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Eclectic methodology in the teaching of English in higher education: A systematic review

Metodología ecléctica en la enseñanza del inglés en la educación superior: una revisión sistemática

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the effectiveness of eclectic methodology in teaching English as a foreign language in higher education through a systematic review of recent scientific literature. The PRISMA approach was followed for the identification, selection, and analysis of studies published between 2019 and 2023 in indexed databases such as Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, and SciELO. Initially, 600 potential publications were identified. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 15 relevant studies were selected. The results show that eclectic methodology, by integrating approaches such as the direct method, the audiolingual method, task-based learning, total physical response, and cooperative learning, significantly contributes to the development of English communicative skills. Furthermore, the incorporation of virtual environments, hybrid models, and artificial intelligence-based tools enhances learning processes and student autonomy. It is concluded that the eclectic methodology constitutes a flexible and relevant alternative for teaching English in higher education, provided there is adequate teacher training and coherent methodological planning.

Keywords: language teaching, higher education, pedagogical methods.

Resumen

El presente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la efectividad de la metodología ecléctica en la enseñanza del idioma inglés en educación superior, a través de una revisión sistemática de la literatura científica reciente. Se siguieron lineamientos del enfoque PRISMA para la identificación, sección y análisis de estudios publicados entre 2019 y 2023 en bases de datos indexadas como Scopus, ERIC, Google Académico Y SciELO. Inicialmente se identificaron 600 publicaciones potenciales., tras aplicar criterios de inclusión y exclusión, se seleccionaron 15 estudios relevantes. Los resultados evidencian que la metodología ecléctica, al integrar enfoques como el método directo, el método audiolingual, el aprendizaje basado en tareas, la respuesta física total y el aprendizaje cooperativo, contribuye significativamente al desarrollo de las habilidades comunicativas del inglés. Asimismo, la incorporación de entornos virtuales, modelos híbridos y herramientas basadas en inteligencia artificial potencia los procesos de aprendizaje y la autonomía del estudiante. Se concluye que la metodología ecléctica constituye una alternativa flexible y pertinente para la enseñanza del inglés en educación superior, siempre que exista una adecuada formación docente y una planificación metodológica coherente.

Palabras clave: enseñanza de idiomas, educación superior, métodos pedagógicos.

Introduction

English language proficiency has become a key competency in higher education, owing to its relevance to academic training, scientific research, and professional insertion in globalized contexts. Mastery of this foreign language enables students to access specialized information, participate in international academic networks, and

meet the demands of the contemporary professional marketplace. Nevertheless, various educational settings continue to face difficulties in developing English communicative skills, particularly when traditional methodologies centered on grammatical memorization and mechanical repetition are employed.

In response to these limitations, eclectic methodology emerges as a pedagogical approach that flexibly integrates diverse methods and strategies for English language instruction, attending to learners' needs, learning styles, and the characteristics of the educational context. This approach combines contributions from the direct method, the audiolingual method, task-based learning, total physical response, cooperative learning, and communicative approaches, enabling more dynamic, contextualized, and student-centered instruction. From a theoretical standpoint, eclectic methodology draws on principles of constructivism and meaningful learning, which emphasize the active role of the student in constructing linguistic knowledge.

Recent studies provide evidence for the effectiveness of the eclectic approach in developing English communicative skills. Investigations such as those by Azzahra (2022) and Chernus et al. (2022) report notable improvements in vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation when methodological strategies are combined. Similarly, studies conducted in higher education settings document advances in reading comprehension, written production, and overall academic performance through the application of flexible, integrative approaches (Cuadros & Santos, 2023; Naga & Prasantha, 2020).

In recent years, the integration of digital technologies and virtual learning environments has strengthened the application of eclectic methodology. Models such as e-learning and m-learning expand opportunities for interaction, autonomous practice, and feedback, thereby supporting English language learning across both face-to-face and virtual modalities. Complementarily, the emerging use of artificial intelligence-based tools allows for immediate, personalized feedback, which increases student motivation and commitment to the learning process.

