

IMPROVING LINGUISTIC AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCES USING THE ONLINE TOOL PADLET AT EIGHTH GRADE OF GENERAL BASIC EDUCATION

MEJORAMIENTO DE LAS COMPETENCIAS LINGÜÍSTICAS Y COMUNICATIVAS MEDIANTE EL USO DE PADLET EN LA EDUCACIÓN GENERAL BÁSICA

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Resumen

El uso de la plataforma online Padlet como herramienta educativa está ganando terreno poco a poco en el campo del aprendizaje del inglés debido a su potencial para mejorar el compromiso de los estudiantes. En vista a ello, se realizó la investigación que se presenta con el objetivo de analizar el mejoramiento del aprendizaje de inglés al nivel de 8vo grado de Enseñanza General Básica (EGB) a través del uso de Padlet como herramienta didáctica para el desarrollo de competencias lingüísticas y comunicativas. La investigación se realizó siguiendo los pasos metodológicos de un estudio cuantitativo, hipotético-deductivo y descriptivo. Con ello, se seleccionó una muestra aleatoria de 56 estudiantes, de la cual, mediante la aplicación de un cuestionario de 10 preguntas, se conoció acerca de las percepciones positivas de los estudiantes respecto al uso e influencia positiva de Padlet en el desarrollo de dichas habilidades necesarias para el aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa. Por último, se ejecutó un diseño experimental pretest-postest y la prueba de hipótesis t-Student para muestras relacionadas, corroborándose así la efectividad de la aplicación de Padlet al relatarse ciertos hallazgos referentes a la existencia de diferencias estadísticamente significativas en relación con las calificaciones de la asignatura de inglés obtenidas por el estudiantado en distintos períodos evaluativos.

Palabras clave: Competencias lingüísticas, Competencias comunicativas, Idioma inglés, Padlet, EGB.

Abstract

The use of the online platform Padlet as an educational tool is slowly gaining ground in the field of English learning due to its potential to improve student engagement. Thus, this research was carried out with the objective of analyzing the improvement of English learning at the 8th grade level of Basic General Education (EGB) through the use of Padlet as a didactic tool for the development of linguistic and communicative skills. The research was accomplished with some methodological steps related to a quantitative, hypothetical-deductive and descriptive study. With this, a 56 students random sample was selected, from which, through the application of a 10-question questionnaire, it was known the positive perceptions of the students regarding the use and positive influence of Padlet in the development of such necessary skills for learning the English language. Finally, a pretest-posttest experimental design and the t-Student hypothesis test for related samples were executed, thus corroborating the effectiveness of the Padlet application by reporting certain findings regarding the existence of statistically significant differences in relation to the qualifications of the English subject obtained in different evaluation periods.

Keywords: *Linguistic competences; Communicative competences; English language; Padlet; EGB.*

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Introduction

Language is an essential part of human life. It is used for communication, daily social interaction and, on many occasions, for the professional development of people (Mora-Umaña, 2018). In this sense, Hernández-Rosado et al. (2019) argue that, in order to be competent in such matters, it is important for any student to develop language and communication skills. Consequently, the development of these skills is crucial for any individual to communicate effectively (Reyzábal, 2012). Additionally, the ability to achieve effective communication through language allows a person to build relationships, share ideas, learn, create opportunities for themselves, and engage in meaningful conversations (Iza et al., 2022). In view of this, Rubio et al. (2019) note that without effective communicative competences, a person's chances of success are seriously limited.

In the educational field, the development of students' linguistic and communicative competences is an essential factor in ensuring that they are adequately prepared for the demands of the 21st-century learning environment (Reyzábal, 2012). Linguistic competences provide students with the grammar and intellectual structure necessary to create a written expression that communicates ideas clearly and effectively (Sánchez & Brito, 2015). At the same time, communicative competences imply the development of the ability to work productively with others to engage in reflective dialogue and debate (Tulasi, 2022; Viera, 2017). As such, these competences form the foundation from which students can reach their full potential as citizens of an

increasingly changing world (Arnao et al., 2013). Under this consideration, the main objective of this research was to analyze the improvement of English language learning at the eighth-grade level of General Basic Education (EGB, from its Spanish acronym) through the use of the online platform Padlet, the latter used as a didactic tool for the development of linguistic and communication skills.

