

APPROPRIATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A PROFESSIONAL PROJECTION STRATEGY FOR APPLICANTS TO AGRICULTURAL LABOUR EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

Global transformations have prompted professionals from various disciplines to seek means of communication in order to establish relationships of various kinds. The acquisition of different languages, especially English, is a crucial factor in this process. However, learning this language is not easy; professionals in fields such as agriculture and livestock, which are the focus of study in this research, face challenges in assimilating it. These difficulties limit their access to work exchange programs or opportunities. Therefore, this research focuses on analyzing the factors that affect the English language learning process and how this influences their job prospects. The study is oriented from a qualitative approach, under a descriptive scope and an action research design. A purposive sample of 25 students and professionals in agricultural areas of the organization 'CAEP- Trabajos Agrícolas en el Exterior' was considered. The results reveal that one of the reasons for the lack of English language proficiency lies in the pedagogical methods used in their training. Also, the lack of motivation to improve their language skills. In conclusion, it is suggested that there is a need to establish concrete guidelines to train migrant professionals, enabling them to acquire an adequate level of the language in order to access job opportunities that will improve their living conditions.

KEYWORDS: English, Career development, Exchange Programs.

1. INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of second language skills is becoming an imperative in a world that is constantly evolving. Today, English language proficiency is no longer limited exclusively to Anglo-Saxon countries, as was the case in years gone by. It has become an essential skill for professionals and students all over the world, which also plays a vital role in their professional development and in improving their competitiveness in the workplace (Gestanti and Nimasari, 2021). In the same vein Arcila et al., (2022), indicate that there is a direct correlation between bilingualism and a country's Gross Domestic Product per capita. The better the level of English in a nation, the higher the average income per individual. Globally, the Epi EF index (EF Education English Proficiency Index) classifies countries and territories into five proficiency levels, from very high to very low. These levels allow the identification of groups of countries with similar second language skills, which facilitates comparisons between regions (Bruthiaux, 2000).

Second language acquisition is influenced by different factors, which can strengthen or weaken the learning process. These include age, socio-economic background, affective and cognitive aspects, as well as the surrounding linguistic environment (Mahrian et al., 2023). Despite the abundance of studies on methodological strategies to improve the acquisition of English as a second language, there is no definitive consensus on how to address this challenge. Moreover, it is recognized that the acquisition of communicative competence depends not only on internal factors, such as cognitive factors, but also on external socio-cultural factors that influence the learning activity (Vadivel et al., 2022; Shalihah et al., 2022).

The rise of English as a second language is not a new phenomenon in Europe. In recent years, its growth has accelerated dramatically, becoming known as the 'unstoppable train' on the continent (O'Dowd, 2018). Between 2001 and 2014, European countries experienced a 1000% growth in teaching through English. In the Colombian context, the Ministry of National Education launched the National Bilingualism Programme in 2004, followed by the 'Bilingual Colombia 2014-2018' initiative. Despite these governmental efforts, minimal progress has been made in bilingualism, and the level of development of proficiency in this language remains low (Estrada et al., 2016). Despite the creation of these projects, very few of their objectives have been met; it can be said that progress in bilingualism is minimal and English language proficiency remains very low (Estrada et al., 2016). However, the results for the level of language proficiency in the CEFR (Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages) and based on the Education First study, Colombia is classified as one of the Latin countries with a low level of language skills in this language, as shown in Figure 1.

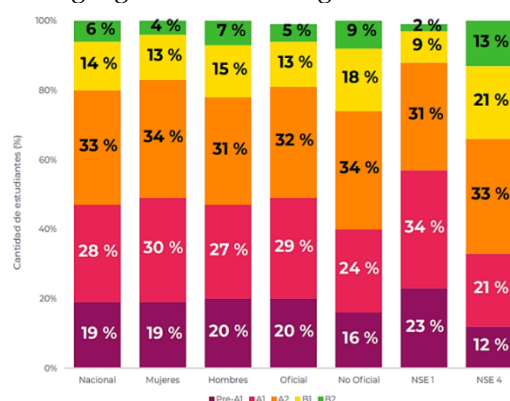


Figure 1: Saber Pro English Test Results - Icfes Portal, 2022. (English Performance Levels By Gender, Sector And Socio-Economic Level).

