

English Language Instruction at the San José School:
Lessons for the Future

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The need for English language instruction in Costa Rica is self-evident: its population requires a level of proficiency that will allow it to compete in a globalized society. However, the educative process does not meet nor surpass the standards expected by the productive sectors of society. The English as a Second Language program at the San José School is the true reflection of the problems found in the public school system. Specifically, the problems lie in the areas of curriculum, teaching methods, assessment, resources, as well as in the areas that provide support, such as human resources management and school-community relations. The solutions to these problems must be, not only feasible, but also broad in scope.

Research problem:

How can the acquisition of the English language be improved at the San José School beyond the expectations established by the Ministry of Education at the fourth, fifth and sixth grade levels in a period of one year?

Goal 1:

Determine the problems in teaching and learning English at the San José School and its consequences in light of the policies established by the Ministry of Education.

Objectives:

- 1.1 Identify the policies established by the Ministry of Education.
- 1.2 Describe the ideal principles involved in the process of teaching English as a Second Language.
- 1.3 Indicate how these principles are not being accomplished at the San José School.
- 1.4 Recognize the consequences generated by the problems.

Goal 2: Analyze how the problems in English language instruction include issues in curriculum, assessment, material resources, teaching methods, school management, and community integration, which does not allow the Ministry of Education to accomplish its objectives.

Objectives:

- 2.1 Identify the problems in terms of curriculum.
- 2.2 Identify the problems in terms of teaching methods.
- 2.3 Identify the problems in terms of assessment.
- 2.4 Identify the problems in terms of material resources.
- 2.5 Identify the problems in terms of school management.
- 2.6 Identify the problems in terms of the community.

Goal 3: Design a proposal with the objective of improving the performance of students of English as a second language in grades 4-6 beyond the expectations of the Ministry of Education.

Objectives:

- 3.1** Define the standards that should be expected of the students.
- 3.2** Indicate the descriptors of each standard.
- 3.3** Identify the sample progress indicators that reflect the acquisition of these standards.
- 3.4** Exemplify how these standards would be executed in my classroom.
- 3.5** Design a proposal in terms of curriculum.
- 3.6** Provide solutions in terms of teaching methods.
- 3.7** Offer alternatives in terms of assessment.
- 3.8** Suggest options in terms of material resources.
- 3.9** Generate a proposal in terms of school management.
- 3.10** Establish recommendations in terms of community integration in the learning and teaching process.

INTRODUCTION

The need for English language instruction in Costa Rica is self-evident: its population requires a level of proficiency that will allow it to compete in a globalized society. However, the educative process does not meet nor surpass the standards expected by the productive sectors of society. The English as a Second Language program at the San José School is the true reflection of the problems found in the public school system. Specifically, the problems lie in the areas of curriculum, teaching methods, assessment, resources, as well as in the areas that provide support, such as human resources management and school-community relations. The solutions to these problems must be, not only feasible, but also broad in scope.

Policies Established by the Ministry of Education

English teaching in Costa Rica began to be an important part of the curriculum of primary schools, under the administration of José María Figueres, in which Dr. Eduardo Doryan, Minister of Education, created the project called "Programa de Lenguas Extranjeras para el Desarrollo" during May 1994.¹

The Ministry of Education, guided by José María Figueres, intended to make education an efficient tool to avoid the breach among social classes. As a result, the project began on July 18th during 1994, as a pilot plan. Likewise, the Ministry of Public Education, had a priority to cover the touristic zones, those with ecological interest and those marginal socioeconomic sectors.

The program of English teaching began its first part with 28 schools around the provinces of the country. The project is known legally by the following code: Proyecto 507/RLA 11/21.05.

This way, 9000 children at the primary school level participated in the project. The purpose was to achieve children's sensitivity to learn a target language and to stimulate their interest about topics such as school, family and body parts, in order to make children aware of the importance of learning a second language to improve their cultural and social background.²

¹ Ministerio de Educación Pública. (1996). Programa de Lenguas Extranjeras para el Desarrollo: PROLED. Guía Didáctica Programa de Inglés- Segundo Ciclo. 1st ed. San José: MEP.

² www.mep.gob.cr.com

The method to achieve this purpose was learning by doing. All activities done in class were characterized by the use of physical and body movement techniques focusing on communication. Likewise, children were to feel as creators of their own learning process through the design of a creative atmosphere.

The policies established by the Ministry of Education were selected and unfortunately they reflected a great appreciation for topics related more with values and certain civic behaviors than anything else. It means that these policies were not related at all with the process of learning English as a second language. The policies were similar to those chosen for the other subjects offered in the curriculum of the school which are totally taught in Spanish and whose goals are closely related to values and civic attitudes.

It does not mean that the English curriculum should not include these aspects, but at least, the policies of the Ministry should be focused on the steps or methods that would take students to speak a second language successfully to achieve a determinate level of English, beginning, intermediate, or advanced.

The Ministry policies are represented in those objectives included in the teaching guide used to offer an academic curriculum to teachers. Some of those objectives are the following:³

- "Propitiate learning situations that allow children to develop a critical and responsible attitude in view of the problems of the context around them"
- "Promote the enrichment of moral, ethic, civic and spiritual values to contribute to the development of a well balance and strong personality."
- "Contribute with the upbringing of young people aware of the necessity and importance of protecting and conserving life, to assure an adequate future to the other generations."
- "Appreciate science and technology in our society as well as in other parts of the world, taking into consideration their implications and the appropriate attitude to assume the right use of them."
- "Inculcate in the students the wish to know about other cultures and the development of a positive attitude to the other speaking countries. To contribute, in this way, to avoid the apparition of prejudices about other societies."

In spite of the goals or policies the Ministry established in public schools, parents, teachers and students showed great motivation to learning English. The surveys done during 1994, showed that the schools within this plan were really motivated with English teaching. Based on this, materials and guides were improved, and this fact allowed the opportunity to initiate the second part of the pilot program. In fact, 252 schools around Costa Rica during 1995 enrolled in the program.

Nowadays, these schools are the key to open diverse doors in future, for those children studying English. They will have the opportunity to apply the language in different areas of life such as jobs, education, and society. Consequently, Costa Rican children and parents understand that a bilingual education represents success and that it is the only way to be integral citizens of society.

³ Ministerio de Educación Pública. (1996). Programa de Lenguas Extranjeras para el Desarrollo: PROLED. Guía Didáctica Programa de Inglés- Segundo Ciclo. 1st ed. San José: MEP.

That is why, English is seen as a bridge to educate modern citizens. The importance of English is that the right use of it is one of the main challenges of future. Persons need to communicate to each other, either in their mother tongue or in a target language to establish an effective interaction with other societies and achieve new opportunities.

Importance of English around the world

- **Importance**

According to the UNESCO, future citizens in the world will confront many challenges in the future and education is indispensable to attain the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice. The UNESCO commission believes that education has an important role to play in personal and social development.

UNESCO does not establish that education will do miracles or magic to change society, but the UNESCO commission agrees that it is one of the most available means to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war.⁴

Our century will confront many challenges in terms of economic and social progress. That is why, children around the world have to be prepared to compete with other countries and not only the proper. Education has to portray to our children that it is the only way to achieve an ongoing process which will allow humans to develop relationships among individuals in different nations.

Today, English is an important proof of this idea exposed by the UNESCO. English is around the world and it is impossible not to speak English. The future is governed by globalization, and those countries, such Latin America, which do not progress at the same time globalization and potential countries do, will face hard situations and will not have the enough diversity to answer those questions everybody is asking.

English is an important part of progress when talking about globalization and changes because during these years it has taken a relevant place in the world. According to the statistics offered by Jack Richards, sixty percent of the world's population speaks English as its native tongue or second -language.⁵ English is a tool that will allow people from around the world to confront globalization for all those countries in progress.

It is important to mention that in the United States, English teachers as a second language, have difficult problems when talking about standards because it presents a great diversity of cultures. It would be ironic to establish one type of parameter. According to Freeman, English is now a necessity in the United States for foreign people and traditional methods have not worked well for English language learners. In many foreign settings, students study English for years but never progress beyond basic knowledge.⁶

⁴ Jacques, Delors. Learning: The Treasure Within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty- First Century. UNESCO Publishing.

⁵ Richards, Jack , & Theodore Rodgers. Approaches and Methods in Language teaching. USA: Cambridge UP.

⁶ Freeman, Yvonne, & Freeman David. (1998). ESL/EFL TEACHING: Principles for success. Chicago: Heinemann.

That is why, when teaching a second language it is need to contemplate all details involved in the successful process in order to make of it an unforgettable experience which can show its results in a tangible form.

- **Why Costa Rican children should learn English?**

After referring to the importance of teaching English around the world, it is necessary to specific why children should learn English because people around teaching make this question frequently. According to Helen Doron, children who start to learn a foreign language in early life obtain a wider cultural outlook as well as they become conscious of the existence of language as a phenomenon. Bilingual children live more experiences than monolingual children who often believe that their culture is the only one that matters in the world.⁷ Children with this opportunity develop higher order thinking abilities and those types of abilities are preferred in the productive sectors of any country.

On the other hand, children should learn English because a second language helps them to develop an interest in other people of different cultures in order to understand more about life, for example the origin of customs, such as the Christmas tree, which have been adopted by the Costa Rican culture, as well as the differences related to races through the world. At the same time, they can be sure their future is going to be better because they will have more opportunities to live with stability, bilingual people will be required for jobs more than those who just speak the mother tongue.

Ideal Principles Involved in the Process of Teaching English as a Second Language

- **Rationale for bilingual education: what is relevant to set principles**

When establishing principles that will take teachers and students to success, it is essential to include within those principles the mother tongue of the children learning English. It does not mean, English should be taught for example in Spanish in order for Latin American children to understand it. But, English teaching should increase its development supporting students' first languages because, this way, teachers build on their strengths and help them to validate themselves as individuals.

- **Principles for success**

The following list of principles to teach English, is a recompilation of the most relevant aspects involved in the teaching process, they are related to different areas, but together they are the key to achieve success.

1. Learning a second language is an important process for all children to be involved in, so curriculum should be planned to include all their necessities.
2. Lessons should be learner centered because learning is the active construction of knowledge by the learner so teachers base lessons on learners' needs and interests.

⁷ <http://helendoron.com/faq1.htm>

3. Lessons should be active in order to involve students into a creative environment which will take them to obtain problem solving and higher order thinking skills, both in their first language and proficiency in English.
4. Learning takes place depending on the environment created for it, so English teaching must be developed in an active group formation by students' side.
5. English teaching needs to be elaborated through the four basic skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking.
 - Writing must indicate cultural information about the rhetorical organization of US academic expository text and audience expectations of such text.⁸ It means, that children must learn how the American culture exposes their believes, opinions and how they see life. Also, children have to know how is conform the written part of the language they are learning because if they do not know, it will be hard for them to write according to the parameters of a real learning.
 - Reading has to motivate students' metacognitive skills. The purpose is to get familiar with the written form of the language. That is why, it would be interesting to evaluate the skills and abilities students have to read in their first language.⁹
 - Listening has to be closely related to the native environment of the second language students are learning in order to acquire proficiency in the areas of pronunciation and fluency.
 - Speaking or the ability to use the language appropriately has as main objective to use the language in context. In other words, it would be something like knowing what type of utterance is recommended to use in a specific moment or situation.
6. Lessons should support students' first language and cultures at the same time children become proficient in the second language.
7. English lessons should be full of motivation because it is an important component of the learning process which can help teachers to obtain relevant advances.
8. The learning process should develop connections between the school, parents, children and the community as interrelated elements of the curriculum.
9. Bilingual education must be to make students feel good about themselves because they are producing something new, interesting and useful to their lives and also to their culture.
10. English acquisition must represent to its learner the opportunity to obtain many benefits and relevant goals, such as jobs and diverse occupations in the productive sector of the country.

⁸ Freeman, Yvonne, & Freeman David. (1998). ESL/EFL TEACHING: Principles for success. Chicago: Heinemann.

⁹ Freeman, Yvonne, & Freeman David. (1998). ESL/EFL TEACHING: Principles for success. Chicago: Heinemann.

11. English lessons have to take the experiences students seriously into account when learning because with these experiences, they will learn more than what any teacher can imagine.
12. Lessons should encourage students to learn by doing or learn in context as suggest by John Seely Brown in his article: "Situated Cognition"¹⁰. Just take students into a context similar to that one in which really they are going to use the language.
13. English teaching should be focused to all different types of intelligences. It means that activities chosen to create the learning process have to be directed to what Howard Garner calls "Multiple Intelligences"¹¹. This theory suggest that children learn in diverse ways because not all of them are equally talented or intelligent.
14. The process of learning a second language also has to include the development of the abilities of critical thinking and creativity.
15. English has to be taught as if it was the mother tongue of children learning it because the most important methods of the ESL Association, such as working in groups, and learning by doing, among others, suggest that this is the only way in which learners will speak English.
16. English lessons have to be active and teachers cannot direct their teaching just to one methodology. For a long time, different methods have been important to teach a second language. Methods such as the Suggestopedia, and the Audiolingual method, among others, have demonstrated that one method to teach is not appropriate.¹² That is why, a combination of different methods is the best methodology.
17. English lessons should avoid repetition and routines which just make students feel tired of learning instead of causing an important experiences to their lives. The use of materials and the inclusion of curriculum within the process is determinant.
18. English teaching has to take students beyond their own expectations about learning. As suggest by Marcy Driscoll¹³ in her book in which she explains the term, "Zone of Proximal Development", used to support this idea. The teacher has to be the bridge to take students far from the stage there are supposed to be.
19. The learning process should be totally constructivist because then children are authors of their own learning experiences. Children acquire information in a

¹⁰ <http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/ilt/papers/JohnBrown.html>

¹¹ www.DISNEY.com.

¹² Richards, Jack, & Rodgers Theodore. Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. USA: Cambridge UP.

¹³ Driscoll, Marcy P. Psychology of learning for instruction. USA: Florida UP.

faster way and build their own learning discovering great sources of information.

20. Finally, the most important principle involved in the process of teaching English as a second language, is that teachers can share the process with their students because they have to participate actively in the process in order to learn cognitively. In other words, children cannot be just receptors of the language and the teacher the person who transmits it. Both, children and teachers, have to interchange the roles because teachers also learn from children. Children have to perform the most important role of all in the process.

English Language Teaching in San José School: An Assessment

The acquisition of English is a tool that will determine the future of our children. According to theorists, childhood is the best stage of life to learn other languages. In this way, our children will use other languages to place Costa Rica in the world market.

Competitiveness is the main characteristic of a progressive country and because of it, Costa Rica is preparing its people to be a bilingual culture, and at the same time to appreciate more the own culture. An excellent example of this ideal is the San José school which has an English program for children studying there.

Probably, many were the reasons the Ministry of Public Education had in order to add English to its curricular goals. As it is normal, San José School has had to face many problems in diverse educative areas. In order to analyze which have been those problems, an assessment of this public school is going to be the proof.

Nowadays, this commitment with society is facing different obstacles that have limited the potential of developing English language skills in students. The program has been affected by diverse problems in areas such as curriculum, human resources management, material resources, teaching methods, assessment and integration of all persons involved in the community as elements of curriculum.

All these areas overlap between them and if there is a problem in any of them, the problem will affect the rest of the elements involved in teaching, causing an inappropriate development in children when acquiring a second language.

These problems are related to the context in which students learn, to the teaching strategies used by instructors and to the other aspects that do not allow children to appreciate, as it should be, this opportunity of learning a second language since their early life in school. The following research is an example of the problems in a rural-public school of Costa Rica.

- **The main highlights of the assessment include the following conclusions:**
 - The English Level of the students in San José School presents some problems of acquisition. Thus, the Ministry of Education cannot accomplish its main goals established in the pilot plan.

- English is not seen as a second language, but as a requirement to pass grades, because there is not an appropriate integration of the elements of the curriculum in order to change this perception.
- Because of economic aspects, there is not a great variety of materials in the school in order to learn English. The problem is because the use of material is a real determinant in order to catch the attention of children with different necessities and ways of learning.
- The School presents a disorganization in the curricular area of English teaching because there are no documents that can support the main objective of English teaching.
- The human resources management at the San José school is not adequate according to the expectations of teachers at the school and there is an important lack of motivation.
- There have been some incorrect applications of teaching methods or strategies by English teachers who are not academically prepared to teach English neither children nor adults.
- The assessment criteria used by teachers has been being inadequate to evaluate what students are really learning and producing, because this type of assessment is focused on teachers.
- It is necessary to make teachers and others involved in this process, aware of the importance of improving the English language acquisition in students because this will be a tool that will help them to have many opportunities in the productive area of this country.
- It would be useful to suggest some of the international standards established by important institutions around the world in order to improve the acquisition of language here in Costa Rica.
- It is necessary to suggest some proposals with the objective of improving the performance of students of English in the diverse areas such a curriculum, material resources, teaching methods, human resources management, assessment and integration of students, parents and other members of the community within the process.



The San José School works as many others in the country. The main guide to teach English is the book offered by the Ministry of education. There has not been an innovation of the "curriculum" since the project began six years ago.

The following is an assessment of how this school has been applying the principles for success explained before. This assessment will allow readers to identify in a certain

way with the problems found not only in this public school but also in many other institutions.

The educative process does not meet nor surpass standards

Although Costa Rica is ahead of other countries in Latin America, its English program is not the adequate enough as it should be. The English curriculum is focused on values and attitudes that students need to present at certain time, but basically the relation with the English language is scarce and the needs of the students are not relevant to teachers.

The necessities of children involved in the process are not been contemplated maybe because of the curricular goals established by the Ministry of Education and also because external situations at the school, such as the lack of appropriate English staff. The context in which children have to learn does not allow them to experiment the learning process as it should be. For example, the lack of a necessity of using the second language, the permanent custom of memorizing chunks of language, the believe that only teachers are producers of learning activities, the traditional ways teachers use to assess their students outcomes and participation in classroom, among others.

Since the implementation of the original pilot plan, there has not been an important change to improve or decrease such program. The program has been working as part of the curriculum of primary schools that until now provided a basic contact with English for their students because certainly there is not more than just a program established by the Ministry of Education.

Analyzing some of the objectives established by the Ministry of Education, it is possible to see that the require level of English is totally basic. The following objectives are a simple sample of the objectives offered by the institution:

- *Comunica sus ideas, conceptos y sentimientos en forma oral y escrita a un nivel básico en situaciones relacionadas con su entorno inmediato.*
- *Reconoce sonidos de la lengua inglesa que aplica como medios para comprender mensajes orales y comunicar sus ideas.*
- *Emplea vocabulario básico en forma oral y escrita para referirse a temas desarrollados en clase.¹⁴*

The objectives of the pilot plan were focused on having Costa Rican children and citizens speaking English to compete in the contemporary society and at the international level, and to be prepare for globalization around the world in future. Also to appreciate their own culture more, and, at the same time, to have more opportunities to work.

Unfortunately, these goals wanted to be reached from a teacher perspective, forgetting one of the principles more important in education , "Lessons should be learner centered"¹⁵ . At the same time, teachers contribute to keep the myth created by the

¹⁴ Ministerio de Educación Pública. (2000). Programas de Lenguas Extranjeras para el desarrollo: Guía Didáctica. San José: MEP.

¹⁵ Kauchak, Donald., & Paul Eggen. Learning and Teaching . USA: University of North Florida.

grammar translation method. That myth is based on the belief that language have to be acquired through repetition and common teaching methods, such as translation.

Costa Rica wanted to meet a set of attitudes, capacities and knowledge that could be included in the learning process in order to create an adequate competitiveness at the level of important companies. People under this type of education would be able to be exacting consumers, looking for quality and efficiency. People under this program would be critical thinkers.

These children would learn in a creative environment, but until now the environment to teach English in a public school, like San José School, has been characterized by the active participation of teachers, as it was in last centuries when the grammar translation method was popular for not requiring oral participation of the students, as it was when teaching Latin.¹⁶

According to Doryan, in his analysis of Costa Rican education, Costa Rican English teaching is not allowing students to develop higher order thinking skills, and the importance of education for the productive areas of the country is that between education, technology, human capital and economic conditions, there is a mutual relationship.¹⁷

In spite efforts and important suggestions, the English program, as a tool to compete, is not meeting nor surpassing standards, as explained before, that have been established by standing countries, as the United States of America. The main sample to support this statement is the "Guía Didáctica" used by most teachers in the schools which teach English.

It is already clear that the world is changing constantly and because of that, education does too. Thus, Costa Rica is not meeting or surpassing the standards, first at all, because since six years ago the Ministry of Education has not improved this guide. The only change is that new editions of the books and curricular guides have been made. This guide was created when the program began and until now has not been updated, nor in San José school, nor in other schools. This guide neither takes teachers through a supporting explanation of how to accomplish English proficiency through the four basic skills, writing, reading, listening, and speaking.

It should not explain how to teach as it was a recipe because each teacher has his/her ideas and methods. But, at least, the guide should suggest, through objectives, the combination of these skills together with an active group formation of the students involved in the process in order to obtain success.

On the other hand, comparing the teaching guide published during 1996¹⁸, and that one published for the 2000 year¹⁹, the only difference that exists in terms of content is

¹⁶ Richards, Jack, & Rodgers Theodore. Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. USA: Cambridge UP.

¹⁷ Doryan, Eduardo. (1999). Educación y Competitividad en Centroamérica. Costa Rica: Cen,1200.

¹⁸ Ministerio de Educación Pública. (1996). Programa de Lenguas Extranjeras para el Desarrollo: PROLED. Guía Didáctica Programa de Inglés- Segundo Ciclo. 1st ed. San José: MEP.

¹⁹ Ministerio de Educación Pública. (1996). Programa de Lenguas Extranjeras para el Desarrollo: PROLED. Guía Didáctica Programa de Inglés- Segundo Ciclo. 1st ed. San José: MEP.

the item referred to presentation or introduction because, in 1996, the presentation of the book was after the background of the implementation of English in the primary schools.

Now, in the teaching guide published last year, the presentation is the justification that Mr. Guillermo Vargas, Minister of Education, gives to continue with English at the primary schools, and what was the presentation before, is now the introduction which is exactly written as it was the first time during 1996.

These are the only changes that the current government made to publish the new guide. The remaining content is exactly the same, the procedures are the ones with which the pilot plan began. The idea of supporting students' first language is the priority.

Unfortunately, the combination of this support with the acquisition of proficiency in English at the same time, is totally ignored. It is not that the first language of the students is not useful at all, but in these days, innovation is the key to success. Besides, most of these techniques, objectives and procedures are not contextualized at the type of context students are learning now.

