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Exploring the Road to C1 English Level - A Descriptive Case Study

Trabajo de Integración Curricular previo a la obtención del título de Licenciado/a en Pedagogía del Idioma Inglés

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Resumen

Este estudio cualitativo reflexiona sobre el procedimiento seguido por una estudiante en la Universidad Nacional de Educación en Ecuador para obtener la certificación C1, así como los métodos, estrategias y materiales que empleó. Utilizando una metodología de estudio de caso descriptivo, la investigación se centra en las experiencias personales de la estudiante mientras navegaba por las complejidades del aprendizaje de idiomas desde el nivel principiante hasta la competencia avanzada. El estudio emplea tres entrevistas semiestructuradas y en profundidad para recopilar información detallada sobre los desafíos que enfrentó, sus motivaciones y las estrategias para superar obstáculos. Los hallazgos revelan que la estudiante encontró obstáculos significativos, especialmente en el dominio de estructuras gramaticales complejas, pronunciación y vocabulario, que son críticos para alcanzar la competencia C1. A pesar de estos desafíos, la estudiante demostró una fuerte motivación para mejorar, impulsada por intereses personales y aspiraciones futuras. El estudio resalta la importancia de un entorno de aprendizaje de apoyo y el papel de actividades prácticas en inglés, como la práctica de conversación y los ejercicios de escritura, en la mejora de las habilidades lingüísticas. Además, la investigación identifica estrategias efectivas empleadas por la estudiante para superar dificultades, incluyendo una gestión del tiempo estructurada, el uso de técnicas de estudio personalizadas y la incorporación de actividades extracurriculares que fomentaron el compromiso y la motivación. La capacidad de la participante para enfrentar desafíos y convertirlos en oportunidades de crecimiento se destaca como un factor clave en su éxito. Este estudio contribuye con valiosos conocimientos sobre el proceso de aprendizaje de idiomas, particularmente para los aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). Subraya la necesidad de que los educadores reconozcan las experiencias diversas de los estudiantes e implementen estrategias que atiendan las

necesidades individuales de aprendizaje. Las implicaciones de esta investigación se extienden a los programas de formación lingüística, sugiriendo que un enfoque integral que combine motivación, prácticas de estudio efectivas y apoyo emocional puede mejorar significativamente el camino hacia la competencia avanzada en el idioma. Al entender la naturaleza multifacética del aprendizaje de idiomas, los educadores pueden apoyar mejor a los estudiantes en su búsqueda de fluidez y confianza en inglés.

Palabras Clave: *Certificación C1, Aprendizaje de idiomas, Estrategias de estudio, inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL).*

Abstract

This qualitative study reflects on the procedure followed by a student at the National University of Education in Ecuador to obtain C1 certification, as well as the methods, strategies, and materials she employed. Using a descriptive case study methodology, the research focuses on the student's personal experiences as she navigated the complexities of language learning from beginner level to advanced proficiency. The study employs three semi-structured, in-depth interviews to gather detailed information about the challenges she faced, motivations, and strategies for overcoming obstacles. The findings reveal that the student encountered significant obstacles, particularly in mastering complex grammatical structures, pronunciation, and vocabulary, which are critical for achieving C1 proficiency. Despite these challenges, the student demonstrated a strong motivation to improve, driven by personal interests and future aspirations. The study highlights the importance of a supportive learning environment and the role of practical English activities, such as conversation practice and writing exercises, in enhancing language skills. Moreover, the research identifies

effective strategies employed by the student to overcome difficulties, including structured time management, the use of tailored study techniques, and the incorporation of extracurricular activities that fostered engagement and motivation. The participant's ability to embrace challenges and transform them into opportunities for growth is emphasized as a key factor in her success. This study contributes valuable insights into the language learning process, particularly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. It underscores the need for educators to recognize the diverse experiences of students and to implement strategies that cater to individual learning needs. The implications of this research extend to language training programs, suggesting that a holistic approach that combines motivation, effective study practices, and emotional support can significantly enhance the journey toward achieving advanced language proficiency. By understanding the multifaceted nature of language learning, educators can better support learners in their pursuit of fluency and confidence in English.

Keywords: *C1 Certification, Language Learning, Study Strategies, English as a Foreign Language (EFL).*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context

The C1 certification in English is a noteworthy accomplishment that can lead to educational and professional prospects in the modern world. The procedure of earning this certification, however, is a significant difficulty for many people. This descriptive case study focuses on the experience of one student who worked on her C1 English certification. It is essential to comprehend the process and methods employed by people pursuing C1 certification in English in order to enhance educational and certification procedures. This study tries to identify the particular challenges that this person encountered and her strategies for overcoming them. The results of this study may be helpful for people looking for comparable certificates as well as educational institutions that offer language training programs and English teachers as well.

1.2 Theme

Our research focuses on exploring the process a participant followed to achieve C1 proficiency in English, despite starting with no prior knowledge of the language and facing additional challenges such as being a mother and working simultaneously. Therefore, reaching C1 competency in English is a noteworthy milestone, particularly for those who have never spoken the language before. In a globalized world where English is widely used, it creates prospects for further education, career advancement, and improved communication skills. On their path to C1 competency, learners may encounter a number of difficulties, such as time restraints, restricted access to resources, possible financial limitations, and occasionally even feelings of self-doubt or dissatisfaction. There are several valid reasons for exploring this topic.

Firstly, understanding the process by which adults achieve high levels of language proficiency can inform language teaching methodologies and strategies, particularly for learners with similar backgrounds and challenges. Secondly, documenting the experiences of individuals like our participant can shed light on the resilience, determination, and strategies employed in overcoming obstacles to language learning, which can be inspiring and informative for others facing similar circumstances.

Lastly, our research can contribute to the broader conversation on adult education, lifelong learning, and the intersectionality of language learning with other aspects of life, such as parenthood and employment. Other studies focused on ELF students address this topic identifying how anxiety can affect student's learning. To illustrate Sadiq's (2017) study showed that anxiety can significantly impact the academic performance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. While third-year students were found to have lower levels of anxiety compared to first and second-year students, no significant differences were found based on the specific program year.

Recommendations based on the study's findings include recognizing and addressing language anxiety among EFL learners, encouraging English practice both inside and outside the classroom, and promoting communication with native speakers in informal contexts such as social media. Similarly, according to Ivanova's et al. (2021) study conducted on the assessment of reading skills in English proficiency exams, we find a direct connection to our research. Both studies focus on understanding the process of acquiring reading skills in English, providing a relevant foundation for our study. Additionally, the fact that our participant took the CAE exam, one of the exams analyzed in this study, provides a direct link between the two studies, which can enrich our analysis by considering the performance patterns observed in that evaluation.

Finally, Ulfa y Bania's (2019) study on the motivation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students relates to our research on the process of achieving C1 level in English. Similar to ours, this study also explores how the influence of teachers and personal learning goals affects students' motivation. These findings could be relevant to our study by highlighting the importance of teacher support and influence, as well as the need to set clear goals for progress in language learning.

1.3 Importance of the study

We believe that this study will be relevant for the educational community in the learning and teaching of English as a foreign language, both for students and teachers. This descriptive case study will also contribute to the process of students who are on their way to obtain their C1 certification level, since it will provide them with tips, recommendations, or routines on how to carry out this process, which for many is very complicated. As for the teachers, it will help them to guide their students in their preparation for the aforementioned certification. We also believe that it will have a great influence on each reader because it is an example of overcoming and constant struggle to achieve the objectives. In this way, each reader will feel motivated to learn about this former student's process and story and will continue on the path to achieve their goals.

1.4 Research question

What was the participant's experience in her process of achieving C1 level of English?

1.5 Objectives: General and Specific

To reflect on the procedure that the participant followed to become C1 certified as well as the methods, strategies, and materials she employed.

- To describe the difficulties that the participant faced in working toward C1 certification.

- To explore the potential implications of the participant to empower others who may face similar situations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies

This chapter sheds light on the multifaceted challenges encountered while learning a second language and the various strategies learners utilize to overcome them, offering valuable insights for both educators and learners. Examining language learning strategies aligns with current efforts to improve educator proficiency.

