

Team-Una: The Social and Linguistic Impact on the Coto Regional

Headquarter: A Perspective from the Participant Students

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Abstract

Team-UNA is a project of Universidad Nacional Costa Rica addressed to reinforce the four basic English skills in high school students from Coto Regional Headquarter. Its outcomes involve both participants of the project, the academician in charge and the students of the English teaching major, chosen as tutors, committed to successfully leading the learning process throughout the school year. The social impact generated by Team-UNA is made apparent by providing access to a second language learning process without the need of paying tuition. This project's aim is to foster social engagement with the community and different high schools in the region, through a humanistic vision. It blends linguistic knowledge and cultural sharing into an interactive environment that is essential for students' success. By being involved in authentic tasks as outlined in the syllabus of the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) learners enhance language competence. The findings of this research reveal the social impact, from the participants' perspective, generated by Team-UNA, and the community ties Universidad Nacional establishes.

Keyword: pedagogical contribution, social commitment, university extension.

Resumen

Team-UNA es un proyecto de la Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica dirigido a reforzar las cuatro habilidades básicas de inglés en estudiantes de secundaria de la sede regional de Coto. Su contribución involucra tanto a los participantes del proyecto, al académico a cargo y a los estudiantes de la especialidad de enseñanza de inglés, elegidos como tutores, quienes están comprometidos a liderar con éxito el proceso de aprendizaje a lo largo del año escolar. El impacto social generado por Team-UNA se hace evidente al proporcionar acceso a un proceso de aprendizaje de un segundo idioma sin la necesidad del pago de la enseñanza. El objetivo de este

proyecto es fomentar el compromiso social con la comunidad y las diferentes escuelas secundarias de la región a través de una visión humanista. Este proyecto combina el conocimiento lingüístico y el intercambio cultural en un entorno interactivo que es esencial para el éxito de los estudiantes. Al estar involucrado en tareas auténticas como se describe en el plan de estudios del Ministerio de Educación Pública (MEP), los alumnos mejoran la competencia lingüística. Los resultados de esta investigación revelan el impacto social, desde la perspectiva de los participantes generado por Team-UNA y los vínculos comunitarios que establece la Universidad Nacional.

Palabras claves: contribución pedagógica, compromiso social, extensión universitaria.

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Identified with the students' needs in the region and moved by a sense of advocacy, in this study, the participants of this research are aimed at analyzing the socio-linguistic impact that the project Team-Una has on Coto Regional Headquarters focused on developing and enhancing English skills for public high school students. Team-Una consists of four hour tutorships carried out on Saturdays by students from the English teaching major at Universidad Nacional (UNA) Campus Coto. It is a service learning community project that follows the syllabus underlined by the Ministry of public education (MEP) to support students academically. The tutorships not only assist the necessities of the participants but they are also an opportunity for the tutors to enrich their professional training putting into pedagogical practice the strategies, techniques, methodological knowledge and individual teaching abilities developed throughout the major. Also, the project seeks for a humanist-social vision among university students so that they can contribute to the community an accessible learning space with high academic value (Barrantes-Elizondo, 2016, p.97). As it is outlined and stated in the objectives of the project, Universidad Nacional causes a social impact in both college students and members of the community. The importance of Team-Una rises from the functions of the university which are enriched through teaching, researching, expansion and intellectual property production (El Estatuto Orgánico de la UNA, 2015 as cited Barrantes-Elizondo et al., 2018, p.75). Hence, UNA transcends the classrooms and its impact is reflected through the connection with social projects.

Team-UNA has grouped the attendance of more than one hundred students which are divided into four groups every semester. In-class teaching is crucial for developing the interaction among the participants because learners need to have communication to become

familiarized with the learning atmosphere. Thus, the role of tutors is the guidance to approach a continues growth based on the goals Ministry of Education is profiling and the four basic skills of the language. Currently, this project has encountered a new period of teaching and learning process employing innovative methodological strategies to keep learners engaged in the course as well as increasing their motivation. It is important to consider that not all the participants bear the tools to learn through virtual sessions, so the academician as well as the tutors work through different means of communication to keep learners encouraged. As Alizadeh (2016) claimed “Without desire to learn, it is very difficult for learners to gain effective learning” (p. 11).

