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An Approach to Integration: The Integration of Language and Content to promote L2 Learner Autonomy at the College Level[1]

Un Acercamiento a la Integración: El Aprendizaje Integrado de Lengua y Contenidos para Promover la Autonomía del Estudiante de Lengua Extranjera en la Universidad

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Abstract

This article reports the preliminary findings of an action research on the effects of autonomy on a group of university students at the post-graduate level taking their first Spanish course through the Content and Language Learning (CLIL) methodology. The participants, whose Spanish was at the low/mid intermediate level (ACTFL, 2012), were exposed to content related to their Masters' degrees at a university in the United States. The sample consisted of 13 students in the experimental group and 14 in the control group. Results showed that students in the experimental group who followed a CLIL class experienced more autonomy than students in the control group who followed a more traditional class with a textbook. Pedagogical implications reflect advantages of planning curriculum according to the students' interests and career objectives.

Keywords: Autonomy, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), metacognitive knowledge, portfolio, university level.

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Resumen

El artículo reporta los hallazgos preliminares de un estudio de investigación acción tendiente a mostrar la repercusión de la autonomía en estudiantes universitarios de posgrado que están cursando una clase de español como lengua extranjera a través de la metodología del aprendizaje de lengua y contenidos (AICLE). Los participantes en la clase tienen un nivel intermedio bajo/medio según (ACTFL, 2012) y estudian en la clase temas relacionados al itinerario de estudios de sus maestrías que se dictan en inglés en una universidad estadounidense. La muestra consistió en 13 alumnos en el grupo experimental y 14 en el grupo de control. Los resultados mostraron que los alumnos matriculados en la clase AICLE desarrollaron mayor autonomía que los estudiantes en el grupo de control que tomaron una clase más tradicional con un libro de texto. Se valoran los resultados por las implicaciones pedagógicas derivadas para futuros cambios a nivel curricular que considera el itinerario de sus carreras en el diseño de las clases.

Palabras clave: Autonomía, aprendizaje integrado de lengua y contenidos (AICLE), conocimiento meta cognitivo, nivel universitario, portafolios

Resumo

O artigo reporta as descobertas preliminares de um estudo de pesquisa ação sobre os efeitos da autonomia em um grupo de estudantes universitários de pós-graduação que estão cursando uma aula de espanhol como língua estrangeira mediante a metodologia Aprendizagem Integrada de Conteúdo e Língua Estrangeira (AICLE). Os participantes tinham um nível de espanhol intermédio baixo/médio segundo (ACTFL, 2012) e durante a aula estiveram expostos a conteúdos relacionados com temas relacionados ao plano de estudos dos mestrados que cursaram nos Estados Unidos. A amostra consistiu em 13 estudantes no grupo experimental e 14 estudantes no grupo de controle. Os resultados mostraram que os estudantes matriculados na aula que utilizou a metodologia AICLE desenvolveram maior autonomia que os estudantes no grupo de controle que tiveram una aula mais tradicional usando um libro de texto. As implicações pedagógicas refletem as vantagens do planejamento curricular de acordo com os interesses e objetivos profissionais dos estudantes.

Palavras chave: Autonomia, Aprendizagem Integrada de Conteúdo e Língua Estrangeira (AICLE), conhecimento meta cognitivo, nível universitário, portfólios

Introduction

Autonomy is a buzzword in nearly every educational textbook, program and syllabus. However, autonomy is not a new concept—there has been interest in self-directed learning since the nineteenth century (Candy, 1991), and this interest expands when adult learners are included (Holec, 1981). Despite the passage of time, the degree of autonomy in both curricula and educational organizations remains constant (Council of Europe, 2004; Marsh, 2013).

In Europe, the Bologna Declaration of 1999 influenced the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by placing the student at the center of the learning arena. In this paradigm, the development of autonomy is essential for achieving the ultimate goal of education: the formation of the whole individual (Salaburu, Haug & Ginés Mora, 2011). The Europal project has also benefited these collaborative efforts in the educational field by maintaining an inventory regarding autonomy both in education and in the area of foreign languages in several European countries (Miliander & Trebi, 2008, Jiménez Raya, 2009). As a result, various studies in the field of linguistics over the last decade have attempted to determine what characterizes an autonomous language learner.