On the scale of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and according to the Education First study, Colombia is classified at level A1, the lowest level on this scale. The results of the Saber Pro tests for students show that at the national level only 20% of those assessed reached B1 and B2 levels, 80% were at lower levels; with regard to gender, it was established that men obtained better results in their language skills, as 22% were at B1 and B2 levels, while 17% of women achieved these same levels. Overall, the results of the Saber Pro tests show that more than 70% of the Colombian students assessed still have significant deficiencies in English, placing the program at the lowest level of proficiency according to the CEFR scale.

Therefore, the need arises to explore the factors that influence the learning of English as a foreign or second language, and its relationship with the level of English language proficiency, considering variables such as age, gender, identity, education, among others (Jou, 2003). However, there is a lack of studies that address the relationship between socio-cultural aspects and the level of English language proficiency, and this is the starting point for the present research. In view of these findings, the purpose of this research is to formulate guidelines and directives that will enable professionals to strengthen their English language skills as an opportunity to access better job opportunities through exchange with other countries.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, we delve into the conceptualization of the object of research, exploring various theoretical bases. Among them, the relevance

of English as a lingua franca, the barriers that restrict its acquisition, its capacity as a tool for professional advancement and, above all, its significance in labour exchange programs stand out.

2.1. English as a Universal Language

In an increasingly interconnected world, the importance of English as a universal language is undeniable. This relevance transcends the simple act of communication, as English has established itself as a unifying bridge between individuals from diverse cultures and regions of the world. Its role as a lingua franca extends beyond geographical and linguistic boundaries, enabling access to global opportunities and facilitating collaboration in a profoundly globalized society (Dutta, 2019). In the contemporary era, characterized by the abundance of information and technological progress, mastery of this language is tantamount to having the keys to access a global network of knowledge, innovation and communication. In this respect, authors such as Teryokhin et al. (2023) have emphasized the growing influence of English in the international arena and its role in promoting a homogeneous global culture.

Furthermore, researchers such as Gamboa et al., (2021) have argued that the English language not only serves as a means of communication, but also plays a fundamental role in the creation of cultural identities and the dissemination of universal values. This aspect becomes even more relevant in a world where multiculturalism and diversity are increasingly evident realities. The consolidation of English as a universal language has been supported by international institutions, such as the United Nations, where it is used as one of the official languages. This reinforces its status as an essential tool in diplomacy and international relations (Vasiliova and Владимирова, 2011).

2.2. Factors Limiting the Development of English Language Skills at University Level

In the university context, English language learning has acquired unparalleled relevance due to its position as a crucial tool for accessing global knowledge, professional opportunities and international communication. However, despite its importance, English language acquisition at university level faces significant challenges and obstacles. These limitations can range from individual factors to systemic issues, and their repercussions can affect students' academic and professional development.

2.3. Individual and Contextual Factors

To understand the reasons behind these difficulties,

it is essential to explore both individual and contextual factors that influence the English language learning process at university. Oleksandr (2017) argues that one of the main obstacles is the lack of constant exposure to the language outside the classroom. Students often lack opportunities to practice the language in authentic, everyday settings, which limits their ability to develop effective communication skills. In addition, Mi (2023) points out that traditional teaching methodologies can limit students' progress by not focusing adequately on practical language use.

2.4. The Importance of Practical Experience

The lack of emphasis on the practical experience of English in the university classroom is an area that deserves further reflection. In a world where effective communication in English is essential for intercultural collaboration and professional success, it is essential that academic programs integrate pedagogical approaches that encourage real-life application of the language in relevant situations. This requires not only a change in teaching methodology, but also the creation of opportunities for students to use the language in research projects, internships and extracurricular activities Oli (2023).

2.5. The Impact on the Workplace

Language proficiency in this language is not only critical for academic success, but has also become an essential requirement in the globalized labour market (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2016). This further underscores the importance of understanding and addressing the barriers to the effective development of these skills at the university level. Students who face obstacles in English language acquisition may find it difficult to access international job opportunities or to compete in a labour market with high global requirements. In itself, the acquisition of English language skills at university level is a fundamental but challenging undertaking. Individual and contextual factors, as well as a lack of emphasis on practical experience, can hinder the effective development of these skills. Recognizing these limitations and working to overcome them is not only essential for students' academic success, but also for their preparation to meet the challenges of the global world. Addressing these issues is a crucial step towards creating a truly holistic education and training individuals with the language skills necessary to excel in an increasingly interconnected world.