In other words, the current government has kept the project at the primary schools because they know English is not a complementary subject, but rather a requirement to be an integral citizen in society. Unfortunately, knowing this, the government seems to forget it because all ideas and expectations remain as the José María Figueres government left it. The current government and the Ministry of Public Education have forgotten the principle which refers to a constant motivation in order to obtain success in the process.

As a result, people in the schools in which English is taught consider that English is important as a communication tool around the world, but when its standards are not achieved, people studying the language do not reflect about its importance and the lack of reflection causes frustration in the students. In this case, children at primary school at the fourth, fifth and sixth grades at the San José School.

To some extent, children are not the only ones who have gotten frustrated. It is also easy to find that people working at the San José School, parents and members of the community get disappointed too because of the type of teaching their children at the school have received and the tangible results of this teaching.

The English program gets worse when English is seen as one more subject which students have to pass because it is necessary and not because it is a key to future. This happens because of the way English is being taught, it is important to mention that the teaching guide is a good element in this process, but the problem is the context in which it is used, the way in which part of the English staff manages the learning process. Students do not feel they are producing by themselves.

According to Doryan, Costa Rican culture is not accustomed to learning by doing, and this is precisely what is affecting teachers as well as students because English acquisition is not representing to learners the opportunity to obtain many benefits and relevant goals such as jobs in the productive sector.

The idea of implementing English in the school wanted to change the context in which Costa Ricans were always learning. The need of showing the importance of learning by doing would be the bridge to make a curve in learning, combining an educative base, and portraying quality, with an adequate profile to work.²⁰

On the other hand, it is also important to mention that other obstacles to meet or surpass the international standards is that there are not enough materials or resources such as books, dictionaries, computers and other aspects that are really valuable when teaching a second language. This is an important obstacle because the use of media contribute with the experiences of the students which certainly establish the level of acquisition of knowledge students will have in future.

Also there is not a vision or mission in the curriculum which can supported, as it should be, the role of English in the educative community, a vision or mission which can demonstrate to members of the community the importance of a second language, in this case the English language which is universal.

These obstacles will not allow people related to education to meet the standards because without these standards, all the process will be as it has been during this time. In Costa Rica, it is common to find people talking about the great achievements private education accomplishes, and how public education goes back, as it does at San José School.

But, these people do not think about how interesting it would be to try to find why those schools teach its students the way they do. To say that they have a good economical status is one reason. But, more than that, there are many reasons and one of them is that most of people do not accept changes because they are not accustomed to be critical thinkers. It is easier to follow what is already established than following new strategies.

Most persons are accustomed to do the same always, teach and wait for a product. It means that the public system or some teachers do not apply the principles of context, such as that one suggest by John Seely Brown, in which students are encouraged to learn in a context real similar to that one in which children will apply their knowledge.²¹

Here it would be really interesting to give some statistics about how are Costa Ricans prepared in important subjects of knowledge in order to work and confront globalization nowadays.

The following information was taken from the book published by the ex-minister of education MR. Eduardo Doryan called *Competitividad y Educación en Centroamérica*, in which he presents which are the most popular requirements, companies ask their workers two present in order to be at the same level important companies are:²²

The level of importance of the management of the English language ,within this chart, is relevant according to the expectations of the big producers of the Costa Rican and international markets.

²⁰ Doryan, Eduardo. (1999). *Educación y Competitividad en Centroamérica*. Costa Rica: Cen,1200.

²¹ <http://www.parc.xerox.com/ops/members/brown/papers/situatedlearning.html>

²² Doryan, Eduardo. (1999). *Educación y Competitividad en Centroamérica*. Costa Rica: Cen,1200. p 34-35

**Characteristics of the beginners when they enter to the labor society,
according to the important companies**

"Ranking"	Características	Porcentaje de empresarios que consideran que se prepara nada, poco o regular en estas características a los estudiantes.
1	Conocimiento del Idioma Inglés	66,7
2	Gestión del ambiente	64,3
3	Gestión empresarial	61,9
4	Gestión de calidad	59,5
5	Organización de la producción de bienes y servicios	57,2
6	Conocimiento de estadística básica	52,4
7	Administración general	45,2
8	Servicio al cliente	42,8
9	Informática	38,1

*Number 1 indicates the area in which people is less prepared

These percentages are true of the situation in which current adults are qualified in the different areas related to capacities and knowledge. As it is obvious, most businessmen consider that people in Costa Rica have a relevant lack of knowledge of English. Probably, our educative system wanted to change that perspective, but until now it has done it scarcely.

Costa Rica needs to change its attitude; it is necessary to stop teaching English as it was taught long time ago when important techniques and methods were ignored, methods such as the Suggestopedia Method. In other words, Costa Rican children need to learn English in a nice and participative way , instead of being static learners.

In addition, there has been an incorrect management of the teaching methods by "teachers" who probably are not prepared in the pedagogical area and make of the English class, a class guided by the direct method in which there is no preoccupation in dealing with the different students proclivities and how to apply the diverse psychomotor, and effective domains, together with the learning styles children have.

The theory clarifies how important is to use diverse activities with the integration of all students as well as avoiding the direct teaching. What happens is that, by different

aspects such as time and context, this type of teaching is almost impossible because directed teaching is still a priority for most teachers, and most of the topics are taught deductively.

Also, it is possible to find an inadequate idea of real assessment around the schools with the English program as a part of their curriculum because this type of assessment works only to measure a product, a product of a circumstance and it does not work to assess even reading, writing, speaking and listening according to the level of the learners.

Thus, in order to contribute to reduce in a certain way this problem, it is necessary to make the Ministry of Education, English teachers, personnel, students and parents aware of the importance of improving the students education, and suggest reforms in the diverse areas such as curriculum, resources materials, teaching methods, management, assessment and integration of curriculum elements of the process.

Only doing this, Costa Rican education will be at the level of the recommended international standards, as those offered by the ESL methods which try to take students through a process real similar to that one they had to learn the mother tongue. The problem in public schools, is that English learning process is based on repetition of words in isolation or the repetition of English chunks that were learned in a determined context.

The English program needs to be seen as part of the curriculum and be combined with the other subjects. Our system should have a solid vision, which can combine universal methods of knowledge and attitudes to have success in the productive area of the country. At the same time, it should give the opportunity of having personal outcomes in the students involved in the experience.

For instance, the process should allow children to feel comfortable with their own characteristics in order to be more confident, the process should allow children enjoy of the bilingual education and include it into their living experiences, the process should allow children to feel successful and important because of their contributions in the experience, and so on.

It is necessary to go beyond, public schools such as the San José School, need to stop using "The grammar translation method" and discover what they have, but the schools themselves do not want to use There are more methods which appear time and again.

It would be impossible just to talk about a problem that is affecting Costa Rican education. It is necessary to show how one of the schools with the English pilot plan works ,which are its problems, the consequences of those problems, which are its causes, and finally which are the possible solutions to the issues exposed before.

This diagnostic is based on the causes and effects of the quality of English learning acquisition by the students at San José Rural – Public School. This is a little school located in San José, San Isidro, Heredia. This school obtained the program at the same time that other schools did. The school has 372 students approximately, all from communities nearby.

During these years, different English teachers have been part of the staff of the school; some were academically prepared and others were not. On the other hand, the

curriculum of this school is based on the objectives that the Ministry of Education contemplates in its teaching methods guide. Besides this, there is not a mission or vision of English language in this rural-public school.

In fact, the Ministry of Education has allotted a specific plan in order to carry out the English teaching program here. But, the main problems for this school are that the specific plan or didactic guide and other teaching methods cannot be applied as it should be because there are some inconveniences in the areas of media, curriculum, teaching methods, assessment and others.

Some of the most notorious effects produced by these causes are for instance: the lack of integration of the basic skills by teachers; the lack of materials available in the school, because most of time students have to work only with their workbooks without the possibility of watching a video to support what they just read.

On the other hand, the area of assessment in the didactic guide proposes a wrong way to assess students and also teachers assess them in a methodic way. There is not a real relationship with the assessment methods and the knowledge acquisition levels of the student. The assessment here is like it has been during long time in the public schools, inspired by Conductism.

For example: they are supposed to know how to answer this question: What special things do you like to do on Mother's Day ?²³ and in real context they can memorize and answer. But, they cannot produce ideas by themselves. The consequence here, is that they are memorizing English phrases are not using it as a communication tool. This situation does not force students to produce sentences spontaneously.

If a teacher really wants to evaluate his students in an appropriate way, he cannot expect to use these type of questions in a test. Instead, he may formulate a question such as: What do you do on Mother's Day ? Can you tell me? In this way, the student will answer a question which is requiring an answer that is not in any book, but rather lies in the experiences that each student in the classroom has lived in his/ her real life and context.

After this introduction to the problems lived here at San José School, there are many problems that will be analyzed during the development of the research. It is important to mention that, on the whole, English is absolutely important as a second language, and people related to the acquisition of English, deserve a learning process which will make them proficient. Any obstacle is not relevant enough to diminish the advantages and significance of the language.

The English teaching process is combined by the components exposed up there. The process needs to have a constant interaction among these elements in order to be successful. English language is not an exception because, as a second language, students need to be supported in all of these areas.

It is essential to include in the plan the rules pertaining to the educative areas shown in the principles for success commented before because they indicate the main steps to be followed in order to cause a relevant cognitive process for students.

²³ English Text Book used in the public schools for students at sixth grade.

The objective of this combination is to show that English teaching needs more than routines; as Pavlov's experiments in his classical conditioning, English teaching needs psychology, motivation, methods for different types of intelligences, among other components.

San José School will be our guide in order to show how important these elements are in teaching a second language in a public-rural school that is trying to go ahead, and which could be those consequences in the process, if the combination or application of them is incorrect and disorganized.

San José Public School

- **The English Language Acquisition at the Public School**

Teaching English at this school is real difficult sometimes because in the language instruction, there are problems that include the areas of curriculum, assessment, material resources, teaching methods, school management, and community integration. These problems do not allow the Ministry of Education to accomplish its objectives.

This situation is affecting the language acquisition of the students because it is impossible to advance in one area if there are others which are damaged. It means that these areas are closely related and the main issue is the lack of a contextualized English program besides that one offered by the Ministry of Education in the areas named before.

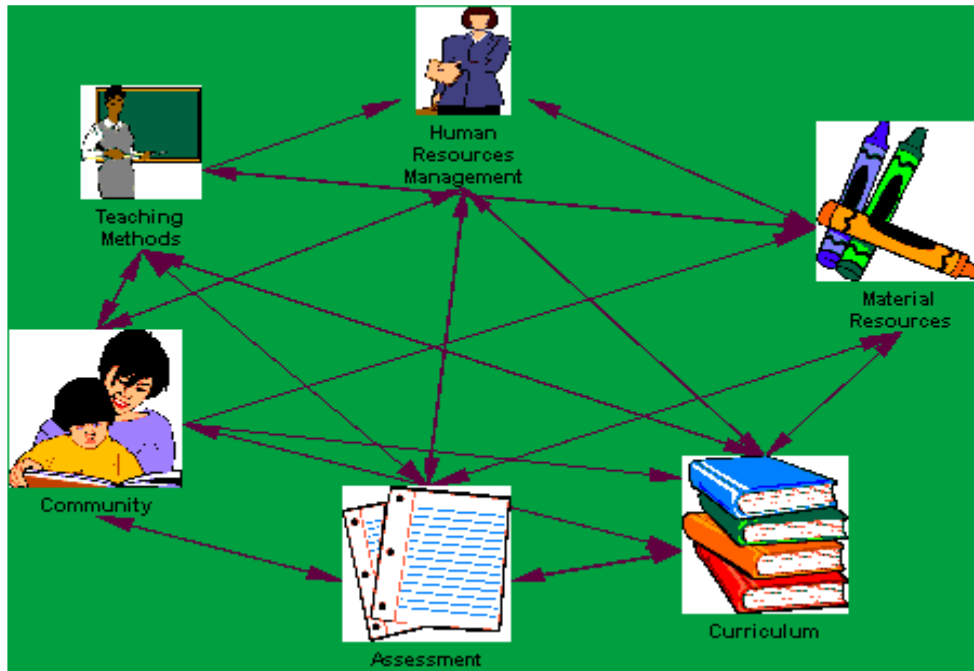
The importance of these components of the English teaching and the learning process is that a combination of both, components and process, lead students to communicate more effectively and avoid, during its correct application, just learning declarative knowledge.

Problems in the areas mention before, are certainly taking teachers to use behavioral teaching methods instead of constructivist ones, which are more appropriate to language learning, according to what Zaida Molina explains in her article called "Planeación Curricular", which gives an enriched explanation of the utility of constructivism when teaching children English.

In order to understand more about this situation, it is necessary to explain what is the meaning of each of the components related to success when learning a second language. Knowing what is the role of each one of these components within the process, it will be easier to identify the problems at the San José School and why they should be seriously considered as obstacles to reach the goals of bilingual education in public schools.

It is important to mention that the following conceptual map indicates how the components of an appropriate learning process overlap among them, and indicates how they are integrated into a processes which takes children involved in to reach a wished level of communication using a foreign language.

The English learning process



* Through this conceptual map, it is possible to analyze the relationship that exists among the elements of an appropriate English teaching process because in a teaching context, they overlap to offer a useful guide for English teachers to understand how children acquired information.

Comentario [ACH1]: Instead of footnoting this, you should use a textbox and place this information next to the graph.

The meaning of Curriculum, Teaching Methods, Assessment, Material Resources, School Management and Community Integration: An introductory explanation of the English language Acquisition program at the San José School.

The meaning of Curriculum and problems Regarding Curriculum

The curriculum proposed by the Ministry of Education is inadequate due to the following reasons: first, English is not integrated into the curriculum. Second, it is content-based only, and not skills-based. Furthermore, it is centered on the teacher and not the learner. These aspects established by the Ministry indicates the use of methodological principles which do not allow students to learn through the basic skills, and also the periods of time to teach English show the absence of an ideal curricular integration taking into consideration the other content areas.

Comentario [ACH2]: Before you even get started talking about curriculum in general, you must clearly indicate how the Ministry of Education's proposal regarding curriculum is inappropriate. You need a thesis statement here like you did at the beginning, only this time, its regarding curriculum.

English is not included in the whole learning process of the students. That is why, there is not a mission or vision to be achieved when talking about English acquisition which can be based on the real context of the students' learning process. The best example of this is found in the mission offered by the Ministry of Education in the curricular guide used to teach English. According to this guide, the main objective of the Ministry is:

“ To create critical and creative citizens, producers of knowledge, able of thinking and express thoughts with neatness and rigurocity. To create citizens able of learning to learn, citizens lovers of their country and worried to achieve a supporting development, and citizens able of making decisions in a changing society which needs of persons with a proficient linguistical code such as English ”²⁴

Analyzing this part of the main objective of the Ministry of Education, it is possible to say that there is not a clear role of the English language to achieve this objective, there is not an offering for the children and their parents involved in the process, about what they will be able of doing with the language in future .Also, this main objective is not related directly to the acquisition of a second language and the objectives of learning it through the content areas which help children to be in constant contact with the second language.

On the other hand, this curriculum is not appropriate because the priority of the program is to teach content. The Ministry of Education considers that children should learn English through topics that are part of their context. The problem is that the Ministry of Education suggests an active participation of teachers in order for students to acquire the information. According to the curricular guide offered by this Institution, the teacher is the person who performs most of the activities to teach the information.²⁵

At the same time, the methodology to teach English proposed by the Ministry of Education in its curricular guide is not based on ESL teaching because it suggests children should learn to develop oral skills in their first years at the school, and learn to develop reading and writing skills at the fourth, fifth and sixth grade.²⁶

Thus, the English curriculum is affected due to this type of teaching methods used until now in the public bilingual education, because children should learn the language through the four basic skills, combining them at the same time. Children’s mother tongue was acquired through a combination of skills. Finally, the periods of time established to teach English also indicate that this curriculum is not appropriate because, due to the absence of English in the other content areas in primary school, these periods should be longer.

The San José Public School is a real sample of the deficiencies of the curriculum offered by the Ministry. All the aspects mentioned before, are tangible at the school. Children only are in contact with English when they are in the English class, after that moment they continue receiving the other subjects in Spanish, breaking any possibility of relation between the English language and the students context.

²⁴Ministerio de Educación Pública. (1996). Programa de Lenguas Extranjeras para el Desarrollo: PROLED. Guía Didáctica Programa de Inglés- Segundo Ciclo. 1st ed. San José: MEP.

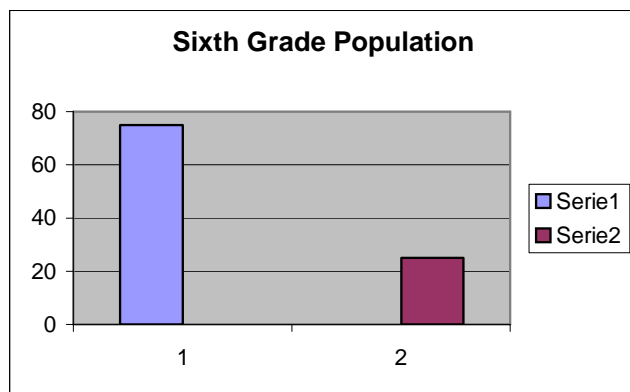
²⁵Ministerio de Educación Pública. (2000). Programa de Lenguas Extranjeras para el Desarrollo: PROLED. Guía Didáctica Programa de Inglés- Segundo Ciclo. San José: MEP.

²⁶Ministerio de Educación Pública. (1996). Programa de Lenguas Extranjeras para el Desarrollo: PROLED. Guía Didáctica Programa de Inglés- Segundo Ciclo. 1st ed. San José: MEP.

For instance, children at the fourth grade have to study the body parts in English and in their Science class too. But, the San José School does not have an integrated curriculum which can allow children learn the body parts in English classes and to use this knowledge in the Science class. Therefore, children learn body parts in the Spanish language resting importance to the English language acquisition.

On the other hand, San José School has problems when talking about curriculum because teachers have been teaching before, have used teaching techniques which take students to learn the language through content. There is not an active participation in the development of skills. For one thing, there are two sixth grade groups at the school, and every group has twenty two students. Most the students at these grades only use the language through words in isolation, and only a little percentage of the population uses the language through phrases and sentences.

The following diagram is a result of a survey made by an English teacher at the San José School, among the students of sixth grade at the San José School, the total of the population is forty four students, as mention before. In order to understand the results of this survey, it is important to mention that the diagram's role is to compare the quantity of students who speak only words in isolation and the quantity of students who use the language spontaneously. In the diagram, "serie 1" represents the quantity of students who only use chunks of the language to communicate, and that "serie 2" represents the short quantity of students who use appropriated phrases and proficient dialogues in English. Together, "serie 1 and serie 2" are the population at sixth grade.



*Analysis made by the sixth grade teacher at the San José School based on an observation done during eight months.

Based on this diagram, which illustrates, basically, that the sixth grade population's management of the language is a consequence of an application of a non-integrated curriculum, It is possible to say that these students have been taught by teachers whose role has been real active in the process.

Students participation has not been a priority during this learning process that the sixth grade students have gone through. Certainly, it would be important to take the San José School as a real reflection in order to help future generations avoid similar problems in the English language acquisition.

- **English is not integrated into the other content areas of the curriculum at the San José School.**

The ESL curriculum is not integrated into all the school's content areas at the San José School. Curriculum is an important word which reflects the goals that an educative institution has to offer students and parents in an educational system that promotes quality. When we think about English instruction as a second language, it is necessary to establish English instruction within the curriculum so that students will be able to speak and use it fluently in order to achieve valuable opportunities in society, the productive sector, both nationally and internationally.

Comentario [ACH3]: Ideas is a very unprecise word. I would eliminate it or substitute it for a word with more meaning.

English teaching at the San José School, like at other public schools, is not integrated into other subject areas, so exposure to the English is minimal since it is not used as a language of exchange in everyday situations. That is why, learning English in a public school context is difficult because these schools have to teach the language in a context in which students learn school subjects in Spanish, and English is studied as a foreign language in classes of 40 minutes.

Definitely, this problem is an important consequence of the absence of curricular integration, which means to teach all subjects of the curriculum in English in order to make a reinforcement of the acquisition of the language in the students, as well as teaching a determined topic in all the areas of the curriculum. In other words, curricular integration means teaching an objective which can be studied in the different areas of curriculum, an objective which can be focused on Science, English, Social Studies or Mathematics. For instance, children at fourth, fifth and sixth grade would have a better management of the second language, if they had to speak English in all the content areas.

This curricular problem could be solved in all the schools similar to San José School. Basically, it is somewhat difficult because even teachers speak English as a second language. But, it is not impossible to teach them to speak English in order to teach the content areas studied at primary. In this way, both teachers and students will contribute to the development of the country from a globalized point of view.

Another way to contribute to the creation of an integrated curriculum at the San José School is to establish a totally constructivist policy in order to teach. This way, children can participate actively in the acquisition of information coming from the diverse areas related to curriculum. This measure will allow students to overlap their knowledge and improve their values as integral members of society.

Also, a possibility of integrating curriculum at the San José School would be the promotion of having bilingual sources and media to teach the different contents in Science, Social Studies, Mathematics and others. At least children will have the opportunity of studying, for instance, the numbers in English to support the acquisition of language. So, if teachers cannot learn the language, at least, students can have a book or magazine in English about Science, for instance.

On the other hand is also possible to find curricular problems at the San José School because the curriculum does not stress skill development but rather content development. Maybe, it is easy to ask why content-based curriculum is a big problem at the San José Public School if this is the way it has been during long time.

According to Freeman and Freeman, content-based language teaching is the kind of instruction in which the use of traditional methods is really the target language itself. It means students study the grammar and the vocabulary of the target language and content is learned through repetition and translations.²⁷ Thus, content is the main priority of this type of teaching at the San José Public School: children have to learn important quantities of words, but they do not learn them through effective methods which allow them to apply the language in context. This is a problem at the school because English should be taught in interactive, effective and creative ways in order to become real learning experiences for the students. Through this type of curriculum, this goal becomes impossible and the curriculum itself is affected. Children are taken into traditional and boring processes of language acquisition.

There are relevant differences when the curriculum is focused on skills development or skill-based because this type of curriculum takes the students to learn by doing. According to Freeman and Freeman, the skill-based curriculum keeps learners cognitively engaged, and keeps the language whole and meaningful, at the same time it takes students to promote growth.²⁸

Some of the most relevant differences found between content-based curriculum and skill-based curriculum are the following:

Content- Based Curriculum	Skill-Based Curriculum	Examples
1. Teachers often teach the language found in books rather than the language students need to use in the English speaking context.	1. Acquisition of language in a natural way, the students use what they learn from the speaking context around them.	1. Using a content-based curriculum students learn the vocabulary related to flora and fauna by memorization. But, using a skill-based curriculum, they can learn the vocabulary through a research of the natural resources.
2. Parents expect traditional approaches and traditional homework assignments.	2. There is a constant development of growth and subjects have to be inquired providing methods such as researches.	2. Using a content-based curriculum, students make traditional homework and do not go through useful researches which let them live new experiences.
3. The emphasis is on learning skills, not on acquiring the language.	3. There is a special interest to learn the language through skills.	3. Using a content-based curriculum, students have to develop skills such as memorization, and using a skill-based curriculum, students apply their own skills.

