

IMPLEMENTING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR SCHOOLS

Laura de Almeida¹
Universidade Estadual de Santa Cruz

Abstract: This paper outlines the actions of a project entitled *English Language, School and Sustainability – Consciousness and Citizenship Relationship*, subsidized by Institutional Program of Initiation to Teaching Service (PIBID) and sponsored by CAPES. Amongst the objectives we develop reading and writing abilities and promote studies and debates about environmental issues under a multi, inter and transdisciplinary perspective. We base it mainly on Freire's assumptions (2001) and on Chaves' researches (2011). In this way, we promote not only the acquisition of the language, but also the participants' search for a change in behavior that leads to citizens who are more involved with these issues.

Keywords: Learning; Acquisition; Environmental issues.

Resumo: Este trabalho apresenta ações de um Projeto intitulado *Língua Inglesa, Escola e sustentabilidade - relação de consciência e de cidadania*, subsidiado pelo Programa Institucional de Iniciação à Docência (PIBID) e financiado pela CAPES. Dentre os objetivos visamos desenvolver as habilidades leitoras e escritoras, promover estudos e debates nas questões problemáticas ambientais sob uma perspectiva multi, inter e transdisciplinar. Baseamos principalmente nos pressupostos teóricos de Freire (2001) e nas pesquisas de Chaves (2011). Desta forma, promovemos não apenas a aquisição da língua, como também que os participantes pesquisem por uma mudança de comportamento que leve à formação de um cidadão mais atuante.

Palavras-chaves: Ensino; Aprendizagem; Questões Ambientais.

Introduction

This article aims to show the activities of a teaching project entitled *English Language, School and Sustainability – Consciousness and Citizenship Relationship (Língua Inglesa, Escola e sustentabilidade relação de consciência e de cidadania)* which is sponsored by the Co-ordination of Higher Education Staff Improvement (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - CAPES). This Project is part of the

¹ Teacher at the Language and Arts Department (DLA) from the Language Course of Universidade Estadual de Santa Cruz, Brazil.

Institutional Program of Initiation to Teaching Service - Programa Institucional de Iniciação à Docência (PIBID) and involves an University Lecturer who operates as the coordinator, an English teacher of a public school acting as a supervisor and ten undergraduate students who put the project's activities into action in the classrooms of the public school during the English lessons.

The PIBID project started in 2014 and will extend to 2016. In the first year of the project, the participants were in charge of five different classes composed of around 170 students in total. Although, this number does not include all the students from the school, the aim is to get a sample of the whole number of students and work with it. The students are between 14 to 16 years old and study in the 7th and 8th grades at a public school in Ilhéus (Bahia/Brazil).

Developing a project in a public school is justified and necessary if one takes into account the social conditions where foreign languages are included in the formal curricula in Brazil. English is taught as a foreign language only twice a week. There are about thirty to forty students or more in each class. Classes are conducted mostly using the mother tongue (Portuguese) and English usually is not connected with subjects outside the classroom.

Considering that the University is closely involved with the issues inside and outside the institution of higher education and the current proposal for the training of teachers, that is, to prepare them for the actual global problems and conditions in order to find solutions or ways to deal with these, we believe that there is an institutional link to the development of this proposal. The research question that guided this initiative was: *How can we relate sustainable issues in the teaching of English as a foreign language in order to enhance motivation and learning for students as well as teachers in Brazil?*

In this case, we develop goals and apply the following items:

- 1) Work the reading and writing competence in the English language with texts referring to sustainability;
- 2) Promote studies and discussions on environmental issues under the multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary perspective, aiming at the efficient and effective development of programs and projects on environmental education in the English language;
- 3) Analyze other resources in the English language that deal with the subject of sustainable development;
- 4) With regards to work in the community, in the public school and in the University, by sensitizing and educating participants to seek a behavioral change that fosters the formation of a more involved citizen;

- 5) Apply reading strategies when approaching the texts;
- 6) Produce teaching material that deals with the theme of sustainable development in the English language by using different genre types.

