

## Fostering Citizenship and English Language Competences in Teenagers Through Task-Based Instruction

Fomento de la ciudadanía y las competencias del idioma inglés  
en adolescentes mediante la instrucción basada en tareas

**Yanilis Romero**  
**Adriana Pérez**

Universidad del Norte, Barranquilla, Colombia


This research analyzes how citizenship and communicative competences can be fostered through a task-based approach to language teaching. This paper proposes the design of a unit with social components as the main meaningful task for the teaching of the English language and for fostering citizenship competencies in A2 level learners. An action research method was used; data collection techniques included observations, diaries, interviews, and students' artifacts. Findings report that tasks might foster English language use if those are designed by taking into account students' context and interests. Furthermore, real-life tasks derived from contextual features can enhance civic engagement and promote values, which can be signals of citizenship.


*Keywords:* citizenship education, communicative competence, English language, values

Esta investigación analiza cómo se pueden fomentar la ciudadanía y las competencias comunicativas mediante un enfoque basado en tareas para la enseñanza de idiomas. Este artículo propone el diseño de una unidad con componentes sociales como la principal tarea significativa para la enseñanza del idioma inglés y para el fomento de las competencias ciudadanas para los estudiantes de nivel A2. Se utilizó un método de investigación-acción; las técnicas de recolección de datos incluyeron observaciones, diarios, entrevistas y artefactos de los estudiantes. En primer lugar, los hallazgos informan que las tareas podrían fomentar el uso del idioma inglés si se diseñan teniendo en cuenta el contexto y los intereses de los estudiantes. En segundo lugar, las tareas de la vida real derivadas de características contextuales pueden mejorar el compromiso cívico y promover valores, que pueden ser señales de ciudadanía.

*Palabras clave:* competencia comunicativa, educación ciudadana, inglés, valores

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Yanilis Romero  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7954-5393> · Email: [yanilistr@uninorte.edu.co](mailto:yanilistr@uninorte.edu.co)

Adriana Pérez  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0438-979X> · Email: [aderamirez@uninorte.edu.co](mailto:aderamirez@uninorte.edu.co)

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## Introduction

In Colombia, 50 years of armed conflict and economic chaos has shaped a society in which conflicts are solved by means of violence and aggression, where many people seem to have no hope or vision for a better future, and where many care only for their own well-being instead of the collective one. However, the chance to improve Colombia as a country in which to live and progress is not only a duty of the government; every single person must take responsibility and do what is appropriate to help and be part of the transformation process. Education is a key means through which a new country can be built; one from which a new type of citizen can start to actively participate in the construction of a peaceful society. Jaramillo-Franco (2008) points out that society is interested in citizens who can be referenced as good role models, people who can put the collective demands over the individual ones, and who are able to solve their struggles in a constructive way. The Colombian General Law of Education (1994) explicitly states: “Education is a process of permanent, personal, cultural and social development that is based on a comprehensive concept of human beings, their dignity, their rights and duties” (p. 1, our translation). Even though all schools are expected to promote citizenship education, their approaches may vary. In some settings, it is taught as an obligatory subject, whereas in other schools, it gets taught rather implicitly (Chaux, 2004). In addition, teachers often focus on teaching core subjects and on students’ scores in order to demonstrate learning achievement in these areas on national standardized tests. This singular emphasis on core subject matter discredits the concept of “integral” education.

According to Wetsby (2002, as cited in Shaaban 2005), in most school programs teachers are not fully trained to complement their academic duty to address their students’ citizenship education. Given the urgent need to intervene in this state of affairs, we sought to introduce citizenship education inside the foreign language classroom. This involved putting into practice a number

of strategies at a high school in Montería<sup>1</sup> (Colombia) and focusing on teaching values and citizenship competencies, so that students were given opportunities to fully develop their potential and become active members of the communities and participate in the construction of a better future. The main objective of this study was to analyze how citizenship and communicative competencies are fostered in the ninth grade English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom at this school through a task-based approach to teaching English.

## Literature Review

The theories and concepts which underpin this study are: citizenship education and citizenship competencies, task-based learning, sociocultural theory of learning, and communicative competence.

## Citizenship Education

A great number of researchers, scholars, and teachers contemplate education as the answer to many of the issues that humans face in society, with educational institutions playing a big role in this area. According to Shaaban (2005), a designer of a proposal for incorporating moral education into the English as a second language (ESL)/EFL classroom in Beirut, Lebanon, “all schools have the obligation to foster in their students personal and civic virtues such as integrity, courage, responsibility, diligence, service and respect for the dignity of all persons” (p. 201), since all of these values are believed to develop distinctive traits of good citizens. Currently, education aims to educate a student who can achieve understanding in the different fields of knowledge, develop critical thinking abilities, behave as a responsible citizen, and who can positively commit to the building of a more inclusive society where there is equity. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the development of an increasingly globalized world, there was a marked

<sup>1</sup> Montería is a medium-size Colombian city located in the north-western part of the country.

emphasis on directing education as a means to ensure youth employment. As pointed out by UNESCO (1998), due to the competitiveness that the globalized economy brought about in the early 90s, policymakers focused on the development of students' employability skills, leaving aside the fostering of citizenship values. Thus, citizenship education has gone from being an essential foundation for instruction, to being removed and even outlawed by schools to then being again a significantly important focus of attention in schools' syllabuses.

