Problem-based Learning Activities as a Promotion of Local Cultural Awareness in A1 English Students[1]

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Abstract

There is a tendency in language courses to use textbooks which focus mainly on anglophone cultures. As a consequence, learners are more exposed to foreign cultures rather than to their own, and they have a few chances to explore and reflect on their own culture. It was evident in a syllabus for an A1 course in a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) degree at a university in Bogotá. This article shows how problem-based activities were used to promote local cultural awareness. This action research study implemented focus groups, questionnaires, students' artifacts, and teacher's interviews. The results show that problem-based activities contribute to students' concept of culture, the development of thinking and cognitive skills, and the ability to apply problem-solving skills in local cultural contexts. It can be concluded that problem-solving activities encourage students to analyze and reflect on cultural aspects, develop skills for solving problems and improve their communicative competence.

Resumen

Hay una tendencia en los cursos de idiomas a utilizar libros de texto que se centran principalmente en las culturas anglófonas. Como consecuencia, los alumnos están más expuestos a culturas extranjeras que a la propia, y tienen pocas oportunidades de explorar y reflexionar sobre su propia cultura. Fue evidente en un plan de estudios para un curso A1 en la carrera de Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (TEFL) en una universidad en Bogotá en el que se vio que la mayoría de los textos se enfocan más en una cultura extranjera que en la cultura local. Para promover el uso de la cultura local en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera, se utilizaron actividades basadas en problemas. De esta manera, este artículo muestra cómo las actividades basadas en problemas promueven la conciencia cultural local. Este estudio de investigación-acción implementó grupos focales, se utilizaron cuestionarios, artefactos de estudiantes y entrevistas a maestros. Los resultados muestran que las actividades basadas en problemas contribuyen al concepto de cultura de los estudiantes, el desarrollo de habilidades cognitivas y de pensamiento, y la capacidad de aplicar habilidades de resolución de problemas en contextos culturales locales. Se puede concluir que las actividades de resolución de problemas animan a los estudiantes a analizar y reflexionar sobre aspectos culturales, desarrollar habilidades para la resolución de problemas y mejorar su competencia comunicativa.

Introduction

Cultural awareness is understood as the capacity to assess critically one's own culture and target culture (Eren, 2023). This ability is essential to comprehend who and where we are and the contributions others make to our reality. When cultural awareness is encouraged in the language classroom, an intercultural perspective is activated, so students can communicate effectively outside their cultural environment, mediate between their language and cultures, and become more sensitive towards other cultures and differences.

Looking at making language students more sensitive and aware of different cultures, this research aims to analyze the way problem-solving activities promote local cultural awareness. Having knowledge and a critical perspective about the local culture is essential to comprehend the reality and understand our roots to mediate with other cultures. Moreover, Post and Rathet (cited in Merrouche, 2010) consider that including cultural content in the language classroom may "enhance students' self-confidence and motivation to learn and provide the opportunity to explore their own identities and interest through a new 'linguistic environment'' (p. 105). As a result, individuals go deeper into the origin and development of their local culture to explore who they are.

Attempting to understand how local cultural content is integrated into the language course of a Bachelor´s Degree in Language Teaching, the syllabus of the A1 English beginner level was analyzed. It was found, that the syllabus focused on understanding and reflecting on anglophone cultures mainly, and there was a lack of inclusion of local culture in the competencies and contents. Moreover, it encouraged few opportunities to students to talk about their culture in their English class.

To support the aforementioned, four teachers were interviewed. They mentioned the material focused mainly on exploring British or American culture. Even though they tried to design activities where students have the opportunity to compare the Anglophone cultures with their own, local culture was left aside. In that sense, they suggest local cultural aspects should be included in the syllabus, so students could recognize themselves as part of a group and critically analyze the differences between anglophone cultures. Hence, in this case, students could acquire the language in a more meaningful way and identify the culture of the city where they live.