2.6. English as a Tool for Career Advancement

In the contemporary professional landscape, English language proficiency has evolved from being

merely a desirable skill to becoming an essential requirement. English is no longer limited to being a simple communication tool; it has risen to the status of a determining factor in career development and success. In a business world operating in a globalized environment, where geographical boundaries are blurred by the need to collaborate with international teams, access foreign markets and participate in global innovation networks, English emerges as the language that connects professionals of different cultures and nationalities (Varol, 2023).

2.7. The Role of English in Professional Communication

English, as a means of communication, is a key enabler in the professional field. It facilitates effective communication in meetings, presentations, negotiations and in the preparation of reports and documents. Authors such as Chaudhuri et al. (2019) have highlighted its role as a lingua franca in the global business environment, underlining its ability to unify communication in a multicultural world.

2.8. Competitive Advantage and Career Opportunities

Those individuals who possess a strong command of the English language enjoy a significant competitive advantage. They have the ability to participate fully in international projects, access cutting-edge information in their field and establish professional relationships on a global level. Moreover, this language has become the key that opens doors to employment opportunities in multinational companies, international organizations and in sectors such as technology, where the majority of documentation and communication is done in this language (Sukprasert, 2019).

2.9. English Language in the Entrepreneurial Context

For entrepreneurs, the English language is an essential skill that allows them to expand their businesses to international markets and establish strategic alliances around the world. The ability to communicate effectively in English facilitates the search for investors and business partners globally, which can be critical to the growth and success of a startup (Suraprajit and Piriyaapun, 2023). Generally speaking, English has evolved from being a language to an invaluable asset for career advancement and access to a variety of employment opportunities. As career aspirations transcend national borders, proficiency in the language becomes an essential catalyst for success in your professional field. Recognizing its importance and promoting its learning becomes a necessity.

2.10. The Importance of English Language in Work Exchange Programs

Student and work exchange programs represent a gateway to enriching experiences and educational opportunities in international contexts. In this scenario, the English language plays an essential role by acting as the common language that allows students from different countries to communicate and participate fully in these experiences. It is therefore relevant to explore the importance of English in exchange programs from various perspectives, supported by research and reflections from experts in the field.

2.11. Effective Communication and International Relationship Building

The relevance of English language in exchange programs lies in several key aspects, as noted by Dhivya et al (2023). It serves as a shared medium of communication between students of different nationalities, facilitating interaction in the classroom, during extracurricular activities and in everyday situations. This not only fosters the building of international friendships, but also collaboration on joint projects and the creation of global professional networks (Rus and Medrea, 2012).

2.12. Access to Opportunities and Diversity of Programs

English language proficiency opens doors to a wider range of exchange programs and destinations, as underlined by Kuiper (2007). Many institutions and exchange programs require a certain level of English language proficiency to participate. Those who are proficient in English language skills have the opportunity to find experiences that better suit their academic and personal goals, which increases their flexibility and enriches their educational, personal and professional development (Takács and Czar, 2021). English also plays a critical role in academic success during exchange programs. Most reputable universities and educational institutions teach their classes in English. Students who arrive with a solid foundation in English are better prepared to meet academic challenges and participate fully in classes, research and extracurricular activities (Jabbar and Mubarak, 2023).

2.13. Cultural Enrichment and Global Perspectives

In addition to being a medium of communication, the English language is a gateway to the culture and knowledge of other countries. Through it, students can access diverse literature, media and cultural perspectives, which enriches their global experience

and understanding of the world (Hasan et al., 2022; Rattan, 2023). As highlighted (Koenig et al., 2020; Yu, 2022), in an increasingly interconnected world, English communication skills are essential for future professionals in a variety of fields. Exchange programs provide students with a unique opportunity to improve their fluency in English and develop intercultural skills that will be invaluable in their future careers.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this section, the elements of the research design are explored in depth, specifically addressing the methods incorporated in the research process, the unit and categories of study, as well as the phases in which the research is carried out. The present research is framed within a qualitative approach, oriented towards the interpretation of factors and causes that have limited the development of the participants' language skills, thus restricting their access to labour exchange opportunities for the purpose of improving their salary and professional conditions. Following Creswell (2013), qualitative studies focus on a holistic analysis of a situation or phenomenon, based on the subjective perceptions and experiences of the informants.

