borges, 2005; Kiely & Askham, 2012; Pajares, 2013; Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010; Mattheoudakis, 2007) and highlight the point that prior learning experiences and beliefs may influence their teaching during their teacher education and throughout their future profession. Barahona (2014) asserts that preservice teachers' previous experiences shaped their understanding of teaching and learning a language; a participant explained that her high school teacher used to teach a lot of grammar lessons, so she thought that was the only way to teach English.

Pre-service teachers' skills and knowledge

The main goal of pre-service teacher training is to prepare them with knowledge and skills for successful classroom practice. Among other things, teachers must develop lesson planning, classroom management, and questioning skills. They must have knowledge of teaching methods and the content to be taught (Tantoy & Gemota, 2019). They must also have knowledge of the target culture (KhawagaGal, 2018; Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2020; Gonen & Saglam, 2012).

Pre-service teachers' challenges in teaching culture

There are many challenges that pre-service teachers can face when incorporating culture in their teaching practices. In fact, most novice teachers can face these problems due to the following reasons: "(1) instructors' negative attitudes towards teaching culture, (2) the lack of effective instruction, resource, and technology of teaching culture, and (3) the absence of academic support for teaching culture at the post-secondary level" (Chen & Yang, 2016, p.169). Alghamdy' study (2018) showed that problems in class preparation, difficulty in speaking English, lack of students' understanding of English instructions, lack of enough available resources to prepare their lessons, lack of knowledge in their students, etc. are some of the problems that pre-service teachers have.

Challenges in planning

One of the hardest challenges is the planning process; many pre-service teachers find it difficult. They have difficulties in choosing activities according to the students' needs and level (Alanazi, 2019; Sahin, 2017). Another hardest thing for beginning teachers is to predict how long any particular

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activity will take. An activity can take shorter or longer than they expect. During the teaching process, the teachers can decide what activities can skip if things start running overtime or what activities to include if the activity does not take as long as they thought. But this ability is developed with practice and experience (Snow, 2006).

Good planning can help to develop this ability and prevent problems in the time management. Before starting the class, the teacher must have all the teaching materials ready; this will avoid wasting valuable teaching time and disrupting student concentration. The lack of class preparation can cause problems in the classroom and affect the normal flow of the teaching-learning process (Espinosa & Soto, 2020). Definitely, planning is one of the most important skills that pre-service teachers should gain; effective planning leads to effective teaching (Ramirez, 2020, p.101). Planning culture-based lessons can be even more difficult. Chien (2022) explains that they can have troubles in choosing appropriate cultural elements due to the lack of intercultural experience. The author asserts that knowledge about the target culture, cultural phenomena, and their learners' cultural background influence the language teachers' competence in choosing intercultural topics, issues, or elements for their classes.

Problems with technology

Technological problems are another challenge that pre-service teachers and learners can face during the online classes, particularly in foreign language learning because it is a language of interaction. Some of problems that affect the efficacy of online teaching are: lack of physical contact between teachers and students, lack of control over learners' activity, need of establishing new classroom routines, connectivity, and lack of appropriate gadgets (Fortová et al., 2021). Hermansyah & Aridah (2021) found that communication and interaction were very limited in online class, and unstable connection makes it timeless and ineffective. McKie (2020) reported that many online students lacked access to quiet spaces to study and more than half said they were unable to access digital course materials. In the same line, Hunter et al. (2021) explain that "the lack of available devices, such as laptops, tablets, and personal computers, are limitations to online instruction in virtual classrooms" (p.152).

Lack of understanding

Lack of students' understanding can also affect the development of an effective teaching process. Alghamdy (2018) found that teachers in training have difficulties during the teaching of foreign languages due to the lack of students' understanding; their English level was very weak so that they could not communicate and understand the instructions. Sowell (2017) claims that good instruction-giving is a challenge for native, nonnative, seasoned, or novice teachers. Therefore, how to give clear instructions must be taught explicitly to pre-service teachers. This is not a skill that will be naturally mastered; it deserves attention and practice. They need to learn how to give clear and concise instructions because giving understandable instructions is fundamental for a good classroom teaching practice. It has an impact on how well students do the activities and, so how well they learn. A lesson can become chaotic or fail when students do not understand what they have to do.