Despite these contributions, a gap remains in the systematization of recent empirical evidence that comprehensively analyzes the effectiveness of eclectic methodology in English language teaching in higher education. The dispersion of studies, the diversity of contexts, and the variety of approaches applied justify the need for a systematic review that synthesizes the principal findings and research trends concerning this pedagogical approach.

In this context, the present article aims to analyze the effectiveness of eclectic methodology in English language instruction in higher education, drawing on a systematic review of studies published between 2019 and 2023. This review seeks to provide updated scientific evidence that contributes to pedagogical decision-making, the design of English language programs, and the improvement of educational processes in higher education institutions.

Methodology

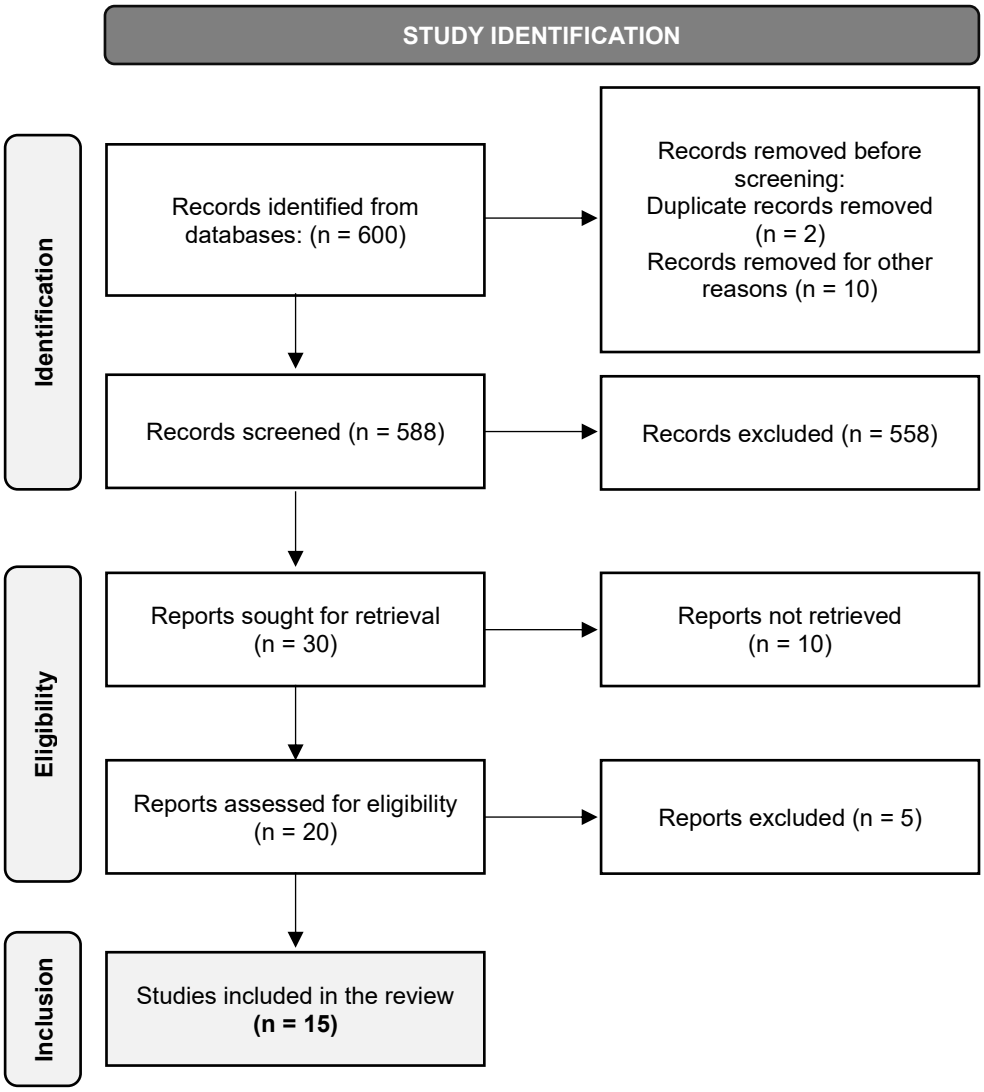
A systematic literature review was conducted following the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA; Page et al., 2021), in order to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and high-quality standards throughout the process. The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory approach, employing a non-experimental, cross-sectional documentary design in which academic articles published within a specified time frame were analyzed without manipulating variables. For source retrieval, specialized databases including Scopus, Google Scholar, ERIC, SciELO, and certified university repositories were consulted, using keywords in both Spanish and English such as *metodología ecléctica*, eclectic method, English teaching, tertiary education, EFL, higher education, speaking skills, reading skills, writing skills, and listening skills. This strategy initially yielded 600 records, from which 15 articles were selected following rigorous criteria.