First, building on the importance of learner self-efficacy, Zahidi y Ong (2023) explored the link between self-beliefs and self-regulated learning strategies (SRLs) in English as a Second Language (ESL) acquisition. Self-efficacy refers to a learner's confidence in their ability to learn English effectively, while SRLs are the specific methods and approaches learners use to manage their own learning process. This research investigated the relationship between these two key factors that influence success in learning ESL. Using a qualitative case study approach with five undergraduate students, the researchers examined the students' self-reported self-efficacy (their belief in their own ability to learn English) and the specific methods they employed to oversee their own education (SRL methods).

This analysis aimed to uncover how these two factors (self-efficacy and SRLs) might be related to the students' overall success in learning English. By examining these individual cases, the researchers hoped to gain a deeper understanding of how self-belief and personal learning approaches can influence achievement in ESL learning. The study's findings suggested a connection between these factors. Students with higher self-efficacy and who

used more effective SRL strategies seemed to achieve greater success in learning English. This suggests that educators can improve ESL learning by encouraging positive self-belief and by teaching self-regulated learning strategies.

This study on self-belief and learning strategies in ESL is a great resource for our thesis. It explores the link between confidence (self-efficacy) and how learners manage their own studies (SRLs). Their finding that students with higher self-efficacy and stronger SRLs achieve more in English aligns with our research on our thesis focus. This suggests fostering positive self-belief and teaching self-regulation strategies can be crucial for ESL learners. By analyzing their case studies, we can gain valuable details about how these factors play out in individual learners. Overall, this research strengthens our exploration of how self-efficacy and learning strategies influence ESL success.

Then, Taufiq's (2016) investigation delves into the challenges faced and strategies employed by an ESL learner as they navigate the learning process. This study aims to understand the difficulties and instructional methods encountered by ESL students. To achieve this, the researcher employed a qualitative approach, collecting descriptive data like words or photos that captured the participant's experiences. In-depth interviews were conducted to gain insights, with the conversations meticulously analyzed and documented. To ensure the validity of the results, the collected data was then compared to existing theories on ESL acquisition. Notably, the interviews were primarily conducted in English to facilitate clear communication, with occasional code-switching to the participant's native Bahasa Indonesia.

This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the speaker's experiences and challenges. The study revealed a variety of challenges faced by an ESL learner. These included limited speaking practice, grammatical errors, pronunciation difficulties, and vocabulary gaps. The participant also struggled with expressing complex thoughts and

navigating cultural differences in greetings. Despite these hurdles, the learner employed various strategies to improve their English. Formally, they simplified sentences and took time to formulate grammatically correct responses. Informally, they re-entered uncomfortable situations to practice speaking, and increased their exposure to English through repeated listening and reading. Motivation came from both a desire for personal growth and a sense of responsibility to teachers and friends.

Notably, the participant invested significant time and finances in attending college and living within an English-speaking environment. Finally, they built a social network of English speakers and immersed themselves in an English-dominant social circle to combat feelings of isolation and anxiety. These combined strategies demonstrate the multifaceted approach this learner took to overcome difficulties and improve their English language skills.

This study on an ESL learner's journey is a great resource for our topic about the road to achieve C1 English level research because it explores the real challenges that participants faced, like limited speaking practice and grammar hurdles, as well as the strategies they used to overcome them. This detailed look offers a practical roadmap for reaching C1 proficiency. By understanding the specific difficulties encountered and the multifaceted approach this learner took, we can tailor our research to address these challenges and highlight effective strategies for achieving a C1 level in English.

Following this, Alharbi (2021) examined the challenges faced by struggling EFL college students. This study explored both the difficulties and positive aspects that shaped their experiences, along with the link between their perseverance and learning goals (career, education). Ten first-year students (bottom 20% in English) and ten randomly selected third-year students participated in qualitative interviews. Structured interviews were used to explore challenges based on categories like educational goals and language mastery. All participants, despite being classified as struggling learners, displayed a positive attitude

towards English and a desire for improvement. This suggested a potential disconnect between academic achievement and practical application. The study emphasized the importance of supportive learning environments and recommended strategies such as focused reading practice and group instruction.

This study on struggling EFL students offers a critical perspective for our C1 English research. Even students identified as struggling showed a strong desire to improve, suggesting traditional achievement metrics might not capture the full picture for reaching C1 proficiency. By analyzing their challenges and the suggested strategies, like focused reading and group work, we can explore how to bridge this gap and equip learners with methods that foster both motivation and practical language skills needed for C1 fluency.

Finally, Kalantar (2024) conducted a national study where he investigated the difficulties and what TOEFL iBT test-takers need to succeed in the speaking and writing sections at the C1 level. The researchers looked at data from 46 students (men and women, aged 22-30) enrolled in TOEFL prep courses at Universidad Nacional de Educación. They used a mix of methods (surveys, observing classes, practice tests) to gather information and analyze it thoroughly. The study found that students struggled to talk fluently about unfamiliar topics, use advanced grammar and vocabulary to reach the C1 level, and maintain accuracy due to their native language's influence. To address these challenges, the researchers suggest offering a preparatory course before regular prep classes. This initial course would focus on improving accuracy, communication skills for unfamiliar topics, and providing corrective feedback. This study's findings can be valuable for TOEFL iBT instructors, helping them understand student difficulties and develop better strategies for their prep courses.

These four studies demonstrate the distinct set of difficulties associated with learning a second language. Insufficient practice opportunities frequently cause learners to struggle,

which exacerbates issues with vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency. Overcoming cultural gaps and articulating complicated ideas can also be difficult. Another challenge that some learners encounter is feeling discouraged around more fluent speakers. The good news is that students can get past these obstacles with the aid of a variety of tactics. Formal strategies can be helpful, such as simplifying sentence structure and organizing answers. Informal techniques like repeatedly using the language and going back to challenging situations for practice are also beneficial.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Learning English in a nation where it is not the primary language or native tongue, and if its application is limited to the classroom, is known as English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In contrast to English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) focuses on students who acquire the language outside of a setting where English is spoken continuously. Based on this, it has been identified two relevant theories that could enrich our study: the theory of constructivism and the theory of communicative competence.

2.2.1 Constructivism Learning Theory

This theory states that learners actively construct their own understanding of the world through experience and social interaction. Al-Shammari et al. (2019) states the following:

Theoretically, constructivism focuses on creating cognitive tools that reflect the wisdom of the culture in which they are used as well as the insights and experiences of learning. Constructivism involves a person understanding the importance of the social dimension during the learning process through observation, treatment,

interpretation, and adaptation of information on building a cognitive structure. (p. 411)

Through experiences and interactions, learners build their knowledge by fitting new information together with what they already know. The context in which something is presented is crucial. Social interaction, environment, and even a learner's beliefs all play a role in shaping their understanding. This theory has had a major impact on education, placing the learner at the center and acknowledging the importance of prior knowledge and a stimulating learning environment (Szabó & Csépes, 2023).

This is why it is important for teachers to take into consideration students' interests and background. Therefore, based on this they will be able to combine both previous and new knowledge.   According to Kieu Oanh y Hong Nhung (2022)," Constructivist experts believe that knowledge should not be implanted in the learner's mind, but constructed through their experiences and activities" (p.93); Certainly, this provides some insights to teachers. The theory of constructivism in the classroom does not adhere to a specific methodology, however, there are five principles that may be applicable, especially for practicing teachers, thus favoring its implementation. This indicates that constructivist teachers intend to achieve the following:

- Value student perspectives, utilizing them as foundations for guiding future lessons and enhancing existing understanding;

- Meaningful classroom activities challenge preconceived ideas, validating or transforming assumptions through new experiences and learning, recognizing that all learners bring their perspectives, regardless of age;

·   Promote personal meaning by designing classroom experiences that connect learning to students' real lives, acknowledging that relevance and interest derive from the students themselves;

·   Constructivist teachers organize learning around "big ideas," guiding students to explore these primary concepts before delving into specific details;

·   Assessment is integrated into daily activities, providing continuous feedback, guiding instruction, and allowing students to reflect on their progress, unlike separate evaluation events such as tests or exams (J. Brooks; M. Brooks, 1999 p. 9).