Current investigations show that one way in which the aforementioned competences can be effectively developed is through the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Gilakjani, 2017). In this regard, Velandia et al. (2019) state that ICTs have become an increasingly important part of education, offering students the opportunity to broaden their knowledge and develop their language and communication skills. Therefore, English students must improve such competences to make full use of the language, as well as to achieve the necessary capabilities to face their academic, professional, and personal challenges (Giménez, 2017).

Valero et al. (2020) recognize that ICTs play a critical role in language learning by providing students with more opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and feedback. Through online tools such as video conferencing, chat rooms, and discussion forums, among others, students can communicate with each other in real time. These resources may help them practice, for example, their oral skills (Ngo & Eichelberger, 2019). In addition, these online tools allow teachers to provide direct feedback on student performance, which is crucial for developing language and communicative competences (Lucas et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, ICT allows teachers to customize the learning environment for each student. Thus, by using teaching software programs, teachers can tailor lessons to individual needs or preferences based on previously identified student profiles (Al-Arif, 2019). Several of these virtual educational tools also make it easier for teachers to track their students' progress over time. Thanks to it, they can adjust teaching strategies accordingly (Nguyen & Pham, 2022).

Likewise, ICTs offer a wide range of multimedia resources that can help teachers create engaging lessons to keep students focused (Gómez-Poveda & Mateus-Hernández, 2016), at the same time that they expand their linguistic knowledge and improve their communication competence (Gilakjani, 2017). For example, videos are an effective tool because they provide visual information that makes it easier for students to understand complex topics quickly and accurately. They can also be used as discussion stimuli, fostering collaboration among students while increasing their confidence when speaking about various topics in English (Wahyuni et al., 2021). Padlet is one of these tools offering this multimedia resource diversity.

Learning and education can be greatly facilitated by the online platform Padlet, one of the most used ICT tools by Spanish-speaking educational institutions (Giler et al., 2020). With its efficient organization and custom design, Padlet is a tried-and-tested method to help foster creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and knowledge integration in young minds (Waltemeyer et al., 2021). As an educational platform, Padlet allows users to access resources simultaneously, enabling more active participation in learning activities.

In addition, Padlet offers customizing functions, meaning that teachers can tailor the learning space to the individual needs of their students (Fisher, 2017). Such a platform also promotes the exchange and

development of ideas among students beyond geographical and cultural borders, thus broadening their horizons outside the classroom environment (Lucas et al., 2021). For these reasons, Padlet can be considered as an excellent resource for educators who want to improve their teaching strategies (see Figure 1).

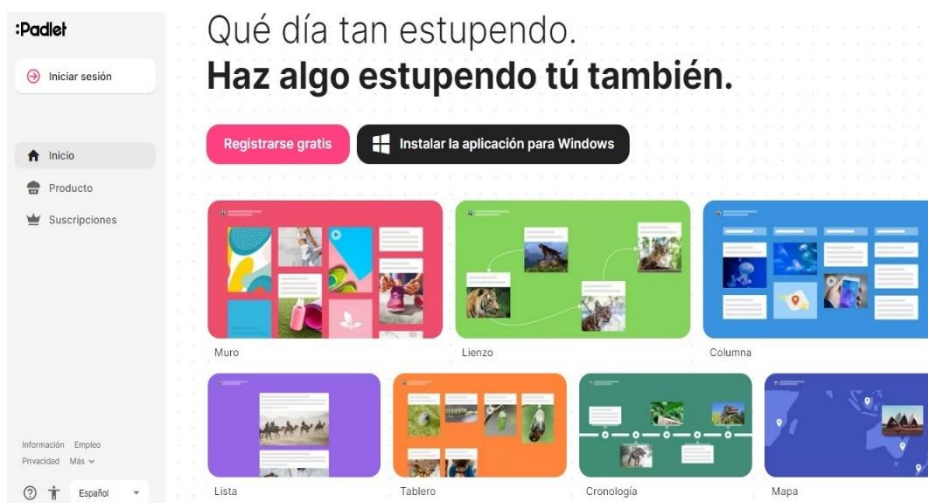


Figure 1. Padlet online platform. Source: (Padlet, 2020).