²⁷ Freeman, Yvonne., & David Freeman. (1998). ESL/EFL Teaching. Principle for Success. Chicago: Heinemann.

²⁸ Freeman, Yvonne., & David Freeman. (1998). ESL/EFL Teaching. Principle for Success. Chicago: Heinemann.

Also, when talking about the curricular problems of the San José School, it is important to mention that the ESL curriculum at the San José School does not adequately reinforce Costa Rican culture nor the culture of English speaking nations. It means, through English students can learn, for example, about the Independence Day. But, this acquisition of knowledge in English about the Costa Rican culture does not reinforce the acquisition of the language and the probabilities of having proficiency using it. Thus, students learn about it, but they do not know how to put into context. This knowledge does not help to understand in a better way what Independence means.

In the same way, the ESL curriculum of the school neither reinforces the culture of speaking nations which use English as a tool to communicate because this is not a important objective to improve the acquisition of language. As the structure of the curricular guide shows, children study English based on topics that were selected taking into account the relation among situations that the students have already experienced. (page 7) It means that there is no learning about situations belonging to foreign cultures such the American culture.

Thus, it is important to have a practical guide to help teachers develop an appropriate curriculum for children which, according to ESL teaching methods theory, must allow students to learn through a process in which they have to be in interaction with knowledge, with language with foreign culture, while students enrich their own language and culture. According to Freeman, the English language acquisition is supported when there is interaction with the language and the real context in which it is spoken. Freeman and Freeman explain that it is really important to support cultural heritage at the same time students are learning the new culture.²⁹

The following are some samples of curricula which can reinforce the own culture and the English speaking cultures.

1. The curricular guide offered by the Ministry of Education should promote the teaching of vocabulary used daily in common situations in the United States. For instance, the content for sixth grade would be more interesting if instead of the topic "Reproductive Systems" focused on Costa Rican culture only (Guía Didáctica, page 25) ; was made a comparison of how students of their same age in the United States also study this topic . In this way, children integrate science and English to reinforce their culture, as well as relate their learning processes with those of other children.
2. On the other hand, the own culture can be adequately reinforced if there would be an interaction and proper use of the linguistical code that have been learned by the students. The conceptualization of the English language had as main objective the improvement of the national identity through the use of English as a second language. The problem until now is that children do not use the language. So, they cannot reinforce the Costa Rican culture. A proper curricular guide should urge to the application of formative teaching in which students have important performances.
3. Finally any curricular guide which takes into account context, will help students learn the language in a proper way even when they are not, geographically, close to the context in which the language is constantly used. It means, any

²⁹Freeman, Yvonne., & David Freeman. (1998). ESL/EFL Teaching Principles for success. Chicago: Heinemann. pp 193-195

curricular guide taking into account how important is to take children to a similar place in which the language is used, will portray success.

Consequently, the ESL curriculum at the San José School does not develop oral proficiency. It is really hard to have students using the language if they have been taught through a content-based instruction, students with limited English proficiency have been often pulled out or regular classes and taught ESL until they developed an intermediate level of conversational proficiency.³⁰

Comentario [ACH4]: Very good, but source that provides support for your argument?

In other words, it is possible to suggest that there is not even a little analysis of why this lack of proficiency existed in certain students. The student's deficiencies are difficult to be analyzed when the priority of learning a second language is the management of content. For example, at the San José School, it is possible to notice that most of the students have an important quantity of knowledge about diverse words. But, this knowledge does not allow them to complete language structures to communicate opinions or ideas. It is possible to say most of students, because the objective to sixth grade students is precisely communication in the second language. But, it is clearly that the curriculum has not achieved this goal.

It is important to mention that proficiency plays an important role when learning a second language because students need to learn words and sentences which can be produced by them spontaneously in a determined context, informal or formal. There is a relevant difference of acquisition of language when children learn vocabulary, but they do not know when and where to use it.

Another visible issue at the San José School curriculum is that the curriculum used at the San José School does not reflect learner diversity, and the diverse learning styles in which they can learn the language. This problem is really a deficiency because this existing curriculum does not take into account the learner experiences and social origins. In fact, learners have widely varying backgrounds that should be analyzed when establishing the goals of the process.

Nowadays, any school, rural-public or urban-public, must consider in its curriculum that there is always the challenge to teach children because all are different and require specific methods and styles to learn. The problem at San José School is that curriculum is not making lessons understandable for children and students are not involved in the process which means having them participating actively in the learning experiences. Children learn in different ways and a content-based curriculum does not give children an opportunity to do so.

Comentario [ACH5]: When did we get to talking about young children? You were talking about ESL in general. You need a transition before this concept.

Comentario [ACH6]: What does it mean to have children be involved in the lesson?

According to Howard Gardner, in his theory Multiple Intelligences, children may have different proclivities and that is why teachers should create learning environments in which all kinds of students can excel. Teachers has to be aware of the variability of abilities found in a classroom. This theory explains that there are several kinds of smarts rather than just one.³¹

Based on Gardner's theory, some examples of learner diversity at the San José School were selected. Some specific examples are the following.

³⁰ Freeman, Yvonne., & David Freeman. (1998). ESL/EFL Teaching Principles for success. Chicago: Heinemann.

³¹ Kauchak, Donald. , & Paul Eggen. (1998). Learning and Teaching: Research-Based Methods. Florida: Allyn and Bacon.

- In a classroom ,you may find children with a different culture, such as Nicaraguan students.
- In a classroom, it is possible to find children belonging to different social status which is a great influence in the learning process of any child. For example, most of the students attending at the school belong to the rural area. But, some other students come from urban areas closely located from the school.
- In a classroom, most students prefer teamwork. But, it is possible to find children who like to work alone. This is what Gardner has called intrapersonal intelligence.
- In a classroom, there is a variability of ages. For example, at the fifth grades, there are students among the 11 years old and the 14 years old. This means that they have to be taught according to their present necessities. For instance, children at the age of 11 may find attractive to draw the body parts. While, children at the age of 14, may find it boring and unattractive.

Based on Howard Gardner’s theory and the examples found at the San José School, it is relevant to mention that teacher qualities are not a part of curricular concerns. It is also essential to specify that the meaning of learning styles is really important in order to understand why curriculum must contemplate in its objectives, and goals that all students in the school are different, socially and cognitively.

Comentario [ACH7]: Source?

The importance of explaining what learning styles are, is really interesting because this is key in achieving favorable student outcomes from teaching methods, assessment and resources materials chosen by their ESL teachers who want to have their students living unforgettable learning experiences which will allow them apply their knowledge in society in order to achieve personal goals and satisfaction.

Basically, learning styles are at the root of many problems in the teaching process because most of teachers do not know how to combine the different dispositions their students have in order to learn.³² Definitely, curriculum and the learning process are affected if this one does not take into account that learning styles influence the way in which teachers should choose strategies, classroom activities and assessment. When there is a mismatch between the curriculum and the learning styles of students, there will be effects on the efficiency and effectiveness of the learning process.

Comentario [ACH8]: What author? You cannot make reference to him, but rather just document the source.

Comentario [ACH9]: You are talking about curriculum? How does curriculum affect the learning process?

Comentario [ACH10]: The example you just gave is not a curricular problem.

Basically, a learning style refers to the preference people have in order to learn something, it is a matter of predisposition to learn a subject. But, not all the time do people have the same preference. For instance, a person who prefers to learn inductively (discovering rules from data) most of time, sometimes need to learn deductively (learn rules first, then apply them), depending on the material to be learned, time available, or other circumstances.³³

Finally, it is important to mention that the ESL curriculum at the San José School is not learner-centered because teachers are the persons who participate and choose the teaching activities most of time. Children are expected to learn content without taking

³² Ehrman, Madeline E. (1996). Understanding Second Language Learning Difficulties. Ohio: SAGE Publications.

³³Ehrman, Madeline E. (1996). Understanding Second Language Learning Difficulties. Ohio: SAGE Publications.

into consideration their prior knowledge which influence learning. Therefore, children at the San José School do not have the necessity to think about their own learning strategies because they are accustomed to follow instructions.

It is necessary to mention that children must be the most important point or center within the curriculum, even taking into consideration their different learning styles. The most relevant aspects about children are their physical, intellectual, social and emotional domains because all children grow up differently.

Comentario [ACH11]: When planning what? How did planning get into the picture? Planning is part of didactics or teaching methods.

Comentario [ACH12]: The domains or the children?

It is relevant to mention that, some time ago, the educative community believed firmly that the teacher should be at the heart of the instructional process. He or she was considered the person who could establish the right procedures to teach, the person who embodied all virtues to teach, despite the children's opinions or feedback. That is why, schools were the direct instruments of a community in order to become into an educate person. The importance of mentioning the role of teachers is because this one cannot be more important than students' role in the curriculum, and if before it was, nowadays research has claimed that any learning process should take into account the students' development and motivation in order to be successful.

Comentario [ACH13]: You must explain further.

(Kauchak, page 11)

Thus, the main objective of curriculum is to have children as the center of every plan (child-centered) because a competent curriculum encourages children to learn by doing through experimentation, exploration, and discovery, building a positive self image.

Also, when thinking about curriculum, we should take into account theories like that one presented by Piaget³⁴, which talks about the stages in which children learn according to their ages. The main reason is that San José School curriculum should not only be prepared to perceive learning styles, but also the children's age in order to help them move to the next stage of the learning process

A good question at this moment, would be if there are some rules to follow up in order to achieve the adequate curriculum or that framework that suggests what children are to learn and how teachers should teach that, using important and unique media.

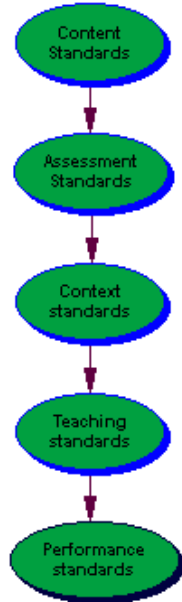
Base on that question, nowadays it is possible to find English teaching objectives that assure that children learn English as they learned their mother tongue. For example, the ESL Association (English as a Second Language), offers diverse objectives to teach English in the basic skills, listening, reading, writing and speaking.

Comentario [ACH14]: The standards are not methods, they are objectives.

Until some time ago, teachers talked about content standards as the definition of curriculum. Currently, they talk about different types of standards such as performance standards, which define what a student should do; content standards, that describe the declarative knowledge students have to know; teaching standards, which outline the skills teachers need to provide to learning; and assessment standards, which identify the essential criteria that will determine the abilities of the students.

³⁴ Piaget believed firmly in that children act different ways according to their age. He believed that these learning stages could be easier by providing activities that engage learners and using materials that involved levels of motor and mental operations. <http://www.indiana.edu/~educp540//piagsc.html>.

Comentario [ACH15]: Where did you take this from? It must be footnoted.



The Meaning of Teaching methods: Learning and teaching

Different domains related to teaching English as a second language have been discussed. It is clear that some of the consequences of those problems are now the causes of other issues in pedagogy at public schools. The San José School clearly reflects these problems.

It is relevant, to mention that teaching methods cover many aspects and that it is somewhat difficult to define a good teaching method because every teacher and student is a world of his or her own; many suggestions and changes have given contributions to this field. That is why, each teacher uses diverse techniques, terminology and methods to teach.

Here it is important to mention that some techniques used by some teachers are not appropriate because, although each teacher has the right to choose methods, not all are correct. Due to this reason, the ESL Association offers a set of techniques and methods which assure children learning. Some of the recommendations are journals, researches, problem solving, cooperative work and others.³⁶ The following information is based on the issues found at the San José School related to teaching methods appropriate use. It is important to mention that the ESL Association gives a set of useful methods. But, these methods are specifically used to specific purposes and that is why teachers must set first the goals they want to reach and then, set the methods

³⁶ Freeman, Yvonne., & David Freeman. (1998). ESL/EFL Teaching. Principle for Success. Chicago: Heinemann.

through which they will do it. Regarding this information, the bad application of a method could cause an appropriate acquisition of the language.³⁷

- **Teaching methods are not being utilized appropriately to teach English as a second language at the San José School.**

Assuredly, education is a challenging field which determines the quality of the citizens in our society. But, the creation of a society conformed by creative and solving problem citizens involves many risks and time, together with dedication and effort. Different questions appear when deciding which is the best teaching practice, questions such as: How should one teach? How should one consider the needs of the students at the same time basic skills integration is being accomplished? are very common in the educational field.

Comentario [ACH16]: Which goal?

Comentario [ACH17]: Teaching is an adjective and you need a noun here.

An effective teaching strategy combines the best of human relations, intuition, sound judgment, knowledge of subject matter, and knowledge of how people learn, all in one simultaneous act. This task of finding an effective strategy, is extremely complex, and one of the factors making it particularly difficult has been the lack of a clear and documented body of knowledge on which to base professional decisions.³⁸

Comentario [ACH18]: Which task?

Basically, teaching methods comprise a combination of important details such as research, motivation, right methods, diversity of learners, use of technology, pedagogical content knowledge, strategies, learning styles, different domains (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor), context, culture, theories, and language. But, the main question is how to combine all these aspects into a lesson plan that will be applied for children, each one with distinct types of intelligences.

English teachers must have a diversity of characteristics and wisdom to know which is the best perspective to allow students to exercise their critical thinking regarding their own knowledge. When we talk about English teaching, it is necessary to keep in mind that the best teaching practices actively involve students in learning because they have to acquire proficiency, which means obtaining an appropriate level of communication in the speaking context depending on the situations, people and topics included.³⁹

According to Kauchak and Eggen, English teachers have to present characteristics such as:

- neatness
- sense of humor
- cognitive flexibility
- understanding of subject matter

The teachers' role and participation will help produce students' outcomes because teachers make a difference. For example, if a teacher comes to a classroom to explain "The Days of the Week", and she just teaches the names without knowing or calling for prior knowledge, she is not demonstrating adequate teaching skills.

Comentario [ACH19]: This comment does not make sense. You cannot give student outcomes personality.

³⁷ See the suggested methods by the ESL Association at: www.tesol.org/assoc/k12standards/it02html

³⁸ Kauchak, Donald., & Paul Eggen. (1998). Learning and Teaching: Research-Based Methods. Florida: Allyn and Bacon.

³⁹ Term used by Omaggio to explain a high quality of English teaching. / Omaggio Hadley, Alice. (1993). Teaching Language in Context. Massachusetts: Heinien and Heinien.

Furthermore, if she teaches according to her perspective forgetting the students' one, it will not probably take the students to acquire the knowledge as a useful tool or experience. It does not mean that there is a cause an effect, but a useful learning process will take students to use knowledge in daily life, not as something that was learned because a teacher taught it, but rather, as something that children learned by own experiences.

For a long time, contributions to teaching methods have changed teaching patterns in the English field. First, the Grammar translation Method or the Direct Method which according to Jack Richards and Theodore Rodgers, was the preferred method because of its goal of learning a language in order to read its literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that resulted from foreign language study; even when this study was through a detailed analysis of its grammar rules.⁴⁰ Then, constructivism appeared to be the method whose process is based on learning by doing. Nowadays, these approaches, depend on those strategies used by teachers and their belief about the existence of a "correct method" or the application of the best techniques to achieve a successful method. What is important when selecting a method, is to take into account that one method to teach is not the most appropriate because a combination of diverse methods is necessary all time.

Thus, based on the concept of teaching methods, the following is a discussion about some problems at San José school, taking into consideration the fact that students attending the school are different and belong to diverse backgrounds.

The teaching methods used at the San José School are not being properly used because these methods reflect a strong role of traditional techniques. As it was said before, methods have been changing during time thanks to the research done by theorist such as Skinner, Wenger, Piaget and Bruner.

These methods are part of the curricular guide offered by the Ministry of Education and are based on theories such as the Schemata Theory, even when most of the recommended methods show a clear preference for traditional ways. These methods are useful. But, the problem is that these teaching methods are being wrongly applied according to the context and necessities of the students attending the San José School.

On the other hand, teachers who were at the school before, used to apply a single method which was focused on repetition and memorization, forgetting students motivation and diversity. Thus, nowadays, students are familiar with that type of teaching and they do not need a variation of teaching methods which help current teachers to follow similar patterns, even when these teachers have knowledge about the modern teaching methods.

It is possible to say the main issue at this school referring to teaching methods, is that these methods do not help students to get linguistical competence that is the main objective of learning a second language in the current productive areas of the country. At the same time, these methods focused on content and acquisition of words transmitted by the teachers, make students get bored and tired faster and sometimes they consider English is not important in life.

Comentario [ACH20]: Please look up more appropriate term.

Comentario [ACH21]: Which goals?

Comentario [ACH22]: Is there such a concept as the correct method?

Comentario [ACH23]: You still have not presented a clear assessment of your student population.

⁴⁰ Richards, Jack., & Theodore Rodgers (1999). Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. USA: Cambridge UP.

Solving this inappropriate use of teaching methods, becomes nowadays an important challenge for public education. But, the most interesting element of this situation is that there exist solutions broad in scope that can be applied at the San José School.

The Meaning of Assessment in the English language acquisition

Assessment is probably one of the most useful tools to analyze what are students acquiring and how much they can use in context. For English teaching, evaluation is real important because this is the tangible proof of the proficiency level students can have. The important matter here is to evaluate students' abilities in second language acquisition, but this way of assessment has to be done according to decisions about the individual characteristics between students.

The meaning of assessment is to give students the chance to know what they know and to discover why they know it. Assessment has to be divided into the four basic skills: teachers must assess their students in writing, reading, speaking and listening.

- **Assessment in Second Language**

According to Genesee and Upshur, assessment involves many different kinds of decisions, decisions about the placement of individual students in particular streams, levels, or courses of instruction; about ongoing instruction⁴¹; about planning new units of instruction and revising units that have been used before; about textbooks or other materials; about student homework; about instructional objectives and plans; and about many other aspects of teaching and learning.⁴²

In other words, assessment does not finish with grading students and deciding whether they should pass or fail a course. If we talk about English language, decisions are doubly important because English teachers should not evaluate the fluency of language through a test that may be surrounded by many situations such as motivation, context, atmosphere, time, people and advantages, positive or negative. That is why, assessment relies on different aspects or factors such as: (Genesee Fred and Upshur John A. Classroom Based Evaluation in Second Language Education. Cambridge University press.1999.)

- Student achievement
- Student behavior in class
- Their attitudes toward school or themselves
- Their goals and needs concerning the outcomes of second language learning
- Their work habits, learning styles and strategies.

Consequently, the assessment criteria must tell teachers about student learning and the effectiveness of instruction. That is why, sometimes, tests are relatively limited because they can only tell teachers about certain aspects of student's achievement. This kind of evaluation does not reflect much about the other factors that are often relevant in second language evaluation.

Comentario [ACH24]: Vague language. What do you mean exactly?

Comentario [ACH25]: I don't think this is what you want to say, because it is important how we assess.

⁴¹ Genesee, Fred., & John Upshur. (1999). Classroom Based Evaluation in Second Language Education. USA: Cambridge UP.

⁴² Genesee, Fred., & John Upshur. (1999). Classroom Based Evaluation in Second Language Education. USA: Cambridge UP.

Evaluation can vary its form: English teachers at public schools cannot pretend that a test, oral or written, is a unique way of knowing if their students are learning English. Precisely, assessment in the classroom means knowing when, how, and what will be evaluated. Teachers' decisions are important because the main objective of assessment is making choices that will improve second language teaching and enhance second language learning.

Comentario [ACH26]: Which teachers are you referring to?

Three essential components of evaluation are information, interpretation and decision-making. It is important to distinguish among these three because information about teaching and learning is rarely meaningful by itself; it becomes meaningful when it is interpreted ; and meaningful interpretations are needed in order to decide what actions to take or what changes to make to instruction.⁴³

Comentario [ACH27]: Is this in your own words? Watch out for plagiarism.

Thus, assessment of a second language such as English, should allow teachers to know what students can interpret and apply from information, and evaluation does not mean doing a test, as those traditional ones (multiple-choice tests), which only can reflect circumstances in which students learn or practice the information for the test.

For example, if a teacher considers that he can perfectly know what his instruction has caused in student's learning through a test, it is completely wrong because teachers do not know if this student really knows, or if he has a pleasant atmosphere to study, or if this student really does not know. It is important to take into account many aspects exposed here and forget that a traditional test is the only means of evaluation.

These statements mentioned before, are precisely, the representation of the way in which students are assessed at the San José School. Based on the explanation offered above about the real and unreal assessment in the English learning process; it is possible to state that the San José School presents an assessment issue due to the absence of creative and modern ways of measuring what students learn and how they learn.

The assessment of students at the fourth, fifth and sixth grade of the school is totally summative⁴⁴ because their knowledge about the language is typified by written tests. The assessment at the San José School is based on one oral test, one written test, one extra class work, concept and daily work at the classroom. But, the main indicators of understanding and competence in the students are the oral and written tests.

As mentioned before, this is not the best way to say how much students have learned and apply in a conversation in context. It means, English teachers at the school are omitting real ways of assessment such as research and portfolios that could give a real result of the students language acquisition.

An ideal question here would be to ask why this is a problem at the San José School. Some answer were given above through the explanation of real assessment and inappropriate assessment. But, to complete that answer it is essential to mention that circumstances such as customs and beliefs are the root of the issue. The Ministry of Education has settled a pattern of assessment of the language and even when English

⁴³ Ur, Penny. (2000). A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory. (6th ed). United Kingdom: Cambridge.

⁴⁴ There is a sample of a written test made for fourth grade students at the San José School in the annexes part.

teachers know the consequences of the use of certain patterns, summative ones; they have to follow them by habit.

Basically, the assessment situation at the San José School reflects the life of many public schools. Children are learning English to face the emerging society. But, most of time their abilities are vanished by a summative grade that depends on different situations such as luck, motivation, context, ethnicity and time. Finally, it is necessary to say that English teachers at the school really do not know their students proficiency level and knowledge.

The Meaning of Integration of Material Resources: Combining different strategies and methods

It has been said that activities such as the integration of material resources are used to allow students to create and solve problems through critical thinking and the application of skills they have been learning.

- **Integration of materials resources in teaching**

Nowadays, we live in a constant changing world in which new requirements are asked to be updated in society. As society changes, schools are really important in any culture. For a long time, research has been looking for the best ways, materials and techniques to improve, our or any, educative system. Nowadays, it is possible to find schools and instructors using high technology to teach and produce in this form a narrow relationship among children and the world.