Constructivism offers a powerful lens for understanding learning, emphasizing that learners actively construct their knowledge through experiences and interactions. Social context, prior knowledge, and the environment all play a crucial role in shaping understanding. This learner-centered approach highlights the importance of teachers considering students' backgrounds and interests to effectively build upon existing knowledge. In essence, constructivism encourages building lessons around "big ideas," valuing student perspectives, challenging assumptions, promoting personal meaning-making, and continuously assessing learning within the context of classroom activities. By embracing these principles, educators can foster a dynamic and engaging learning environment that empowers students to become active participants in constructing their own understanding of the world.

2.2.2 Communicative competence theory

This theory emphasizes not only the mastery of grammar but also the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts. It was developed by Hymes as a response to Chomsky's focus solely on grammatical competence. Hymes argued that to understand how individuals acquire their first language, we must also consider their sociolinguistic competence, which involves understanding the social and cultural nuances of language use. This broader perspective on language learning has been influential in communicative language teaching, which aims to develop learners' ability to effectively communicate in real-life situations (Byram, 2021). By integrating the principles of communicative competence into our analysis, we can examine not only the grammatical mastery of the language but also how the learner developed the ability to use English appropriately and effectively in various communicative situations. This enables us to better understand the processes of language learning and the strategies used to overcome barriers on the path to linguistic fluency. However, according to Kakhramonovich (2021), recent criticism has been directed towards communicative competence, which is based on models of educated native speakers and views their communicative competence as the ultimate goal of foreign language learning. The critiques focus on several problematic points. Firstly, there is questioning regarding the definition of native speaker norms in a context of large-scale migrations, intercultural encounters, and increasing linguistic and pragmatic differences among speakers of the same language.

Additionally, it is argued that this model may demotivate learners by setting an impossible goal to achieve, such as becoming like a native speaker, which could devalue their social identity and competencies developed within their own culture. It is also noted that the communicative needs of non-native speakers are vastly different from those of native

speakers existing in a specific speech community, and they vary according to the social context in which they wish to operate. The example provided in the excerpt demonstrates how non-linguistic factors, such as mental norms, speech etiquette, history, and culture, significantly impact speech. Therefore, it is suggested that these factors must be taken into account for expression to be clear and meet the speaker's expectations.

On the other hand, Tursunovich, (2023) highlights how learning a foreign language contributes to the development of the student's communicative competence, enabling them to effectively use it as a communication tool. Additionally, it mentions various tasks that help improve professional communication in the foreign language, including (a) updating grammatical knowledge; (b) the ability to choose and use appropriate language norms; (c) understanding different types of communicative statements; (d) developing skills to adapt to communicative failures and understand the sociocultural characteristics of native speakers of the language being studied.

In summary, communicative competence is an essential skill for successful communication in today's interconnected world since it includes not just verbal competency but also the capacity to negotiate a variety of social and cultural contexts. In addition to focusing on grammatical correctness, language learners should have a thorough awareness of pragmatic customs, cultural quirks, and the various communicative demands in various circumstances. Through continuous improvement of their communication skills, people can improve their capacity to interact, work together, and prosper in a society that is becoming more interconnected.

2.2.3 Standardized tests (TOEFL iBT and Cambridge CAE)

Standardized English language examinations are used extensively to assess language skills in educational and professional settings around the world. These exams, which are

designed to assess specific language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, are used by educational institutions for student admissions, employers to evaluate employment skills, and governments to certify linguistic competencies for citizenship as well as immigration programs. Villarroel and Estrada (2018) found that it is critical to inquire about and examine how the concept of taking language examinations became fashionable, as well as when it became a necessity, a mandate, or synonymous with social and academic standing (p. 498). That is why the objective of this section is to study and synthesize the characteristics of each of these tests, as well as their structure and when they should be administered.

2.2.3.1 CAE (Certificate in Advanced English)

In her study, Mamaraimovna (2024) states that:

The Cambridge English Exams, developed by Cambridge Assessment English, include a range of exams catering to different proficiency levels and purposes. The   most well-known exams are the Cambridge English: Preliminary (PET), Cambridge English: First (FCE), Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE), and Cambridge English Proficiency (CPE). These exams assess the test takers' language skills across all four areas: Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. They are widely recognized by educational institutions and employers globally. The exams are scored on a scale from A to C, with C indicating the highest level of proficiency. (p. 176)

This summary confirms the scale of the examined problem and the importance of the Cambridge English tests, ranging from the simplest to the hardest. However, there is Cambridge English: Advanced CAE, an exceptionally complete test of the level C1 of the

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The CAE process impacts the advanced level of English because the Civic Commission proprietary to the CAE evaluates nominees in all language proficiency categories: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This test is very popular with colleges and employers worldwide and gives students the possibility to gain international knowledge and employment. Besides performance of the four primary language comprehension abilities, this test also evaluates the utilization of English in casual and work-related contexts.

2.2.3.1 TOEFL iBT (Test of English as a Foreign Language)

As Zhang (2008) points out in the study, "The Internet-based Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL iBT) was first launched in the United States on September 24, 2005. Since then, it has gradually rolled out worldwide and has replaced the TOEFL computer-based test (TOEFL CBT)" (p. 1). Put differently, this kind of test has developed over time and gained international recognition because so many establishments use it to assess each trainee's proficiency in English. This standardized test was designed with the goal of testing its learners' language skills in a much more academic setting. That is why each of its questions or assignments is separated into two sections: integrative and independent. In the independent section, students are supposed to discuss their thoughts on a topic, whereas in the integrative section, they must speak or write about more concrete topics relating to the academic area.

According to Kalantar (2024), applicants get 45 seconds to respond to an independent question and 60 seconds to complete the integrated activities in the speaking segment. The writing tasks are allocated 20 minutes for the integrated activity and 10 minutes for the independent task (p. 100). This suggests that time is crucial because it is determined by the format of each of these standardized English tests, as well as the quantity of questions on

each of them. It is also vital to consider the themes on which each exam focuses, as this will affect the difficulty and time required to complete the exams.

In conclusion, each of these standardized tests previously mentioned was designed to measure the levels of linguistic competence that each of the candidates has in the command of the English language. Each one has a different structure, and its content therefore also varies; however, both are known worldwide and have equal importance. The only thing you have to take into account is the purpose for which you want to render either the CAE or TOEFL iBT.

2.2.4 Graduation Standards at UNAE

Obtaining an academic degree marks a key milestone in every student's educational journey. Graduation requirements vary greatly across institutions and academic programs, reflecting the diversity of teaching approaches and the unique needs of each discipline. Hence, because of its universality, English has become extremely helpful in a variety of contexts. It is now not only required to communicate with others but is also thought to be necessary to complete university.

Akther (2022) found that speaking English fluently is now a requirement for getting a job or advancing in your profession. Speaking and understanding English is becoming more and more necessary, even in places where it is not the primary language (p. 99). As a result, each of its graduates will have more opportunity to succeed in their professional careers nationally as well as internationally.

According to Alek et al. (2019), "In Indonesia, TOEFL is used by most universities as a tool to measure students' English proficiency level and also as one of the graduation requirements. Every university has its own requirements which need to be fulfilled by the students before they finish their study" (p. 51). Thus, in Ecuador, each university has the

authority to determine the graduation requirements for its students, as well as the sort of standardized examinations used to assess English ability. The most commonly utilized standardized tests in Ecuadorian universities are TOEFL, BT, and Cambridge CAE.

Therefore, one of Ecuador 's largest universities, the Universidad Nacional de Educación, has its own graduation regulations that have been updated over time to meet the demands of each of its students. It is important to note that each major has its own set of regulations that are determined by the attributes that their students must possess. For instance, the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages major must comply with four requirements for the graduation of its students. One of them is, according to theReglamento de Regimen Academico (2018), "Demonstrate a C1 level of English according to the Common European Framework of Reference through an official international standardized test, for example: Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) with a minimum grade of C, TOEFL iBT with a score between 110 and 120 or an IELTS between 7.5 and 8" (p. 12). This emphasizes the significance of both the C1 certification in English and English language competency itself, which was one of the requirements at the time to continue and complete the graduation process.