On the other hand, regarding the scope, the study is framed within the descriptive method, according to the perspective of Merriam (2009), which allows to detail aspects inherent to the object of study and to describe relevant facts in the context of the research. The purpose is to present a detailed analysis of the situations and occurrences that arose during the research process. The design of this study is based on the qualitative method of an action research design, as proposed by Kaptan (2016). This approach is suitable for an in-depth analysis of a problematic situation in a specific context. In this particular case, the aim is to characterize the factors and causes that contribute to the limitations in the development of

language skills of professionals who participate in the work exchange program of the company 'CAEP Trabajos Agrícolas en el Exterior' and thus formulate an action plan focused on the strengthening of English language skills with a view to enabling the applicants to exchange work in foreign countries.

3.1. Unit of Study

The unit of study in this research consisted of professionals and students seeking work exchange opportunities through the company 'CAEP Trabajos Agrícolas en el Exterior,' specifically in the agricultural sector in the United States. These individuals are mainly characterized by their involvement in areas related to agriculture and livestock activities, and range in age from 18 to 28 years old. While they have experience in the agricultural field, some face difficulties in materializing these exchanges due to deficiencies in their English language skills. In terms of the purposive sample selected for this study, a convenience sampling approach was applied to select 30 participants from the 75 work exchange applicants. The selection criteria included the condition of being students or professionals in the agricultural sector and the expression of an explicit interest in participating in exchange programs. In addition, limited English language skills were considered a key requirement, which prevented them from accessing these job opportunities.

3.2. Categories Of Study

Since this research adopts a qualitative approach, the object of study is examined through the analysis of categories, sub-categories and dimensions that facilitate the understanding of the factors or causes that have hindered the development of English language skills among professionals and students aspiring to participate in work exchange programs abroad. The operationalization of these categories is presented in detail in Table 1.

Table 1: Operationalisation Of Study Categories.

Categories	Subcategories	Dimension
Individual Factors	Motivation Previous Experience Learning Resources and Strategies	Level of interest and enthusiasm for learning English. Perception of the usefulness of English in their career. Previous experience in teaching English. Participation in previous exchange programs. Access to educational resources for learning English. Use of effective learning strategies.
Contextual Factors	Institutional Support Social and Economic Barriers	Availability of English courses at the institution. Support and guidance from academic advisors. Financial constraints in accessing English language programs. Social expectations and cultural pressures related to learning English.
Factors Related to the Labour Exchange Program	Language Requirements Linguistic Support during the Exchange	Level of English language proficiency required by exchange programs. Specific language requirements in the workplace. Availability of English classes or tutoring at the exchange destination. Interaction with native English speakers during the program.
Motivational Factors	Personal Goals and Expectations Self-Efficacy	Expectations about job opportunities abroad. Personal goals related to learning English. Beliefs about own ability to learn English. Perception of language difficulty and self-confidence.

Note: The Table Presents the Study Categories from Which the Research Object Is Analyzed.

The categories and subcategories provide a sound analytical framework for investigating and understanding the factors that influence the limitation of English language skills development among applicants to agricultural labour exchange programs abroad.

3.3. Stages of the Research Process

In compliance with the established objectives, the present research is structured in three distinct stages:

The first stage focuses on the characterization of individual factors, contextual factors, those related to the work exchange program, as well as motivational factors that could restrict English language acquisition and have an impact on the opportunities for participation in work exchange programs desired by professionals and students in the agricultural field.

The second stage, known as planning, is oriented towards the formulation of an action plan through strategies that facilitate the English language learning process for professionals and students interested in participating in work exchange programs in the United States. Finally, in the third stage of reflection, a socialization of the proposed strategies is carried out together with the participants of the study. This stage aims to consolidate concrete actions that contribute to the fulfilment of the expectations of those involved in the research process.

4. RESULTS

The results derived from the research are aligned with the achievement of the objectives and the execution of the phases that make up the research framework.