Studies have investigated direct, significant benefits from having introduced citizenship education to the students, the school environment, and the community at large. Harecker (2012), in her research in Austria, stated:

Using exercises in schools which are based on a "values-centered" pedagogy is considered to be a worthwhile investment, which brings even more worthwhile dividends with it. In many cases, teaching can become easier, more enjoyable and has more effect; the pupils become more focused, more active and more independent. (p. 3)

Hébert and Sears (2004) also claim that "citizenship education should not be limited to one subject or school discipline, but shared with other disciplines—for example, with language and literature courses" (p. 8). Since language art does not have an explicitly detailed content, ESL/EFL has the perfect characteristics, materials, and resources to implement citizenship education (Shaaban, 2005).

### Citizenship Education in Colombia

In Colombia, the concept of *citizenship education* has been viewed as a crucial issue in the pursuit of peace. It is believed by many that, due to the circumstances lived by Colombians through the last 50 years, it is crucial to take action to prevent acts of violence and intolerance from continuing; therefore, the government has decided to implement citizenship education. According to the Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN], 2004):

Education is one of the ways that can make peace a reality . . . if we give our children quality education, we will be not only getting them away from poverty, but also, giving them the opportunity of living and making a country of peace. (p. 3, our translation)

The Colombian education system in the last decade has paid attention to the development of the citizenship competences within schools. Thus, the "Educational Revolution Program" has been created to help students gain, through a good education service, all the competences to develop as global citizens, with the ultimate purpose of ensuring students with values and ethical behavior.

Educational centers are crucial to establish strong foundations to promote citizenship education, but this teaching has to be experiential instead of just theoretical. That is why citizenship education is not meant to be just a lecture where students are filled with information and facts, but a lesson where students get to interiorize the values and put them into practice in their lives. The MEN (2004) issued the standards for citizenship education, which introduced an integral program in civic and citizenship education. But the question is what to teach?

The teaching should be contextualized according to each community and its needs, thus, special relevance in this project is given to two important values: respect and responsibility as they are closely linked to the three main groups of competencies (i.e., coexistence and peace; democratic participations and accountability; as well as plurality, identity, and appreciation of differences) proposed by the Ministry (MEN, 2004) in order to categorically encourage the development of citizenship behavior.

### Communicative and Task-Based Language Teaching

Hymes (1970, as cited in Johnson, 2004) called the ability to express utterances with the appropriateness of when to use them, according to the context, sociolinguistic

competence. For him, in addition to the knowledge of structures that enable someone to express ideas, feelings, and opinions, language is a means to communicate. His concept of communicative competence includes both the knowledge and the ability to use the language. Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a second language communicative competence framework comprising three elements: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. The goal in many ESL/EFL educational contexts is to equip learners to interact successfully with native speakers or someone who uses English as a means of communication, and to make the person more competitive for a globalized world.

Concerning task-based instruction, Willis (1996) proposes tasks as helpful goal-driven assignments that foster meaningful communication and thus support the language learning process.

Nunan (1989) offers two types of tasks: Real-world tasks designed to practice or rehearse those tasks that students are likely to face in daily situations, and pedagogical tasks, which are theory-based and aimed at facilitating language acquisition, but which are not necessarily similar to real-world tasks. For the sake of this research, a pedagogical task is proposed in its three basic forms: pre-task, task, and post task. In other words, by using tasks, it is possible to introduce “children to the global goals as part of foreign language lessons, which can redress this balance and integrate a more holistic, personalized approach to children’s education into our classroom practice” (Maley & Peachey, 2017, pp. 10–11).

## Method

### Context

This study was carried out in a public school that offers integral education from K to 11 to approximately 2,200 students coming from the lowest income families around the southern part of the city of Montería. The high school is dealing with issues as bullying, rude manners, disrespect, lack of discipline, campus vio-

lence, and poor academic performances. Additionally, disciplinary reports evidence the students’ negative attitude to study, failure to complete homework or bring material to classes, purposeful interruptions of teachers’ classes, and lack of engagement in their learning process. In terms of English teaching and learning, students are taught using a mix of strategies with no clear definition of the method to guide their learning process. In regard to the syllabus, it is annually designed by the teachers, which means that the content is changed frequently with little monitoring of the sequencing of the lessons.

However, there does not seem to be any concrete action plan for bringing about a true transformation of the situation or any specific follow up plan to track students’ progress in terms of citizenship and values education.

### Participants

The ninth graders formed a large group of 44 students: 25 young women and 19 young men, whose ages ranged from 12 to 15. They had been learning English for three years and were dynamic and liked working hard when they were fully engaged in doing tasks, especially tasks that required movement. They love asking questions and taking surveys among themselves; this aspect was discovered in a survey project class in which most of them fulfilled the requirements of the activity. Thus, they were easily attracted to work when something new was brought to the class.

Another participant was a female English teacher (part of the research team) with five years of experience working at the institution. Her language level was B2. She had taught the target students for two years in a row. Her role involved the design of the activities, rubrics, and the implementation of the unit.

### Procedure

This small-scale project followed the principles of action research, which requires a thoughtful process

by which the teacher-researcher reflects on their own educational practice and, at the same time, collects and analyzes data to provide solutions to an identified problem. The problem, as described above, stems from the urgent need to implement methodologies that will develop citizenship competences in the schools and, specifically, the need to assess the methodology implemented in the ninth grade EFL classroom at a local high school in terms of its contribution to the development of both citizenship and communicative competences.