Benson (2010) recognizes that autonomy is a complex construct, capable of presenting obstacles if the researcher does not specify beforehand what "construct" is being studied. Therefore, Benson (2010) suggests that one define the construct accurately in order to avoid future problems. One definition of autonomy that is often cited is related to "control." In other words, Benson (2010) holds that "autonomous language learners are, therefore, learners who are in some sense 'in control' of important dimensions of their learning" (p. 79). For Sinclair (1999), just observing students in the classroom is insufficient for determining their level of autonomy. The author instead proposes making this determination by measuring students' metacognitive knowledge or "capacity" to make informed decisions about language learning. This idea becomes more relevant within the framework of a CLIL language class that adopts a portfolio because it eventually provides practitioners with information to improve their teaching experiences. In other words, the portfolio allows the teacher to delve more deeply into students' interests, reflections, and metacognitive knowledge in order to better understand how students' capacities relate to their own learning.

For this reason, this study is designed to begin to fill a gap in the study of autonomy. This study has been operationalized through

students' metacognitive knowledge in a CLIL classroom setting. Based on the results of analysis stemming from a European portfolio model, this study has been adapted to the American university classroom format. This research included 27 students in the fall semester of 2011. The didactic implications arising from this study suggest that changes in curriculum design should be implemented in future courses.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Questions that motivated the study were as follows:

Q1. Does the CLIL class promote autonomy?

Q2. Does the portfolio promote learner's autonomy in this particular class?

From these questions, the following hypotheses emerged:

H1. Students taking the CLIL Spanish class will demonstrate greater autonomy than students who did not take the (CLIL) Spanish Class.

H2. The portfolio will promote autonomy.

Literature Review

According to the analyzed literature, there seems to be a lacuna in the L2 class, especially in the CLIL context, where the topics studied follow the interests and concentration of students' areas of study. Prior to discussing this gap in greater detail, this literature review considers content and language integrated learning (CLIL), content-based instruction (CBI), and the use of language portfolios in terms of their contributions to autonomy.

Content and Language Integrated Learning and Content-Based Instruction

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is a methodology that enhances not only autonomy but also motivation (Dalton-Puffer, 2012;Grabbe & Stoller, 1997; Madrid & Madrid, 2014). It is also the medium through which the language taught is the vehicle to integrate academic content (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). In addition, there seems to be a keen interest in university students all over the globe to learn a new language for job purposes or to fully function abroad in social situations; as a result, CLIL provides an opportunity to more fully engage students (Fortanet- Gómez, 2013).

In this article, we will be referring to CLIL and CBI (Content-Based Instruction) interchangeably in the sense that both share pedagogical essential aspects and also considering Llinares's (2015) idea of integration:

> The actual concept of integration. *What* it entails and *how* it can be materialized in the classroom, should receive more attention by researchers and practitioners, no matter whether the context at hand is a so-called immersion setting in Canada or a so-called CLIL school in the Netherlands. (p. 59)

This resemblance has also been supported in Cenoz (2015), Coyle et al., (2010) and Dalton-Puffer (2007). CLIL is the term that is widely used in Europe, while CBI is more popular in the United States and Canada. Despite its differing origins, CLIL intends to boost minority languages and support the learning and teaching of foreign languages. As indicated in the CLIL Eurydice report (Fortanet- Gómez, 2013), CBI has been more associated with LEP students. Certain researchers have outlined aspects of CLIL that differ from perspectives supported within CBI; in particular, immersion has been considered in some depth (Cenoz, Genesee & Gorter, 2014; Perez- Cañado, 2012).

Integrating Content and Language in Institutions

Several researchers have reported success in the integration of content and languages in educational establishments in Europe and in the United States during the last twenty years (Grabbe & Stoller, 1997; Marsh, 2013; Mehisto, Frigols & Marsh, 2008). In Europe, interest in content-based methodology has increased across the continent, partially due to socio-educational policy. *The European Centre for Modern Languages published The European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education* (Marsh, Mehisto, Wolf & Frigols, 2011) with information regarding the objectives and responsibilities that teachers should consider for optimal performance: the role of the student, curriculum integration, integration of content and language teaching, professional development, and teacher preparation to face the challenges presented.

On the American continent, the efforts carried out in the experimental field using integrated curriculum planning are reflected in the teaching of ESL in primary and high schools (Bigelow, Dahlman & Ranney, 2006; Kaufman & Crandall, 2005; Wegrzecka-Kowalewski, 1997). It also can be seen at the university level in the teaching of EFL in Colombia (Bedoya Hernández, 2012; Gonzales Moncada & Sierra

Ospina, 2008). The literature also reveals an abundance of linguistic programs for teaching languages, such as Spanish, Russian, Japanese, Chinese and French, in some American universities where academic content is taught in various levels of these languages (Bailey, 2009; Dupuy, 2000; Jourdenais & Springer, 2005).