Summing up, this proposal is interdisciplinary and aims to address the problem of the environment that occupies a prominent place in the media and at conferences related to the theme. Besides, we visualize a curriculum approach of the language degree course with the scientific, technological, artistic and cultural courses to propose the development of this theme in the basic education teaching networks. This study intends to develop not only the skills of all parties involved, but also to help them to interact with environmental issues.

Theoretical framework

As mentioned before, our aim is to relate environmental education as an interdisciplinary subject to the teaching of the English Language. This choice of topic focuses on the guidelines of the Curricula Parameters of Foreign Language (Parâmetros Curriculares de Língua Estrangeira – PCNs), which requires the use of different topics when teaching, so called “transversal subjects”.

Firstly, we will present the justification for the choice of the environmental issue according to the PCNs. Later on, some aspects related to environmental education and its relation to their teaching at schools will be pointed out.

This study begins with the legacy of the cross-cutting issues left by the National Curriculum Parameters, specifically concerning environment in order to understand how they were processed in the National Curriculum Guidelines and how they were absorbed and resignified within the schools, particularly in the political-pedagogical projects. Related to this, Almeida (2012) discusses the emphasis on teaching reading in the PCN, since according to him,

enhancing the relevance of our teaching should start with the discussion of the three groups of reasons that justified the propositions of the PCN. The focus on reading was considered the most adequate for the majority of our schools because of (1) practical considerations about our working conditions, (2) social relevance, and (3) educational relevance. (ALMEIDA, 2012, p.17)

Basing on *National curriculum parameters* we find that it was the Ministry of Education in Brazil (MEC) that

que, por meio do documento "PCN: temas transversais" (Brasil, 1998d), da Secretaria de Educação Fundamental, incentivou que se conferisse atenção especial aos temas 'ética', 'saúde', 'meio ambiente', 'orientação sexual', 'pluralidade cultural',

'trabalho e consumo'. Propôs-se que tanto as escolas quanto os professores das diferentes disciplinas assumissem, de forma transdisciplinar, tais temáticas. (BONFIM, 2013, p. 29)

From now on, we will present some researches about environmental education and its importance and relevance in the teaching of all subjects, which in our case, is the English language.

Among the many studies conducted on environmental education, some discussions about the subject addressed by Reigota (1994) who emphasizes that environmental education as an educational perspective may be present in all subjects. We also based on Chaves (2011), who presents the environmental problems experienced in a public school in Itanhém (Bahia).

Regarding the necessity of preservation, we emphasize the reflections of Boff (1999) which alert us to the need for a new paradigm of coexistence that fuses a close relationship with the earth and inaugurates a new social pact between people in the sense of respect and preservation of everything that exists and lives.

We have adopted the definition of environmental education by Reigota (1994, p.10) because, according to the author, "the environmental education should be understood as political education, in the sense that it claims and prepares citizens to demand social justice, national and planetary citizenship, self-management and ethics in social relations and with nature". From the concepts raised by this author and others which we may encounter, we build up our theoretical framework for addressing environmental issues in schools.

After a theoretical introduction to the subject we move onto the practical elements of the ideas presented by the theoretical framework.

In this way, we observe the important role of the school in relation to environmental education. In addition, we emphasize the question of interdisciplinarity presented in the premises of the EA (Environmental Education) by Dias (1998, p. 126), among which we highlight: b) "Environmental problems are always complex and require the intervention of specialists from various disciplines for their solutions, in an interdisciplinary approach".

The garbage produced in cities is undoubtedly one of the major problems in most Brazilian municipalities. The 1st International Congress on Education in the city of Porto Seguro, in the State of Bahia (CIDEB) in 2011, with the topic "Education for a State without borders: From theory to practice", provided ways to tackle the problem, that is, the situation in which some municipalities like Ilhéus and Itabuna are, which is

also experienced by other cities. However, it is possible to overcome the problem through transformative actions.

This Congress addressed the ideas propagated by Cilene Chaves (2011) in her book on daily practices in environmental education. According to her, environmental problems affect everyone and becomes a global challenge to all inhabitants of the planet. In the meantime, there is the school that, following recommendations from the National Environmental Policy (Law 6,938/81), looks for guidance in the guidelines of the National Curricular Parameters (PCNs), incorporating environmental discussions in its teaching matrices.