Action research, as mentioned by Cohen et al. (2017), aims at improving practice by acting and reflecting on it. It is designed to bridge the gap between research and practice and, as a form of “self-reflective” inquiry,” it allows researchers to examine their practice in context and thus find ways to improve it so that it can have a positive impact on social justice. As Cohen et al. discuss, action research turns practical problem-solving into a systematic tool to collect relevant data to expand knowledge; it enhances the competencies of participants to be able to do research. The researchers immerse themselves in an ongoing cyclical process that allows them to gather robust information to better understand particular complex social situations, which may ultimately explain processes of change within social systems at large. Thus, there is an implied ethic principle to improve the quality of human actions starting from specific problems that practitioners face in their professional practice.

### Design of Activities

A task-based unit was designed with the purpose of providing opportunities to expose learners to learn English and use it meaningfully, as well as to promote civic awareness about a global problem. The topic chosen by the researcher in consensus with the teacher-researcher was global warming. As a result, the unit proposed has some linguistic features, competencies,

and evaluation and a general plan of action made up of details that are more specific about the lesson such as timeframe, objectives, procedures, and materials needed (see Appendices A and B).

## Data Collection Techniques

### Observations

An external teacher observed each lesson. Observation helped the teacher-researcher to analyze aspects such as exposure to the target language, the amount of time devoted to learning, materials, methodology, and evaluation. Seven observations were carried out for four weeks, comprising 12 hours of observation in total.

### Diaries

Diaries—called notepads for students (a friendlier tag)—were chosen to obtain information on how learners perceived the class. Diary entries were recorded by students at the end of each class. The questions were given in students’ native language so their act of reflecting would be clear. Students’ entries were guided by pre-established questions (see Appendix C). The sample of diaries analyzed were from five students whose profiles differ in terms of interest and engagement during the sessions.

### Videotaping

As Burns (1999) states, video recording is used for capturing in detail naturalistic interactions and verbatim utterances produced by either the learner or the teacher. The researcher chose this data source to analyze aspects such as exposure to the language, attitude, and features of the teaching methodology. All the lessons were video-recorded, with the camera located in an inconspicuous place. The videos were transcribed and analyzed after the implementation of the whole unit and relevant data obtained were coded to identify categories.

### Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were held with two different groups of five students each: one group prior to the intervention and the other after the intervention. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The information gathered was analyzed thematically in categories. The interviews combined predetermined questions with opportunities for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions to better grasp the participants' insights.

### Students' Artifacts

PowerPoint presentations made by the students were taken as a source to get relevant data to support their understanding about the social issue. Slides from each group were analyzed to nurture the findings of this study.

### Results

First we carefully analyzed the information gathered and contrasted it with our own thoughts, ideas, and impressions. Then we coded the data into categories to finally attempt some interpretation and description of the patterns revealed by each instrument regarding students' communicative and citizenship competences. In this analysis, the students are given a number to protect their identity (e.g., Student 1, Student 2, etc.).

### Analysis of the Observations

After the observations, it was possible to state that students' communicative competence was promoted. Next, we present some evidence of the pragmatic, linguistic, and sociolinguistic competences in practice. Turns 7 and 8 in Excerpt 1 show that students understood what the teacher was requesting from them and there was some behavior that responded to what she had just asked them to do. Something similar happens in Turns 9 and 10 where the teacher once again asked and students used English correctly to provide non-elaborated answers.

**Excerpt 1.** Promoting Pragmatic Competence (Taken from Lesson 1)

7 Teacher: Could you please sit down?

- 8 Students: Thank you miss!  
 9 Teacher: How was your weekend, eh? How was last week? How was your Saturday? How was Sunday? OK, good, fine?  
 10 Student: Normal...  
 11 Teacher: Normal? What did you do?  
 12 Student: Regular.  
 13 Teacher: What did you do?  
 14 Student: We did party.  
 15 Teacher: Oh...you went to a party, OMG...whose party?  
 16 Students: [in chorus] Eimis's

In Turn 15 the teacher recast a student error, giving this student the opportunity to notice the correct way to say it. Students also showed a budding ability to functionally use their linguistic resources to convey meaning and give an accurate reply when the teacher asked.

As seen from the last part of Turn 6 to 16 in Excerpt 2, the three students involved showed that they understood what they had summarized in the previous class and were capable of communicating their ideas orally using English as a means to transfer the message. Excerpt 2 also shows that the summary of the participants was good, which was in accordance with the unit's aim of writing the synthesis of a video.

**Excerpt 2.** Promoting Pragmatic Competence (Taken from Lesson 1)<sup>2</sup>

- 8 Teacher: Let's review, we are going to review our topic *y luego de que ya recordamos entonces iniciamos con la lectura. Quién me quiere voluntariamente ayudar con la lectura. Entonces vamos a leer qué es global warming en la lectura* [and after we have recalled, then we will start by reading the text, who voluntarily wants to help reading the text? OK, let us read what global warming is in the reading]. *¿Qué consiguió* [Student 1] *que era global warming?* Please, read aloud for the rest of the class.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that, in this excerpt, the teacher reported having used Spanish (the students' mother tongue) as a strategy to guarantee that students understood the content.

- 9 Student 1: Global warming. Global warming refers to the increase of the earth's temperature due to the increase of the amount of gas in the atmosphere.
- 10 Teacher: In the atmosphere. OK, thank you. *¿Qué encontraron que eran las causas allí? Las causas Quién quiere ayudarme con las causas. ¿Quién tiene las causas? Levante la mano.* [Student 2], *¿me puedes ayudar por favor?* [Could you help me, please?]
- 11 Student 2: Causes: driving a car, flying an airplane, greenhouse, contamination.
- 12 Teacher: Again. Read louder.
- 13 Student 2: Driving a car.
- 14 Teacher: OK, driving a car, driving cars, the greenhouse effect, *¿qué mas?* [raising the voice tone to call everyone's attention]
- 15 Student 2: Contamination.
- 16 Teacher: And contamination. *Ahora sí, quién tiene los effects* [Now, who has the effects?]. Thank you [Student 2]. *¿Alguien más?* [Anybody else?]. Effects. Lady?
- 17 Student 3: And some animals are moving to new houses because of their natural habitats.
- 18 Teacher: Yes! Animals are moving to new houses or to new areas. *Muy bien.*

Sociolinguistic competence was also fostered during the teaching unit, as can be seen in Excerpt 3. The teacher was waiting for some students to begin their presentation, but they were having trouble with the electronic devices and a student used formal language to ask her to wait some more minutes.