Grounded on the previous information, this project is committed to avoiding the desertion of the learners’ population and promoting the sense of pedagogical engagement tutors should have as future professors/ teachers.

Theoretical Considerations

Academicians who work at a public university understand that teaching is not the mere responsibility education implies. The formation of students during any of their processes requires teaching, research to support the teaching process, the creation of intellectual property and university extension into the community. Regarding university social responsibility, Martinez as cited by Ahumada-Tello et al (2018) defined this term as

voluntary willingness of educational institutions which benefits the deployment of its members towards others in a social space. In this sense, University Social Responsibility aims to incorporate a process of acquisition of values, knowledge and skills that help human beings to find solutions to the social, economic, and environmental problems. (p .4)

The project Team-Una embraces that responsibility before the graduates of the teaching English

major become part of the labor force of the country contributing their competence to the national educational system by supporting the second language learning process of all the students who participate in the project.

University Outreach

Based on the mission and vision of the university, projects are designed, approved and applied to complement the ethic teaching commitment between the institution and the community by using university extension which is one of the pillars that supports Universidad Nacional. That fulfillment is highly connected to what public universities are expected to reach. As cited by Oaks et al. (2009) university outreach should be understood as: “a form of scholarship that cuts across teaching, research, and service. It involves generating, transmitting, applying, and preserving knowledge for the direct benefit of external audiences in ways that are consistent with university and unit missions” (p.230). Actually, public universities are engaged in providing its members with constant improvement to contribute socially, culturally and economically to the country’s development. Universidad de Costa Rica (2020) mentions:

The alliance established by the academy with the society so that, together, they can create programs aimed towards giving a new sense to social life while changing, in turn, the social reality. Likewise, there is an ethical link between the University and the community, where both are dialectically integrated and provide feedback to each other based on the joint construction of knowledge encouragement of greater inclusion, justice, and solidarity. (para. 3-4)

Action Oriented Approach

Team-Una is implemented at Universidad Nacional, Campus Coto in 2017 focused on the Communicative Approach following the guidelines of Ministry of Education (M.E.P). In 2020 the project moves to the action oriented approach and concepts such as object and subject, reflection and action, learner and user are portrayed united with the aim of using the language in more or less complex situations as an inducement to approach the four basic skills. Therefore, Team-Una adapts the pedagogical and didactic transition prioritizing in curricular contents that reinforce the competences mentioned before as well as the goals established in every unit of the project. Regarding the Action Oriented Approach Common European Framework of References for Languages, 2001 explains

views users and learners of a language primarily as ‘social agents’, i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to complete in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action. While acts of speech occur within language activities, these activities form a part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning. (as cited in Kaliska, 2016, p.31)

Faro (Teaching Strengthening for the Restoration of Opportunities)

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, this project starts in Campus Coto supporting the learning process for high school students to pass the national standardized test called “bachillerato”, which appraised the students’ language competence through reading comprehension. However, the policies set by the Ministry of Education change the evaluation process that ends up with another test called FARO, which includes the assessment of the four basic skills. Actually, in 2020, during its piloting process, a listening test following the standards

of the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CERFL) was applied to the students. As a result, Team-Una took into account the transition in evaluation to focus on the new objectives being established by M.E.P (2018) which says “FARO are tests that contribute effectiveness by guaranteeing results that can have a diagnosis without bias and prevent possible inequalities in the educational system” (p. 5).