4.1. Results First Stage: Diagnostic

Through the study of the research categories formulated in this stage, we sought to characterize the factors that have limited the development of English language skills by the sample subjects. To achieve this purpose, opinion surveys were applied and focus groups were conducted. The results arising from the analysis of the participants' perceptions and arguments are presented below:

4.2. Category Individual Factors

In the in-depth analysis of the study category 'Individual Factors', based on the collection and analysis of the responses obtained in both the opinion survey and the focus group, several dynamics have been identified that highlight the determining elements in the limited development of English language skills by applicants interested in accessing labour exchange programs. These findings are of

significant relevance in the context of the search for job opportunities in the agricultural sector in the United States. Firstly, it has been observed that motivation, measured in terms of level of interest and enthusiasm for learning English, exhibits a decreasing level. This decrease can be attributed, to a large extent, to the lack of a clear perception on the part of most participants of the need to be proficient in the language as a fundamental requirement for carrying out contracted work activities abroad. This lack of recognition of the importance of English proficiency may have contributed to a low level of motivation among applicants to work exchange programs in the agricultural sector.

In relation to the previous experiences of the participants, it has been found that some of them have had previous work experiences through other work exchange companies abroad. However, these previous experiences have not required English language proficiency as a compulsory criterion for accessing job opportunities in the agricultural field. Furthermore, previous experiences related to language learning during their university education have emphasized a communicative approach to teaching, with a particular emphasis on vocabulary acquisition, leaving aside grammatical training and, even more so, oral communication in the language. These gaps in language skills have emerged as a significant challenge for participants seeking work exchange opportunities. In terms of available resources and learning strategies for English language acquisition, informants have expressed a widespread perception of limited access to educational resources for language learning. Furthermore, they lack a clear understanding of which learning strategies would be most effective in achieving this goal. This lack of adequate guidance and resources constitutes an additional obstacle in their journey towards English language acquisition.

Overall, the results of the study category 'Individual Factors' reveal the various challenges faced by applicants seeking to participate in agricultural work exchange programs in the United States through the company 'CAEP Agricultural Jobs Abroad'. These challenges range from a lack of motivation and awareness of the importance of the English language, to a lack of prior language skills, to a shortage of resources and effective language learning strategies. These findings provide a solid basis for the formulation of recommendations and strategies that can effectively address individual limiting factors and thereby improve the prospects for success of participants seeking work exchange opportunities in the agricultural sector.

4.3. Contextual Factors Category

The analysis of the study category 'Contextual Factors' reveals critical aspects of the external factors that influence the limitation of the development of English language skills among individuals who aspire to participate in specific labour exchange programs in the agricultural sector in the United States, under the management of the company 'CAEP Trabajos Agrícolas en el Exterior' (CAEP Agricultural Work Abroad). Firstly, with regard to the institutional support provided by the companies offering these work exchange programs, applicants have highlighted that they face a lack of availability of English language courses offered by these institutions. Despite the support and guidance of academic advisors, these resources have proven to be insufficient to achieve in-depth English language proficiency, particularly in the area of conversational proficiency, which is an essential requirement for accessing the US labour market in the agricultural sector. This finding suggests a significant gap in the resources and support approach provided by the institutions involved in managing labour exchanges. In terms of the subcategory 'Social and Economic Barriers,' it has been identified that the majority of applicants face economic constraints that limit their ability to access English language programs. In addition, they have pointed to the existence of social expectations and cultural pressures related to English language learning, which negatively influence their ability to develop the level of oral and written proficiency necessary to be able to work effectively in the United States. These economic and social barriers stand as significant obstacles in the way of these individuals acquiring proficiency in English.

Overall, the results of the study category 'Contextual Factors' clearly illustrate the external constraints faced by applicants to agricultural work exchange programs in the United States through the company 'CAEP Agricultural Jobs Abroad'. These constraints range from the unavailability of English language courses, despite the support of academic advisors, to economic constraints and social and cultural expectations that hinder the development of essential language skills. These findings provide a solid basis for the formulation of strategies and policies that effectively address these contextual factors in order to improve the prospects for success of applicants in their pursuit of work exchange opportunities in the agricultural sector.