The proposal of work with the topic of teaching sustainability in a foreign language covers other interdisciplinary issues as well as ethical issues, since it aims at contributing to the formation of the citizens by making them aware of environmental problems faced by residents of the region of UESC, in the cities of Ilhéus and Itabuna.

Thus, we chose a transformative educational paper as discussed by Freire (2001, p. 36) when he says that being in the world means “transform and re-transform the world, and not adapt to it”. The present research is justified by arousing the political consciousness of educators which can intervene in reality. Still, according to Freire (2001, p. 36), education can give people greater clarity to “read the world” and this clearly opens up the possibility of political intervention in reality so it can rapidly evolve into a better world.

Finally, we will build our theoretical model by means of a joint concept, definitions about environmental education and the transforming role of the school in this context. So discussing environmental issues is useful when teaching English language as we could see by the authors presented above.

Method , Data analysis and discussion

In order to accomplish our goals established at the beginning of this article, we decided to interview the public students in order to find out their opinion about the choice of this topic, sustainability, in the teaching of the English language.

The method is based on a self-assessment questionnaire which aims at identifying what aspects students from the public school are aware of with regards to the topic of sustainability. With the implementation of the project, we first performed a diagnosis to know more about the reality of the school. Based on this knowledge we researched what students knew about the theme of sustainability.

The following graphs are a result of the questionnaire applied by university students at the public school to students in Ilhéus on May 13, 2014.

1-Do you know what sustainability is?

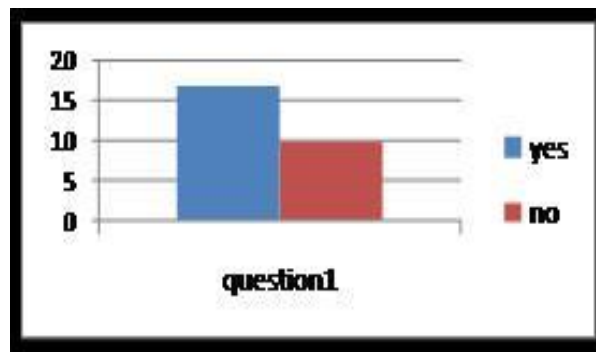


Figure 1. Graph about the results of question one

The majority of the students from the public school claim to know about sustainability.

2 – Does your school develop activities on sustainable development?

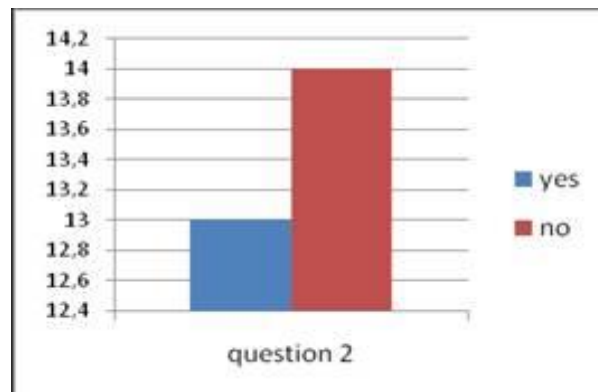


Figure 2. Graph about the results of question 2

In this case, more students answer negatively about this topic being discussed in the school.

3 – Do you know any song in the English language that deals with this theme? (the environment /sustainable development)

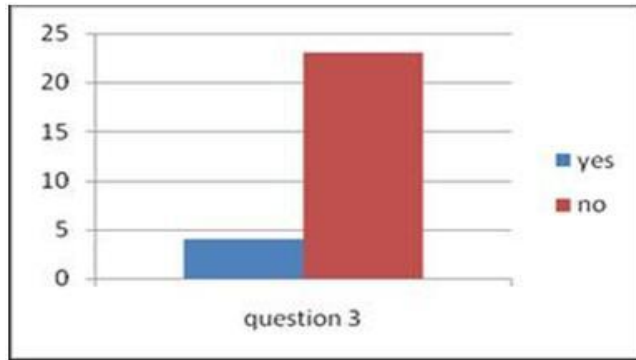


Figure 3. Graph about the results of question 3

Above, many students answer that they do not know songs about this topic.