Despite technological innovations that provide new levels of interactivity and engagement, Padlet, as an online platform, has yet to be sufficiently explored as a potential aid in language and communication teaching. At the same time, research on the use of such a pedagogical resource for the development of linguistic and communicative competences to improve English learning is a relatively new concept. As more benefits are reaped from this technology resource, more studies on its educational efficacy are needed to broaden existing knowledge in this area. It is hence considered that it is the responsibility of scientists to investigate these possibilities and evaluate them to facilitate better education by identifying how virtual pedagogical strategies can be better used within classrooms.

Materials and Methods

In order to achieve the objective of this research, a quantitative study was conducted, whose typology corresponds to a descriptive and hypothetical-deductive research design. An experimental design was also used for the implementation of a simple random sample selection method (Sáez-López, 2017). The sample was taken from a population of 120 students attending the eighth grade of EGB at Enrique Ponce Luque School in Quevedo, Ecuador. It consisted of 56 students in total: 30 female students (53.6%) and 26 male students (46.4%), with ages ranging between 12 and 13 years old, with percentages of 64.3% (36 students) and 35.7% (20 students), respectively.

The primary data collection instrument implemented was a questionnaire of 10 multiple-choice questions, using a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where one means complete disagreement, while 5 represents total agreement with the stated question. The questionnaire was subjected to an internal consistency analysis, which yielded a satisfactory result and was validated with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient value (α) of 0.86 (Quero-Virla, 2010).

The information collected in this step of the research was useful to characterize and describe the perception among students regarding the use of the virtual platform Padlet for the development of language skills (6 items) and communication skills (4 items), as well as the use of this type of tools in general for learning the English language.

Thus, it was proposed as a study hypothesis that the implementation of Padlet for didactic purposes influences the improvement of the different linguistic and communicative competences associated with the teaching-learning process of the English language. Therefore, in order to corroborate or refute this hypothesis, an experimental design was carried out, using the results collected from prior tests of the English subject which, for the purposes of this research, are called pretest. After implementing Padlet for a period of four (4) weeks, the research participants were given another knowledge test - known as posttest – to evaluate the knowledge, linguistic, and communicative skills acquired in English as a foreign language during that period.

With the information obtained from the aforementioned processes, we proceeded with the statistical analysis based on the t-Student hypothesis test for related samples (González-Betanzos et al., 2017). This parametric test was selected because a normality test was initially performed with the residual values resulting from the difference between the pretest and posttest grading scores (Ricardo & Rubio, 2020). According to the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test applied for more than 50 items of a statistical sample, it was determined that the data behaved following a normal distribution ($KS = 0.118$; $p = 0.075 > 0.05$).

These calculations served to determine whether, or not, there was, in effect, a significant difference in the improvement and development of linguistic and communicative competences in English after the implementation of the online platform Padlet.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Analysis of Linguistic Competences

After processing all the collected information, a description of the student perception of the development of the linguistic competences for English language learning with Padlet was made. The data is represented in the following figures.

Figure 2 shows that 66.1% of the participants agreed and totally agreed that Padlet was useful to enhance the linguistic competences related to the comprehension of the English language, whereas 18.9% of the participants stated that they partially or totally disagreed with this statement; the remaining 16.1% neither agreed nor disagreed with this question. Nevertheless, 88.9% of the students perceived Padlet as a useful

resource for learning English, not occurring the same with 9% who partially or totally disagreed with it. 7.1% were not inclined to any of these options.