2.2.5 Relevance of autonomous learning

Self-learning emerges as a crucial skill in today's society, marked by constant changes and the need for continuous adaptation. By allowing individuals to direct their own learning process, this practice encourages the development of lifelong learning skills, empowering people to acquire knowledge and competencies throughout their lives. The autonomy provided by self-learning stimulates intrinsic motivation, strengthens metacognitive skills and contributes to building confidence in one's own abilities. Furthermore, by customizing the educational process according to individual styles and

preferences, self-learning not only drives creativity and innovation, but also becomes an effective means of reducing educational gaps and preparing people for constantly evolving professional careers.

Ultimately, self-learning is not only an educational approach, but a key element for empowerment and prosperity in a dynamic and challenging world. In a study carried out in Indonesia Noprival et al. (2023) mentioned that due to the self-interest strategies used by the participants, they strongly improved their English skills. Choosing pleasurable practices such as listening to songs and watching movies, actively using online resources, and adopting personally convenient strategies highlight autonomy in decision-making about the learning process. These actions reflect the relevance of autonomous learning, where individuals actively direct their own linguistic development.

The studies that we analyzed offer insightful information about the difficulties and methods involved in learning a second language, especially in obtaining C1 proficiency in English. The study conducted by Zahidi and Ong (2023) emphasizes the significance of self-efficacy and self-regulated learning methods (SRLs) in the achievement of successful English language acquisition. Common issues such a lack of speaking experience, grammar mistakes, and pronunciation issues are listed by Taufiq (2016). Alharbi (2021) highlights the value of encouraging learning environments and finds that struggling EFL university students have a good attitude about English.

Studies on the TOEFL iBT by Kalantar (2024) and Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE) by Mamaraimovna (2024) highlight the critical function that standardized assessments play in gauging language competency. It emphasizes the integration of theories like constructivism and communicative competence and stresses the significance of self-directed

learning. Graduation Standards at UNAE highlights that a C1 level must be demonstrated in order to graduate.

In closing, the literature review offers a thorough description of the variables that affect the acquisition of a second language as well as methods that can assist students in reaching C1 level English competence. Teachers can create more successful methods for teaching and learning languages by taking into account the interactions between self-efficacy, SRLs, supportive learning settings, theoretical frameworks, standardized testing, and autonomous learning. In order to prepare students for success in their academic and professional efforts in a world that is becoming more interconnected by the day, a holistic knowledge is essential.

3. Methodology

3.1 Paradigm

Interpretive paradigm is utilized to explore the individual interpretations and meanings that participants ascribe to their language learning experience. We hope to gain a greater knowledge of the participant's experiences, viewpoints, and opinions about language acquisition and competency attainment by using this paradigm.

According to Darby et al. (2019) the concept of interpretive research challenges the notion of an objective, divisible reality. It asserts that reality is more than just summations of its elements; rather, it is a holistic construct that is continuously modified by human perceptions. According to this paradigm, human conduct is voluntaristic, meaning that people actively interact with their surroundings as opposed to being passively impacted by outside forces. As a result, interpretive study highlights how people actively shape their perceptions and how reality is subjective. "However, interpretive research may have its own critique as it

rejects knowledge developed as a foundation base shared as a universal law, and questioning its validity" (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Despite this, adopting an interpretive paradigm can provide deep insights into specific contexts, such as cross-cultural studies, by collecting and interpreting qualitative data.

Interpretivism emphasizes personal contributions and considers various variables, enhancing the validity of data. Moreover, according to (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020) this theory maintains that to effectively comprehend the world, it is crucial to consider the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It argues that the fundamental meanings underlying social life are derived from social interaction and individual consciousness. According to this perspective, the social world emerges from interactions among individuals and is shaped by their interpretations and perceptions. This profound understanding of social reality implies that qualitative research, such as case study, grounded theory, and ethnography, is essential for unraveling the complex webs of human experience and social interactions. That is why in our study, adopting an interpretive approach offers several benefits

Firstly, it allows us to deeply explore individual experiences and subjective interpretations, enriching our understanding of the language learning journey. Secondly, it emphasizes the importance of considering the specific cultural and social context in which language learning occurs, aligning well with our focus on a particular educational setting. Lastly, it acknowledges the active role of individuals in shaping their experiences, providing valuable insights into effective learning strategies. Overall, embracing an interpretive paradigm enhances the qualitative nature of our study and provides a robust framework for exploring language learning within a specific context.

3.1 Type of Research

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach. Qualitative research focuses on understanding and describing phenomena from the participants' perspective, using non-numerical methods such as interviews and observations. According to Ary et al. (2009), qualitative research emphasizes the significance of context and individual interpretations in understanding human behavior. They argue that human actions are deeply rooted in social, historical, political, and cultural factors, making it essential to examine them within their specific settings. Unlike quantitative research, which isolates behavior from its context, qualitative inquiry seeks to comprehend the underlying motivations and meanings behind human actions within a particular time and place.

3.2 Research Method

A case study research design is a method of thoroughly exploring a topic or phenomenon by focusing on one or more individual situations. This method enables the researcher to gain a thorough understanding of all of the facts and background around the topic under investigation. To accomplish this, many forms of data are gathered and examined, including interviews, observations, and documents. The goal is to gain a comprehensive and deep understanding of the case in order to further knowledge and theory in that field of study. Actually, "case study" refers to an in-depth investigation. In-depth involves investigating all aspects of the case. A case study is a thorough examination of a phenomenon that yields subjective rather than objective information. It provides extensive understanding about the phenomenon but does not allow for further generalization (Singh, 2006, p. 147).

Moreover, in accordance with Zainal (2007), "descriptive case studies are set to describe the natural phenomena which occur within the data in question, for instance, what different strategies are used by a reader and how the reader uses them" (p.3). This kind of

research will assist us in comprehending and analyzing all of the elements and circumstances that the participant had to deal with in order to achieve the C1 certification. Considering that she had to learn this language from scratch. Additionally, this design will enable us to understand her reality and to consider the problem at hand.

There are two kinds of case studies that can be conducted according to the nature of the study. According to Harwati (2019), "A single-case study emphasizes on a single case only, whereas multiple-case studies include two or more cases in the same study" (p. 151). In order to carry out this research design, it is necessary to carefully analyze the purpose or objective of our study in order to decide which of the existing case studies will be the most appropriate for the research. It is important to take into account the characteristics of each one, as well as the advantages and disadvantages they provide. As this research will be based only on a single case study, since each of the aspects that are part of the individual or the case will be studied in depth, the most appropriate will be a single case study.

Researchers in psychology and education have made extensive use of case studies. One possible approach could be to perform a case study of an inner-city school where the pupils have demonstrated exceptional performance on standardized examinations (Ary et al., 2009, p.29). This design focuses on a single participant to explore her experience in depth. It is noteworthy that this was implemented for a former student of UNAE.

3.3 Techniques and instruments

Mathers et al. (2000) found that "The interview is an important data gathering technique involving verbal communication between the researcher and the subject. Interviews are commonly used in survey designs and in exploratory and descriptive studies" (p. 1). This information emphasizes the significance of using interviewing as a research study technique, highlighting that it promotes communication between the researcher or

interviewer and the participants or the subject under study. A research project can make use of a variety of interview formats. For instance, a semi-structured interview enables us to collect more detailed data and information since it allows us to add more questions as needed to get more information or to clarify certain points. That is why we chose to conduct a semi-structured interview for our project. Semi-structured interviews are more potent than structured interviews because they allow the researcher(s), especially in qualitative research, to obtain in-depth information from informants (Ruslin et al. 2022).

Semi-structured interviews are a researcher's chameleon. They can adapt to different stages of a project. Early on, they help gather background information and refine research questions. Interviews are also valuable at the end of a project to collect feedback. They offer unique insights, revealing participants' thoughts, feelings, and even hidden biases. Interviews can uncover both shared perspectives and differing viewpoints, and even lead to entirely new research avenues. Overall, interviews are a powerful tool for researchers to build rapport and gather rich data (Karatsareas, 2022, p.101).