According to M.D Roblyer, material resources or technology, as it is popularly called nowadays, are the heart of education and when talking about materials, people must think about computers, CD roms, multimedia, books, newspapers, articles, bulletin boards, posters, crayons, clay, wood, markers, film stripes, maps, pictures, pencils, and other things which are going to help teachers achieve their goals.⁴⁵

Certainly, that little list of materials may help teachers, in this case English teachers, to facilitate the process of learning a second language for all students. The reason is that if teachers combine the foreign language with the integration of materials, will develop a significant cognitive process, which will allow children to have an easier acquisition of the second language.

It is true that people consider materials like technology because ,as it was said before, nowadays everything is related to technology and technological innovations. But, it is important to say that modern tools and better techniques are only a better way of going on with its application in one more area and because of that, we cannot leave books and other tools apart because they can also help teachers to find a useful teaching process, rather than a product.

It is clear that the main objective of using materials during English teaching, will motivate students to use the language in context; applying psychomotor, metacognitive and affective domains. Some of the main reasons to integrate materials in the classroom are:

⁴⁵ Roblyer, M.D., & Jack Edwards. (2000) Use and Design of Instructional Technology: Integrating Educational Technology into Teaching. USA: Prentice Hall.

Comentario [ACH28]: Unclear statement. Please clarify and rephrase.

Comentario [ACH29]: When, where, exactly

Comentario [ACH30]: Watch this common mistake!

Comentario [ACH31]: Who is "both"?

Comentario [ACH32]: Overgeneralization. Watch your evidence. Pick specific examples and details.

- ✓ To facilitate the English learning process in classrooms.
- ✓ To catch students' attention easier and in dynamic way.
- ✓ To help students visualize and use interactive features.
- ✓ To encourage children to enjoy of learning English and like this, to spend more time learning.
- ✓ To help children learn by doing because definitely humans learn more when they have been responsible of creating the process.⁴⁶
- ✓ To make children know they have participation and control over learning because this wisdom they are acquiring is been developed by themselves and their abilities.
- ✓ To help students to break down barriers because through technology, they have sources of endless information.
- ✓ According to Kosma, materials (visual media) seem to have unique instructional capabilities for topics that involve social situations or problem solving because they provide powerful visual means of representing the main objective of the topic.⁴⁷
- ✓ Material resources, in English, help avoid traditional methods, verbatim and memorization of the language.
- ✓ Material resources make learning easier for all type of proclivities or intelligences.⁴⁸
- ✓ Material resources help students stimulate those abilities that they have, but have not developed.

On the other hand, there are different situations that English teachers can manage if they use the correct materials, despite the method. It could be constructivism, behaviorism, conductism, or a combination of them. The use of resources makes a difference in the process, teachers decide the management of them. But, undoubtedly, these tools such as books, clay, worksheets, color pencils, color books, will result in students with an open mind, and critical thinking, analytical, complex and creative ways of being.

Beyond all this, more than mentioning the list of materials presented up there, it is also need to have the creativity to achieve and be sure of producing all kinds of student outcomes .

Comentario [ACH33]: Where is there a list of materials?

The Meaning of Human Resources Management

Learning a second language such as English, requires of a productive relationship between the English learning process and the administrative domain applied in these instructional centers, such as San José School. As an integral part of the learning process, the human resources management at the San José School, sets important guidelines that are real important to obtain success when teaching children.

Certainly, English is becoming an important tool in developing students' critical thinking because they need to evaluate why it is necessary to learn it at school. At the same time, regular teachers are also investigating the importance of English within the cognitive process students need to go through. All of these concerns can be clarified if the educational center contemplates human resources management one of the most important bases of their instruction.

⁴⁶ Driscoll, Marcy P. (2000). Psychology of learning for instruction. USA : Allyn and Bacon.

⁴⁷ Information offered in a university course called Use and Design of Instructional Technology.

⁴⁸ <http://www.thirteen.org/wnetschool/concept2class/month1/>

The importance of human resources management is that it allows schools to portray integration, organization, control, planning and solidarity. At the same time, the school assures to society that children involved in the process are being guided by teachers who are the adequate components students need to go to a cognitive learning process.

- **Human resources management meaning**

Management focused on human resources and the correct application of it within the curriculum

Basically, human resources management refers to the placement of correct guidelines at the school, which indicate how the staff, in this case the English staff, must be considered into the English teaching process and which is the role that teachers have to follow to propitiate real learning experiences to their students. Nowadays, the administrative area is in charge of carrying out those activities and recommendations which strengthen the acquisition of English to allow students to become integral future thinkers through the help of their teachers.

As a matter of fact, curriculum management and that of human resources constitute a special and serious engagement for education⁴⁹. Any educative institution must offer its teachers the opportunity to create by themselves innovative teaching processes to involve students, and must allow teachers to improve their teaching qualities, abilities, knowledge and training.

As a result, we can say that the main objective of an efficient management of the curriculum and human resources is to combine them to contribute to a learning process that can take the school to manage, control and create an excellent atmosphere for students. A skilled administration of these areas establishes objectives such as:⁵⁰

- * **Social Objectives:** The management of human resources has to contribute positively to all necessities and demands of our society, and its citizens. Furthermore, for any school, this has to be relevant because parents and students need to assure a prominent future through a bilingual education, and also teachers need to accomplish through teaching a prominent social development.
- * **Organization Objectives:** These objectives of organization within the school, mean, that each part there must be responsible of a global coordination to achieve the current expectations of the bilingual education. The school has to coordinate the management of the curriculum together with the human resources area. For instance, the superior should support the existence of bilingual activities at the school, such as dramatizations⁵¹, and inform to the rest of the staff about the importance of these activities to the learning process of children studying English.

⁴⁹ Palma, Katty. (1998). "Adecuaciones Recursos Humanos" Introducción al currículo: El desafío de la administración del personal. Costa Rica.

⁵⁰ Palma, Katty. (1998). "Adecuaciones Recursos Humanos" Introducción al currículo: El desafío de la administración del personal. Costa Rica.

⁵¹ Marcy Driscoll, in her book, chapter 11, suggests the application of relevant learning environments to enhance students' skills to use the language. / Driscoll, Marcy P. (2000). Psychology of Learning for Instruction. USA: Allyn and Bacon.

- * **Functional Objectives:** Functional objectives refer to the correct management of human resources to keep them adequately covering all necessities of the school as an institution created according to specific purposes, such as forming students with higher order thinking skills or forming students with social values. For one thing, the English staff has to be functional to the school, in the sense, that teachers have to help the institution to achieve the goals of its bilingual program.
- * **Personal Objectives:** An adequate management of human resources in the school may allow each teacher in the school to achieve his or her personal goals. The school has to contribute and support teachers' personal projects to achieve its general objectives. It is important to say that when teachers, as members of the Institution, do not accomplish their goals, motivation decreases, and the global performance of the center can be affected. For instance, the school has to offer current training for English teachers in order to improve their knowledge, in this way, teachers innovative their professional aspirations.

- **Essential activities of management in the human resources area**

To make the meaning of human resources management clearer, it is necessary to say that there are some activities which are a relevant part of this process. For example, there must be services for teachers, a valuable selection of staff, evaluation, motivation, compensation and finally the most important of all, there must be staff development: continuous training of those teachers working in the school.

The importance of the community members in the English learning process

When the integrate curriculum was explained, there were important aspects and points that had to be seriously taken into account in order to offer to students a cognitive process to learn a second language. Within these aspects, it is possible to find the importance of the members of the community at the school as generators of meaningful-learning processes. It is necessary to analyze which is the role they have in learning in order to understand how they can help children to progress.

The community members are all those persons who perceive the results of the teaching process children are receiving, and also those persons who help children acquire the language through motivation, information, opportunities and support. In other words, the community members are not only receptors of results, but also transmitters of knowledge.

Definitely, the role of the community members within the English learning process is eminent because they represent the context and conditions in which children will use the language, and also because improve or decrease the acquisition of the language. For instance, a child may learn important information about the English language, but if he or she is not motivated by the persons in his or her context, she or he will not appreciate that acquired knowledge.

Which is the role of community members in the English learning process?

Members in the community and family are considered important elements within the English learning process and teaching processes because they help children daily. For instance, motivating them to discover a new language, helping them to make researches about the language, explaining to children how important is to have a

bilingual education, supporting children achievements in the learning process, allowing children to include in the real context what they learn from the language, and so on.

In other words, they facilitate, motivate or spoil the process. One of the main reason is that community members perform or establish the socio-cultural context in which students will develop their cognitive abilities, together with aspects such as objectives, teachers, contents, evaluation, pedagogical strategies, resources and others.

According to Cecilia Motta Di Mare, parents, together with teachers, students, and other members of the community, are transmitters of culture, context, motivation, experiences, and upbringing. These persons are involved in the process to stimulate and exercise students' mind.⁵²

This combination between the school, family and community is real important, but generally, this combination does not reflect the importance of its role, as it should be, for many persons. One of the main problems is that parents are seen as those people who supply material resources to the school. This is a great error because the real role of parents is to be responsible persons that help their children to perform a correct role in the acquisition of English.

In other words, parents may turn into generators-elements of learning experiences, and teachers have to stimulate them to take part in scholarly activities, cooperating with the development of activities that they manage and that must be incorporated into that list of childhood experiences. Also, community members have to accomplish to support the English language acquisition of the students with these requirements mentioned about parents' duties. It means, community members also have to be generators of learning experiences.

Basically, these social actors will cooperate with the necessities and expectations of themselves, the community, the school and family. Probably, students will make a better effort to accomplish all social demands of the current context in which they live their learning experiences. Thus, there has to be a constant interaction between the members or elements of the curriculum.

It is important to say that, in order to produce an adequate learning process, it is need to have good relationships between: students, teachers, and parents. These relationships must show support, collaboration, respect and stimulus.

San José School: English Language Acquisition

An analysis of the English Language Acquisition problems at the San José School

After a general explanation of the basic elements included in the English language acquisition, whose purpose was to clarify which is the role and utility of each one when children need to learn a second language, it is important to mention some of the most popular problems affecting the acquisition of English at a public school, specifically at the San José School.

⁵² SIMED. (1996). Algunas Visiones sobre la Relación Escuela, Familia y Comunidad. San José: Editorama. pp. 27-30

Each explanation, offering a suggested application of the components of the English acquisition during the learning process, specifies the role of these components in the schools, and now, using the San José School as a true reflection of the problems found in our educative system, it will be possible to identify some of the causes and consequences of an inadequate application of these elements during the children's learning process.

Main Issues

Curriculum

Identifying the problems at San José School in terms of curriculum

The wrong application of the curriculum goals in English teaching due to the lack of content to learn, lack of processes to be followed and lack of suggestions for teachers to apply in the learning context

According to Orrill, the educative system of the United States had been taken to a deeply dangerous situation because its labor force was not been prepared to solve problems and compete on a global level. The only solution that would save the economy of the country, was to arrive at a national strategy for resurgence that could reach every school in the country.⁵³

When this change happened in America, during the Charlottesville meeting⁵⁴, the educative system began to give results, and the context was improved. Nowadays, it is possible to say that the system is what Americans were looking for long time ago.

The comparison is made to establish that, in these days, the English teaching process in Costa Rican public schools, is taking children in the wrong direction and that a change is urgently needed in order to improve the economy and future of the country. Costa Rican public education is being now, or has been being, what American education was before. At the San José School, the system specially focused on guidelines that were settled by the Ministry of Education in its teaching methods guide, and there is not a vision or mission that can determine how to use content, which process has to be followed and what teachers can do to help students. Teachers have to decide how to apply and choose those elements improving the English curriculum, or maybe worse, persons ignoring the purposes of English teaching decide most of time how to apply curriculum.

From this situation in the curriculum of the San José School it is possible to infer that there is total absence of an English curriculum to guide teachers. The reason for this affirmation is that the only guide related to the goals and attitudes children are supposed to develop through English teaching, is the one from the Ministry of Education, and such a guide does not contemplate children as the actors of constructive knowledge, as it was explained in the introduction to the analysis of this school.

According to David Vale, in his book called " Teaching Children English" , he suggest that the English curriculum involves children in the construction of it as the builder

⁵³ Cobb, Nina. (Ed.). The Future of Education: Perspectives on National Standards in America. (Orrill. Robert, Trans.). USA.

⁵⁴ This meeting was made during 1989 in Charlottesville, Virginia. For the first time in history, the governors and the President of the United States came together to establish national goals in education.

builds the house. He says that children have to be encouraged to build part of a curriculum.⁵⁵

Based on the affirmation made by David Vale, it is possible to say that children are builders of curriculum because they are builders of the development of it, since the moment in which they know the objectives and contents of the units through which English is learnt. Children may help teachers to develop curriculum when they participate being creative and spontaneous including their intellectual skills in the learning-teaching process in order to achieve the established objectives.

Children learn better when they are closed to the environment in which the contents are developed. Some examples indicating that children are helpers in the development of curriculum are the following:

1. Students at fifth at the San José School are studying the natural beauties topic. The school is surrounded by natural beauties. So, if a child suggests that it would be better to learn the topic out of the classroom in order to appreciate them, it is necessary to think about the suggestion taking into consideration details and the necessary to do it. In this way, the child is helping to develop curriculum.
2. Students at fourth grade at the San José School are studying the similarities and differences among dollars and colones. The method include in the curriculum indicates that children must do the coins and bills of both countries, Costa Rica and United States, in order to appreciate them. Thus, children help to develop curriculum in the moment in which they give imagination, spontaneity and creativity to the creation of the bills and coins
3. The last unit of sixth grade is referred to the outer space⁵⁶. The topic is focused on reading and writing what makes it kind of boring and unattractive. Thus, students at sixth grade are builders of the development of curriculum since the moment they collaborate with ideas, activities, dialogues and performances to study the topic from different methods.

Consequently, referring to curriculum, it is possible to find content problems because the teaching guide offers wide lists of content according to the grades students have to go through during the academic years. However, there is not a curricular parameter to indicate how much of it has be learned according to the levels of English acquisition. Due to this lack of curricular parameters, teachers direct teaching to a based-content approach in which children learn and learn more words without making connections among them in order to create short sentences.

Allen Queen, suggests in her book that the longer the educational model continues to be based upon past principles and values, the more limited success it will have.⁵⁷ Basically, English teaching at this school is based on old principles because, as it was said before, the only tool working as the curricular mission of the institution was published six years ago.

⁵⁵ Vale, David., & Anne Feunteun. (1999). Teaching Children English: A training course for teachers of English to children. USA: Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁶ Ministerio de Educación Pública. (2000). Programas de Lenguas Extranjeras para el desarrollo: Guía Didáctica. San José: MEP. pp. 8-9

⁵⁷ Queen, .Allen J. (1999). Curriculum Practice in the Elementary and Middle School. USA: Prentice Hall.

Innovative changes, as the current activity-based approach, which says that children do not normally learn language making structures of six new words at the same time because they are only able to learn language as part of a whole learning experience, are totally ignored.⁵⁸

Unfortunately, content in the school is being imposed in language-based courses of study, where children are exposed only to small and predetermined chunks of language. The idea of encouraging children to acquire language through an activity-based curriculum is far away from reality.

The correct application of curriculum is also affected in terms of processes and context because of the way in which English lessons are distributed. This distribution consists of teaching English everyday during periods of 40 minutes. There are two groups of each level at the school and each group has one English lesson per day.

Teachers are supposed to achieve the main goals established by the Ministry of Education, including warm-ups, objectives, and evaluation in context, in only 40 minutes, which practically makes it hard for teachers to know more about the different type of students in the classroom and their social backgrounds, elements that are basic in the teaching process. In other words, the amount of time allotted not only makes it hard to accomplish with the established objectives, but also, diminish the possibilities of communication among the students and the teacher.

As a matter of fact, the lack of time per day for English instruction is taking teachers to only consider the main result the product, and not the process of instruction. Although these lessons are given day to day, it is not enough time per day because there is no integration of basic skills: listening, writing, reading and speaking. Thus, there is not an integrated curriculum at the San José School.

An integrated curriculum means that a curriculum should focus on the four areas mentioned before. For example, curriculum in writing skill development may contain distinct assumptions about the nature of language and language learning, and about the teaching of writing.⁵⁹

The goal of trying to teach conversation skills, mentioned in one of the objectives of the Ministry of Education, is considered impractical in view of the restricted time available for foreign language teaching in this school.

There are few opportunities to the students at the San José School to develop oral skills which indicate proficiency. Thus, the objective of acquiring conversation skills, established by the Ministry of Education have to be accomplish little by little what makes the learning process to be less successful of what it should be.

But, giving a English lesson per day do not help teachers to accomplish with this believe because most of time topics have to be studied quickly in short sessions. For example, analyze a lesson plan of 40 minutes to introduce the family members at the fourth grades.

⁵⁸Richards, Jack., & Theodore Rodgers (1999). Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. USA: Cambridge UP.

⁵⁹ Reid, Joy.M. (1993). Teaching ESL Writing. New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs.

A forty minutes lessons plan
Topic: The Family Members

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activities</u>
10 minutes	1. Prayer, greeting and review
15 minutes	2. An introduction and explanation of the names of family members
10 minutes	3. Application of only one basic skill to support the topic
5 minutes	4. A superficial evaluation of what students have understood and perceived.

The lesson ends and the teacher probably used only one basic skill and there were no applications of the psychomotor, affective and cognitive domains. The following class will allow teachers to make a short review, but the English guide or program indicates that new things about the family have to be learned that day. Basically, teachers do not have the opportunity to measure, in a tangible form, how successful was this first intervention students had with the topic.

In other words, topics are introduced quickly in order to conclude with what the English guide proposes. Although, there is not a guideline that indicates to teachers what they have to do day to day, it is important that the first impact with the topic can be real interesting and unforgettable for the students. Teachers can go back the following class to see or analyze in a deeper way what was taught. But, the first impact with the topic is real important to recall prior knowledge.

On the other hand, the main problem according to the type of curriculum exposed by great theorists such as Ausubel, Bruner, Chomsky and Piaget, is that teachers cannot have a real contact with student's background, interests, abilities, and likes. Although during forty minutes the teacher can stay with the students day to day, they really do not know them and with this type of lesson plan, topics become the center of the process and the student's needs are left in second place.

As B.F. Skinner demonstrated in his theory, conductism has been criticized since the 50'ss when psychology claimed that the cognitive processes were being affected by this way of teaching.⁶⁰ Nowadays, conductism continues affecting and confusing teachers who opt to use it in their classrooms and leave apart the key word "cognitive process" which emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge and how to apply that knowledge in context. Taking into consideration all those important aspects of a satisfactory curriculum, San José School presents some deficiencies in its curriculum, producing in this way, some consequences which hinder student's cognitive abilities. Such as creativity, cooperation, critical thinking, solving problems, and so on.

Conductism is being used in these lessons because teachers need to use time practically in the same way (almost 10 minutes for each item to complete the plan). According to SIMED, conductism is all intended to create an operating behavior in

⁶⁰ Sequeira Alicia. (1997, May). Currículo como proceso cognitivo. UCR., 6-7.

students: there is no psychological analysis of behavior, only an operant conditioning of behaviors.⁶¹

Few times, teachers can take twenty minutes to be a partner to students in the learning process. It is necessary to apply some solutions in order to improve the kind of curriculum students are acquiring and the knowledge they are transferring to their mental development which will be used in different situations of life. The urgent improvement of an integrated curriculum is the tool to reach students' necessities.

Teaching Methods

Identifying the Learning and Teaching problems at San José School

The type of teaching methods used at the San José School do not focus students' cognitive necessities because they are based on a conductivist tendency

English teachers need to know how to contextualize the English programs for each level, according to the real cognitive necessities of the non-native speakers students. When referring to teaching methods, it is self evident for teachers that they have to look for the better ways in which they are going to teach and what details they should have in mind in order to produce an effective teaching and learning process.

Basically, English teaching at San José School presents problems because teachers who were part of the staff before, could not change or eliminated the myth that has been around the way education has to be provided at school. This myth suggests that children have to learn using deductive methods.

Teaching the content students are supposed to learn now is kind of difficult because that myth, deductive methods are better, is still in the mind of a great amount of teachers. Although current teachers are in favor of constructivism, theory which establishes the best methods to produce improved learning experiences for students; and they are improving their majors studying under a constructivist tendency, they cannot apply productive teaching methods within the plan, because they still have to eliminate the myth and fight against other type of obstacles, still when they are, until now, being academically prepare to teach under this tendency.

English teachers and their abilities to teach are important components of the process. The problem is that, because students are non-native speakers who have not had contact with teachers who taught English appropriately now students cannot learn what they are supposed to because they first have to learn what they did not learn before.

The main problem about teaching methods is that there has not been a combination of relevant details such as diversity, motivation and different domains, among others. The variation of methods to teach has been absent due to the prominent use of the common methods, such as memorization, which certainly facilitates the teaching process for teachers. But, damage the learning process of the students. This problem is the result of the use of a method in which the diversity of the students and their proclivities are ignored at all.

⁶¹ Suárez, Ana., & María Isabel Corella. (1997). Los Mapas Conceptuales: una técnica cognitiva para ayudar a al calidad de la educación. Costa Rica: UNESCO/SIMED.

The San José School, presents a “English instruction” which is mainly based on direct methods, such as working individually, memorization, translation, active participation of teachers, and others. These methods are applied in the school most of time, and due to this situation, it is important to mention that direct methods are those in which English teachers have to focus on basic contents in order to have students understanding what is required. Thus, teachers spend much time using a methodic instruction and less time analyzing the real necessities of students.

Also, there is a big disadvantage: because inadequate methods have been applied at the San José School, students have not learned what they should know and because of that, teachers cannot spend the required time in planning to evaluate the diverse types of students that can exist in a classroom. It is a big problem because, on one hand, teachers are teaching contents that had to be studied, for example, one year ago or two and not what students need to know at the indicated level. For instance, students at fifth grade at the San José, were supposed to know the prepositions since years ago. But, they did not know them until now. Thus, in order to study the topic “Giving addresses at my community”, it was necessary to teach them what were prepositions and them how to use them into addressees. And on the other hand, they do not have the opportunity of taking into consideration students’ background and the real context in which students are in order to acquire a second language.

Simultaneously, circumstances at this public school, sometimes make teachers forget how important it is to make the right choice in teaching methods or techniques. These circumstances are related to the teaching style created by teachers who did not have cognitive flexibility, understanding of the subject matter, or neatness to deal with children.