Justification

Language learners and teachers must realize that their understanding of local culture is prone to change with time because of the number of discoveries related to its origin and development. For instance, current students could obtain higher awareness of the relationship between their target language and its culture if bilingual teachers decided to switch from their traditional methodologies of teaching language and culture to a local one based on clearer knowledge related to the history of culture, its development, and its expansion. Additionally, involving critical local culture awareness in language classes, students might boost their knowledge of the cultural diversity in their surroundings coming from the different communities or ethnic groups in the city they currently live in.

Based upon this, it is important to develop local critical cultural awareness where the main idea is that students could reflect on their own local culture, and they can create real opportunities for interaction with students from several cultural backgrounds. A study focused on developing cultural awareness conducted by Fandiño (2014) showed that using cultural knowledge as the primary tool to develop a consciousness about one's own can help better language learning.

This study considers cultural competence as the sum of knowledge, skills, and characteristics that allow one to perform intercultural actions, implying an ability to reflect on one's cultural identity, values, and beliefs in order to understand those descriptions, explanations, examples, and anecdotes about a target culture. It shows that language learning can be achieved by working on what is known as both cultural and multicultural communication. Based on that, language learning encourages the interaction with other cultures while linguistic elements of the language are acquired.

Likewise, cultural awareness enriches life experiences and the representations students have about different aspects of social life. Moreover, it might re-construct individual beliefs about what culture is and aspects that are part of it, making aware of the differences that exist between them.

A study done by Martínez Méndez (2017) focused on promoting the inclusion and use of Colombian culture in English classrooms through board games such as Pictionary, 'Domino', Snakes and Ladders, and Monopoly. As a result of the implementation of those board games, the class environment improved and students built knowledge about their culture while they enhanced their language competence

Previous studies have revealed that Colombian cultural awareness was included in some activities carried out in class; however, in syllabus design, there is still a lack of promoting local critical cultural awareness. In contrast to Fandiño (2014) and Martínez Méndez (2017) who focused on national culture, we attempted to implement problem-based activities to promote local cultural awareness.

Problem-based activities were selected since they require knowledge of specific facts, comprehension, analysis, and synthesis of real-situations (Bloom 1956). Based on the above, the purpose of this study is to analyze the way problem-solving activities promote local cultural awareness in A1 students from a Bachelor's Degree in language teaching in a private university in Bogotá.

Theoretical Framework

To develop this research, it was essential to understand how language becomes the vehicle to promote and make cultures visible. In this way, students become more aware of their own culture and develop skills to evaluate and critique others. This could be done through active methodologies that integrate the learning of a language and elements that encourage critical thinking and reflection. As a result, this theoretical framework discusses and analyzes the connection between language and culture, the concept of critical cultural awareness and problem-solving learning.

<u>The connection between language and culture</u>

Language and culture are linked. Without language, communication would be limited, and there would be less need for communication without culture, there would be no communication. In this case, the discussion

of language involves aspects that could be useful to see cultural aspects, realistic situations, and fluent communication. Wang (2018) says that language is the expression of ideas about what society and culture are, and what society thinks and does. We can conclude that language is an expression of culture. As a result, it is important to keep in mind that language learning processes demand special attention to express any detail of the target language inside the appropriate cultural context.

Kramsch (2013) describes culture as the cornerstone that members of a social group use to express the general practices they have developed throughout time with others. Seeing that, it is important to recognize that culture is learned and shared knowledge that specific groups use to shape their behavior, beliefs, personality, and so on to face their life experiences through time. Additionally, it comprises the way people interact with the rest of the humankind and, as Brown (cited in Wang, 2018) says 'culture is an integral part of the context where we have a constant interaction with others using language' (p. 117).

Critical cultural awareness

Baker (2012) defined cultural awareness as a deep comprehension of the function that each person has in a culture. Thus, foreign language learners need to be aware of the cultural aspects of the language used; for that reason, promoting cultural awareness might guarantee understanding and respectful for other cultures in terms of customs and beliefs, and break down barriers that impede to learn and appreciate from others

Critical cultural awareness is a way to boost the students' empathy to deconstruct stereotypes. According to Houghton (2013), a stereotype is the most difficult cultural barrier to face and beat. For that reason, the role of local critical cultural awareness is to rebuild the beliefs students have about certain people, customs, or traditions. As a result, teachers should expose students to different cultural backgrounds to enhance local critical cultural awareness and skills to participate in local and global communities. Moreover, when the acquisition of a foreign language is enhanced by local critical cultural awareness, learners leave the classroom with the essential skills to participate in local and global communities.