We used the interview guide instrument in combination with this data gathering technique, which helped us a great deal because it included all of the topics covered in the interview and gave us a clear process flow.

Mensah (2020) states the following:

An interview guide is a list containing a set of questions that have been prepared, to serve as a guide for researchers in collecting information or data about a specific topic. An interview guide is the easiest data collection instrument to use, particularly the semi-structured – contains questions that are loosely structured to give participants more opportunities to express themselves fully. (p. 4)

To put it another way, the interview guide is a useful instrument for data collection in research. It enables participants to speak freely, as the questions are flexibly structured, particularly in their semi-structured format. Furthermore, it facilitates open-ended data collection, providing more opportunities for participants to expose their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about the topic in question.

3.4 Participants

For this study, a female participant was selected who was a former student of the National University of Education in the career of Pedagogy of National and foreign languages. What is notable about this case is that she managed to reach this level starting with a completely zero level of English, in addition to going through other setbacks that made this work difficult. She is currently a graduated student and has her C1 certification in the English language. Furthermore, she stood out for her tenacity and ability to overcome substantial challenges in her quest for English C1 certification. We made that decision based on the topic's richness of insight she could offer to people interested in this study and her individuality.

3.5 Research Steps

Three in depth interviews were conducted with the participant at different points in time. This strategy allowed for the analysis of whether there was any type of connection between the experiences shared in each interview. Moreover, this decision was taken based on other studies that applied similar procedures, for instance, study conducted interviews to explore multiple dimensions of female empowerment, utilizing a structure that divided interviews into sections to address demographic, general, and specific aspects of empowerment in areas such as economics, health, education, as well as social and political aspects.

This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the different aspects and female empowerment. Following a similar approach, my study on education in second language learning employs three distinct interviews, each focused on different but related categories. This will allow us to thoroughly explore the various facets of the second language learning process, providing a more complete and detailed insight into the subject matter."

The interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's informed consent.

3.6 Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. Subsequently, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns, categories, and relationships between the data. The analysis focused on exploring the participant's experiences and their evolution over the interviews, seeking connections between the time periods. According to Naeem et al (2023), the findings are more consistent and reproducible because of this structured approach, which also makes it possible to draw direct linkages between the facts, interpretation, and conclusions. This methodical, disciplined technique guarantees completeness and reduces the possibility of prejudice (p. 2). We will obtain more accurate results with this manner of examining the data, free from any manipulation influenced by our opinions or feelings—in this case, those of the researchers. We'll make sure that every result is accurately derived from the responses provided by the participants.

4. Results and Discussions

In this section we present the results obtained from the research whose main objective was to understand the experience of the participant in her process of achieving the C1 level of the English language. To achieve this, a case study was conducted, where the participant's

journey was analyzed in depth, including the methods, strategies and materials she used to achieve the C1 certification.

For this research, in-depth interviews were used as the main tool for data collection. Three interviews were conducted with the participant, each lasting approximately 15 to 20 minutes. The interviews were conducted through an online platform and were recorded with her consent for later analysis. The interviews were guided by a previously designed protocol, which included open-ended and semi-structured questions to explore in depth the participant's experience in her English learning process.

The protocol was structured around the following thematic axes or three sections: Motivation, Difficulties, and Strategies. Once the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed verbatim, yielding a total of approximately 10 pages of text by using an online tool called "Good Tape Transcripción". Subsequently, a thematic analysis of the transcripts was conducted to identify patterns, categories and relationships among the data. In the following, we will present the results obtained from our research, organized according to the specific objectives that guided our study. Each specific objective was designed to explore different key research aspects in order to respond to the main research question, and the findings are presented in an order that reflects this structure.

4.1 Specific objective: To describe the difficulties that the participant faced in working toward C1 certification.

Figure 1

Difficulties encountered by the participant in her C1 certification
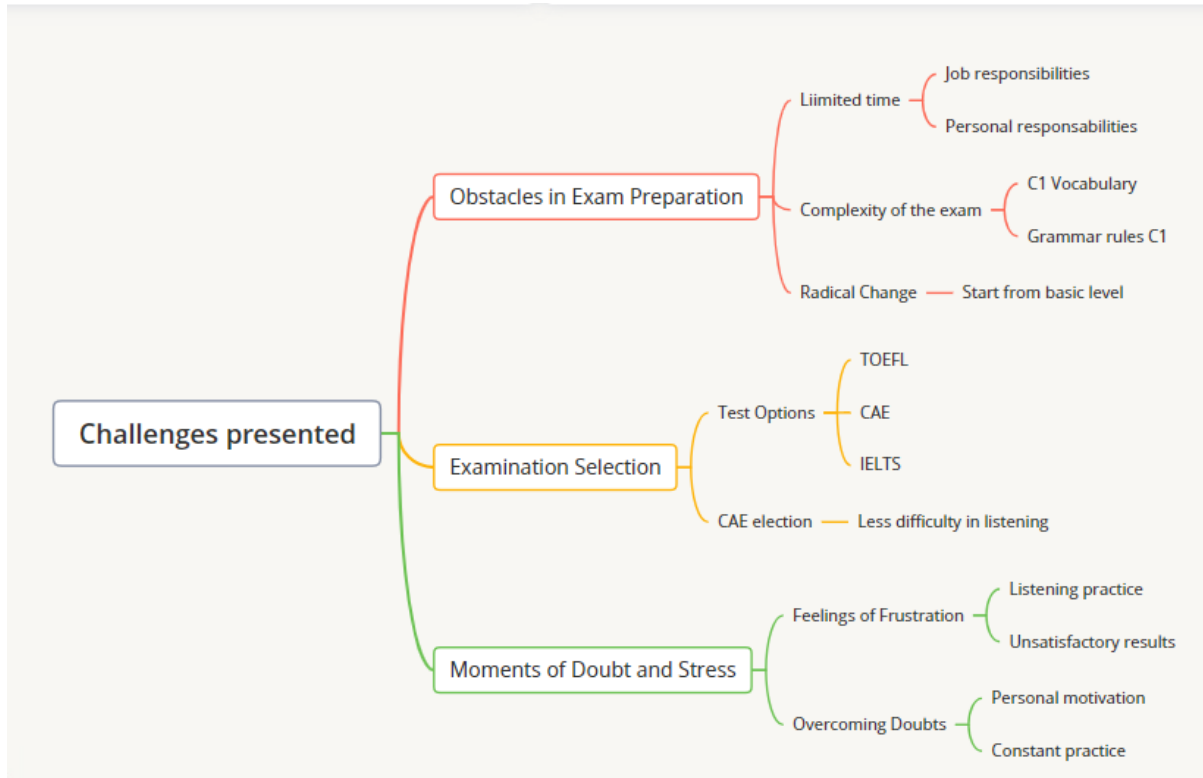
Note. This figure shows the main challenges faced by the participant during her entire process of learning.

Figure 1 reveals that preparing for the certification exam proved to be a formidable task due to several interconnected factors. Time constraints imposed by work and personal commitments hindered dedicated study. The participant mentioned the following:

> *"Estaba en el proceso de embarazo y incluso tenía que trabajar y esto era demasiado, demasiado cansado. Más aún estando embarazada tuve que trabajar. Llegaba en las tardes, en la noche, hacer los deberes, en la mañana clases, después trabajar"* *["I was in the process of pregnancy and even had to work and this was too much, too tiring. Even more so being pregnant I had to work. I would come in the afternoons, in the evening, do my homework, in the morning classes, then work."]* .

In addition to this, the exam's demanding content, characterized by complex language and intricate grammar, presented a significant intellectual challenge. This was also mentioned by the participant in the interview.