Jack Richards explains in his book, Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching, that there has to be an agreement between the objectives of the teaching course and the methods used. He suggests that differences among methods at the level of approach manifest themselves in the choice of different kinds of learning and teaching activities in the classroom.⁶²

Thus, at the San José School, methods to achieve a comfortable level of proficiency for the students are not included in the process. Concepts such as the Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding are ignored by the students because they do not know creative teaching methods in which their teachers can accomplish a role as the suggested by the Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding.⁶³ For instance, most of students at the San José School are not being helped by teachers to discover what they have learned until now. They do not know an English teacher who can help them to discover the knowledge that is inside them. Some examples of this situation are the following:

1. Students at fourth grade are supposed to learn ten numbers in English each month, that is what the curricular guide indicates. So, English teachers most of time follow this indication, and forget that children can go beyond ten numbers per month. So, here is where teachers should apply the indicate by the Zone of

⁶²Richards, Jack., & Theodore Rodgers. (1999). Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. USA: Cambridge UP.

⁶³ Carranza ,Rosa . (2001, August 24). Reflexiones sobre la necesidad de mejorar el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje. La Nación, pp. 8-10.

Proximal Development. If students can learn more than ten numbers, why not give them the opportunity.

2. Students at sixth grade are supposed to know the Costa Rican souvenirs, knowing their names is enough to indicate they speak English. Taking into consideration the teaching concept offered by Scaffolding, teachers should take students to a higher level, teaching them the different souvenirs, but also, asking them how these souvenirs are in order to have students speaking about the souvenirs and not just knowing their names.

From a general point of view, the issue with teaching methods is that they are not the most appropriate to foster a real learning process for the students at school. These methods do not require an active role of the students in the process and that is why learning English for them is kind of tedious or boring because there is a lack of modern or innovative methods.

Most of methods used still by current teachers are drills, repetition, memorization, individual work, questioning and answer. Clearly, these methods belong to old methods such as direct method, grammar method, and others.⁶⁴ Consequently, teaching methods that stimulate students' multiple intelligences, are avoided by teachers which means that not all children in the classroom are learning in cognitive, creative, critical, dynamic, and innovative ways. For instance, simple, teaching techniques such as story telling, brainstorming, journal writing, publishing, body movements, singing, calculations⁶⁵, among others, are not part of this school.

The variation in teaching methods is real important and necessary because according to Maureen Priestley, it is almost impossible to have a group in which all integrants are at the same academic or intellectual level. That is why, it is a great goal to work with diverse types of students, and at the same time achieve that all of them will obtain educative progress.⁶⁶

Assuredly, these problems mentioned before are affecting the students' learning process because English teachers do not have time to find out what their students are really learning and based on that acquisition of knowledge, establish the following correct goals to continue with the process without provoking an important lack of information in the students.

Besides, having had bad teachers in the past, now the students are being taught by persons who really have received an education and specialized courses to teach English; but there are eminent obstacles which do not allow these non-native speakers, each one with different ways of learning, to be considered within the plan because there is not an enough necessity or time to do it.

In simpler terms, the most relevant causes of deficiencies in teaching methods in this school are:

- Students are required to emphasize their learning process on what they should know and not on what they really know
- These students have been taught by other teachers with no proficiency in the English language or pedagogy

⁶⁴ Freeman, Diane. (1995). Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching. Oxford UP.

⁶⁵ Armstrong, Thomas. (1994). Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

⁶⁶ Priestley, Maureen. (1996). Técnicas y Estrategias del Pensamiento Crítico. México: Trillas.

- The period of time for each lesson is of forty minutes
- The contents for each month are so narrow and they are not contextualized in the student's reality
- Conductism has influenced most of their English learning experiences.

In addition, the teachers' perspective is taking the main place in the learning process because the main objective of teachers at this moment is to have students learning what they did not learn before, learning the new contents faster and giving a product of that hard process in which teachers do not have time or chance to ask or prepare a plan in which at least three types of intelligences are applied to achieve a goal.

Summarizing, this is a serious problem because students are not able to speak English according to their expectations; and because rules of skilled teaching methods are being broken: Learning styles, cognitive perspectives and pedagogical content knowledge.

An example is a lesson plan in which an English teacher has a priority: to follow the conductism paradigms to teach "content". There are 40 minutes to teach "The family members":

- 10 minutes are given to greet, pray and arrange the classroom.
- 10 minutes are given to mention the family members (but as students of fourth grade have not studied them, teachers need not ten minutes, but rather twenty).

There are just 10 more minutes, teachers' decision making is important. What happened? The lesson was not productive. The teacher had to spend time teaching what they were supposed to know and probably she spent the reminding time explaining the new things. Any person would think that it is okay, but many important aspects have been let out. That is why, it is really urgent to solve this problem in order to support as soon as possible students' needs according to their context.

Assessment in the English field

Identifying the problems in terms of assessment at the San José School

Traditional assessment or multiple-choice tests are the tools to measure the English language acquisition of the students at the San José School

As it has been proved, San José school is facing diverse problems in the English language acquisition as a second language. The causes of some problems are the consequences of others and so on. As the curriculum of the school is being affected, assessment is being affected as well.

Unquestionably, the assessment of the English learning process has been improved in those countries in which curriculum has been too. Researches have been investigating in order to seek different alternatives to assess more closely those instructional activities in the classroom. But, when the learning development is characterized by a curriculum in which children are not the main actors, educators are not concerned about the usefulness of traditional assessment.

In this case, the assessment of the English language teaching at the San José School is characterized by a traditional methodology that sometimes is wrongly applied because there is not a goal to be measured. In simpler words, the problem with assessment at the school is that this evaluation does not help teachers find out what a student knows or can do to show growth in the instruction.

Sometimes, it could appear that the known paper and pencil tests are quicker to be developed and easier to be checked. But, as it was said before, this kind of test do not show the progress of students. The reason is that traditional evaluation environments exhibit quantitative progresses and do not exhibit qualitative assessment. For example, it is possible to analyze a pencil and paper test done by non-native speakers at fourth grade level at school.⁶⁷

First at all, this test is totally written: the teacher is the only one who makes questions, in order for students to produce an answer that probably was learned by heart. Second, there is no student's interaction with the English language because the test does not require students knowing English for communication, but only to answer specific questions, and finally does not contemplate students differences, such as age, background, capacities, interests, abilities, acquired knowledge, ways of learning, likes, when learning.

On the other hand, this test is probably the main test to grade students' knowledge. But what can a teacher assess here? Listening, reading, writing or speaking... Probably, none of them or maybe only one of them.

According to J. Michael O'Malley, this kind of tests are those which reveal that current assessment procedures do not assess the full range of essential student outcomes, which makes it difficult to use the information gained for instructional planning. He emphasizes that these tests do not assess the full range of higher-order thinking skills considered important in today's curriculum.⁶⁸

Unfortunately, children learning English at the San José School are assessed only by these type of tests and an oral test per each three-month period they are at the school. In simpler words, children abilities are changed by discrete skills which do not contain authentic representations of classroom activities. There is an important lack of validity to ensure student's interests and motivation.

The counterpart to authentic ways of assessment, teachers who approve traditional assessment, may suggest that there is no other way to measure students' improvement. Certainly, the problem with children at the San José School is that they are losing contact with those skills with which they will need to function effectively in a future technological and complex society.

On the other hand, the issue with assessment at this School is that a real English learning process has to be assessed from four points of view: speaking, writing, reading and listening, and with the traditional assessment of this school, it is practically impossible.

⁶⁷ The test done for the students at the four grade is in the final part of this research called Annexes. The readership can find all details in there in order to understand the discussion exposed above.

⁶⁸ O'Malley, J. Michael., & Lorraine Valdez Pierce. (1996). Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers. USA: Addison- Wesley Publishing Company.

Penny Ur, in her book A Course in Language Teaching, comments precisely on all those traditional techniques used for multiple-choice tests. She explains how useless they are to give feedback on knowledge to the testees.⁶⁹ The explanation given by her about the application of these techniques and its purposes, works to affirm that at the San José School the assessment domain does not agree with the purposes of the bilingual education or the ESL programs.

First at all, this traditional assessment is not focused on the four basic skills. Each of them needs a different form to be really evaluated. Second, English acquisition by children do not contemplate their different learning styles .

In this school, all English tests show a traditional way to evaluate, probably by custom or because the curriculum of the school requires this kind of assessment. Certainly, real perceptions of English are being let apart, strategies for communication, and abilities for critical thinking. Certainly, there exists a total absence of real techniques which can show teachers that children are not inert beings that only react if they receive a stimulus.

It would be appropriated to make a critical study of the application of some traditional techniques used at the San José school to "evaluate" students abilities and outcomes. The following study is based on those techniques criticized by Penny Ur, in her book called A Course in Language Teaching.

<u>Techniques</u>	<u>Application</u>
1. Questions and Answers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used to test almost anything. Closed questions look for fewer answers. Thus there is no improvement higher order thinking skills.
2. True and False	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It does not test writing or speaking abilities, only listening or reading. Mostly used to test grammar content of a reading or listening passage.
3. Multiple Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It does not test in a real way because it offers optional answers that make it easy to mark. It is time-consuming, the process of comprehension may take more time and effort than the main point to be tested.
4. Matching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Items make students spend to much time in other aspects instead of the right answer.
5. Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Its validity may be suspect. It tests the ability of the student to

⁶⁹ Ur, Penny. (2000). A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory. USA: Cambridge University Press.

	transform grammatical structures, but students do not know the meaning of the target structure or how to use it in context.
6.Rewriting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is to test writing only and has the same sort of things as transformation.
7.Translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is neither recommended to teach nor to assess students knowledge of the target language. Translating a chunk of language, does not mean students speak English.
8. Essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is to assess only language forms, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and content. Oral communication skills are ignored.

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Evidently, a change to an authentic way of assessment is urgent at the San José School in order to decrease wrong ways of measuring the abilities of children when learning. Teachers need to know what and how much students have learned in order to monitor the effectiveness of their instruction. In this case, teachers at this School are evaluating quantity and not quality. Probably, conductism is being a big influence in this particular area of English teaching in the school.

Identifying the problems in terms of material resources

English teachers at the San José School have difficulties in accomplishing a cognitive English learning process as it is required nowadays due to a relevant lack of material resources

As this research is based on the English language acquisition at the San José Public School, it is necessary to explain what the role of a public school is in order to understand the economical situation of it. Essentially a rural-public school presents the following characteristics:⁷¹

- This kind of school is different from urban-public schools.⁷²
- It has been said that this type of school does not produce changes in the learning process and it is kind of routine.
- These schools are little and student's attendance is moderate.
- These schools take into account those programs made for urban-public schools which are totally different from their context. So these schools' real necessities are left apart.

⁷⁰ This information belongs to a critical study made by Penny Ur, also it contains personal opinions of their application

⁷¹ UNIR (1997, November). Informes varios del trabajo de UNIR: sobre desarrollo regional y rural. UNIR

⁷² Educational centers located in places like San José Capitol. Pérez, Humberto. (1981). Educación y Desarrollo. San José: SIMED

Taking into consideration these characteristics, it is possible to outline which are the material resources the San José School has and which are those resources that economically are out of its reach. But, certainly without the necessary resources materials, the quality of education at the San José School is really good. Thus, the description above about rural schools is focused only in the economical possibilities of these centers which are reflected at the San José School.

Through different researches, it is easy to appreciate that teaching materials are useful tools when learning a second language. San José school is suffering some deficiencies in this area because it counts on few materials to support the English language acquisition of its students.

English language in the school is taught basically through the books called "Costa Rican Children: Citizens of a Modern and Integrated World", given by the Ministry of Education in agreement with UNESCO. Besides this, there are not many other materials that can be used to develop cognitive skills such as listening, reading, writing and speaking.

The main reason for this problem is the economical situation faced by this Institution. This school is a rural public school which receives few donations for English teaching. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education does not provide other types of material resources for the School.

In addition, students attending this school do not come from a high social or economical status. Their families are normal or poor families which are fighting against illiteracy. In this sense, it is almost impossible to count with the economical support of these persons.

Probably, persons reading the results of this research may ask why material resources are a problem, when the teachers are competent. Nowadays, those type of questions exist because many persons who still believe teachers are the main transmitters of knowledge, are not aware of the importance media has in teaching.

The lack of materials at the San José School is a relevant issue because most teachers need to supplement to some extent, the particular needs of a class in order to contribute with language learning. Media is really an important component because children learning English here most of time do not have even a picture to visualize from another perspective the topic they are studying.

Due to the lack of materials such as overhead projectors, posters, pictures, books, computers, visuals (eye-catching), magazines, color pencils, among others, the learning process is more difficult for children here and sometimes it causes them frustration. Children are real active and they like to innovate because their imagination does not have limits, but if there is not motivation to develop these skills, it is really hard to catch their attention when they are in the classrooms.

From a learning style perspective, the lack of media at the San José School is important and needs a quick solution because the instructional materials, every one of them, are used to supply a determinate student's necessity.⁷³ Integrating media into

⁷³ Glover, Susanne, and Georgeann Grew. (1994). The Classroom Management Survival Kit. Good Apple.

teaching procedures is a bridge to really achieve individual differences among students and also to facilitate the acquisition of the known basic skill through which English language is acquired.

According to Dembo, from his educational psychology point of view, media is used to enhance memory and language development because all these different tools are used to prevent more effective learning in some students and less effective in others.⁷⁴

Fundamentally, San José School receives donations that are designated for general purposes at the School. For instance, there is just one tape recorder that is used by all personnel and for all subjects. So, if the music teacher is using it, English teachers cannot take advantage of this tool in their class to create and develop capacities in their children. The problem gets worse because there is not a budget to buy another one.

On the other hand, certain kinds of student's learning needs are being not covered because English teachers take advantage of their abilities to substitute the benefits of some materials at the classroom.

But, The Multiple Intelligences theory, whose author is Howard Gardner, perfectly indicates that children learn in different ways because they have diverse strengths and weaknesses. Because of that, each material resource can be used to develop a type of intelligence in order to help all children in the classroom understand the topic they are studying.⁷⁵

Some of the few materials used for teachers at the San José School are photocopies and they help children to color them and visualize in a better way what is being taught. This is necessary because, as it was exposed, the books given by the Ministry of Education sometimes are not adequate enough to fulfill students cognitive needs because most of them were created to urban-public school's contexts.

For example, most of examples refer to the life style of San José, such as malls, avenues, streets, buildings, restaurants and others. The problem is important because San José School is located in a rural context. It does not mean books have to be designed according to the place in which students study. But, the given examples should be less specific.

Another resource is the creation of maps to teach children to give addresses in English within their community; the workbook given by the MEP contains a map to teach this topic. But the map is of San José City and it does not have appropriate visual literacy, cultural effects, active visual engagement, focus attention, legibility, verbal elements and letter style.

For example, Heinich and his colleagues, made an excellent explanation of visual's creation in their book called Instructional Media and Technologies for Learning.⁷⁶ Thus,

⁷⁴ Dembo, Myron H. (1994). Applying Educational Psychology. (5th ed.). USA: Longman Publishing Group.

⁷⁵ Kauchak, Donald., & Paul Eggen. (1998). Learning and Teaching: Research-Based Methods. USA: Allyn and Bacon.

⁷⁶ Heinich, Molenda, Russell and Smaldino. (1999). Instructional Media and Technologies for Learning. USA: Merrill-Prentice Hall.

these deficiencies about visual designs, make the problem bigger because the only book to support in a visual form is limited of benefits.

Sometimes, it is necessary to use the environment of the community as a material resource to teach and it is great because some researches suggest to take students into real context to improve their learning experiences.

But, you are not sure if they understand and sometimes it could be dangerous to go out of the school with thirty-two students or more, all of them asking the teacher different things at the same time, while she/he is probably thinking how to manage them in a street in which cars go and go.

Consequently, this lack of media close to the twenty-first century can directly affect children learning English at this school because in a certain way, this issue becomes a great disadvantage to accomplish with the growing society requirements to work, such as solving problem skills or being inform about computers, and be updated.

Now, the lack of media can be just one more problem to be solved in the future, but it is important to take into account that children deserve an appropriated English language acquisition that can be as good as they believe it is and that can allow them to communicate with other speaking countries.

It is important to mention that materials focus on the communicative abilities of interpretation, expression and visualization of students which help them enjoy the learning process more.

Thus, children learning at this school are not enjoying learning as they should due to the lack of materials. Instead, they are involved in lessons focus on the presentation of grammatical forms using, most of time, the blackboard as a resource material.

In other words, children competencies development is directly affected because children are not developing unique instructional capabilities, social interaction and problem solving skills. The lack of powerful visual means to represent the objective of teaching is the main cause.

Finally, this lack of media, is forcing teachers to use traditional methods such as rote memorization and students are not been stimulated to discover the abilities they have. Children are always active and they like to learn every time more and more, but this type of teaching takes them to get tired of learning a second language which until now is for them one more subject.

To briefly indicate the material resources found at the San José school, this is an inventory made by the English department. This inventory shows specifically the quantity and advantages of the components enclosed in the chart, the materials were counted to have an idea of the available to teach English this year.⁷⁷

These materials service a student population of 167 students at fourth, fifth and sixth grades, plus the rest of students at first, second and third grades, who count too with these materials to acquire the language.

⁷⁷ This inventory was made based on the quantity of materials at the school and also with information provided by an article called " Learning with Technology" by North Central Regional Educational Laboratory" provided by an English course at ULACIT, called Use and Design of Instructional Technology.

Inventory

Material	Quantity	Advantage
1. Crayons	2 boxes	Encourage creativity
2. Clay	2 boxes	Encourage creativity
3. Audiotapes	0	Easy to use
4. Tape recorders	1	Develops listening
5. Markers	5	Inexpensive
6. Flash cards	0	Illustrates facts
7. CD players	1	High quality sound
8. Furniture	Normal	Facilitates context
9. construction paper	If students can buy it	Encourages creation
10. lab equipment	0	Experiences
11. Maps	Only in Spanish	Illustrates concepts
12. Movies, films	0	High resolution image
13. Cable television	0	Variety of programs
14. Notebooks	If students can buy it	Necessary for tasks
15. Photocopy machine	0	Easy to use
16. Posters	Done by teachers	Most people remember visuals longer than they remember words.
17. Radio	1	Multiple formats
18. Dictionaries	0	Much information
19. Textbooks	Given by the MEP	Relevant edited
20. Toys	0	Kids like them
21. Typewriters	Three in bad state	Promotes skills
22. VCR'S	1	Combines sound vision
23. Computers	0	Help children to develop creativity and thinking, at the same time they learning process is easier. ⁷⁸
24. Color printers	0	Share color products
25. Compact disks	0	Interactive learning
26. Multimedia	1	Stimulates student's interests in learning.

After explaining that the lack of materials at the San José School is caused by economical problems and absence of donations to the English department, it is

⁷⁸ Heinich, Molenda, Russell & Smaldino. (1999). *Instructional Media and Technologies for Learning*. USA: Merrill-Prentice Hall. pp 136-138.

important to say that this problem is directly affecting the curriculum of English teaching. That is why, it is important to find the optimal solutions as soon as possible as well as explaining and justifying their importance.

Human Resources Management

Identifying the problems in terms of human resources management

Constant training or motivation for English teachers at San José school do not exist

According to the author of the article called "El Desafío de la Administración de Personal", is important to emphasize that one of the main objectives of a successful teaching process is the constant training and motivation of teachers, and this objective of management is not being accomplished at the San José School. The author, as it was exposed, concludes that there is bad management in any institution if its personnel, in this case English teachers, are not achieving their personal satisfaction or projects.

Basically in this school, English teachers have been only taking courses at the university level to improve their teaching skills, methodologies and knowledge. But, English teachers have never received a training course to support the teaching and learning process, they have gone through in order to become competitive teachers and appropriated helpers of children during the learning period at the school.

The problem is caused in a certain way by the Ministry of Education and, when analyzed, the problem comes also from the management of personnel at the school. The Ministry of Education organizes few English training programs for teachers and also offers little information about ways of improving and innovating techniques or about possible institutions offering training courses. For instance, information about conferences or seminars, related to English acquisition, done at educative centers such as universities. Thus, the school does not reflect the necessity of sending its English teachers to update their knowledge and teaching techniques. Thus, this obstacle becomes into a problem not only for San José School, but also, becomes into a social problem because teachers are part of a working community which is not reaching their personal expectations.

On the other hand, it is appropriate to say that the human resources management issue is important because teachers need to improve their tools and wisdom every time it is possible. Certainly, teachers are self-responsible of innovating their teaching methods and knowledge, this is not a requirement. But, teachers have to look for opportunities to become competitive, not only to guide their students, but to contribute with the country development.

Due to the importance of the human resources management, the Ministry of Education should develop a strategy to solve this deficiency. For instance, the Ministry could prepare an English seminary once every year to assure that its teachers will communicate with students in professional and equal way. Teachers have to be trained in order to apply the best of bilingual education because learning English has to be a productive process and, although teachers are not directly transmitters of knowledge, they have to be the ideal "classmates" of children involved in the English language acquisition.

According to Dembo, teachers influence students' beliefs because, according to their beliefs about the nature of the teaching-learning process, the students' behavior in classroom will be defined. Teachers need to feel competent and they transmit their expectations to their students.⁷⁹ For instance, if the English teacher is worried about his few opportunities to improve his abilities, these feelings are going to be probably transmitted to his students through his actions. So, unconsciously, the teacher may provoke a static learning process for his students, which is going to affect them.

Consequently, the English staff of this school cannot attend training sessions because there is not an opportunity for it because usually important training programs are organized during the working schedule and during the week. Undoubtedly, due to the lack of information for English teachers, they ignore important English courses and training which can give to their majors another perspective due to that information exposed by important exponents of the English teaching art, that always suggest the best methods, cognitive approaches to learning, planning for instruction and social development.

Probably, San José School's human resources management is breaking down with the personal objectives of English teachers because there is not information easily available for them about the importance of assisting to training in order to improve their techniques and methodologies. Nowadays, English is required for almost every job and that is why, children are learning it since they are in preschool. But, if there exists this type of deficiencies, teachers cannot improve as much as they should.

According to Castro, the current productive sector of the country requires persons to make appropriate decisions, persons who can solve problems, and persons who can think in a critical and creative way. She emphasizes that each decision a worker makes will help to build a solid economic position around the world, and to achieve this goal, the country needs to be managed by persons with critical skills to enhance positive results in the different productive areas of the country.⁸⁰

Education is the basis for developing any productive mind to work for the country and if teachers, persons who are an important part of the process, are not able of transmitting these critical skills, the productive area of the country can be affected in future. This is precisely what is happening at the San José School: teachers do not receive constant training to improve their cognitive and critical skills because these skills need to be stimulated as much as it is possible.

At the school, English teachers only can modernize their teaching strategies to combine the necessary skills at the university level, which is paid by their own. The human resources management of the school defends this situation, saying that teachers are not allowed to go to training programs because they have to work at the time or day in which it is going to be.