Lack of participation

In EFL learning, participation is a means by which students demonstrate interest in the topic and in the activities. Achieving classroom participation is a great challenge for pre-service English teachers, too. When learners stay without saying anything, they can get stressed and disappointed (Sanchez, et al. 2021). Alghamdy (2018) found that poor teaching methodology, inadequate professional skills, and the absence of motivation are aspects that reduce interest in learning English. Another aspect that can affect students' participation is the lack of vocabulary. Canga & Cifone (2015) highlight that knowledge of vocabulary is of utmost importance to facilitate the students' participation in the foreign language. Those students with a limited vocabulary find it more difficult to participate actively. Another aspect that can affect students' participation in culture-based lessons is the complexity of the content in the authentic materials. Kilickaya (2004) mentions that "authentic materials often contain difficult language, unneeded vocabulary terms and complex language structures, which causes a burden for the teacher in lower level classes" (p. 2). For this reason, pre-service teachers need to develop their skills to adapt content according to the students' level. They have to teach essential vocabulary to facilitate understanding because it is a central area in learning foreign languages (Raja et al. 2018). Finally, anxiety, stress, or low self-confidence are also reasons of lack of participation (Sanchez et al. 2021).

Lack of mother tongue cultural knowledge

In some classes, learners might know very little about their own culture, which can affect the teaching of the new one. Ambrose et al., (2010) explain that prior knowledge, beliefs and assumptions help to build new knowledge in an effective way as they allow students to have a perception of the new information in order to be able to interpret it by relating it to the previous one. Therefore, learners of a foreign language should acquire good knowledge of both the home and target culture so that they can reach intercultural awareness and communicate adequately (Abushihab, 2016). In this context, Knutson (2006) points out that “the development of students' cultural awareness starts by encouraging them to recognize their cultural identity in relation to other cultures” (as cited in KhwagaGal, 2018, p. 51). Chien (2022) asserts that “the target and home culture should be equally valued (...) English teachers must teach English in a culturally sensitive manner by respecting the local culture of learning” (p.104). They should make students compare the mother and the target culture. They have to develop awareness of the cultural differences between English and their own native language; it helps learners to have cross-cultural knowledge and communicate effectively (Benahnia, 2015).

Benefits of teaching and learning culture in EFL classrooms

The importance of teaching culture has its origin in the connection between language and culture as interdependent elements; the two depend on each other. When we teach a language, we are teaching customs, ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (Brown, 2000). Learning culture enhances the authenticity of the communication; students who know the foreign language and foreign culture may be more successful interpreting and using the language (Tran, 2019). In fact, misinterpretation and breakdown in language communication may occur when speakers do not understand the cultural setting and social behavior properly. In this sense, the place of culture teaching in a language classroom is straightforward. Teachers should find ways to implement the elements of context which influence language use (Gonen & Saglam, 2012, p. 27).

Therefore, KhwagaGal,(2018) states that “culture should be incorporated in the process of FL not only to contribute to the development of teachers' language proficiency but also to develop in them a sense of positive attitudes, and tolerance towards others' cultures” (p.15). According to Akyildiz & Ahmed (2020), "the goals of foreign language teaching and learning have expanded to include the promotion of acceptance and understanding of other cultures. In addition, there has been an increased awareness that the role of language teaching should include cultural awareness as part of English

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language learning" (p. 330). In the same line, Gonen & Saglam (2012) note that "the role of foreign language teachers has gained importance since they serve as a medium to teach both the language and the culture of the foreign language" (p.26).

Many teachers would agree that teaching culture makes learning more motivating and improves learners' linguistic competence. It increases curiosity and interest in the target culture (Genc & Bada, 2005). Peterson & Coltrane (2003) states that "culture must be fully incorporated as a vital component of language learning. Second language teachers should identify key cultural items in every aspect of the language that they teach" (p.3). Through the learning of other languages, students could gain a knowledge and understanding of the cultures that use that language. "In fact, students cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs" (Chen & Yang 2016, p. 168).

Strategies to teach culture

There are different strategies to teach culture. Some of them are authentic materials, which are written or oral text produced by real speakers or writers for real audiences. There are two types of authentic materials: a) newspaper articles, short stories, advice columns, magazine ads, and graphic novels, and b) television commercials, movies, radio broadcasts, lectures, songs, podcasts, and conversations or service encounters among native speakers (Gilmore, 2007).