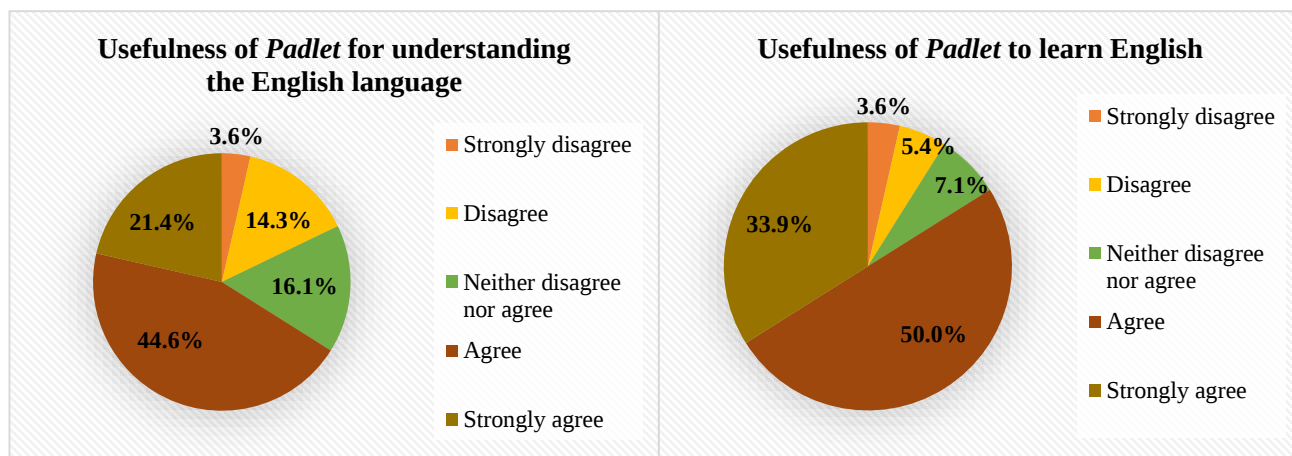


Figure 2. Usefulness of Padlet for learning and understanding the English language.

Figure 3 shows that Padlet was useful to improve English pronunciation, being the predominant criterion for 60.7% of the respondents, while 17.9% of them disagreed with this statement. However, there is a significant 21.4% of students who neither agreed nor disagreed in this regard. Padlet also proved to be considerably useful for activities involving sentence structuring, as well as for participation in conversations (according to 69.6% of the participants). 12.5% of the respondents disagreed with this assertion. Nonetheless, a significant percentage of 17.9% of students did not express either agreement or disagreement with the statement.

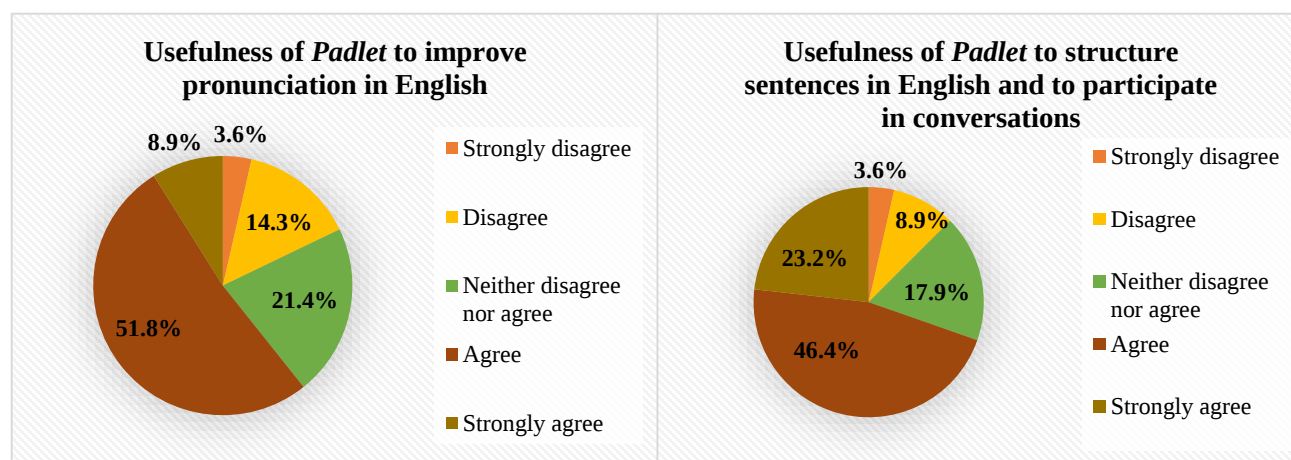


Figure 3. Usefulness of Padlet to improve pronunciation, sentence structuring, and participation in conversations in English.