In Spain, there are varied proposals dealing with faculty development work and research related to CLIL methodology, ranging from different levels of language assessment to language and cognitive development (Breeze, Llamas Saiz Martínez Sala Pasamar & Tabernero, 2014, Madrid & Madrid, 2014). As a result, there has been a tendency for teachers to work collaboratively. Those who happen to teach the same group of students exchange ideas to improve and develop the curriculum. From the learners' standpoint, an important contribution of CLIL is that it supports their cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1989) because students work with different academic content and use this content as a vehicle to develop their language skills. For example, students working with topics such as human rights will be able to work and increase their vocabulary specific to this topic while simultaneously focusing on various linguistic aspects. Another way of promoting autonomy in the L2 classroom is through the language portfolio, which will be described in further detail below.

The Language Portfolio

Because of its ability to promote autonomy and motivation (Little 2002, 2005; Sisamakis 2010), the language portfolio is increasingly being used in L2 classes (Canga & Fernandez, 2012; Klenowski, 2012; Sobrino-Morrás, Pérez-Sancho & Naval Durán, 2009). Through the portfolio, students reflect upon their learning, evaluate their own work, and make decisions regarding their learning. This perspective is important when considering students at the university level because through the adoption of the portfolio, instructors gather important information that can serve many purposes, such as improving the curriculum based on the students' needs, giving the students the opportunity to self-rate their work, and allowing students greater participation in the teaching and learning experience. To achieve these lofty goals, teachers must consider what students have to say when they are analyzing their own work; metacognition is closely related to different degrees that the students show when they are in control of learning situations or contexts. We aim to shed more light on this area because several researchers have called for further investigation (Benson, 2010; Gao & Jun Zhang, 2011; Sinclair, 1999).

A strong example of the power of portfolios can be seen in the European Portfolio for Languages (PEL). The Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2001) developed this portfolio to serve as a guide in the teaching, learning and assessment of different languages in different countries. The portfolio also reflects efforts to promote the development of learners' autonomy, to develop multilingualism and to increase mutual understanding through intercultural dialogue. To date, there have been ongoing efforts and discussions related to the adaptability of the portfolio in various contexts. For example, debates have taken place about the importance of different ministries in each country as well as the relationships between stakeholders at all levels, including parents, students and supervisors.

The PEL contains three distinctive elements. The first is the section called "language passport," where one can identify the learner's skills. The second component is the "language biography," which is considered the axis of portfolio. Here, students reflect upon and evaluate their progress in learning the language. This section also allows the teacher to access information regarding the student's experience with the language, both inside and outside the classroom. The third component is the *dossier* used for storing information or skills mentioned in the passport and the portfolio's language biography.

The European portfolio was developed in conjunction with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). According to the CEFR, one of the portfolio's objectives is to facilitate language study by students in the European community. Nonetheless, this research has adapted the portfolio for use in the graduate university context at an American university. Through this adaption, the research aims to broaden the research base of the PEL, thus providing more insight into the role of portfolios in encouraging student autonomy in other contexts.

Methodology

Research Design

The current study falls under the category of action research because it has been carried out by instructors investigating aspects of their own practice in order to make changes or better classroom situations (Bailey & Nunan, 2009). This qualitative-quantitative action research method allowed us to thoroughly investigate the autonomy of graduate students, operationalized as "the ability to justify or make informed decisions about learning." Since we were unable to randomly

select the participants, the sample included regularly- occurring classes, placing this study's participants into the intact groups category.

Operationalization of the Constructs

Autonomy in this research was operationalized as "the ability to justify or make informed decisions about learning." The CLIL class has been operationalized as a "Spanish course where the topics chosen are closely related to the topics of the participants' Master's degrees." This group did not use a textbook, and the instructor selected different topics associated with the students' careers. The grammar and vocabulary lessons were mostly dictated by the content used. The Spanish class that did not follow the CLIL format has been operationalized as "a Spanish class that follows a traditional textbook." The textbook used was published in the United States and intended for students at the intermediate level (ACTFL, 2012). The textbook includes the following units: personal relationships, pastimes, daily life, health, wellness, travel and nature. Students in this group also had access to ancillary materials from the textbook online. This material helped them to reinforce vocabulary and practice grammar.