Inclusion criteria encompassed studies published between 2019 and 2023, research focused on English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction, articles that explicitly incorporated an eclectic approach or the integration of multiple methods, and those conducted in higher education or equivalent levels. Conversely, duplicate articles, publications without full-text access, works that did not provide a detailed description of methodological application, and studies lacking empirical results were excluded. Data collection was based on a systematic documentary review, employing a bibliographic matrix as the instrument to record key information from the 15 selected articles: authors, year of publication, method employed, population studied, results obtained, and main conclusions. This tool enabled the organization, synthesis, and efficient comparison of information.

In ethical terms, full respect was maintained for the copyright and academic integrity of the sources consulted, in alignment with the standards of the Council of Europe (2001) and the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020); likewise, the privacy of participants in the reviewed studies was safeguarded, as the analysis was restricted to data published in official sources. Nevertheless, this review has

inherent limitations, including reliance on articles available through open-access or institutional databases, which may constrain the comprehensiveness of the findings, as well as the heterogeneity of designs and contexts across the selected studies, which complicates direct comparisons.

Figure 1
PRISMA flow diagram



Results and discussion

The studies included in this systematic review consistently demonstrate that eclectic methodology favors English language learning in higher education across both receptive and productive skills. The findings are organized into three main categories: development of communicative skills, integration of educational technologies, and effectiveness of the eclectic approach in higher education contexts.

With regard to the development of communicative skills, the reviewed studies report significant improvements in pronunciation, oral fluency, and vocabulary expansion when methodological combinations integrating the audiolingual method, the direct method, and communicative activities are applied. Azzahra (2022) and El-Beltagy (2019) provide evidence of relevant advances in students' oral production. Complementarily, Dabon

et al. (2019) note that the incorporation of cooperative task-based learning strengthens oral production and classroom interaction.

Concerning the integration of educational technologies, the results show that the combined use of virtual platforms, mobile applications, and hybrid learning environments enhances the effectiveness of eclectic methodology. Studies such as those by Guano et al. (2021) and Egas-Villafuerte et al. (2022) highlight that e-learning and b-learning models favor autonomous learning, consistent practice, and student motivation. Furthermore, recent research incorporates artificial intelligence-based tools for immediate feedback, evidencing improvements in linguistic performance and self-regulated learning (Thamrin et al., 2023).

Regarding the effectiveness of the eclectic approach in higher education, studies conducted in technological institutes and universities report positive outcomes in reading comprehension, written production, and overall academic performance. Investigations carried out with engineering and general studies students demonstrate significant differences in favor of groups receiving instruction through eclectic approaches, compared to those taught with traditional methodologies (Cuadros & Santos, 2023; Naga & Prasantha, 2020).

The positive impact of the eclectic approach on the development of communicative skills can be attributed to its capacity to integrate complementary techniques that address different dimensions of language learning. The combination of methods such as audiolingual, task-based learning, and cooperative learning allows for a balance between linguistic accuracy and communicative fluency, as proposed by Rivers (1981) and contemporary communicative language teaching approaches. These findings coincide with previous studies that emphasize the need to move beyond rigid methodological models in foreign language teaching.

In this vein, Medina et al. (2019) demonstrate that an eclectic methodology based on suggestopedia and the CRAFT program fosters meaningful English learning by reducing anxiety, enhancing motivation, and improving linguistic retention, aspects that align with the results analyzed in the reviewed studies, particularly in higher education contexts. Similarly, Sarifa (2020) provides evidence that implementation of the eclectic method significantly improves communicative competence in EFL students by promoting the balanced use of cognitive, communicative, and affective strategies.

