

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this section, we will describe some supporting theories and studies related to the underpinning constructs set up in this investigation. The first one encompasses the skill of speaking. The second construct is material development and the third one accounts for the particularities of a rural setting.

2.1 Speaking Skill

The next lines describe some theories reinforcing the speaking skill: concepts, characteristics and stages, are explained. In any language, there are, basically, two kinds of skills: receptive and productive. Receptive skills are the ones that deal with reading and listening and productive ones are writing and speaking. With regards to the speaking skill, which is the first theoretical construct, we define it as “the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts” (Chaney, 1998, p.13). The most important aspect of speaking is to be able to communicate feelings, thoughts, and emotions to establish social relationships, which is framed under principles of interaction that are inherent to every human being.

Likewise, Brown (1994) also stated that speaking is “an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information” (p.276). Based on the previous facts, when developing the skill of speaking, the functions of language stated by Halliday (1978) can be addressed. They are: instrumental when language

is used to communicate wants, likes, preferences; personal when language expresses individuality; interactional related to the use of language to interact in groups; regulatory as a way to control; representational to explain something; heuristic when language is used to wonder about an issue; and imaginative to be able to be creative with the language.

In the specific context, where this study was carried out, students live in a social context where the English language is not used at all. It means they do not need the language to interact on daily bases. This issue made the speaking skill teaching conditions challenging. In this sense, this study wanted to provide students with initial steps to be able to develop speaking skills in English.

Brown (2001) suggested that when dealing with speaking, aspects such as the type of discourse to be used, the teaching of pronunciation, the accuracy and fluency, the affective factors and the interaction effect need to be clearly stated. In other words, the author argued that depending on the specific characteristics of the context, some of the previous elements might deserve more or less attention.

All in all, authors such as Cornbleet and Carter (2001) asseverated that speaking is a face to face action, it happens in real time and it is interactive. The authors further asserted that the speaking skill is divided into small sub-skills that are useful for language users to be effective in such a skill. In the case of speaking, opening and closing conversations, turn-taking, repairing, paraphrasing and interrupting are part of it.

Thus, the workshops that were applied focused on the sub-skills previously mentioned. Besides that, and considering the fact that students feel more anxious when they had to speak, we followed the following patterns: Engage-Study-Activate (ESA) suggested by Harmer (1998) as an effective way to deal with the teaching of speaking. The didactic strategies proposed to engage students were either warming up activities such as games, stimulating pictures, etc. or lead-in activities related to the review of vocabulary. All in all, the main objective of these strategies was to make students feel interested in the topic and to reduce the level of anxiety.

In the Study section, we focused on the language that was going to be used. In other words, the grammatical issues were addressed. Finally, in the Activate part, students were asked to put into practice what they had learned in the warming up activities as well as in the study section. This was the time when students had the opportunities to initiate their oral productions.

In addition to what was already mentioned, this study related to what Brown (2001) stated as principles for designing speaking techniques. He mentioned that when developing any kind of strategy to enhance speaking, one must be aware of students' needs, aspects that motivate students, the use of authentic and meaningful language, the provision of appropriate feedback, the link between listening and speaking, the opportunities to initiate communication and the expansion of speaking strategies.

2.2 Material Development

Materials development is an essential element in teachers' practices. It is because, as stated by Núñez, Téllez, Castellanos and Ramos (2009) "teacher-developed materials that fulfil students' needs can be seen as an innovative practice in the EFL classroom" (p. 18). Hence, teachers might move from passive to active agents in the teaching and learning processes as they innovate in their classrooms. Materials development is also significant for students since it provides them with meaningful input, which facilitates their foreign language learning development (Núñez et al., 2009). Besides, developing or adapting materials fosters learner-centered approach due to content can be contextualized (Clarke, 1989). Thus, materials development is beneficial for both, teachers and students.

Mainly materials development has been selected and evaluated by publishing houses. In other words, "It is common to see text publishing conglomerates offering teacher proof training programs, promoting the traditional one-size-fits-all methodological model, and commercializing

educational materials like textbooks and software” (Álvarez, 2008, p. 7). However, there is not a unique textbook that fulfills completely all teachers’ and students’ expectations and necessities to succeed in the foreign language teaching and learning processes (Núñez, Pineda & Téllez, 2004). Thus, “Developing materials for EFL/ESL [English as a Foreign/Second Language] classrooms should not be viewed as a task confined to textbook developers” (Núñez et al. 2004, p. 129).