Context and Participants

The sample consisted of 27 students. The experimental group was composed of 13 students, and the control group included 14. The median age in the experimental group was 31 years, while in the control group, it was 25. In regards to gender distribution, the female percentage was higher than male in both groups (62% in the experimental group and 86% in the control group). All students were American, except for one who was Italian. In all cases, the mother tongue or (L1) was English, except for that of the Italian student. Students took a placement test, and based on the results, they were placed into low/mid intermediate level classes (ACTFL, 2012). In the experimental group, the class curriculum was based on topics selected by the instructor; these topics were chosen based on typical areas of study in the students' master degree programs. The topics presented were the aborigines, the environment, and human rights. Students in the control group used a textbook published in the United States. The duration of both classes was a semester, and the groups met twice a week for two hours.

Data Collection Instruments

Data for this study came from two sources: a survey and a portfolio analysis. First, students took a survey based on a set of questions adapted from Sinclair (1999). The survey questions were piloted prior to actual administration. Students answered the questions immediately following every oral presentation. The information was collected following their first oral presentation (third week of class) and their final oral presentation (last week of class). The questions used were the following:

1) Why did you decide to work on this topic?
2) Did you like it? Why? Why not?
3) How did it go?
4) Why did you organize your research the way you did?
5) What do you think about the way you worked?
6) Did you have any problems? If so, what were they?
7) Why did you have them?
8) What else would you have done differently?

(Questions adapted from Sinclair, 1999, p. 97).

The second source of data stems from the analysis of portfolios submitted by students at the end of the semester. We used the following criteria (Table 2) based upon the operationalization of autonomy used in this research.

Table 2. Rubric used in the analysis of the portfolio

Autonomy
a) Student exercises "control" in the portfolio
b) Student reflects on his/her learning

The rationale for sentence a) states that the student can exercise a high or low level of self-control (Candy, 1991). In other words, he/she can be autonomous or not. With regards to b), we determined that autonomy means questioning, reflecting and contributing (Ushioda, 2009). As a) and b) in the rubric seem to be broad categories, we noticed

a need for clear guidelines in order to analyze each portfolio. Therefore, we decided to elaborate on a few descriptors for future categorization results. A 7-point Likert rating scale was used for the evaluation of each portfolio. We encountered a few disagreements between the raters in both groups and resolved them through discussions and peer agreement.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

To process the answers to the research questions, the researchers followed Sinclair's three-level categorization where each level describes learners' meta-cognitive knowledge. The categories suggested by Sinclair (1999) are as follows: Level 1: "largely unaware," Level 2 "becoming aware", and Level 3 "largely aware." For example, if the language used by the student in describing his/her experience offered little or insubstantial justification, improper use of metalanguage, or lacked logical arguments, the level of metalinguistic knowledge was marked as 1, "largely unaware." However, if the student supported statements using anecdotes and resorted to self–analysis and metaphors, these responses could be categorized as 2, "becoming aware." If a student made use of what has already been described and also provided various alternatives of how he/she could have worked, this response could be categorized as level 3, "largely aware." The data collection was performed in the learners' L1 because the purpose was not to analyze their interlanguage; rather we sought to analyze the construct of autonomy.

Results

Results of the Pretest/Posttest Based on Sinclair (1999)

In the following table, we notice that 28% of the answers in the experimental group could be categorized in level 3 because they were able to provide different alternatives when answering the questions. 47% of the answers could be grouped in level 2 and 25% in level 1. Regarding the control group, we notice that most of the answers fell under levels (1&2).

Table 3. Total values for the first oral presentation

Oral Presentation 1	Largely unaware (%) Level 1	Becoming aware (%) Level 2	Largely aware (%) Level 3
Experimental Group	25	47	28
Control Group	38	53	9

In order to offer more substantial evidence to complement the table above, the following section presents a few extracts voicing the students' opinions compiled from the answers at each level.

Level 3 (Largely Aware)

S1. I looked for general information related to the Miskitos. There wasn't a lot of available information so I had to find 3 different types of sources and piece together my presentation from that information. I then used a Powerpoint to present in class.

S2. I could have practiced in front of Spanish speaking people, and not just in front of a mirror or alone. I should film myself at home too.