> *"Además, la certificación C1 es muy complicado obtener esta certificación, porque ustedes deben tener experiencia en este tipo de exámenes. Y son preguntas a veces muy complejas de entender, o como es un nivel C1, entonces es un vocabulario muy avanzado, que a veces uno ni siquiera imaginaba que eso existe"["In addition, the C1 certification is very complicated to obtain this certification, because you must have experience in this type of exams. And they are sometimes very complex questions to understand, or as it is a C1 level, then it is a very advanced vocabulary, which sometimes one did not even imagine that it exists"] .*

Moreover, commencing the preparation process with a foundational English level exacerbated the difficulties, creating a substantial gap between the required proficiency and the starting point.

> *"También lo que se me hizo complicado es que yo, al empezar con un nivel completamente nuevo, no sabía nada nada nada de inglés, entonces fue un cambio radical que yo tuve que dar para este proceso" ["Also what was complicated for me was that I, starting with a completely new level, did not know any English at all, so it was a radical change that I had to make for this process"].*

The choice of the CAE exam was based on a careful evaluation of different options, primarily due to its perceived accessibility in the listening component. Overcoming initial anxieties and frustrations, particularly in the listening section, required persistent practice and personal determination. The exam's linguistic demands, notably in grammar and specialized vocabulary, highlighted the need for focused preparation aligned with the exam's specific requirements. These factors collectively influenced the overall preparation journey.

It is evident that every barrier or difficulty that the participant raised has made the C1 English language certification process extremely difficult. These difficulties emphasize how crucial it is to continue to prepare well when learning a new language. These findings are in line with previous research by Kalantar (2024) and Taufiq (2016), which also highlight the various difficulties that students encounter when learning a new language—in this case, English—and getting ready for worldwide standardized tests.

These two studies demonstrate that learners frequently encounter obstacles such as inadequate oral practice and grammatical problems, and regarding standardized exams perhaps because of the influence of their mother language, some students find it difficult to speak accurately, employ sophisticated grammar and vocabulary to achieve the C1 level, and discuss new subjects with ease, which were also emphasized in the study's findings. However, they also employ strategies such as sentence simplification and immersion in English-speaking environments to improve their skills. Moreover, learners frequently face initial difficulties starting from scratch in English, compounded by the rigorous academic expectations of the C1 level (Taufiq, 2016).

Finally, two standardized tests—the Cambridge and TOEFL exams—are discussed in the papers of Mamaraimovna (2024) and Zhang (2008). They show the intricacy of each exam by outlining its structure, constituent parts, and even the amount of time allotted to each candidate to complete it—a point that our participant also emphasized.

4.2 To explore the potential implications of the participant to empower others who may face similar situations

Figure 2

Insights to support others in similar circumstances

Note. Figure 2 depicts strategies applied to handle difficult situations when learning a L2.

The effective strategies that the participant used, such as integrating English learning into her daily life through music and TV shows, and participating in extracurricular activities, highlight how continuous practice and enjoyment of the process can improve learning. These strategies not only help maintain interest, but also facilitate learning in real contexts.

"Yo trataba de escuchar las canciones en inglés todo el tiempo porque era algo que en realidad me encantaba. También veía series en inglés, series que me gustaban a mí y de esa manera no era tan tedioso el aprendizaje."*["I tried to listen to songs in English all the time because it was something I really loved. I also watched series in English, series that I liked and that way learning wasn't so tedious"].*

Taufiq (2016) explores how an ESL learner faces and overcomes various challenges. In his study, the participant mentioned using informal strategies, such as simplifying sentences and repeatedly exposing oneself to uncomfortable situations to improve speaking skills. The importance of increasing exposure to English through repeated listening and reading is also highlighted. This underscores how integrating learning into daily life and

employing enjoyable activities like listening to music and watching TV shows can be effective in improving language skills.

The support of teachers and the recognition received were crucial for his motivation. This indicates that positive encouragement and recognition can play a significant role in student perseverance. Mentors and educators have the ability to positively influence student success through emotional support and positive reinforcement.

> *"Lo que fue una gran motivación y a seguir adelante para mí, para no rendirme, fueron las palabras de cada uno de mis profesores de inglés, ya que ellos veían el sacrificio que realizaba constantemente y se dieron cuenta de que tenía esa pasión para enseñar, esa pasión para aprender inglés." ["What was a great motivation for me to keep going, to not give up, were the words of each of my English teachers, since they saw the sacrifice I constantly made and realized that I had that passion for teaching, that passion to learn English "].*

Alharbi's research highlights the importance of supportive learning environments and the positive attitudes of struggling EFL students. The study notes that despite difficulties, students showed a strong desire to improve, which was likely influenced by their learning environments and the encouragement they received. This supports the notion that positive feedback and recognition from teachers can be a significant motivating factor in a learner's journey Alharbi (2021). Moreover, Zahidi and Ong's study on self-efficacy and self-regulated learning strategies in ESL highlights the role of self-belief in language learning success. The findings suggest that learners with higher self-efficacy, which can be bolstered by positive reinforcement from teachers, are more likely to succeed. This supports the idea

that encouragement and acknowledgment from teachers can enhance a learner's confidence and motivation Zahidi y Ong (2023).

The C1 certification requirement was a significant motivator for the participant, demonstrating that academic and professional requirements can act as a significant driver. However, the need to reconsider these policies was also mentioned, as the lack of such requirements could negatively affect the job prospects of future graduates.

"Eso sí es una pena que ya no les obliguen porque eso sí les motiva bastante y les ayuda en el futuro demasiado. Pero bueno, en ese momento, claro que fue una motivación porque si es que no obtenía esa certificación C1, no podía culminar mis estudios en la universidad." [" It is a shame that they no longer force them because that does motivate them a lot and helps them a lot in the future. But well, at that moment, of course it was a motivation because if I didn't obtain that C1 certification, I couldn't complete my studies at the university "].

According to Kalantar (2019), self-efficacy plays a crucial role in motivation and the application of effective learning strategies. The C1 certification can act as an important driver of self-efficacy and motivation as it provides a concrete and challenging goal for students. Removing these types of requirements could negatively impact students' self-efficacy and motivation to achieve advanced levels of English proficiency, which relates to the statement about how C1 certification contributes to motivation and future career prospects.

"Yo considero que fue una mala elección y que la universidad debería reconsiderarlo seriamente porque las promociones que mi promoción, la cual fue una de las primeras, la mayoría de los estudiantes salieron con la certificación C1 y por ende ahora ellos están trabajando en su profesión."[" I consider that it was a bad choice

and that the university should seriously reconsider it because the promotions that my promotion, which was one of the first, the majority of the students came out with the C1 certification and therefore now they are working in their profession"].

The participant believes that the C1 certification requirement was a beneficial policy that provided graduates with a significant advantage in the job market, as most of her cohort, having obtained this certification, managed to secure employment in their field. However, she suggests that the university should reconsider this policy, as its removal might have diminished job opportunities for subsequent graduates, highlighting the importance of maintaining standards that facilitate successful entry into the professional market.

Ultimately, the participant's journey to achieving a C1 English certification was marked by significant challenges. Balancing work and personal life while tackling the exam's demanding content proved to be a formidable task. These experiences corroborate previous research indicating the hurdles language learners often encounter when preparing for standardized tests. The decision to pursue the CAE exam followed a careful analysis of alternatives, and persistent effort was necessary to overcome initial difficulties, particularly in the listening component.

The participant implemented effective strategies, such as immersing herself in the language through entertainment and participating in extracurricular activities, demonstrating the importance of continuous practice and enjoyment of learning. The support received from her teachers and recognition of her achievements were instrumental in maintaining her motivation, underscoring the crucial role of positive reinforcement in the language learning process. These findings suggest that academic policies can be a powerful motivator, but it is essential to ensure that they do not become a barrier for students.

5. Conclusions

This study aimed to reflect on the procedure followed by the participant to achieve C1 certification, examining the methods, strategies, and materials she employed. It also sought to describe the difficulties she encountered in her pursuit of C1 certification and explore the implications of her experience for others in similar situations.

The analysis identified significant challenges faced by the participant, such as lack of speaking practice and difficulties with grammar and pronunciation. Despite these obstacles, she demonstrated notable resilience and motivation, driven by a desire for personal growth and commitment to her educators and peers. Key strategies, such as sentence simplification and immersion in an English-speaking environment, were crucial to her progress.