Also, teachers cannot defend their rights because there is not a document that can support them. For instance, when any organization prepares a training meeting of English language teaching, they call all schools with the pilot plan. But, the manager of the school can do really nothing because of the absence of a document which

⁷⁹ Dembo, Myron H. (1994). *Applying Educational Psychology*. USA: Longman Publishing Company.

⁸⁰ Castro, Silvia. (2000). *Introducción al Pensamiento Crítico*. San José: Editorial EU ULACIT.

specifies permission to assist to this type of formative activities. Thus, it is impossible for the manager at the school, to decide if teachers go or not..

On the other hand, this situation is causing an inappropriate working climate for English teachers experiencing this situation, and that is why, one of the most important components of the educative process is being affected. There is no motivation, and according to Partin, schools that maintain a positive school climate are marked with a high degree of cohesiveness and high level of morale, among students as well as the staff. He emphasizes that there is research evidence that school climate is related to the level of academic achievement.⁸¹

Thus, if English teachers are not motivated because there is no stimulation, probably the learning environment for both teachers and students will be boring, depersonalized and there will not be new challenges to be reached by these persons involved in the process. Different theories, such as the Model of Motivational Design by John M.Keller⁸², have shown that motivation is really concerned with instruction. Undoubtedly, if teachers are motivated to achieve their personal goals and success, their performance in the classroom will be better and the teaching task will be easier and dynamic.

Thus, this lack of motivation and constant training for teachers, will make children lose the opportunity to improve knowledge. It is important to say that San José School's curriculum can be affected by this situation because English teachers may lose contact with all rules and methodologies that have to be taken into account when teaching within a classroom full of children with different proclivities.⁸³ Important changes in this current society will be ignored by the educative area if these deficiencies are not solved as soon as possible.

The following is an important recompilation of some of the most relevant training meeting and materials English teachers at San José School have lost during the current year:

- Jack Richards, an important pioneer of the English teaching, was presented in a training program to English Teachers during April,2000.
- Innovative standards given by ESL programs are totally ignored by these teachers because they do not know the existence of a current web sites offering the information.⁸⁴
- The Forum Magazine published in January,2000 an important report about English teaching and the most current techniques to teach children in bilingual programs.⁸⁵
- The next coming of the important theorist, Howard Gardner, is completely ignored by the English staff at the San José School.

These are some samples of the lack of information at the human resources management department of the San José Public School.

⁸¹ Partin, Ronald L. (1995). Classroom Teacher's Survival Guide. USA: Prentice Hall.

⁸² Driscoll, Marcy. (2000). Psychology of Learning for Instruction. (2nd ed.) USA: Allyn and Bacon.

⁸³ Molina, Zaida. (1999, Jun). Planificación, diseño y desarrollo curricular. Umbral.

⁸⁴ The readership can find an explanation of the ESL Association about the existence of appropriate English teaching standards.

⁸⁵ Ancker, William P. (2001, Jan). Acquiring vocabulary through a context-based approach. Forum Magazine, (39), 18-19.

Community Integration in the English Language Acquisition

Identifying the problems in terms of Community Integration

Community members around the San José School are not integrated into the English learning process of children at the school

Parents have an important participation in the learning process. But, at San José School, they do not determine the role when we talk about English because there is no communicative connection among parents, English teachers, and other elements in the community.

As a matter of fact, parents consider that they cannot help their children in the learning process because they do not manage the language. For this school, this problem means a big disadvantage because English is not seen as a tool for the future, but as something unnecessary or difficult to assimilate. In this case, parents know that their children are learning English and that is all, they do not evaluate English usage. The school is completely disconnected from the social environment of its students and their families when talking about English. There is no connection between the English teaching-learning process and the community and the main reason is because most members of the community do not need to use it for communication and that is why, they do not evaluate its usage in the country and rest of the world.

According to Campos and Smith, members at the community, parents and teachers must have an adequate intervention in the school environment in order to know what is the role of those elements related to the teaching-learning process.⁸⁶

Based on this, it is clear that the San José community members around the school are not aware of the elements being part of the English teaching process in the school. Thus, parents, important actors within the cognitive experiences of children, do not carry out their role which is closely related to tracking their children's achievements and progress at the learning stage.

If both teachers and parents ignore each other's ways of living, it is really difficult to work as a team to support what children learn at the school and at their sociocultural environments because there is no communication to find out which are the strengths or weaknesses of children in these two contexts.

Basically, because of the current community context and because of the type of growth parents had, parents and the other members have not kept a closed contact with the English language, and this fact makes them worried about the context in which their children are acquiring the language and the experiences they can have. The lack of participation of the community members is due to scarce contact they have had with the foreign language.

Consequently, if parents do not participate in the English language acquisition process, teachers cannot make a more real teaching in the context in which children develop their activities. On the other hand, this lack of connection between the students' learning environment and the affective context in which they also live, can create an inadequate environment without any motivation to discover new experiences.

⁸⁶ Campos, Carlos., & Smith Marjorie. (1992). Técnicas de diagnóstico familiar y comunal. San José: Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia.

Teaching children a second language is complex in a certain way because of aspects as the ones discussed through this research analyzing the components of English language acquisition in children at fourth, fifth and sixth grades at one public school. According to Queen, the process certainly becomes difficult if teachers do not know the affective context from which their students come to school: there may be poverty, divorces, family disintegration, child abuse and other related issues.⁸⁷

Most of time, parents cannot even find out how are children doing it in school in this matter because they say that they do not understand a word. An interview was made to a mother of a fourth grade student at this school to know her opinion and doubts about the learning process of her child.⁸⁸

After this interview, it is important to say that this school is teaching English for five years now, and those children who are now in the last years, at least, know the basics of English: they know to write, to compose and to speak a little bit. But, probably their parents have not had a participation in these achievements.

Basically, this is a big problem for the English acquisition of children because maybe they are advancing in an area in which their parents have no participation or knowledge. If we analyze this, from a curricular point of view, this problem is affecting the progress of a language which could be so useful in future.

The main causes of this issue are maybe the context in which their parents grew up because most of this people belong to rural areas, in which soil, and agriculture are their ways of living. During long time ago, these persons did not need to learn a second language in order to obtain jobs and money, today a second language is almost always required to get a job. But, these parents do not see it like that. It does not mean that due to the provenience of these persons, they do not need to speak a second language. But, it means that due to the context in which they grew up, they consider a second language is not necessary to get a job.

On the other hand, the economic factor is an important enemy because most parents cannot find resources to study English in order to help their children. Thus, it is kind of difficult for them finding another way of helping their children to speak English. Although, any person may say that it is not necessary to have these parents learning English because children are the persons who are receiving classes at the school and so they must know the subject. It is important to say that parents are components in the learning process who really contribute with the children outcomes.

Certainly, there must be other ways to help children to learn English just than having parents learning it. But, any other way must contemplate the economical status of these families. For example, parents can assist periodically to "talleres" or meetings about the performances of their children at the bilingual program. Being responsible parents marks a difference even when these persons do not speak English, and assisting to a meeting is possible economically. After this, another factor contributing to this problem, would be the lack of interest of some parents that even come to school to find out how are their children doing at the school

⁸⁷ Queen, Allen J. (1999). *Curriculum Practice in the Elementary and Middle School*. USA: Prentice Hall. p 30.

⁸⁸ The readership can analyze this interview at the end of this research paper in the annexes segment.

Thus, offering a solution could be more difficult than just coming to a meeting to analyze children performances difficult, but it is really necessary to continue teaching English and to have parents in the right place, as indirect-members of curriculum.

Designing proposals with the objective of improving the performance of students of English as a second language in grades 4-6 beyond the established expectations.

The issues exposed before, in the different elements of English language acquisition process, need to be solved as soon as possible in order to have an educative process which can meet and surpass the standards expected by the productive sectors of society. The solutions to these problems must be feasible and also useful because our educative system needs to make important changes and educate people with critical thinking who are able to produce innovative ideas.

First at all, it would be interesting to set and define the standards that should be expected of the students. Much research has been done in order to establish those standards that could be useful to teach English as a second language and to know the progress and cognitive behaviors of students. Due to many persons and relevant efforts, today ESL standards are the results of many years' effort on the part of TESOL members and others who have sought to improve the education of students who are learning English as a second language.⁸⁹

The ESL standards (English as a Second Language) have been analyzed in different occasions because they are international and keep children as the center of education. The perspectives on ESL standards are to have people in future speaking English as if it was the mother tongue of those non-native speakers.

These standards attempt to avoid limits in the English learning process because the purpose of learning a second language is not to limit students capacities, but to expand students' potential. The following information was taken from the web site offered by the TESOL Association in the United States of America: this Association makes an important explanation of the ESL standards used for Pre-k-12 students.⁹⁰

What are the ESL standards and how they help English teachers?

The ESL standards are settled according to levels of language proficiency: beginning, intermediate and advanced. It is important to specify at which level of English students are in order to have a right organization, correct goals, standards, appropriated descriptors, and indicators (vignettes are examples to clarify the standards). The ESL standards have framed around three goals and nine standards organized into grade-level clusters, each cluster have goals, standards, descriptors, progress indicators and vignettes, or examples.

The goals of the standards are based on social language competence, academic language competence and sociocultural knowledge competence, which are the areas students need to develop. The ESL standards are a guide for teachers in order to know specifically what students should know and be able of doing as a result of their teaching.

⁸⁹ Readership can have extra information about the background of ESL standards in the annexes segment of this research paper

⁹⁰ <http://www.tesol.edu/assoc/k12standards/it/02html>

The standards are divided into three goals. In goal 1, they focus on the use of the language to accomplish personal and social interaction tasks. In goal 2, standards indicate that English has to be used in further academic learning and tasks. In goal 3, they address the cultural parameters of using English with others. It is important to mention that the third standard in each goal, specifically, targets the use of learning strategies to enhance knowledge of the social, academic and sociocultural purposes of using English. Thus, ESL standards are guidelines to state the steps schools can use to develop a better ESL curriculum.

It is important to say that each standard has descriptors which describe the behavior students acquire when reaching a standard. These descriptors are not prescriptive: they assist curriculum developers and teachers to identify proper objectives. Also, standards have sample progress indicators which are observable activities that students may perform to show progress toward meeting the designated standard.

In other words, sample progress indicators are instructional techniques that teachers may use to determine how students are doing. They may also assist educators in making decisions or establishing them according to students settings, backgrounds and goals of the English program of the institution.

Finally, standards have vignettes and discussions about them, which provide instructional sequences drawn from real life experiences. These vignettes demonstrate the standards in action and describe student and teacher activities that promote English language learning. Vignettes are representative of types of students for whom these standards are designated (socioeconomic status, ethnic, linguistic and educational backgrounds), the types of educational settings; the geographic regions and communities; and of the characteristics of teachers who provide ESL instruction.

To conclude, discussions of vignettes connect the vignettes to the standards and select progress indicators. The discussions explain how the instructional activities encourage students to meet the standard and highlight the students use of English.

After this relevant explanation about the meaning and usage of the ESL standards, it is necessary to define those standards that should be expected of the students, indicate their descriptors and identify the sample progress indicators that reflect the acquisition of these standards.⁹¹

ESL Standards: Grades 4-8 TESOL PROGRAM

Goal 1 Standard 1

To use English to communicate in social settings: Students will use English to participate in social interactions

❖ Descriptors

- sharing and requesting information

⁹¹ The following information belongs to the web site of TESOL Association.
<http://www.tesol.edu/assoc/k12standards/it/01.html>

- expressing needs, feelings, and ideas
- using nonverbal communication in social interactions
- getting personal needs met
- engaging in conversations
- conducting transactions

❖ **Sample Progress Indicators**

- ask peers for their opinions, preferences, and desires
- correspond with pen pals, English-speaking acquaintances, and friends
- write personal essays
- make plans for social engagements
- shop in a supermarket
- engage listener's attention verbally or nonverbally
- volunteer information and respond to questions about self and family
- elicit information and ask clarification questions
- clarify and restate information as needed
- describe feelings and emotions after watching a movie
- indicate interests, opinions, or preferences related to class projects
- give and ask for permission
- offer and respond to greetings, compliments, invitations, introductions, and farewells
- negotiate solutions to problems, interpersonal misunderstandings, and disputes
- read and write invitations and thank you letters
- use the telephone

Goal 1, Standard 2

To use English to communicate in social settings: Students will interact in, through, and with spoken and written English for personal expression and enjoyment

❖ **Descriptors**

- describing, reading about, or participating in a favorite activity
- sharing social and cultural traditions and values
- expressing personal needs, feelings, and ideas
- participating in popular culture

❖ **Sample Progress Indicators**

- recommend a film or videotape to a friend
- write in a diary or personal journal
- describe, read or write about a personal hero
- persuade peers to join in a favorite activity, game, or hobby
- discuss issues of personal importance or value
- locate information for leisure activities (in oral or written form)
- write a poem, short story, play, or song
- describe favorite storybook characters
- recommend a game, book, or computer program
- listen to, read, watch, and respond to plays, films, stories, books, songs, poems, computer programs, and magazines
- recount events of interest

- ask information questions for personal reasons
- make requests for personal reasons
- express enjoyment while playing a game
- talk about a favorite food or a celebration
- express humor through verbal and nonverbal means

Goal 1, Standard 3

To use English to communicate in social settings: Students will use learning strategies to extend their communicative competence

❖ Descriptors

- testing hypotheses about language
- listening to and imitating how others use English
- exploring alternative ways of saying things
- focusing attention selectively
- seeking support and feedback from others
- comparing nonverbal and verbal cues
- self-monitoring and self-evaluating language development
- using the primary language to ask for clarification
- learning and using language "chunks"
- selecting different media to help understand language
- practicing new language
- using context to construct meaning

❖ Sample Progress Indicators

- use a dictionary to validate choice of language
- ask a classmate whether a particular word or phrase is correct
- use a computer spell checker to verify spelling
- use written sources to discover or check information
- keep individual notes for language learning
- test appropriate use of new vocabulary, phrases, and structures
- ask someone the meaning of a word
- understand verbal directions by comparing them with nonverbal cues (e.g., folding paper into eighths, lining up)
- tell someone in the native language that a direction given in English was not understood
- recite poems or songs aloud
- imitate a classmate's response to a teacher's question or directions
- associate realia or diagrams with written labels to learn vocabulary or construct meaning
- practice recently learned language by teaching a peer

Goal 2, Standard 1

To use English to achieve academically in all content areas: Students will use English to interact in the classroom

❖ Descriptors

- following oral and written directions, implicit and explicit
- requesting and providing clarification

- participating in full-class, group, and pair discussions
- asking and answering questions
- requesting information and assistance
- negotiating and managing interaction to accomplish tasks
- explaining actions
- elaborating and extending other people's ideas and words
- expressing likes, dislikes, and needs

❖ **Sample Progress Indicators**

- request supplies to complete an assignment
- use polite forms to negotiate and reach consensus
- follow directions to form groups
- negotiate cooperative roles and task assignments
- take turns when speaking in a group
- modify a statement made by a peer
- paraphrase a teacher's directions orally or in writing
- respond to a teacher's general school-related small talk
- explain the reason for being absent or late to a teacher
- negotiate verbally to identify roles in preparation for a group/class presentation
- ask a teacher to restate or simplify directions
- join in a group response at the appropriate time
- listen to and incorporate a peer's feedback regarding classroom behavior
- greet a teacher when entering class
- distribute and collect classroom materials
- share classroom materials and work successfully with a partner
- ask for assistance with a task

Goal 2, Standard 2

To use English to achieve academically in all content areas: Students will use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form

❖ **Descriptors**

- comparing and contrasting information
- persuading, arguing, negotiating, evaluating, and justifying
- listening to, speaking, reading, and writing about subject matter information
- gathering information orally and in writing
- retelling information
- selecting, connecting, and explaining information
- analyzing, synthesizing, and inferring from information
- responding to the work of peers and others
- representing information visually and interpreting information presented visually
- hypothesizing and predicting
- formulating and asking questions
- understanding and producing technical vocabulary and text features according to content area
- demonstrating knowledge through application in a variety of contexts

❖ **Sample Progress Indicators**

- take notes as a teacher presents information or during a film in order to summarize key concepts
- synthesize, analyze, and evaluate information
- write a summary of a book, article, movie, or lecture
- locate information appropriate to an assignment in text or reference materials
- research information on academic topics from multiple sources
- take a position and support it orally or in writing
- construct a chart synthesizing information
- identify and associate written symbols with words (e.g., written numerals with spoken numbers, the compass rose with directional words)
- define, compare, and classify objects (e.g., according to number, shape, color, size, function, physical characteristics)
- explain change (e.g., growth in plants and animals, in seasons, in self, in characters in literature)
- record observations
- construct a chart or other graphic showing data
- read a story and represent the sequence of events (through pictures, words, music, or drama)
- locate reference material
- generate and ask questions of outside experts (e.g., about their jobs, experiences, interests, qualifications)
- gather and organize the appropriate materials needed to complete a task
- edit and revise own written assignments
- use contextual clues
- consult print and non-print resources in the native language when needed

Goal 2, Standard 3

To use English to achieve academically in all content areas: Students will use appropriate learning strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge

❖ **Descriptors**

- focusing attention selectively
- applying basic reading comprehension skills such as skimming, scanning, previewing, and reviewing text
- using context to construct meaning
- taking notes to record important information and aid one's own learning
- applying self-monitoring and self-corrective strategies to build and expand a knowledge base
- determining and establishing the conditions that help one become an effective learner (e.g., when, where, how to study)
- planning how and when to use cognitive strategies and applying them appropriately to a learning task
- actively connecting new information to information previously learned
- evaluating one's own success in a completed learning task
- recognizing the need for and seeking assistance appropriately from others (e.g., teachers, peers, specialists, community members)
- imitating the behaviors of native English speakers to complete tasks successfully

- knowing when to use native language resources (human and material) to promote understanding

❖ **Sample Progress Indicators**

- scan several resources to determine the appropriateness to the topic of study
- skim chapter headings and bold print to determine the key points of a text
- take notes to summarize the main points provided in source material
- verbalize relationships between new information and information previously learned in another setting
- use verbal and nonverbal cues to know when to pay attention
- make pictures to check comprehension of a story or process
- scan an entry in a book to locate information for an assignment
- select materials from school resource collections to complete a project
- rehearse and visualize information
- take risks with language
- rephrase, explain, revise, and expand oral or written information to check comprehension
- seek more knowledgeable others with whom to consult to advance understanding
- seek out print and non-print resources in the native language when needed

Goal 3, Standard 1

To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways: Students will use the appropriate language variety, register, and genre according to audience, purpose, and setting

❖ **Descriptors**

- using the appropriate degree of formality with different audiences and settings
- recognizing and using standard English and vernacular dialects appropriately
- using a variety of writing styles appropriate for different audiences, purposes, and settings
- responding to and using slang appropriately
- responding to and using idioms appropriately
- responding to and using humor appropriately
- determining when it is appropriate to use a language other than English
- determining appropriate topics for interaction

❖ **Sample Progress Indicators**

- advise peers on appropriate language use
- prepare and deliver a short persuasive presentation to different audiences
- write a dialogue incorporating idioms or slang
- write business and personal letters
- create a commercial using an appropriate language style for the product
- create a cartoon or comic book
- initiate and carry on appropriate small talk (e.g., while visiting a classmate's home, on a bus, at a party)
- determine when it is appropriate to tell a joke
- use idiomatic speech appropriately
- advise peers on appropriate language use

- express humor through verbal and nonverbal means
- interact with an adult in a formal and informal setting
- role play a telephone conversation with an adult
- make polite requests
- use English and native languages appropriately in a multilingual social situation (e.g., cooperative games or team sports)
- write a letter or e-mail message to an adult or a peer using appropriate language forms
- demonstrate an understanding of ways to give and receive compliments, show gratitude, apologize, express anger or impatience
- greet and take leave appropriately in a variety of settings

Goal 3, Standard 2

To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways: Students will use nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose, and setting

❖ Descriptors

- interpreting and responding appropriately to nonverbal cues and body language
- demonstrating knowledge of acceptable nonverbal classroom behaviors
- using acceptable tone, volume, stress, and intonation, in various social settings
- recognizing and adjusting behavior in response to nonverbal cues

❖ Sample Progress Indicators

- determine the appropriate distance to maintain while standing near someone, depending on the situation
- maintain appropriate level of eye contact with audience while giving an oral presentation
- demonstrate in a role play two aspects of body language common to one's own culture
- analyze nonverbal behavior
- describe intent by focusing on a person's nonverbal behavior
- add gestures to correspond to a dialogue in a play
- respond appropriately to a teacher's gesture
- obtain a teacher's attention in an appropriate manner
- use appropriate volume of voice in different settings such as the library, hall, gymnasium, supermarket, and movie theater

Goal 3, Standard 3

To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways: Students will use appropriate learning strategies to extend their sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence

❖ Descriptors

- observing and modeling how others speak and behave in a particular situation or setting
- experimenting with variations of language in social and academic settings
- seeking information about appropriate language use and behavior

- self-monitoring and self-evaluating language use according to setting and audience
- analyzing the social context to determine appropriate language use
- rehearsing variations of language use in different social and academic settings
- deciding when use of slang is appropriate

❖ **Sample Progress Indicators**

- model behavior and language use of others in different situations and settings
- rephrase an utterance when it results in cultural misunderstanding
- evaluate behaviors in different situations
- observe language use and behaviors of peers in different settings
- rehearse different ways of speaking according to the formality of the setting
- test appropriate use of newly acquired gestures and language

Basically, these are the three goals, based on social language, academic language and sociocultural knowledge, facts which are closely related to the competence in English students are supposed to develop. Each goal contains three standards with its respective descriptors and sample progress indicators.

In order to understand in a better form how these standards are applied in the teaching and learning context, the following information is the application of the goal 3, standard 3 use, in a sixth grade English class at the San José School. Basically, this is an example of how this standard would be executed in a classroom at the San José School. The students are at the intermediate level of English competence. That is why, the standard 3 of goal 3 was chosen to exemplify this class.

**This is an English class based on National Parks.
“A Tour to the Braulio Carrillo National Park”**

❖ **4-8 Vignette**

Grade Level: Sixth grade in a bilingual class
 English Proficiency Level: Intermediate level
 Languages of Instruction: Spanish and English
 Focus of instruction: National Parks
 Location: Rural San José School

❖ **Background:**

The following vignette describes Mrs. Sandí’s English sixth grade class of 22 Costa Rican students in their sixth year of a bilingual education program in one public school, San José School. They are at the intermediate level of English proficiency and will make the transition out of the bilingual program next year when they enter high school. Their community is located closed to an important highway in Costa Rica, in which a relevant national park is located. They are expected to know it and be able to give information in English about it. To accomplish that goal, Mrs. Sandí has arranged for the students to visit the national park and the nearby highway after school, during two days.