S3. I wanted initial background facts about the Shipibos, and Wikipedia was very useful. I then used keywords, such as 'Shipibos, Shipibos beliefs,' 'Shipibos current problems' and other variations of helpful search words. I was also curious if there were any YouTube videos about the Shipibos, their native language, or anything else that maybe of interest to me that I wanted to share with my classmates. I accidentaly found the You Tube video 'Shipibos En Lima SOS' and I watched the 9:47 minute video clip over and over because I was in shock, and at which point, I knew I had to include it as part of my presentation.

Level 2 (Becoming Aware)

S4. I chose the Kuna peoples of Panama because I had seen some Kuna women while traveling briefly in Panama in 2005. I had always wondered what their history was but never took time previously to find out.

S5. I searched online for the characteristics of the Tarahumaras and then I chose what I found most interesting.

S6. I could have put a few bullet points on my powerpoint to assist with less reading directly from my notes in the presentation.

Level 1 (Largely Unaware)

S7. I looked for information in the Internet.

S8. I looked up for information about Shakira and translated it. Then, I looked for pictures and video to match.

S9. Nothing.

The table illustrates that the highest values in both groups are expressed in the category "becoming aware." In other words, students resorted to anecdotal evidence, introspection and meta-language. In terms of the final oral presentation, we observe the following.

Table 4. Total values for the final oral presentation

Oral Presentation 2	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Experimental Group	8	40	52
Control Group	44	42	14

Below, we include a few extracts of student voices quotes that fall under the category of level 2, "becoming aware."

S1. The main thing is to make myself understood. I chose this topic knowing that it was complicated to explain in Spanish. There were lots of words to learn and remember. I tried not to use my paper.

S2. I think I did a job. I found that Walmart now has organic products. I felt more comfortable this time. I know I need more practice to speak in public.

S3. I don't see this as an issue but I spent a lot of time looking for photos to tell my story. I'm not sure if I made myself understood. Sometimes I feel I have the intention to say something and when I say it in Spanish, it does not sound as what I wanted to say.

S4. The pronunciation problems are due to nervousness, and even when I prepare I still get nervous speaking in Spanish in front of a classroom.

In the experimental group, the level three values have increased. An explanation for this could be that students resorted to alternative strategies that helped locate the answers at this level. Table 5 provides a summary of both presentations.

Table 5. Summary of values found in both groups

	Largely unaware level 1	Becoming aware level 2	Largely aware level 3
Experimental Group	16	44	40
Control Group	40	48	12

Based on the answers provided in the experimental group, we observe that the majority of values fall into categories 2 and 3. In the control group, most values fell into the level 2 category. We offer a few possible explanations for this finding, which will be elucidated upon in the conclusion.

Inter-rater Reliability

To test the inter-rater reliability, we decided to use the Kappa Cohen test electronic calculator, which is available online[3]. For the interpretation of results, we used the Landis and Koch (1977) rating scale.

Table 6. Agreement between evaluators according to Cohen Kappa Test

Rater Agreement	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Experimental Group	K=. 923076	K=. 692307	K=. 692307
Control Group	K=: .714286	K=. 714286	K=. 928572

Following the Landis and Koch rating scale (1977), the percentage found (k = 923 076) was almost perfect because, according to the rating table, the number is between 0.81 and 1.00. In other words, the

[3] The calculator used to find the k value using Kappa Cohen can be found in [http://justusrandolph.net/kappa/]

evaluators did not differ significantly when rating the experimental group (category 1). Regarding level 2, "becoming aware," the following difference was found: k = 692,307. Following the same procedure, the percentage is 'substantial' as the value of k is defined by the values .61 and .80. Similarly, in level 3 "largely aware," the value was k = 692307. We observed that in the control group, the value for level 1was also substantial. Level 2 was also reported to be substantial, while level 3 was 'almost perfect.' Taking this into account, and with respect to the first hypothesis at the beginning of the study, we can say that, indeed, the students who took the CLIL class demonstrated greater autonomy at the time of the posttest. Raters categorized their responses to the questionnaires mostly at levels 2 "take control" and 3 "with great control."

Results of Portfolio Analysis

To analyze the portfolio, the researcher used a rubric with the following categories: a) student exercises "control" in the portfolio and b) student reflects on his/her learning (table2). Further descriptors were used, and two raters evaluated the portfolios before comparing the experimental group with the control group. The following sections describe the results first for the experimental group, then the control group.

Experimental group. With respect to "student exercises control in the portfolio" (see rubric-section a), students in both classes completed all parts of the portfolio (85%). We identified progress in at least two skills. In terms of "student reflects on his/her learning" (see rubric-section b), the results show the following: most students (61%) show evidence of reflection in their writing. This evidence was collected from various parts of the portfolio: assessment needs, linguistic bibliography, long- and short-term learning goals.