According to Figure 4, most of the students (58.9%) considered Padlet as a useful online platform for making descriptions in English, against 21.5% who thought the opposite. 19.6% did not rate this question either for or against. Additionally, 42.9% of the students expressed that they could better organize their speech in English using Padlet. On the contrary, it was a relatively difficult action for 32.1% of them. The remaining 25% did not issue a conclusive criterion in this regard.

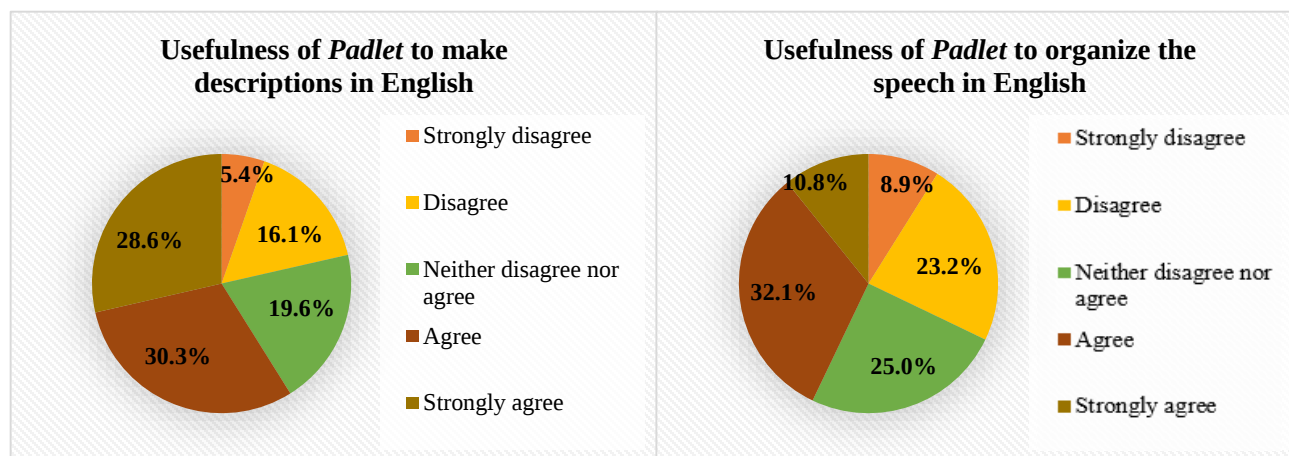


Figure 4. Usefulness of Padlet to make descriptions and to organize speech in English.

Descriptive Analysis of Communicative Competences

Regarding communicative competences, Figure 5 shows that 75% of the students agreed that Padlet was useful for communicating with their peers in English. On the contrary, 12.5% did not perceive it this way. The remaining 12.5% did not opt for any of the above options. Similarly to the previous result, 73.2% of the student sample considered Padlet to be very useful for communicating ideas in English, while 10.7% did not. The remaining 16.1% expressed neither agreement nor disagreement.