**Excerpt 3.** Evidence of Sociolinguistic Competence (Requesting Time Politely)

Miss, Yanilis...Do you mind waiting, please?... We need some time. The computer does not accept my pen drive... we are trying. (Taken from Lesson 7)

The other category was citizenship competencies: The findings in this category come from observations made by the teacher-researcher who construed students' interaction as an ongoing process where citizenship

competencies took place. The promotion of citizenship competencies was an active component of the teaching and learning process of the English sessions. We acknowledge that fostering citizenship requires a long process, which in this specific context, had positively started.

In addition, this category recognizes the idea that students in the target group were and are experiencing a series of realities that may help them become better citizens in a long-term process.

As a whole, it is possible to say that classes presented opportunities for learning and practice, not only English but also civic behavior among students and teachers. This single factor matches the idea proposed by the socio-cultural theory where the learning process is seen as a social process within a given context and learners as active agents under the guidance of an adult (Vygotsky, 1978).

The methodology (task-based learning) offered opportunities for social interaction between the teacher and the students; it seemed that the classroom was a democratic place where the participation of both (learners and teacher) was necessary for the success of the sessions; the teacher constantly invited students to participate and ask for the clarifications they thought they needed. We may argue that the teacher unconsciously applied some of the strategies proposed by Shaaban (2005) because she promoted students' active involvement, cooperative learning, and explanation as part of the unit she was carrying. Though her methodology was based on a task-based approach, it clearly suits Shaaban's suggestions as to teaching citizenship competences.

In this way, students were able to be actively involved and broke the pattern in which only the teacher asks questions. Excerpt 4 evidences that the relation was set to be bidirectional instead of unidirectional. Note that in the observer's comment students are the active actors of the class, as one of the students asked what the word "anthropogenic" meant, followed by an explanation

from the teacher who supported the definition with an example.

**Excerpt 4.** Asking for Clarification and Supplying Requested Information About New Words (Taken from Lesson 1)

125 Teacher: [The teacher is presenting the activity]. In the next activity, you have headings, headings are like titles. You are going to identify which heading goes with each picture, OK? I'm going to give you two minutes to try to find out which one goes with which one, one picture is left out, there are only five...1, 2, 3, 4, 5, so I'm going to label just five pictures, I'm gonna give you two minutes, think about which picture goes with each heading. Which picture with which headings?

126 Student 3: What is floods, miss?

127 Teacher: Look at me. The Sinú river is increasing [used body language] and then goes to houses, and then got floods. Another word that you don't know?

128 Students: Flood.

129 Teacher: Yes, another word that you don't know?

130 Student 2: Anthropogenic.

131 Teacher: Anthropogenic...Do you know what is anthropogenic? It is caused by human activity, if I for example cause the rain [body language], let's suppose that I am doing things and then the rain will come, that is anthropogenic, so the rain is caused by my activity, anthropogenic means that people cause that...Another word? No? OK, let's see which words go with each one. Another minute so you could finish. Again, you are going to put one heading under the picture, OK.

In Excerpt 5, more specifically in Turn 18, the teacher assigned turns for students who were willing to participate in the class and they responded positively to this routine. They were patient, they listened to each other; it is possible to see that students were feeling capable and competent when participating.

**Excerpt 5.** Assigning Turns (Taken from Lesson 2)

18 Teacher: Yes. Animals are moving to new houses or to new areas. *Muy bien, ese es uno. ¿Otro efecto?*, another effect? Student 3?

19 Andrea: Due to the earth heating...sea level are raising [and] people have to move away from the coast.

Although students were not all the time displaying responsibility, it can be argued that they could have been developing argumentative competencies. When the teacher called out a student, she told the teacher to allow her to do her group presentation next class, and when the teacher asked for the reasons, she sustained her position with an argument, trying to negotiate with the teacher. Apparently, the teacher allowed more time, and the students promised to make a better effort and present a quality product.

**Excerpt 6.** Negotiating and Reaching Agreements (Taken from Lesson 4)

33 Student 3: Teacher, can we leave it for tomorrow?

34 Teacher: Why for tomorrow? What is it for tomorrow that cannot be done today?

35 Student 3: For tomorrow, we are going to be more prepared.

36 Teacher: So, what do we do?

37 Student 3: We practice hard.

Student 3's behavior was a confirmation that she was on the way to developing citizenship competencies, as she was able to manifest her position, listen to the uncomfortable situation, and ask for a second opportunity to comply with the task. The aforesaid performance paired with another standard typified as a communicative one in the documents for citizenship competencies (MEN, 2004). Thus, it was found that students were partially practicing values such as responsibility, which is a fundamental trait we considered when establishing a connection between citizenship education and moral values.



As part of the three citizenship objectives for the unit (see Appendix A), students reflected on a problematic situation, as shown in Excerpt 7. They were relating to the citizenship standards described by MEN (2004): “actively collaborate to reach common goals in my classroom and recognize the importance of rules to attain those goals” (p. 17, our translation) and “constructively work as teams [and] participate with my teachers and classmates in a project-oriented to a common welfare” (p. 19, our translation).