Control group. With regards to "student exercises control in the portfolio" (see rubric-section a), we observed that only 57% of the class presented all of the different parts of the portfolio. As for the criteria of "student reflects on his/her learning" (see rubric-section b), 57% of students reflected on their short/long-term goals in writing, both in the needs assessment, and in the linguistic bibliography and other components.

Considering the second hypothesis in this research, we observed that the portfolio promotes greater autonomy in those learners who took the CLIL class. Upon analyzing the learners' autonomy, we found

evidence that 85% of the students in the experimental group showed evidence of all parts of the portfolio, while in the control group only 57% of the students demonstrated this capacity. For exemplification, we will present student extracts from the portfolio (linguistic bibliography). These extracts were written in Spanish and are here transcribed in English.

Students in the experimental group

In the future, I hope to attend classes in the business field. I am an MBA student and I want to learn things about my profession. (S.1)

My long-term objectives are to communicate with other people in the language and have the right level to work with an organization. (S.2)

I want to live in a country where Spanish is spoken and work with people whose expertise is environmental studies. (S.3)

My writing, speaking and listening have improved enormously. I need to learn more vocabulary and Spanish terms related to economics so that I can use the language in my future career. (S.4)

Students in the control group

My knowledge of the language has grown a lot. Besides, the chapter about nature has helped me increase the vocabulary about environment. My grammar has improved as well. In spite of this, I need help in a lot of things. (S.1)

Next semester, I hope to continue learning more about grammar and improving my comprehension, listening… (S.2)

I learned a lot of vocabulary but I do not know every word or phrase from the book. I do not like the exercises from the supersite. I am fed up with the supersite

I understand the reason to use it. I can use and study with the supersite in the future. (S.3)

I would like to learn more verb tenses. I would like to speak more. I think I can write more or less. I know I need to practice speaking more. (S. 4)

Conclusions

We noticed that 40% of the students were able to justify their answers in category 3, "largely aware," but the control group's answers demonstrated a lower value (12%) in that category. A possible explanation might be that students in the experimental group resorted to the selection and presentation of topics that were closely related to their concentrations in their Masters' degrees. When asked the last question "What else would you have done differently?" they offered examples of alternatives, which permitted their responses to be categorized as level 3. In several instances, we noticed that students' answers demonstrated knowledge that they were acquiring in their current studies, previous experience, or in their bachelor's studies and job-related experiences.

The majority of the students in the control group opted to select topics related to their books. In their presentations, the atmosphere became monotonous, and many of the presentations overlapped with what others had said. For example, many students presented the topic of "traveling." A possible explanation for this overlap was that students found their repertoire of choices restricted. This restriction led students to answer questions using statements without strong justifications or deeper insight, which explains why those answers were categorized in level 1. At level 2, the experimental group and the control group are nearly equal, at 44% and 48%, respectively. We noticed a difference in level 1 in both groups (40% control and 16% experimental). We also saw in the experimental group that most of the answers were categorized in level 2 because learners provided sound and justifiable explanations.

Regarding the portfolio, the difference between both groups might be explained by the fact that in the experimental group, students found the content of the class to be rich, varied and more in sync with their concentrations and interests. Students presented topics that were closely related to the issues dealt with in class. Therefore, students were able to reflect upon topics of interest; by comparison, the students in the control group exhibited less motivation.

The pedagogical implications of this research demonstrate the importance of fostering teamwork with teachers and/or experts of content classes at the university level. Such collaboration could assist in refining the didactic rationale in Spanish foreign language classes that follow the content-based instruction format. Secondly, this research also highlighted the importance of planning activities related to the interests of adult students studying different specializations.

Regarding the limitations of the study, we believe that the following factors need to be noted. First, the age groups should be

considered, as the students in the experimental group seemed to have more work-related experience than the participants in the control group. Second, in the experimental group, students had the chance to work with material that they studied in their own concentrations, whereas the control group worked only with topics related to their books. At this point, we believe in the importance of incorporating more specific topics related to students' interests and needs, especially at the university and graduate levels.

Future research should focus on content-based instruction formats where autonomy could be operationalized in other aspects, including the sociocultural aspect. Future studies should contemplate motivation and autonomy in students as well as other variables, such as students' use of the target language outside of the language classroom.

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