Local culture reflects the rules, customs, structures, and ideas of a particular social group (Mazurlina, 2018). In that sense, when a group of people do a regular activity, it will become a habit in that locality, and people will call it their culture. Therefore, it regulates cognition and behavior from the interaction between local people through the development of language and cultural practices to gain knowledge and understanding using commonality to foster inhabitants' optimal development and learning.

Problem-based learning

Problem-based learning (PBL) was adapted to reform and create new learning situations. Barrows and Tamblyn (1980) defined problem-based learning as "the learning that results from the process of working toward the understanding or resolution of a problem" (p. 18). Therefore, problem-based learning enhances students' development of the skills to understand and solve real-world problems.

Figure 1 provides Loghman and Teoh's (2018) model of PBL. Firstly, the problem is presented to the students in the same way it would appear in reality; secondly, language learners are exposed to the problem; then, students research carefully into the problem; later, students reason about the problem in order to form a conclusion or judgment; after that, students create a mix of ideas that compound the problem which will permit them to posit possible solutions for it; after that, the skills and knowledge students have are applied to solve the problem. In the next stage, students solve a similar problem using the knowledge and skills previously learned. Next, students and teachers reflect on the way the problem was solved and their interpretation of it; lastly, students recognize their ideas or learning gained in the problem's solution.
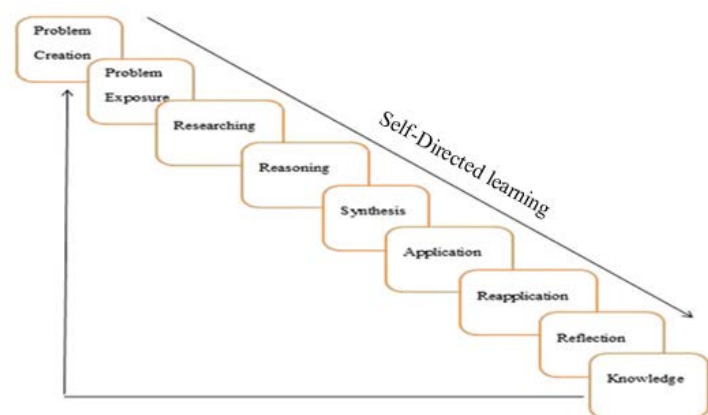
Note: This model shows the specific steps of problem-based learning and teaching

Figure 1: Problem-based learning model

PBL encourages students to become "self-directed learners" since they learn to control their learning and develop the capacity to select and use the available resources to fulfill their needs. In addition, PBL asks students to demonstrate their understanding of the material and build critical thinking and reasoning skills and promotes students' creativity and independence and helps them develop a sense of ownership over their work.

Method

This study implemented a qualitative approach to determine how PBL promotes local cultural awareness in an A1 English classroom. Likewise, we followed an action-research design based on Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) model that involves planning, action, observation, and reflection.

Planning: we planned four activities to present the topic and activities to solve the problem. These included the presentation of the topic, clarification of students' confusions, explanation of each activity, and final performances of speaking and writing activities to develop problem-solving skills.

Action: students developed activities to promote local cultural awareness. Four sessions were held on a teleconference platform (*Microsoft* Teams) and learners attended through virtual remote settings.

Observation: After each of the sessions, we observed behaviors and attitudes towards the PBL activities and local culture; so, we decided to create different rubrics and after each session assessed students' results and behaviors following them. Hence, we realized that they were clarifying and improving their cultural and language knowledge during the lessons.