**Excerpt 7.** Promoting Citizenship Competences (Taken from Lesson 3)

- 8 Teacher: So that's the problem that we need to talk about, because that is the problem that every day a guy is putting a lot of noise. Now, which would be the solution for that problem? One person!
- 9 Student 5: Dialogue.
- 10 Teacher: Yes, dialogue.
- 11 Students: Manners.
- 12 Teacher: Yes.

These competencies were developed thanks to the task-based methodology as learners were first exposed to situations that presented a problem affecting the people of the world. Afterward, they analyzed it, reflected upon it, and proposed possible solutions; later, as a task, students were asked to find a problematic situation affecting their community and then do some kind of research about the problem, the effects or consequences, and then propose possible solutions. This methodology promoted the planned citizenship goal since it prompted students to construct and celebrate agreements regarding what problem to discuss in their presentation, how to distribute the work and responsibilities among themselves, what text finally to present in their slides; to decide who would be those to present the work orally in front of the others. It is important to admit that students attempted to keep their agreement and sometimes failed, but what is more important to highlight is that they finally did what was required of them and made a presentation.

The fact that students were able to look around in their communities with critical eyes and question what was perhaps taken for granted and accepted as an everyday reality constituted an important citizenship exercise.

### Analysis of the Interviews

The interviews were analyzed in a systematic manner by splitting the text into significant components, creating categories and putting similar ideas together, thus helping the analysis make more sense (Burnard, 1994). These categories were the teacher's methodology, participation, diaries, learning, and motivation.

**Teacher's Methodology.** In the first set of questions, students acknowledged the teacher's methodology as a significant factor in their performance. Student 1 stated:<sup>3</sup>

I feel that now students understand a little bit more and participate in class. I don't feel the teacher is explaining something, but that we all are constructing the lesson.

**Participation.** Students also reported that another factor that helped them was the stress-free environment, since the teacher motivated participation voluntarily, not obligatorily; therefore, they felt more at ease and were eager to participate.

I like the class because [the teacher] is not threatening us to participate, she doesn't say it is a mark, but she says: “Who wants to contribute?” (Student 1)

**Diaries (Notepads):** Students' impressions about the notepads were all positive.

We can let off steam with the notepad. We just have to write and learn, and by writing we can revise what we have learnt. (Student 1)

Since the teacher asks us to write about what happens in the class, we reflect on the topics and the experiences that the lesson gives us. (Student 3)

<sup>3</sup> The interviews were held in Spanish and we have translated the students' answers.

Such insights allowed the perception that the notepad was a tool that helped students delve deeper into their thoughts and feelings.

**Learning.** Likewise, in the second interviews, carried out at the end of the study, students displayed acknowledgement of improvement both in the academic part as well as in the personal one.

In the academic part I have changed, I felt that it has been better, the lessons, every day we have learnt more things, more experiences. (Student 2)

I have changed a little in the academic part, my mind is wider open. (Student 3)

**Motivation.** Motivation was another aspect students mentioned; they expressed the following:

Interviewer: Is there a word you could use to express how you feel now in classes?

Student 2: Motivated.

Before my mind wasn't able to catch all those things in English, and now, I feel more motivated, more excited about English. (Student 3)

### Analysis of Students' PowerPoint Presentations

PowerPoint presentations in the foreign language classes have been used for quite some time and they have demonstrated several advantages, such as making both teaching and learning interactive and an enjoyable and rewarding activity (Musa & Al-Dersi, 2013). Students who were part of this study had been working on the unit called "Global Warming." Throughout the unit students were then asked to carry out a group mini-research project which included identifying a particular environmental problem affecting their communities, thinking of its causes, consequences, and possible solutions, and, as a final product, they were asked to make a PowerPoint presentation to report their findings to the class. This task was intended for students to continue developing the ability to identify a problematic situa-

tion, construct a problem-solution text, synthesize it in PowerPoint slides, and orally present it to the class.

We designed a rubric to evaluate the presentations (see Appendix D). The criteria used for that evaluation were completeness, use of discourse markers and connectors, clarity and coherence, and citizenship competence.

Next, we summarize the findings after analyzing the slides of five groups. It is worth mentioning that all the students demonstrated in this analysis the capacity to identify an environmental problem affecting their community. Some of the problematic situations found by students were: the excessive pollution of water and soils (Group 1), street contamination (Group 2), bad odors and mosquitos due to accumulation of waste (Group 3), noise pollution (Group 4), and security problems (Group 5). The content of the five presentations was organized taking into account the main four aspects (problem, causes, effects, and solution) which students discussed.

Regarding the identification of the issue, students were able to recognize relevant problems in their surroundings; most of them provided an example, made a comment, and showed photos of them. These three elements in their work also demonstrated that learners had understood and possessed clarity about their intended research, that they were able to have a critical look at their environment.

The students were also able to give more details about the problem, specifying what they considered to be the causes and the consequences. Groups 1 and 2 rightly identified some of the conditions leading to excessive pollution of water and soils (see Figure 1).