4.4. Category Work Exchange Program Related Factors

The study category 'Factors Related to the Labour Exchange Program' yields important findings that

highlight the relevance of the elements linked to labour exchange programs in limiting the development of English language skills of applicants for job opportunities in the agricultural sector in the United States, under the sponsorship of the company 'CAEP Trabajos Agrícolas en el Exterior' (CAEP Agricultural Jobs Abroad).

Firstly, with regard to the subcategory of 'Language Requirements,' it has been observed that the level of English proficiency currently required by companies offering work exchanges is perceived as extremely high by the subjects linked to the study. This is particularly evident with regard to proficiency in oral communication in the English language, since, according to the perception of these individuals, specific language requirements in the workplace are continuous and recurrent throughout the work placement. This perception underlines the need for a significant emphasis on the development of oral language skills during the preparation and development of work exchange programs in the agricultural sector.

Regarding the subcategory of 'Language Support during the Exchange,' informants have pointed out that companies managing work exchanges offer some level of support for English language acquisition. However, they stressed that this support tended to follow traditional methods similar to those used in university contexts. In addition, they noted a lack of emphasis on facilitating interaction with native English speakers during the program. This lack of focus on practical interaction with native speakers may limit participants' ability to develop their communicative competences in a real, everyday environment.

Overall, the results of the study category 'Factors Related to the Work Exchange Program' underline the importance of reviewing and adapting the language skills requirements of work exchange programs in the agricultural sector, with a special focus on the development of oral competencies in English. In addition, they suggest the need to rethink the language support methods provided during the program, with the aim of fostering more effective and authentic interaction with native speakers of the language. These adjustments could significantly improve the preparation of applicants and ultimately increase their prospects for success in the US workplace.

4.5. Categories Motivational Factors

The results of the analysis of this category reveal that most of the professionals and students aspiring to be part of the work exchange programs in the United States express a strong desire to achieve their professional goals. However, some of them show a lack

of clarity about their personal goals related to English language learning, which leads to doubts about their ability to master the language and the need to strengthen their self-confidence. It is important to note that applicants for work exchanges in the company 'CAEP Trabajos Agrícolas en el Exterior' are not motivated to learn the English language due to various factors. These factors include lack of financial resources, shortage of time and lack of tutors who can provide personalized guidance according to their learning style.

4.6. Results Second Stage: Action Plan

The research conducted has identified a number of factors that limit the development of English language skills among applicants for work exchange opportunities in the agricultural sector in the United States through the organization 'CAEP Agricultural Jobs Abroad.' These findings are critical to understanding the challenges faced by these individuals and, more importantly, to formulating effective strategies to help them achieve their career goals abroad and improve their job and salary prospects. One of the main challenges identified relates to the lack of awareness of the importance of English language proficiency. Many of the participants have not recognized the need to acquire English language skills as an essential requirement for carrying out work activities abroad.

In response to this problem, the strategy that can be implemented is to develop awareness-raising campaigns that highlight the critical importance of English in the context of labour exchange programs in the agricultural sector. In addition, psychological support and coaching programs can be offered to build the self-confidence and motivation of applicants. With regard to previous language skills, it has been observed that many previous work experiences have not required English as a compulsory criterion. Moreover, the experiences related to English language learning during university education have mainly focused on vocabulary acquisition, leaving aside grammatical training and oral communication in the language.

In this sense, the most appropriate strategy to mitigate this problem should be to adapt English language teaching programs to focus on the development of essential oral and written skills for the workplace. Limited access to quality educational resources has also emerged as a common challenge. It is therefore pertinent to expand learning options, including virtual libraries with up-to-date materials, interactive online platforms and language learning applications. Establish subsidy or scholarship

programs to help financially constrained applicants access high quality English language courses.

Interaction with native English speakers during the work exchange program is essential for the development of authentic communication skills. A strategy to fulfil this purpose may therefore be to revise language support programs to include more interaction with native speakers of the language through cultural exchange programs and volunteer activities. Overall, the proposed strategies are based on addressing individual, contextual and work exchange program-related factors that limit the development of applicants' English language skills. By implementing these measures, it is expected that these individuals will be better prepared to meet their work goals abroad and improve their job and salary prospects in the agricultural sector.