Collaborative Learning

The integration of students while developing and interacting in the different activities becomes the main pedagogical strategy to work with the Action Oriented Approach taking into account that the participants of the project come from different institutions, and they have varied levels of linguistic competence. Their developmental sequence is certainly conditioned by the opportunities they have in their high schools, and this aspect enriches their performance when working collaboratively. As a result, the transition from in person teaching to in person remote teaching makes the use of collaborative techniques even more effective and relevant. The project uses collaborative learning as the scaffolding strategy to link writing to reading and listening to speaking. Laal, M. (2011) cites

CL is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product. In the CL environment, the learners are challenged both socially and emotionally as they listen to different perspectives, and are required to articulate and defend their ideas. (p. 491)

Formative Assessment

The project obtains its outcomes on continuous evaluation monitoring students' production through formative assessment. The results are used to provide learners with feedback and to analyze their improvement to adapt the weekly templates attached to the objectives of the

project and the requirements of the Action Oriented Approach. “This type of assessment is conducted to assess students’ understanding, learning needs, and learning progress concerning a particular unit of learning materials” (Karimi, 2014, as cited in Widiastuti & Saukah, 2017, p. 51).

Competence

Team-Una focuses each of the activities on the guidelines already established by The Ministry of Education. The conceptualization of competence this project deals with links language to meaningful interaction centering meaning as the most important element when encoding and decoding. The structure of the target language is understood descriptively within a real life context. “Competence is defined as learners' ability to efficiently express what they mean in the target language and successfully achieve communications in real-life situations (Lightbown and Spada, 1999 as cited in Larsari, 2011, p. 161).

Remote Teaching

The in-person education stops, and Team -Una overtakes the challenge to keep helping the community which is immersed in a worldwide pandemic. The participants of the project, academician and tutors have taken on the challenge to continue teaching virtually, and high school students responded positively to start classes under a new modality the Universidad Nacional names “In-person Remote Teaching” providing students with the information through a virtual learning environment. Mosquera (2017). defines virtual Learning Environment as “It is a platform wherein teachers and students interact and share resources. He reports that most teachers who used virtual platforms for pedagogical benefit have found it useful and productive”. (as cited in Mathew et al., 2019, p.102).

Synchronous Learning. The learning and teaching process implies strategies, techniques, approaches and methods that for the project Team-Una are clearly outlined in its proposal. The process started focused on the communicative approach, and then it moved to the Action-Oriented approach during in person sessions that are now taught virtually combining both synchronous and asynchronous learning to contribute the process to the progress of the students.

Shahabadia, M. M. & Uplaneb, M. (2014). “Synchronous e-learning is live, real-time (and usually scheduled), facilitated instruction and learning-oriented interaction. In this type of learning, learning experiences are live and real-time” (p. 131).

Asynchronous Learning. Learning is a process that gets students into a journey, which is determined by a teaching action and a learning experience. Whether that journey is assumed virtually or in person, the general and the specific objectives are fulfilled by looking for the most appropriate pedagogical path. In this new challenge 2020, the project continues providing its participants with the opportunity to access knowledge through an inclusive learning opportunity and asynchronous teaching becomes part of this new modality as well. Shahabadia, M. M. & Uplaneb, M. (2014). “Asynchronous e-learning takes advantage of computer-mediated communication (CMC) to achieve the promises of learning “anytime and anywhere” through asynchronous online discussions” (p. 132).

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Teaching virtually means a management of information and communication technologies from both, teachers and students. Previous to the beginning of the Remote Teaching sessions, students were surveyed about their access to internet and technology as well as their interest to continue learning English virtually. Ratheeswari, K. (2018). “It refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunication” (p. 45).

Methodology

This study was aimed to understand the impact of the project. It was conducted as a case study design in which the researchers were focused on analyzing the perspective of the high school students attending Team-UNA regarding their second language learning process. Initially, the researchers justified the study through a qualitative methodology in which data was gathered from participants in terms of pedagogy, university commitment and technological devices once Team-UNA moved to Remote Teaching; a survey, shared by Google Forms was carried out by both researchers and finally the outcomes were analyzed and triangulated. Through the findings obtained, the researchers concluded that Team-Una reinforces a second language process which was first limited to reading comprehension for students to pass the standardized test and now to prepare students for FARO. The interest in the topic and the interest to describe the researcher of the study included the participation of seventy-three students between the ages of fifteen and seventeen. The survey held was applied once, and all participants responded to all survey items.