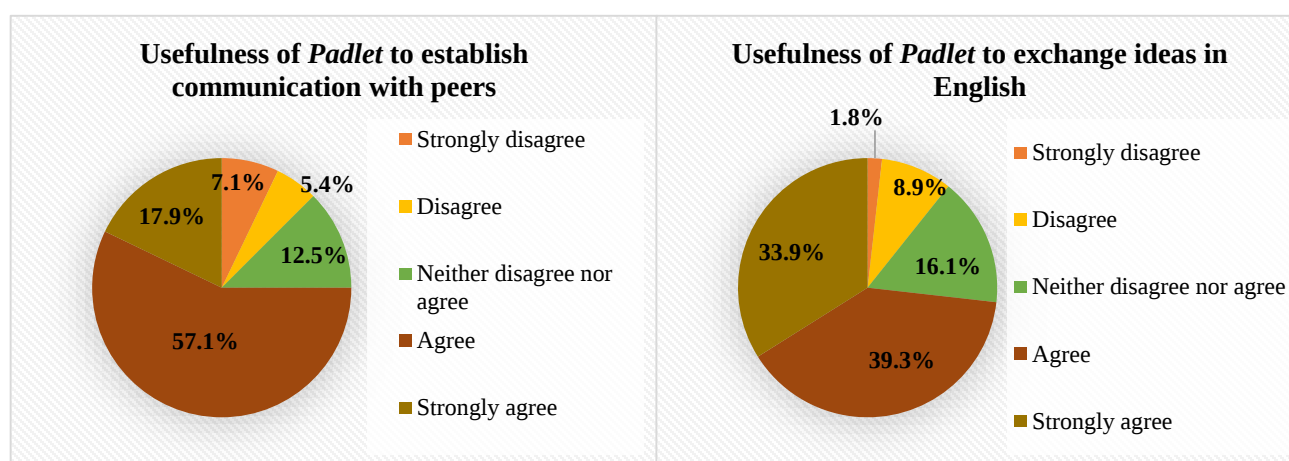


Figure 5. Usefulness of Padlet to establish communication with peers and exchange ideas in English.

Similarly, Figure 6 shows that almost 70% of the students emphasized the usefulness of Padlet for establishing dialogues in English, with only 9.7% stating the opposite. However, it should be noted that about 20% neither agreed nor disagreed with this question. Finally, the usefulness of Padlet for understanding and responding in English during a conversation was pointed out by 64.3% of the participants, while 21.4% did not agree with it. 14.4% remained neutral when answering this specific item.

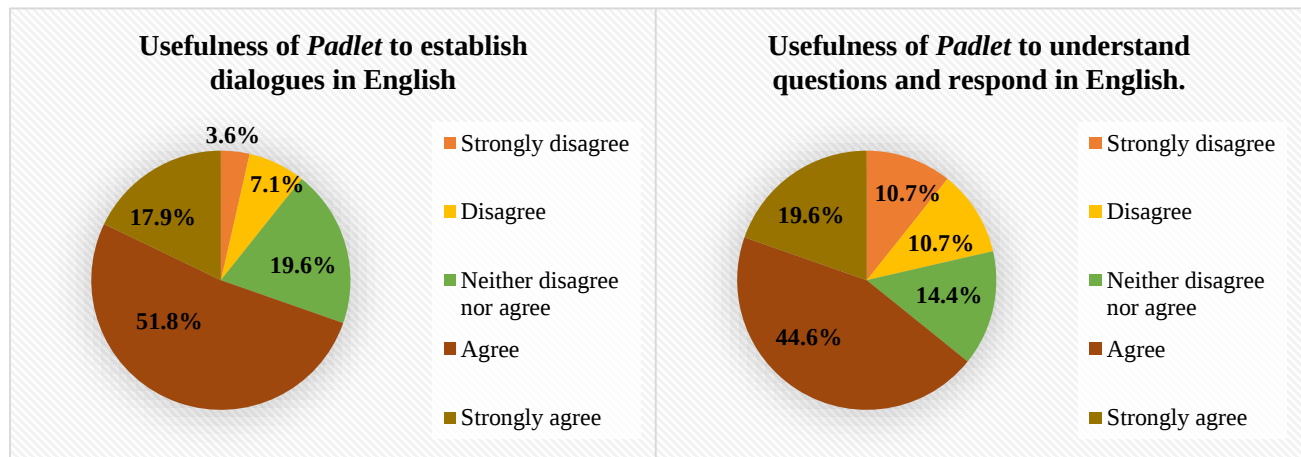


Figure 6. Usefulness of Padlet to establish dialogues, understand, and respond in English.