Feedback format

Criteria	Score		
1. Does it include a photo of the place?	2	1	0
2. Does it say the name of the place?	2	1	0
3. Does it say where the place(s) is/are?	2	1	0
4. Does it mention characteristics of the place?	2	1	0
5. Does it mention a different place from La Candelaria?	2	1	0
Evidence of the problem			
1. Do students state their new understandings about the place?	5	1	0
2. Does it mention evidence of the problem (is it in good or bad conditions)?	5	1	0
3. Is the evidence relevant?	3	1	0
4. Is the evidence enough to support the problem?	3	1	0
Language use and pronunciation			
1. Do the students have complete control of the language with occasional errors, but they do not impede communication?	3	1	0
2. Do the students have good pronunciation which makes the communication easy to understand?	2	1	0
3. Do the students use the language require for the activity?	3	1	0
Presenting skills			
1. Do students use clear, audible voice?		1	0
2. Do students maintain the interest of the audience?	3	1	0
Poster – Infographic design			
1. Does it include an attractive design?	2	1	0
2. Does it have illustrations?	3	1	0
3. Does it have creative use of visual aids that add meaning?	3	1	0
4. Does it include logical flow of ideas?	2	1	0
5. Does it include legible large fonts and color contrast?	2	1	0

Figure 2: Rubric to assess student's development of cultural awareness

Reflection: In this stage, we analyzed and reflected on the way PBL activities were carried out.

Setting and participants

This research took place at a private university located in Bogotá, in an undergraduate program in language teaching. We used the *Microsoft Teams* platform to carry out our remote sessions because it permits us to share images, performances, videos, among others options to get deeper explanations of the topics and development of the activities. Participants were invited to be part of the study through an active consent form. It was sent by email and explained that the participation was voluntary, their information would be kept anonymous, and they would not receive any compensation or punishment in case they did not want to participate. Eighteen English as a foreign language (EFL) students from the class Introductory English A1 accepted to participate in the study, 13 women and five men. Ten participants came from different neighborhoods of Bogotá, and eight from small towns near Bogotá. This diversity allowed a socio-cultural environment where participants had the chance to learn about traditional places, local customs or cultural practices from different parts of the city.

Data collection instruments

The purpose of the data collection was to explore students' knowledge of local culture and the benefits of conducting PBL activities in the classroom. Data were gathered from focus groups, questionnaires, artifacts, and a teacher's interview:

1. *Focus groups:* They were used to identify students' reflection, analysis, about problem-solving activities. They were implemented in four sessions in two different groups with 12 students. The focus groups lasted from 60 to 80 minutes, and were carried out through *Microsoft Teams*.

2. *Questionnaire:* It was used to know students' knowledge, thoughts and beliefs about their local culture.

3. *Artifacts:* Students' reflection essays allowed us to have a clearer idea of what students perceived about culture and local culture, the changes in their opinions they considered necessary and the strategies they applied to solve a problem.

4. *Interview:* We gathered information about the teacher's perspective of teaching local culture in an EFL class and the impact of including local culture in language learning. In fact, during 40 minutes, the teacher allowed us to know that from a personal perspective, the implementation of local culture in a university course for future bachelor's degree of EFL would be extremely beneficial for students permitting them to improve their foreign language level more quickly using learning strategies like board games or flashcards focused on local places/characters with English vocabulary.