Regarding the identification of causes and effects, these groups were able to identify the precise effects of the problem they were stating. This situation was a good indicator to know that students did not only learn about the characteristics of a problem-solution text but also about how those issues have an undesirable impact on the environment and on people (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Slides Showing Problems Found in the Community by Groups 1 and 2

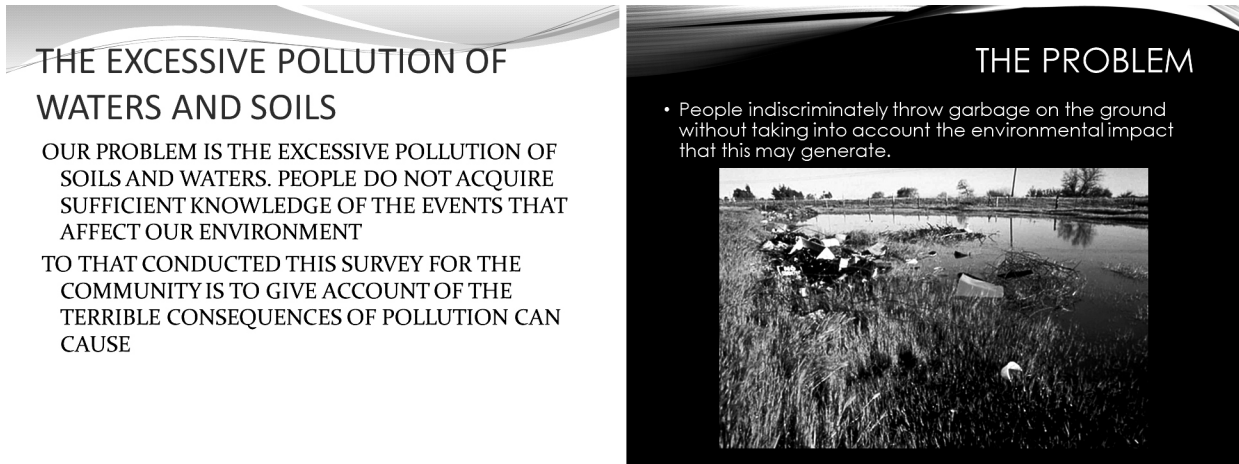


Figure 2. Slides Showing Causes Presented by Groups 1 and 2

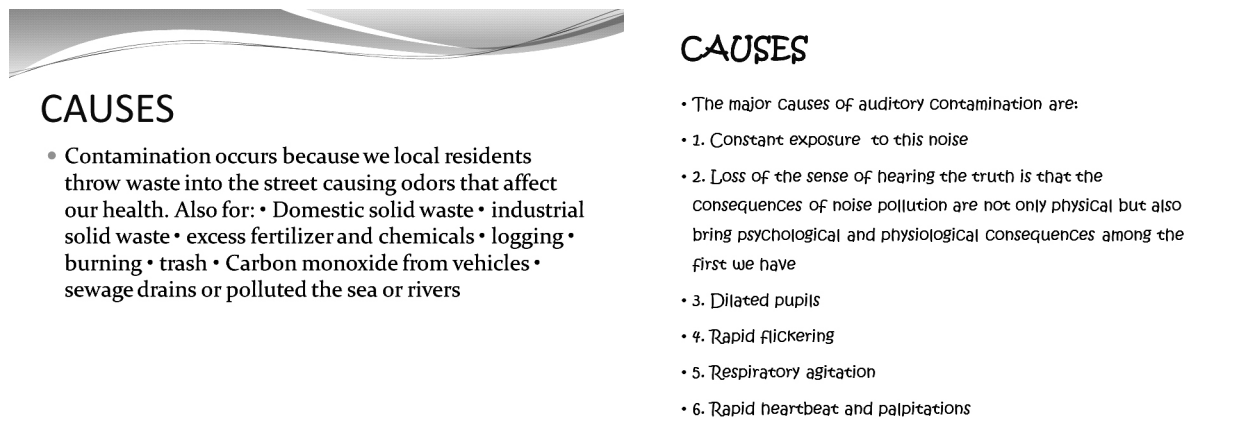
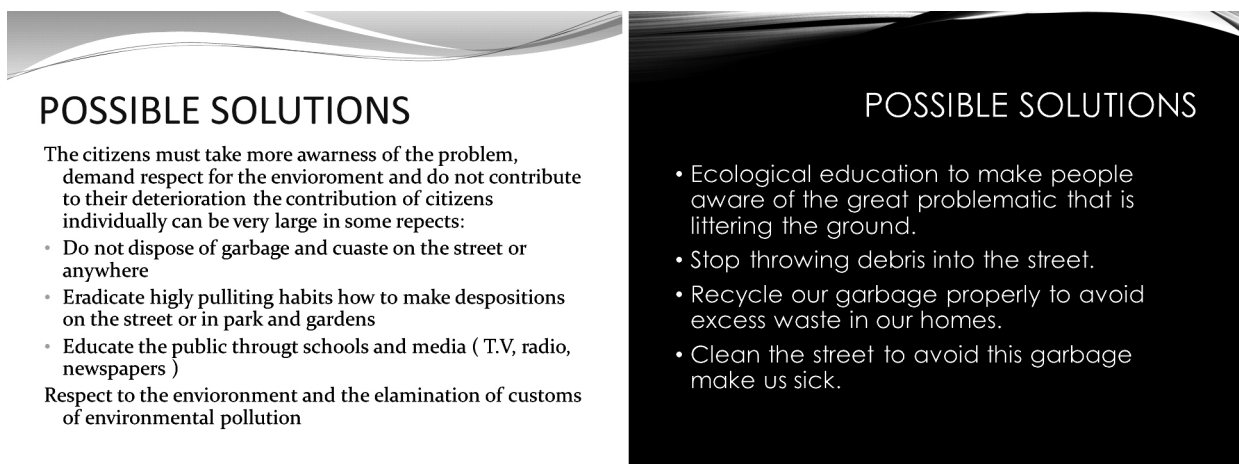


Figure 3. Slides Showing the Proposed Solutions by Groups 4 and 5



All the groups proposed practical solutions. Group 4 gave a peaceful and collective solution and Group 5 showed awareness and knowledge of their legal rights (see Figure 3).