For Ramos and Aguirre (2014), Colombian classrooms are characterised by diverse types of students, so one of the teachers’ role is to adapt and create material accordingly. It means that daily activities students do should be presented and discussed in the material used to teach English because it creates certain levels of empathy which facilitate the learning process. Also, this is the opportunity to engage parents in the teaching and learning process. Materials development is an endeavour undertaken by teachers since they know how people learn and are also acquainted with students’ diverse contexts, needs, interests, and learning styles (Núñez & Téllez, 2009). In short, developing materials is an opportunity for teachers to motive students and to innovate in the classroom considering them from a holistic perspective, in order to respond to the demands of the new society.

There are many authors who have defined materials development (Tomlinson, 1998; Candlin & Breen, 1979; Cunningsworth, 1984; Harmer, 1998; Núñez & Téllez, 2009). All of them are in agreement on the fact that materials development relates to the resources that are used to enhance students’ learning. For the purposes of this study, workshops were used as instructional materials. Thus, this study will consider the following definition related to materials:

It embraces an array of behaviors leading to fostering effective teaching and learning settings. Moreover, it includes the adaptation and/or creation of a learning-teaching exercise, a task, an activity, a lesson, a unit, or a module composed by one or two units. (Núñez & Téllez, 2009, p. 175)

When developing materials, it is important to keep in mind the following steps: to carry out a needs assessment, to establish goals and objectives, to conceptualize content, to design the syllabus, to select materials / activities, to organize contents/activities, to assess the material success (Núñez et al., 2004; Núñez et al., 2009). In such a way, teachers as material developers might guarantee coping with needs of students, teachers and institutions to improve pupils' motivation, creating significant materials, and enhancing learning outcomes. Therefore, the aforementioned procedures must be considered when designing materials.

Besides that, and according to Tomlinson (2011), there are some second language acquisition principles that materials developers should take into account. First, students must be exposed to a meaningful use of language in order to acquire more knowledge. Second, learners must be motivated with appealing materials to be involved in their learning process. Third, materials must be an easy bridge that connects students' experiences, needs and context with contents. Fourth, materials should be the tool for achieving communicative skills. Fifth, materials must be the opportunity to support the students' confidence. Sixth, students need materials that cope with their different styles of learning. Seventh, materials should power the students' cognitive, emotional and social skills. Finally, materials should provide the opportunity for outcome feedback among teachers and students. These principles are valuable suggestions to develop suitable material for learners.

At this stage it is worth highlighting that the first step for designing the workshops is to address students' academic needs in rural areas. Thereby, students' needs are the parameters or pointers to be taken into account when making decisions regarding teaching and learning. These parameters emerge from a diagnosis that compiles the aspects students lack in the English learning process in rural schools.

In this sense, knowing the academic population's needs allows to more effectively address the learning and teaching process. According to Núñez et al. (2009), "approaching our students' needs helps us know and understand them better to make teaching and learning decision" (p. 32).

When designing workshops, knowing students' needs becomes a pillar in this current study because it provides us clear insights to approach the topics that support their EFL learning process.

Another perspective that contributes to approaching students' needs is pointed out by Graves (2007). He stated that when assessing students' needs we must take into account "what the learners know and can do, and what they need to learn or do" (p.12). In this direction, the workshops we developed deal with the topics students are supposed to learn, but they also include themes that they are highly interested in covering in the English classes as they related to their previous knowledge and life experiences. Hence, the process of dealing with needs may include questions to identify problems, to look for priorities, to realise abilities, to regard attitudes, and to search for solutions (Rosset, as cited in Brown, 1995). Furthermore, recognizing and considering students' needs and perceptions is important because these opinions of how they would like to learn and what they need to learn in today's world should shape materials (Nuñez & Téllez, 2009).

2.3 Rural Schools

In our Colombian context, a rural school can be categorized as rural for its geographical location. If the institution is located in rural area it is just named as a rural institution. However, a rural school needs to be perceived as an institution integrated by students who live in the rural area and they are exposed to a great variety of challenges to attend school. These challenges have to do, for example, with lack of transportation and the amount of time some students spend to arrive at school. Also the students in rural areas help their families in their daily activities before and/or after school which adds tremendous amount of responsibilities on top the ones the students have to do for school in order to succeed.