Data analysis

To analyze the information from the students' artifacts, questionnaires, focus group, and interview, firstly they were transcribed and saved into a word document. Later, the information was read many times and codes related to culture and local cultural knowledge were identified. Then, those initial codes were grouped into categories and subcategories. As a result, three categories emerged: the concept of culture, development of local culture knowledge, and recognizing one's own culture. They were summarized in Figure 3.
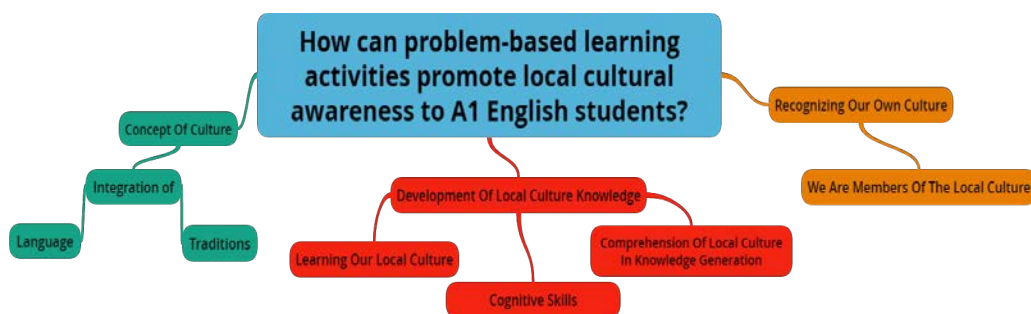
Note: This illustration shows the structure followed in this research and the categories that emerged after data analysis

Figure 3: Categories emerging after data analysis

Results and Discussion

The first category showed how students understood and interpreted culture in their English class. The second category referred to the development of local cultural knowledge that involved students in critical thinking skills. Finally, the third category was related to recognizing our own culture.

Concept of culture

In this category, we focused on the students and teachers' definitions of culture. In their definitions, two specific aspects of culture were included. First, language was recognized as a means of expressing and understanding culture, while traditions were conceived as thoughts that are passed from one generation to another.

Language

Language becomes a vehicle to learn and express feelings, opinions, and beliefs about cultures. In that sense, when students were asked about the connection between language and culture, Participant 1 mentioned: "language is an integral stage of culture in any society" This excerpt shows participants understood language goes beyond a combination of letters and becomes the way to learn about cultural aspects, shape the thoughts and foster identity with a particular social group that is part of the local culture. In other words, from this student's perspective, language learning not only develops communicative competence, it also permits deep comprehension and a critical view of different cultures where the foreign language is also spoken.

Moreover, it was seen that language encouraged participants to express ideas about their culture, reinforced it, influenced personal identity, and created boundaries of behavior. For instance, Participant 2 mentioned "culture allows us to show other people parts of our identity and in the same way understand the identity of the others". This statement reveals that for students, language is not only a key component of communication, it is also a part of identity since language allows students to be identified as part of a group and understand their customs, beliefs, and traditions.

In this sense, Kövecses (2010) argued that language is a repository of meanings in the form of linguistic symbols shared by members of a culture to interact with each other for particular purposes. Therefore, language means being able to communicate, understanding the others words, intentions and the culture in which they live. Thus, language determines the daily conduct of students and constitutes the main point of their social organization and interactions.

Traditions

During the different lessons, we discovered that students described traditions as a concept that allowed them to be identified as members of a community. Traditions were also linked to the concepts of behaviors, customs, history, and places. As Participant 3 said, "for me, customs have been shaped since people are children, since their parents and the school teach them about it and what identifies them, to face a certain city or country". Therefore, the student realized that customs are the product of a learning process throughout life and allow him to feel as a member of a community that lives in a city or country.

Students also emphasized the importance of places to remember and maintain traditions, since they build memory and become a symbol of identity. In fact, learners claimed that recognition of typical places helped to strengthen their mastery and perception of local culture, and it also helped keep valuable memories of invaluable places, beliefs and behaviors. In relation to this, Participant 4 mentioned that:

> I understand culture as tradition and customs, but it is not only that, it is also the recognition of places that contribute to something good of the city and that would be culture because apart from contributing to the city it also contributes to the people.

According to Kramsch (2013) it is relevant to recognize the ways of behaving, talking, and believing in communities. Hence, traditional practices are as varied as people, which motivates various practices of preexisting social structures. Maluleke (2012) interprets the concept of recognition as something forged over the years, so traditional cultural practices reflect the values held by members of a community for periods and represent a critical piece of our culture. In a nutshell, identifying the daily contexts and the expressions used in them are the essential bases of societies to keep customs throughout time.

Development of local culture knowledge

In this category, we examined how problem-solving activities impacted students' development of cognitive skills and comprehension of local culture. It was important because it determined students' abilities to recognize their own culture, solving difficulties that implied cultural knowledge.