These proposed solutions were consistent with some of the proposed standards for citizenship education (MEN, 2004): “identify and analyze situations in which civil and political rights are violated” (p. 23, our translation). The slides also evidence the students’ growing command in English: They not only wrote fairly accurate texts, but most of them managed to give spoken messages during the oral presentations. The task-based instruction provided instances in which the foreign language was used to convey ideas and promote communication among the actors in the classroom.

### Analysis of Students’ Notepads

Students were given the chance to self-evaluate their role during the class, and their attitude to face conflict while the sessions were taking place. Participants were numbered to provide confidentiality of the identities of the students.

Student 1 was concerned and understood that every action brings consequences either positive or negative. She wrote in the reflection for Lesson 3 that her classmates did not do the right thing; then, the teacher called students’ attention for not being responsible. She even recognizes that the teacher was scolding them, as they were not behaving as expected. In the same sense, she finally admitted that the “scolding part” was a good thing to do as the teacher brought them down to earth. She wrote: “But the teacher gave us a talk, one of those I called scolds, but I like them. She brings us down to earth. So, after this, everybody must present tomorrow.”

The form in which Student 1 expressed her consciousness about not coping with the objectives of the class and immediately starting a call for commitment was evident in her reflection for this class. Thus, she

started to develop citizenship competencies, especially the one that refers to a person who foresees the consequences in the short and long term about his or her actions and avoid those that can cause harm to others or themselves.

In general terms, students showed that the class motivated them to talk in English as their oral participation was noticeable throughout as it increased throughout the lessons. The fact that students were able to write summaries, complete charts, read, comprehend, and give their own conclusions using the English language are proof that students’ communicative competence was being developed through the activities proposed in the unit. Some other aspects to highlight are that most students’ responses in English were fairly well-constructed, and they initiated verbal interventions in English, which means that they felt comfortable communicating ideas using the English language. The above-mentioned evidence may indicate that the task encouraged learners in a constructive way to learn language through meaningful interaction while developing activities and tasks, as Feez (1998) claims in his assumptions on task-based instruction.

In a general view, students understood and conveyed messages, but it is evident that they should work on spelling, syntax, and cohesion, among other elements (see Figures 4 and 5 where there is a sample of students’ synthesis from the video).

**Figure 4.** Transcription of the Synthesis of a Video Written by Student 6 [*sic*]

Ana is a business management, she spoke in the video about Global Warming, the effects of global warming, the green house effect.

Causes: problem affecting humanity, green house causes poor economy, and in all the humanity.

Principal solution: Not to contaminate, plant trees, carpool, reduce waste, reuse bulbs.

Change your way of thinking.

**Figure 5.** Transcription of the Synthesis of a Video Written by Student 7 [sic]

Ana is a person; she talks about the problem of contamination in the video. She mentioned the effects of the big problem of global warming, and others.

Some causes: this problem affects all the animals and the people. Another problem is the economy because it affects the soil

Solution: stop contamination, use the 3 R's, and use cars with many people in

Figures 4 and 5 showed that English language learning was taking place during the implementation of the lessons. The students' writings were more comprehensible, and ideas were organized. This evidence is coherent with Willis's (1996) ideas about evaluating tasks in terms of achievement of an outcome as they bear some resemblance to real-life language use.

### Conclusions

After the application of this research project, we could see that citizenship and communicative competences were fostered using a task-based approach to language teaching, because the role of the task proposed in the unit let learners experience several situations like identifying a problematic issue; proposing possible solutions for it; interacting with classmates, teachers, and people from the community; and producing a problem-solution text. Such experiences contributed to the understanding of the students' role in society and how they can contribute to the solution of real-life problems that could also benefit their communities and impact society at large. That is to say, learners were the participants of this study and it was possible to evidence the process through which they were undergoing while learning English and displaying positive civic behavior as future citizens.

Upon concentrating on the evidence of citizenship competencies developed in this ninth grade EFL class, it was perceived that most learners were capable of

adjusting to the rules proposed for the harmony of the class and demonstrating that they could all come to an agreement to turn in a requested product. In addition to this, students showed certain commitment to foster values such as respect and responsibility. Nevertheless, it is indispensable to say that they still needed time to work on those aspects, since pupils are within the process of developing character, which is meant to be a long process. Coexistence was seen among students, respect and responsibility existed in the classroom and they were put into practice when students listened to each other and conducted themselves in an ethical manner. To be realistic, the promotion of citizenship competencies needs more than a unit to be developed and they can be perceived not in the way they are written in the standards but with small actions, insofar as students are provided with chances to assume a positive attitude while participating in the process.

An important lesson derived from this experience is the fact that the teacher can plan more detailed scaffolding for the students before they are able to produce the type of text they are expected to produce. As it was, the teacher never showed the class an example of the final product they were supposed to produce and was never explicit about the criteria of evaluation (the students never knew the rubric for the oral presentation). Some students fully engaged with the task showed awareness of different tools with which they had to fight for their own rights, which aligns with the purpose of the study: to see how the students' citizenship competences were developed. The verbalization of awareness of responsibility or participation in the problematic situation or in the solution was taken as an indicator of a higher level of awareness. Other signals of the development of citizenship competences were students' attitude to resolve conflicts during the lessons and the receptive attitude to work on the weaknesses when being corrected by the teacher. For further studies, the assessment of citizenship via the use of validated instruments is recommended.