4.7. Results Third Stage: Reflection

During the third stage of the research, a focus group was held to discuss and present the strategies formulated to improve the level of English language proficiency of the sample subjects who aspire to obtain a work exchange opportunity in the agricultural sector in the United States. At this meeting, participants shared their opinions and reflections on the proposed strategies, underlining the vital importance of each of them in the English language learning process. One participant emphasized: 'Each of these strategies plays an essential role in our journey towards English proficiency. We cannot rely exclusively on one tactic alone; we need to adopt a holistic approach that addresses various aspects of language learning.'

Another member of the group added: 'The strategies presented cover a wide range of aspects of English language learning, from awareness-raising to interactive practice with native speakers. I am convinced that, if we apply all these strategies in a consistent and committed way, we will experience a marked improvement in our language proficiency. The lively discussion in the focus group reflected a general consensus among participants on the need to address multiple facets of English language learning. In addition, the importance of implementing a variety of strategies to maximize individual and collective progress in language proficiency was underscored.'

The session concluded with a renewed commitment by participants to integrate these strategies into their English language learning practices, recognizing the strategic importance of a comprehensive and diversified approach on their path to language fluency and success in their future employment opportunities in the agricultural sector in the United States.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this study highlight the difficulties faced by agricultural professionals in the current employment context. The limited experience of new graduates in solving common challenges in the labour field, their limited exposure to agricultural production and their lack of knowledge in new technologies are factors that negatively impact their transition from academia to the world of work. In addition, the lack of foreign language skills, particularly English, adds to these limitations, resulting in a significant disadvantage in a globalizing world of work. The agricultural sector plays a key role in the Colombian economy, and globalization has increased the need for collaboration and knowledge transfer in this area. Agricultural exchange programs offer a unique opportunity to gain international experience and share knowledge, but this opportunity is intrinsically linked to English language proficiency.

English is widely recognized as the international language of business and science, and in the agricultural context, where research, technology and international collaboration are essential, the ability to communicate in English becomes a crucial competitive advantage. In addition, many agricultural exchange programs take place in English-speaking countries or with institutions operating in the language, further underlining the importance of English for successful participation. However, the educational, motivational and cultural barriers affecting English language learning are undeniable. These factors significantly influence the ability of agricultural professionals and students to acquire language skills. Each individual has unique circumstances and challenges that may hinder their learning of a foreign language.

In light of these limitations, it is essential to recognize the importance of investing in English language learning and improvement as an integral part of career planning. English language training not only facilitates communication and access to key resources but also opens doors to international employment opportunities and collaborative projects that can boost the careers of those who aspire to successful participation in agricultural exchange programs and global agriculture in general. In this regard, educational institutions, businesses and government agencies should consider strategies to address these barriers, including implementing language training programs, supporting participation

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in exchange programs, and promoting the importance of English language in the careers of agricultural professionals and students. Overcoming these barriers can strengthen the position of individuals in the global agricultural industry and enrich their work and professional experiences. Therefore, it is established that there is a need to address barriers in English language learning as a language competence in the success of agricultural professionals and students.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study have concluded that competence in English language skills plays a significant role in the selection of candidates for agricultural exchange programs. This enables them to participate more actively in activities, collaborate in joint projects and make the most of available learning opportunities. In addition, participants with a good command of English experience fewer language and communication barriers, which contributes to a quicker and more effective adaptation to their exchange environment. It has also been observed that an advanced level of language skills not only influences the first stage of applicant selection but also plays a key role during the agricultural exchange experience.

On the other hand, participants with limited English skills tend to face difficulties in communication, which may negatively affect their ability to interact productively with others and take advantage of learning opportunities. This can have a direct impact on their success during the agricultural exchange program. Consequently, this research underscores the importance of investing in the development of English language communication skills as an integral part of the preparation of participants in agricultural exchange programs. Providing resources and support to improve language proficiency can significantly contribute to the overall success of participants in these experiences and enrich their professional development in the agricultural field. These findings underscore the importance of language proficiency as a career development strategy for those aspiring to participate in agricultural exchange programs. They also highlight the need to provide adequate support and resources for students to improve their language skills, which will enable them to compete more successfully for selection and have more enriching experiences during their work exchange programs.

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