4- What do you do with the trash in your home?

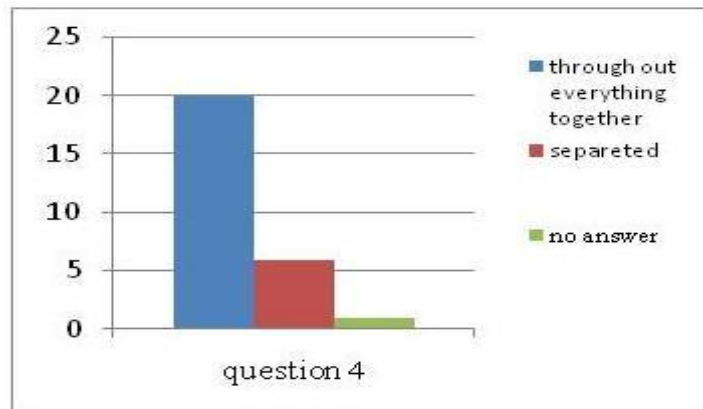


Figure 4. Graph about the results of question 4

In the graph above, many students answer that they throw the trash out without separating it for recycling.

5-Do you have recycling in your city/neighborhood/school/ supermarket/shop/ somewhere you know?

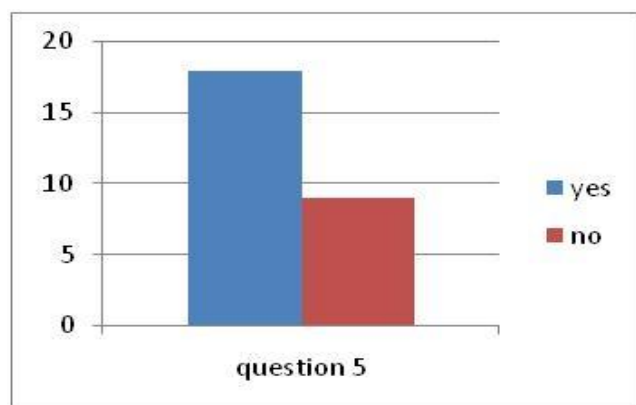


Figure 5. Graph about the results of question 5

Now, there is a contradiction in the response to question 5 in relation to that of question 4: If there is recycling, why then do they not bother about separating the trash?

6-Do you contribute to preserving the environment?

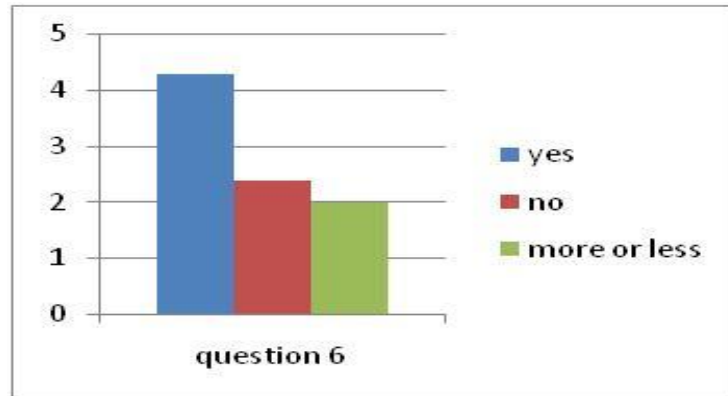
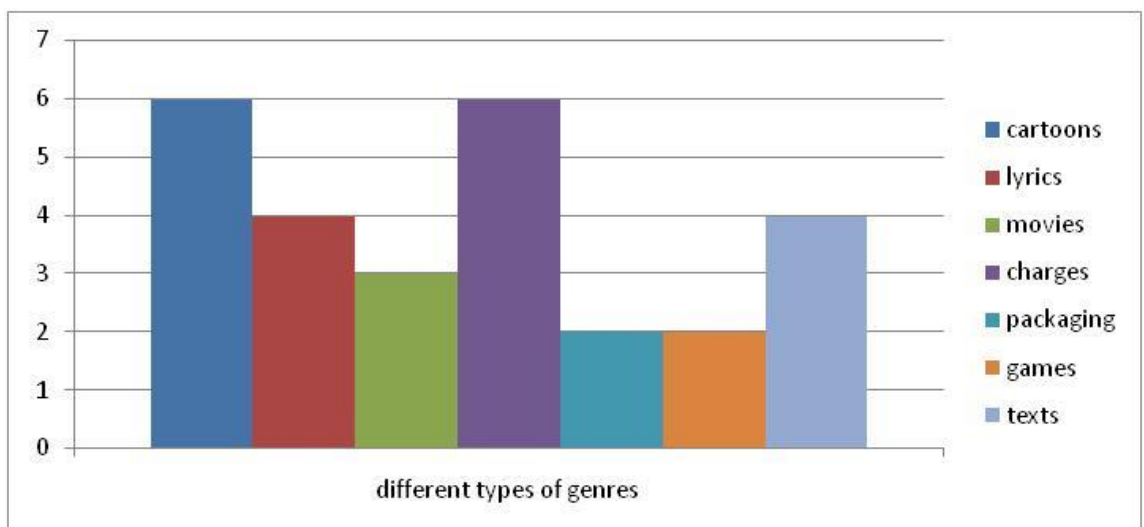