Also, these institutions in rural areas are managed by teachers who need to be really sensitive to their students' needs and living conditions. Teachers who learn by doing on a daily basis by putting in practice what

theories about education lack. Educators in rural areas are professionals who, sometimes, are not trained in the area they have to teach, but they perfectly understand that students in rural settings are probably the most committed students to succeed just because arriving at school it is an odyssey for some of them. In a recent paper, Ramos and Aguirre (2016) suggested that:

The occupation of rural areas in Colombia has changed over the last few decades. Colombia was, by the middle of the last century, a country with half of its population living in rural areas, whereas now only a fifth of its total population lives in rural settlements. Thus, as rural areas have decreased, most schools' models have been developed with a focus on urban areas. (p. 212)

This change can be interpreted as failure for our educational system to keep the population in their regular habitat. It could also be understood that through education the population in rural areas has changed their minds and they perceive urban areas as place with more opportunities and more hospitality for them. As a result, less people who start their lives in the rural context want to stay there forever. Hence, our education system is failing at motivating and retaining local educated people in their home area. Often, society admires those individuals who succeed in life and they are even more admirable if they were born and studied in rural areas and then they moved to big cities to be successful. Society does not admire enough those who are born in rural areas and progress in their studies and later on go back to promote progress in the rural areas.

For Liggett (2010) rural is defined as 'territory, population and housing units not classified as urban. "Rural" classification cuts across other hierarchies and can be in metropolitan or non-metropolitan areas" (p. 67). In this sense rural is defined as opposed to urban which is not exactly true. A rural area has its own characteristics and uniqueness that it does not need to be compared to urban areas. Due to this fact when it comes to define rural education, it is defined in terms of what it lacks compared to education in urban areas which is in one sense a wrong approach. Rural education has to be recognized as a unique whole unit

composed by individuals who live and attend schools in a rural area and, as any other social group, strives for being better each day.

According to Triana *et al.* (2004), rural education is a group of complex educative practices that take place in rural zones. It has particular characteristics such as the low rapport between teachers and students and the need to attend students from diverse ages. In the same line, Parra-Sandoval (1996) suggests that this kind of education has four main objectives:

- To transmit cultural and social values.
- To teach based on cognitive bases.
- To be a place able to integrate individuals with local, regional and national scientific knowledge.
- To link production and training as part of teaching.

Rural education is also impacted by contextual and cultural issues such as poverty, inadequate health care, poor nutrition, limited prenatal care, home violence and early insertion in the work market. All of these aspects as asserted by Triana *et al.* (2004) permeate students' lives at schools. Thus, many students have difficulties when learning any subjects at school.

For Serrano (2007), in Colombia, the rural education system history shows that a big gap persists between rural and city schooling. Moulton (2001) highlighted that educational models designed for urban areas are not so relevant in rural areas, and then teachers need to be more aware of the students' environment in the rural areas. Therefore rural education needs to be seen and addressed from the inside, in a way that what whatever comes from the outside it is not imposed. Otherwise, the educational system will be perpetuating a colonization system, in other words, a rural education system mistakenly imitating an imperfect urban educational system.

The Colombian government has tried to implement diverse ways to address education in rural areas. They are Unitarian Schools, Rural

Development Concentration, The New School, Accelerated Learning, and Rural Education Service and the Sectorial Project for Rural Education. According to Ramon (2004), Unitarian School has to do with individualized instruction, active learning, and the use of guides as resource material for learners. This approach aims at mixing learners of several ages in order to multi-grade teaching. Toledo (1978) described Rural Development Concentration as a type of education that tried to connect education with training requirements of the labor force. The New School is an active school in which students participate in their own learning by developing projects. The connection between the school and the community is strong and the students are motivated to participate democratically in the schools' decisions (Serrano, 2007). In Accelerated Learning students are grouped into units or themes based on coverage, importance and relevance to student's cultural background. The curricula do not belong to one specific grade (Serrano, 2007). Rural Education Service and the Sectorial Project for Rural Education worked with students who are thirteen years old or older they had not attended school or they dropped out before finishing third grade (Serrano, 2007).

One of the missing elements in the Colombia rural education system is related to the lack of resources for teachers and students to address the curricula in an effective way. Also, one important missing part it is the lack of human resources. There are few foreign language teachers working in rural areas. Homeroom teachers try to do their best to help students at learning English as a foreign language but it is not their field of expertise. In doing so, teachers in rural areas take advantage of any kind of resource they have at hand to meet the curricula expectations in order to teach the foreign language. Often they select textbooks which are not intended for the students of rural areas. To this respect Moulton (2001) suggested that:

national curricula and instructional materials are usually written in the predominant language of the capital city, whether that be a national language, a foreign one, or the language of those in power, minority groups, many of which are in rural areas, are not always conversant with that language. (p.21)

As the main constructs and related-studies have been explained and discussed in this section, the upcoming chapter presents the pedagogical objective, theories related to education, language learning, and teaching. In the same way, the methodology and procedures followed to develop the workshops will be addressed.