Findings and Analysis

The information analyzed in this research is the outcome obtained from the questionnaire applied to the students and conducted by the researchers. Stating the relevance of University Extension and the importance of English for high school students of the region, the results reflect the positive impact of the project on the attending population.

Pedagogical Contribution to their process

The participants highlighted positive aspects about the practice of teaching at Team-UNA. As can be observed in Table 1, it indicates that the participants' perceptions revolved around their experiences along the tutorships. 29 respondents demonstrated that the learning process is enriching while 20 were more favorable towards the tutor's attitude. 12 participants

considered the teaching process valuable for their learning. On the other hand, 6 perceived the class interaction as an essential feature, and 2 participants claimed that the project is advantageous for the assistance of high school's assignments. 4 participants did not provide a response.

Table 1

Positive Aspects from the Participants of Team-UNA

Survey Item	Responses	Number of Responses
Positive aspects of Team-UNA	Enriching Learning	29
	Tutors' Attitude	20
	Teaching process	12
	Class Interaction	6
	No Response	4
	Assistance of High School's assignments	2

University Commitment

In relation to the responses of the following item, the participants expressed different conceptions respecting the effort from Team-UNA to the population which can be seemed in the Table below. 67 participants interpreted Team-UNA as an academic support for high school students. 2 considered necessary the project because it is a tuition-free learning opportunity. 3 participants viewed the project as a supporting process when not knowing the language while 1 interpreted the project as a process for FARO.

Table 2

Participant's Perceptions of Team-UNA

Survey Item	Responses	Number of Responses
What do you think about Team-UNA?	Academic support for high school students	67
	A tuition-free learning opportunity	2
	A supporting process when not knowing the language	3
	A process for FARO	1

Table 3 shows the opinions about the benefits obtained for participating in the project; it indicates the effective service to the population. 38 participants said that they improved pronunciation and lexicon. Also, the responses showed that 30 participants have acquired new knowledge such a general comprehension of the target language while 5 argued that the project supported their homework doing.

Table 3

Student's Advances During Team-UNA

Survey Item	Responses	Number of Responses
	Improve pronunciation and Lexicon	38
How has Team-UNA support your learning necessities?	Acquire Knowledge such a general comprehension of the target Language	30
	Support their homework doing	5

Remote Teaching

Table 4 revealed that 37 participants expressed their favor to the remote teaching as a satisfying process. However, 26 argued that the remote learning is an uncomfortable experience while 10 considered it as difficult.

Table 4

Participant's Experience in Remote Learning

Survey Item	Responses	Number of Responses
Mention your experience during the remote learning.	Satisfying	37
	Uncomfortable	26
	Difficult	10

Conclusion

1-Higher education implies the link of teaching, research, production of intellectual property and university extension. The project Team- Una carried out by Universidad Nacional is fulfilling its main objective in the region supporting the second language learning process of its participants.

2-The participant students recognize as the two main contributions to their welfare the academic support in their developmental sequence and the teaching commitment the tutors of the project demonstrate.

3-The transition to remote teaching had a temporal negative affectation on a low percentage of the participants because of technological inconveniences; however, the tutors and academician provided them with asynchronous options to keep up with the learning process. Actually, the project keeps fulfilling the purpose of Universidad Nacional in ways that are consistent with generating, transmitting, applying, and preserving knowledge for members of the internal and external community.

4-Team-Una, a project that has students from different institutions in the region, has been able to link the community ties Universidad Nacional establishes to the promises of learning students are looking for. Universidad Nacional, as responded by the students, has become an academic opportunity for learning regardless the fact that Tam-Una is a tuition free service community project, as indicated in the findings of this research.

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