Likewise, the findings are consistent with those reported by Chernus et al. (2022), who affirm that the eclectic approach facilitates the comprehensive development of language skills by allowing methodological adaptation according to the student's level, learning style, and educational context. This assertion reinforces the idea that methodological flexibility is a key element for successful English learning in diverse university settings.

On the other hand, the qualitative synthesis conducted by Valledor et al. (2023) highlights that applications and digital environments incorporating the eclectic approach enhance student autonomy and active learning, which aligns with the results of the present review, where a growing trend toward the integration of eclectic methodologies in virtual and hybrid higher education contexts is evident.

Furthermore, the integration of digital technologies emerges as a key element that amplifies the benefits of the eclectic approach. Virtual environments, mobile applications, and hybrid models facilitate constant exposure to the language, autonomous practice, and meaningful interaction, fundamental aspects for the development of communicative competencies. In this regard, the incorporation of artificial intelligence-based tools represents an emerging trend that adds value to the teaching-learning process through immediate and personalized feedback, in accordance with the observations of Thamrin et al. (2023).

Nevertheless, the results also indicate that the effectiveness of eclectic methodology depends on coherent pedagogical planning and adequate teacher training. The indiscriminate or uncoordinated use of methods can generate fragmentation in the teaching process, reducing its educational impact. Therefore, teachers need to possess methodological and technological competencies that enable them to strategically select and articulate the most pertinent techniques according to learning objectives and the educational context.

In synthesis, the findings of this systematic review reinforce the pertinence of the eclectic approach as a flexible, adaptable, and effective strategy for English language teaching in higher education. The discussion of the results allows for the assertion that eclectic methodology not only corresponds to the current demands of language education but also opens new perspectives for pedagogical innovation through the integration of digital technologies and emerging resources.

The results of this systematic review are consistent with recent literature that underscores the potential of the eclectic approach as a suitable pedagogical alternative for language teaching. Its flexibility allows teachers to select strategies adapted to the specific context, integrating didactic materials, videos, and songs through motivating techniques that foster the comprehensive development of the four English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). In this way, meaningful learning is promoted among students, while more personalized and effective instruction is consolidated.

Likewise, the integration of digital technologies is identified as expanding the possibilities for autonomous learning, interaction, and linguistic practice, aspects noted in contemporary studies on English language teaching. The progressive incorporation of AI-based tools adds value through immediate and adaptive feedback.

However, the effectiveness of the eclectic approach depends on teacher training, strategic planning, and coherence in the integration of methods. Indiscriminate or uncoordinated use may lead to pedagogical dispersion.

Conclusions

The systematic review conducted allows for the conclusion that eclectic methodology constitutes an effective and adaptable pedagogical approach for English language instruction in higher education. The scientific evidence analyzed demonstrates that the strategic combination of diverse teaching methods responds pertinently to the diversity of learning styles and current educational demands, surpassing the limitations of traditional methodological approaches.

Furthermore, the reviewed studies evidence that the application of eclectic methodology favors the comprehensive development of English communicative skills, specifically in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The integration of methods such as audiolingual, task-based learning, total physical response, and cooperative learning contributes significantly to improving fluency, linguistic accuracy, and active student participation in the learning process.

Similarly, it is concluded that the incorporation of digital technologies, such as virtual learning environments, and e-learning, b-learning, and m-learning models, enhances the effectiveness of the eclectic approach by promoting autonomous learning, constant interaction, and student motivation. In this sense, the progressive inclusion of artificial intelligence-based tools represents an innovative opportunity to strengthen personalized feedback and optimize English teaching-learning processes.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of eclectic methodology depends to a large extent on the pedagogical and technological training of teachers, as well as on coherent methodological planning that adequately articulates the different approaches and resources employed. Disorganized or indiscriminate use of methods can limit their educational impact, making it essential to strengthen teachers' professional competencies in the design and implementation of eclectic strategies.

Finally, further research is recommended on the impact of eclectic methodology in combination with emerging technological resources, particularly those based on artificial intelligence, in order to deepen understanding of its effectiveness across different higher education contexts. These future lines of inquiry will allow for an expanded understanding of the eclectic approach and contribute to the continuous improvement of English language instruction.

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