Learning our local culture

Throughout the sessions, learning about local culture allowed students to develop critical thinking skills as a powerful resource to analyze, interpret and evaluate different aspects of local culture. Anggraeni et al. (2023) affirmed that critical thinking skills require reflection, experience, and cognitive abilities to solve problems and make the right decisions. In this sense, implementing problem-solving activities encouraged learners to use their knowledge, reflect and interpret local cultural aspects to solve the problems assigned.

This is illustrated in the Participant 4's comment: 'It helped me to expand my cultural and historical knowledge about our city and to learn more because I had to look for arguments and words in English to defend an idea.' This statement demonstrates the development of critical thinking when students use their cognitive abilities and interpret information to support their ideas and acquire new knowledge about culture.

Moreover, the development of critical thinking skills was evident in the group activities. The infographic seen in Figure 4, shows that students used their cognitive skills to understand the task, search, and summarize the information. As a result, they acquired new knowledge about their local culture.

Note: La Vieja Ravine was the place selected by students to talked about its general information

Figure 4: Group activity in Lesson two about the place selected

Furthermore, students' critical thinking skills provided elements to support their arguments in a foreign language and, as a consequence improve their competence as well. For example, Participant 5 said, "I consider that what I learned in the class, I was able to apply in a real case". Based on the last comment, it can be inferred that the projects developed problem-solving skills and knowledge became meaningful as it went beyond the classroom and was applied in students' real life. Baumfield et al. (2008) argued that the development of critical thinking is effective at improving students' thinking and problem-solving skills. Thus, learners understood the content, found it relevant, and found solutions for the cases stated. Similarly, we found students perceived they improved their productive skills. For example, Participant 8 reported, "I think that I improved my speaking and writing skills in the different activities, where I could see and enhance some of the mistakes I was making before these activities". Even more, similar to Participant 8, four other students commented on having improved their English skills specially in their oral performance and vocabulary. Hence, problem-based activities generated more active involvement in the recognition of student mistakes.

Cognitive Skills

When students developed the problem-based activities, they used cognitive skills to manipulate the information, acquire knowledge, and reason. In this sense, Kinshuk (2002) said that the development of cognitive skills challenges learners to analyze, interpret and be engaged in decision-making skills.

The following Figure shows an example of a written activity where students described the stages needed to improve the architectural style of a local place to motivate people to visit it more frequently. As can be seen, in this challenging problem, they analyzed and interpreted the information, and agreed on the improvements; therefore, they enhanced their cognitive skills and learned their own local culture

> To restructure this place, we were thinking in some strategies that could help us preserve it, the first is to establish a period to perform maintenance and make people aware of the importance of caring for the environment, the second one is to install different containers in strategic places recycling and the third strategy is to provide a tour guide service that take care of this place. We would like to restructure this ravine, making that people don´t damage natural places, not writing on its walls and not throwing garbage to the ravine also creating environmental awareness among other citizens.

Note: Students demonstrated strategies to clean and restructure a cultural place

Figure 5: Writing activity in Lesson Four

It can be seen that problem based-learning encouraged students to use higher cognitive skills such as perception, awareness, reasoning, intuition, and understanding to solve the situation. As a result, students' learning was more active and they were able to solve situations making use of their previous knowledge and experience, as well as increasing their knowledge about the language and local culture.

Comprehension of local culture in knowledge generation

First, problem-based learning allowed students to connect their previous cultural knowledge with the new one. For instance, Participant 10 mentioned during an interview, "It is necessary to be able to talk about things that we already know to understand the culture of my city". Therefore, problem-based activities provided students opportunities to enrich what they already knew about their culture with life experiences, language, descriptions of places and traditions, all expressed in English. In that sense, students became more aware of their their roots and roles or functions in society.