Inferential Statistical Analysis (Pretest – Posttest)

Once the description of the student perception of the development of linguistic and communicative competences in English using Padlet was done, the t-Student hypothesis test was run. It included the information obtained from the pretest and posttest results. Thus, the following null and alternative statistical hypotheses were posed:

$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$ (the average scores of pretest and posttest in English language learning are the same).

$H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$ (the average scores of pretest and posttest in English language learning are different).

As can be seen in Table 1, the pretest scores yielded an average result in English learning ($\bar{x} = 7.95$; $\sigma = 0.44$). However, once Padlet was implemented, the posttest result significantly increased ($\bar{x} = 8.91$; $\sigma = 0.69$), generating a score difference of +0.95.

Table 1. Statistical Descriptive Values of Pretest and Posttest Results.

		Mean	N	Standard deviation	Standard error of the mean
Pair	Pretest	7.95	56	0.44	0.059
	Posttest	8.91	56	0.69	0.093

In order to establish whether the difference between the above-mentioned pretest and posttest scores is significant, the results of the following table need to be interpreted (Table 2). It is observed that the p-value of the t-Student test for samples related to the pretest and posttest results is significant ($t = 9.91$; $p = 0.00$). In consequence, the null hypothesis H_0 is rejected. It can be hence stated that the average scores of pretest and posttest for English language learning are different. This confirms that the use of Padlet is effective for the improvement of linguistic and communicative competences in English as a foreign language.

Table 2. Student t-Hypothesis Test for Samples Related to Pretest and Posttest Results.

t- Test	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of the mean	95% Confidence interval		t	df	Significance (two-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pretest – Posttest	0.95	0.73	0.09	1.16	0.77	9.91	55	0.00

Conclusions

Upon reaching the end of this research, the fulfillment of the main objective is evinced. It consisted of analyzing the improvement of English language learning with the implementation of the online tool Padlet for didactic purposes to promote the development of linguistic and communicative competences of eighth-grade students of General Basic Education in Ecuador. It was demonstrated by contrasting the hypothesis stated in this regard.

It was determined through a descriptive analysis that there is, in general, a positive perception on behalf of the students regarding the didactic benefits that Padlet offers to improve linguistic and communicative competences for learning English as a foreign language. It has been found that the implementation of Padlet as a didactic tool has a significantly positive impact on the EFL learning process. This finding was reached through an experimental design involving a pretest and posttest method that required the evaluation of the t-Student hypothesis for related samples.

In this regard, studies have reported similar results. Thus, it is posited that by promoting the use of technology for didactic purposes, learners can be motivated to improve and develop important language and communication skills (Gilakjani, 2017; Iza et al., 2022; Nguyen & Pham, 2022). Such a change in the teaching strategies may contribute to improving the levels of engagement within the classroom. By that means, learners are encouraged to learn collaboratively the English language through interactive exercises. In addition, both teachers and learners can benefit from using these innovative tools, leading to a more satisfying learning

experience based on sharing ideas, practicing new words, connecting people, and increasing knowledge retention.

Nonetheless, although the study determined that Padlet as an educational tool was beneficial in helping students learn English, it is subject to certain limitations. First, it is difficult to obtain much more realistic results without a sufficiently large sample that frames the breadth of the experiment. Second, unequal access to relevant technology and effective Internet connectivity may influence learners' ability to engage in online activities, which may bias the results. Furthermore, Padlet was designed for collaborative groups of learners. Therefore, limited individualized feedback on students' progress may result in discrepancies in understanding and further hinder their development of the knowledge and skills associated with English language learning.

Finally, after involving qualitative and quantitative elements in the exploration, it became evident that the problems of inadequate teacher training, low learner engagement, and lack of access to technological resources need to be addressed. Moreover, while the usefulness of Padlet for language learning and the development of linguistic and communicative skills underscores the progress in this burgeoning field, further efforts must be made to ensure fair implementation and access for all learners before its full potential can be realized.

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