Authentic materials are ideal to develop intercultural communicative competences. They bring the reality of the outside world to the classroom. There are a lot of different authentic materials; but teachers need to select the most appropriate ones taking into account students' level and age (Reid, 2014, p.162). Jerrold (2013) explains that "authentic materials are rich sources for a wide range of assignments and activities that heighten awareness of the target culture. Students can research the target culture and report to the class on specific elements or characteristics" (p.7). By using them, teachers are providing their learners with the understanding of the context where the language is used (Candido, 2017).

Videos are excellent learning tools for students since they can show authentic use of target language, and they can get significant outcomes in overall cultural knowledge (Hafid, 2015). They introduce learners to a wide array of real life language experiences that enriches their learning environment, and contextualizes their learning process (Kim, 2015; Herron et al., 2000). They help to increase the general cultural knowledge of foreign language learners at an introductory level (Shilpa, 2012).

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Films offer students an opportunity to witness behaviors that are not obvious in texts; they connect language and culture (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). "Films are considered a very valuable tool to classroom learning in a course on cross cultural management as they communicate through their characters, story, context, dialogues and audio-effects at several levels to students" (Nur, 2014, p. 371). Students will definitely enjoy watching a movie or a video that is related to the class topic. The teacher can come up with numerous tasks related to the movie and include culture, vocabulary and grammar at once (Brdarić, 2016). Pandey's study (2012) showed that students enjoyed movies as a learning experience in the classroom. Both teachers and students agreed on the effectiveness of movies as classroom learning tools.

Finally, Karam (2017) ensures that posters, bulletin boards, maps, displays and realia can create a tangible presence of the target culture. Visual materials promote student motivation, interest in the language and culture, and participation (Jung & Park 2016). "The inclusion of culture in the EFL classroom is possible with materials such as posters, which offer a wealth of cultural information and enhance student engagement and learning" (Brdarić, 2016, p.42).

METHODOLOGY

Research design and participants

This qualitative phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007) aims at identifying the pre-service teachers' perceptions about teaching culture-based lessons in primary and secondary EFL classrooms during their online teaching practice. The research was conducted in the 8th semester of English major at the Technical University of Cotopaxi, which is a public university in Ecuador. 37 pre-services teachers of about 21 to 30 years old participated in the study, 21.62% of them were male, and 78.38% were female. 97.3% were single and 2.7% were married. All of them identified themselves as mestizos. In this semester, the English pre-service teachers studied two subjects: Ecuadorian and American Culture and Society and Class research, and they were doing their teaching practices. They participated in culture-based lessons as students in the subjects of Ecuadorian and American Culture, and they planned and taught four culture-based lessons to their students in their teaching practices following an action research process. They applied culture-based lessons in seventeen institutions; there were 17 groups of 2 and 1 group of 3.

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Data collection

Students had to plan, teach and write their reflection (what happened? so what? then what?) after the implementation of each culture-based lesson. At the end of the semester, they presented an action research project as part of an assignment. We informed students about our research objective and asked them to sign an informed consent to use their reflection. In addition, a survey in Spanish with two open-ended questions was applied: 1) how useful was culture-based lessons taken in Ecuadorian and American culture and society for planning and teaching culture in your classes? and 2) what are the positive and negative points about your experience in teaching teaching culture to your students?

Data analysis

The thematic analysis method was used to analyze data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). We read seventeen projects, identified relevant extracts, and categorized them according to the research questions. We selected extracts whose ideas were repeated in at least 3 projects. The categories related to the first question were: influence of learning experiences into teaching benefits of teaching culture, and strategy to teach culture. As for the second question were: planning culture-based lessons, time management, technological problems; lack of understanding, lack of participation, and lack of L1 cultural knowledge. The answers from the survey also were analyzed. We took extracts that were more repeated and placed in the categories previously identified. The most relevant and grammatically correct extracts from six projects (identified with codes for ethical considerations) and from the survey were analyzed and discussed into the light of existing theory.

Table 1. Information about the projects

N°	TEACHING CONTEXT	GRADE	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	AGE	PROVINCE/ CITY	CODE
1	Urban public school	7th	37 students 15 females 22 males	12 to 13 years old	Cotopaxi/ Latacunga	(SSPA)

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2	Urban public school	7th	29 students 12 females 17 males	11 to 12 years	Pichincha/ Quito	(SSCP)
3	Urban public school	2nd of bachelor	26 students 17 female 9 males	16 to 17 years old	Cotopaxi/ Pujilí	(SSCV)
4	Urban public school	10th	30 students 9 females 21 males	14 to 15 years old.	Cotopaxi/ Latacunga	(SSAL)
5	Urban private school	4th	27 students 11 females 16 males	8 to 9 years old	Pichincha/ Quito	(SSCC)
6	Urban private school	4th	17 students 8 females 9 males	8 to 9 years old	Cotopaxi/ Pujilí	(SSBC)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research question 1: What are pre-service teachers' opinions about learning and teaching culture?