From the teacher's point of view, she always recognized the contributions of problem-based learning to building knowledge. In this sense, she mentioned, "There is meaningful learning, when what is important to me is rooted in my brain; what is not, I discard it. Therefore, the new information acquires meaning in a cognitive structure with an interaction between new and previous knowledge". Consequently, students could organize their knowledge logically to be confident and engaged in learning about local culture through solving problems. As the teacher acknowledged, this process helped learners focus on relevant information and acquire knowledge about their culture. This in turn, made them feel like members of a culture.

Henao Mejía et al., (2019) explained that by acquiring cultural practices, students became aware of the similarities and differences between local and foreign cultures. Learners' cultural awareness was evident when they identified and explained the meanings and values arising from local perspectives. To sum up, learning about local culture can be the first step to developing learners' intercultural competence and, therefore, accepting themselves and others.

Recognizing our own local culture

In this final category, we analyzed how students identify themselves as a part of their local culture through. The activities were a brief description of places and the process of solving local problems regarding the local aspects.

We are members of the local culture

Problem based-activities made students more conscious that they were part of a specific local culture, since they could interact and recognize local cultural places, traditions, and customs in a second language. These actions, interactions, and recognition are known as the social competencies that allow students to identify themselves as members of a local culture and that identity enables them to become aware of their own culture. Consequently, the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) refers to the social competencies as knowledge and skills needed to address the social dimension of language use and culture accuracy. It can be stated that due to learners' involvement in finding solutions for local problems, they also practiced the social dimension of language as stated by the CEFR.

In this research, students identified their cultural identity when they realized their culture made them unique, so learning about it was perceived as a good idea. This is evident in the following comment from Participant 9. She reflected on the culture of Bogotá when she stated the importance of her local culture, saying that "I think that it is what identifies us and differentiates us from the others, apart from that it is good to learn and understand it". In sum, socio-cultural cues were relevant in the development of problem-based learning in order to generate an identification and interaction related to learners' cultural knowledge and environment, and generate their engagement in the process.

Moreover, the teacher recognized the potential of problem-based learning to encourage students to recognize themselves as a member of a culture, since she helped them to recognize specific aspects of it. This can be seen in this extract from the teacher's interview: "The social competence allows us to give students the confidence to talk about what they know, in the context of what they should move and with what kind of expressions they can use." Therefore, problem-based activities encouraged students to learn and recognize socio-cultural norms, know how to use the language expressions, and communicate appropriately inside the culture.

As a result, students were engaged in exploring all available resources to communicate effectively through the development of problem-based learning activities that generated bifold benefits. They recognized and learned more about their local identity and experienced and practiced the social dimension of the foreign language as they solved the problems.

Conclusions

Bearing in mind that the objective of this research was to analyze the way problem-solving activities promoted local cultural awareness, we could conclude that students changed their concept of culture, since they realized that language is a fundamental element of culture which allowed them to express opinions, critiques, and points of view from different cultural aspects. Moreover, they realized that traditions are learnt throughout their lives and are essential when they want to identify themselves with a specific culture and understand who they are.

Moreover, the problem-based activities encouraged students to develop critical thinking because they reflected, analyzed, and reflected on different cultural aspects to build their own concept and identification with their local cultures. Problem-solving activities developed students' skills to manipulate information, interpret and make decisions about their lives that helped them learn about their local culture.

Some limitations we faced at the beginning of the research were related to learners' participation. Based on the initial observations, the lack of participation from students was due to shyness about the mistakes they probably could make. This limitation was expected since they were beginners, and it was overcome because researchers planned the instructions, modeled,, and monitored all the activities. Nonetheless, it was impossible to have all participants' opinions when applying all the data collection instruments. This might

have limited the scope of the results; however, information from the teacher and most of the population was included in the data analysis.

Further research could focus on encouraging cultural awareness in more proficient language learners, to analyze if they might achieve higher levels of critical thinking and reflection. Additionally, problem-based learning could also be used to promote national culture; for example, the students could analyze ideological perspectives, social conflicts, values, and religious affiliations. Another idea for further research would be exploring foreign cultures and promoting intercultural awareness. Finally, we want to note the need to include aspects of the local culture in the syllabus and not only foreign culture in our English classroom.

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