❖ **Instructional Sequence:**

Mrs. Sandí usually instructs her students using English. At this point, students understand most of her instructions and basic language; they have been during sixth months with her. However, she is beginning to include more English to help prepare the students for their studies next year. The curriculum of sixth grade requires students to manage information about Costa Rican national parks in order to offer information in English, at the same time they may have social interactions.

Mrs. Sandí sees the nearby Braulio Carrillo National Park as an ideal means for helping her students practice English in a meaningful way. The teacher and the students will visit the national park next weekend. People at the park are mostly Costa Ricans, but there is a great quantity of foreign people who speak English as a means of communication. Due to this fact, children will have the opportunity of experiencing how native speakers behave and use the language, opportunity that will take students to improve their usage of the language and their discourse.

Last week, classes have been related to the vocabulary belonging to the environments of national parks. The teacher has cautioned the students that there may be dangerous and marvelous elements at the parks. Students have been in touch with the environment of the Braulio Carrillo National Park, names of plants, animals and different species.

The teacher has explained to students that visiting the Braulio Carrillo National Park is lovely and has intended to pair up each student with one classmate in order to enjoy the learning experience, and based on the constructivist theory which indicates that learning is enhanced by social interaction⁹², and in order to help students to learn significantly more. The teacher makes sure that students get familiar with the information in English of the park because the tour will be totally in English.

Days before, the teacher brings visual media, a film, to support the future visit to the park because the film portrays situations in which the context is real and people's actions are appropriate.⁹³ In this way, the students apply cognitive, affective and social domains. The teacher asks the students to pay attention to the way the tourist guide and the foreigners speak and behave.

After viewing the film, they discuss in a semicircle, applying critical thinking and English language skills, the situations and context used in the film. Students comment that people in the film use words like poor umbrella, white-faced monkeys, tapirs, etc. They say that the intonation of the Costa Ricans is different and that they used Mr. and Mrs. too much when addressing the foreigners. Mrs. Sandí asks the students to think why tourist guides used titles so much. All students agree they are doing that because probably it is the first time they are meeting these foreign people.

Also, students express that it is important to keep that level of communication because the use of language depends on the context and the type of persons involved in the conversation. The teacher asks why they think in the way. One student responds that he would not feel comfortable calling a foreign person by her first name because in Costa Rican culture, it is not appropriate, only when it is allowed by the person himself. In the following activity, the teacher asks the students to write down one or two sentences from what they remember in the video. As an example, the teacher replays an interchange of words of people in the videos, so students can write down all the

⁹² Kauchak, Donald. P. , & Paul Eggen. (1998). Learning and Teaching: Research Based Methods. USA: Allyn and Bacon. pp 9-10.

⁹³ Kostelnik, Marjorie, et all. (1996). Themes Teachers Use. New York: Scott, Foresman and Company.

words. Some students write their sentences on the board. The rest of the class comments on the choice of words and the type of grammar that was used by the characters in the scene.

One student suggests that most of the vocabulary used is formal because tourist guides use bits of language like "would you like to..." . The teacher agrees with them and explains the use of it. Another student asks why the visitors used many gestures and body language to express a feeling or opinion. In Costa Rica, people are not like that, people is different, so..... he says. The teacher reaffirms that observation.

As a final activity, Mrs. Sandí sits the students on chairs that are placed in a circle, and she uses the fish-bowl technique. To begin, three students take turns entering the circle to play a student, tourist guide or visitor role. Mrs. Sandí describes sceneries, such as the encounter of the foreigners with the different species at the Braulio Carrillo National Park, or the visit of the visitors at the restaurant of the park. This way, students will practice what they will probably say and face in the future visit to the park, and the rest of the class will make suggestions.

❖ Discussion:

Students are encouraged to:

- Explain their choices
- Evaluate behaviors in different situations
- Share their experiences and opinions with the rest of the class
- Observe language use and behaviors of peers in different settings
- Model behavior and language use of others
- Identify diverse ways of speaking according to the formality of the setting
- Use critical thinking to comment the real contexts of English language acquisition
- Pretend plays real similar to those of daily life (tourist, students, visitors, etc.)⁹⁴

Mrs. Sandí is helping her students meet a school requirement and get familiar with the level of English they will use when attending next year to high school. The teacher has closed them to a place which was unfamiliar, a different sociocultural environment where they will need to use sensitively the English language and its cultural implications.

The teacher has created a process of preparation before visiting the park in which they are going to use the language. The teacher has explained the use of the words and has presented a film. The film would help students to increase their awareness of language use and behavior to develop their basic skills, listening, reading, speaking and writing. Thanks to the film, students have analyzed the formality of the language use, appropriateness and the non-verbal gestures used by the foreigners. Students could make comparisons to their own culture.

Finally, the role play activity offers the students an opportunity to practice both what they have observed and conclude about interactions with foreign people. They also

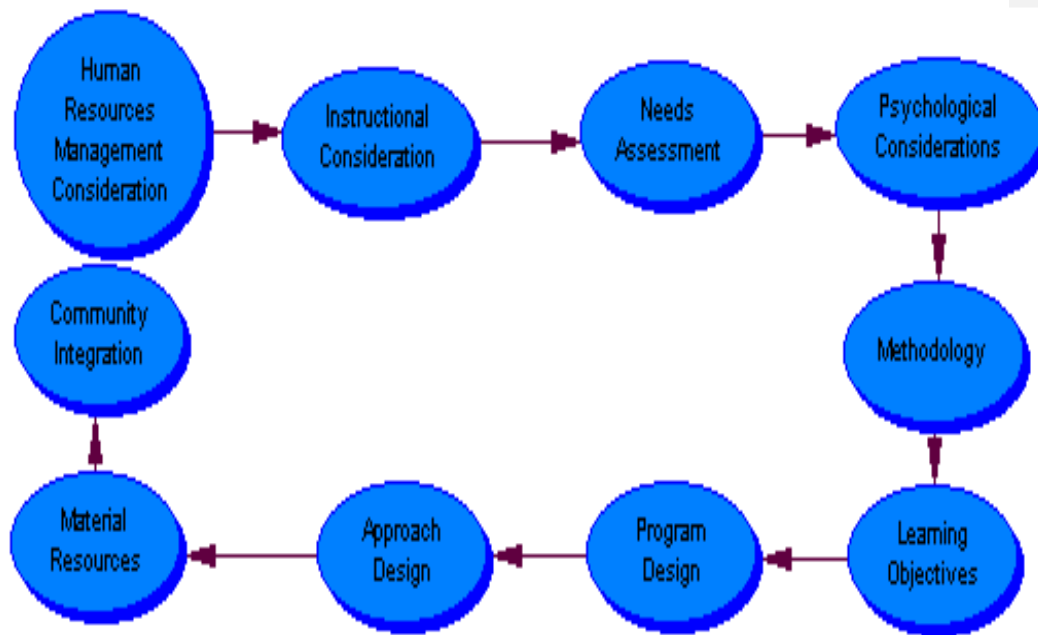
⁹⁴ Kostelnik, Marjorie and others. Themes Teachers Use. Page 254. The author of the book recommends the application of this technique in order to obtain important benefits when teaching a second language.

evaluated their classmates' suggestions to improve the language and behavior. This opportunity to practice helps students diminish their anxiety about their level of English at the national park.

Designing Proposals to support the English Language Acquisition at the San José School

Designing a Proposal in terms of Curriculum:

Language Curriculum Development Processes



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The conceptual map above, shows the relationship that exists among the components of an integrated curriculum which can allow English teachers to generate positive cognitive learning experiences in their students. As it was analyzed, San José School presents some problems in terms of curriculum and this conceptual map represents one possible solution to those deficiencies found at this School.

The functional curriculum that San José School needs has to be integrated because purposes, objectives, and organization of content have to agree with the goals of the bilingual program at the School. A content-based curriculum is not more useful in order to teach English to children. A learning-based curriculum is a feasible solution that teachers at the school can apply in a short time because instructors need to follow a

⁹⁵ This conceptual map was made based on the information offered by Jack Richards and Theodore Rodgers, in their book " Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching", page 159.

statement of aims and of specific objectives which indicates some selection and organization of content.⁹⁶

In other words, the solution to issues in the curriculum domain is to design a curriculum which responds to the unique needs of learners, their intellectual needs, interests and talents. This curriculum has to be composed of key principles that can emphasize on knowledge rather than on quantities of information that students can provide, must emphasize real world experiences rather than concrete facts, and this curriculum has to set the best processes to be followed in order to develop English competence among students.

This type of curriculum will offer teachers the best instruments to assess the content students are to learn, be aware of the best processes to achieve this content, and finally know what they have to do or can do to help their students in the English language acquisition process. While children should be considered at the center of the educative process, teachers will have success in finding out which are students' personal concerns. This way, teachers can produce activities closer to the real experiences students have and language acquisition will be more productive.

On the other hand, it is important to mention that the English curriculum offered by this public school is not the same as the one offered in the basic domains such as science or mathematics. These subjects are taught daily during two lessons or better say it, during 80 minutes which is the equivalent of two lessons of English of 40 minutes each one.

Everyday, students have the opportunity of being in touch with these subjects during 80 minutes, and teachers can apply in a better way most of the aspects of an integrated curriculum.

According to Richards and Rodgers, time is an important element of curriculum because it indicates how long students are supposed to be in contact with the language. They suggest that the main goal of English teaching is to develop conversation skills that can take students to interact in different social situations with different types of persons. They affirm that this important goal can be impractical if there is restricted time available for foreign language teaching at the school because this fact can limit both teacher and students' skills.⁹⁷

Based on this affirmation, it is evident that curriculum at the San José School needs to be improved in this area because children can lose relevant opportunities to improve their language skills and teachers can limit their knowledge for instruction, making of this experience, something common and cognitively insignificant.

In order to support the idea of enhancing English teaching time blocks at the San José School, the following diagrams show the opinions of students at fourth, fifth and sixth grades at the school, who consider that it would be interesting to increase time blocks in order to learn more and in order to have more opportunities to develop in a better way the activities in the classroom. All of them answered to the following question:

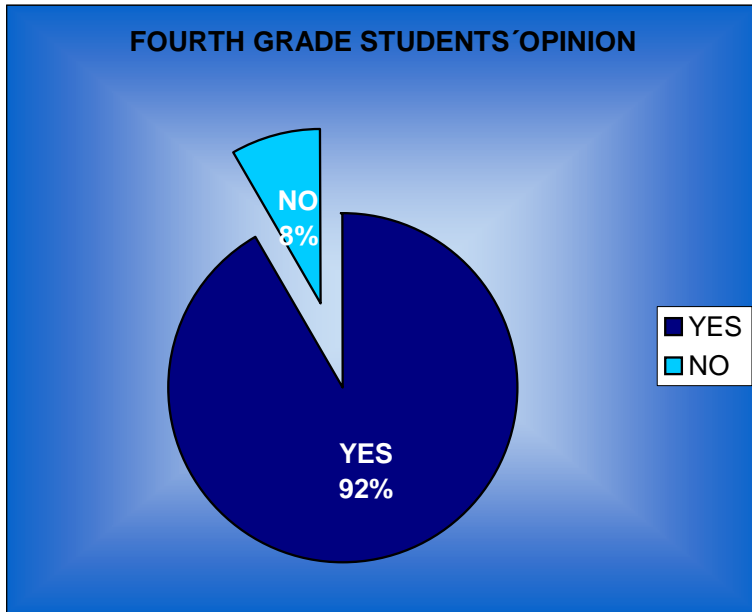
"Would you like to have time blocks of 80 minutes in English language classes, instead of 40 minutes?"

⁹⁶ Queen, Allen. J. (1999). *Curriculum Practice in the Elementary and Middle School*. USA: Prentice Hall.

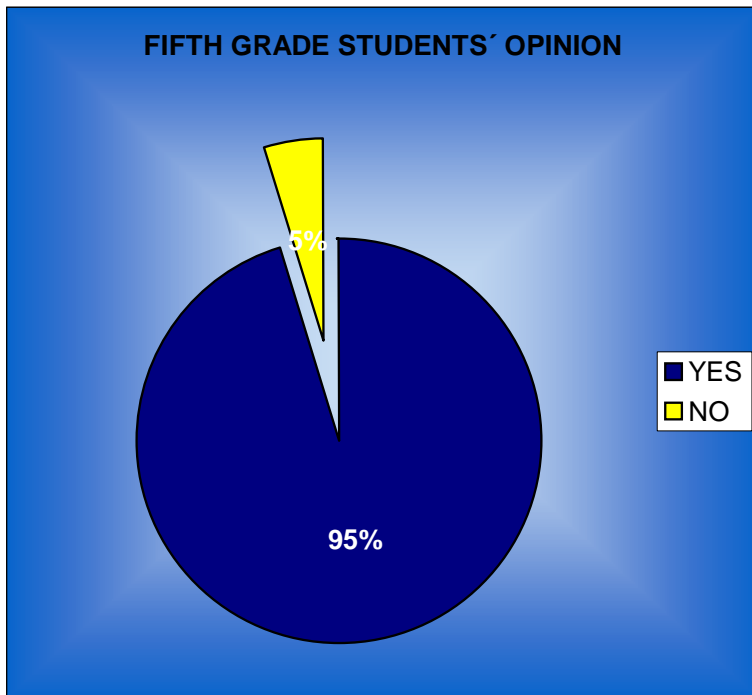
⁹⁷ Richards, Jack., & Theodore Rodgers. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. USA: Cambridge UP.

The following are students' answers about the question:

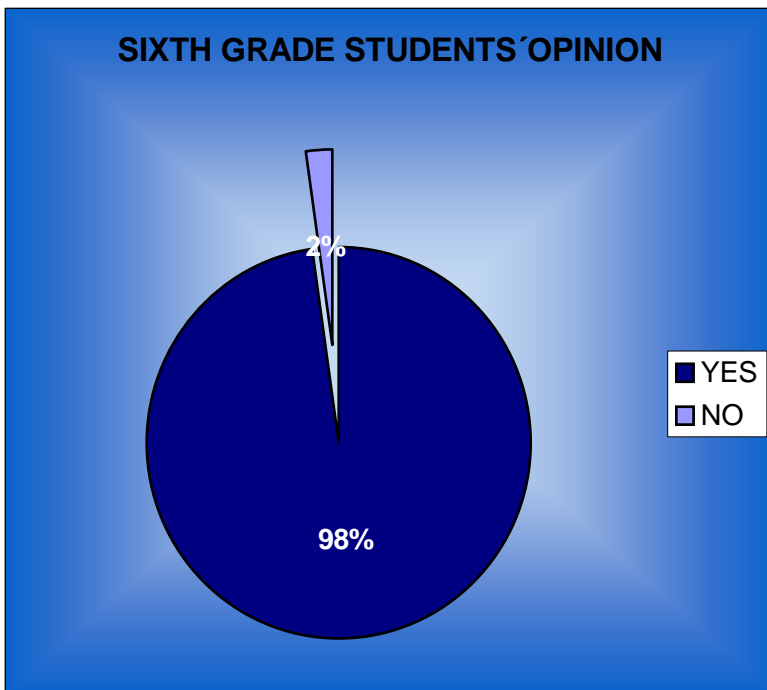
1.



2.



3.



Thus, the best solution to this problem is to create a plan to change the quantity and quality of the English lessons given at the school. It would be more pleasant for teachers and students to have two lessons per day or at least to have two lessons most of days. Every teaching plan would be fixed to teach during 80 minutes instead of 40 minutes. Topics will be better studied and there will be a constant combination of basic skills because teachers can direct big portions of time to each activity. For example let's analyze the following plan:

The Family Members.

- 10 minutes would be given to greet and check list
- 10 minutes would be used to make a warm up about the family members.
- 20 minutes would be spent in the presentation of the topic. Pictures and sheets would be given to stimulate vision
- 10 minutes would be used to read a text about the family members.
- 10 minutes would be used to talk about the reading
- 10 minutes would be used to clarify students' doubts
- 10 minutes would be used to work in the workbooks to complete any exercise related with the topic.

Undoubtedly, the solutions offered before will change the vision of the bilingual program at the San José School. An integrated curriculum and more time to accomplish the right combination of the integrated elements, are initial steps that will take the educative public system to become an important means to create visionary students.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ An interview was made to a sixth grade student in order to know his opinion about the new proposals to change San José School curriculum. You may find it at the annexes segment of this research.

Providing Solutions in terms of Teaching Methods

Teaching methods are closely related to teachers actions or behaviors and student learning. Thus, it is necessary to establish a solution to the problems exposed before at the San José School, which can be applied in context. A variation in the bilingual programs could be offered. But, this solution is out of public school hands, and out of San José School's possibilities .

A real solution will be to use the same content programs sent by the Ministry of Education. But, teachers have to look for constructivist methods to teach topics in an interconnected set of teaching actions designated to accomplish the four basic skills, listening, writing, reading and speaking. This interconnection will allow teachers to combine methods directed to the four basic skills development because there will be, at least, one method to each skill. In other words, the content can be kept the same, but the methods to teach it have to be focused on the development of the four basic skills in order to students develop communicative competence according to their characteristics.

In other words, the content will be taught according to the students' environments . For example to teach the words that they could need in a real situation, and avoid an unnecessary accumulation of contents that they even manage or remember because were taught in a systematically and conductively way which did mean something important to them.

This solution of a combination of teaching methods, is supported by the important researchers, Donald Kauchak and Paul Eggen, in their book "Learning and Teaching". They suggest that language competence is reached only if there is a combination of the four basic skills and the affective, psychomotor and social domains. The best teaching methods to achieve this require that teachers apply actions designed to reach that students so that they can understand the concept of a theme.⁹⁹

San José School needs of teaching methods which can give students time to think about their own development in order to increase long-term achievement, teaching methods which can provide students with concrete examples to illustrate abstracts ideas to show themselves their ability to understand those ideas.

Penny Ur offers an important explanation about the teaching methods that can be used in the four basic skills in order to take students to fluency rather that to accuracy. She explains that teaching methods must be as follows:¹⁰⁰

- Listening: Listening comprehension practice in the classroom should take students to learn to function successfully in real-life listening situations.
- Speaking: Classroom activities that should develop learners' ability to express themselves through speech.
- Writing: The purpose of writing is the expression of ideas, the conveying of a message to the reader.

⁹⁹ Kauchak, Donald., & Paul Eggen. (1998). Learning and Teaching: Research-Based Methods. (3rd ed.) USA: Allyn and Bacon.

¹⁰⁰ Ur, Penny. (2000). A Course in Language Teaching. USA: Cambridge University Press.

- **Reading:** Reading teaching methods should take students to understand wide sentences in the target language instead of understanding only words in isolation through a text.

Thus, to explain the content taken into account all the objectives of an appropriate teaching practice, San José School can make this combination of methods, because only this way the teacher will have a communication channel for each different student in the classroom. It is important to mention that students have different types of intelligences.

On the other hand, teachers can motivate students to work in groups, so students who do not know something will be helped by those who do know it. It means that work will be done between students with different facilities or intelligences, and finally, only like this, students will be the center of our activities and planning will be more effective.¹⁰¹

The following information, represents some of the methods that can be applied in short time at the San José School in order to diminish the issue related to teaching methods here.



Teaching Methods

- **Group Formation Activities:** This type of method requires the students to work cooperatively, to act together, to support each other, to make physical contact with each other, to lend and receive trust, in highly enjoyable situations. For example, teachers may ask students to sit down in a semicircle in order to comment about any important topic, in this way students are sharing opinions and recommendations.
- **Discussions:** This type of activities take students to develop communicative skills instead of grammatical accuracy. For instance, teachers can involve students in a problem which needs a practical solution in this way learners work on the same task, but each learner has different information needed to solve the task.¹⁰²
- **Poems and Songs:** Teachers do motivate students when using poems and songs because these are choral activities that make children feel they are learning together and enjoyable process.
- **Arranging the classroom according to the topic:** Children need their own space and when they are together in a comfortable place, they expect more communication. Definitely, this teaching activity takes students to develop cooperative learning activities and it encourages socialization. Isolating children

¹⁰¹ Vale, David., & Anne Feunteun. (1995). Teaching Children English. USA: Cambridge UP.

¹⁰² Richards, Jack., & Theodore Rodgers. (1999). Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. USA: Cambridge UP.

in individual seats discourages teamwork and may encourage children to become more dependent upon the teacher.¹⁰³

- **Storytelling:** This method includes concepts and ideas of a topic. Students will enjoy this technique because they love hearing stories. According to Penny Ur, telling a story in the foreign language is one of the simplest and richest sources of a foreign language input for younger learners. (Ur, Penny, page 289)
- **Brainstorming:** This is a valuable technique for stimulating creative thinking in groups. It can be incorporated into San José School teaching methods because this is quick and effective technique.¹⁰⁴
- **Artwork:** Most students love to draw, specially if they are not being evaluated. Art has been used successfully to build students' self-esteem and self-confidence, at the same time creativity and imagination are been developed.
- **Journals:** This technique has a variety of purposes such as improving writing skills, reminding the student of important things to remember, or to strengthen self-reflection skills.
- **Field Trips:** This technique can be applied at the San José School because field trips are not to expensive. The benefits of this technique can be greater because this is one of the most valuable ways of helping students apply their textbook and classroom learning to the world.
- **Construction:** This technique takes students to build or make things which close them to reality and they become highly motivated when involved in real tasks.

To sum up, it is important to mention that these are only some teaching methods that can be used by English teachers at the San José School in order to end up with the issues commented before. Some of the books consulted to find out this information are real useful and feasible by most teachers at the books stores. It would be useful to read some of them in order to be updated with the current English teaching methods.

Offering Alternatives in terms of Authentic Assessment

In order to solve the situation exposed before in the assessment criteria at the San José School, product and not process, it is important to consider some excellent methods and strategies used by theorists who are faithful to constructivism. As it was explained before, authentic assessment is that which allows students to play an active role in the assessment process, despite their cultural background, learning styles, and academic ability.

First at all, English teachers at this school have to focus assessment on what students really know and can answer in a spontaneous way. Until now, it is probable that they ignore, to a great extent, what most of their students manage in terms of writing, reading, speaking and listening.

The following are solutions that English teachers at San José School can applied in order to diminish the problems related to traditional assessment which do not offer a real report of the instructional benefits of teachers. These solutions are focused on the development of basic skills, and it is not complex to establish them as the assessment criteria of the English curriculum, because they are practical and authentic.

¹⁰³ Glover, Susanne., & Georgeann Crewe. (1994). The Classroom Management Survival Kit. USA: Good Apple.