Influence of learning experiences into teaching

"...lo que nosotros aprendimos en Ecuadorian American culture and society podemos enseñar a nuestros estudiantes y ampliar su conocimiento acerca de cultura" [what we learned in Ecuadorian and American Society we can teach our students and expand their knowledge about culture]

Aprender temas culturales en la clase de Ecuadorian - American culture and society me permitió conocer y reforzar mis conocimientos para poder impartir en mis clases. [Learning cultural topics in the Ecuadorian - American culture and society class allowed me to learn and reinforce my knowledge to be able to teach in my classes.]

Al aprender cultura en las clases me han ayudado a que en mis clases tenga una idea más clara de cómo enseñarlo.[Learning culture in the classes has helped me to have a clearer idea of how to teach it in my classes.]

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The extracts show that the pre-service teachers' learning experiences influenced their teaching. They say that what they learnt was useful to plan and deliver culture-based lessons in their teaching practice. This may be due to learning experiences that can influence teaching. Othman & Kiely (2016) found that preservice teachers' instructional practices in their internship were based on their previous L2 learning experience with teachers, instructional activities, and classroom organization. The authors highlight the role of prior learning experiences, which may influence their teaching during teacher education program and throughout their professional teaching profession. Barahona (2014) and Naylor et al, (2015) also suggest that pre-service teachers' previous experiences shaped their understanding of language teaching and learning.

Benefits of teaching culture

Cuando implementé las lecciones enfocadas en la enseñanza de la cultura a mis estudiantes fui capaz de reforzar mi competencia y comprensión cultural sobre otras culturas alrededor del mundo. [When I implemented the lessons focused on teaching culture to my students I was able to reinforce my cultural competence and understanding of other cultures around the world.]

Obtuve más conocimiento cultural enseñando cultura a mis estudiantes. [I gained more cultural knowledge by teaching culture to my students.]

Para enseñar un tema cultural primero debía conocer sobre el tema lo cual esto me ayudó a incrementar mis conocimientos en cuanto a la cultura. [To teach a cultural subject I first had to know about the subject which helped me to increase my knowledge of the culture.]

The pre-service teachers mentioned that the benefit of teaching culture was the development of knowledge and cultural awareness. They needed to learn the cultural topic before teaching it. Teaching is one of the best ways to learn something. In this sense, teaching culture in the pre-professional practice is a good opportunity to learn the foreign culture, which helps their language learning. Students are more successful interpreting English texts and using the language if they know the foreign language and foreign culture (Tran, 2019). "In fact, students cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs" (Chen & Yang, 2016, p. 168). Cultural knowledge can provide sensitivity and understanding towards another culture, and it allows language practice (KhwagaGal, 2018). Thus, learners will be more motivated to learn English and curious for the target culture (Genc & Bada, 2005; Benahnia, 2015).

Strategy to teach culture

La estrategia cultural de utilizar materiales auténticos me permitió enseñar la cultura de forma práctica los contenidos más importantes; los alumnos tienen una mejor comprensión del tema. [The cultural strategy of using authentic reading materials allowed me to teach the culture in a practical way the most important contents, the students have a better understanding of the topic...] (SSPA)

El tema enseñado en clase fue totalmente interesante para los niños porque usé videos para explicar el tema como una herramienta útil para enseñar conciencia cultural. [The topic taught in class was totally interesting for the children because I used videos to explain the topic as a useful tool to teach cultural awareness.] (SSCV)

Enseñar cultura a través de pequeños segmentos de películas fue una estrategia que permitió que los estudiantes comprendan mejor cómo los americanos celebran ciertas fechas. [Teaching culture through short film segments was a strategy that allowed students to better understand how Americans celebrate certain holidays.] (SSAL)

Como profesor pude comprobar su comprensión a través de la elaboración del póster [As a teacher I was able to test their understanding through the poster development]

Some future teachers mentioned that authentic materials such as videos and segments of films with cultural content are useful strategies to teach culture because they motivate their students. They also said that the elaboration of posters allows them to check their students' understanding of the topic. Literature on the teaching of culture asserts that these strategies are useful when incorporating culture into the classroom because they facilitate learning.