The findings emphasize the importance of a holistic approach to teaching English. The participant's experience highlights that emotional support and a positive learning environment are vital in overcoming barriers to second language learning. Additionally, it underscores the necessity for educators to recognize and address the diverse experiences and motivations of their learners.

6. Recommendations

Given the limitations of this study, which focused on a single case and may not be generalizable to all learners seeking C1 certification, future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Examining the experiences of multiple participants can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the journey to advanced language proficiency and account for variations in learner experiences. It is also recommended that educators adopt a holistic approach that integrates motivation, effective learning strategies, and emotional support into their teaching practices. Creating a

positive and supportive learning environment is crucial for helping learners overcome challenges and achieve fluency. Effective strategies such as sentence simplification and immersion in English-speaking contexts should be incorporated into language learning practices, as they have proven beneficial. Additionally, educators should be attentive to the diverse needs and motivations of their students, tailoring support and resources to meet individual learning requirements. By addressing these recommendations, educators can better support learners on their path to advanced language proficiency.

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8. Annexes

Apendix 1: Validation of the instruments

Name(s) of students: Carolina Coronel & Pamela Ñauta

Exploring the Road to C1 English Level - A Descriptive Case Study

Instrument 1:

Objective to be reached:
To discover how to maintain constant and effective motivation for learning English.

Research Question: What was the process followed by an English student from PINE to achieve a C1 certification?

Objective of the data collection instrument:
By using semi-structured interviews, our goal is to obtain detailed and profound information to achieve a more precise and comprehensive understanding of the data we seek to collect. This approach allows us to explore specific topics in a more flexible manner, enabling our participant to contribute their experiences and perspectives more broadly and in detail, enriching our analysis and helping us to gain a more complete view of the theme under study.

Questions:
Motivation
1. ¿Cómo influyeron tus intereses personales y aspiraciones futuras en tu decisión de aprender este idioma desde cero?

2. ¿Hubo momentos específicos en los que enfrentaste desafíos significativos en tu aprendizaje del idioma? ¿Cómo te mantuviste motivado/a durante esos momentos?

3. ¿Hubo alguna actividad extra en la universidad como clubes, talleres o viajes que hayan promovido tu motivación para aprender el idioma?

4. ¿Recibiste algún tipo de reconocimiento o recompensa por tus logros en el aprendizaje del idioma? ¿Cómo influyó esto en tu motivación?

5. ¿Qué estrategias utilizaste para mantener la motivación a largo plazo y evitar el agotamiento o la fatiga en tu estudio del idioma?

6. ¿Crees que la obligatoriedad de graduarte con un nivel C1 en el idioma fue un factor motivador en tu proceso de aprendizaje?

Instrument to validate the data collection instrument

Instruction: Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement on the statements provided below by encircling the number that corresponds to your best to your judgment.

1 – Strongly Disagree   4 – Agree
2 – Disagree   5 – Strongly Agree
3 – Undecided

Criteria

The items in the instrument are relevant to answer the objectives of the study.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The items in the instrument can obtain depth to constructs being Measured/studied.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The instrument has an appropriate sample of items for the construct being measured/studied.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The items and their alternatives are neither too narrow nor limited in its content.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The items in the instrument are stated clearly.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The items on the instrument can elicit responses which are stable, definite, consistent, and not conflicting.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The terms adapted in the scale are culturally appropriate.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The layout or format of the instrument is technically sound.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The instrument is not too short or long enough that the participants will be able to answer it within a given time.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The instrument is interesting such that participants will be induced to respond to it and accomplish it fully.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The instrument as a whole could answer the basic purpose for which it is designed.	1	2	3	4	**5**

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS SECTION

1. Do you consider that the proposed items correspond to categories, unit of analysis or variables of the study?

Yes X NO_____

2. What items would you add or erase?
I consider all the questions are relevant to gather the information the researchers are looking for and match the research questions.

3. What other suggestions would you make to improve this instrument?

Maybe in order to gather more information in question 3 you could change the question from: *¿Hubo alguna actividad extra en la universidad como clubes, talleres o viajes que hayan promovido tu motivación para aprender el idioma? To ¿Qué tipo de actividades extracurriculares en la Universidad, como clubes, talleres o viajes, encontraste más motivadoras o enriquecedoras para tu aprendizaje del idioma? ¿Cómo crees que estas actividades contribuyeron a tu progreso y compromiso con el estudio del idioma?*

Instrument 2:

Objective to be reached: To reflect on the challenges faced during the preparation for obtaining the C1 certification and offer advice to other students in similar situations.

Research Question:
What was the process followed by an English student from PINE to achieve a C1 certification?

Objective of the data collection instrument:
By using semi-structured interviews, our goal is to obtain detailed and profound information to achieve a more precise and comprehensive understanding of the data we seek to collect. This approach allows us to explore specific topics in a more flexible manner, enabling our participant to contribute their experiences and perspectives more broadly and in detail, enriching our analysis and helping us to gain a more complete view of the theme under study.

Difficulties

1. ¿Cuáles fueron los principales obstáculos que encontraste mientras te preparabas para obtener la certificación C1?

2. ¿Hubo momentos específicos en los que te sentiste abrumado por el nivel de dificultad del examen? ¿Cómo los superaste?

3. ¿Qué aspectos del idioma encontraste más desafiantes durante tu preparación para el examen de certificación?

4. ¿En qué medida influyeron las responsabilidades personales o académicas en tu proceso de preparación para el examen?

5. ¿Experimentaste alguna vez dudas sobre tu capacidad para alcanzar el nivel C1? ¿Cómo las enfrentaste?

6. ¿Cómo te sentiste emocionalmente durante todo el proceso de preparación? ¿Hubo momentos de estrés o ansiedad significativos?

7. Después de obtener la certificación C1, ¿cómo reflexionas sobre las dificultades que enfrentaste durante tu proceso de preparación? ¿Qué consejos darías a otros estudiantes que están pasando por lo mismo?

Instrument to validate the data collection instrument

Instruction: Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement on the statements provided below by encircling the number that corresponds to your best to your judgment.

1 – Strongly Disagree	**4** – Agree
2 – Disagree	**5** – Strongly Agree
3 – Undecided	

Criteria

	1	2	3	4	5
The items in the instrument are relevant to answer the objectives of the study.	1	2	3	4	5
The items in the instrument can obtain depth to constructs being Measured/studied.	1	2	3	4	5
The instrument has an appropriate sample of items for the construct being measured/studied.	1	2	3	4	5
The items and their alternatives are neither too narrow nor limited in its content.	1	2	3	4	5
The items in the instrument are stated clearly.	1	2	3	4	5
The items on the instrument can elicit responses which are stable, definite, consistent, and not conflicting.	1	2	3	4	5
The terms adapted in the scale are culturally appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5
The layout or format of the instrument is technically sound.	1	2	3	4	5
The instrument is not too short or long enough that the participants will be able to answer it within a given time.	1	2	3	4	5
The instrument is interesting such that participants will be induced to respond to it and accomplish it fully.	1	2	3	4	5
The instrument as a whole could answer the basic purpose for which it is designed.	1	2	3	4	5

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS SECTION

1. Do you consider that the proposed items correspond to categories, unit of analysis or variables of the study?

Yes X NO_____

2. What items would you add or erase?

In the first question: *¿Cuáles fueron los principales obstáculos que encontraste mientras te preparabas para obtener la certificación C1?* You could add another question to ask for specific examples on how this person face and overcome these obstacles.

In question number four: ¿En qué medida influyeron las responsabilidades personales o académicas en tu proceso de preparación para el examen? You can ask here how the participant balanced these responsibilities with her/his studies and how this person managed his or her time.

3. What other suggestions would you make to improve this instrument?

I am not quite sure, but I suggest you check the objective and the research question for this second group of questions. I am not clear if you want to know about the process of getting the C1 or just focusing on the challenges. Please check that. What do you want to know? According to the interview questions I think you are just focusing on the challenges, but you need to clarify that in the research question.

Instrument 3:

Objective to be reached: To identify effective strategies for learning English and progress towards level C1.