Figure 6. Graph about the results of question 6

Another contradiction: How do they contribute to environment when they do not recycle the trash?

Besides this research, we also produced a booklet made of different genres of texts, such as, cartoons, charges, movies, lyrics, games and so on. Now we will present the amount of material produced and which genre was more used by the undergraduate students participating in the project. In the table below, we will show the type of genre which appeared more in the booklet material made by the scholarship students:



In a brief look on the table above, we can notice that some genres appear more than others. So the type of genre with was more used were the cartoons and the charges. Although we can see that the lyrics and packaging labels appear a lot too. On the sequence, we have the material based on movies and others based on games and texts. It shows that the undergraduates are more involved with the genre type of cartoons and charges when dealing with preparing activities to apply with students from public schools. Moreover, this kind of genre is more suitable to teenagers because of their writing style. So, the students seemed to be more easily involved in activities with this kind of genre. In this way, they participated more in the classrooms since there was more identification with this genre. Although, the other kinds of genres, such as lyrics music and games, got a lot of their attention too. As a result of this, we can point out that students should be exposed to a wide variety of genre types of texts in order to get their involvement in the English classes.

With reference to the survey on the knowledge of the subject by students of the public school we found that most young people know about the concept of sustainability. As for whether the school develops activities on sustainable development, half of the students confirmed that, the other half denied. We asked if the students knew any songs in English that deal with this theme (the environment, sustainable development) we found out that most did not. As for what they did with the garbage from their homes, we found that most students throw away all trash without separating it.

Also, we asked the students if they had recycling systems in their city/neighborhood/school/supermarket/shop/or another place that they knew of, which was confirmed by the majority. To the question of whether they contribute to preserving the environment we found that the majority do not. Based on their answers and on the reality of this city (Ilhéus), we can affirm that there is currently no recycling policy in place. This was one of the contradictions in their answers: the students claim that they help protecting the environment, but at the same time there is no environmental policy in place in that city. Trash is collected without separating it, so we can conclude that they do not have deep knowledge on this topic.

Based on the assumptions above, we decided to apply some activities aiming at changing this reality by using selected texts and recreational resources. In regards to movies and songs we noted the existence of more music than movies under this theme.