Candido (2017) found that authentic materials provides a good understanding of teaching cultures and keeps the student's attention focused on the lesson. There are a lot of different authentic materials; but teachers need to select the most appropriate ones taking into account students' level and age (Reid, 2014, p.162). Jerrold (2013) also explains that these materials are appropriate for many assignments that foster cultural knowledge.

In the same way, videos are essential to understand cultural information because of their visual aids. Hafid (2015) considered that "videos are effective teaching materials more than any other materials because it relates the language with its real context. This will help EFL learners to learn the language, culture and its appropriate use in real contexts" (p.44). Herron et al. (2000) asserts videos have been considered beneficial in cultural instruction since it shows real life situations. They help to increase the general cultural knowledge of foreign language learners at an introductory level (Shilpa, 2012).

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Videos enhance motivation to listen to English, increase experience with non-verbal expressions, and help to grasp cultural aspects (Kim, 2015).

In addition, films can increase students' cultural awareness because a) students get a lot of new information and insights from the movie, b) they can compare their culture and others even though they are not interacting with them, and c) it can prevent them from culture shock (Nur 2014). Both teachers and students agreed on the effectiveness of movies as classroom learning tools (Pandey, 2012). The teacher can come up with numerous tasks related to the movie and include culture, vocabulary and grammar at once (Brdarić, 2016).

Last but not least, posters promote visual representations through images. They can be used to present cultural content or assess students' comprehension through the elaboration of them, which can increase interest in learning. "The inclusion of culture in the EFL classroom is possible with materials such as posters, which offer a wealth of cultural information and enhance student engagement and learning" (Brdarić, 2016, p.42). In line with this, Karam (2017) ensures that posters, bulletin boards, maps, displays and realia can create an authentic environment in which students can visualize key aspects of the target culture.

All in all these strategies have a positive effect on the students' interest, motivation, and understanding. They must be incorporated into the foreign language curriculum in order for students to learn the culture successfully. Teachers can use any of these strategies taking into account the cultural element to be taught, the students' level and age.

Research Question 2: What were the main challenges in applying culture-based lessons by pre-service teachers?

Planning culture-based lessons

Planificar buscando estrategias de enseñanza que motive al estudiante. [Plan looking for teaching strategies that motivate the student]

La planificación debido a que procuramos buscar temas que sean atractivos para nuestros estudiantes, entonces tardamos en encontrar un tema y material que nos ayude a captar la atención e interés de ellos. [Planning because we try to find topics that are attractive to our students, so it takes time to find a topic and material that will help us capture their attention and interest]

Considero que los principales problemas encontrados fueron al decidir la estrategia que se iba a usar en la clase. [I consider that the main problems encountered were in deciding the strategy to be use in class]

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En parte se me dificulta realizar planificaciones y actividades acorde al nivel de inglés que tienen mis estudiantes. [In part, it is difficult for me to plan and carry out activities according to the level of English my students have.]

The pre-service teachers indicated that the design of culture based lesson plans was really difficult. They had problems in finding topics, strategies, materials, and activities according to the students' level and needs. It could be due to the scarce experience in cultural learning. Regarding this, Chien (2022) found that participants had trouble choosing appropriate cultural elements due to lack of intercultural experience. The author asserts that knowledge about the target culture, cultural phenomena, and their learners' cultural background influence the language teachers' competence in choosing intercultural topics, issues, or elements for their classes. Another reason for this could be the pre-service teachers' experience in planning. In fact, Sahin (2017) found that when planning, teachers in training find it difficult to find an activity that is appropriate in relation to the students' level of learning. In addition, Alanazi (2019) states that the problem for beginning teachers is that they are not clear about how to incorporate a variety of activities to keep students interested and engaged, as well as the time to predict how long any particular activity will last. This finding suggests preparing pre-service teachers explicitly on how to plan, teach and assess culture-based lessons.

Time management

La falta de tiempo ya que los estudiantes sólo tenían 40 minutos de clases en zoom y se demoraron en entrar 5 minutos a clases por lo que no se alcanzaba a explicar todo el tema cultural de buena manera. [Lack of time, since the students only had 40 minutes of classes in zoom and it took them 5 minutes to enter the classroom, which meant that they could not explain the whole cultural subject in a good way.]