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## About the Authors

**Yanilis Romero** holds a master's degree in English Language Teaching (ELT) and is studying for a PhD in Education at Universidad del Norte (Colombia). She has worked researching on projects regarding the improvement of teaching and learning English processes with different audiences in public institutions.

**Adriana Pérez** holds a PhD in Educational Sciences from the Latin American and Caribbean University (Venezuela), a master's degree in Education in Teaching Spanish, and a BA in Education from the Universidad de Oriente in Venezuela. She is currently working for the Spanish Department in Universidad del Norte.

## Appendix A: Unit Planning

Aspect	Description
Task	To make a presentation about a local problem and propose solutions for it.
Communicative competences	Linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic
Linguistic features	Words that signal a problem Lexis around environmental problems Discourse organizers Cause & effect indicators
Citizenship competence	To critically analyze conflicts among groups, in my neighborhood, town, or country. To construct, implement, keep, & repair agreements between groups. To show respect and tolerance.
Evaluation	Students' participation during the task cycle. Final presentation. Criteria: identification of problem, proposal of solutions, spelling, and use of lexis

## Appendix B: Detailed Plan of Action

Class stage	Objective/competencies/ standards	Teacher's procedures and students' activities
Warm-up (15–30 min)	<p>Follow instructions given during classes to do academic activities.</p> <p>Show a tolerant attitude and respect when listening to others.</p>	The teacher does a warm-up activity. Silently, some students act out some words while others infer the meaning in Spanish (unknown words in a video they will watch).
Pre-task (2 hr)	Use general knowledge of the world to comprehend what is heard.	Students watch a video twice. They have to take notes as the video is playing.
	Coherently organize texts when writing taking into account formal elements such as punctuation and spelling.	Teacher asks students what the video is about. She uses yes/no questions.
	Summarize information from a video in writing.	In groups of three, students write a short paragraph about a video message based on what they know or on notes taken.
	Development of respect and tolerance when listening to others and working together	Students share what they write while the teacher writes key words on the board. Later, she induces students to notice three things: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The problem</li> <li>2. The causes and the effects</li> <li>3. The possible solutions</li> </ol>
	Express opinions, likes, and preferences about topics discussed in class.	Students give their opinions related to the topic (interesting, important: why or why not?)
Task (3 hr)	Identify a problem-solution text and understand it.	Students read a problem-solution related to global warming.
	Critically analyze conflicts between groups in the neighborhood or community.	In groups, students discuss their understanding of the causes, effects, and possible solutions. Students fill out a chart and then share as a class.
	Construct, celebrate, and keep agreements among people and groups.	Students read another cause-effect text and answer some comprehension questions regarding the problem, the cause, and the effects. In groups of four, students think of a problem in their community. They design a presentation using slides to show the problem, causes, and consequences (pictures needed).
2 hr	Make short oral presentations on findings of a research.	In groups of four, students formally present their findings in a five-minute presentation. Listeners should write down possible solutions to the problem presented by each group.
	Express opinions orally about the topics developed in class.	The best groups share their work with other groups from the same grade.
Post-task (3 hr)	Students make short oral presentation about their findings.	Students report to the class their findings in a very informal way.
	Propose a solution to a given problem.	Students organize the information and investigate further so they can do a short oral presentation for the class.



## Appendix C: Prompts of Questions to be Answered in Students' Diaries

*Note.* The questions were originally given to the students in Spanish.

1. What was your role (positive or negative) in the English class and/or in the group work? Explain.
2. How was your contribution? (Positive, negative, significant, unhelpful, useless).
3. How did you perceive the contribution of the other partners?
4. What went right/wrong in the class, and/or in the group work?
5. What could have been done differently?
6. Was there a conflict in the class? Describe it.
7. How was your participation in the conflict?
8. Was it solved? How was it solved? Or how could it be solved?

## Appendix D: Rubric to Evaluate Students' Oral Presentations

### Oral Presentation: Problems in our community

*Note.* The original was provided in Spanish.

Teacher's name:

Student's name:

Category	4	3	2	1
Content	Shows a complete understanding of the subject.	Shows a good understanding of the topic.	Shows a good understanding of part of the topic.	Does not seem to understand the topic very well.
Completion	The work has the complete content: three slides with visual aids.	The work has almost all required parts: three slides with visual aids, loaded with text.	The work has all the parts.	The work does not have all required parts.
Oral presentation	Shows preparation, enthusiasm, and uses a good tone of voice. The ideas are presented in a clear and orderly manner.	Shows some preparation, enthusiasm, and uses a good tone of voice. The ideas are presented properly but not very coherently and orderly.	Shows very little preparation and enthusiasm, and uses a low tone of voice. Shows isolated ideas with little organization.	Does not show preparation, enthusiasm, and does not use an appropriate tone of voice. Does not present ideas orally and lacks coherence regarding the ideas.
Language	Facial expressions and body language generate strong interest and enthusiasm about the topic.	Facial expressions and body language sometimes generate strong interest and enthusiasm about the topic.	Facial expressions and body language are used trying to generate enthusiasm, but it seems fake.	Very little use of facial expressions or body language. They do not generate much interest in the way they introduce the topic.
Visual aids	Students use several visual aids, which show considerable work/creativity, and they make the presentation.	Students use 1–2 visual aids, which show considerable work/creativity, and they make the presentation better.	Students use 1–2 visual aids that make the presentation better.	Students do not use any visuals or any support during the presentation.