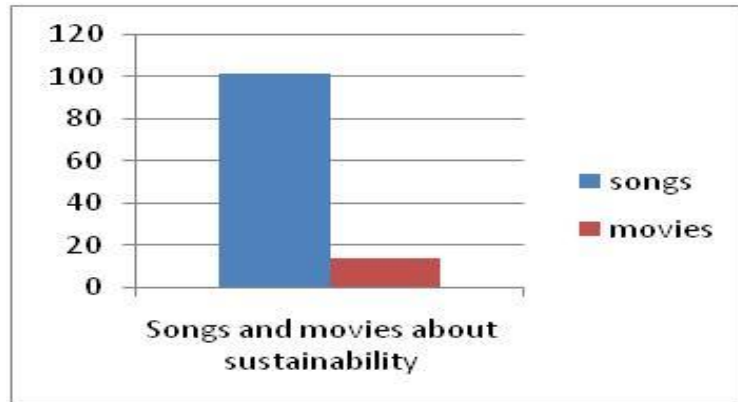


Figure 7. Graph about the results of the research about songs and movies

For this reason, we decided to develop the theme of the project through songs. We found that there are more songs related to sustainability than movies, which is why we chose a song to be analyzed. One example of this is the analysis of the song “Mercy, Mercy Me” by Marvin Gaye: The situation of pollution in the skies, seas and radiation, among other problems.

Besides approaching songs and movies about sustainability we also worked with texts using different topics related to the same issue. When working with texts we apply reading strategies such as skimming and scanning.

There is a graph below illustrating the research to evaluate which topic appeared more often in the texts selected by the undergraduate students:

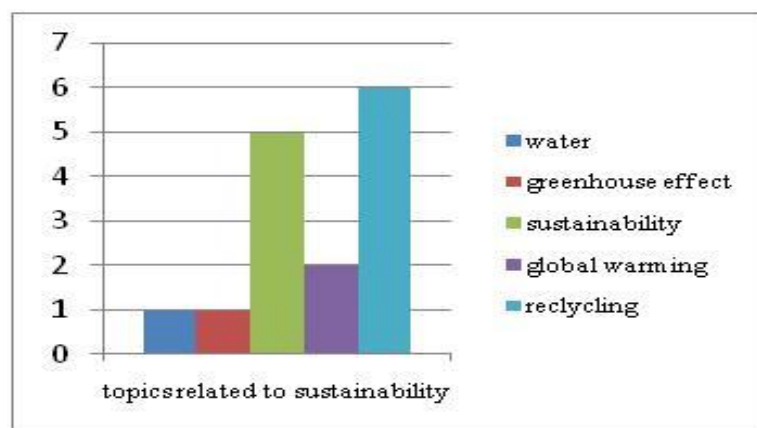


Figure 8. Graph about the results of topics related to sustainability

Based on the graph above we can infer that water was the topic which appeared most often in the search for topics related to sustainability. Then, the other topics such as sustainability, global warming and recycling appeared less frequently. This does not mean

that the other topics are less important; however, there is one which is affecting the neighborhood more than the others.

In order to get the understanding of the different topics related to sustainability by means of the different genre types, we made use of reading strategies. According to Dota (1994), we should make use of the following reading strategies:

- *Estudo de layout*
- *Typographical clues*
- *Background knowledge*
- *Prediction*
- *Context*
- *Cognates*
- *Skimming*
- *Scanning*
- *Grammar points*
- *Dictionary*

Based on Dota's assumptions of reading strategies, we realized that both the undergraduate and the public school students were challenged when reading something. The target is not to read by translating word by word, but through understanding the reading by using the strategies mentioned above.

Final considerations

Among our objectives we aim to develop competent readers and writers through the application of sustainability-oriented texts. As the research is still in progress, we present our preliminary results, in the following part.

On the basis of the data collected we found that, through music, we can raise the issue of sustainability. Based on the results of the data presented we can point out that sustainability is little known subject, which justifies the discussion of this topic in school.

Furthermore, reflecting on the activities which are being carried out in the project, we realized the need to address the theme of the environment in public schools in order to help students to not only learn the English Language, but also to improve their formation as citizens, about changing the reality where we live to improve our lives, according to Freire's (2001) assumptions. Considering the genre types, our research shows that some genres are more frequently chosen by the undergraduate students than others in the project.

We proved that cartoons were the genre that was used most and the one that was most successfully accepted by public school students. We can conclude that the project has been developed in a way to cater to the needs and the wants of both the undergraduate and the public school students.

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