El tiempo era limitado, ya que no se podía completar todas las actividades o porque simplemente no les gustaba esa actividad. [Time was limited, as it was not possible to complete all the activities or because they simply did not like that activity]

No tuve buenos resultados en el desarrollo de las actividades a los estudiantes porque no hizo una correcta distribución del tiempo para cada actividad. [I did not have good results in the development of the activities to the students because I did not make a correct distribution of time for each activity.]

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Hubo problemas de tiempo en la clase, y por ende, las actividades no fueron completadas porque los estudiantes no respondieron pronto. [There were time problems in the class, and as a result, activities were not completed because students did not respond promptly.] (SSCP)

Los niños se toman mucho tiempo para hacer las actividades [The children take a long time to do the activities.]

Pre-service English teachers claimed that they had trouble getting their students to finish the activities in the planned time. They also stated that the time established for the online class was not enough; most of the time the students did not attend the class on time. In addition, the students needed more time to complete the activities or there was lack of interest in completing them. This suggests that pre-service teachers need to develop their skills to distribute the time for the activities appropriately and prepare activities taking into account students' level. They also have to develop the ability to skip or add activities depending on the class time (Snow, 2006). Problems with technology can also affect the lesson development (Hermansyah & Aridah, 2021). Time management can motivate or demotivate students. To avoid frustration or demotivation, teachers can give extra minutes to students who require it because all students have different learning pace (Espinosa & Soto, 2020).

Technological problems

Los estudiantes no contaban con una buena conexión de internet lo cual complicaba utilizar plataformas para el desarrollo de la clase. [The students did not have a good internet connection, which complicated the use of platforms for the development of the class]

Los alumnos no tenían buena conexión a internet, dispositivos de reproducción de video ambiente y concentración para estudiar. [The students did not have good internet connection, ambient video playback devices and concentration to study] (SSCP)

Mis alumnos no estaban preparados para usar plataformas virtuales. [My students were not prepared to use virtual platforms]

Debido a problemas tecnológicos algunos estudiantes no pudieron entender la clase. [Due to technical problems some students were unable to understand the class.] (SSPA)

The internet connection was very bad and if we added the noise of the environment, our students could not understand the topic, or listen to videos or the audio.

Most of the pre-service teachers pointed out that the lack of connectivity, the lack of electronic devices and the lack of students' knowledge in using them were main difficulties in teaching culture

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online. Students could not get access to virtual platforms or the outside noise disturb the comprehension of videos and the teacher's instructions. Undoubtedly, "the lack of available devices, such as laptops, tablets, and personal computers, are limitations to online instruction in virtual classrooms" (Hunter, et al., 2021, p.152). In addition, internet connection is the most common problem that is beyond the teachers' control (Fortová et al. 2021). McKie's study (2020) mentions that 52% of participants said that a slow or unreliable internet connection had affected their learning. During the planning process, teachers have to analyze the accessibility to technology that their students have.

Lack of understanding

Les cuesta entender el tema. [The language since they do not dominate the English language and it is difficult for them to understand] (SSCV)

Contenido un poco difícil de entender puesto a que lo trabajaban por primera vez [Content a little difficult to understand since they were working on it for the first time]

Tuve que traducir las preguntas y respuestas para que los estudiantes pudieran responder. [The teacher had to translate the questions and answers so that the students can answer them] (SSPA)

Dentro de los problemas encontrados fue el lograr que ellos entiendan el tema. [One of the problems encountered was getting them to understand the subject.]

Tuve problemas con las instrucciones, ya que los estudiantes no las entendieron completamente. [I had problems with the instructions, as the students did not fully understand them.]

Tuve problemas con la última actividad, los alumnos no entendieron las instrucciones de las actividades. [I had problems with the last activity, the students did not understand the instructions of the activities.] (SSAS)

Another challenge was the lack of understanding of the content, activities, or the instructions when teaching culture-based lessons. This could be because of the students' low level of English. This finding is related to what Alghamdy (2018) found; teachers in training had difficulties during the teaching of foreign languages due to the lack of level of their students; their English level was very weak so that they could not communicate in the language and they could not understand the instructions. The pre-service teachers also said that they used translation to perform some activities to facilitate understanding. Regarding this, Sowell (2017) cries "there might be instances when the use of the L1 for instruction-giving is justified for the sake of efficiency and clarity, but there is a danger of overuse and the possibility that students and teachers will become accustomed to the

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comfort of instructions in the L1” (p.10). Thus, pre-service teachers need to develop their skills to give clear and concise instructions. Instructions have a direct effect on learning; classroom problems can emerge if students do not understand what they have to do (Sowell, 2017).