Research Question: What was the process followed by an English student from PINE to achieve a C1 certification?

Objective of the data collection instrument:
By using semi-structured interviews, our goal is to obtain detailed and profound information to achieve a more precise and comprehensive understanding of the data we seek to collect. This approach allows us to explore specific topics in a more flexible manner, enabling our participant to contribute their experiences and perspectives more broadly and in detail, enriching our analysis and helping us to gain a more complete view of the theme under study.

Strategies

1. ¿Qué estrategias utilizaste durante el proceso de aprendizaje?
2. ¿Cómo gestionaste los momentos de frustración o desánimo que surgieron durante tu estudio del inglés?

3. ¿Cómo estructurabas tu tiempo de estudio y práctica del inglés para obtener resultados efectivos?
4. ¿Hubo alguna técnica de aprendizaje específica que encontraste especialmente beneficiosa para avanzar de nivel?
5. ¿Qué consejos darías a otras personas que están empezando desde cero en el aprendizaje del inglés y aspiran a alcanzar un nivel avanzado como el C1?
6. ¿Cómo adaptaste tu aprendizaje del inglés a tu rutina diaria y a tus responsabilidades personales o laborales?
7. ¿Qué papel jugaron las actividades prácticas, como la conversación oral o la escritura, en tu progreso hacia el nivel C1?

Instrument to validate the data collection instrument

Instruction: Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement on the statements provided below by encircling the number that corresponds to your best to your judgment.

1 – Strongly Disagree	4 – Agree
2 – Disagree	5 – Strongly Agree
3 – Undecided	

Criteria

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5
The items in the instrument are relevant to answer the objectives of the study.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The items in the instrument can obtain depth to constructs being Measured/studied.	1	2	3	**4**	5
The instrument has an appropriate sample of items for the construct being measured/studied.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The items and their alternatives are neither too narrow nor limited in its content.	1	2	3	**4**	5
The items in the instrument are stated clearly.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The items on the instrument can elicit responses which are stable, definite, consistent, and not conflicting.	1	2	3	**4**	5
The terms adapted in the scale are culturally appropriate.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The layout or format of the instrument is technically sound.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The instrument is not too short or long enough that the participants will be able to answer it within a given time.	1	2	3	4	**5**
The instrument is interesting such that participants will be induced to respond to it and accomplish it fully.	1	2	3	**4**	5
The instrument as a whole could answer the basic purpose for which it is designed.	1	2	3	4	**5**

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS SECTION

1. Do you consider that the proposed items correspond to categories, unit of analysis or variables of the study?

Yes X   NO _____

2. What items would you add or erase?

Maybe number two can be improved by asking if somebody was there to help the participant during these moments or provided her some tools to help her cope with stress.

In number three you can ask if the participant experienced any difficulties keeping this study routine and how the participant solved that.

Maybe you can add a question related to the materials the participant used and how she/he had access to them.

In the last question I don't clearly understand why you are asking just about those two skills, but it can help to ask for specific examples on how the participant practiced those two skills and the way they helped them to achieve the C1.

3. What other suggestions would you make to improve this instrument?

No more suggestions.

Evaluator's Names: Jessica Elizabeth Ochoa Delgado

ID: 0106280498

Academic Degree: Master's degree

Signature:

Appendix 3: Letter Consent from the participant

Estimada: [REDACTED] s

Por medio de la presente carta, yo, Diana Carolina Coronel Quezada, con el numero de cédula [REDACTED] olicito formalmente tu autorización para utilizar tu participación en mi investigación educativa titulada "Exploring the Road to C1 English Level - A Descriptive Case Study". Esta investigación se está llevando a cabo como parte de mis estudios académicos en La Universidad Nacional de Educación.

El propósito de este estudio es examinar las estrategias utilizadas para poder alcanzar el nivel C1 en inglés. Tus aportaciones serán de gran valor para profundizar en el área de la educación, especificamente en las estrategias necesarias para obtener un nivel alto en la certificación.

Tu participación en este estudio implica responder a las preguntas realizadas en una entrevista. La información recogida será utilizada únicamente con fines educativos y de investigación, asegurando tu anonimato y confidencialidad en todo momento.

Por favor, ten en cuenta que tu participación es completamente voluntaria y puedes retirarte del estudio en cualquier momento sin ninguna consecuencia. Además, cualquier dato recopilado se utilizará únicamente para los propósitos mencionados y no se divulgará a terceros sin tu consentimiento explícito.

Si estás de acuerdo con los términos y deseas otorgar tu consentimiento para participar en esta investigación, te agradecería que firmaras una copia de esta carta y la devolvieras a mí.

Si tienes alguna pregunta o necesitas más información sobre este estudio, no dudes en contactarme a través de dccoronel@unae.edu.ec o al 0994753830

Agradezco sinceramente tu disposición para contribuir a mi investigación académica. Tu colaboración es fundamental para el éxito de este proyecto.

Firma del Participante: [REDACTED]

Número de Cédula: ... [REDACTED]

Appendix 3: Interview Transcriptions

**Link:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1k51DWfRLcC-pjKUSkq-NMRYlu-pbo5FyHeRw7k9MSsw/edit?usp=sharing**

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE EDUCACIÓN

DECLARATORIA DE PROPIEDAD INTELECTUAL Y CESIÓN DE DERECHOS DE PUBLICACIÓN PARA EL TRABAJO DE INTEGRACIÓN CURRICULAR
DIRECCIONES DE CARRERAS DE GRADO PRESENCIALES - DIRECCIÓN DE BIBLIOTECA

Yo, *Diana Carolina Coronel Quezada*, portador de la cedula de ciudadania nro. *0106992076*, estudiante de la carrera de *Pedagogia de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros* en el marco establecido en el articulo 13, literal b) del Reglamento de Titulación de las Carreras de Grado de la Universidad Nacional de Educación, declaro:

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Ratifico con mi suscripción la presente declaración, en todo su contenido.

Azogues, 19 de agosto de 2024

(Diana Carolina Coronel Quezada)
C.I.: *(0106992076)*

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DIRECCIONES DE CARRERAS DE GRADO PRESENCIALES - DIRECCIÓN DE BIBLIOTECA

Yo, *Pamela Salome Ñauta Vivar*, portador de la cedula de ciudadania nro. *0106813488*, estudiante de la carrera de Pedagogia de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros en el marco establecido en el artículo 13, literal b) del Reglamento de Titulación de las Carreras de Grado de la Universidad Nacional de Educación, declaro:

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De igual manera, concedo a la Universidad Nacional de Educación - UNAE, la autorización para la publicación de Trabajo de Integración Curricular denominado *"Exploring the Road to C1 English Level - A Descriptive Case Study"* en el repositorio institucional y la entrega de este al Sistema Nacional de Información de la Educación Superior del Ecuador para su difusión pública respetando los derechos de autor, como lo establece el artículo 144 de la Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior.

Ratifico con mi suscripción la presente declaración, en todo su contenido.

Azogues, 19 de agosto de 2024

Pamela Ñauta

(Pamela Salome Ñauta Vivar)
C.I.: (0106813488)

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE EDUCACIÓN

CERTIFICADO DEL TUTOR

Certificado para Trabajo de Integración Curricular de Carreras de Grado de Modalidad Presencial

Carrera de: Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros

Yo, Luis Andrés Peralta Sari, tutor del Trabajo de Integración Curricular de Carreras de Grado de Modalidad Presencial denominado "Exploring the Road to C1 English Level - A Descriptive Case Study" perteneciente a las estudiantes: Diana Carolina Coronel Quezada con C.I. 0106992076 y Pamela Salome Ñauta Vivar con C.I. 0106813488, doy fe de haber guiado y aprobado el Trabajo de Integración Curricular. También informo que el trabajo fue revisado con la herramienta de prevención de plagio donde reportó el 9 % de coincidencia en fuentes de internet, apegándose a la normativa académica vigente de la Universidad.

Azogues, 08 de agosto de 2024

Firmado electrónicamente por:
LUIS ANDRES PERALTA SARI

Luis Andrés Peralta Sari

C.I: 0104553912