¹⁰⁴ Partin, Ronald L. (1995). Classroom Teacher's Survival Guide. USA: Prentice Hall.

Feasible solutions of authentic assessment in the basic skills:¹⁰⁵

• **Reading Assessment:**

First at all, it is important to take into account students' prior knowledge and that assessment does not mean making a test, but identifying the purpose of reading and matching instructional activities to that purpose. In assessing reading skills, teachers can identify learners' needs with regard to the local curriculum. After that, teachers may want to execute activities such as monitoring students to include the steps of progress into a reading portfolio; and making students reflect in order to cause self-assessment, which helps both teachers and students become aware of students' attitudes, strengths and weaknesses in reading.

On the other hand, self-assessment also encourages students to become independent learners. In the San José School case, children are real young and teachers can provide short sentences and pictorial responses such as smiling faces for students to circle to indicate their reading habits.¹⁰⁶

Self-assessment of reading can take various formats such as checklists, rating scales, question/answer, sentence completion and learning logs. Also, there are different reading activities that can be organized at the San José School such as:

- Retelling: Students are asked to retell a story or text they have read. This will give them the opportunity to speak in an informal setting. This means that students can develop oral language proficiency as well as reading comprehension. Retelling is a more powerful tool for assessing reading than having students read aloud.
- Literature response: Responding to literature helps students become better readers. These responses could be journals related to what the student is reading.
- Literature discussions groups: These are teacher-guided discussions that occur while students are in the process of reading a book or an article. It brings benefits for second language learners because they increase comprehension, listening skills participation and give more time for teacher observation of their' learning.

• **Oral language Assessment:**

Oral language does not imply that teachers should have students pronouncing chunks of words or recalling memorized phrases. Oral language assessment means capturing a student's ability to communicate for both basic communicative and academic purposes. In other words, teachers have to assess if their students can get involved in interactions where meaning can be negotiated by contextual cues.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ These authentic ways of assessment are supported by the kind of assessment recommended by the TESOL Association and its ESL standards.

¹⁰⁶ O'Malley, Michael., & Lorraine Valdez Pierce. (1996). Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners. USA: Addison Wesley Publishing Company.

¹⁰⁷ O'Malley, Michael., & Lorraine Valdez Pierce. (1996). Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners. USA: Addison Wesley Publishing Company.

Self-assessment is also important here because students take greater responsibility for their learning because they are in charge of listening to performances and comparing them to the characteristics of effective performance. Students at San José School are children, so teachers can ask them open-ended questions to engage them in self-assessment orally and make them take notes on that.

The following oral language assessment can be directed by English teachers at the San José School because they reflect what students know to use in context and their ability to communicate meaning:

- **Oral interviews:** interviews can be discussions or conversations with the teacher and with other students. It is relevant to say that the use of oral interviews elicit language functions such as describing, giving information and expressing opinions. It is necessary to say that the questions of the interviews need to be prepared according to students' interests and ages, avoiding cultural differences.
- **Picture descriptions or stories:** this type of assessment takes students to describe or tell a story about a picture or pictures. It is necessary to mention that the important aspect to be assessed here is students' ability to communicate meaning rather than creativity to tell the story based on pictures.
- **Information gap:** This way of assessing involves students in descriptions of pictures, maps or objects. These descriptions require detailed descriptions of physical objects and linguistic command of colors, shapes, sizes, directions, locations and sequences. Students are assessed on their effectiveness in bridging the information gap.
- **Role plays:** This way of assessment is particularly effective in developing oral language skills of English learners. There is an interactive context to use elements of real-life conversations such as repetitions, interruptions, hesitations, distractions, gestures and expressions.

- **Writing Assessment:**

Writing assessment must allow children to express information about varied purposes. Writing assessment must evaluate substantive information contained in the message they are able of writing.

Self-assessment in writing encourages the type of reflection needed to again increased control as a writer. Self-assessment encourages students to think about their purpose in writing and reflect on what and how much they are learning.

The following are writing assessment activities that are easy to apply at the San José School:

- **Dialogue journals:** This technique takes students to regularly make entries addressed to the teacher on topics of their choice. The topics may be on a book they particularly like, their interests, or their attitudes toward learning in different content areas.
- **Learning logs:** Students make entries during the last five minutes of each period, responding to questions such as what did I learn today?, What was hard to understand?, etc. It is important to say that teachers should avoid correcting student language in the learning log.

- **Writing checklist:** It is important for students to check their own writing with respect to the types of standards typically contained in holistic and analytic scoring rubrics.

After these practical suggestions about authentic assessment focused on basic skills, it would be interesting to apply some other methods centered on students. These are the use of portfolios which contains examples of students' work and products that they have developed. Then, observation in the classroom is another method to assess because seldom teachers look at what is happening in the classroom. Finally, conferences in which students can express personal opinions through the real quality of English they have and so on.

On the other hand, authentic assessment could be the use of journals because they produce a great interaction between teachers and students. Journals are dialogues in which students can be evaluated by their sensitivity to answers. For example, let observe the following examples of traditional assessment and authentic assessment about National Parks:

SITUATION:

The teacher needs to evaluate if his students understood the information about National Parks. The question is: which is the best form to do this? Here there are two choices, one of them is conductivist and the other is constructivist:

- **Conductivism:** Students are assessed according to the similarity of their answers to those in the workbook.
 1. Which is the national park that has one of the most beautiful beaches in the world?
 2. Where is located Santa Rosa National Park?
 3. How many national parks are in Costa Rica?
 4. Which is the national park located next to the high way to Limón?
 5. What kind of animals has Manuel Antonio national park?
 6. Is Carara a biological reserve or a national park?

Here the student need to know specific answers to obtain a good grade, but these questions do not tell to teachers if the students speak or do not speak English. We even know if students know already in Spanish what a national park is.

- **Constructivism:** Students are encouraged to show their learning.
 1. Try to make an essay using all the information you know about national parks in Costa Rica.
 2. Write down a letter in which you are telling somebody about the national parks in Costa Rica.
 3. Make a little journal telling to your teacher a trip that you have done to a national park or about which park you would like to visit.

On the other hand, a real evaluation instead of using just a test, is to ask students to search information about a topic. For one thing, to evaluate if students know which are the "farm animals", the teacher can ask the students to draw a farm and to find out which animals must be there and which must not.

If students research, they will make questions to their parents or family, and the most important thing is that they will distinguish by themselves the kinds of animals. They will put the names or the figures of the correct animals because they investigated it.

In addition to this, it is important to plan assessment according to students' abilities, because not all students have the same intelligences to execute a specific type of test. For instance, maybe it is better for a group of students to do a written test, like a composition, because they have ability to compose. But, probably, the other side of the group prefers an oral test because they have fluency to speak.

Finally, it does matter what kind of method you use to assess your students, and it really matters to know what they know and what they have interpreted from all instruction. Constructivism is an excellent theory to apply all methods allowing students to express quality because students are being part of assessment and are not inert things just answering questions that only can answer correctly if there has been a long process of memorization.

Suggesting Solutions in terms of Material Resources

As it was exposed before, San José School presents diverse deficiencies in the area of material resources due to a lack of funding. Although, economical problems are hard to solve, English language teaching is wide and thanks to this fact, teachers at San José School can find useful solutions to create cognitive processes, using non-expensive material that is available in different parts of the country.

According to the author, teachers have to make great efforts to supply all needs that children have during the English learning process that cannot be supplied by the available resources at the school and that educators cannot address in other easier ways.¹⁰⁸

Anyone associated with public schools will readily admit that current resources are not optimal. Current educational methods are sometimes criticized for failure to interest and motivate students because activities and skills are irrelevant to students' needs. But, these disadvantages cannot stop or seriously affect the project of learning English since childhood¹⁰⁹.

One of the best solutions to the lack of material resources at San José School is to let apart those resources that are hard to have and foster children's abilities, metacognition, and skills through activities that can enhance student's self-esteem and increase their willingness to spend more time on learning. These activities help children know that they can learn from each other as well as from the teacher or the available media.

Basically, the solution is based on the characteristics of the learning task teachers may offer. English teachers have to involve students with their creativity and knowledge, with their creation and love. For example, drill and practice programs can replace

¹⁰⁸ Chapter #3 Learning theories and Integration Models, page 69. / Roblyer, M.D., & Jack Edwards. (2000). Integrating Educational Technology into Teaching. USA: Prentice Hall.

¹⁰⁹ Chapter #3 Learning theories and Integration Models, page 70. / Roblyer, M.D., & Jack Edwards. (2000). Integrating Educational Technology into Teaching. USA: Prentice Hall.

worksheets; a good tutorial program can offer instruction in topics for which teachers are in short supply, and stimulation can let students repeat experiments without using materials.¹¹⁰ For example, teachers can promote learning the numbers singing a song which is like a drill, this drill can be bored or can be funny depending on the way in which the teacher manage it according to his/her creativity.

On the other hand, to support this kind of activities and learning it would be important to include, within the goals, constructivist principles which indicates that instruction must address students' affective needs as well as their cognitive ones. Teachers need to have their students learning by doing because interactive qualities replace materials in a certain way.

For one thing, if English teachers are creative and there are no visual aids to teach the "Farm animals," they can create a representation of them with clippings of newspaper; then paste them in foam or construction paper. Finally, they can bind these papers to design a book to create a new book or make a portfolio for students.

Another example to replace lack of materials is to have students reading, writing, listening and speaking in a natural environment. For instance, children need to learn the names of the "Traditional games". So, the teacher, with great creativity, will take them out and bring the most popular games, such as the "stick and cup".

On the other hand, Penny Ur suggests the use of posters, pictures and games, which certainly are not too expensive and are useful to teach children. She expresses that this type of materials are particularly appropriate for younger learners because they constantly use them. She also says that the use of visual aids is real important and although they are expensive most of times, the important thing is that they can be eye-catching and relevant for children.¹¹¹

Ronald Partin also makes a considerable list of media which can be applied at the San José School because they are not difficult to design or buy. Partin recommends materials such as poems, periodicals, cartoons, clay, dictionaries, worksheets and lectures, among others.¹¹²

In conclusion, an excellent solution to this lack of materials is to prepare English teachers to be open-minded, critical, creative and spontaneous; and above all, English teachers need to work a lot under the constructivist philosophy and a combination of methods. Children cannot lose the opportunity of learning English or using materials. The solution is to have teachers being creative and generating materials in a cheaper way, at the same time they are teaching children to fulfill their own necessities.

Generating a Solution in terms of school Human Resources Management

It is important to propose some solutions as soon as possible in order to avoid a damage in other integral parts of the English teaching process and student's cognitive development.

¹¹⁰ Chapter #3 Learning theories and Integration models, page 70.

¹¹¹ Ur, Penny. (1996). A Course in Language Teaching. USA: Cambridge UP.

¹¹² Partin, Ronald. (1995). Classroom Teacher's Survival Guide. USA: Prentice Hall, 1995.

Analyzing this problem, it is possible to establish some solutions. However, taking into account that any solution must begin at the Ministry of Education because this Institution should create and promote more seminars for English teachers. For example, they should offer seminars related to curriculum, evaluation, pedagogy, and other areas in education. This way, teachers can address specific activities to cover specific classroom needs and problems.

After this important suggestion, it is important to say that there are specific solutions to San José School's problems. These solutions are the best ones because they are based on the management principles of any skilled institution. First at all, the main step in order to solve the problem is to make the school manager aware of the importance of allowing teachers to attend these seminars because many aspects, such as curriculum and teaching methods, can be improved.

Then, it is also necessary to support English teachers attendance to seminars with written permission from the institution in charge of the event. It means that the Ministry of Education has to be agree with every event. The idea is to avoid obstacles from the manager's side, like it has been during this year at San José School.

Finally, the administration of human resources at the school must be completely sure that teachers are receiving motivation. It means that there must be more motivation for English teachers because they really need to apply the best techniques and characteristics of the meaningful teaching processes.

Establishing Solutions in terms of Community Integration

Offering a solution is sometimes difficult because we are talking about a big quantity of parents that cannot help their children to learn English. But, to begin solving this problem, it would be so useful to begin to make a meeting per month in which parents can go to get informed about the process which their children are going through. The meetings can be in Spanish and teachers can introduce English words little by little.

Then, teachers can suggest little "Talleres of English" to parents that can come to receive them for free. In this way, parents can participate actively in the process. On the other hand, teachers may require students to do all projects with their parents, and those children whose parents do not care about it, can work alone with the teacher in special sessions.

Consequently, it is very necessary to explain to children the important of the role of their parents, although they cannot understand a word. But, children must know that they can teach their parents and in this way parents can help them. So communication will be improved and the curriculum will not be affected at all. On the other hand, the community will obtain benefits because families will be in more contact and also because most people are learning English, the universal language which opens doors to everybody around the world.

Conclusion

The idea of implementing a bilingual program in public schools was key to opening the door to a wide globalization which will be managed only by persons with cognitive and critical thinking skills. Having linguistics and social competence in a second language will be, in a near future, a basic requirement to work in any area of the productive sector of the country.

Through this research, English language usage and benefits were shown and supported by important theorists such as Pavlov, Skinner, Gardner, and Piaget, among others. At the same time, different issues and deficiencies affecting the success of the bilingual program in terms of curriculum, teaching methods, media, assessment, human resources management, and community integration; were analyzed. Based on relevant information sources and conclusions which indicate in different terms and topics, the correct application of those elements within a real cognitive English learning process.

Taking into consideration that San José Public School has been the true reflection of the problems found in the public school system of Costa Rica, it is necessary to be aware of the proficiency language level our children are acquiring to compete in a globalized society.

This research concludes that the educative process does not meet nor surpass the standards expected by the Ministry of Education when it decided to create the pilot plan. But, this research also concludes that it is time to change this situation eliminating the myths of the traditional teaching and learning process.

Absolutely, the English language acquisition of children at school needs to be improved and feasible solutions given to every analyzed issue found at the San José School. Solutions which can be applied in a short time by constructivist teachers who know that children are producers of their own learning experiences.

At the same time, the possibility of establishing international standards, as the presented by the TESOL Association, becomes a solution broad in scope. The standards will change Costa Rican educative system in order to increase our citizens' possibilities and so forth.

A competent level of English in our children will make them aware of their great capabilities to be integral human beings. To conclude, it is important to mention that many misconceptions about bilingual education and its applications will be avoided by people who know the current role of public schools in order to acquire new ideas and projects. It has been enriching to analyze different ways to achieve improvement in the process.

Finally, the incorporation of this information to the readership's knowledge will be a great tool to help English language students develop a cognitive learning process that will allow them to apply the knowledge acquired at the school to their real environment.

Annexes

1. Sample of a multiple-choice test at the San José School for Fourth Grade Students.

San José School

II English Test. Fourth Grade. IV
Teacher: Francinne Sandi V
Total points: 40 points
Percentage: 30 %
Time:80 minutes

Obtained points:.....
Percentage:.....
Grade:.....

Name:.....

Section:.....

PART I : COMPLETE. Write down three sentences using the persons in the pictures. They are family members. 3 pts

- 1. My.....has.....
- 2. My.....is.....
- 3. My..... has.....

PART II: QUESTION MARK. Answer the following two questions using the words in the parenthesis. Remember to say who is the person and describe him/ her. 2 pts

1. Who is that person? (brother- in law)

2. Who is that person? (mommy)

PART III: DEVELOPMENT. Make your own Family Tree, using the model you have been studying. 10 pts

1. My grandfather- My grandmother	2. My grandfather- My grandmother
-----	-----
1.----- 2.----- 3. My mother	4. ----- 5.----- 6.-----
-----	-----
7.----- 8.----- 9.-----	10. Me 11.-----12.-----
-----	-----

PART IV: COMPLETE. Fill in the blanks using the prepositions in there. 5pts
(on, in next to, between, close to, in front of)

1. The grocery store isthe meet market and the green store.
2. The apple is the box.
3. The bus station is..... to the taxi station.
4. The ball isthe table.

PART V: COMPLETE AND DEVELOPMENT. Complete the following sentences using adjectives. 4pts

1. My grandfather is.....
2. My cousin is.....
3. My sister in-law is.....
4. My step mother is.....

Develop three sentences using the adjective you studied in class. 3 pts

1-----

2-----

3-----

PART VI: MULTIPLE CHOICE. Choose the correct answer using possessives. 5 pts

1. This is family

- a. Gabriell's family
- b. Gabriela's family
- c. Gabriel's family

2. This is.....father

- a. Mother's
- b. Cindy's
- c. David's

3. family is big

- a. Alejandra's
- b. brother's
- c. this

4. This picture is picture

- a. Ana's
- b. Maria's
- c. sisters

5. This are.....families

- a. Karol's and Gabriel's
- b. Karol's and Gabriel's
- c. Karol's and Gabriel's

PART VII: COMPLETE. Write down the correct name of the numbers showed below. 4pts.

90.....

100.....

96.....

93.....

PART VIII: COMPLETE. Complete the following sentences using frequency adverbs. 4 pts.

1. I..... go to school

2. I go to the doctor

3. I..... fight with my friends

4. I help my mother at home.

GOOD LUCK MY FRIENDS!

Extra points: Write down the occupations of your father and mother.

1.....

2.....

2. This is an interview that was made to a fourth grade student's mother at the school in order to prove the disagreement among some members of the community and the English learning program

Interview:

**Mrs. Gabriela Lopez.
Fourth grade student's mother
June 25th, 2001
San José School**

1. What do you think about English?

R/ Well every body says that it is so useful and that our children will have to use it in future when they are going to work or study.

2. Have you ever talked with your son about English and its benefits, if you believe English has benefits?

R/ Yes, well I consider it has some benefits, but I have told him that he has to study hard because I cannot help him in this and also because he has to pass the year.

3. Do you have knowledge about English?

R/ No, no that much I wish, I remember few things because I went to high school and I took some classes there. But, I do not understand English. Even what my child writes in his notebook.

4. How do you feel about this situation?

R/ Well, is kind of difficult because I cannot help my son and sometimes he asks me for help to do a homework or to study for a test. We have a dictionary in our house but when we look for a word it does not appear or has acronyms that we do not know. So, I get worried because I know that my child does not understand something and maybe has to do a test or something.

5. Do you think that English comes to affect the learning process of your children because you cannot help him?

R/ No, I do not think so. I will help him with motivation and love even when I do not understand what he is study because English is important, every body says that and I think that this is the way it is.

Sometimes, I call some friends of my older children because they are in high school and maybe they understand and can help my child. It is wonderful to know that in future my children will not have trouble with English. Children learn fast and even when he does not understand, only him can do it.

6. Would you like to learn a little bit of English?

R/ Oh my God!!!!!!! I am too old for that, but I will do anything to cooperate with the school in which my child is studying and with the learning process of my child too. The problem is that we do not have money to pay a English course.

7. How can you be a part of the English learning process of your child even when you do not understand English as a second language?

R/ We have to support our children and even when we cannot understand for example what was a test about it to, we have to motivate them. Sometimes, he comes home and tell me that he got a 90 in an exam and I go to check it but I do not understand what are the questions about it. Even though, I tell him that it is good and that I am so happy about it. We have to love them and give them all our time and motivation.

3.This is an interview that was made to a student of sixth grade in order to show how the community of students agree with the idea of enhancing the time blocks for teaching English.

**José Hans Zamora
Sixth grade student
June 29th,2001
San José School**

1.What do you think about English classes?

R/ I think that they are very important to our development as integral persons.

2.Do you like to have one English lesson per day?

R/ Kind ofyes I do.....

3.How do you feel about it?

R/ Teacher May I tell you the truth? I do not feel good because it is kind of few time to catch something. It would be better to have more time per day.

4.Would you like to have two lessons per day?

R/ Yes, or every other day, themes would not be uncompleted.

5. Do you learn something interesting during 40 minutes?

R/ Yes, I learn just some things not everything. Sometimes, I have questions and I cannot ask to my teacher because there is not time she has to leave.

6. Do you think classes go fast?

R/ Yes, so much there is not time because it is very few time.

7. Do you feel all activities in the classroom are similar?

R/ Yes, there is not a big variation. I wish I could have time to play and speak with my friends about English. We do not read or color something.....you know teacher sheets.

8. Would you like to suggest something?

R/ I would like that the teacher only could speak English and that things that we do not know could be explained with more time. So, I would like that future lessons were of 80 minutes or two lessons per day. This is my last year at the school and I would like to know that other generations are going to receive more English.

4. **4. This is a background about the origin of the ESL Standards in the educative field.**

<http://www.tesol.org/assoc/k12standards/it/02html>
<http://www.tesol.edu/assoc/k12standards/it/01.html>

ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students

Preface

Deborah Short, Project Director, March 1997

The *ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students* is the result of many years' effort on the part of TESOL members and others who have sought to improve the education of students who are learning English as a second or additional language in the United States. The effort began more than 6 years ago with a TESOL task force chaired by Denise McKeon. It quickly became apparent to ESL educators in the United States at that time that the students we serve were not being included in the standards-setting movement that was sweeping the country. The task force sought to ensure educational equity and opportunity for our students and developed the Access Brochure, the text of which can be found in Appendix A. The Access Brochure was instrumental in getting school-based personnel to consider our students and include them in school reform efforts.

The task force's goal then shifted, and Else Hamayan became the new chair of a smaller team. Many of the original task force members continued to work on the effort as key advisors and have provided advice and feedback. The goal of this new task force was to create a conceptual framework for setting standards for ESL. Promising Futures is the document this team developed, and it is available through TESOL's Professional Paper series.

Promising Futures is also the basis for the introduction to this standards document.

In March 1995, the TESOL Board of Directors approved a project that would develop a full standards document. The project committee, as the new task force came to be known, created the organization for the current document -- establishing the goals, standards, and explications of the standards, namely the descriptors, progress indicators, vignettes, and discussions. We decided to organize the standards by grade-level clusters (pre-K-3, 4-8, 9-12) and to address different English proficiency levels (beginning, intermediate, advanced, and limited formal schooling). Writing teams from many TESOL affiliates, one National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) affiliate, and several states crafted the standards, descriptors, progress indicators, and vignettes during the summer and fall of 1995.

These volunteers drew from their own experiences to create a living document that represents the field of ESL in the United States. A list of these writing team members is found in Appendix B. A draft of the ESL Standards was released in March 1996. Since then, numerous educators and policy makers have reviewed the document and commented on it. This final document reflects, to the extent possible, the valuable feedback that TESOL has received.

The project will not finish upon this publication of the ESL Standards. TESOL is committed to helping educators translate the goals and standards into classroom practice. Future work includes the preparation of assessment guidelines and scenarios that link these ESL standards with classroom assessments, teacher education and curriculum development materials, and professional development opportunities. In all, this is an exciting effort that should improve the education of students learning English as an additional language and help them achieve success in school and beyond.

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