Lack of participation

Los estudiantes no estaban motivados porque ellos no sabían suficiente vocabulario para participar.

[Students were not motivated because they did not know enough vocabulary to participate] (SSCC)

Los estudiantes necesitaban más vocabulario para participar y sentirse más motivados [Students needed more vocabulary to participate and feel more motivated] (SSCP)

Participants say that their students were not motivated to participate because they lacked vocabulary. It may be because they have little experience with cultural topics so they do not have prior knowledge of key vocabulary. In fact, Canga & Cifone (2015) establish that knowledge of vocabulary is of utmost importance to facilitate the interaction of students in a foreign language. Although lack of vocabulary can indeed affect participation, there are other causes that we can analyze. For example, poor teaching methodology, inadequate professional skills, and the absence of motivation (Alghamdy, 2018), the complexity of the content in the authentic materials (Kilickaya, 2004), anxiety, stress, or low self-confidence (Sanchez et al. 2021). Achieving classroom participation is a great challenge for pre-service English teachers; they can get stressed and disappointed (Sanchez, et al. 2021). A deep study of this issue can help to understand better its causes and find strategies to train pre-service teachers to plan more engaging lessons.

Lack of mother cultural knowledge

El enseñar una cultura fue un desafío, ya que al dar clases a estudiantes de quinto de básica, les atrae pero necesitan comprender primero nuestra cultura para poder adentrarse a aprender una extranjera. [Teaching a culture was a challenge because when teaching fifth-grade students, they are attracted to it, but they need to understand our culture first in order to learn a foreign one.]

Los estudiantes no tienen conocimientos culturales básicos sobre nuestra cultura porque cuando se hacen algunas preguntas ellos no responden correctamente. [Students do not have basic knowledge about our cultural because when I asked some questions they do not answer correctly]. (SSPA)

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Enseñar cultura a niños pequeños es complejo porque aún no conocen bien nuestra cultura y por ello resulta difícil realizar este tipo de clases. [Teaching culture to young children is complex because they do not yet know our culture well and therefore it is difficult to carry out this type of class] (SSCV) Pre-service teachers claim that their students' knowledge of their own culture was limited, which affects the understanding of the target culture. They explained how difficult it is for them to teach culture since children do not have any prior knowledge about the topic. This may be because of the little experience in learning both the mother and the target culture. In this context, Ambrose et al. (2010) states that the prior knowledge, beliefs and assumptions help students to build new knowledge in an effective way since it permits them to have a perception of the new information in order to be able to interpret it by relating it to the previous one. So, teachers must incorporate both the L1 and L2 culture. Learners of a foreign language should acquire good knowledge of their own culture so that they can compare it with the foreign language culture (Abushihab, 2016). With little kids it might be a good idea to start teaching tangible aspects of the culture.

CONCLUSION

This article has identified the pre-service English teachers' opinions and challenges in teaching culture-based lessons in their teaching practices. It was found that their learning experiences with cultural content not only helped to increase their cultural understanding, but also provided them insights to plan and teach culture in their teaching practice. They reinforced their cultural awareness both by learning and teaching culture. The strategies that most of the pre-service teachers used were: authentic material like videos, films, and posters. The visual representations in the authentic materials developed the students' interest, motivation and cultural understanding. The study also report some challenges when teaching culture-based lessons. They had problems in finding appropriate content, materials and activities according to students' level and needs during the planning design. They also had problems in managing the class time appropriate, problems with technology, the lack of understanding of class instructions due to the low level of English, lack of participation, and lack of mother culture knowledge. These aspects may have hindered learning and affect pre-service teachers' motivation to teach. Thus, researchers suggest that future English teachers receive training on how to implement culture-based lessons in their teaching practices to facilitate their professional development. These findings are subjected to limitations such as sample size and the quality of pre-

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service teachers' reflections. A longitudinal study must be conducted to analyze the pre-service teachers' experiences in teaching culture based lessons.

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